

# POPULAR CULTURE REVIEW

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# From the Editor



Editing *Popular Culture Review* for the last 27 years has been a labor of love. I would like to acknowledge the support of UNLV's College of Liberal Arts and Department of English as well as PCA/ACA and, most recently Policy Studies Organization.

Thank you all,  
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## *From the Editor's Desk*

I hope you enjoy this wonderfully diverse issue in which we present a potpourri of very readable essays. We see what lies behind "The Misguided Zen of *Fight Club*" and the "Shifting Values" of Punk subculture. The reprehensible "pseudo-event" of the Ebola crisis is given a Baudrillardian interpretation, while the multimedia's increasing importance in expanding the role of museums is presented. Both *Twilight Zone* and *Sesame Street* take on new dimensions under the mirrors of theory. How Woody Strode and John Ford took on black stereotypes is explored, as are "race relations and American Popular Culture" in *The Tempest*.

We have increased the number of book reviews and hope for a still greater number in the future.

Finally, I want to thank Associate Editor Carol Turner who bailed me out of a tough spot and served ably for several issues. I couldn't have done it without her, and appreciate the diligence and grace with which she served.

*Felicia*



### **“another old Buddhist monastery thing”: The Misguided Zen of *Fight Club***

Though *Fight Club* has received a surprising amount of scholarly attention centering on issues such as masculinity, trauma, anarchy, and the narrator's existential crisis since the novel's publication in 1996, only one scholar to date has explored either the novel or the subsequent film (1999) through a Buddhist lens. In "*Fight Club: An Exploration of Buddhism*," Charley Reed argues that the film "is truly a Zen Buddhism parable, telling the story of an every-man who though imprisoned in a life of suffering, desires to find enlightenment and peace" (par. 11). While I agree here with Reed, I stop short in accepting his suggestion that the narrator is doing so "in the mold of Siddhartha Gautama" (par. 1). Reed's overarching approach centers more on "transposing" (Reed's term) Buddhist concepts rather than expanding upon those in the work itself. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Buddhism is a little more self-evident in the novel than in the film; whatever the reason, though, Reed's assessment leaves his readers wanting a more in-depth analysis of what the characters themselves are doing and saying concerning Buddhism. I propose here, then, that the driving force behind the narrator's dual personality and attendant violence is best examined through the Buddhist concepts of *samsāra* (the world of suffering), *shūnyatā* (emptiness), and *paticca samuppada* (nondualism), all three of which are explored in the novel itself. Further, counter to Reed's argument that the narrator achieves enlightenment, I suggest he merely glimpses *prajñāpāramitā* (the perfection of insight) on an intellectual level when shown compassion (*karuṇā*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) at the novel's conclusion by people who, due to terminal illnesses, have embraced their own impermanence.

The Buddhist notion of *samsāra*—the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth sentient beings traverse until reaching enlightenment—is caused by the delusion that we each see ourselves as "a beautiful and unique snowflake," as the novel puts it (126). It is this very notion of a unique and individual self which Buddhism and *Fight Club* calls into question. The narrator manifests Tyler Durden, his dynamic doppelganger, as a sort of Zen master whose job is to instruct him about the concepts of emptiness and nondualism through his words and actions. According to Francisco Collado-Rodríguez, Palahniuk's early novels employ "teaching characters" such as Tyler, Brandy (*Invisible Monsters*, 1999), and Ida (*Choke*, 2001) who teach the narrators and "the common reader, allegedly trapped by the forces of consumerism,

about medical, scientific, and philosophical theories that frequently contradict the principles and idea on which Western societies are based" (10). As the narrator's teacher in *Fight Club*, Tyler's purpose is to beat home the fact that concepts such as individuality, permanence, and ego are a delusion. In understanding nondualism, which is an affirmation of the interrelatedness with all things, one recognizes that accepting emptiness leads to wisdom and compassion. According to the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, this understanding "is based upon the recognition that the objective world, like a vision, is the manifestation of the mind itself; it teaches the cessation of ignorance, desire, deed and causality" (qtd. in Goddard 283). Though he teaches the "cessation of ignorance" through shedding "desire," Tyler, as a "manifestation of the mind" of his creator, further problematizes the latter's struggle for freedom by the doubly dualistic nature of their relationship.

Nondualism and emptiness go hand-in-hand like the narrator's trendy yin and yang coffee tables which "fit together to make a circle" before the narrator blows up his condo upon recognizing that "the things you used to own, now they own you" (33-34). Here we see that the narrator has a cursory understanding that the cessation of suffering comes from divestiture; it is not just "things" which trap us, though, it is also concepts, desires, and emotions—the building blocks of ego. It is precisely this feeling of entrapment that opens the way for the narrator's creation of Tyler, whose identity seems to stem from a misguided sense of rugged American individualism accentuated with catchy Zen one-liners. Depicted as a Unabomberesque Thoreauvian Zen militia leader, Tyler turns his band of shaved-headed "space monkeys" against the greatest cause of contemporary American suffering: the rampant consumerism that feeds our simultaneously aggrandizing and dehumanizing sense of self as we bungle through our "lives of quiet desperation." According to Tyler, "You're one of those space monkeys. You do the little job you're trained to do. Pull a lever. Push a button. You don't understand any of it, and then you just die" (2). Like Thoreau's "laboring man" who toils at the cost of living, and Marx's proletarian who produces at the cost of owning, the modern space monkey—"a generation of men raised by women"—lives an emasculated life devoid of agency, self-respect, and self-knowledge (41). In an attempt to reignite these traits in a few random men one night, the narrator pulls a gun on Raymond K. Hessel, a nighttime convenience store clerk whom he threatens to kill unless he tells him what he wants to do with his life other than "working a shit job for just enough money to buy cheese and watch television" (147). Once

Raymond is “listening and coming out of the little tragedy in [his] head”—a great definition of samsara by the way—the narrator asks him again (146). Unable to answer, the narrator says, “Then you’re dead right now” (146). That is, if you don’t know who you are right here, right now, you are already dead because you are either living in the lost past or the unknowable future to come, neither of which exist. We might even liken this brief violent interchange to the Zen *kōan* interviews addressed below.

In Chapter 2 we learn that the narrator has been regularly attending several free evening support groups for terminally ill people to help alleviate his own insomnia and make him feel better about himself. The one group which really moves him—and the only one in which he is able to cry—is called “Remaining Men Together,” a testicular cancer support group which acts as a sort of Zen *sangha* or community for the narrator. He is finally able to let go when he acknowledges the transient nature of existence: “Everything you can ever accomplish will end up as trash. Anything you’re ever proud of will be thrown away. . . . [R]ight now, your life comes down to nothing, and not even nothing, oblivion” (7). While this recognition sounds nihilistically bleak, from the Buddhist perspective it is actually quite affirmative. That is, once one embraces the transient nature of existence—that nothing, not even notions of self are permanent—one can move on with life in the present moment. The language here, though, is highly negative: “trash,” “thrown away,” “oblivion.” Oblivion—to lose conscious awareness—is a tricky word in this context. In distinguishing “nothing” from “oblivion,” he is acknowledging that *nothing* implies its opposite, *something*; whereas oblivion, or *emptiness* or *the void*—whatever you want to call the ineffable—is something. At Remaining Men Together the narrator gets “lost inside oblivion, dark and silent and complete” (12). Indeed, after his sessions he “felt more alive than [he’d] ever felt” (12). “Every evening, [he] died, and every evening, [he] was born” (13). However, as D.T. Suzuki suggests in *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, “This may be called ecstasy or trance, but it is not Zen. In Zen there must be *satori*; there must be a general mental upheaval which destroys the old accumulations of intellection and lays down the foundation for a new life; there must be an awakening of a new sense which will review the old things from a hither to un-dreamed-of angle of observation” (66). Although the narrator is able to get lost in the suffering of others, and although Tyler enables him to “review the old things from a hither to un-dreamed-of angle of observation,” he is and will remain far from *satori* (enlightenment).

It is in Chapter 3 we learn how the narrator first meets Tyler. Stripped down and in a state of relative innocence—that is, naked and asleep on a beach—he “sees” Tyler, looking like a wild Zen hermit, “naked and sweating . . . hair wet and stringy, hanging in his face.” “You just wake up at the beach,” the narrator tells us, echoing his *you wake up at this airport or that* refrain throughout this chapter (Palahniuk 22). Though “Tyler had been around a long time before [they] met,” it is in this liminal zone between land and sea (between sleeping and waking), where he awakens to his relationship with his alternate personality (22). This primal encounter is one of the key moments in the novel, and it is in the first words uttered by Tyler that we begin to truly see the place of Zen in the narrator’s world view. Sitting “cross-legged in the shadow of the standing logs” of driftwood he had just arranged in the shape of a giant hand on the beach, Tyler hits him with what sounds like a classic Zen *kōan*:

‘Do you know what time it is?’

I asked, ‘Where?’

‘Right here,’ Tyler said. ‘Right now.’ (22)

Before we explore the meaning of this exchange, a word on Rinzai *kōan* interviews. In these brief formal interviews known as *sanzen, rōshis* (Zen masters) present their students with *kōans*, which are designed to act as a medium through which understanding can be achieved intuitively rather than intellectually. *Kōans*, like those found in *The Blue Cliff Record* which the narrator mentions later in the novel, are generally transmitted to students through short narratives or poems which intentionally seem illogical, ambiguous, and paradoxical. They are not puzzles with single prescribed answers arrived at through logical analysis; rather, they are meant to provide insight through embodying key elements of Zen teachings. As Buddha tells his disciple Ananda in the *Śurangama Sūtra*, “You must learn to answer questions spontaneously with no recourse to discriminating thinking” (qtd. in Goddard 112). This is the crux for the narrator. How can someone who simply applies the same statistical formula over and over again for a living as a “recall campaign coordinator” (Palahniuk 21) for a major automotive company respond with anything resembling spontaneity? He cannot even answer the most mundane of questions—“Do you know what time it is?”—because he is so accustomed to being in transition from one place (and time zone) to another. As such, all he can do in response to Tyler’s question is shoot back another question. Tyler’s answer gets to the heart of all Buddhist teachings: “Right here . . . Right now (22). This is it, nondualism

encapsulated. Right here right now is all there is according to Zen philosophy; everything else is a delusion in a similar way that the manifestation of Tyler is a delusion; he exists only in the mind of the narrator, the seat of the dualistic world of *samsāra*.

Following Tyler's *kōan*, the narrator poses one to himself: "If I could wake up in a different place, at a different time, could I wake up as a different person?" This, of course, is the genesis of his manifestation of Tyler and the driving concept of the novel's plot. A few lines later he responds to his own question: "Sometimes, you wake up and have to ask where you are" (23). These sentences operate, like *kōans*, on multiple levels. The question most basically addresses the repetition of takeoffs and landings which the narrator tells us about throughout the chapter; once we've read the novel through, though, we understand this question as a form of foreshadowing that the narrator is in fact Tyler himself. On a deeper level, the narrator is grappling here with some pretty heady philosophical conceptions of time, space, identity, self, and dualism. The chapter comes to a close with a rather profound lesson about Zen practice and enlightenment:

The giant shadow hand was perfect for one minute, and for one perfect minute

Tyler had sat in the palm of perfection he'd created himself.

You wake up, and you're nowhere.

One minute was enough, Tyler said, a person had to work for it, but a minute was worth the effort. A moment was the most you could ever expect from perfection.

You wake up, and that's enough. (23)

The "palm of perfection," like the lotus flower Buddha is sometimes depicted seated on, is indeed something we "create" for ourselves through the practice of compassion and wisdom—two things not on the narrator's radar until the very end of the novel, and even then only in the periphery. Perfection exists only for a moment, Tyler tells him, for a moment, according to Buddhist philosophy, is all we have. One has to "work for it" in the sense that it is always already there for the uncovering, and when realized, it is "worth the effort," even if only for a moment. "You wake up, and you're nowhere . . . and that's enough" because nowhere is our original nature, before mind—before place, trajectory, discrimination, past, present. Nowhere. "Right here. . . . Right now" (22); for an enlightened being, this is enough.

Were the narrator to seriously grapple with these ideas there would be no fight club, no Project Mayhem. As the novel progresses, though, we realize he merely "uses" Buddhist

philosophy superficially and self-indulgently. The opening of Chapter 8 merits an extensive quotation to show how shallow (and manic) his understanding of the Buddhist concepts he espouses really are.

Until today, it really pissed me off that I'd become this totally centered Zen Master and nobody noticed . . . I write little HAIKU things and FAX them around to everyone. When I pass people in the hall at work I get totally ZEN right in everyone's hostile little FACE.

Worker bees can leave  
Even drones can fly away  
The queen is their slave

You give up all your worldly possessions and your car and go live in a rented house in the toxic waste part of town where late at night, you can hear Marla and Tyler in his room, calling each other human butt wipe. (54-55)

There is a lot to be said about this rant. To begin with, a "totally centered Zen Master" would obviously not be pissed off that no one recognizes them as such. This type of ego-grasping is utterly antagonistic to Zen. Likewise, there are several instances in the novel where the narrator minimizes the Zen he purports to embrace by referring, for example, to the *haiku* he writes as "little . . . things" he angrily shoots off to people not in an attempt to selflessly foster their enlightenment, but instead to point back to his own self-purported spiritual superiority. His use of caps here highlights the anger boiling up within him; it is as if we can hear, Jekyll-and-Hyde-style, Tyler's "hostile" voice violently ripping its way through the narrator's own words. Interesting too is his use of the second person, which allows him to superficially divest himself of self, but not so much in the Buddhist sense; rather, it simply enables him to shed the consumer-driven self in place of becoming a devil-may-care wannabe Zen practitioner. To distance himself from the misogynistic sex scene he next describes in the novel, the narrator tells us how Zen he is:

Just by contrast, this makes me the calm little center of the world. Me, with my punched-out eyes and dried blood in big black crusty stains on my pants. I'm saying HELLO to everybody at work. HELLO! Look at me. HELLO! I'm so ZEN. This is BLOOD. This is NOTHING. Hello. Everything is nothing, and it's so cool to be ENLIGHTENED. Like me.

Sigh. Look. Outside the window. A bird.

The boss asked if the blood was my blood. The bird flies downwind. I'm writing a little haiku in my head.

Without just one nest  
A bird can call the world home  
Life is your career

I'm counting on my fingers: five, seven, five. (54-55)

Alluding to the *Heart Sūtra*, his comment that “[e]verything is nothing” quite succinctly encapsulates the gist of Mahāyāna philosophy. The notion of emptiness is a non-negative negation, an affirmation of our interrelatedness with all things. “Everything is nothing;” in the words of the Buddhist sutra: Form is emptiness, emptiness is not different from form. Emptiness means *no-thing* when divested from the realm of the perceiving dualist mind; it connotes a mind unfettered by the attachments of conceptions, distinctions, and delusions. In the “Look at me” quote above, the narrator uses the first person “I,” “me,” and “my” seven times—hardly the language of one who truly believes that “Everything is nothing.”

He also relies on his assumptions of what it means to be enlightened when he is in stressful situations in this chapter and elsewhere; it is here too that we see him employ *haiku* for the first time. He uses them as a centering practice in place of the meditative mind-palace he was able to create for himself during guided meditation in the support groups preceding Marla's arrival. In each instance he is feeling outside stress—being confronted by his coworkers' hostile glances (*haiku* 1), being interrogated by his boss (*haiku* 2), while impatiently waiting on Marla (*haiku* 3), and being asked by Marla if she can stay the night (*haiku* 4). Moving from a Marxist-inflected *haiku* as the chapter opens, to progressively more philosophically-oriented ones, his verse interestingly becomes more in touch with Zen as another key incident in the novel is hinted at the end of the chapter: the first real pain felt by the narrator as Tyler pours lye on his hand. The first *haiku* quoted above reads too didactically, and even though it concerns nature (bees), it lacks the requisite seasonal reference and the time- and place-specificity of traditional *haiku*. What is interesting about it, though, comes in retrospect as we move through the novel. While on the surface the content seems illogical—that the queen is the slave of the workers—we might read it from the standpoint that the narrator is the metaphorical queen enslaved by both Tyler and his space monkeys, both of

whom can leave at will, while the narrator, psychologically oblivious to his dualistic personalities, cannot; he is trapped in the hive of his mind.

The second *haiku* is still steeped in the language of the marketplace ("career"), but it is moving in the right direction: to have a home (a "nest") in the Buddhist sense is a delusion because it implies permanence, a place of origin and trajectory to and from. Being "[w]ithout just one nest," though, a bird, like a follower of the Tao, is free to "call the world home" (55); the bird's very existence is its reason for being. Birds do not operate in the realm of dualism because they have no perceived self-nature. Sadly, our narrator's life is his "career" in the sense that it, at least until he creates fight club, is his life. Read another way, though, "Life is your career" rings true with Buddhist thought in that our "job" is to live in the present moment; our career is right here right now. The third *haiku* moves closer towards an understanding of nondualism and emptiness: "Flowers bloom and die / Wind brings butterflies or snow / A stone won't notice" (58). Like the bird in the previous *haiku*, these things—flowers, weather, insects, a stone—don't exist to be anything other than what they are; they traverse the world of interconnectivity willy-nilly without direction or care. This *haiku* addresses the seasons and the transformative nature of existence that goes along with them, as well as provides a lesson on egolessness in the final line: the stone pays no mind to what is going on around it—it doesn't grasp on to delusions; it doesn't create alternate realities for itself; it takes what comes because it exists in the realm of no-mind. The final *haiku* in Chapter 8 shows the narrator slowly gaining insight into the cruelty of his personality. Marla has just asked if she can stay over for the night: "I don't answer," he says. "I count in my head: five syllables, seven, five. A tiger can smile / A snake will say it loves you / Lies make us evil" (62). Though slow to recognize his true relationship with both Marla and Tyler, he is at least cursorily aware that he is presenting Marla with a lie-infested façade, and in doing so, is becoming "evil."

Two pages before this admission, though, the narrator once again superficially claims enlightenment while thinking of ways he can torment his boss: "I'm enlightened now," he says. "You know, only Buddha-style behavior. Spider chrysanthemums. The Diamond Sutra and the Blue Cliff Record. Hari Rama, you know, Krishna, Krishna. You know, Enlightened" (60). But as Tyler tells him, "Sticking feathers up your butt . . . does not make you a chicken" (60). His use of the phrase "you know" three times here highlights his lack of understanding the words and concepts he espouses similarly to the "little HAIKU things" mentioned above. Further:

Tyler says I'm nowhere near hitting the bottom, yet. And if I don't fall all the way, I can't be saved . . . I shouldn't just abandon money and property and knowledge. This isn't a weekend retreat. I should run from self-improvement, and I should be running toward disaster. I can't just play it safe anymore . . . Only after disaster can we be resurrected. 'It's only after you've lost everything,' Tyler says, 'that you're free to do anything.' What I'm feeling is premature enlightenment. (61)

We hear the same sentiment in *Choke* when Victor tells us that "You [have] to get right to the edge of death to ever be saved" (3), as well as in *Invisible Monsters* when Brandy says, "Our real discoveries come from chaos," and "You have to jump into disaster with both feet" (258, 260). As the Zen saying goes, you have to die on the mat to live. Victor's understanding of enlightenment, though, is about as superficial and self-serving as that of *Fight Club's* narrator: for Victor, "enlightenment" means being "comfortable and confident in the world;" that, he says, "would be nirvana" (38). One would freely agree with this sentiment were Victor not making this statement about an online porn site he liked as a child which was composed of pictures of "this one dumpy guy dressed as Tarzan with a goofy orangutan trained to poke what looked like roasted chestnuts up the guy's ass" (36). The "premature enlightenment" the narrator of *Fight Club* experiences is merely his ego fighting back. Until he fully embraces emptiness and nondualism by going "right to the edge of [the] death [of his ego] to . . . be saved" from the word of suffering, he will continue to greedily grasp at delusions of spiritual self-grandeur. As Dōgen says of premature enlightenment, "Though you are proud of your understanding and replete with insight . . . you may loiter in the precincts of the entrance and still lack something of the vital path of liberation" (*On Zen Practice* 13).

If he were truly trying to achieve liberation as Reed claims, it seems contradictory to desire the destruction of the planet as a way to "force humanity to go dormant or into remission long enough for the Earth to recover" (Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 116). Though this idea might have a romantic appeal for radical environmentalists, a Buddhist practitioner would not say things like: "I wanted to destroy everything beautiful I'd never have. Burn the Amazon rain forests. Pump chlorofluorocarbons straight up to gobble the ozone . . . I wanted the whole world to hit bottom" (114-115). Indeed, in this one-page diatribe, the narrator uses the first person "I" and "my" twenty-one times, highlighting the stranglehold maintained by his ego. Several of those "I"s, as with the two quoted above, are paired with the word "wanted," which is truly the

problem shackling him to the *samsāra* world of desire. Reed also claims that the narrator actually achieves enlightenment in the film when he transforms from "a slave of consumerism to a confident and caring individual free from all things tying him to this world" (par. 25). In ridding himself of Tyler's hold, Reed concludes, the narrator "breaks the final barrier holding him from accepting the true Buddha nature" (par. 26). This reader does not buy it; the narrator is too ego-centric for this reading, even if we understand Tyler as a physical manifestation of his ego metaphorically acting in place of the narrator's actual ego. That is, Tyler as ego, the narrator as original mind or Buddha nature. Were the narrator to accept his nondualist Buddha nature as his true nature, he would recognize that there is no distance between his mind, body, and what is real, for they are one and the same. Not recognizing that time and space and "other" are merely conceptual frameworks causes an unending stream of separations (and manifestations), each pushing him further and further from the reality of original-mind.

None of this is to say that he does not have flashes of insight, but they almost always come from the voice of Tyler. For example, while being questioned over the phone by a detective about blowing up his condo, Tyler whispers into his ear to tell the detective, "I'm breaking my attachment to physical power and possessions . . . because only through destroying myself can I discover the greater power of my spirit . . . The liberator who destroys my property . . . is fighting to save my spirit. The teacher who clears all possessions from my path will set me free" (101). The narrator, of course, does not repeat this into the phone. By "destroying" himself—by eradicating all notions of self-perceived identity—he could, if he proves sincere, uncover his Buddha nature. However, the narrator's problem is doubly compounded by the fact that even after blowing up his "attachment to physical power and possessions," he still has two selves to rid himself of: his ideal self (Tyler) and his attachment-ridden actual self, the latter of which, according to Buddhism, does not exist in the first place.

Though Tyler does provide the narrator with a few important Zen lessons throughout the novel, he is by no means a compassionate teacher. Case in point: when discussing the genesis of Project Mayhem, the narrator tells us "Tyler didn't care if other people got hurt or not. The goal was to teach each man in the project that he had the power to control history" (113). Controlling history (even one's own) and controlling ego are two entirely different things. A few pages later we hear Tyler's words recited by a space monkey addressing new recruits at their makeshift "Buddhist monastery" on Paper Street: "You are not a beautiful and unique

snowflake. You are the same decaying organic matter as everyone else, and we are all a part of the same compost pile . . . Our culture has made us all the same . . . We all want the same. Individually, we are nothing" (126). Reminiscent of the narrator's harsh lesson about impermanence at the beginning of the novel ("everything you can ever accomplish will end up as trash"), we get a powerful mix of Zen and anti-consumerist rhetoric. According to Zen, there is no such thing as permanent, unique individuality, and once divested of ego, we indeed "are nothing" in the sense that we are no longer grasping at preconceived notions of identity. From a biological and spiritual standpoint, though, this nothing is *everything*, for we actually "are the same decaying organic matter as everyone [and everything] else" (126).

At the end of the novel, as the narrator is awaiting the explosion of the Parker-Morris Building with himself in it, Marla and members of one of his former support groups have selflessly come to save him, "all the bowel cancers, the brain parasites, the melanoma people, the tuberculosis people are walking, limping, wheelchairs toward [him]" (195). It is here, for the first time that he acts even remotely compassionate by telling them to get out before the building explodes. They know the building is about to be destroyed, Marla explains, showing that they have selflessly put themselves in harm's way to save him. "This was like a total epiphany moment for me," he says (195). That someone who cares for him would put herself in harm's way is really a pretty pathetic epiphanic moment, but considering the ego-centric way he has used Zen throughout his ordeal, it is a concession we should at least grant him. With the police chopper on its way, "and Marla and all the support group people who couldn't save themselves" trying to save him, he shoots his cheek out, effectively "killing" Tyler and calling to mind the Buddhist saying that if you meet Buddha on the street you should kill him (197). That is, eliminate all preconceived notions, even the goal of Buddhahood.

In the brief final chapter, the narrator awakens in what he thinks is heaven, everything "white on white," a world devoid of advertising slogans and designer home furnishing catalogues (197). His psychiatrist, whom he thinks is God, asks why he caused so much suffering when "each of us is a sacred, unique snowflake of special unique specialness [. . .] God's got it all wrong," the narrator says; "We are not special. We are not crap or trash, either. We just are. We just are, and what happens just happens" (198). Initially, the narrator seems to at least intellectually comprehend *prajñāpāramitā*, recognizing that Tyler's earlier injunctions that we are "crap" and "trash" were merely a form of ego-centric self-flagellation rather than

compassionate teachings pointing the way towards enlightenment. Once he opens himself up to receiving and showing the compassion and wisdom which comes with understanding nondualism, he at least begins to superficially recognize that it was his attachment to complacency and then rage against the consumption-driven world of late capitalism which enslaved him to his (and Tyler's) ego.

As paradoxical as it sounds, it is through the concept of nondualism that one realizes that embracing emptiness leads to wisdom, which is the genesis for compassion. His wisdom in this case, while not transcendent, is the knowledge that he has been trapped inside his own head, which is the only place *samsāra* can exist. His obsessive support group attendance at the beginning of the novel was purely ego-driven to relieve his own suffering without opening the way to caring about those who were truly suffering around him. Similarly, he misguidedly uses bodily suffering to escape mental suffering at fight club, where physical pain provided him with a counter to the deadening of self-consciousness attendant in a world of simulacra where everything is "a copy of a copy of a copy" (11). While violence is certainly antithetical to Buddhist philosophy, the narrator wrongly sees the ascetic nature of Buddhist practice as a form of self-induced suffering. The difference between fight club and a Buddhist *sangha* is that in the latter, practitioners work to lessen self-consciousness because it is the self that leads to suffering, whereas in fight club, reawakening the conscious self through pain is the goal.

Once the narrator opens himself up to Marla and the terminal patients he does have a flash of insight. As he says above, "what happens just happens," suggesting the Buddhist concept of *tathatā*, which means "thusness," or the true nature of things devoid of our delusions. A *tathāgata*, then, is one who uninhibitedly comes and goes thusly, much like the narrator's idealized self. While I agree with Reed that the narrator has a moment of heightened clarity, I stop short of suggesting he attains enlightenment because ridding oneself of a dual personality and ridding oneself of ego are two entirely different bars of soap. As the narrator tells us at the conclusion of the novel, he does not "want to go back [to the world]" because fight club is still going strong even without him. "Everything's going according to the plan," a space monkey in scrubs informs him in the psychiatric ward; "We're going to break up civilization so we can make something better out of the world" (198-199). To leave this "white on white" world would mean, if he actually were enlightened, having to embrace the way of the *bodhisattva*, one who, although having finally attained enlightenment and able to leave the

birth-death-rebirth cycle of *samsāra*, chooses to remain in the world of suffering until all other sentient beings achieve enlightenment. If anything, he has more in common with the older Hīnayāna school of Buddhism in which the enlightened *arhat* leaves the world of suffering behind forever. Labeling the him an *arhat*—one who needs no further learning—would certainly be a stretch in this reader's opinion. For, contrary to Reed's assessment of the film, our narrator is not "a confident and caring individual free of all things tying him to the world" (Reed par. 25). There is no real indication at the end of either the novel or film that he has attained spiritual enlightenment, for, echoing Tyler, "Sticking feathers up your butt . . . does not make you a chicken" (Palahniuk 60).

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### Carrying the Whole Black Race: Woody Strode, John Ford, and the Trials of Blackness

Woody Strode, in speaking of his role in the John Ford western, Sergeant Rutledge, says the following: "You never seen a Negro come off a mountain like John Wayne before. I had the greatest Glory Hallelujah ride across the Pecos River . . . And I did it myself. I carried the whole black race across that river" (McBride 610). Strode experienced a long career as an actor, working with some of film's most heralded directors, such as John Ford, Stanley Kubrick, Lewis Milestone, and Sergio Leone. Yet Strode's stature as an actor has been categorized by some as that of a former athlete, whose roles catered to negative racial stereotypes. However, during this, the 100th anniversary of Strode's birth in 1914, it is time that that his career and his performances be reevaluated, particularly his roles in the films of John Ford. Strode worked in four of John Ford's films, and theirs was a close and complex relationship; they were friends for life. Thus, a close examination of his performances in Ford's *Sergeant Rutledge* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* will show not a stereotypical portrayal of black masculinity, but an incisive interrogation of racial injustice and stereotypes. Examining these films and the relationship of these two men opens up a needed discussion about the status of Strode as an important yet neglected black actor whose roles in a number of films serve to critique and attack historical racism. The nature of this critique is rooted in a trusting friendship between the men, a friendship which showcased, both on the screen and in real-life, a cross-racial collaboration that was unique, enduring, and worthy of more critical attention.

In his work, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, Donald Bogle says this about the actor: "Strode had his most serious (and best) role in John Ford's *Sergeant Rutledge* (1960) . . . But Ford's epic was an exception to the general run of movies Strode worked in. In subsequent films such as *Spartacus* (1960), *The Last Voyage* (1960), *The Sins of Rachel Cade* (1961), *Two Rode Together* (1961), *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), *The Professionals* (1967), and *Shalako* (1968), Woody Strode found himself again bare-chested with muscles bulging and teeth gleaming" (186). With these words, Bogle consigns Strode to the dungeon of the black buck. Moreover, rather than closely addressing the roles Strode played in these films, Bogle simply labels Strode's career as one which can be relegated to the realm of stereotype. Earlier,

within the single page which this work devotes to Strode's long career, Bogle says nothing to suggest that Strode is an important figure in black and American film history. Instead, he writes this about Strode: "With his magnificent physique and spectacular style—quick eyes that flash and dart malevolently, gleaming white teeth fixed in a broad smile, and biceps and triceps that he was quick to flex—Strode became the movies most notable black muscleman, appearing in adventure stories and spectacles" (185). Bogle says these comments regarding Strode's early career in the 1950s, but one gets the sense that this is his estimation of the entirety of Strode's work in film.

For Strode, as a black athlete turned actor, there seems to have been a double challenge, one which Charlene Regester discusses in her essay, "From the Gridiron and the Boxing Ring to the Cinema Screen: The African-American Athlete in pre-1950 Cinema": "As the black athlete was transformed on the screen, he represented both danger and desire—binary opposites, resulting in a problematized image . . . . It thus appears that the black male athlete has always been a viable commodity and a point of exploitation for the cinema industry" (270-71). Regester's contention is crucial to consider in any discussion of Strode's acting long acting career, because it brings to the fore this question: at what point should one disregard his athletic career, and examine his acting career solely on its merits? Moreover, at what point can one look beyond his physique, or at least focus on something more than simply that when discussing Strode's acting career?

In his 1976 essay, *The Devil Finds Work*, James Baldwin makes several points which contribute to this discussion. Of the challenges confronting the black actor, Baldwin says the following: "What the black actor has managed to give are moments—indelible moments, created, miraculously, beyond the confines of the script: hints of reality, smuggled like contraband into a maudlin tale, and with enough force, if unleashed, to shatter the tale to fragments" (104-105). Further along in the discussion, Baldwin makes the point that during the 1970's, many of the "black films" of the era were intended to "make black experience irrelevant and obsolete" (106). Although he does not name the films, one might imagine that he is referring to the "black exploitation" films of the time. Of such films, Baldwin also says that they used as actors, "a staggering preponderance of football players and models" (105). This of course brings one back to the point which Regester makes regarding the black male athlete as commodity and site of exploitation for Hollywood. However, of all of the football players turned

actors during that period of time, it is Woody Strode who stands out—particularly in the films of John Ford—and whose career deserves closer examination. In fact, within many of the roles which Strode played, there are these “indelible moments,” when the actor’s performance transcends his physique and background and the stereotypes attached to such, and gives the audience the “hints of reality,” of which Baldwin writes.

*Sergeant Rutledge* opened in 1960, during which the United States of America was going through a great social upheaval in the form of the civil rights movement. Of course, after 1960, there was more upheaval to come. In the book *Pappy: The Life of John Ford*, written by Dan Ford, the famed director’s grandson, the younger Ford observes: “Warner Brothers, sensitive about possible criticism from the black community, screened the picture for a number of civil rights leaders at various stages of its completion. Their reactions were almost unanimously positive. But when *Sergeant Rutledge* was released the following spring, it was poorly received by critics both black and white” (286). Contributing to this and other criticisms *Sergeant Rutledge* is a misreading of the film. It is a historical drama of a special kind, belonging to a sub-genre which one might call the “historical tribute movie.” Earlier in the book, Dan Ford makes this comment, which I think is informative in terms of the making of *Sergeant Rutledge*: “The mood of the country was changing, and Hollywood was changing with it. There was a new, more liberal, more permissive spirit in the air. Minority groups were clamoring for their piece of the American Dream, and there was a new generation of political leaders who seemed willing to give it to them. John was confused and ambivalent. He liked the new liberalism—particularly the struggle for black civil rights, which in his mind was not unlike the struggle for Irish freedom. But he also knew that he was an old warhorse with set ideas, and that his ability to respond to change was limited” (284). Given these factors, then, what John Ford offers the nation in *Sergeant Rutledge* is his response, as a director who had given American “the West” on celluloid, a film which expands the view of how the West was won, by introducing a view of that saga which includes, as opposed to excludes, the black presence. At one point, John Ford is said to have told Woody Strode, “I cannot make you a star.” Well, he didn’t make Woody into a star. Instead, he made him into a symbol. *Sergeant Rutledge* represents John Ford’s homage to the Black as soldier and American, and is also his blow for civil rights.

As Kathryn Kalinak observes in her essay, "How the West Was Sung: Music in the Westerns of John Ford": "With *Sergeant Rutledge*, Ford put race on the front burner, and no one who saw the film could doubt his intentions" (181). Some critics have remarked that *Sergeant Rutledge* is a confusing movie, because it is in some ways a suspense movie, a courtroom drama, and that these are not John Ford's strong suit. However, what Ford renders in *Sergeant Rutledge* is an expanded vision of how the West was won, and the creation of a "legendary" figure, "Captain Buffalo." The film, then, is not about "realism," but about myth-making, and it does this by addressing and perhaps even attacking some myths, all the while it seeks to create new ones. The central myth of the film surrounds the creation of a figure "Captain Buffalo," personified by Woody Strode, who is strikingly perfect for this role. During this time, there were more polished black film stars; Sidney Poitier and James Edwards come to mind, but neither of them would have been as convincing a figure to personify what Ford is ultimately getting at in this film, which is a tribute to "the 9th Cavalry Regiment, the great Negro unit that had fought some of the hardest fights of the Indian Wars" (Ford 284). Ford thus needed a striking, physically imposing figure, someone who could fill the role of "Captain Buffalo," in such a manner, as to add to the legacy of the Buffalo Soldiers and thus pay homage. Following *Sergeant Rutledge*, a number of films were made which focus upon the Buffalo Soldiers, but this was the first. Other television and movie views of the Buffalo Soldiers include the following: a 1968 episode of the TV western, *High Chaparral*; the 1993 film, *Posse*, which actually features Woody Strode in the role of Storyteller; and the 1997 TNT original film, *Buffalo Soldiers*, which stars Danny Glover. Within *Sergeant Rutledge*, Ford is more than simply responding to the tenor of the times, indeed, he is actually leading the way for Hollywood renderings of the saga of the Buffalo Soldiers, without which the story of the West is incomplete. As Kalinak notes, "Essentially a courtroom drama, *Sergeant Rutledge* nonetheless engages critically with generic expectations of the western, inserting African American soldiers on the frontier into dominant cultural myths about the West and its settling. The Indian wars in the latter half of the nineteenth century were fought by ten cavalry units stationed on the Great Plains, two of which, the Ninth and the Tenth, were made up of segregated African American units commanded by white officers. Thus, roughly 20 percent of post-Civil War U.S. cavalry troops were black. This is not a small proportion" (188).

Within the title song, "Captain Buffalo," the persona is compared to John Henry, the mythical black steel driver, who was, according to legend, the strongest man working the rails. Clearly, the comparison is intentional. Also intentional within the film is the usage of stereotypes in order to address and dispel them. There are at least three stereotypes addressed within this film: the stereotype of the black buck or menace; the stereotype of the lynch mob; and the stereotype of the racist courtroom in which a black man cannot get justice. Ford's film intentionally addresses these stereotypes, in order to attempt to expose them as fraudulent, in the same way that the real criminal is exposed within the film. The plot of *Sergeant Rutledge* is fairly simple, although it is told through a series of flashbacks. A black man, Braxton Rutledge, a 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant in the 9<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry, is being tried for the rape and murder of a white woman, Lucy Dabney, and the murder of her father, Major Dabney. The charges are circumstantial, but the case seems strong, given that it is Rutledge who discovers the dead bodies and who then runs—only to be apprehended, by Lt. Tom Cantrell, his white commanding officer. Ultimately, however, Cantrell serves as Rutledge's defense attorney during the court martial. In some real ways, the black race is on trial in the courtroom, as Rutledge is presumed guilty, on the basis of his both bigness and his blackness. In fact, early on, there is a lynch party with noose in hand, ready to hang Rutledge without a trial. Clearly, Ford adds this archetype of racial history—the lynching of a black man—in order to add depth and resonance to the drama. In her essay, "A Race Divided: The Indian Westerns of John Ford," Angela Aleiss says the following: "Racial bigotry is the subject of *Sergeant Rutledge* (1960). The Indians in this Western, however, serve merely as a catalyst for exploring Black-white racial tensions; they are little more than faceless, shadowy figures who resemble the Apache warriors of Stagecoach. Based on "Captain Buffalo," an original screenplay by James Warner Bellah and Willis Goldbeck, *Sergeant Rutledge* is dedicated to the Ninth and Tenth U.S. Cavalry officers and their all-Black volunteer units (180).

As a courtroom drama focused on race, *Sergeant Rutledge* addresses the themes of servitude, incarceration, and allegiance by presenting a black figure who is in "protective custody"—this time, the custody of a beneficent white attorney who believes in Rutledge when seemingly, all others do not. In his article, "The Black Image in Protective Custody: Hollywood's Racial Buddy Films of the Eighties," Ed Guerrero makes the case that the black actor is frequently in the "protective custody of the white male star. At one point, Guerrero

states, "Hollywood has put what is left of the Black presence on the screen in the protective custody, so to speak, of a White lead or co-star, and therefore in conformity with dominant, White sensibilities and expectations of what Blacks should be like" (239). In the film, Braxton Rutledge is in the protective custody of Tom Cantrell, played by Jeffrey Hunter, who as counsel for the defense, must convince an all-white court that a black man, a former slave, is not guilty of raping and killing a white young man and then also killing a white man, her father. The opening scenes of the film show a lynch mob, ready to spill black blood. The mob is ready to spill black blood—to lynch Rutledge—precisely because of the prevalent racial stereotypes. The mob has been blinded by the blackness of Rutledge, so much so that early on, they cannot "see" or fathom anyone other than the heroic Rutledge as the suspect. As Regester notes, "Strode is shown in the film as being desirable as his body becomes the object of the camera's gaze, but at the same time he is the embodiment of danger because he is fleeing from a murder accusation" (279). The nature of the "danger" is that of the black man as would-be rapist (of white womanhood), as symbol of defiance and athletic and sexual prowess, and an unknown and unbridled virility. Clearly, this film seems to suggest that the black male is to be feared; is not to be trusted, all the while he is to be admired for his physical presence. Perhaps this is what Regester and others mean by "problematized image" (270). One could clearly view the film as saying that not only is this lone black man, Braxton Rutledge on trial, but so too, is the entire race. This is a particularly intriguing notion, because, as Kalinak notes: "The crusading journalist, editor and publisher Oswald Garrison Villard, who in 1903 wrote one of the first chronicles of the buffalo soldiers, described African Americans in the military as 'on trial,' producing a soldier 'who must worry incessantly about his relations to his white comrades'" (189). Braxton Rutledge is the personification of blackness on trial, and the nature of "blackness" as shown in the film is that it is surrounded, or bounded, by fear. Not only is there fear of Rutledge's blackness, but Rutledge has been shown to have a fear of whiteness, particularly in terms of his dealings with white women. In one particular scene, Braxton Rutledge is alone in a deserted railway station, and is attempting to protect a lone white woman, Mary Beecher, played by Constance Towers, from marauding Apache. Beecher also serves as the love interest of Lt. Cantrell. Within this scene, Ford addresses a number of stereotypes, including the stereotype or myth is of the big black male as rapist, an image straight out of Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*. Ford's film counters this image with a powerful

one of Braxton Rutledge, at one point bare-chested because he has been wounded by the Apache, alone with the lovely young Mary Beecher, but protecting her, and even addressing the fact that she represents "trouble" for a black man like him. This scene is an example of Ford's film taking on the stereotype head-on and countering. And, if Rutledge personifies blackness on trial, this film represents one instance where the black man is found not guilty, in spite of the earlier specter of a racist courtroom and threatening lynch mob.

As much as Sergeant Rutledge is a tribute film, it is also a film about injustice. One of the most poignant scenes within the film occurs when Braxton Rutledge holds a dying comrade in his arms, and they speak of what their service means, both to them, their children, and the black race in general. The dying Cpl. Moffett says to Rutledge, "My three little girls. What's going to happen to them, Brax?" To this, Rutledge replies, "Someday, Moffett, they are gonna be awful proud of you." With his last words, Moffett makes another statement question about legacy and sacrifice, "We're fools to fight the white man's war." To this, Rutledge replies, "It ain't the white man's war. We're fighting to make us proud. Someday your little girls . . . ." By the time Rutledge utters these words, his comrade is dead, but the effect of the scene lingers on, offering up an image of proud black men who sacrificed their lives in spite of the injustices surrounding them as second-class citizens. This scene brings to mind the "Double V" campaign, which was waged by the black press and community during WWII. The slogan "Double V" stood for victory both abroad, in the war effort, and victory at home, against racism. For Rutledge and his fellow buffalo soldiers, there is always a double battle to be waged, albeit, in this instance, against another ostracized group, Native Americans. Clearly, that is the impetus behind the actions of Braxton Rutledge and his comrades, acceptance as men and as Americans. They must show their allegiance to country and flag, even though they recognize the racism which they confront. Thus, ultimately, the film asks its black characters, particularly while they are fighting and dying, this question: "to whom, ultimately, do you have allegiance?" And, according to Braxton Rutledge, that allegiance is both to one another, as "Buffalo Soldiers," and also to the American flag, for through their allegiance to duty and country, they hope to combat and defeat racism, if not for themselves, then for future generations.

That theme, allegiance, is also evident in the character of Pompey, played by Woody Strode in Ford's masterpiece, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*, a film about the settling, or perhaps even the taming, of the West. Within the film, there are different methodologies which

are advocated to accomplish this end, as the character of Ranse Stoddard, played by James Stewart, advocates for law, education and civility, while that of Tom Doniphon, played by John Wayne, believes the gun and violence are the means by which the West will be won. As is the case in *Sergeant Rutledge*, the film *Liberty Valence* concerns itself with the theme of war; in this case, a war waged between white men for control of the town of Shinbone. However, Ford uses the character of Pompey to highlight allegiance and the loyalty of a black man in the face of blatant racial injustice. In order to appreciate and comprehend Ford's subtle critique of racism within *Liberty Valence*, one must focus on the scenes in which Pompey, who is essentially Tom Doniphon's "Man Friday," appears, usually at Doniphon's side. It is he who serves as Doniphon's farm hand, side-kick, and keeper, helping his employer protect the law-abiding white citizens of Shinbone, a town in the midst of the territory. Yet, it is also Pompey whose character more is perhaps revealing as any other in the film, in that it is through this character—and through a close examination of the scenes in which he appears—that this "Western" becomes also a film which poignantly addresses the topic of racism and the ostracism experienced by black settlers who were part of the western saga.

As Kalinak observes, "Two Rode Together shares with other late Ford westerns, such as *The Searchers*, *Sergeant Rutledge*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*, and *Cheyenne Autumn*, a revisionary impulse to take account of what is usually repressed when the dominant culture controls the historical narrative of the American West" (187). It is through the role of Pompey that Ford offers up an insightful critique of racism, one which is "embedded" within the film. Prior to examining *Liberty Valence*, a bit more closely, it would be helpful to turn to the work of Toni Morrison to discuss a concept which will be beneficial in addressing the image and role of Strode in this (and other) Ford films. In her work, *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison speaks of a "dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence" (5). The utilization and evocation of the "Africanist presence" is precisely what is occurring in both of these films, perhaps more powerfully and subtly in *Liberty Valence*, but also very clearly in the courtroom scenes in *Rutledge* which is, after all, a film about racial alienation and prejudice. *Liberty Valence* is not, at least on the surface, but the characterization of Strode as a "dark, abiding, signing" presence in *Liberty Valence* is in some ways more powerful because it is not on the surface a film about race. Instead, it is about identity—the American identity, writ large, and the means by which the West can be tamed and our country, our nation, can be realized. There are

numerous types of white men and women in *Liberty Valance*—foreigners, Easterners, cowboys—but there is only one black, Pompey. Within this film, Pompey thus becomes a “signing Africanist presence,” through which John Ford critiques American hypocrisy, by showing the alienation of the black person or person of color.

In his review of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, Roger Ebert says the following: “The way Ford employs the African-American Pompey is observant. The tall, confident Woody Strode appeared in five Ford pictures, all the way from *Stagecoach*, to Ford’s final film, *7 Women* (1966). It is made clear in *Liberty Valance* that segregation was the practice in the territory. When a meeting is held to vote on statehood, Pompey sits outside on the porch. When he walks into a bar to fetch Tom, the bartender won’t serve him, and Tom slams hard on the bar: ‘Give him a drink.’ But Pompey won’t drink. He is Tom’s farmhand and seems to be his only confidant, a protective presence; he always has Tom’s back. Ford isn’t making an anachronistic statement on racism, but he’s being sure we notice it” (3). Ford clearly shows us that Pompey is little more than a slave whose loyalty to Tom Doniphon is without question. As a matter of fact, it is he who is the sole mourner when Ransom Stoddard and Hallie Stoddard (played by Vera Miles) return to Shinbone to pay their respect to the late Doniphon. Indeed, John Ford seems to be saying, Pompey’s status within the town is little more than that of a semi-citizen. There is a poignant sadness and a harsh realism to the scenes where Pompey’s ironic status is shown, such as when white man after white man enters the town saloon, where every white man is able to vote. Yet, Pompey is seated outside, rifle at his side, protecting the white man’s right to vote, while he has no such right. The other scene which Ford uses to hammer home the status of Pompey as outsider or semi-citizen is one which occurs within a classroom, conducted by Ransie Stoddard. The school is for immigrants, such as the Ericsons and Mexicans, and of course, the sole black, Pompey. In his essay, “John Ford’s Wilderness: *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*,” David Coursen says the following which is pertinent here: “The extent of Ford’s willingness to question, if not actually discard, even the most sacred American myths and ideals comes into vivid focus in a relatively straightforward, almost didactic scene midway through the film. This sequence takes place in the new school in the frontier community of Shinbone, where teacher Ransie Stoddard (James Stewart) presides over a virtual western miniature of the American melting pot. The class day begins with a group of Mexican children singing the ABC Song while their patriarch, buffoonish town marshal

Link Appleyard (Andy Devine), beams his approval. The next question is addressed to the class's token Negro, Pompey (Woody Strode, here looking as Uncle Remus as Ford could make him), and he stands up so that his face shares the frame with the likeness of the Great Emancipator himself. The sequence is just unsettling enough that when Tom Doniphon (John Wayne), Pompey's master/employer/companion, bursts into the classroom and sends Pompey back to work, our response is curiously ambivalent. The overt content of the civics lesson, expressing faith in universal education, law and egalitarian democracy, makes it reprehensible to deny a black man access to education. But Pompey's actual position in the classroom, where he is more completely servile, more truly a 'boy' in demeanor and circumstance than anywhere else in the film, complicates our response. Of course, in the early Shinbone Pompey cannot eat in a restaurant, drink in a saloon, or vote in a town meeting" (Coursen). This scene, with Pompey struggling and yearning for education and equality, only to be sent back to the field—and his place as servant—by Doniphon, exposes the hypocrisy of white patriarchy.

Ironically, it is Pompey who later saves Doniphon's life, when the former, in a drunken fit of despondency over losing Hallie, the woman he thought was his, tries to commit suicide by burning down his own house, with himself in it. And, how is Pompey repaid by Doniphon? He is re-enslaved by Tom. Within this film, Tom is a representation of the heroic ideal white male—he who purportedly tamed the West—yet he is also represents the flaws of the heroic ideal. In fact, viewing these two films in comparison, one sees that Ford is pointing to an alternate vision, one which suggests that the white male did not "tame" the West alone, and also that the ideal was painfully flawed. It is the pain suffered by Pompey which points this out. Pompey is the most loyal to Tom in the film yet the least appreciated. Pompey is Braxton Rutledge. These scenes with Pompey go to the heart of what Ford is trying to say about race within both films. Clearly, within both films, the law is seen as unjust: it is the law which first enslaved noble men like Braxton Rutledge and Pompey. It is the law which seeks to hang Rutledge, mainly because he is black. There is of course, circumstantial evidence linking him to the rape and murders, but the greatest circumstance, Ford's film says, is Braxton's black skin. Moreover, it is the law which prohibits Pompey from taking part in the Shinbone elections, or taking a drink at the town saloon, even though he is clearly, the "man"—the manly equal to any other man in Shinbone, including his boss.

Within both of these films, the black male played by Strode is shown as poised, dignified, and loyal, yet also isolated and underappreciated. It is Tom who commands, or pulls Pompey out of the classroom when the black servant is attempting to gain an education. It is Tom who seemingly respects Pompey, for his physical strength and "manliness," yet it is Tom who neglects to treat Pompey like a man. Moreover, one need only compare the scene in which Tom pulls Pompey from the classroom, education and a greater step toward "liberty," with the scene where Pompey saves Tom's life by pulling him from his burning house, to see what Ford is getting at within both of these films. If *Liberty Valence* has as one of its themes "liberty" and self-determination," then clearly Tom Doniphon, the great white hero, is portrayed as acting antithetically to the spirit of "liberty for all." Within this film, perhaps not only the black man, but America is on trial, as John Ford uses the characters portrayed by Woody Strode to signify the alienation and injustice experienced by blacks. Whether through the lynch mob of white men who wish to hang Braxton Rutledge, or those who walk by Pompey while he sits outside the saloon which they enter to vote, it is clear that Ford uses these two characters to highlight American racial injustice.

Not enough attention has been paid to the entirety of Strode's work with John Ford, and also to the complex yet close, almost kinship relationship, between Ford and Strode. John Ford was an Irish Catholic who felt that his own background helped him understand the plight of blacks. At one point, recounting his own war experiences, Ford talks about how, after landing at Omaha Beach, he saw "scores of black bodies lying in the sand. Then I realized that it was impossible not to consider them full-fledged American citizens" (McBride, 607). It is Ford who fights for Strode when the studios wish to cast either Harry Belafonte or Sidney Poitier in the role of Braxton Rutledge. It is Ford who casts Strode in several of his other films, including *Two Rode Together* (1961), and *7 Women* (1966). Along with Ford's own sons, Strode who was one of the few people allowed to call John Ford, "Papa." Of their relationship, in response to criticisms of racism within his work, John Ford countered with the following statement, "The people who say such things are crazy. I am a Northerner. I hate segregation, and I gave jobs to hundreds of Negroes at the same salary the whites were paid . . . Me, a racist? My best friends are black: Wood Strode and a caretaker [Bill Ramsey] who has worked for me for thirty years" (McBride 607). Indeed, during Ford's declining years, it was Strode who moved into Ford's house, for four months, sleeping on the floor of Ford's bedroom, taking care of his dear

friend. Strode characterized theirs as a father-son relationship. Clearly, it can be argued that John Ford used Woody Strode, perhaps as a symbol of Ford's liberal views. In a 1972 interview with Frank Manchel, which incidentally, took place in John Ford's home (where both Ford and Strode's first wife, Princess Luana were present), Strode mentions how Ford told him, "Woody, we'd like to show what the black man did in American history . . . We would like to show that they helped build the American West also" (Manchel 363).

In his autobiography, *Gold Dust*, Strode talks about coming back from Italy in 1973 just in time to make it to Ford's side prior to his death. Strode speaks of how he "sat there on the side of his bed for six hours, holding his hand, until he went into a coma" (*Gold Dust*, 249). In the memoir, Strode continues, "He died. His sister and I took an American flag and draped him in it. We got some brandy, toasted him, and broke the glasses into the fireplace. I walked out of that house, and I never looked back. First Kenny [Washington] and then John Ford: my best friends were dead" (249). In his work, *John Ford: The Man and His Films*, Tag Gallagher writes the following, "The funeral [for John Ford] was held September 5, at Hollywood's Church of the Blessed Sacrament. Richard Koszarski reports that, before the service, the church was empty except for the coffin and a single mourner, Woody Strode—a scene out of *Liberty Valence*" (455).

The nature of the relationship between Woody Strode and John Ford was one of depth and complexity. Indeed, as much as Ford cast Woody Strode in roles in which the black actor was in the protective custody of a white co-star (usually a leading man), it can also be argued that Strode's very career was in in the "protective custody" of John Ford, at least for a period time. Strode, in discussing his relationship with the famed Italian director, Sergio Leone, says the following: "*Once Upon a Time in the West* was the only picture I did for Sergio Leone . . . Unfortunately, Sergio is dead today, but if you checked with his office, you'd find he has an autographed picture from John Ford. On the picture, Ford wrote, 'If there's anything I can do to help make Woody a star, I'll do it for free'" (237). The cross-racial relationship between Ford and Strode is one which demands more examination than this space affords, but suffice it to say, that perhaps, in the final estimation, John Ford and Woody Strode were in the protective custody of one another, marking a strange yet touching relationship. Clearly, there was love and respect and loyalty, and it is those qualities which are evident in Strode's performances in *Sergeant Rutledge* and *Liberty Valence*. The theme song for *Sergeant Rutledge*, "Captain

Buffalo," is a tribute song, one which seeks to reinforce the myth-making of the film: "Have you ever seen a soldier in the U.S. Cavalry/Who is built like Lookout Mountain, taller than a redwood tree?" Those lines, along with others in the song, which compare "Captain Buffalo" to the mythic John Henry, paint a picture of what John Ford is trying to do within both the film and for the career of Woody Strode. As Kalinak states in her discussion of the song, "The song expresses what the film cannot depict: a powerful black male" (193). For John Ford, Woody Strode was an apt figure to characterize that "powerful black male." Moreover, Strode was for Ford the loyal black male figure, the actor to whom he turned over and over again, to make statements about racism, and to also help sustain the career of one of his closest and dearest friends, theirs being a complex, cross-racial friendship. Big, black Woody Strode is the vehicle that Ford uses to comment on racism and hegemony, as any close analysis of the characters played by Woody Strode will yield a powerful critique of the master narrative of the American West. Within these characters of Braxton Rutledge and Pompey, is to be found an abiding a quiet dignity, integrity and loyalty, which serve to counter prevailing stereotypes regarding black masculinity. Additionally, the black male characters in these two films counter the notion that it was white males alone who "won" or tamed the Western frontier. Finally, it is clear that the partnership of John Ford and Woody Strode is a filmic friendship which deserves more critical attention, and appreciation, for the varied ways in which Ford utilized the talented black actor to make timely statements about social injustice and to expose the inherent flaws in the master narrative of the West.

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### **Seeking Grace: *The Tempest*, Race Relations, and American Popular Culture**

Since the last half of the 20th Century, postcolonial readings of William Shakespeare's plays have dramatically changed the ways these plays are performed and taught. Perhaps the most notable changes have occurred in interpretation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Postcolonial interpretations generally consider the character Caliban a sympathetic figure, with some theorists going so far as to designate him the hero of *The Tempest* whose homeland and freedom are stolen by Prospero much the same as how Native Americans' homeland and Africans' freedom were stolen by New World settlers. These new interpretations burst upon the scene and generated a great deal of interest in reading and performing *The Tempest*. They also generated controversy and a backlash against those readings that has even found its way into the mainstream media. The backlash against postcolonial readings making Caliban a sympathetic figure in *The Tempest* parallels the discourse that occurs in American popular culture around issues of the slavery of Africans and African-Americans in this country, civil rights, and race relations. Indeed, it is not an oversimplification to say, historically speaking, as go readings of Caliban, so go American race relations and understandings of slavery.

Throughout much of American history, African-Americans were overlooked and their experiences absent from mainstream popular culture. There were, of course, references to African-Americans in popular culture, both during slavery and after the Civil War, and there was also the occasional African-American who would himself or herself make an appearance in American popular culture. Still, even when African Americans were present, they had no choice but to conform to the expectations of white America if they wished for any measure of economic success. One example is in minstrel shows of the late 19th Century. Typically, these shows portrayed the African-American post-Civil War experience as one of longing wistfully for the bygone days of slavery. African Americans, according to minstrel shows, were simple, docile, and less intelligent, and they lamented the fact that freedom had taken them from the South and the easy lifestyle they had there. African Americans were portrayed in these minstrel shows as being "[p]reoccupied with visions of a good master and good rum" and preferring "an old-time possum hunt and barbecue to a fancy meal in a northern hotel" (Van Deburg 112).

Most minstrel shows were what is referred to as "burnt cork minstrel shows," which were shows with white performers who portrayed African Americans by appearing in blackface, but

there were some African-American minstrel companies who would market themselves as superior to these burnt cork minstrel companies, as they were authentic and not mere imitations. All too often, though, these African-American companies found that audiences demanded to see the same characterizations of former slaves as had been performed by the burnt cork minstrel companies. Unfortunately, these characterizations by African Americans may have reinforced stereotypes, as audiences may well have thought, "If these genuine [African Americans] behaved in much the same manner as their white imitators, who could question the fundamental accuracy of the minstrelsy interpretation of slave life and culture?" (Van Deburg 113).

As such, the presence of African Americans in popular culture of that time did not have much of an impact on dispelling stereotypes, and "their primary contribution to reeducating white America would be to reserve a place on stage for future generations" (Van Deburg 113-14). The same could be said of African Americans who appeared in film and television through much of the 20th Century. When they were portrayed at all, African Americans generally were shown as benign, jovial, happy-go-lucky, noncritical, and nonthreatening to white Americans. From Arthur Duncan of "The Lawrence Welk Show" to Nat King Cole and his television variety show to Sammy Davis, Jr. as a member of the Rat Pack, African-American visibility and success oftentimes came with the condition that the African Americans made visible not offend white American sensibilities, and when they did offend those sensibilities, they were often quickly censured for it. As such, they were not able to increase social consciousness to any great extent, and their contributions were mainly, as with the African-American minstrel companies, that of making room for future generations of performers.

Traditional readings of *The Tempest* were not concerned with such matters as oppression and race relations. Instead, these readings were similar to the interpretation presented by Frank Kermode in his introduction to the Arden edition of *The Tempest*, published in 1954. In his introduction, Kermode takes the position that *The Tempest* sets forth "the great and perennial problem of the nature of Nature" (xxv). To be sure, Kermode acknowledges the play's handling of issues related to European colonization of the New World, and he even goes so far as to recognize that Caliban "is the core of the play" (xxiv). However, Caliban as "core" of *The Tempest* primarily serves to show, according to Kermode, the extent to which Art is able to subdue and civilize Nature. Kermode's reading and traditional readings

of the play assert that Prospero is able to transform Caliban "by breeding and learning" from a purely natural brute to a more civilized being able to express himself verbally (xlviii).

In fact, Caliban's own words in *The Tempest* make clear the extent to which learning to speak has given him a means of profound expression. One of the most beautiful passages in the play is in Act 3, Scene 2, where Caliban is describing to Stephano and Trinculo the magic of the island. He tells them the island's noises "give delight and hurt not" and that they sound like "a thousand twangling instruments" (III.ii.131-32). His description is wistful and heartbreaking, especially when he talked of the magical dreams he would have and told Stephano and Trinculo, "when I waked / I cried to dream again" (III.ii.138). Caliban says learning to speak has only been useful because it teaches him "how to curse" (I.ii.367). It is through speaking, though, that Caliban is able to describe his island home, convince Stephano and Trinculo to try and overthrow Prospero, and atone for his rebellion at the end of the play. Caliban's final words in the play, that he is "a thrice-double ass" for having followed Stephano and Trinculo, speak particularly powerfully to his sense of failure by the end of *The Tempest* (V.i.295).

Caliban's words that he was a "thrice-double ass" who will "seek for grace" are pointed to by traditional scholars as providing evidence of Caliban's awareness that the civility offered by Prospero is superior to his own rebellious nature (V.i.295). The traditional reading requires that *The Tempest* unequivocally assert the superiority of civilization over uncivilized nature, and as such, it requires interpreting Caliban's rebellion as unwarranted and his punishment at the end of the play as completely justified. According to Kermode, Shakespeare has created in Prospero an exemplar of how Art can most benevolently control Nature, by exercising "virtue and temperance" (xlviii). Prospero, then, is virtuous, temperate, and civilized. Caliban, by rebelling against Prospero, rejects these qualities, and at the end of the play, he sees the error in his ways and resolves to "be wise hereafter / And seek for grace" (V.i.294-95). His punishment is seen as justified, as it has allowed him to understand that Prospero's ways are superior to his own.

Such readings of *The Tempest* are similar to and tend to reinforce the traditional view of slavery in America as a largely benevolent institution. The portrait this reading gives of Prospero's enslavement of Caliban is that of a genteel, refined, and well-educated person merely attempting to teach an uncivilized and ungrateful native appropriate and civilized

behavior. The reading sets forth a view of slavery as possibly beneficial to the person who is enslaved, insofar as it allows that person the opportunity to learn civility. It is not a stretch to think that slaves who had such benevolent masters may be wistful for the bygone days of slavery after gaining their freedom. Certainly, someone accepting the view of slavery put forth by traditional readings of *The Tempest* would be more apt to view a rebellious slave as one who has betrayed his or her master, rather than as someone justifiably seeking freedom from inhuman treatment. Insofar as these traditional readings of *The Tempest* allow for the possibility of the pro-slavery views prevalent in American popular culture after the Civil War, such readings of the play did little to affect race relations and popular culture, as those pro-slavery views continued unquestioned.

This began to change in the 1960s and 70s, and a visible indicator of that change in American popular culture was the release of Alex Haley's book *Roots* in 1976 and the TV miniseries made of the book in 1977. The miniseries portrayed slavery as harsh and inhumane, something that African-American slaves would risk death and endure serious physical injury in order to try to escape. It was also an extremely popular miniseries, with the final episode attracting almost 90 million viewers and becoming the most-watched television show in this country up to that time (Van Deburg 155). The miniseries and the book on which it was based were not without their problems. Some scholars criticized the miniseries as filtering the African-American experience through a "white lens" in order to attract more white viewers, and Alex Haley was accused of plagiarism and fabricating part of the book, which was supposed to tell his family history (Van Deberg 145, 155-56). Still, *Roots* successfully put in front of the country a view of slavery that few other media had done, at least certainly not to as large an audience.

At about the same time, the Caribbean and Latin America began to read the character of Caliban in *The Tempest* as a symbol of their own cultural history. In his essay "Caliban: Notes Toward a Discussion of Culture in America," published in 1969, Cuban Roberto Fernández Retamar wrote,

Prospero invaded the islands, killed our ancestors, enslaved Caliban, and taught him his language to make himself understood. What else can Caliban do but use that same language -- today he has no other -- to curse him, to wish that the 'red plague' would fall on him? I know no other metaphor more expressive of our

cultural situation, of our reality . . . [W]hat is our history, what is our culture, if not the history and culture of Caliban? (Retamar qtd. in Garber 27)

The same cultural shifts that gave rise to the postcolonial interpretation of Caliban in Latin America also brought about productions of *The Tempest* in the United States that cast African Americans to play the part of Caliban. In fact, casting Caliban as an African American in productions of *The Tempest* had become so ubiquitous by 2008 that, when discussing a prison production's casting of a white man as Caliban, Marjorie Garber comments on "how different this version of the play is from those one might see in a modern theater" (3).

The shift in popular culture that had led to the success of the miniseries *Roots* had also led to a shift in the understanding of Caliban from treacherous and ungrateful monster to sympathetic and oppressed enslaved African American. *Roots* and these portrayals of Caliban are some of many ways that African Americans of the 1970s had begun to call attention to their cultural history and shared experiences. A 1976 article says about interpretations of *The Tempest* at the time, "Caliban, like many Afro-Americans today, finds roots in Africa and claims heirship to a kingdom. He has fragmentary memories of ancestral beliefs. He is fortified by his ancestral gods" (Bruner 251). This description of Caliban sounds strikingly similar to Kunta Kinte, main character of Haley's novel *Roots*. Certainly, both characters have in common their utility to African Americans who gave voice to their cultural traditions. James W. Coleman goes a step further and states that "Calibanic discourse influences a tradition of modernist and postmodernist African American male novels" (Coleman 1). The influence of this discourse in African American creative works arose from new readings of Caliban as a sympathetic character.

In the mid-1970s, American postcolonial scholars also began to think of Caliban as an oppressed and sympathetic figure mistreated by Prospero much the same as how African-American slaves had been mistreated. While the traditional reading of *The Tempest* sees Caliban's language as evidence that Prospero has attempted to bestow a benefit on him, postcolonial scholars instead view Caliban's speech as subversive and an attempt to undermine Prospero's imperial power over him. In his book *Shakespeare and Race*, Imitiaz Habib outlines three main ways Caliban's use of language subversively undermines Prospero's authority over him. First, Caliban's speech allows him to communicate with Stephano and Trinculo. In Act 2, Scene 2, Stephano states that he will give Caliban "some

relief" for his ability to speak, notwithstanding what he describes as Caliban's inhuman appearance (II.ii.64). Caliban's ability to speak, then, moves him in the eyes of Trinculo and Stephano from a mere monster to someone deserving some measure of kindness.

In addition, according to Habib, Caliban's ability to speak reinforces the importance of Prospero's books to his own power. Repeatedly, Caliban reminds Stephano to "Burn but his books" in order to overpower and depose Prospero as ruler of the island (III.ii.95). Because Prospero has taught Caliban the power of words, Caliban is able to recognize the centrality of words to Prospero's power and realize that Prospero's power can only be overcome by destroying the source of Prospero's magic words. The third way Habib states that Caliban uses speech to undermine Prospero's power is through cursing. As Caliban says to Prospero in Act 1, "You taught me language, and my profit on 't / Is I know how to curse" (I.ii.366-67). The fact that Caliban has been taught to speak by Prospero and then uses that ability to speak in order to curse Prospero places both of them in a sort of rhetorical equality. In fact, Habib insists that Caliban's moral position is superior, since, unlike Prospero's curses, Caliban's curses do not actually cause bodily harm. "The efficacy of this cunning recursive strategy is proven in the fact that Prospero's only response . . . is to silence him with the threat of force" (Habib 242).

Habib and other postcolonial scholars thus transform Caliban's ability to speak from a benevolent gift of a kind master to a subversive tool used to undermine unjust imperial rule. The traditional reading that tends to reinforce the view of slavery prevalent in late-19th and early-20th century American popular culture, where slavery is a largely benign institution that actually did some good to African-American slaves, is soundly rejected by postcolonial scholars. Instead, slaves are understood as oppressed, brutalized, and willing to take drastic measures to be free. In Act 3, Scene 2, Caliban persuades Stephano and Trinculo to depose Prospero and take his place as ruler of the island, stating his wish to become their slave. While the traditional reading would see this as evidence that Caliban prefers slavery to freedom, postcolonial scholars see Caliban's actions as proof that he has internalized the imperial value system encountered during his enslavement. According to postcolonial readings of *The Tempest*, Caliban is enslaved and his homeland taken by a powerful individual who exploits him and demands free labor in return for the avoidance of bodily harm, much the same as Native Americans and African Americans were exploited by New World settlers.

Still, it would be an overstatement to say that postcolonial scholars speak with one voice as regards readings of English literature in general or *The Tempest* in particular. As Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin state in their *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, postcolonialism "is not, it may be helpful to remember, a homogenous body of writing, or a single way of approaching the question of colonial power relations" (7). Many postcolonial scholars approach the character of Caliban and his use of language as does Habib, emphasizing the ways Caliban subverts Prospero's authority through the language Prospero has taught him to speak. Such a reading emphasizes Caliban's agency and the personal power that he retains despite Prospero's rule. Other postcolonial readings of *The Tempest* think it naïve to assume Caliban had any power at all, as colonial rule is so overpowering that even Caliban's assertions of power can be seen as merely parroting the power structure imposed on him by Prospero. Loomba and Orkin ask, "in what voices do the colonized speak – their own, or in accents borrowed from their masters?" (7).

An example of Caliban acting, or at least attempting to act, in accordance with the dominant colonial power structure is found in Act 1, Scene 2, where Prospero accuses Caliban of having attempted to rape Miranda. Caliban responds to Prospero, "Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else / This isle with Calibans" (I.ii.353-354). In this passage, it is Caliban himself who expresses the colonialist desire to populate the land with his own kind. He does not deny Prospero's accusation but instead justifies his actions in a way that a colonizer would understand. Whereas in the past, Caliban was "[his] own king," he has been deposed by an individual who killed his mother and forced him into slavery (I.ii.345). As the play progresses, it seems that Prospero is intent on seeing Ferdinand and Miranda marry and themselves populate the island with children. Caliban's words in Act 1, Scene 2, then, merely express a desire to regain power over the island in a way that Prospero would understand, through the violent overpowering of others and colonization of the land with his own people.

The traditional reading of *The Tempest* would see Caliban's wish to rape Miranda and populate the island with "Calibans" as evidence of his brutal and barbaric nature (I.ii.354). Certainly, Miranda's response to Caliban sets forth this sentiment: "Abhorred slave, / Which any print of goodness wilt not take, / Being capable of all ill!" (I.ii.354-356). These lines begin a speech wherein Miranda tells Caliban that teaching him to speak had the effect of "endow[ing] thy purposes / With words that made them known" (I.ii.360-361). In other words, the colonizer's

gift of "civilized" language to the colonized gives the colonized the power to express that which had been previously inexpressible. Inasmuch as the colonized possesses any power, it is only that power given to him or her by the colonizer. Before Miranda taught Caliban language, he "wouldst gabble like / A thing most brutish" (I.ii.359-360). Caliban's native identity was no identity at all, according to the traditional reading, and being taught the colonizer's speech and mannerisms in essence changes him from a mere "thing most brutish" to an individual finally able to understand his own thoughts (I.ii.358-360).

By contrast, a postcolonial reading of this passage would emphasize the hybrid nature of Caliban's identity as civilized native, which is to say that Caliban neither exemplifies a civilized colonizer nor an uncivilized native person. As Homi Bhabha states, "[i]t is not the Colonialist Self or the Colonised other, but the disturbing distance in between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness – the White man's artifice inscribed on the Black man's body" (45). Miranda having taught Caliban to speak does not amount to the transformation of a native non-being into a civilized being like the colonizer, but rather it results in the native becoming a hybrid identity that defies ready identification as either native or colonizer. Caliban's power, then, arises from the fact that the colonizer is incapable of appropriating him completely. Loomba similarly states that "[t]he ambivalence of colonial discourses indicates a failure of authority smoothly to impose itself upon those it seeks to govern" (145). Postcolonial readings of this sort emphasize, not the extent to which Caliban has lost power and been assimilated by the colonizer, but the extent to which he retains power as a result of his hybrid identity.

After their introduction in the 1960s and 70s, postcolonial interpretations of *The Tempest* quickly became popular in scholarly circles, and by the 1980s, the traditional readings were widely derided by critics. Scholars still adhering to the traditional interpretation of the play risked "being demonized as 'idealist' or 'aestheticist' or 'essentialist'" (Felperin 171). The play became so identified with colonization of the New World and issues around slavery in America that some critics found it necessary to devote "considerable polemical energy to arguing that *The Tempest might* be about something other than (or rather, something in addition to) colonialism" (Halpern 265). In fact, critics in other countries have been reluctant to embrace *The Tempest* as useful in their own contexts due to the strong identification with New World colonialism that Postcolonial scholars have insisted upon when interpreting the play. For

instance, Frank Brevik expresses surprise that former Soviet Bloc countries did not point to the play as analogous to their own circumstances as they began to revolt and break away from the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As Brevik notes, one reason Eastern European countries may have been reluctant to utilize *The Tempest* as speaking to their own oppression, as Caribbean countries had during the 1960s, was because in the interim, the play had become nearly inextricably linked to New World colonialism (132-33).

As Shakespeare scholars in this country began publishing articles and books containing this postcolonial understanding of *The Tempest* and began teaching students this reading of Shakespeare's play, a backlash developed both in academia and in popular culture. Political commentator George Will wrote a piece that appeared in *Newsweek* April 22, 1991 titled "Literary Politics," in which he spoke out against what he deemed unnecessarily politicized readings of literature, such as the reading that "Shakespeare's 'Tempest' reflects the imperialist rape of the Third World" (111). Will was particularly distressed by the assumption that literary works are political, and he said such a belief "radically devalues authors and elevates the . . . critics . . . as indispensable decoders of literature" (111). In other words, Will's charge is that not everything is political, and critics are ruining Shakespeare by forcing their political readings on the texts. Instead, they should limit themselves to "esthetic" readings of the texts, which by all appearances would be those more in keeping with Will's own reading. He does not go into detail what would constitute an "esthetic" reading versus a political reading, but presumably such a reading of *The Tempest* would not see Caliban as a victim of oppression analogous to those victimized by imperialist powers in the New World.

Shakespeare scholar Stephen Greenblatt responded to Will's article with an article of his own titled "The Best Way to Kill Our Literary Inheritance Is to Turn It into a Decorous Celebration of the New World Order," which appeared in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on June 12, 1991. In it, Greenblatt states it is curious that Will would argue *The Tempest* is not about imperialism in the New World, as *The Tempest* contains several key indicators that Shakespeare intended exactly that interpretation when he wrote the play. For instance, Greenblatt notes that the secretary of the Jamestown settlement had written of a storm and shipwreck off the coast of Bermuda that was similar to the storm in the first act of *The Tempest* (114). He also points to an essay written by Michel de Montaigne around this same time period called "Of the Cannibals," which spoke admiringly about the native people of the New World.

As Greenblatt states, Shakespeare had clearly read "Of the Cannibals," since one of the characters in *The Tempest* quotes part of the essay (114).

Given this historical evidence, Shakespeare clearly intended to draw parallels between New World imperialism and Prospero's exercise of power over the island in *The Tempest*. Greenblatt correctly states, then, that "it is very difficult to argue that *The Tempest* is *not* about imperialism"(114). Contrary to Will's apparent belief that reading *The Tempest* in this way ruins Shakespeare, Greenblatt insists that "it is . . . difficult to come to terms with what *The Tempest* has to teach us about forgiveness, wisdom, and social atonement if we do not also come to terms with its relations to colonialism" (115). Only through acknowledging the clear connection Shakespeare was making between *The Tempest* and colonization of the New World can the other thematic elements in the play be seen most clearly. In other words, teaching Shakespeare effectively requires teaching the connection between *The Tempest* and issues of New World imperialism. To do otherwise, to teach some "esthetic" reading that ignored all the evidence of this connection, would in essence be tantamount to ruining Shakespeare.

Indeed, Will's "esthetic" reading of *The Tempest* would privilege removing from the play any unpleasant entanglements with issues of imperial domination over even what the author intended when writing the play. Clearly, this supposedly non-political reading has a definite political agenda, and Greenblatt implies as much from the title of his essay that such readings are "a Decorous Celebration of the New World Order" (113). Stated in those terms, this "esthetic" reading and the political purposes it serves start to sound very familiar: Caliban was not the oppressed symbol of imperial domination of the New World. He was a disloyal servant who served a benevolent master. Similarly, slaves were not routinely mistreated in America, and after the Civil War, they were wistful for the lives they had before. This "esthetic" reading and the protests that politically liberal race-mongers are taking over teaching *The Tempest* have at their core the same attempts to sugar-coat troubling issues in America's past having to do with slavery and imperial domination.

After Will's and Greenblatt's articles in the early 1990s, Shakespeare seemed to undergo a resurgence in popular culture. From 1990-2000, three film adaptations of *Hamlet* achieved commercial success, and this same period of time saw film productions of *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Love's Labour Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Titus Andronicus*, all of which were profitable for movie studios and producers (Thompson 1059).

Some critics charge that popular culture's interest in Shakespeare in the 1990s was interest in a Shakespeare who had been "dumbed down" for popular audiences (Thompson 1053). Critic Richard Burt states of the film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays that generally "mass culture narratives rely on dated scholarship: they view the writings as timeless monuments, as literary texts in which Shakespeare was working toward a final draft rather than thriving, continual sites of cultural production and revision" (Burt 215). Such an understanding of the texts would see changes made for a film adaptation, such as the modernization in Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet*, as directorial alteration of a timeless text rather than as a text being formed through a process of cultural interpretation.

As such, the films would certainly operate under assumptions contrary to much of recent Shakespeare theory, especially postcolonial, queer, feminist, and presentist readings of the plays that are more inclined to embrace the ways that culture changes the texts by interacting with them. Is this the same as saying that these films reflect a "dumbed down" Shakespeare that is free from the influence of modern critical scholarship? The most recent film adaptation of *The Tempest*, Julie Taymor's 2010 film starring Helen Mirren as Prospera, can only be said to reflect the slightest hint of postcolonial interpretations of the play. Certainly, Mirren's Prospera is no ruthless or unsympathetic master, and Caliban himself hardly garners sympathy by hurling insults at an older woman. Whatever else might be said about the film, it certainly does not reflect a postcolonial reading of the play. Still, one would hesitate before calling Taymor's adaptation of *The Tempest* "dumbed down."

In fact, for such a production as Taymor's *The Tempest* to be made for a popular audience, while not reflecting the latest scholarship but still being very smartly produced and played, speaks toward the possibility of popular culture ascribing meaning to Shakespeare's texts quite apart from historical context, authorial intent, or even Will's 'esthetic' considerations and also apart from the latest scholarly research. Taymor herself states that, while "obvious themes of colonialization and usurpation . . . clearly were part of Shakespeare's worldview," she hoped to "go beyond sociopolitical commentary achieved through a casting choice" in her own production of *The Tempest* (480). Djimon Hounsou, the actor whom Taymor cast as Caliban, argues that his character is definitely no mere brutish savage, but for Hounsou, "Caliban is all about being closely connected to nature," rather than being an enslaved postcolonial subject (Wilkins).

What, then, does this mean for postcolonial interpretations of Caliban as sympathetic and oppressed hero for those victimized by New World imperialism? They definitely continue but do so apart from popular culture's understanding of race, slavery, or even Shakespeare's works as a whole. Additionally, as in earlier periods of American popular culture, currently there is at best ambivalence as regards cultural attitudes about race and slavery in this country. This is evidenced by the sometimes racially inflammatory rhetoric in this country around the subject of President Barack Obama. School districts' attempts in Texas and Tennessee to change descriptions of the slave trade in children's textbooks from the "trans-Atlantic slave trade" to the "Atlantic triangular trade" show that even perceptions of slavery in this country are by no means a settled issue (Lee). Yet, by and large, this back and forth in popular culture occurs apart from, and largely oblivious to, postcolonial academic critical scholarship. The extent to which Shakespeare's plays, particularly *The Tempest*, will be formed by popular culture apart from this postcolonial academic framework remains to be seen.

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## Richard Matheson and the Twilight Fantastic

### On the Theoretical Front

One of the most pernicious effects of the poststructuralist meta-critical excesses that have characterized the major trends in literary research for the last three decades is doubtlessly the voluntary erasure of both the limits of our corpus of study and those of our endeavor; as literary criticism becomes, in the words of Jonathan Culler himself, "an unbounded corpus of writing about everything under the sun" (3), the very object of literary science appears more distant and undefined than ever. Naturally, generic studies have been quickly sacrificed upon the altars of Lacanian or Derridian thought, which have stirred our discipline into a series of logical dead-ends, for merging with psychoanalysis or philosophy is hardly a viable idea when it comes to distinguishing literary studies from neighboring fields, and can only lead our discipline to its dissolution.<sup>1</sup> Some of the most classical deconstructionist arguments, which are today considered all but axiomatic, have been utterly detrimental to further the comprehension of our object of study, for they have cemented the notion that All is the Text and the Text is All – we are all by now very familiar with the famous Derridian quote, "*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" (227), which, conveniently mistranslated into English as "There is nothing outside the text,"<sup>2</sup> has become a sanctified authorization to consider everything as possible literature – after all, Paul de Man did state that the difference between literature and literary criticism was "delusive" (33), without however specifying to which type of literature or literary criticism he was referring. Fortunately, this is obviously not the case, for then, most literary critics would fail to establish any type of textual authority based upon the aesthetic value of their work. The reasons for theory's flight in our field are exposed elsewhere (Ferrerias Savoye, 2009); for our purpose, suffice to say that, as literary scholars, our obligation seems to be precisely the opposite of that imposed by over-conceptualized post-modern criticism: to

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<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, through its desperate attempts to ape the conceptual apparatuses of neighboring fields, post-structuralism is only actively working towards the dissolution of the identity of literary studies.

<sup>2</sup> "Hors-texte" in French is a technical word used in the printing profession and which refers to an added illustration or plate inside a book; the following quote should be therefore translated as "There are no illustrations" or "There are no images," which, within its original context is perfectly understandable, albeit a tad redundant – obviously, all we have left from Rousseau is text and no pictures (See *De la Grammatologie*, 227); this ill-inspired English translation has become a dogmatic statement, falsely legitimized by its attributed authorship, which has allowed literary criticism to enter the realm of meta-theory and to lose sight of the literary.

study literature as such, rather than using it as a pretext to theorize in the manner of whichever theory or conceptual apparatus appears to be in vogue at the moment.

### Genre Crisis

Directly affected by the textual confusion enforced by postmodern theory that would have us believe that we can actually read a train schedule as if it were a novel (Eagleton 8), generic studies have been left aside, and therefore, we are not much wiser today than we were thirty years ago when it comes to distinguishing the fantastic from the marvelous or horror from science fiction, which all blend together to create a somewhat vague "mode," propitious to over-conceptualized speculations of a would-be philosophical nature: since post-structuralism does not seem to care about the obvious differences between literary works and literary inquiries, chances are that it would be even less interested in distinguishing "The Little Red Riding Hood" from *Nightmare on Elm Street* – or a sonnet from a tax income form for that matter.

In spite of some efforts, mainly in French and Spanish (Ferrerías Savoye, 1995, 1996-2014, Roas 2010, 2011), the fantastic – as a genre or a mode – remains as undefined as ever, as shown by the fairly recent special issue of *Comparative Literature and Culture Studies* devoted to the fantastic, *New Studies on the Fantastic in Literature*, which exhibits a general disorientation as to what one may conceive as "the fantastic," as well as regarding its possible materializations; although the issue is entitled "New Studies on the Fantastic in Literature," most of the essays that compose it deal with films rather than texts,<sup>3</sup> and cover a wide range of narrative genres or modes, from horror to science fiction, from African fairy tales to Cyber-Punk, allegedly "post-human" narrations, leaving the reader with the impression that, in the end, any literature which strays from a direct representation of reality as we collectively perceive it is susceptible to be "fantastic," and hence fair game for abstract speculations within the conceptual frames of philosophy, sociology and, of course, psychoanalysis.

This un-definition of a very specific literary and narrative occurrence such as the modern fantastic is in actuality celebrated by some critics, such as Lucie Armit, who enthusiastically states in her introduction to *Contemporary Women Fiction and the Fantastic* that:

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<sup>3</sup> Against fashionable but unnecessarily confusing terminological trends that insist in calling a film – and everything else – a "text," I prefer to use both words, "text" and "film," to refer to two distinct types of narration, the written and the visual.

"... carving up fantasy and the fantastic and jamming its literature into a series of discrete, neatly labelled boxes kills literature dead. So much ground has been lost in comparison with other fields of literary criticism while critics of fantasy have been futilely squabbling over whether a text is marvellous or fabulous, or how to subdivide science fiction into space opera or sword and sorcery." (2000, 13)

Indeed, it would be helpful if Armitt were to be a bit more specific regarding which "ground" has been won in which "other fields of literary criticism," and which critics have actually been "futilely squabbling" over correct narrative genre classification; given the direction post-structuralist criticism has taken over the last three decades and its open despise for defining either literature or literary genres, Armitt seems to be pointing to a non-existent debate. As to considering generic classification, that is "jamming literature into a series of discrete, neatly labelled boxes," as an activity that "kills literature dead," it might be just a matter of opinion. Guy de Maupassant published a chronicle in 1883, entitled "Le Fantastique," in which he attempted to distinguish the modern fantastic from the traditional marvelous; should we then infer that the author of "The Horla" was attempting to "kill literature dead?" If pressed to choose a side, we might be tempted to pick Maupassant over Armitt and admit, along with one of the major figures of French literature, the need for discerning the fantastic from other narrative categories, which do not fulfill the same aesthetic function, nor are intended to elicit the same type of reception. It would appear that, on the contrary, it is the very definition of any narrative genre or mode that would "kill the critic dead," for, by voluntarily preserving a widely open and ultimately highly indeterminate notion, scholars grant themselves a nearly unlimited scope of study which allows for endless speculations. If Armitt were to distinguish the fantastic from the marvelous, science fiction or magical realism, there would indeed be very little left of *Contemporary Women's Fiction and the Fantastic*. In the final analysis, there seems to be a fundamental logical flaw at the core of Armitt's position, which points to an irresolvable contradiction: indeed, how can one study a definite narrative genre while simultaneously denying the possibility of its definition? Just as in her previous work, appropriately entitled *Theorising the Fantastic*, Armitt falls into the post-structural "literary" theoretical temptation, and favors abstract, over-conceptualized and polysemic speculations over empirical research and functional concepts, which, instead of deepening our understanding of a specific narrative occurrence – the fantastic – contributes to further un-define it.

## Fantastic Realities

To fuse any anti-realistic narration within a hazy notion arbitrarily named “the fantastic” – or optionally “fantasy” – is obviously counter-productive, for it does not allow us to interpret specific narrative occurrences in their own right, but rather forces us to receive and understand Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* in the same manner as we do Lovecraft’s *The Dunwich Horror*. There is such a thing as a fantastic narration, perfectly distinguishable from its immediate neighbors, and exemplified by an identifiable corpus, notwithstanding the usual intersections we may encounter from time to time between different narrative modes.<sup>4</sup> To put it succinctly, since this essay is about Richard Matheson and *The Twilight Zone* and not about defining narrative modes,<sup>5</sup> the fantastic is the product of the clash between two theoretically antithetical and mutually exclusive semiotic codes, that of reality and that of the supernatural; the fantastic occurs when the unexplainable – and not simply the unexplained – appears amidst a highly identifiable reality, which, due to its mundane and unremarkable characteristics could be construed as “hyper-reality,” and which becomes one of the terms of the narrative conflict. As shown by previous research (Ferreras Savoye, 1995, 2003, 2014) the characters and the situations of fantastic narrations tend to be highly common, when not decidedly uninteresting, hence without any inherent narrative authority; only the irruption of the supernatural element will justify the attention of the receptor as well as the existence of the narration itself. The fantastic is the only Occidental narrative mode<sup>6</sup> the structure of which relies upon the binary opposition between a collectively accepted notion of reality and one or several elements that defy it, and whose syntagmatic progression feeds upon the epistemological conflict it creates by suggesting the possibility of the impossible. Whereas the marvelous in all its forms, from mythologies to fairy tales to modern fantasy – from Perseus to the Sleeping Beauty to Flash Gordon and Conan – implies the existence of a different reality, subjected to its own laws, the

<sup>4</sup> The term “mode” appears to be more precise than “genre,” which refers to at least three different parameters: format (novel/short story), narrative mode (realism/marvelous) and narrative category (detective novels/romance novels).

<sup>5</sup> For a more precise structural definition of the modern fantastic mode as well as of its historical and cultural evolution, please see Ferreras Savoye, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> The modern fantastic is born out of the one-dimensional perception of reality that takes hold of European and Anglo-American consciousness after the Enlightenment and throughout the Industrial revolution, and hence corresponds to very specific historical and geographical contexts; to apply the same parameters of analysis to other continents’ literary and narrative productions would be openly disregarding the very circumstances that prompted its inception and favored its evolution to this day, for, contrary to the affirmation Todorov made in his venerable *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, the fantastic does not disappear at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (174-175), nor has it been replaced by Freudian psychoanalysis (168-169).

fantastic depends exclusively upon the continuous subversion of our reality and is the narrative result of a constant negotiation between the very believable and the rationally unacceptable.

This functional definition obviously relies on what has become today a crucial target of post-structuralism: a collectively accepted notion of objective reality. If, as argued by current radical cultural constructionism, reality is nothing more than a cultural construction itself, then, indeed, it is likely to become increasingly difficult to distinguish what is rational from what is not – a problem that, fortunately, does not seem to affect the scientific community. This debate, which should have been quickly resolved after Sokal's famous hoax,<sup>7</sup> is unfortunately very much alive today, as the untenable notion that objective reality is nothing but a cultural construction fuels an endless amount of theoretical material whose only goal seems to demonstrate that nothing can be demonstrated. In order to proceed, we must therefore take a leap of faith and believe that, indeed, there is an objective reality, or at least a collectively shared notion of such, and that the laws of physics are not the same as those of baseball, despite Stanley Fish's laborious and unconvincing rhetorical attempts: believing that there is such a thing as reality is the price to pay if we want to progress towards a structurally functional definition of any narrative mode.

The functional definition of any narrative mode is only valid insofar as it can be demonstrated empirically, and in the case of the fantastic, such demonstration is all the more crucial that it participates directly in the much needed delimitation of a coherent corpus of study. The popular American TV show, *The Twilight Zone*, imposes itself as an exemplary illustration of the fantastic mode and of its primary structural components, and its study will not only help us to better understand the mechanisms of this particular mode, but it will also contribute to the description of our object of study and to the elaboration of its canon.

### **In the Zone**

The aesthetic direction of the *Twilight Zone* is resolutely fantastic, for it opposes from its very first episode, "Where is Everybody?" an identifiable, everyday life reality to an irrational phenomenon, namely the sudden disappearance of all human life in a small town, which sooner or later causes the breakdown of the epistemological order. Although "Where is Everybody?" cannot be considered a fantastic narration in the strict sense of the word, since

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<sup>7</sup> Please see *The Sokal's Hoax*, which documents the epistemologically disturbing trajectory of Sokal's mock essay within the academic community.

the unexplainable will be explained at the end of the story when we discover that the protagonist has been hallucinating as a result of a military experiment, it still holds as an illustration of the semiotic opposition between the very possible and the totally unacceptable we find at the core of the fantastic effect, for the main narrative conflict relies upon the desperate attempts of the main character to understand why people have vanished, which do not constitute a coherent progression towards the truth, as is the case with detective fiction, but rather reflect an increasing epistemological disorientation. At the structural level, not only the rationally satisfying conclusion occupies a very reduced space in the economy of the narration, but it also represents the beginning of an entirely new narrative syntagm, the themes of which – space travel and isolation – establish narrative authority in their own right, albeit in a rather elliptical manner and for a limited time only. “Where is Everybody?” might return from the fantastic to the uncanny as soon as we are provided with a rational explanation to what appeared to be irrational, even if this explanation is based upon temporary insanity,<sup>8</sup> but only at the price of a radical structural shift that introduces another situation, different characters, and an entirely new set of concerns susceptible to generate narrative authority independently and beyond the closure of the fantastic syntagm itself. The very first episode of *The Twilight Zone*, micro-structurally significant by nature since it sets the tone for the entire series, is therefore composed of two different narrations; the first and by far the most important in terms of narrative economy and tension is fantastic, while the second, more suggested than developed, belongs to the uncanny of the techno-scientific persuasion – not quite science fiction – two tendencies which will be abundantly represented throughout the rest of the series.

Onomastically, *The Twilight Zone* mirrors the elements of its micro-structurally representative first episode, for it suggests the basic semiotic binary opposition at the core of the fantastic mode: whereas “twilight” points to indeterminacy and vagueness, both visually and chronologically, “zone,” commonly associated with the military or administrative lexical registers, refers on the contrary to a very realistic, specific notion of topographic measure, hence not only to reality at large, but to a rationally structured reality, that which has proven to be epistemologically sound and which determines our perception of what we may conceive as

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<sup>8</sup> Madness, along with death and dreams are privileged thematic domains in the fantastic as well as in the uncanny, for they represent an intermediate area between understanding and ignorance: all three are very tangible parts of the human condition but still elude rationalization.

the truth; semiotically, "twilight" defies "zone," just as, in the fantastic mode, the supernatural phenomenon defies a hyper-realistic representation of our world.<sup>9</sup>

The short format of the series serves the delicate narrative balance between the highly credible and the impossible, indispensable to create and maintain the fantastic effect, by preventing either terms of the opposition from overcoming the other while preserving tension and hence retaining narrative authority – it is not a coincidence if the longer, 60 minutes format, which was adopted during the fourth season, was abandoned during the fifth and last season, which returned to the original 30 minutes format (commercials included). If the impossible were to completely obliterate reality, we would find ourselves in the marvelous; if on the contrary, the unexplainable were to be rationalized, the narration would fall into the uncanny.

Just as the short story remained the chosen format for fantastic narrations from Maupassant to Lovecraft to Jean Ray,<sup>10</sup> the condensed format of the *Twilight Zone* episodes is propitious to the fantastic, for it allows to create and sustain a narrative authority based upon a semiotically unresolvable conflict without allowing any of its terms to defeat the other, which would necessarily displace the tension and imply a modal shift, either into the marvelous or into the uncanny.

### **Wonders of Reality**

Paradoxically, *The Twilight Zone* is also privileged ground for the study of the fantastic because of its insistence in representing a very "normal" reality, which is subverted by the introduction of an element or phenomenon which produces the fantastic effect; the more normal the environment appears, the greater surprise the supernatural element will cause, and hence generate tension and narrative authority. The supernatural element which clashes with this hyper-realistic environment can belong to the semiotic code of another anti-realistic mode,

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<sup>9</sup> The same can be said regarding the more recent *X-Files* series: "files" refers to an organized, administrative reality while the "X" symbolizes the yet unidentified, that is the unknown.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen King might have been the first author to convincingly stretch the fantastic effect for hundreds of pages, by carefully dosing constantly the most identifiable reality and the supernatural, such as in *Needful Things* or *The Dark Half*. Previous examples, such as Jean Ray's *Malpertuis* or Jean-Paul Raemdonck's *Han* remain isolated attempts, the latter far from being convincing; as to Jean Ray, he is still more read because of the adventures of Harry Dickson than because of *Malpertuis*, and although Harry Dickson's mysteries are theoretically more uncanny than fantastic, for the apparently supernatural occurrence is rationally explained at the end of the narrative syntagm, very much akin with the structural characteristics of the detective story, said explanation is often far-fetched enough to escape the boundaries of acceptable realism; when it comes to the great classics, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* remains, in terms of extension, the proverbial exception that confirms the rule, or at least the tendency.

such as science fiction or the marvelous, without compromising the integrity of the fantastic effect as long as the opposition between identifiable reality and the unbelievable is respected: the presence of a Martian in a marvelous universe of the space-opera variety will not create narrative tension by itself; however, the same Martian in a mall on a Saturday afternoon will create a sensation just by being there, that is create a conflict that justifies the narration by establishing authority through the means of the opposition between the expected and the unacceptable. The supernatural elements we find in fantastic narrations do not necessarily have to be original, as long as they are opposed to a reality the recipient recognizes as her or his own.

This is not to say that every single episode of *The Twilight Zone* can be deemed fantastic: "Time Enough at Last" which tells of an atomic holocaust, and "Steel," the story of a robotic boxing match set in the future, could be seen as belonging to the uncanny and science fiction respectively; since the possibility of complete annihilation by means of weapons of mass destruction evoked in "Time Enough at Last" is unfortunately as current today as it was in the fifties, the narration remains within the boundaries of realism; "Steel," on the other hand, takes place in a distant future (the 1970s), an enlightened era in which human boxing matches have been outlawed and boxers replaced by robots, and must be hence considered as science fiction for it does not represent the reality we know but rather its projection in the future.

There exists as well the always present possibility of intersection or co-existence of two neighboring modes within one narrative syntagm, as we have seen above concerning the very first episode. "The Rip Van Winkle Caper," for instance, starts in the fantastic mode, as four gangsters steal an important load of gold and decide, in order to elude pursuit, to go into hibernation for a century or so by means of a gas invented by one of them. The impossible existence of such gas introduces an irrational element within a very identifiable reality – four regular outlaws hiding in the desert after a heist – and hence creates the fantastic effect by opposing the real to the impossible. However, the conclusion of the episode will take place in the future, when gold has become worthless after humanity found a way to manufacture it, making the opposition between our identifiable reality and the impossible disappear since the universe in which the narration ends is no longer ours and therefore escapes the limits of our reality. "The Rip Van Winkle Caper" hence morphs into science fiction when our reality is replaced by its future projection, just as "Where is Everybody?" morphs from the fantastic into

the uncanny when it provides an allegedly rational explanation to the protagonist's unexplainable experience.

Besides that of Rod Serling, the contribution of Richard Matheson to *The Twilight Zone* is among the most determining as to the general aesthetic and narrative direction of the series. Matheson inspired or wrote all together sixteen episodes for *The Twilight Zone* throughout the five seasons of the series and participated in its attempted revival after Serling's untimely departure. Although some of the episodes penned or inspired by Matheson for the series may fall into neighboring modes, such as science fiction, i.e., "Third from the Sun" and the aforementioned "Steel," or the uncanny, i.e., "Nick of Time," most of them can be considered as belonging to the fantastic, for their narrative authority relies upon the tension created by the irruption of the impossible in an identifiable reality – as we will see later on, Matheson even introduces the fantastic effect within the universe of science fiction in "Death Ship," the analysis of which will prove most helpful to further define the semio-structural composition of the fantastic mode.

#### **The Fantastic According to Matheson**

The episodes "Little Girl Lost" and "Night Call" can be seen as nearly perfect illustrations of the modern fantastic, thematically as well as motif wise, for they establish narrative authority upon a semiotic opposition between a highly identifiable reality – our very own – and the impossible, and explore recurrent themes of the fantastic mode, such as the existence of other dimensions and of life after death. In "Little Girl Lost," we see how, in a very typical family environment, a little girl vanishes into another dimension until she is rescued by her father, with the help of a physician friend of her parents and the family dog. The presence of the physician, who can only speculate that the little girl has fallen through a hole into another dimension, brings forward the failure of official epistemology, since he can offer no real explanation for the phenomenon, even if he actively participates in saving the little girl.

"Night Call," scripted by Matheson and based on his short story, "Long Distance Call," is a casebook example of ghost story set against a modern, common background, which corresponds to Maupassant's perceptive albeit underdeveloped definition of the mode as a representation of a reality close to us in which, however, something "almost" impossible is

happening.<sup>11</sup> Its main protagonist, a rather pushy older lady, is all but exceptional, hence two of the primal elements of the narration,<sup>12</sup> setting and characters, belong to a decidedly realistic representation of reality, bordering the uninteresting – the general unpleasantness of the character upon which the narration focalizes suggest an ill-tempered disposition which precludes any likable quality. As it often happens in representative modern fantastic narrations, such as Maupassant's versions of "Le Horla,"<sup>13</sup> "La Chevelure" ("The Head of Hair"), and "Qui Sait?" ("Who Knows?"),<sup>14</sup> setting and characters appear deprived of any ability to produce narrative authority – neither this bitter old maid nor her dull existence in such lifeless environment appear susceptible to attract, let alone hold our attention. This lack of narrative interest will be maintained throughout the syntagm, functioning as an underlining semiotic code which constantly reminds us of our own reality, from her cozy but utterly banal interior to her checkered bedspread, from her linguistic register and tone to her daily activities, which consist mainly in drinking tea and playing cards with the lady who tends to her needs. Logically, in order to establish narrative authority, the conflict begins very quickly, and significantly during perhaps the least spectacular moment in the protagonist's utterly uninteresting life, that is in bed during her sleep, and is initially caused by a very credible event – an unexpected phone call in the middle of the night. As the protagonist picks up the receiver, however, she is unable to make out who is on the other end of the line before the communication is cut off. When she calls the phone company the next morning, she is told that the storm knocked off many lines the night before and that the call she received was most likely caused by some interference.

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<sup>11</sup> Maupassant's distinction between the fantastic and the marvelous, as exposed in his famous chronicle "Le fantastique" (*Le Gaulois*, October 7, 1883), is still perfectly valid; it does not however clearly identify the uncanny as different from the fantastic but instinctively fuses both notions with the cautious use of the word "almost."

<sup>12</sup> See James Potter's classical *Elements of Literature*, which establishes the primary structural elements of all narrations, namely setting, characters and plot; incidentally, we may update Potter's terminology and replace "plot" by "conflict," for narrative tension is created through binary oppositions which translate into conflicts between two or more manifestations of these primal elements, usually but not necessarily the characters: Jack London's novels for instance often set the character against the environment. Potter does not include the very postmodern possibility of language against itself, an interesting idea brought forward by Roas in his definition of the fantastic, and which could apply to experimental texts such as Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* or Perec's *La disparition*; however, when it comes to traditional as well as contemporary popular narrative production, Potter's classification is still highly functional.

<sup>13</sup> Along with the two versions of the Horla (1886 and 1887), we can as well mention the short story published one year before the first version (*Gil Blas*, February 17, 1885), entitled "Lettre d'un fou" ("Letter from a Madman") which already introduces one of the most memorable sequences of both versions of "Le Horla," when the impossible creature, standing between the narrator and a full size mirror prevents him from seeing his own reflection.

<sup>14</sup> This archetypal fantastic narration happens to have been Maupassant's very last creation, which indicates the commitment of the author of *Bel Ami* towards this particular narrative mode.

Naturally, the calls continue and the phone company eventually traces them to a fallen wire lying on the ground in the cemetery. The protagonist has herself then driven to the cemetery – she is confined to a wheel-chair – to the grave of the man who was once his fiancé and whom she involuntarily killed a week before the wedding as a result of her pushy disposition – by insisting on driving the car and causing a terrible accident which also made her crippled. She then discovers the phone line dangling over the headstone and falling into the ground. This coincidence eliminates any interpretation of this narration as uncanny – if so far the protagonist, tortured by remorse, could indeed be the victim of sonic hallucinations, the presence of the wire literally connecting to the grave establishes an irremediable link between the world of the dead and our own. The story concludes shortly after she asks the mysterious voice to leave her alone, regretting her order the second after she gives it when she discovers that the night caller is indeed the man she loved, who, yet once again, will yield to her wishes and leave her alone – this time forever.

The alternation between the real and the unreal is semiotically contained within the paradigm of the phone, which suggests not only both modernity and progress against superstition, but also, and perhaps more importantly, communication, that is the determining structural factor of human epistemology. Our episteme can only be of a collective nature, hence be born and exist through communication – the betrayal of an object solely devoted to communicate such as a phone points to the breakdown of communication at large, which implies that of our epistemology as well.

Both "Little Girl Lost" and "Night Call" administer hyper-realistic and irrational paradigms to suggest the possibility of the impossible and the failure of our epistemological certainties, and exemplify the modern fantastic by re-visiting traditional themes – parallel dimensions and ghosts – in a contemporary setting, which accommodates monosemic, apparently anti-literary paradigms, such as the pajamas of the little girl's parents or the shawl of the broken hearted old lady.

#### **The Madness Alibi**

We encounter a similar shift from the uncanny possible towards the fantastic impossible as the one we have observed in "Night Call" – that particular moment when the eventuality of a rational explanation disappears – in both "Young Man's Fancy" and "Terror at 20,000 Feet," which, just like "Night Call," suggest first the possibility of mental illness as a plausible

explanation for the narrative conflict and use the final structural twist characteristic of the series to introduce the paradigm that throws the entire narration into the fantastic mode. The very Oedipal "Young Man's Fancy," which shows the reluctance of a soon-to-be married man to part with the house in which he grew up, appears to be for the most part the description of a psychologically weak individual slowly regressing into childhood in a slightly pathetic way; however, at the very end of the syntagm, as he decides, much to his bride's dismay, not to leave the house, his deceased mother appears, and the final shots are those of a young boy asking the now ex-fiancée to leave, as the narration moves from Oedipal delusion territory into the fantastic realm.

Following the same structural pattern although using radically different paradigms, "Nightmare at 20,000 Feet" tells the somewhat ridiculous hallucination of a man afraid of flying who sees an ape-like creature literally peeling one of the wings of the plane in the middle of the flight. Since the protagonist is the only one able to see the strange creature and as his behavior grows increasingly erratic, we become convinced of his delusional state, confirmed by the evolution of the narration, for we see him appropriating a gun and shooting at the creature through the window before being evacuated on a stretcher once the plane has landed. However the very end of the syntagm shows a definite damage to one of the wings, which corresponds to what the protagonist saw, hence opening wide what appeared so far to be a closed narrative structure. What we were led to believe all along the narration as being the hallucinations of the protagonist caused by his irrational fear of flying turns out to be true, and the uncanny is allowed to become fantastic thanks to a very final narrative twist, a trademark of the series which admirably suits the fantastic effect. For the same reasons as the written fantastic privileged the short format in order to maintain a delicate balance between the believable and the rationally unacceptable, the final twist typical of the Twilight Zone episodes allows to introduce an unresolvable semiotic conflict into the narration without jeopardizing the coherence of the narrative universe – indeed, by placing the incriminating evidence that proves the existence of the impossible at the very end of the syntagm, the economy of the narration leaves no chance to the receptor to accept or reject such clash, and hence retains authority.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The emblematic cliché of the hand coming out of a freshly dug grave right before the screen fades to black in most zombie movies is probably the most recognizable graphic representation of the open structure typical of the fantastic – even the protagonist of the last version of "Le Horta" concludes his diary, hence the narration, with a question mark.

The fantastic according to Matheson is therefore not limited to the traditional paradigms of the mode, but can also incorporate elements from the uncanny without losing its structural integrity; and, as we will see now, if the uncanny is not safe from the fantastic, neither is science fiction.

### **Flirting with Science Fiction**

The first episode of *The Twilight Zone* based on a short story by Matheson, "And When the Sky Was Opened," demonstrates the importance of syntagmatic organization over paradigmatic selection when it comes to generating the fantastic effect, and how a narrative mode is not necessarily determined by the connotations of its paradigms. The main elements of "And When the Sky Was Opened" seem indeed typical of the science fiction mode: an experimental spaceship with three astronauts aboard has disappeared from the radar for twenty four hours during a test flight before crashing in the Mojave desert, leaving the three astronauts unharmed and the ship only slightly dented. The primal elements of the narration – astronauts, spaceship, space travel and suggested black hole – belong to the narrative vocabulary of science fiction, however, they are solely organized in reference to our reality, for when the story begins, the mysterious incident in outer space and subsequent crash have already happened and their only function is that of as a point of departure for the narrative conflict. The tension itself is created by the irruption of an unexplainable phenomenon which takes place on earth, within the rather familiar environments of a hospital room and a homey bar: the three men and their spaceship are progressively being erased from reality, leaving no trace of their existence, not even in the memory of those around them. The means by which the protagonists discover that they are being unexplainably eliminated from reality involve as well very familiar elements and actions, easily identifiable by the receptor as corresponding to our collectively accepted notion of normalcy. For instance, one of them attempts to reach his parents from a phone booth and simply vanishes after first his mother and then his father inform him that they do not have a son with his name. The family, by definition – if only etymologically – the most "familiar" environment in our collective consciousness, that which is perfectly known and cannot betray, is therefore the most elementary reality that serves as a revelator for the impossible occurrence. This particular narrative paradigm – the breakdown of the family – is a pervasive motif in the horror mode, as pointed out by Tony Williams in *Hearths of Darkness*, which contextualizes the triumph of horror cinema within the generation that

fought the Vietnam war, that is a generation sent to die in a foreign land and for the wrong reasons by its elders, hence betrayed by the most fundamental structure of them all, the family cell. In the case of the fantastic, the family structure, usually associated with the motif of the house, favors the radical defamiliarization that characterizes the mode, for it represents the familiar environment *par excellence*, hence that which theoretically should preclude any unexpected threat. The perversion of the familiar order in both senses of the word corresponds to that of our most elementary certainties – those which even precede reason for they are perceived and assimilated by children – and it is the one most likely to cause an immediate rupture of reality; more recent narrations at both end of the fantastic spectrum – from *Amytville* and *The Exocist* to *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Hellraiser* to the more childish *Poltergeist* – represent at various degrees the disintegration of the family structure. Naturally, in “And Then the Sky Opened,” it is soon after the protagonist discovers that his own parents do no longer acknowledge his existence and ask him to hang up that he vanishes from the phone booth.

The elimination of the three astronauts, of their spaceship and of their mission is indicated throughout the narration by a very mundane object, namely the issue of the newspaper that features the return of the three astronauts on the front page and which progressively changes to reflect their elimination, juxtaposing therefore a hyper-realistic, fundamentally monosemic element – a newspaper, the purpose of which is precisely to inform upon reality – and the impossible, systematic erasure of three human beings from that very same reality. In spite of relying upon paradigms belonging to the science fiction mode, “And When the Sky Opened” is a fantastic narration, which takes place in our reality and establishes authority by perverting some of its most fundamental elements, such as families and newspapers.

Similarly, the episode “Death Ship” seems to be constructed along the lines of a typical science fiction adventure: three astronauts land on a distant planet, encounter a ship identical to theirs that has crashed and find their own dead bodies when they explore the wreck. Back on their own ship, they attempt to decide if the wrecked ship is truly their own and if they will crash when they attempt to take off. We will discover at the end of the episode that the three men have indeed crashed but that their captain has simply will himself and his crew out of death, and the conclusion shows them getting ready for landing, forever captive of an endless loop that condemns them to always return to the moment that preceded their crash. Although,

here again, we are in the presence of the most traditional motifs of science fiction – three astronauts, a spaceship and a crash on a distant planet – the tension is created by the unexplainable, even within a reality which by definition is different from ours for it is that of the science fiction mode.<sup>16</sup> The phenomenon confronted by the three astronauts escapes their episteme and hence creates a rupture in their own reality, however different it might be from ours. The exploration of different worlds and the encounter with strange creatures, which can be treated in the space-operatic mode, *Star-Trek* style,<sup>17</sup> or in a dystopian, somewhat more mature mode, such as in Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris*, suffice to create narrative tension in the science fiction or space-operatic modes; in "Death Ship," however, the conflict that generates narrative authority and justifies the narration depends neither upon exotic encounters in outer space, nor upon disenchanting anticipations of what the future of the human race might be, but upon the irruption of an unexplainable phenomenon within a controlled environment: the spaceship could indeed be replaced by a simple plane and the crew of astronauts by regular aviators without affecting in the least the general balance of the story. The narrative authority of "Death Ship" does not rely upon the development of the science fiction paradigms it uses, but rather upon the binary opposition between what we are ready to understand and what is out of the limits of our epistemology – throughout the entire episode, the members of the crew attempt to understand how this disturbing replica of both their ship and their bodies can exist. Some of their speculations, such as the possibility of a hypnotic defense mechanism developed by the planet in order to protect itself from invaders, seem to lead the narration into science fiction, and are somewhat reminiscent of Lem's *Solaris*, however, they remain underdeveloped in the economy of the narration, which relies mainly upon maintaining the opposition between what could be acceptable, even in a futuristic spaceship, and what remains unexplainable.<sup>18</sup> Behind the guise of a science fiction narration, *Death Ship* is an updated treatment of the theme of the double, or doppelganger, associated with death in traditional folklore and used more or less directly in several canonical fantastic narrations, such as Maupassant's *Le Horla* or *Lui?* demonstrating that the fantastic is not in the paradigms in

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<sup>16</sup> The intricacies of science fiction as a prospective by opposition to realistic narrative mode are well detailed in Moreno's massive *Teoría de la ciencia ficción*.

<sup>17</sup> It could be argued that *Star Trek* belongs to a sub-genre of the marvelous, for it structurally corresponds to the traditional travel adventure narrations of the marvelous kind, such as *Sinbad's Travels* or *The Hobbit*.

<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the unexplainable betrayal of the computer HAL in Kubrick's *2001: Space Odyssey* could be considered as fantastic, for it escapes the laws of the narrative universe, even if said laws reflect a different state of technology.

themselves but rather in their organization against an acceptable, apparently logical reality. And of course, this is but one convenient manner to turn reality into another dimension.

#### **Matheson's Fantastic Dimensions**

A recurrent theme of fantastic literature explored by Matheson in *The Twilight Zone* is that of the other dimension. Besides "Little Girl Lost," "A World of Difference" and "A World of His Own," both narrations which fit the parameters of the fantastic mode for they oppose the believable and the impossible, Matheson introduces a logical rupture within a realistic universe which little by little causes the transformation of our reality into another dimension. Passed the first narrative twist, "A World of Difference" could be seen and works as an uncanny narration, for the events it relates are disturbing but quite plausible: an executive about to go on an outing for the weekend with his wife suddenly discovers that he is in reality a washed-up actor involved in a bitter divorce playing the part of an executive for a small budget film. The protagonist insists on denying reality throughout the narration, wanting desperately to believe that the life he is acting is actually his own and not the other way around, and we are hence led to believe that he is delusional, suffering from an acute case of split personality. However, at the conclusion of the narrative syntagm, the protagonist returns to its fictitious life, literally merging with his non-existent character, becoming the script that bares his new name and that his agent, perplexed by his client's sudden disappearance, pushes distractedly to one side of a table as the set is being taken down. The possible uncanny turns then irremediably into the fantastic, for the escape of the protagonist through the pages of a script is, of course, rationally unacceptable.

Albeit through different narrative motifs, "A World of His Own" presents a similar theme, for it as well tells of the victory of a parallel, imaginary dimension over our reality. A middle-aged, mild-mannered writer is caught by his wife while entertaining a charming blonde young lady, who mysteriously disappears when the writer cuts off a bit of magnetic tape from the recorder in which he dictates his ideas and throws it into the fireplace. As the story progresses, we find out that not only the protagonist can create whatever he dictates into his tape recorder, but that his wife and even Rod Serling himself, who makes a brief appearance at the end of the episode, are nothing by bits of tape, which the protagonist will gladly throw into the fire at the end of the story before creating again the pleasant young lady from the beginning by dictating her description into his tape recorder.

Both narrations, which appropriately contain the word "world" in the title, point to the triumph of the parallel dimensions created by imagination over reality from two opposite points of view: while "A World of Difference" follows the continuous, desperate attempts of the protagonist to escape the dreary confines of his existence by moving into the fiction he is representing as a professional actor, the atmosphere of "A World of his Own," as well as the attitude of his protagonist are much more subdued. From the office to the movie set to the house of the protagonist, where is dragged by his angry wife, to the movie set again and finally back to the fictitious office and on a plane to an exotic destination as the script that bares his name is nonchalantly discarded, "A World of Difference" can be seen as a race of the protagonist through a variety of backgrounds in order to defeat reality. The writer of "A World of his Own," on the contrary, does not move from his cozy living room, and the fireplace where he discards his creations symbolizes both comfort and peace. Whereas the protagonist of "A World of Difference" has to fight throughout the narration to eventually make his delusion real, that of "A World of His Own" has already the power of turning his smallest thoughts into reality.

The structural composition of both episode exemplifies the mechanism of the fantastic effect for they both dose the possible and the impossible all along their respective narrative syntagms – the false office where the protagonist of "A World of Difference" believes he works is highly realistic, so is the film set, and the final shots which shows the set being taken down indeed qualifies as hyper-realistic. Similarly, the living room in which the protagonist of "A World of His Own" indulges himself into the whims of his imagination is very typical of a middle-upper class suburban house, whose only particularity is to not have any – it is through the representation of a very possible reality that the fantastic succeeds in presenting the impossible.

Beyond their exemplary value as to the mechanism of the fantastic effect, these two narrations also point towards a possible definition of our very object of study, which is narrative parallel dimensions. As pointed out elsewhere (Ferrerias Savoye 2013), the most traditionalist literary critics agree with the most cutting edge post-structuralist theorists when it comes to the un-definition of literature – from essay to philosophy, from theatre to correspondence, from theological speculations to political discourses, the literary canon has included a wide variety of writings, the literary nature of which can be in some cases highly debatable. This apparent lack of discrimination, however, is more the result of generic incoherence than of openness, for

some media, such as cinema or comic books, have been arbitrarily excluded from "literature" and are still to be considered as canonically eligible material. The unifying concept of parallel dimensions allows us to progress towards a better understanding of "literature" – in all its forms – as a narrative production of the imaginary, and hence helps not only to define our object of study, but to better evaluate its influence upon our collective consciousness: if we are to consider the bible as work of literature – just as we consider Greek and Roman mythologies as fictitious narrations – then the influence of parallel dimensions over our culture becomes an undeniable fact, which makes literary studies suddenly all the more crucial. Entire genres, such as the marvelous and science fiction, are based upon and determined by the concept of parallel dimensions; it could even be argued that the most realistic novel constitutes a parallel dimension for it organizes realistically a necessarily non-existent reality.<sup>19</sup>

The fantastic appears to be the only mode devoted to representing the transition between our reality and a parallel dimension, and "A World of Difference" as well as "A World of His Own" are in this sense very significant, for they both tell of the encounter between our world and another, directly related to our capacity of imagination – in the words of Rod Serling himself, "You unlock this door with the key of imagination. Beyond it is another dimension (...)." In the case of Matheson, this encounter between reality and a parallel dimension often becomes a transition from one to the other, echoing the structure of two other episodes, one based on his short story "Third from the Sun" and the other directly scripted by him, "The Invaders," which prove difficult to categorize, although they might fall into science fiction, especially the latter. In "Third from the Sun," two families decide to leave what appears to be earth aboard an experimental spaceship in order to escape atomic doom, and we discover at the very end, once they have already departed, that they are actually heading towards Earth, the "third planet from the sun." In "The Invaders," a terrified woman is chased around her house by a mysterious albeit rather small flying saucer that she eventually destroys hysterically with a hatchet; we then hear a desperate radio message emanating from the saucer in which an alarmed officer informs "Central Control" that the ship is destroyed, that a member of the crew is dead and that this place is populated by "giant creatures." As the woman starts to

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<sup>19</sup> The case of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* remains a very unique and isolated case of non-fiction novel; however, when we consider the semiotic weight of any intentionally aesthetic treatment of language, we may conclude that, for all its lack of imagination, *In Cold Blood* is a parallel dimension, or at least has become one now that the original historical context in which the crimes took place is no longer.

pound again at the saucer, the officer's voice warns against any type of counter-attack, for these creatures are "too powerful," and his dying words, repeated several times, constitute the ultimate warning: "Stay away!" As the woman, exhausted, collapses over to one side, the camera focuses upon the tiny spaceship deformed by the impacts of the hatchet, on one side of which we can read the following caption: "U.S. Air Force Space Probe No.1." Just as the final narrative twist of "Third from the Sun" reveals that what we thought to be our Earth is in reality another world, that of "The Invaders" shows that who we thought was human is in actuality a gigantic monster from a different world, identical to ours except for its unfathomable dimensions. In both instances, we are provided with hyper-realistic elements which work towards the manipulation of the receptor in accepting the represented universe as his or her own: the interactions and the activities of the families from "Third from the Sun" are indeed typical of a bourgeois evening, and the protagonist of "The Invaders" chases the minute flying saucer in her chamber robe; in this sense, both episodes correspond structurally to the mechanism of the fantastic, for they introduce a direct clash between semiotic dimensions – only that in these two cases, the other dimension happens to be our reality.

Towards the climax of the narration, the protagonist of the ambitious albeit problematic film, *De Sade*, of which Matheson wrote the script, states that he can no longer distinguish reality from fantasy; however, it remains unclear whether he considers this to be a good or a bad thing. Our analysis of Matheson's fantastic contribution to the *Twilight Zone* seems to reveal a similar intent: reality is definitely not enough and imagination must be able to push its limits in order for us to escape into another dimension, following the good advice of Rod Serling. And this other dimension might be strange, dark and scary – but it is always entertaining.

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### **Postmodern Pastiche: Following the Path of Productive Parody on Sesame Street**

Critics of postmodernism may dismiss the theory as an overarching discourse serving as a showcase in the demise of high art, the inability to achieve truth, the death of the grand narrative, or the emptiness of parody. While I do not wish to engage in a discussion regarding the facets of postmodern theory itself, I will focus on addressing the issue of pastiche and parody specifically, as well as their context. This article seeks to explore parody that serves a purpose, which I refer to as *productive parody*, and in order to accomplish this I chose *Sesame Street* as the primary basis for my analysis. While *Sesame Street* functions overall as postmodern pastiche, there are certain segments of the show that serve implicitly as parody. Firstly, I will provide an overview of postmodern pastiche and how *Sesame Street* fits into that description, and secondly I will analyze specific segments of the show, both vintage and contemporary episodes, in order to illustrate how they function as a form of productive parody. Additionally, by analyzing contextual shifts within the educational platform of a televisual pastiche, we may be better able to assess exactly how productive parody functions, as well as its implications.

#### **Pastiche and Parody**

There are multiple ways that we can define parody and pastiche; therefore, I would like to begin by exploring the tension between the definitions that have been established by postmodern scholars thus far. Fredric Jameson has referred to pastiche, in the postmodern age, as an empty and meaningless replacement to parody without the presence of a "healthy linguistic normality" (17). Thus, parody no longer exists in postmodern culture precisely because we are unable to create new meaning, as language and subject have become both fragmented and schizoid (Powell 39). Since Jameson argues that we must have linguistic normality (i.e., modern language) in order to create parody, he provides us with a gloomy prospectus of our inability to derive new meaning from established works (at least in parodic form), while simultaneously indicating we no longer have a formal and healthy language structure.

Linda Hutcheon, on the other hand, provides us with a distinctly different perspective of postmodern pastiche and parody. She refers to "postmodern parody" specifically, generally objecting to the notion that parody and pastiche are one in the same or that parody has been

replaced with pastiche in the manner stated by Jameson. Hutcheon argues that, "postmodern parody is a value-problematizing, de-naturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representations" (94). In other words, postmodern parody functions as a way to recontextualize the past and acknowledge how we are now separated from that past by confirming and subverting the power of representation in history (94-95). Additionally, Hutcheon argues that, "postmodern parody is both deconstructively critical and constructively creative, paradoxically making us aware of both the limits and powers of representation" (98).

Within this essay, the notion of pastiche and parody aligns itself more closely with Hutcheon's position; however, her definition does not provide us with sufficient information in order to properly address differences between the two terms and how they function within the context of an educational television series. I define pastiche as the adaptation, and subsequent mixture, of various styles that make reference to previously established works. That is, pastiche functions as a form of borrowing materials from a variety of different mediums and piecing these materials together to form a medley of various aesthetic styles and textual references. We complicate this definition further by placing it within the context of postmodernist theory. By confining pastiche and parody into postmodern culture (which I believe are inherently tied to one another in relation to our current socio-cultural condition), we are then able to illustrate a more robust, and applicable, form of pastiche.

For example, Dadaists employed multiple techniques in the creation of their art, including collage and photomontage, which can be said to be a form of pastiche. After all, Dada artists were creating works by (literally) piecing together different parts from different mediums, in order to create a brand new object. However, we cannot discuss Dadaist collage in terms of postmodern pastiche, as the Dada practice pre-dates postmodernity by decades. On the contrary, *Sesame Street* is an example of a postmodern pastiche, not simply because it was developed after the theory's establishment; but rather, in its use of distinctly different visual styles (e.g., animation and puppetry) that were originally employed to maintain the attention of pre-school children (Lesser 75-76). I point out this distinction in order to avoid confusion of the term pastiche, and to reiterate that I am discussing pastiche and parody in the context of the postmodern era.

While pastiche may be nothing more than a mishmash of styles and references that serve no particular purpose (as argued by Jameson), parody is generally accepted as an apparent imitation or critique of a previous work, often times creating new meaning. Jameson is less cynical in his discussion of parody, and describes "parody as a readily received idea," one that "found a fertile area in the idiosyncrasies of the modern and their inimitable styles" (16). For Jameson, parody was not "devoid of laughter" like pastiche, but served a purpose in imitating established works, even if it was simply for comedic effect (17). Hutcheon argues that parody, although imitative, differs, dramatizes and emphasizes the original text, by which irony acts as the "main rhetorical mechanism," in turn allowing us to become aware of these distinctions (31). She stresses that parody's main intent is not to copy, but to recontextualize and rework conventions, generally in a respectful manner. Additionally, Hutcheon makes the distinction that "parody is a bitextual synthesis, unlike more monotextual forms like pastiches that stress similarity rather than difference" (33).

I define parody as a critique, whether positive or negative, of an original work that is generally conceived via humorous and harmless imitation. While Jameson and Hutcheon offer distinct definitions by which both claim that pastiche and parody are different from one another (and I concur), ultimately, I believe that parody can be part of a postmodern pastiche, although this is not always the case. As aforementioned, *Sesame Street* serves as an example of postmodern pastiche as a whole, but certain segments within the show, such as *Monsterpiece Theatre*, operate expressly as parody. I will provide a more detailed analysis of several of the show's elements and would like to note that when referring to *Sesame Street*, I am not referring to any specific period of time since the show's inception in 1969; therefore, some of the parodic pieces and elements discussed herein may no longer be a part of the show's current lineup.

Finally, this brings me to the question: What is productive parody? Unlike blank parody, a productive parody serves a specific purpose functioning beyond mere visual flamboyance. An example of blank parody is Gwen Stefani's *Wind It Up* video. The music, along with the visual content clearly mimics the 1965 film *The Sound of Music*; however, the parodic elements do not add any further meaning to the song and serves no function besides visual flair. To contrast, productive parody is a tool used by *Sesame Street* to assist children in the process of learning, which is accomplished by recontextualizing established texts whose

original audience were adults (i.e., the play *Much Ado About Nothing*). Parody can alter the context in which the original content was re-created and subsequently interpreted, and this re-appropriation should serve a purpose, even if it is comedic relief.

#### **Sesame Street as Postmodern Pastiche**

One of the qualities that made *Sesame Street* a pioneer in educational television was the role research played in designing the show. While part of the research was dedicated to creating specific lesson plans for each episode, part of it was also dedicated to the format in which these lessons would be shown to children. Precisely because *Sesame Street* was created to reach a wider audience via television, both researchers and producers, needed to make note of how this information would be presented. During the show's initial design stages, research indicated that limited attention spans of preschoolers would present a challenge. According to Gerald Lesser, one of the show's original chief advisors, *Sesame Street* championed this challenge by using "many short segments . . . and a variety of styles and techniques (mixing animation, puppets, live-action films, pixilation and any other visual devices the producers could invent)" (76). In order to help "sustain attention or retrieve it when it is lost," *Sesame Street* still combines fantasy and reality by mixing "four main ingredients: puppets; the cast of live adults and children on the set; animation and pixilation; and live action films" (Lesser 129).

Upon incorporating and mixing together these stylistic elements and technological advancements, *Sesame Street* came to function as a form of pastiche and subsequently redefined educational television. *Sesame Street* did not create the medium of television, nor did it create the various aesthetic styles it incorporated within the show. What *Sesame Street* did do however, was to change the content and context in which these various elements functioned. For example, *Sesame Street* did not create animation in and of itself, but re-appropriated its contents (to teach children the alphabet), and changed its context (to become part of the educational process). The show borrowed heavily from previously established technologies and styles, but it used these borrowed elements to produce a brand new format for children's television. By using the term "borrowed heavily" I am not in any way implying that *Sesame Street* directly imitated previous televisual styles; on the contrary, it used these styles to completely change the context in which they originally functioned.

I have spent many hours viewing various episodes of *Sesame Street* (both full length and highlights), online, via DVD sets, as well as episodes currently syndicated on the PBS channel. Throughout these viewings I noticed a number of changes to the show; however, its basic format continues to be comparable to what it was in its inception (they still use a similar pastiche of visual, aural and textual elements). While the show continuously updates its techniques and format in order to accommodate the newest generation of viewers and avoid becoming static, it is telling to observe how the show has not strayed unrecognizably far from the elements that made the show a success initially (Note: The DVD sets contain a disclaimer actually stating that vintage episodes are not suitable for the needs of today's children). Animation and musical scores alongside a mixture of live action and puppetry are still at the heart of *Sesame Street's* appeal, and most likely its success as well.

I find that *Sesame Street*, at its most basic level, functions as a postmodern pastiche, but more so in its use and formatting of the visual. The show was produced to be consumed by audiences solely through their television screens and in turn, the focus of the appropriation and quality of visuals used on the show would be inherently larger than other mediums. The show, as a whole, does not need to parody in order to be considered pastiche - an idea that Ingeborg Hoesterey refers to as *pastiche volontaire* (18). Additionally, Hoesterey states that, "pastiche structuration lends itself to exposing and rewriting cultural codifications that for centuries marginalized unconventional identities" (17). Although Hoesterey is speaking in the context of the art world, her ideas are applicable in supporting my argument regarding *Sesame Street* as a postmodern, televisual pastiche. *Sesame Street* has not only adapted previous formats and mediums and re-appropriated them for its own use, but it has also re-codified what educational television was and could be in the future.

#### **Context In/Out of *Sesame Street***

Although *Sesame Street's* producers did not wish to design a show to be strictly dependent upon adult participation, they knew that in order to attract the largest possible audience of preschoolers, the show also needed to appeal to adults, older siblings or both. The primary reason for this was simple: older members of the family were the ones who controlled the TV set. If *Sesame Street* failed to appeal, at least in some capacity, to this particular dynamic, their target audience may have been left behind, so to speak (Lesser 45). Additionally, the positive effects of parent/child co-viewing are well documented, which

provided yet another reason for producers to target a more mature audience. A parent who watches *Sesame Street* alongside his/her child, even without asking questions or interacting with the content, plays an important role in the child's learning process (Lesser 79-80).

However, even upon taking these aspects into consideration, *Sesame Street's* creators were adamant that "nothing is included in the program solely to attract this older audience and nothing is made to depend entirely upon their participation with the young child" (Lesser 120). Nonetheless, there is no denying that several elements within the show, most notably parody, are aimed at older family members. Guest celebrity appearances and parodies of well-known works are two main features still employed today that are specifically designed to appeal to a mature audience. In turn, the show not only provides us with a pastiche of different mediums and styles, it consequently creates a shift in context on a macro and micro level. On a macro level, *Sesame Street* has appropriated a number of established elements into the show, which highlights a major shift in context from its original use (e.g., children's education prior to television or animation that was primarily used for entertainment) to its current use (e.g., televisual pastiche for children's informal education). On a micro level, the best example of the re-contextualization of information is through the show's use of parody, which is doubly complex when dealing with an audience of preschoolers, as well as older family members.

I argue that the micro level shift in context, specifically, allows for parody to serve a purpose, which in the case of *Sesame Street*, is founded in the instruction of various literacies to preschool aged children (e.g., correctly reciting the alphabet, visually recognizing objects or successfully counting to the number 10). In the context of the show itself, parody serves a dual function: 1) It aims to attract older audience members into viewing the show, and 2) It changes the context of the original content, which was most likely designed for adult entertainment (e.g., *NYPD Blue*), into educational content, which is aimed at teaching children basic literacy skills (e.g., *ABCD Blue*). Consequently, many (if not all) *Sesame Street* parodies function as both entertainment for the mature audience and children, as well as an educational tool that can better prepare children for formal education. Following the path of productive parody on *Sesame Street* leads us to the multitude of educational segments that appeal to individuals of almost any age, and this is where I turn to next.

### **Productive Parody on *Sesame Street***

In viewing numerous *Sesame Street* parody segments, I found that these parodies function in a number of different ways, including, but not limited to, teaching children to count, add, subtract, recite the alphabet, recognize body parts, and even be conscientious about their hygiene habits. These short video segments are content-driven and generally humorous and light-hearted in nature. While I do argue that *Sesame Street* provides us with great examples of productive parody, I cannot ignore the fact that the show is also meant to entertain; therefore, not all parody segments are productive in the sense of directly providing content meant to educate, but I have yet to find any aspect of these segments (or the show itself) that fails to entertain. Thus, even if a parody piece is not clearly indicative of having embedded a particular literacy lesson for children, its secondary function is to parody simply for entertainment purposes; though, examples of “entertainment only” parodies on *Sesame Street* are the exception and not the rule.

*Sesame Street's Monsterpiece Theater*, hosted by Cookie Monster as Alistair Cookie, is a parody of PBS' *Masterpiece Theatre*, whose original show host was British personality Alistair Cooke. *Monsterpiece* mimics the format of *Masterpiece Theater*, not only in its host persona, but also in its introduction and broadcast of a variety of classic works. *Sesame Street* uses the platform of *Monsterpiece Theater* as fertile ground by which to parody a number of classic and popular works in film, television, literature and theatre. Generally, each *Monsterpiece* segment begins with an introduction by Alistair Cookie, which is then followed by a parody sketch and subsequently ends with Cookie's closing remarks and possible mention regarding a future episode. *Monsterpiece Theater* is itself a parody of a classic British television series and the sketches shown within the segment are yet another parody, which in turn makes this popular *Sesame Street* segment function as a dual parody or a parody within a parody.

I viewed a total of fifteen *Monsterpiece* episodes that parodied four films, two television shows, three plays, four musicals and two books. There are many more episodes, but I will limit discussion to those that I viewed. Only two episodes (i.e., “Waiting for Elmo” and “Twin Beaks”) out of the fifteen were primarily entertainment for adults, rather than education for children. Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* and David Lynch surrealist TV drama *Twin Peaks*, are somewhat difficult texts to comprehend and *Sesame Street's* parody of these works

are, what I would consider, clearly directed at a mature audience, particularly those who are familiar with the originals. "Waiting for Elmo" satirizes Beckett's play by illustrating its reputation for being incomprehensible, yet brilliant and "Twin Beaks," highlights the inherent duality and strangeness present in Lynch's cultic television show. Ironically, both of these works are the most inaccessible pieces that *Sesame Street* appears to have parodied, and this may be the reason why there is such a limited contextual shift from adult comprehension to child education.

The remaining thirteen episodes are not only comedic portrayals of beloved classics, but productive parodies as they directly address various literacy issues in hopes of educating preschoolers. *Sesame Street* can appeal to adults simply by parodying texts that are otherwise unfamiliar to children, as preschoolers do not yet possess the knowledge or ability to recognize a parody or understand its purpose. In turn, the shift in context is much more apparent in these episodes, functioning on two levels for the adult (i.e., parody and education), but only one level for the child (i.e., education). (Note: *Sesame Street* was part of my pre-school years, but it has only gained further appeal with me as an adult, as I now possess the proper skills and knowledge to fully understand the nuances and sheer genius of the show. The context in which *Sesame Street* resides has completely shifted in the last 25 years, yet the magic has not. I believe that parody is but one element of the show that successfully demonstrates a continuous slide in contextual understanding for education and entertainment purposes, as well as maintaining a strong hold on audiences of all ages.)

For ease of clarity, I have listed the thirteen *Monsterpiece Theater* episodes and briefly describe how each episode functions as productive parody. Each list is ordered with the name of the parody, name of original (if different), the medium (i.e., play, film, etc.) and description. I would also like to note that all of these episodes can be easily found with a quick Google or YouTube search:

1. "ABCD Blue"/*NYPD Blue* (television): An emergency police call leads two monsters to help those who forgot how to recite the alphabet.
2. "Anyone's Nose"/*Anything Goes* (musical): A female monster sings about how she learned to recognize and understand her nose.

3. "Conversations with My Father"/*Conversations with My Father* (play): A papa monster teaches his son how to conserve energy and water.
4. *Dr. No* (film): A doctor named No cures his patient by instructing him to recognize the word "no."
5. *Fiddler on the Roof* (musical): Russian peasants sing about addition, which helps them keep track of how many fiddlers are on the roof.
6. *Gone with the Wind* (book): In order to survive a terrible windstorm, two puppets try their hand at subtraction, in turn teaching children a basic math skill.
7. *Guys and Dolls* (musical): A male and female monster demonstrates that it is okay for boys to play with dolls and girls to play with trucks.
8. *Lethal Weapon 3* (film): Danny Glover and Mel Gibson guest star to introduce the dangerous number "3," which is then followed by number "4."
9. "Monsters with Dirty Faces"/*Angels with Dirty Faces* (film): A police monster is given the dangerous task to advise the dirty gangster monsters that they must wash their faces, in turn teaching children the importance of hygiene.
10. *Much Ado About Nothing* (play): A restaurant patron orders a hearty meal only to be told, ingredient by ingredient, that the restaurant is out of everything; in turn teaching the number "0" and the concept of "nothing."
11. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (book): Literal translation of the book title, where children are taught several numbers, including "1" that flies over the cuckoo's nest.
12. *The Sound of Music* (musical): A monster sits on top of a mountain waiting to hear the sound of music, but ends up illustrating other types of sounds such as a cow and ambulance siren.
13. "The 400 Blows"/*Les Quatre Cents Coups* (film): A monster celebrating his birthday takes 40 blows in order to blow out all of the birthday candles on the cake.

*Sesame Street* parodies are in no way tied only to *Monsterpiece Theatre*; in fact, there are a number of different types of stand-alone parodies on the show - some involve popular musical stars parodying their own song (e.g., Feist's *1234*), while others parody an artist (e.g., The Beatles), and there are even *Sesame Street* characters parodying each other (e.g., Oscar the Grouch reinvents a Kermit song). These parody segments are about three or so minutes in

length (a tiny portion of an hour-long show) and are incredibly effective in communicating informal learning skills, which speaks to the powerful nature of this type of narrative and visual tool for educational purposes. HBO's dark comedy, *Six Feet Under*, was parodied in a segment that featured Count Von Count counting six feet under a dinner table. Those familiar with the original show, such as myself, may be amused by *Sesame Street's* innocent, yet effective use of the show's name to teach children how to count to the number six. Another example is Cookie Monster's *Share it Maybe*, which is a parody of the popular, and highly imitated, song *Call me Maybe*, and as the parody title indicates, the song conveys the message on the importance of sharing. There are far too many parodies on *Sesame Street* to be covered wholly herein, but I believe that these examples provide a solid foundation for analyzing productive parody on *Sesame Street*, as well as other children's television shows.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout this paper, I have attempted to explain and subsequently demonstrate two main concepts: how *Sesame Street* functions as postmodern pastiche, and how specific segments within the show serve as a form of productive parody. When I first began reviewing literature on postmodern pastiche and parody, as well as *Sesame Street*, I noticed a research gap that never tied these two ideas to one another. This struck me as odd, and it ultimately became the main impetus for delving deeper into postmodern theory and analyzing *Sesame Street* in the process. As I mentioned before, I am not an educational scholar and I cannot speak to the level of direct cause and effect in terms of *Sesame Street* and its efficacy in educating children. Even though that is not what I set out to address in this article, I am confident that most parody segments on the show serve a precise function in its goal to educate pre-school children on basic literacies, and in turn better preparing them for school.

Another important focal point lies within the contextual shifts, whether large or small, which are inherently present in every episode of *Sesame Street* and nearly all parody segments. After providing a closer analysis of the constant change in context within the show, we may now have the ability to better assess exactly how productive parody functions as a whole. As we have covered thus far, *Sesame Street* is a postmodern television pastiche, but this is not done without an underlying purpose that stems beyond entertainment. Parody, in and of itself, creates a contextual shift simply by moving from the original to the imitation, but when we link this shift with an attempt to entertain a mature audience and simultaneously

educate preschoolers, we encounter a multitude of educational segments that appeal to individuals of nearly any age. Although I believe this article to be concise in terms of addressing productive parody within the pastiche format of a children's television show, there is room for original research to combine educational scholars and childhood psychologists with visual arts scholars and postmodern theorists. A bit of imagination and creativity should take it from there.

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### **The Last of the Crass: Understanding the Shifting Values of Punk Subculture**

In 1970, Ed Sanders of The Fugs coined the term "Punk Rock" (Shapiro 492). From this moment onward, Punk developed into one of the most iconic and influential subcultural movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It spawned a newfound political activism from youths and encouraged postmodern thought that challenged traditional values and it did so in an aggressive fashion never before seen. Eight years later, the band Crass released their song "Punk is Dead" effectively killing the scene while still in its adolescence (Crass). So, why is it that a culture such as Punk with such a significant following can dissolve so rapidly? The answer can be found within the philosophical shift of perception from youth subcultures. It is debatable the exact point at which Punk dissolved, but one can observe a clear change in the idealism of the 1970s subcultures and the mindset of the modern citizens of the post-2000 era (Burstein 3). In the 70s, "Punk gave the individual a route to personal liberation. Punk meant something more" (Berger 5). In 2000, "there is no Punk; just kids in black shirts" (Cabernach). What was once liberation became a fashion. Punk as a subculture dissolved because of society's inclination towards pragmatism. It became simply entertainment rather than a movement.

#### **"You Can Be Who?": Defining Punk**

'Punk' is a word that has always been notoriously difficult to define (Abebe). 'Punk' gained its subcultural connotation when musicians usurped the word to mock police dramas like *Kojak* and *Baretta* that used 'Punk' as an insult for the antagonists in the shows (LeBlanc 35). Youths started using the word 'Punk' to describe those who rejected authority and engaged in deviant behavior for the sake of promoting individual expression. 'Punk' therefore came to be defined as a militant expression of postmodern thought characterized by independence, alienation, and exaggeration (Eriksen).

Punk was created to be in direct opposition to not one clear issue, but rather in opposition to the overall authoritarian mentality of western culture (Eriksen). Everyone's opinions were to be valued in Punk culture as long as the idea was not the product of sole conformity and obedience. It was the duty of humankind to question reality and express doubt in its institutions. This Punk idealism sought to create a world in which members of a dominant culture would be encouraged to use individual moral reasoning for its beliefs. Therefore, Punk

offered the liberation of all those who were oppressed (Berger 5). It offered an escape from social expectations. If someone were gay, religious, feminist, etc. they were accepted (e.g. Queercore, Christian Punk, Riot Grrrl respectively). Punk was inherently created to give a voice to the minority.

### **"Bloody Revolutions": Where Does Punk Come From?**

Punk emerged out of an amalgamation of a whole host of prior resistance movements but it specifically arose out of a rejection of Glam Rock (see Hebdige). Glam Rock focused its energy on flamboyant clothing and expressed ideas of youth angst. It was meant to break away from the collectivism of most other subcultures. Instead, members strived to individuate themselves while pursuing hedonistic ideals. It abandoned political topics to focus on escapism. Coincidentally, Glam Rock became hugely popular and began to popularize the concept of subculture and social deviance.

Punk twisted the Glam Rock escapist identity and combined it with Skinhead aggressive politics. Both styles were combined to exhibit a combat-like uniform that was also flamboyant and offensive to look at (e.g., tattered clothes, combat boots, long spiked hair, safety pin jewelry). As Punk grew, it splintered into a whole host of other sub-genres like Garage Punk, Straightedge, Hardcore, etc. (Turrini and Joseph 59). Each of these sub-genres of Punk created their own styles of music, fashion, and ideology while still remaining under the Punk umbrella.

In the late 80s and 90s, Punk became widely popular for mainstream audiences with self-proclaimed Punk bands like Green Day and Blink 182 (Matula 21). However, these bands tweaked the sound to be more appealing to larger audiences. They "used bratty vocals and loud, compressed guitar sounds rather than the loudly mixed vocals, with guitar and bass-playing that employed distinctive 'figures' [of traditional Punk]" (Turrini and Joseph 59). Slowly, Punk was twisted beyond recognition and gave rise to more self-oriented cultures like Grunge and Goth (Clark 2).

After Punk, there was a change in the pattern of youth subcultural thinking. Punk represented the final stage of subcultures and counter cultures (Clark 2-3). Punk groups stood outside of dominant cultures. Every group before Punk had an idealistic purpose to challenge normative behavior. They resisted hegemonic culture.

Post-Punk cultures could be more accurately termed co-cultures. They functioned in

parallel to mainstream society (Clark 2-3). These so called subcultures were tolerated and embraced. New cultures simply became a part of the mainstream. Punk turned into simply music as opposed to a subculture or a political movement. It lost its meaning and became an eclectic fashion. If traditional Punk were based on criminality and anarchism, then this new Punk was just a fake imitation. It did not challenge the mainstream in any capacity because it was accepted. Therefore, it failed to meet the definition of what it meant to be Punk and what it meant to be a subculture.

#### **"White Punks on Hope": Crass**

To better understand this phenomenon, one can examine a forerunner of Punk idealism: Crass. Crass was a Punk band that formed in 1977 Britain (Berger 80). The band primarily included Gee Vaucher, Penny Rimbaud, Eve Libertine, Pete Wright, Mick Duffield, Phil Free, Joy De Vivre, Steve Ignorant, and Andy Palmer (Berger 9).

Crass is significant for two reasons: 1) they became a symbol for the representation of Punk and 2) they directly mirrored the narrative of the Punk culture (see Berger). This is because they had complete control over their works, an uninhibited willingness to attack all things authoritarian, and a persistence to sustain their anarchic pursuits. Crass proposed their anarchist, no-authority-but-yourself message and they lived their lives in sync to this message arguably greater than almost any other Punk group. They showed youths that anyone could decide how to live. Songs like "Big A, Little a" and "Do They Owe Us A Living" became their anthems and preached their two biggest theses: you are an individual and have the ability to live the life you want and that political systems and large scale institutions are stealing that ability from you. Crass' message became so popular that it eventually created the Anarcho-Movement which impressed upon listeners to become politically active and demand social change (Savage 584).

With Crass in mind, one can examine the successes of Punk to understand its failing. Punk attempted to use a three step process to optimize its effectiveness. Members created an ideal to strive towards. As they worked for this ideal, they were inevitably met with resistance. They used that resistance to compel themselves to further action and formed a collective identity to distinguish resisting forces. They became known as their Punk identity. These three principles of ideation, resistance, and anonymity made political movements like Punk successful (Butler).

Having an idea is perhaps the most obvious aspect of Punk's popularity. People need to have something to say if others are going to listen to them (Butler). If one wants to elicit social betterment, they need cooperation. Cooperation can only occur when others agree with one's preliminary idea. The idea that started Punk was a reaction to their musical predecessors and general antiauthoritarianism (Hebdige 63). Pre-Punks were annoyed with the misrepresentation of the middle class by the Glam Rock groups of the time. They therefore created their own style which used the authentic gritty and insolent mentality of the struggling middle class youths.

Similarly for Crass, the band's drummer, Penny Rimbaud, and lead singer, Steve Ignorant, were listening to Sex Pistol's song 'Anarchy in the UK' (Thompson 311). At one point in the song, Johnny Rotten, Sex Pistol's lead singer, says that there is 'no future.' Rimbaud and Ignorant took this statement as a challenge. They believed that there was a future and it was something that people should fight for. They therefore created their idea: they were going to form a band that would instigate social change rather than a complete nihilistic separation from society. Crass proposed 'Punk' as something more than simple criminality. It could be used to instigate actual change of these oppressive institutions. In Crass' unintentional anthem, "Do They Owe Us a Living," the audience can easily understand the band's position:

Fuck the politically minded, here's something I want to say  
about the state of the nation, the way it treats us today.  
At school they give you shit, drop you in a pit  
You try, you try, you try to get out but you can't because they've fucked you about.  
Then you're a prime example of how you must not be.  
This is just a sample of what they've done to you and me.

#### "Do They Owe Us a Living"

Crass leaves no subtlety to their lyrics. They oppose large political systems because the band believed that these systems mistreated their members. They saw these systems indoctrinate children to fit one single ideology and subjugated individuals throughout their lives. As a result, Crass impressed upon people to challenge the system.

This leads to the second key aspect of the band's success. They resisted. Resistance is important because, by definition, a subculture needs to be outside of the dominant culture (Butler). A subculture represents an identified aspect of what is wrong with the mainstream

society (Barker 430). By clashing with the majority, the subculture is demanding attention and is exhibiting its refusal to allow society to continue with its behavior. The resistance clearly defines a group's purpose. The members in agreement will automatically form a union against their opposition and work cohesively as a group unit rather than thousands of individual voices. The argument also simply brings more attention to the subject. If someone is fighting for something, that means two groups are discussing one topic. It does not matter if they see it as positive or negative. It is in the consciousness of twice as many people as before. This means more people are becoming aware of the issue. They can form their opinions about the issue and have the opportunity to make a stand against it. Even if people choose to oppose the Punk side, Punks still force people to form their own philosophy. Punk confronts ignorance and apathy and facilitates action.

Crass was notorious for their resistance (see Berger). They viciously attacked organized religion, sexism, war, and general authoritarianism. And every social concern that they tried to bring to light, brought about aggressive resistance. The band struggled against police, lawyers, and general citizens. They even had confrontations with notable groups such as Baader Meinhoff, the KGB, the CIA, the IRA, MI6, and Margaret Thatcher ("You're Not Punk"). This only fueled their ambition to continue. For every person that opposed them, they grew more adamant in their idealistic pursuits. The reactionary mentality to fight those that fight one's self, pushed Punks like Crass to strive for more. When people oppressed them, it only solidified their belief that something was wrong. In Crass' song, "Banned from the Roxy," they illustrate the resistance that they experienced from people's perception of them.

Banned from the Roxy... Okay  
I never much liked playing there anyway.  
They said they only wanted well behaved boys  
Do they think guitars and microphones are just fucking toys?  
Fuck'em, I've chosen to make my stand  
"Banned from the Roxy"

Again, one can see others trying to pervert Punk's message by indoctrinating a specific set of expectations. Bands are supposed to be "well behaved boys" who play inoffensive music and get off the stage. Crass rejected that and "made [their] stand."

The final aspect of their success was anonymity (Butler). Anonymity allowed for

responsibility to be diffused among the entire group. There were no specific leaders in Punk. It was a collective effort. Everyone had an equal opportunity to participate. The reason that this was so useful was because with leaders, the opposition could identify a person to suppress. It was easy to silence one person. However, if everyone involved had an equal say, it was far more difficult to silence their collective voice. Social change was not meant to uplift one person. Rather, it was meant to help society as a whole. The action was what was celebrated, not the individual. Therefore, the subculture strived to deconstruct the individual's identity by encouraging the use of uniforms, false names, and symbols. In essence, they created their own collective identity. By using these methods of deindividuation, the focus escaped the sole members of the group. They entered into a unit, and as a unit, they were free to break the rules that were imposed upon them by society.

Crass did this to an extent that surpassed almost anyone else (see Berger). Each of the band's members changed their names to pseudonyms. They all wore black uniforms. They identified themselves with an ambiguous symbol and simple catchphrases. Crass also stressed minimalism in everything they did to suppress their identity. They only spent as much money as was necessary, their logo was just a few lines and circles, their clothes never showed any kind of branding except for their own and at their shows, they used 'domestic lighting' to represent the equality of the band and the audience (Thompson 318). All of this was done to promote a collective identity. The band's founder himself remarks, "we'd lost ourselves and become Crass" (Thompson 320).

People were able to escape these constrictions of institutions through simple labels. In Crass' song, "Don't Get Caught," the band notes how institutions view subcultural efforts. They group people as invincible large scale movements. Even against armies, these groups can still function.

They'll think it's easy on the news at 10.  
The commie-anar-fems are at it again.  
Annoying the police and the passive grassroots.  
We're living in a country where the army shoots.  
People with courage dumped and stranded  
Don'ts and won'ts look on empty handed.  
If you fuck up the state, don't be a star,

They're stuck if they don't know who you are.

"Don't Get Caught"

"Don't Get Caught" details how when an individual stands up for something, they are stopped, "people with courage dumped and stranded." However, when someone rejects their personal identity, they can challenge the system without personal consequence, "if you fuck up the state, don't be a star. They're stuck if they don't know who you are."

Eventually, these core principles of Punk's initial success began to fracture. The primary meaning of Punk ceased to be internalized by its audiences (Clark 5). Instead, the audience regurgitated bands' lines about independence at the shows and went about their corporate lives afterwards. Punk simply became popular. It was another way for people to feed the contented nature of their lives. Comfort was now their primary concern. They shifted from being utilitarian idealists to being self-occupied pragmatists.

In 1984 (Berger 254), Crass became a victim of this shift when they played their last official show. The reason for the break was two-fold. First, the band's message was being distorted. The people who were coming to their shows were seeing them as entertainment rather than activism. Their message was not being internalized. Rather, it was adding to the machine of complacency and apathy in the society.

The second reason they broke up was because of individual differences within the group members. The band was struggling with an identity crisis and a thirst for individuation. The members themselves were failing to grasp the purpose of their efforts. As the band's founder Penny Rimbaud states, "The differences were manifesting in what we saw as activism, consumerism . . ." (Berger 255). Members wanted to be individuals again. The gravity of being Crass was weighing down on them. It was difficult to live up to an ideal that asked for its members to always follow a specific ideology. As Pete Wright explains "you can't wear boots because they're not vegetarian. You can't look at girls because it's sexist. Can't indulge in holiday in the sun because it's bourgeois" (*Shibboleth: My Revolting Life* 258). The expectations of the band were becoming too great to satisfy. The definition of the band was negating its members' rights, which was paradoxical to the band's overall message of individual authority. They wanted to restore their personal happiness at the expense of societal actualization.

### **"Reality Asylum": The Issue of Meta-modernity**

The reason that this shift of perception took place was because Punk paradoxically succeeded in its purpose. The postmodern ideal which dismissed the accepted and expected norms of society urged its followers to reject the foundationalist grand narratives imposed upon them by their modernist predecessors (Irvine). These subcultures meant for people to form their own unique voices in society and promote social change. What ended up happening was after 70 years of these subcultural movements popularizing postmodernism, rebellion became commercialized. Mainstream culture recognized this phenomenon of youth achieving identity through things like "Punk clothes" and "Punk life styles." Consequently, they manufactured the "Punk image" and sold these items to youth as a way to be "cool."

Anarchy was fabricated into the hegemony of mainstream culture and Western culture entered into what is known as meta-modernity (Irvine). This meant people took postmodernism as a given rather than a problem to be solved. In turn, this reverted society to the behavior of the modernists while maintaining the philosophy of the postmodernists. People understood that fundamentalist institutions were flawed, but there really was not anything that could be done to stop them. Yet, people did not see a fault in this mentality because the individual members of society believed they were completing the quest of the postmodern ideal. They thought about challenging traditional behavior, which could be rationalized as progress. And, everyone had their own voices and they were seen as popular for being supposedly independent.

In doing this, one can see the dissolution of Punk's crucial aspects. The prioritization of the self dissolves anonymity. The fabrication of dissent into mainstream culture dissolves resistance. And, the paradoxical nature of meta-modernity negates the reactionary idea of Punk. Through this process, pragmatism emerged and idealism was made irrelevant. People do not fight the systems that are oppressing them. Instead they see these structures as an obligatory aspect of life. Therefore, all subcultures are inculcated into society. They become simply another part of the hegemony. Self-actualization and complacency become their priorities over societal actualization. Anything contrary to that world order is seen as entertainment and therefore meaningless.

### **"Punk is Dead": Where is Punk Now?**

In the post-2000 era, Punk groups can still exist, but they exist as something other than a subculture. They are simply music or at best the aforementioned co-culture. Essentially,

there are three types of modern Punk band. First, there are bands from the Generation X era that continue to perform in the age of the Millennials. This includes groups such as Subhumans, Descendents, Iggy Pop and so on. They continue to draw significant crowds, they sing their same songs, and they promote the same lifestyle as they did in the 70s and 80s.

Second, there are underground Punk bands. This group includes bands such as Step Right Up, Uglybones, ACxDC, and so on. They typically do not achieve mainstream success, but they maintain an attempt at the original Punk ideology. They continue to support the Punk ethos and even refer to themselves as "old school." Songs about misanthropy and anger towards political systems are common themes within their music. They simply adapt their lyrics to the issues of the times.

The final group is the self-proclaimed modern Punk bands that do achieve mainstream success. This includes bands like Sum 41, Blink 182, Green Day, and so on. These bands will often achieve this status by signing onto larger record labels and altering the raw DIY-ness of their original sound to appeal to larger audiences. Typically, they will also lose the high speed loudly mixed aggression of traditional Punk and replace it with bratty vocals and compressed instrumentals, as previously mentioned (Turrini and Joseph 59). Unsurprisingly, this usually alienates their original core audience.

What is interesting about all of these groups is that they all at least started similarly to the Generation X bands. They all even try to maintain this integrity. Regardless, if they sign to a major label or change their styles, they still carry the Punk connotation and intentionally or unintentionally allow the Punk ideal to stay alive. Punk bands continue to perform across the nation (Cartwright, Hanula, and Morris). They maintain a similar fashion of spiked hair and tattered clothes, they still use self-effacing band names and pseudonyms to represent themselves, and they still express anger at the social structures that they disagree with. But, the argument is not necessarily that Punk has died. The simple existence of self-labeled Punk bands dismisses this idea. Rather, it is subculture that has died and transformed into a series of things to be consumed. Punk becomes simply a couple hours of entertainment rather than a political movement.

When Punk started, it shocked people (Cartwright, Hanula, and Morris). No one had ever seen someone literally shout their opinions into a crowd as fast and loud as they could. It was something that could not be ignored. It was the ultimate catharsis. As Jeffrey Hanula, lead

singer of hardcore band Step Right Up, explains, "There was a Romanticism about it." But, as times change, so do the ways people perceive how to promote change. Society had seen the hippies tell everyone to love each other. When that did not show results, Punks said get mad and make your own changes. For more than 70 years people had heard various messages that attempted to revolutionize the world. These cultures definitely influenced the world, but they never fulfilled their ideals of total cessation of oppression. In the 2000s, people simply deviated from what they once felt. Now, they thought that if nothing works, they might as well join the system.

A perfect example of this is the 2013 fashion exhibit, *Punk: Chaos to Couture* (Abebe). This gala event hosted by *Vogue Magazine* attempted to "subvert the mainstream" by attracting high profile socialites to the Metropolitan Museum of Art dressed up as 'Punks.' When asked to comment on Punk culture at the gala, celebrities gave such quotes as:

"The curator of the exhibit told me that the color of punk was pink so I'm in pink by Chanel." Anna Wintour (Howard)

"I did not [have a punk phase]. That's why I think my version of punk for me is not probably the mohawk, typical punk that you'd sort of envision. A little bit more like 'romantic punk.'" Kim Kardashian (Howard)

"I feel very elegant but kinda punk rock because it's leather."  
Jessica Alba (Howard)

These quotes illustrate the exact status of Punk in modern times. The Punk fashion was a negation of beauty. Punks ripped their clothes, wore safety pin jewelry, and crudely sewed patches to their clothes to represent poverty and aggression. It was a message that vanity was not as important as the media would want one to believe. So, when the editor in chief of *Vogue Magazine*, or beauty icons like Kim Kardashian and Jessica Alba, are celebrating Punk fashion, there is undoubtedly a misinterpretation. If Punk can be co-opted by institutions such as high fashion and simultaneously welcomed by the same materialistic individuals that it literally shouted against, then one can easily argue that Punk no longer stands against hegemonic culture.

This gala is certainly not an isolated incident of how Punk is perceived in the 2000s. One can observe this corruption of Punk in commercials like Garnier Fructis' shampoo advertisement that uses a Transplant's song to sell their product (Usinger). Or, it can be seen

in promotions for the Olympics on NBC (Matula 19). Or, it can be seen by simply going to one's local Hot Topic where tattered "Punk" clothes can be purchased at exorbitantly marked up prices (*Punk's Not Dead*). Punk is no longer deviant. It is cool and accepted. It fails to meet the very definitions of the word. And it certainly fails to promote social betterment as a jingle in a shampoo commercial. This is not Punk as a subculture. It is vanity packaged as something accessible for everyone. It is high fashion that ignores political issues in order to sell a product. And that is what is being embraced by audiences and is dissolving subculture.

#### **"So What?": Conclusion**

Society simply needs to remember that the impetus of Punk as a lifestyle is possible. Again, one can simply examine the aftermath of Crass' breakup to support this. Artist, Gee Vaucher, has written two books about anarchy, feminism, and animal rights. She currently continues to make art for record sleeves and her artwork has been displayed in numerous galleries. Drummer, Penny Rimbaud, has written over fifteen books largely about his philosophy. He also performs jazz and spoken word poetry regularly. Vocalist, Eve Libertine, maintains working with various bands and creating art for galleries and record sleeves. Bassist, Pete Wright, went on to form the performance art duo Judas 2. Vocalist, Steve Ignorant, has also written several books about his time with Crass and sporadically performs Crass material without the original members. Most of Crass' other members have also remained politically active and continue to create new art and sporadically perform music.

Punk can be more than a night out and a strange costume. It can be a way to fight for people's right to simply have rights (Butler). Punk and subculture as a whole represented a deviation from norms that avoided change at the expense of society's members. Subculture fostered this opportunity to be understood, unoppressed and satisfied. People may have entered into a world that is beyond subcultures; however, that does not mean that they are precluded from expressing subcultural ideals. Individuals can form their own philosophies and grow through socialization rather than consumption. By doing so, they will create a structure stronger than any large scale institution. But, when this idea is co-opted and perverted to simply become entertainment and a product of exploited youth, then how can a subculture survive? The problem with this shift of values is that it allows society to tolerate apathy and incompetence. Without having subcultures of value, there is no way to represent the ills that plague society. Society then enters into a state of stagnation. People need subcultures like

Punk because they push individuals to strive for progress. And it may not always succeed, but it does benefit the collective consciousness of the world.

Punk brought about a new age of enlightenment, in which people discovered the power of their own voice. It told people that they could use that voice to propagate the complacency and self-interest of the pragmatists, or they could use that voice to revitalize authentic activism and strive for the social betterment of the idealists.

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## **Digitizing and Downloading Culture: Museums in the Age of Multimedia**

The rapid evolution of technology over the last two decades has ushered in a new era for the public museum, which has undergone multi-faceted transformations over the last century, as individual cultures have decided what is and is not worth preserving in formal institutions. In addition to traditional public institutions like the British Museum and the Louvre, which typically house foreign cultural antiquities, smaller collection specific museums have also proliferated, with from specialties from the history of German Leather production to fields of science and engineering to specific historical tragedies or genocides. Whether a museum is national, regional, or local, university or private—single subject collections or place and object based—the very nature of collection, and in most cases, public exhibition, have radically changed over the last two decades. Rather than discuss the reconceptualization of museums in the post-modern era, this short essay instead explores the ways in which technology is being incorporated into the museum experience, both physical visits and virtual tours and applications, the way digital collections are being composed, and how virtual interaction influences the future of the museum experience itself.

In 1984, the Museums Association adopted the following definition to succinctly express the cultural purpose of the museum: "A museum is an institution which collects, documents, preserves, exhibits, and interprets material evidence and associated information for the public benefit" (Pearce 2). Although the origin of the museum lies in the nineteenth-century, the development of the museum as an institution over the last two centuries has reflected and enhanced this cultural concern. Modernity in particular was concerned with the development of meta-narratives, overarching discourses through which objective realities and eternal truths could be defined and expressed (2). Museums were, and still are, seen as playing a part in the development of the citizen, serving an educational purpose (3). Objects, which can have lives much longer than our own, have the power to carry the past into the present by virtue of their "real" relationship to past events—which is just as true for casts, copies and fakes as it is for more orthodox material, because all such copies bear their own "real" relationship to the impulse which created them, and have their own place in the history of perception and taste (Jones 1900, quoted in Pearce, 24). Perceptions of reality are fundamental to the collecting process, as well as the process of curatorial effort and the art of exhibition (Pearce 24).

Collections are significant in our attempt to construct the world; the effort to understand them is one way to understand the meta-narrative, of which each "era" composes a small part (37).

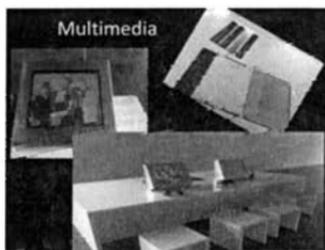
The educational roles of museums has always been considered paramount, as much can be learned from objects about the development of technologies, design, other cultures, the past and present, and the natural world (Keene 66). Museums and art/artifact collections are important to the growing digital media arts sector as well. Museums have been enthusiastic about the web, and even the smallest of collection generally have websites and attempt to reach new audiences via new media. In addition, multimedia exhibits are becoming commonplace in museum displays and exhibits. Digital media have enormous potential for enlivening, explaining, and enhancing access to collections (107). A few areas of (admittedly) field-specific interest include: decorative arts; literary authors; films, music and sound; collections as "places" of interest, i.e., museum buildings themselves, and the design and architecture of collections. For academics, research fields and access are rapidly expanding thanks to the digitization and cataloguing of collections—digitization initiatives are quickly making available searchable databases. The essence of the modern museum is a building, but in the future the museum will be more a process or an experience that moves out into the communities they serve (139).

### **Technology in the Museum**

A wide array of digital and communication technologies are making an impact on museum collections, including content, infrastructure, delivery, and rapidity of change (140). Content consumed by museum visitors includes digitized images, virtual reality, personification, and multiple media: audio, video, and touch. The general categories I'll highlight here include digital media in the physical museum, virtual tours and mobile application, and the digitization of major collections.

Perhaps the most familiar way digital technologies are shaping and enhancing the spectacle of museums is within museums themselves. Museums were quick to adopt technologies to enhance the experience of visiting the brick and mortar collections. This approach includes excerpted or specially made videos that enhance parts of the physical collection. An example of this blended approach is the relatively young Topography of Terror museum in Berlin. Here the collection itself relies heavily on multimedia and reproductions of primary source material to guide the visitor through the realities of politics and genocide in the

1930s and 40s. Education is a major part of this center, which has both individual “learning” experiences and public lectures. Research for scholars is also an important part of the museum, which has a dedicated archive on the lower level that is available via prior arrangement. Contextualization of events is important is key; photos, newspaper articles, letters, and other primary source material engages visitors on an individual level—guests can read as much or as little as they wish, customizing their learning experience. Interactive media is important as well; archival footage of major events runs continuously to compliment the exhibit. Patrons can sit and watch newsreels that elaborate on parts of the exhibit. These technological enhancements are becoming commonplace in most major museums and collections.



Multimedia at the Topography of Terror



Auditorium and Archives at the Topography of Terror

The British Museum's current exhibit Ancient Lives has brought the visitors' experience to a new technological level. The exhibit of 8 (mostly Egyptian) mummies from the museum's collection were submitted to CAT scans. The museum then made film footage of the scans, producing a digital “unwrapping” of the mummies' layers. As one stands in front of the mummies themselves, the overhead screens reveal the layers behind the sarcophagi. Visitors can touch separate screens to zoom in on specific parts of the mummy—pre-selected highlights including amulets hidden in the wrappings, broken bones and injuries, hair braids, et cetera. The curators have also used 3D printing technology to print the amulets tucked inside each mummy's wrappings; in this way, visitors can get a close look at the objects adorning the bodies, accompanied by explanations and religious significance—all without the risk of causing

irreparable damage to the mummies themselves. As a frequent museum visitor, I found this multi-media approach fascinating—a fresh, interesting way to experience a familiar topic.

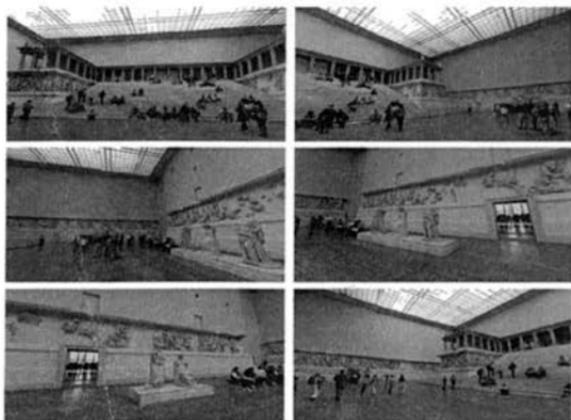


Catalog for the current British Museum Ancient Lives exhibit.

### Virtual Visits

Another area in which some museums chose to expand is the virtual tour world. While the idea of a "virtual tour" seems fairly obvious, in fact versions of this option vary widely in terms of what museum material they include, how the viewer can move around the museum virtually, and so on. If one googles "Pergamon Virtual Tour," for example, dozens of pages of tours pop up from different, unofficial tour companies and sites. There are online repositories of third-party virtual tours for most major museums beyond what each institution designs and offers itself—and interestingly, these are largely free. Yet the broad categories here are quite different. Some sites allow visitors to replicate a physical visit by dragging the view of the room in a 360-degree manner, with the added benefit of zooming in to artworks for more detail than a physical visit could offer (see images below). Virtual curation, or the programmatic way of conveying information about objects including dates, country/culture of origin, date of acquisition, is fairly standard. Objects in collections available via virtual reality are accompanied by information identical to the physical arrangement.

Many museums have put together multimedia virtual tours that are almost preferable to ticket entry times and crowd-packed halls. As an example, the Uffizi Gallery in Florence has a welcome video and general information on its "Museum" tab; one can browse works by artist. A map helps visitors prepare for the arrangement of collections, but virtual tourists can explore the museum via 360-degree room access that allow them to zoom in and select individual works hanging on the virtual walls. Individual piece information is limited, but the overall experience is more thorough than most.



"Virtual Tour" 360 degree panoramic tools for the Pergamon Museum, Berlin

Official collection web sites like the British Museum create virtual tours of collections that are less interactive, but substantially curated for educational purposes—arguably fulfilling their cultural "function" quite efficiently. One can prepare for and get glimpses of special exhibits, tour major parts of the collection, and access specially designed online tours like "The Gladiator." On an educational level, special exhibits like "The Myth of the Trojan War," which pair ancient pottery in their collection with stages of Homer's epic account, are quite useful and easily shared via online teaching platforms. These tools are free to all viewers without

registration.



British Museum online exhibits and educational tools.

Mobile applications, or apps, have exploded in the last five years. iPods as narrative guides appeared quickly in major museums, including the Louvre, taking advantage of the widely familiar technology. Some museums check out iPods as guides; others make their tour apps free and assist patrons with loading them. Over the last two years the dominance of iPod/iPhone apps has proliferated, and includes the 9/11 Memorial Museum, Museo del Prado, the Hermitage Museum, and so forth all readily available on iTunes. The Tower of David museum in Jerusalem's Old City has just updated their multimedia offerings with iPads that digitally overlay ancient topography when the camera is used to view the surrounding landscape. The Victoria & Albert Museum has a team of techies and developers whose key function is to design exciting multimedia projects to enhance the museum experience. For example, the V & A Spelunker is a game that mimics cave exploration, but is synced up to the museum's collections. The "Digital Media at the V & A" page on the museum's web site is devoted to ongoing work on web sites, apps, and gallery exhibits both in and outside of the museum.

There is also an external market for museum and tourist apps—which vary widely in quality and cost, although generally the apps range from \$2 to \$10. Like virtual tours, these apps include collections of images of objects, virtual tours of museums, audio guides to monuments and museums, and interactive, remedial education tools. Some apps, like MoMA,

simply offer catalogues of their collections, with the physical information cards reproduced for the virtual viewer. One can browse by floor, special exhibitions, and artistic medium, and there are limited audio guides available as well. Others imbed small video clips in their room-by-room slide shows. Again the information on individual pieces is consistently sparse. Individual pieces presented via slideshow, while arguably the least creative, are still useful for lay visitors.

Other apps, like the Vatican's, offer a virtual experience meant to compete with a physical visit. Sixty-second video clips prep viewers for major sections of the physical museum, who can then select from more detailed slide shows allowing close ups. A history of the collection and the curatorial arrangement of the museum are offered in addition to specific galleries and collections. An added experience is the ability to get individual audio explanations—pulled from the museum's audio tour files—and the ability to get closer to things like the Sistine Chapel than one can in person. For example, the Sistine Chapel tour includes pan shots of the ceiling as well as individual slides of each panel. Textual information accompanies the audio. One advantage to application tours are the details they highlight for users—including slide shows of individual works that allow zooming in to appreciate the details. On a Lippi painting, for example, a series of seven slides highlights for the viewer the detail and skill of the physical painting in a way that a physical viewer could not hope to appreciate without setting off proximity alarms. From an educational perspective, this is very useful; from a financial perspective, virtual tours and apps may be the only way cultural heritage is accessible.



The Vatican's mobile app (welcome video & tours)



Fillipo Lippi's Madonna and Child (same)

### **Selective Collection Composition**

One issue that eventually museums will have to address is the limited way they shape their "digital exhibits" as they race to present and curate their collections on the Internet. Most typically, they only allow access to collection information through the interpretive frameworks they provide, which reinforces earlier attitudes about collections and viewing. This does not appear to be shifting yet in the ongoing digital revolution (Keene 139). Almost all of the virtual tours and collections available literally reproduce the physical experience as closely as possible. While this is potentially exciting and educational for those who cannot travel—and arguably only scholars "care" about the way collections are framed and presented for consumption—it does replicate the formulaic interpretation of history that recent scholarship across disciplines are struggling to reevaluate. In other words, museums must guard against technological determinism—the key issues become not the capabilities of technologies, but the politics, cultural effects, and moralities of how we use them (140).

Digitizing collections is gaining traction quickly, but varies pretty widely by museum and type of collection. Most digitized collections are limited to an individual museum's well-known pieces or specific collections, like the Louvre, which has one of the least sophisticated online presences. Often works appear as lists or as slide-show type features. Search functions include special exhibits, categories like painting, architecture, or sculpture, and searching for artistic movements or artist. Background information on individual pieces is fairly limited on most sites. Despite the limitations of this type of presentation, which is largely one-dimensional, the opportunity for collaboration and wider general access to images and histories on the Internet are increasing.

Google's Art Project is an interesting and ambitious project that appears to be a one-stop site for browsing art. Launched just four years ago (in February 2011) and with initial collaboration agreements with 17 major museums, it is rapidly expanding. Of course, copyright and permission issues entailed by endowments, gifts, and collections or pieces on loan make this project expensive. It has the advantage of allowing museums to avoid the costs associated with creating their own virtual museums, but instead it seems that most museums working with this project are allowing Google only partial access to their already developed digital collections. One can browse specific collections, like those at the Acropolis Museum, but only 24 pieces and seven artists are represented here. On the Acropolis Museum web site,

however, one can tour permanent collections (with impressive historical detail and tutorials on architecture), temporary exhibits, tour the design plans and construction of the museum itself, and so forth.

Other collections offer fuller access. The Getty offers 3,325 individual artworks by 713 artists. The slide-show format is basically identical though. One can select a specific work and enlarge it, as well as access information on the piece largely identical to what a visitor to the physical museum sees. In a sense this is a gross under-utilization of what technology can do, but the project is still relatively new. Finally, the replication of the pre-fabricated collection is alive and well in the virtual world. While this is a pleasant, clear introduction to viewers who know little about art in general—and arguably, this is Google's main audience—it does, necessarily, choose pieces and eras for the viewer, providing a de facto ivory tower perspective and neglecting a thorough approach to movements, which are often not easily represented by individual works or artists.



Google Art Project (home page)



The J. Paul Getty Museum collection on GAP

### Public Engagement in the Digital Age

In an age of saturated technology and savvy tech users, museums are still inventing ways to engage physical visitors as well as maintain a cyber-presence. This tandem is evident in the Acropolis Museum in Athens, which is situated over an ongoing excavation. Visitors can stand just a few feet above archaeologists and watch as they clear mosaics and outline walls of the dwelling beneath the plexi-glass floor of the museum—a type of interactive archaeology.

Archaeologists also give tours of the museum, and concentrate on the en situ nature of the museum itself. Yet in general, digital engagement seems to far outweigh attempts like this.



Entry to the Acropolis Museum, Athens

There are numerous other ways museums attempt to keep their public engaged via technology. The British Museum recently filmed and screened a 90 minute movie to accompany their Vikings: Life and Legend exhibit. Featuring two well-known historians, the film took viewers behind the scenes of the exhibit itself. That film is opened to theaters worldwide in June 2014. The British Museum is also a forerunner in interactive Twitter promotion. They have events like "Mystery Object," "Born/Died on this Day" (accompanied by sketches or portraits from the collection), "Mummy Monday," promotions for free, weekly public lectures on various topics, "BM Selfie Day," and so forth. They get quite a bit of activity via their Twitter and Facebook pages, and seem to be at the forefront of technological innovations.



DefiningBeauty will not only feature iconic marble sculptures, but also beautiful terracottas [ow.ly/1CnTe](http://ow.ly/1CnTe)



No plans for the kids tomorrow? Explore the Museum with a SamsungCentre photo mystery trail! [ow.ly/H0kw9](http://ow.ly/H0kw9)



To mark Waterloo200, BonaparteAndTheBritish looks at propaganda in the age of Napoleon [ow.ly/lamFc](http://ow.ly/lamFc)



Sample tweets from the British Museum

### The Future of the Museum

Questions for the future of the brick and mortar museum include economic and cultural aspects. Keene notes that most of the "economic value" of museums does not derive from their collections; economic value is measured in terms of consumption. Museum goods that can be "consumed" include experiences (visits), shop purchases, picture libraries, object identification, curatorial or conservation services, and the hiring of galleries for events (159). It is much more difficult to determine cultural value, although museums have influence in setting monetary value of cultural objects, adding value to their current collections by increasing the objects in that collection, and maintaining the value of the collections as arbiters of cultural history (166-7). Ambient computing is another emerging technology, in which sound, images, and other media can be delivered via a range of new devices; these capabilities have only just begun to be explored by museums (183). Digitization will have far-reaching consequences on the way museums operate. Keene suggests that technologies could lead to a shift in the role of

museums, from gatekeepers of knowledge to brokers and facilitators of access (183). Making public what is in museum collections may lead to a greater demand for access and use.

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## **The American Ebola “Crisis” Did Not Take Place: A Baudrillardian Interpretation of a Manufactured Pseudo-Event**

As the title of this essay unequivocally implies, the purpose of this reflection is to examine the American Ebola “crisis” through the lens of the complex, interdisciplinary philosophy of Jean Baudrillard. Upon its release in 1991, Baudrillard’s aptly named and provocative text *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* immediately triggered a wave of polemical reactions in American intellectual circles. However, Philip Hammond notes that Baudrillard’s analysis of this conflict is now considered by many specialists of media studies to be the standard interpretation of the Gulf War. Given the sensitive nature of the subject itself, the philosopher’s central thesis was initially misunderstood by many critics and lay readers alike. In this canonical essay, Baudrillard attempts to articulate his well-founded fears related to the hegemonic role of the corporate, mainstream media in the effacement of reality and the dawning of “simulated reality” or what he terms “hyper-reality.”

According to the philosopher, carefully manufactured and contrived images, which incessantly bombard the modern subject through a myriad of divergent screens, have taken the place of the real itself. In other words, Baudrillard posits that we can no longer discern between concrete reality and its ubiquitous, symbolic representation in the virtual space through which the vast majority of our experiences are now filtered in the modern world. This investigation will highlight that the philosopher’s theories related to the disconnect between screen-based signs of war and actual carnage itself are also applicable to epidemics such as Ebola. The irrational climate of fear and downright paranoia deliberately fueled by a sensational media after the latest Ebola outbreak gives credence to many of the tenets of Baudrillard’s philosophy that were originally considered to be extreme a few decades ago.

Before delving a little further into key Baudrillardian concepts which offer a cogent theoretical framework for understanding the baffling social phenomenon of how a couple of isolated cases of Ebola magically became a pandemic in the United States, it would be useful to provide a brief overview of the virus itself. The first reported outbreak took place in Zaire (now called the Democratic Republic of Congo) in October 1976 (Breman and Johnson 1663). This “unusually lethal hemorrhagic fever” decimated the inhabitants of this impoverished African society (Breman and Johnson 1663). Although the local authorities were eventually

able to curb the spread of the disease and to protect the remainder of the population, they were unable to eradicate the virus entirely. For this reason, "sporadic fatal outbreaks in humans and non-human primates" continued to occur throughout the African continent (Li and Chen 1138). In their recent article entitled "Ebola Virus Re-Emergence: Is it Really Knocking at Our Door?," the microbiologists Dar and Choudhary offer the following synopsis of the history of the disease: "Named after the Ebola river valley where the first reported outbreak occurred, the virus has shown endemic activity with intermittent outbreaks since 1976. The virus was relatively quiescent in the 1980s and returned with a vengeance in the mid-1990s. The story of the current outbreak began in Gueckedouin (Guinea)" (363). All of the scientists mentioned above underscore that Ebola is a deadly infection that must be taken seriously. Ebola outbreaks necessitate immediate and swift action in an era of globalization.

Nonetheless, the scientific community also emphasizes that Ebola is mainly a "third world problem" due to the nature of the virus itself. Specifically, "The Ebola virus is transmitted only through close and direct contact with the blood or body fluids of human cases or affected animals" (Dar and Choudhary 363). In medical terms, Ebola is extremely infectious but non-contagious. Given that this infectious disease is not transmitted through airborne pathogens, it is "hard to catch" in a so-called developed country (Kluger 32). Affirming that one has a better chance of getting struck by lightning or dying in a traffic accident from a statistical perspective than contracting the Ebola virus in the Western world, Michael Brooks explains, "The rapid transmission in West Africa is largely a result of broken civil structures and health-care systems [...] The consequences are a dearth of medical resources and a mistrust of government [...] there is little reason for us to panic in the West" (31-32). Given the scientific consensus that most individuals living in the United States have nothing to fear with the exception of medical personnel in charge of directly treating sick patients who have been transported to American soil from Africa, a well-informed, rational person must wonder why the American populace is so obsessed with this issue. Why is this minor problem that is so easy to control with the proper protocols monopolizing the conversation in American culture and politics? Even as I write these lines, the country has already been declared Ebola free, yet unfounded fears still reign supreme.

Numerous scholars assert that the mainstream media is largely to blame for the "Ebola Panic Disorder" that has afflicted millions of Americans (Brooks 31). Instead of responsibly

reporting the nearly irrefutable aforementioned scientific facts about Ebola and reassuring the public, American journalists have made a concerted effort to manufacture ambivalence. Interjecting doubt where there is none to be found from a scientific perspective, the American media has crafted a hyper-real narrative that more closely resembles a cinematic script than a faithful representation of reality. Corianne Egan explains that media coverage of this (non-)event is like a "big-budget Hollywood" production that is completely divorced from reality (40). The intentional barrage of misinformation on major news outlets gives viewers the impression that Ebola is lurking around every corner. As opposed to representing the threat of Ebola (or the lack thereof) in a realistic fashion, the alleged "watchdogs" have created their own version of reality that is merely a figment of their imagination when compared to actual evidence. Unfortunately, in Baudrillardian terms, these simulacra have replaced reality to such an alarming extent that the real appears to be on the verge of collapsing entirely.

Gregg Gonsalves, Peter Staley, and Jeffrey Kluger underscore that the Ebola scare is not the first questionable viral threat that has been blown out of proportion by the media to the point of becoming a cinematic work of fiction. Reminding the reader how the media concocted a frightening story line related to HIV-AIDS in the 1980s which was not supported by scientific inquiry, Gonsalves and Staley lament, "The toxic mix of scientific ignorance and paranoia on display in the reaction to the return of the health care workers from the front lines of the fight against Ebola in West Africa, the amplification of these reactions by politicians and the media, and the fear-driven suspicion and shunning of whole classes of people are all reminiscent of the response to the emergence of AIDS in the 1980s" (1). As Gonsalves and Staley note, the AIDS panic of the 1980s is an example of how the media skillfully distorts or misrepresents reality in order to create a more interesting narrative when scientific facts are rather banal and need to be embellished. People who were alive in the 1980s vividly recall images of individuals refusing to use public restrooms due to the fear of AIDS contamination. Indeed, the parallels between the media's (mis-)representation of the dangers of being exposed to AIDS and Ebola are quite striking. In both instances, journalists framed these issues in a certain fashion to obfuscate scientific data which indicated that very few people were at risk at all in the United States. Deriving inspiration from Philip Alcabes's book *Dread: How Fear and Fantasy Have Fueled Epidemics From the Black Plague to Avian Flu*, Kluger asserts that SARS and swine-flu are two other salient examples from recent history which illustrate that the

media often creates its own version of (hyper-)reality (33). From a Baudrillardian standpoint, media simulations which now stand in for the real are pure works of fiction that bear only a vague resemblance to actual reality.

Similar to Egan, Baudrillard hypothesizes that this calculated onslaught of misinformation is like a spectacle or a film which the viewer experiences in real time. In *The Intelligence of Evil*, Baudrillard goes even further than Egan by theorizing that cinematic hyper-reality has entirely "eclipsed" the real in the modern world where the subject is drowning in an endless ocean of simulacra (Norris n.p.). As the philosopher affirms in the context of the Iraq War, "What we are watching as we sit paralyzed in our fold-down seats isn't 'like a film;' it is a film. With a script, a screenplay, that has to be followed unswervingly [...] It's the same with the cinema: the films produced today are merely the visible allegory of the cinematic form that has taken over everything-social and political life, the landscape, war, etc." (125). Baudrillard's concept of "cinematic" hyper-reality, developed in his later works such as *The Intelligence of Evil* and *The Transparency of Evil*, explains why all of the major news networks spun the same exact narrative ignoring decades of research conducted by scientists about the Ebola virus. Due to the nefarious effects of media consolidation and corporate ownership, there is usually one "official version of events" with minute, insignificant variations depending on the channel in question that is prepackaged for our consumption (Hammond 306). It should be noted that the popular comedian Jon Stewart often parodies this dearth of perspectives and lack of integrity on his Comedy Central program *The Daily Show*. Demonstrating that news reports of major events follow a rigid script that is never questioned by mainstream journalists, a frequent segment of Stewart's show makes fun of reporters that literally repeat the same lines on major local and national stations. Like actors, most contemporary journalists do not engage in critical thought when they read verbatim from the approved screenplay. Given the senseless ostracism and violence that have resulted from the manufactured Ebola panic including angry neighbors throwing rocks at Thomas Duncan's apartment complex, this phenomenon is no laughing matter (Kluger 32). Moreover, this irrational, misguided behavior confirms Baudrillard's assertion that many people have lost the ability to distinguish between reality and its symbolic representation. Furthermore, the fact that traditional media outlets were successful in their efforts to instill fear into the hearts of millions of Americans related to a

disease that threatens almost no one in the Western world is emblematic of the "acute crisis of simulation" to which Baudrillard often refers (*Seduction* 48).

In *The Intelligence of Evil*, Baudrillard deconstructs the pervasive notion of the media as a benevolent "fourth estate" that protects public interests. Instead of disseminating useful evidence-based information which would allow citizens to make logical decisions and to understand the world in which they live more fully, the philosopher contends that media images are solely designed to be consumed by passive receptacles. As Baudrillard hypothesizes, "the countless images that come to us from this media sphere are not of the order of representation, but of decoding and visual consumption. They do not educate us, they inform us" (77). As a "Post-Marxist" philosopher, Baudrillard posits that controlling the dissemination of information is now much more important than having a stranglehold over the means of production in a society in which "all of the basic needs of the masses have been satisfied" (Messier 25). (Mis-)information is the new "opiate of the masses" that undergirds the current social order.

In order to explain why there is such little resistance to the fantastical chimeras or far-fetched screenplays devised and endlessly transmitted by the mainstream media through a plethora of different devices, Baudrillard develops the theory of proliferation. Offering an operational definition of what the concept of proliferation entails, Baudrillard muses, "by giving you a *little too much* one takes away everything [...] the more immersed one becomes in the accumulation of signs, and the more enclosed one becomes in the endless over-signification of a real that no longer exists" (*Seduction* 30-33). The philosopher describes the tragic situation of the modern subject as being buried under a constant avalanche of banal signs that have no meaning outside of a code whose only purpose is to promote consumption. Given that these simulacra have taken over nearly every facet of our lives through our television, computer, and smart phone screens, Baudrillard maintains that there is "no exit" from the omnipresent apparatus of simulation (Kellner 128). At home, work, school, in shopping centers, and even on the street, there is no reprieve from the images that concretize our quotidian (hyper-)reality. Fully immersed in the ubiquitous realm of signs from all sides in the modern world, concrete reality in essence ceases to exist. As opposed to thinking logically about the most pressing issues that confront our society and trying to find possible solutions to these complex

problems, Baudrillard explains that the subject has been conditioned to react compulsively without reflection.

When applied to the fake American Ebola crisis that continues to flash across our screens in spite of the aforementioned scientific certainty, Baudrillard's theories that were once deemed to be exaggerated by his detractors do not seem to be that outlandish at all. Indeed, the utter lack of skepticism from much of the American public related to the official Ebola script validates many of the core principles of Baudrillard's philosophy. Baudrillard was a provocative visionary who had the uncanny ability to anticipate all of the present and future ramifications of certain social phenomena unfolding in front of his eyes until his death in 2007. The phony, cinematic Ebola epidemic in the United States is yet another example which illustrates that the deleterious effects of media saturation in a hyper-real, globalized world are becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. In *The Intelligence of Evil*, Baudrillard rather convincingly argues that sometimes the only "events" which can even be considered to have transpired at all are fictitious, hollow pseudo-events that permeate our fractured social consciousness. As the philosopher outlines, "it is the news media that are the event. It is the event of news coverage that substitutes itself for coverage of the event" (133). If Baudrillard were still alive today, he would undoubtedly affirm that the American Ebola crisis did not occur outside of the confines of the pervasive media sphere itself. Unfortunately, the problem is that "the mass media have become the exclusive condition through which the social is staged, and [...] there is nothing outside of their operational logics" (Abbinnett 69).

Not only does Baudrillard's philosophy offer invaluable insights concerning how information is carefully packaged and released for our immediate consumption by the integrated political and social elite, but it also answers the question *why*. Why would the corporate, mainstream media expend so much effort in order to dupe and indoctrinate "consumer citizens" (a term created by the historian Lizabeth Cohen) by continually fabricating non-events? The answer to this question is rather simple. Given that a handful of transnational conglomerates which dominate the contemporary economic landscape own all of the major news outlets, the CEOs and shareholders of these entities have too much to lose if a real conversation were to take place.

In a globalized, neoliberal world in which social inequalities are greater than at any other point in the history of human civilization in both developed and developing societies, the

corporate media has a vested interest in ensuring that an economic system from which they derive unheralded profits is never questioned. Hence, the hegemonic function of the corporate media is to generate distractions in the form of pseudo-events which pump fear into the souls of unreflective citizens. Pseudo-events serve to quell any semblance of meaningful dialogue related to genuine social problems such as the massive gap between the rich and the poor reflected in the progressive eroding of the American middle-class. As Baudrillard explains in his essay *America*, the media intentionally fabricates idealistic simulations of the "American dream" that only recognize "evidence of wealth" in the face of growing economic disparities (109; my trans.). Since the corporate media possesses the means of reproduction (of reality), the presence of acute poverty in the wealthiest nation in the world is relegated to the status of non-existence from the standpoint of social consciousness.

In conclusion, the American Ebola crisis is merely the latest in a long line of other pseudo-events orchestrated by the mainstream media. Although this deadly infectious disease has claimed the lives of far too many victims in impoverished countries throughout Africa since the 1970s, the official script performed daily by American journalists on all major networks falls into the realm of a sensational spectacle. The gap between this ludicrous screenplay and the scientific reality that very few Americans were ever at risk confirms Baudrillard's theories related to hyper-reality and the strategic role of media saturation in the modern world. Instead of relying upon decades of scientific erudition which should have allayed any unfounded fears regarding the most recent Ebola outbreak, the American media deliberately perpetrated a "shameful and pointless hoax" (*The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* 72). Given the lack of pushback from the undiscerning American populace, simulated reality appears to be the new norm. This recent pseudo-event beckons us to ponder whether Baudrillard's prediction that reality would one day be effaced entirely has come to fruition.

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### The Truth, So Help Me God

Like all writers of serious literature, I've always anticipated that moment when I'd encounter some perplexing attempt at defining some aesthetic term – *beauty, love, truth*... In the end perhaps, what we discover is to be comfortable with the ambiguity of it all, that state of mind where complexity becomes a synonym for being human.

However, some instances make us aware of how devious we can become in the name of such an abstraction – in this case I discovered something about the term *truth*, as in the term "do you swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God?"

I was driving home on a weekday in mid-afternoon in Rochester, NY, listening to the radio. I was coming back from my office in City Hall, near the Mayor's office. What was a poet and writer doing with an office at City Hall? I was the country's only full-time, city-government Writer-In-Residence – ever! – and my duties included creating narratives from the oral histories (stories) of people in the city, from the elderly, to youth, to city councilmen, local celebrities, and even the Chief-of-Police, who had been a boyhood friend of mine. The narratives were part of a larger program of writing and reading to enrich communities throughout the city of Rochester, New York – but the narratives, which I transcribed and wrote after several interviews with people, proved very popular, especially with the column I did with Gannett newspapers once or twice a month. They also came out in a book, *Hearts and Times: The Literature of Memory*, and that book was adapted for the stage and had a successful run in Chicago.

About six months prior to my afternoon drive (which I'll get to here), I put on a concert for the city of Rochester which included music, poetry, rappers, storytellers, and a unique combination of an ex-con, terrific poet named Etheridge Knight, and my friend, Gordie Urlacher, the Chief of Police, who read the narrative I wrote after getting his oral history. Gordie's story, humorous and told with a good heart, described a time in his youth when he fell off the back of a bus on his way home from a Catholic grammar school. He ended up breaking both arms, leaving him unable to attend school. He described his attempt to avoid trouble by saying he fell off his bike, and how the nuns showed up at his house and felt sorry for him and hinted at the right answers on tests with inflections in their voices as they administered school tests. Besides Gordie reading it at the concert, it was published in Gannett for a couple of hundred thousand people to read.

Apparently, the D.A. or the prosecutor liked the story as well.

There is a reason a man or a woman finally tells a personal story some ten or twenty – or fifty – years later. Of course our memories are quirky things; who knows why we retain what we do, and why we forget? Obviously, some experiences stay with us forever – first love, death of a parent, etc. But there are also many experiences which stay with us because they are unresolved in our minds, because we know there is a story, but its meaning is still unclear. I have a poem I've written called *The New Camera* about taking a photo with a Polaroid camera and pulling the negative to the light and waiting not sixty seconds but fifty years for the exposure to become a clear image. I'm not sure why Gordie chose his story about falling from the bus, but I imagine there was some irony that stayed with him, the nuns in effect rewarding him for doing something wrong (hanging onto the back of the bus). But whatever the reason, I saw in Gordie a good-naturedness, laughing at himself and understanding that our experiences in youth sometimes entertains us for a long time.

The prosecutor saw it otherwise.

As I said, I was driving home from my office on a beautiful summer afternoon. I was feeling good because earlier that day I brought several senior citizens whose narratives we published in a little booklet to a junior high school so they could share their stories and interact with the students. When eighty year-old Sarah McClellan read her story about bringing the corn to a gristmill in Mississippi on the back of a mule when she was twelve years old, the students began asking questions. Sarah's story was about how there was an "advantage" to being a country girl, no matter how hard the life was or how much fear she had of the snakes in the branches in the trees she passed under on the mule – because she "knew, I mean *knew* what we ate, knew it from the ground that it came from. And we knew what we wore, from the cotton in our hands to the corn sack made into a party dress." "Yes, we knew," Sarah added, where everything we needed came from. It was our world around us, and the hard thing was simply the respect we gave to our daily bread."

This was an important story to pass on to a generation whose materialistic needs appeared magically every day, although I remember the first question from the students following the story: "How much allowance were you given a week?" Sarah laughed and nodded her head. "Not a penny," she replied.

Speaking of money, that's what got my friend Gordie in trouble – greed!

But before I get back to that afternoon drive, I want to get back to my office at City Hall, my position as "Writer-in-Residence" fully funded by a City government concerned with community enrichment. Again, I was the only one then, for eight wonderful years in Rochester, with no precedent in America, and, despite the incredible effects of the programs we began – featured on NBC's *The Today Show*, NPR's *Weekend Edition*, *The U.S. Congressional Quarterly's Governing Magazine*, and Associated Press features – there has been no full-time fully funded city government hands-on writer-in-residence since that time. I'm not talking about a ceremonial state "poet-in-residence," like my friend the late Bob Dana of Iowa who said to me at dinner some years ago that he'd been poet-in-residence in Iowa for so long he wasn't sure if the state knew if he were still alive! Yes, there are a lot of "ceremonial" positions – but those positions very rarely touch the lives of ordinary people, and it's my belief (which, by the way, has made me an outcast in "Writers' Circles" for the last twenty years, they are meant to be that way. Let me explain.

Where are all the "writers and poets" in America, those insightful individuals with a flair for effective communication? There's a lot of them out there, many now sanctioned as such by attending graduate college writing programs – 250 or 300 programs, as many as 4000 or more "new writers" in those programs every year! Does this translate into a more enlightened populace? Well, we know the answer to that, don't we: fewer readers, fewer critical-thinkers, fewer people who can write their own stories or self-expressions, and more and more individuals who respond to the overwhelming "story-substitutes" that set the mind-frame of America – T.V. commercials, sit-coms, capsulated news briefs, MTV, and political commentary that tries to extract the emotions so pent up in a culture lacking the means of legitimate self-expression.

A few of these graduate program writers end up teaching in those writing programs, some of course as directors. If we back up for a moment, get some distance in order to observe objectively how socio/economic/educational systems work in this country, since we can't just eliminate artistic or literary achievements in America without becoming suspect, we find a way to simultaneously celebrate and marginalize them, treat them as important but insignificant in the real world. I've heard professors call poetry, for instance, "ditties," and they meant it. The reason, perhaps, that literature retains its place in our respectful curriculums, is because it seems so utterly impotent as far as its immediacy, its significance to our everyday world. That is

why contemporary literature never gets the respect of literature of other centuries, why James Wright is one kind of poet, take him or leave him, and Shakespeare is another. And the directors of these programs seem to know their place, making each of their students feel special about their own achievements and never worrying about the notion of the literature they create having a real impact on a multitude of others in the world around them. That was a big reason, in fact, for my efforts to create literary narratives – using my talents as a listener and a poet – from the oral histories of ordinary people. I found a very satisfying bond to the universal audience of ordinary readers.

So I was proud that night at the concert in downtown Rochester when Police Chief Gordon Urlacher read his story to the delight of several hundred people. To those who did not know Gordie, it made him seem human. So that afternoon, driving home, listening to the courtroom coverage of the Urlacher trial which was being covered by major media of course, I was shocked to hear my name! Why was my name uttered by the lead prosecutor in this case? He introduced my writing, my transcription of his story, my literary accomplishment – published in Gannett newspapers for thousands, and to another few hundred in my book, *Hearts and Times* – my narrative from Gordie's oral history about his boyhood story. As I drove, I heard the commentator say, "The District Attorney brought into evidence Ross Talarico's narrative to point out that Police Chief Urlacher has been a liar all his life..."

Imagine that! My writing, this legitimate piece of literature, brought up and read from in a courtroom with thousands of people listening in. The first reaction was my disgust – my friend's story, so popular and endearing to many, written to humanize him, now used to convict him and send him to jail. It wasn't fair, I said to myself, that's not what literature is for. But a while later, I thought about it again.

What was the prosecutor after? The Truth? Why not focus on a piece of literature? After all, it does reveal who we are, ultimately, right? Oh, I know there's other arguments here, especially regarding how we change in adulthood, and what influences affect us, and what our choices are, etc. But finally it did strike me – and yes Gordie was found guilty and went to prison – it was a powerful day when I heard my writing introduced in court to convict my friend; but that's exactly how literature should work, and the DA was insightful (however a bogus interpretation at the time) . . . he knew the effect of literature. Some creative writing program

somewhere should consider him for a directorship! If a prosecuting DA could feel the impact of literature, then who couldn't.

In this very personal case here, there is a sad but hopeful lesson. That's what we should be teaching in our creative writing programs, that creative writing is not just original, clever, entertaining though somewhat mysterious, but also a powerful means of persuasion. Give a copy of that new poem to the district attorney; give a copy to the pharmacist; to the retail clerk at Macy's. Give a copy to the executive secretary of a CEO.

Let literature retain its persuasiveness. Let literature makes us feel goo (or bad!) about writing it.

Ross Talarico

## BOOK REVIEWS

### ***Comics Through Time: A History of Icons, Idols, and Ideas.***

**By M. Keith Booker, Editor. Greenwood, 2013.**

*Comics Through Time* is a four volume work that seeks to provide comprehensive insight into many of the important moments, movements, people, and stories in comic book history. The four volumes are arranged chronologically, covering the beginnings of comic books as a medium in the 1800s up through the present day. A casual reader plunging through every volume would no doubt be taken aback by the breadth of the materials and events being catalogued.

Arranged alphabetically, each volume of *Comics Through Time* functions as part glossary and part encyclopedia, all while telling the story of that particular period in comics history. While Volume 1 emphasizes newspaper comic strips and The Golden Age creation of the superhero archetype, Volume 2 highlights the impact of and response to the censoring body Comics Code Authority. These foci lend a narrative tone to an otherwise scholarly venture, allowing information to be interpreted via an ever-growing understanding of the public's relationship with comic books as both a commercial endeavor and an artistic medium.

There are some limits to the scope of texts being discussed. As we are told in the preface to each volume by editor M. Keith Booker, "the principal focus is on American comics." American and British comics are the focus of every volume, with minimal deference paid to non-Anglophone comics, and then only those with large Anglophone followings or which have impacted Anglophone comics in some way. Given that the longest volume reaches almost two thousand pages, it is understandably necessary (though regrettable) that such principles of exclusion had to be enforced.

*Comics Through Time* also provides essays on a number of genres and themes, often over the course of multiple volumes. For example, while Volume 1 (1800-1960) does not offer an essay on "Gay and Lesbian Themes," every other volume does. In this way, a comprehensive and evolving story of many movements and ideas is told. Each of these essays, be they on genres such as horror or crime, trends such as adaptations from other

media, or specifics such as the Cold or Iraq War, provides concise insight into important issues and areas of American comics, many of which are more relevant today than ever before.

*Comics Through Time* is not a text which seeks to take its reader on an exhaustive journey through every major storyline of every major character. It is not a Marvel or DC Comics encyclopedia. The drawback of this is that when dealing with the "bigger" characters and heroes of American comics, a defining moment or storyline will be condensed into a paragraph before the writer shunts the reader off into another story arc or critical point of reflection. However, this is not a flaw in the works, but rather a choice. Storylines are catalogued more for their effect on comics as a medium than for their potential importance to the story of a character. Given the subtitle of *Comics Through Time*, it is fitting that such fandom-fervor be excluded in favor of academic insight into comics. Keith Booker's *Comics Through Time* is an engaging and instructive history of the ideas and icons of cultural history.

Shaun Leonard, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

***Dance Floor Democracy: The Social Geography of Memory at the Hollywood Canteen.***  
**By Sherrie Tucker. Duke University Press, 2014.**

*Dance Floor Democracy* recounts a multidimensional understanding of the Hollywood Canteen where, between 1943-45, Hollywood stars and starlets dance with servicemen, "big shots danced with little shots." While the Warner Brothers 1944 feature film *Hollywood Canteen* depicts the activities at the canteen as harmonious and simplistic, "stories of uncomplicated American goodness during WWII," a "torque-free," multicultural dance floor — a portrait that defined our national memory, Tucker's research tells a very different story.

The Hollywood Canteen was a USO-like venue providing programs, services and live entertainment to United States and Allied troops on leave during WWII. Hollywood's biggest stars participated as volunteers. Bette Davis and John Garfield headed the Organizing Committee and Jules Stein, President of the Music Corporation of America headed the finance committee that established and supported the Hollywood Canteen. Tucker's many interviews with surviving participants, recorded between 2000 and 2010, document the disparity of recollections and attitudes toward race and politics surrounding the Hollywood Canteen. They reveal the relationship of the Canteen organizers, volunteer dancing/jitterbugging hostesses, busboys, cooks, servers, and the male, female, black and white soldiers who visited the Canteen while on leave in Los Angeles. Placing the Canteen in context of the times, she gives us the saga of the politics and race in wartime America.

The chapters are grouped into four parts each focusing on particular aspect of the Canteen: the physical location, the jitterbug dancing, the roles and recollection of the participants, the FBI files and the movie "Hollywood Canteen." Included in the narrative are the specifics of the geography of the segregation that divided streets and neighborhoods as exclusively black or white. Racial segregation in housing was in full play in Los Angeles, as well as throughout the nation. She broadens our understanding of the times and activities by including, along with interviews of the participants, documentation in the form of transcriptions of the portions of the FBI files that have been declassified. Those who wished to implement full integration including cross race dancing were presumed to be communists. The anti-communist obsession by the FBI was in play in wartime America, and continued into the 1950s when it reached its peak, now known as the McCarthy Era. Many Hollywood personalities,

writers, actors, producers were blacklisted; Hollywood was suspected of being a hotbed of communists, according to the FBI.

Tucker's research includes declassified excerpts of the FBI files that followed suspected Communist activities by Canteen organizers and participants, to the physicality of the "jitterbug," the torque of which exemplifies the complexity of the relationship of the Canteen to the population, and race and gender relations both civilian and military. Torque is an essential quality of Jitterbug — the dance. The metaphoric use of the qualities of *torque*, (mechanics: a twisting force that tends to cause rotation), is shrewdly applied to enhance the reader's understanding of the complexity of the politics, race relations and gender assumptions of the period. The jitterbug, and the literal sense of a jitterbug: a bug that is jittery or continuous movement in a multiplicity of directions reflects the variety of attitudes and interactions experienced by the visitors to the canteen. The story of the torque of the jitterbug, "bodies sharing weight, velocity, and turning power without guaranteed outcomes is an apt metaphor for the jostling narratives, different perspectives, unsteady memories, and quotidian acts that comprise social history" (Tucker).

Tucker aptly documents the discrepancies between national memory as exemplified in the romanticized film, *Hollywood Canteen*, and the racism and sexism underpinning the reality. As Tucker puts it: "This is a long book about a small place while at the same time a small book about a large topic." Her work unveils a forgotten but critical piece of our national experience.

Margot Mink Colbert, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

***Mad Men and Working Women:***  
***Feminist Perspectives on Historical Power, Resistance, and Otherness.***  
**By Erika Engstrom, Tracy Lucht, Jane Marcellus, and Kimberly Wilmot Voss.**  
**Peter Lang, 2014**

*Mad Men and Working Women*, a collaborative effort by four female scholars, is a fresh approach one of AMC's most popular drama series, *Mad Men*. Although the series has just drawn to its end, the show has garnered awards from the media industry, critical praise, and scholarly attention; this volume delves into the myriad ways *Mad Men* "relates to, comments upon, explains, and illustrates philosophy, ethics, work, nostalgia, advertising, materialism, masculinity, and a host of topics relating to the human condition"(2). Overall, it is a thorough, creative, and well written contribution to the scholarship examining representations of gender in this popular series.

As the authors note in the introduction, contemporary dramas such as *The Good Wife* (2009 -), *Scandal* (2012 -), and *Nashville* (2012 -) depict female leads at work in various capacities: lawyer nee political wife, a DC crisis management strategist, and country singers, respectively. Yet in these shows the personal overshadows the political; women's careers are assumed rather than explored and contextualized. *Mad Men*, on the other hand, is different because "its goal is neither hegemonic reinforcement nor self-consciously contrived counterhegemony. Like a good novel, it tells a complicated story about complicated people in a complicated time. Women's truths are not constructed *outside* of that complexity; they *emerge* from that complexity" (5). The issues and concerns highlighted in the show's episodes reflect contemporaneous issues in the lives of men and women that continue today.

The authors' approach to *Mad Men* is through the lens of historical portrayals of working women in the U.S., paying attention to unexplored territory in gender status depicted in the series by deconstructing the male gaze and examining the "hidden power of women within a male-dominated industry, mass media's framing of the "Other," and stereotypes of working women that have, and continue to, cast work in terms of gender difference" (7-8). By providing a reading of pre-second wave feminism (rather than constantly presupposes the show's women as victims), this study provides historical context and analysis that shake up traditional readings by "1) exploring historical constructions of women's work, (2) unpacking feminist and non-feminist discourse surrounding that work, (3) identifying modes of resistance, and (4)

revisiting forgotten work coded as feminine" (9).

Among the many interesting approaches to gendered divisions in the professional world, several chapters stood out. In "The Women of *Mad Men*: Workplace Stereotypes Beyond Kanter," Engstrom connects Kanter's three stereotypes of women—the corporate wife, the secretary, and the token woman—to the roles represented by the women in the series, considering how they portray or break free of these stereotypical roles. In "'Oh, and Men Love Scarves': Secretarial Culture from *Bartleby the Scrivener* to Joan Holloway," Marcellus provides a historical context for cultural and media constructs of secretaries of the early twentieth century. Wilmot Voss takes a fresh approach to the stereotypical housewife in "In Defense of Betty: The Role of Gender, Motherhood, and Social Class for Homemakers," highlighting the myriad ways housewives worked in the community. Lucht's "Race, Religion, and Rights: Otherness Gone *Mad*" examines otherness through the show's treatment of historical events and characters from minority racial, religious, and sexual orientation categories.

Overall, this contribution to gender studies is a fresh and insightful work that offers numerous points of entry for readers, and is a welcome addition to scholarly work on popular mediums.

Heather Lusty, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

***Ken Follett and the Triumph of Suspense:  
A Popular Writer Transcends Genres.***

**By Carlos Ramet. McFarland & Company Inc., Publishers, 2015.**

In his recent book, *Ken Follett and the Triumph of Suspense: A Popular Writer Transcends Genres*, Carlos Ramet celebrates a writer who has succeeded in many genres by offering a view of how fiction and nonfiction works interact and indeed, need each other in order to become and remain relevant. A continuation of the work begun in his 1999 publication, *Ken Follett: The Transformation of a Writer*, Ramet covers ground not examined in his previous work. While the first book discusses how Follett succeeded in and transformed a popular genre, this book focuses on the way in which Follett's literary efforts and successes were shaped by the cultural and political issues that fractured existing national power structures and by the way in which the publishing industry in his day worked.

Although Ramet does discuss how Follett shaped plot, characters, and theme in order to focus on the political landscape, which he found so intriguing, in this work Ramet predominantly focuses the way in which the world outside of Follett's novels affects the books Follett has written. Ramet examines the conflicts that arose as a result of Follett's international success. He details the way in which the personalities of Follett's supporters and collaborators "helped and hindered him" (2) professionally. Ramet also describes the way in which attachment to both literary and popular, but perhaps less revered, work can encourage a writer to forge results that become platforms in which any writer can explain and further critical political and philosophical conversations. Ramet defines Follett as an author living in what Follett termed "the most dramatic and violent century of the human race" (163) and claims that Follett used fiction to analyze the way in which the 20<sup>th</sup> century conflicts reshaped countries and cultures and personal relationships on an emotionally engaging, but also historically accurate level. In so doing, according to Ramet's assessment, Follett transcended genres not only by moving back and forth between the production of serious and multiple lighter forms of literature, but also by deftly connecting the philosophical and political dots between the real world practices of nationalism, patriotism, skepticism (and the resultant militaristic impulses)

with the fictive impulse that kept him writing. And all of it is used to further explore the complicated history of the complex individual who rose to such prominence.

Ramet as a result not only provides us with another way to inspect the value of Follett's body of work and to understand the man, but also gives us a view of how books are written and how the real world shapes a writer and his fiction in general. By giving a view comprised of the political world that engages Follett's interests, a discussion of the publishing world in Follett's day, and an analysis of how popularity in one venue can alter how novels and their creators are perceived, Ramet succeeds in crafting a biography of Follett in which the writing process is examined as well via the life of a literary success story.

Kim Idol, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

***Japanese and American Horror: A Comparative Study of Film, Fiction,  
Graphic Novels and Video Games.***

**By Katarzyna Marak. McFarland & Company, 2015.**

In *Japanese and American Horror*, Katarzyna Marak offers an in-depth study comparing and contrasting the horror narrative patterns of two distinct cultures – American and Japanese. With the American public's rising interest in Japanese horror narratives, this work succeeds in filling a gap missing by painting a broad picture of the similarities and differences in the depiction of fear and horror narratives in American and Japanese cultures.

A brief introduction sets the stage for the rest of Marak's study by clearly stating the purpose of all horror narratives - to terrify the audience. In order for this task to succeed, the viewer of the tale needs to be aware of the underlying cultural cues that serve to invoke the feeling of terror. This study denotes how the Japanese and Americans views of these cues can be vastly different, leading viewers to see the same film but come away with two different emotional responses. Marak explains that for American audiences the horror narrative relies on an epistemological conflict (asking why or what for), whereas the Japanese horror narratives tend to be ethical in nature (trying to find out why or what for).

The work discusses some of the most popular forms of horror by examining a plethora of different mechanisms used in horror narratives, including ghosts, monsters, monstrosities, the divine and the unholy. In the first section, *Ghosts*, Marak explains how these creatures evoke fear in the characters of ghost narratives by depicting the interruption of the dead past into the living present. While this phenomenon is ultimately what evokes terror in the audience, there exist major differences between the American and Japanese cultural framework with regard to ghosts. For Americans, ghosts are not seen as an everyday reality; for the Japanese, the dead live near the world of the living and actually exist close enough to visit family members during a certain season. While both cultures believe in the idea of the dead being able to return and interact with the living, the reason for a haunting may vary according to each nation's cultural framework.

Fans of zombie narratives will appreciate the second section of Marak's study, *Monsters and Monstrosities*, which comprises the longest section of the work and covers the most ground, discussing the monstrous predator, vampires, werewolves, monstrosities, and

the undead body; the latter section contains some of Marak's keenest insights. As she succinctly points out, both cultures regard the body of the dead as fundamentally polluted, as well as both defiled and defiling. American horror narratives, however, hold a macabre interest with the gory details of the dead, while Japanese works tend to be much more restrained. Fans of the American cable series *The Walking Dead* will enjoy the narratives Marak examines in this section, such as Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* and Capcom's groundbreaking video game *Resident Evil*.

The last unit of the book, and the segment in which Marak's analysis really shines, tackles narratives pertaining to *The Divine and the Unholy*. Marak illustrates the dissimilar cultural cues represented to American and Japanese horror viewers through an analysis of the American and Japanese concepts of both demons and religion. This juxtaposition identifies how America's predominantly Christian culture and Japan's Buddhist belief system contain vastly different characteristic mechanisms and represent the broadest differences in American and Japanese horror narratives. Fans of survival horror games will especially appreciate Marak's analysis of the religious layers contained in the eponymous videogame, *Silent Hill*.

While mostly illuminating and comprehensive, there are some negative aspects to this study. For example, many times Marak's narrative analysis becomes bogged down in long-winded plot summaries. In addition, the conclusion introduces many examples that would have fit better within the main sections of the study; for example, her discussion of pacing within American and Japanese narratives and a fleeting discussion of the American remakes of Japanese horror movies may leave some readers feeling short changed.

The positive aspects of *Japanese and American Horror* far surpass the detractions. While at first glance it may look like Japanese and American horror narratives are not that different, Marak's work peels back the layers to demonstrate that only by understanding the differences between the cultural cues of American and Japanese horror tales can one begin to understand the nuances the narratives portray.

John J. May, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

***Kill For Peace: American Artists Against the Vietnam War.***  
**By Matthew Israel. University of Texas Press, 2013.**

The Vietnam War is one of the most controversial and widely discussed periods of American history. The participation of the US Army and the strategies the American government chose to pursue are still openly criticized by the world public. The domestic response to the US involvement in Vietnam, however, started to grow negative almost from the very beginning and resulted in frustration and heavy disapproval of American actions in Asia. Artists were one of the groups to protest most vigorously. This is the subject that Matthew Israel's *Kill For Peace: American Artists Against the Vietnam War* brings to our attention. The author's study is an energetic endeavor to uncover the reactions and actions of artists during the US partaking in the war and to reveal the interrelationship between the Vietnam War and art.

Israel provides an impressive overview of paintings, installations, sculptures, and photographic images created during the time of the Vietnam conflict and articulates "what antiwar art was in the United States during the Vietnam War" (2). His book is an exhaustive analysis of the works of leading artists of that time, including Rudolf Baranik, Jay Belloli, Judith Bernstein, Leon Golub, Jasper Johns, Edward Kienholz, Claes Oldenburg, Violet Ray, Martha Rosler, Peter Saul, Nancy Spero, Carol Summers, and many others. The author's brilliant account encapsulates historical aspects of the Vietnam era as well as a detailed examination of the artworks of the period. This combination makes Israel's book both unique and lays the groundwork for the accuracy of his investigation.

Throughout the book, from the introduction through its eight chapters to the conclusion, the author creates a clear line of reasoning, tracing the development of the artists' protest and rigorously historicizing it. The first chapter contextualizes the war in US history, providing the essential background to understanding it. Israel's analysis transitions smoothly to the next chapter where he discusses the emergence of important protest groups such as Artists and Writers Protest (AWP), Artists' Protest Committee (APC), and Art Workers' Coalition (AWC) and gives an overview of the first protests that started in 1965. He aptly labels them as "extra-aesthetic actions" (23) and argues that they not only became the central actions of protest in the initial stage but also remained a prominent form of action later on. The artists and writers

united to demonstrate their disapproval of the US involvement in Vietnam. In 1965, the first advertisements such as "End Your Silence" and the flyer "Stop Escalation" were published and spread. The chapter "Creating Antiwar Art" demonstrates a radical change in the artists' protest as they began to turn away from "extra-aesthetic" actions and "incorporate antiwar sentiment into works of art" (37). It resulted in the creation of such significant work as the *Artists' Tower of Protest* (or the *Peace Tower*) in 1966. The author also provides a vivid discussion of the key art movements in the USA at the time, namely formalism, pop art, and minimalism. To point out only some of the works that Israel examines here, it is worth mentioning Dan Flavin's *monument 4 those who have been killed in ambush (to P.K. who reminded me about death)* (1966), Wally Hedrick's *Vietnam* (1968), and Jeff Kramm's *May Lai* (1970).

The author broadens the scope of his analysis discussing "the most significant antiwar effort from the arts community" in 1967, i.e., Angry Arts Week (70). During that time, the artists were incorporating "direct evidence of casualties" (72) in their works and, as the book pinpoints, made napalm and rape the key themes. To illustrate his speculation Israel discusses Violet Ray's *Revlon Oh-Baby Face* (1967), Jeff Schlanger and Artists' Poster Committee *Would you Burn A Child?* (around 1968), a series of paintings by Leon Golub *Napalm* (1969), Peter Saul's *Saigon* (1967) and *Typical Saigon* (1968). As a critique of the policy the US government adhered to in the years from 1968 to 1970, such works as James Rosenquist's *Daley Portrait* (1968), Edward Kienholz's *The Portable War Memorial* (1968), Duane Hanson's *War (Vietnam Scene)* (1969), Artists' Poster Committee of AWC: Frazier Dougherty, Jon Hendricks, and Irving Petlin's *Q. And babies? A. And babies* (1970) were created as a desperate artistic scream to end the war in Vietnam. Israel also provides a brief overview of the artists' reaction to Nixon's decision to invade Cambodia followed by a very comprehensive analysis where he demonstrates the influence of the Vietnam era's art on the modern war art, drawing parallels between the artworks created during the Vietnam conflict and the recent artworks that protest against the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. As examples the author discusses a new version of the *Peace Tower* (2006), *iRaq (Abu Ghraib Prisoner)* created by Forscrew Graphics in 2004 and Mark Wallinger's installation *State Britain*.

Matthew Israel's *Kill For Peace: American Artists Against the Vietnam War* is a very ambitious project that in the length of a book manages to discuss the actions of artists who

desperately and persistently tried to influence people's minds and stop the merciless war. The author's choice to combine a historical approach with a passionate (and undoubtedly thorough) visual analysis of the most influential paintings of the time makes *Kill For Peace* an outstanding and distinguished academic achievement. Those concerned with the Vietnam War, the art created during that era and, indubitably, visual analysis must read this eminent book.

Tatiana Prorokova, Philipps-University of Marburg, Germany

## Contributor Biographies

**Chase Cartwright** lives in Minnesota where he is pursuing an MA in Forensic Psychology. He currently works as a fiction editor for *The Whistling Shade Literary Journal*. His writing has been presented at the National Undergraduate Literature Conference and the Midwest Undergraduate Conference in the Humanities.

**Margot Mink Colbert** is Assistant Chairperson and Professor in the UNLV Dance Department. Choreographer, teacher, dancer, her artistic career spans the professional, independent and academic milieus. Her choreography has been performed internationally in Europe, South America and Israel. She holds a Bachelor degree from the renowned Juilliard School of Music.

**Frank E. Dobson, Jr.**, has published fiction, nonfiction, and scholarly work. His recent novel, *Rendered Invisible*, examines the themes of racially-motivated violence and racial reconciliation. He is presently working on a scholarly project which examines the careers of pioneering black male actors, such as Clarence Muse, James Edwards, and Woody Strode. Dobson works at Vanderbilt University and also teaches at Fisk University.

**Told Giles** is currently Assistant Professor of English at Midwestern State University in Texas. His recent scholarship appears in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, *Philosophy and Literature*, and the *Journal of Beat Studies*. He is also Associate Editor of the *William Carlos Williams Review*.

**Kim Idol** is a writer/instructor partial to dogs, guns, and rock climbing. Her short stories have been published in *Danse Macabre*, *Portland Review*, *Toasted Cheese*, *Dead Neon*, and submitted to the *Kulka Best American Voices* anthology. She is currently at work on a collection of essays on chaos theory and detective fiction.

**Shaun Leonard** is a film and television journalist and academic, originally from Galway, Ireland. He is completing his MFA in Creative Writing at UNLV, while writing scripts for stage and screen. His film and TV podcast, [www.isitabicycle.com](http://www.isitabicycle.com), debuts new episodes every Friday.

**Heather Lusty** is an Assistant Professor in Residence at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She is co-editor of a collection of essays on James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence entitled *Modernism at Odds* (University Press of Florida, 2015), and recently curated a multimedia curated submission appearing in *en media res*. She works on modernism, nationalism and identity, and architecture.

**John J. May** is a PhD student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He holds a B.A. in History from Brooklyn College and an M.A. in English Literature from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. His research focus is twentieth-century American Literature with an emphasis on H.P. Lovecraft.

**Keith Moser** is Associate Professor of French at Mississippi State University. He has published four books since 2008. Moser has also contributed numerous essays to peer-reviewed publications, such as *The French Review*, *The International Journal of Francophone Studies*, *Dalhousie French Studies*, *French Cultural Studies*, and *Forum for Modern Language Studies*.

**Marci Mazzarotto** is a PhD Candidate at the University of Central Florida and an Associate Professor of Digital Media at a South Korean University. Her research interests are within the fields of Visual Arts and Communication/Media Studies, through diverse topics such as the Avant-Garde, Video Art, Television, and Zen Buddhism.

**Tatiana Prorokova** is a doctoral candidate in American Studies at Philipps-University of Marburg, Germany. Her PhD project analyzes the representation of U.S. interventionism from 1990 onward and American culture of imperialism in film and fiction, combining U.S. Foreign Policy with Literary and Media Studies. She completed her M.A. in English and American Studies at Otto-Friedrich-University of Bamberg, Germany, and received a Teacher's Diploma of English and German from Ryazan State University, Russia.

**Daniel Ferreras Savoye** is professor of French, Spanish and Comparative Literatures at West Virginia University. His work has appeared in *Hispania*, *French Literature Series*, *Angulo Recto*, and *La tribuna*. He is also the author of *The Signs of James Bond* (McFarland, 2013) and *Lo fantástico en la literatura y el cine* (ACVF, 2014).

**Ross Talarico** is an award winning author whose most recent book is the novel, *SLED RUN*. New poems have recently appeared in *Voices in Italia-Americana*. He lives in San Diego.

**Michelle Villanueva** is a candidate for the MFA in Creative Writing – Poetry at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She is also an attorney whose academic interests involve rhetorical strategies providing greater access to court and negotiation processes for historically underrepresented groups. Her hobbies include cooking and traveling.

### ***Popular Culture Review***

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Please note that the journal is now all electronic and all requests for submission guidelines and/or submissions should be sent to Felicia Campbell (Department of English, University of Nevada, Las Vegas) at [fcampbell@ccmail.nevada.edu](mailto:fcampbell@ccmail.nevada.edu). Documentation may take the form appropriate for the discipline of the writer; the current MLA style sheet is a useful model. Please submit your file in MS Word, Ariel 12 pt font, double spaced, sans pagination. Please include a 50 word bio with your article submission. The editorial staff will defer to the current *Chicago Manual of Style* to resolve stylistic differences.

The journal invites articles on all aspects of both popular and American culture. Correspondence about membership in FWPCA/FWACA, which includes a subscription to *Popular Culture Review*, should be sent to Felicia Campbell and [felicia.campbell@unlv.edu](mailto:felicia.campbell@unlv.edu).

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