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US Icons and Iconicity

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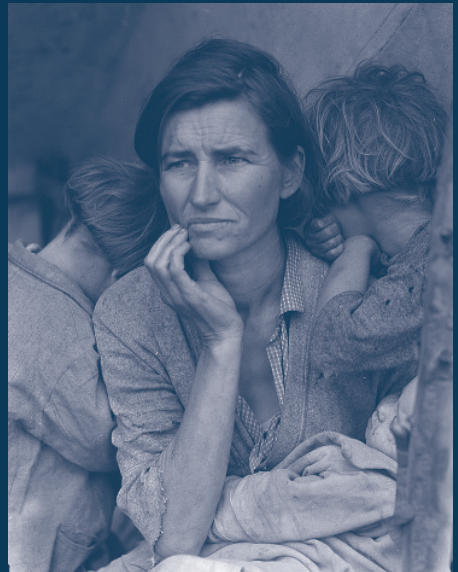
Preface: Icons as a DiscursivePractice

Klaus Rieser

> AAA. Aids Ribbons. Al Capone. Apple. Barbie. Beach Boys. Betty Friedan. Billy Graham. Buffaloes. Cape Canaveral. Charles Lindbergh. Chevrolet. Chinatown. Cowboys. Donald Duck. Doris Day. dot com. El Vez. Ellis Island. EPCOT. FDR. 5th Avenue. Frederick Douglas. Frontier. Geronimo. Ground Zero. Harley Davidson. Harvey Milk. Hippies. Hollywood. James Dean. JFK. Joan Baez. John Wayne. Las Vegas. Lincoln Memorial. Lucky Luciano. Malcolm X. Martin Luther King. Melissa Ethridge. Moby Dick. Monument Valley. Muhammed Ali. NASA. Nashville. Neil Armstrong. Noam Chomsky. Playboy. Pocahontas. Rainbow Flag. Richard Nixon. Rocky. Rosa Parks. Route 66. Silicon Valley. Sitting Bull. Smith & Wesson. Statue of Liberty. Sunset Boulevard. Susan Sontag. Tupperware. Twin Towers. Unabomber. Vietnam Memorial. Wall Street. Westpoint. Windows. Woodstock. Wounded Knee. Xena, the Warrior Princess. X-Files. Zabriskie Point.

These are just a few American icons which pertain to three main groups: First, fictional as well as historical characters (Daisy Duck to Harvey Milk); second, locales, monuments, or typical natural elements (Ground Zero, Vietnam War Memorial, Buffalos); and third, logos, isotropes, and computer icons (dot-com, Windows, trash bin, etc.). Despite the large amount of icons populating the US cultural and social landscape, any reader with more than rudimentary knowledge about the USA will recognize most of them immediately. But what are these icons precisely? How do they come into being? Who gives them their specific shape? What aspects of an emotionally, socially and historically complex phenomenon do they cover? What aspects are left out? What denotations and connotations do they carry? What are cultural or political consequences of these icons? What is their relation to the mass media? How do they or their reception change over time?

How are they challenged or toppled? Can we do without iconicity? How are mainstream icons appropriated by those on the margins and vice versa? Icons being symbols of the prevailing discourses, what do they tell us about the relations between classes, ethnic groups, and genders? These are some of the questions which came to my mind when I chose the topic of icons for the subject of a conference at the University of Graz in 2003. In their contributions to this conference many researchers have dealt with these questions and have answered or ventured their opinion on many of them. A selection of the papers presented at the conference constitutes this book. While these contributions cover a diverse terrain and constitute a plethora of opinions, it seems to me that there is an agreement on icons having conflicting, even paradoxical functions in modern US society.

Hegemonic, but also democratic tools

A particularly noteworthy aspects of icons—one which accounts for their lasting value in American culture—is that they are in an ambivalent, tension-fraught position between on the one hand a suturing function, as hegemonic tools of dominant groups to control the shifting identities and interests of the mass of people and, on the other hand, as democratic elements in the media age, as symbols of popular identities and interests. Icons can thus be expressions both of dominant and of popular interests. Their first aspect, namely their dominant function, can best be approached from a Gramscian (c.f. Laclau, Laclau and Mouffe) or Foucaultian (c.f. Rabinow) perspective, while their democratic side is reflected in the concepts of Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons.

A short definition of hegemony by Lawrence Grossberg may help to remind us of the social situation in which icons come into being and are maintained.

> Hegemonic leadership, through which the ruling bloc attempts to rearticulate the structure of the social formation, has to operate where the masses live their lives. It has to take account of and even allow itself to be modified by its engagement with the fragmentary and contradictory terrain of common sense, of popular culture, and of the 'national popular' (Grossberg *Dancing* 209).

In my view, icons are precisely such a contested popular area in which this hegemonic process takes place. They come into being in response to the lives of the masses and cannot do without them. But they are employed by dominant groups—what Grossberg call "the ruling bloc"—to structure society. In other words, icons constitute an attempt to focus and anchor the sliding of signification, to freeze the social indetermination into hegemonic forms, and to foster social cohesion by placing consensus over conflict. They are, in short, a central element in the manufacturing of consent. Through their employment, the underlying relationships of historical processes are hidden from our perception; instead, we build our understanding of the world on (mass mediated) appearances.

On the other hand, that hegemonic functioning has to allow for a peculiar relation to resistance. As Grossberg puts it: "A hegemonic politics does not incorporate resistance but constructs positions of subordination that enable active, real, and effective resistance" (*Dancing* 209). Grossberg goes on to point out that for some groups this subordination means being placed outside the social formation, whereas for others it entails the above-mentioned possibilities of resistance, as long as it leaves the position of the dominant groups intact. For example, as the time for the conference drew closer, I not only received a number of exciting proposals for papers but also an email from Ruth McIntosh from the University of Northern Iowa, who disagreed with my opinion on the democratic possibilities of icons I had formulated in the call for papers. In her email she pointed out that she refused to enroll her Native American daughter in the local high school whose football team name and icon was "Redskins." Drawing a parallel to blackface, she argued that "the continued existence of the comical Indian chief with the big feather bonnet is an ugly icon, to which Native Americans never consented." (McIntosh) She therefore concluded that "American icons don't have to win the consent of the marginalized. They only have to become popular within the dominant culture." And I have to agree. My original wording in the call for papers was imprecise. Popular icons can be—and often are—maintained in spite of resistance from the marginalized. Rather, a hegemonic poli-

tics uses icons in a popular field in which majorities, power, but also resistance in acts or words play a role. In fact, Ms. McIntosh's email to me is itself such an act of resistance, just like her refusal to enroll her daughter in the local high school. It also serves to remind us that the topic we treated in the conference and which is being covered by this book is a highly contested and highly problematic one, especially for people outside academia.

Despite this example, I maintain that icons are not totally enthralled in hegemony. As already mentioned, they are best understood as over-determined, as having multiple causations. Thus, they are readable in different ways, carry endlessly different connotations, betraying in their structure and structural omissions the intangibility of meaning. Moreover, a purely negative attitude to icons—prevalent in much public criticism of the media—stems, at least in part, from a distrust of images which is the result of an overvaluation of bourgeois print culture and logocentric discourse. In difference to this public distrust of icons (which itself stands in ironic contrast to the widespread reliance of people on images as conveyors of information), some media researchers point out that images, and icons in particular, play an important role in public discourse. In fact, if we follow Michael Warner's thesis that "[t]he public is a discursively organized body of strangers constituted solely by the acts of being addressed and paying attention" (Warner *Publics and Counterpublics* qtd in Hariman and Lucaites 2003, 36), then the public is itself formed through visual icons. Drawing on this analysis, Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites stress that since the public is a body of *strangers* rather than people intimately connected, public discourses could not function without providing bases of identification or symbols of important abstractions—without icons, that is.

An example of iconicity: Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother"

Before I make room for the multiple voices of our authors, I would like to share a few words on the book's cover image. This photograph by Dorothea Lange, which has become legendary under the

title "Migrant Mother," exemplifies some of the major aspects of iconicity. Its iconic status has been extensively established: For example, on a Library of Congress internet page it is referred to as "an icon of the Great Depression",[1] while elsewhere it has even been identified as a quintessential "American icon" (Heyman, qtd in Gawthrop 65).

And Roy Stryker, head of the FSA photo section, claimed it was THE image of the collection. This is what he said in 1972:

> After all these years, I still get that picture out and look at it. The quietness and the stillness of it. . . . Was that woman calm or not? I've never known. I cannot account for that woman. So many times I've asked myself what is she thinking? She has all the suffering of mankind in her but all the perseverance too. A restraint and a strange courage. You can see anything you want to in her. She is immortal. Look at that hand. Look at the child. Look at those fingers—those two heads of hair (19).

It is also clearly one of the most often quoted and easily recognized images of our time. Dorothea Lange took the photograph in February or March of 1936 in Nipomo, California as part of her larger project of depicting the plight of migratory farm labor for the Resettlement Administration (later to become the Farm Security Administration). It
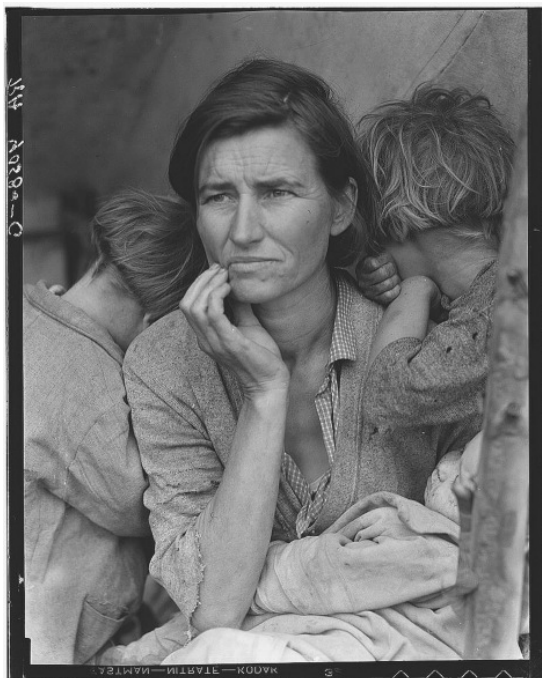
[1] "Exploring Contexts: Migrant Mother". Further information on the image can also be found at "Dorothea Lange's 'Migrant Mother,'" another internet page of the Library of Congress.

depicts Florence Owens Thompson with three of her seven children at one of the most distressing moments of her life; she was stranded at a pea pickers' camp without work because the crop had frozen. In Lange's account: "She told me her age, that she was thirty-two. She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food." (Lange).

Apart from its celebrity, the photograph is interesting because it shows the resistant side of iconicity. This image is clear proof that it is not always the official version, or the sunny side, or the corporate power which turns social reality into an icon. We not only have the Mt Rushmore National Memorial, Mickey Mouse, and Coca Cola, but also the "Migrant Mother," the "Accidental Napalm," and the "Kent State" photographs.[2] With its portrayal of the poor, the photograph "Migrant Mother" allows for a public appreciation of a critical aspect and era of the USA.

Moreover, since the photograph is well documented, we can trace not only the coming into being of this icon but also some of its transformations and its contested nature. I will only list a few facts which reveal its iconic status as a process, a cultural phenomenon, rather than an immobile fact. Originally, the photograph did not have its slogan-like name, being referred to rather as "Destitute peapickers in California. Mother of seven children. Age thirty-two. Nipomo, California." Also, the photograph is actually untypical for Dorothea Lange, who preferred placing her subjects in context to the more personalized close-up. In fact, it is part of a series of six images,[3] and was not the first to be published. Neither is the famous picture an "original": The photographer at a later point retrieved the negative and retouched it, hiding a thumb which was originally visible in the foreground, on the pole at the right.

[2] For an excellent analysis of the latter two iconic photographs see Hariman and Lukaites 2001 and 2003 respectively.
[3] Five of these images can be accessed on the Library of Congress website "Dorothea Lange's 'Migrant Mother.'"

Above and below: Two more images from the "Migrant Mother" series.
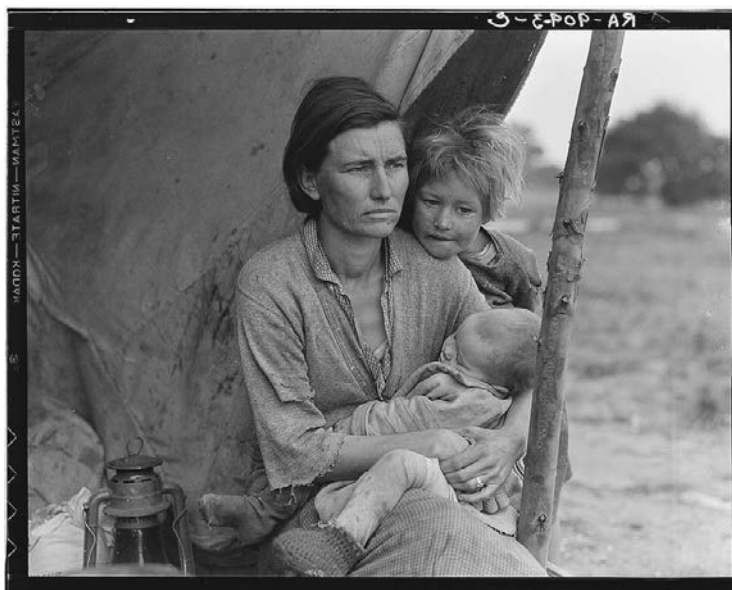
More importantly, in terms of the social functioning of icons, one of the daughters later attempted unsuccessfully to stop the publication of the photograph, and Florence Thompson herself in part disliked the image because of its atmosphere of despair. In the 1970s Thompson was even tracked down by a researcher, Bill Ganzel, who interviewed and photographed the aged Ms. Thompson and the three daughters present in the famous image from the 1930s.

Bill Ganzel: "Florence Thompson and Her Daughters, 1979."

Finally, "Migrant Mother" is a truly public icon, because the photograph was taken by Dorothea Lange when she was working for the US government (FSA/OWI). Thus it is not copy-right protected and can be downloaded from the Library of Congress site at no cost or can be ordered from their photoduplication service branch for a small fee. On the other hand, if financial worth is indicative of iconic status, "Migrant Mother" also fulfills *that* requirement: In 1998 at a Sotheby, New York auction the Paul Getty Museum offered almost 250 000 Dollars for an early, unaltered print of the photograph. (Koetzle 37).

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Introduction

Walter W. Hölbling, Klaus Rieser, Susanne Rieser

This book investigates the ontology as well as the social and cultural impact of US icons. American studies scholars from various nations have come together to explore origins, maintenance, and manipulation of icons and to trace their hegemonic as well as subversive impact. Icons arise in diverse circumstances and then experience mutation, modulation, adjustment, refinement, and diversification until they either fade and expire or else join the pantheon of core US icons, becoming almost eternal. Contributions include analyses of iconic figures such as Billy the Kid or Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, they cover stereotypes from obese bodies via Aunt Jemima to iconic femmes, and they examine material icons such as the Dollar Bill, the Zapruder footage of the JFK assassination, or iconic sites like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

The first section, "Icons in Material Culture," discusses historical and political icons focusing on material culture. *Birgit Schwelling* theorizes the Vietnam Veterans Memorial—a place where the American nation conserves, recollects, and honors its scientific, artistic, and political heritage of the Vietnam War—as an icon of American memory politics. *Heinz Tschachler* discloses the material symbolisms of the dollar bill, which belongs to a cohesive web of stories, events, national symbols, and rituals that both constitute and represent what official America claims as the shared experiences in the nation's history. *Øyvind Vågnes* explicates how 26 seconds of an 8 mm film have achieved mythic status: The Zapruder footage of John F. Kennedy's assassination has indeed become a repository of images that serves as a source for reinscription in almost every visualization, narrativization, or dramatization of the event.

Out of the numerous icons derived from literary characters or their authors, the section on "literary Icons" investigates four of the lesser-known ones. *Nassim Balestrini's* contribution on Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle on Stage" focuses on the reception history of the tale, especially on the enormous popularity of numerous stage

adaptations which succeeded in establishing Irving's tale as heart-warming and Rip as an icon of American origin. Early stage adaptations of the story of Pocahontas, arguably America's first national allegory, are the topic of *Samuel Ludwig,* who reads the various productions as reflections of as well as responses to contemporary socio-cultural attitudes and illustrates the shifts in the plays' emphases from original marriage myth to imperialist land acquisition to a parody of the original. Quite a different focus is chosen in *Allan Phillipson's* work on Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer, one of the most popular icons of the late 20th century. In what one might call an act of popular cultural archaeology, Phillipson 'restores' the original character of Mickey Spillane's hero and illustrates how numerous simulacra and parodies have helped to make Mike Hammer into another fictional hero you cannot kill, yet in the process may well have killed his original character. Quite as a contrast, the following contribution by *Teresa Requena* deals with a woman who has become an enigmatic icon of the intellectual literati - Gertrude Stein, according to Bruce Kellner "the best known unread writer in American literature." Requena investigates the processes that contribute to the creation of this status, points out what has been excluded, and what of Stein's own making as well as of her critics has established her reputation as an icon of modernism that combines experimentation with unintelligibility.

Opening the section on "Stereotypes as Icons," *Alice Deck's* "The Mammy/Aunt Jemima as an American Icon: Toni Morrison Responds" looks at the complex treatment the Nobel prize winner gives to one of the most popular white stereotypes of black women. Deck illustrates how Morrison deconstructs the nostalgic icon of nurturing black femininity from the pre-Civil War times of slavery and invests both The Mammy and Aunt Jemima with qualities that make readers recognize their potentials as disruptive agents. *Dagmar Fink* compares the unequal reception of butch and femme icons: While most queer-feminist theories treat only the butch as a transgression of femininity, Fink makes an argument for an understanding of femme-ness as equally radically distinct from heteronormative femininities. *Greta Olson* describes the American obsession with the exposure of and

competition between idealized, fetishized, iconized bodies: The perfect body of American superstars by now has become a world icon. Citing the cowboy and the Indian as two major US-American icons, *Jan Roush* shows what happens when the colonized group subverts these emblems for their own purposes: Using excerpts from Sherman Alexie's work, Roush analyzes humor and the tribal tradition of the trickster as a means to convey the perspective of Native Americans today.

The final section on "Iconic Personae: Stars and Heroes" features some of the most legendary American figures. *Page Laws* portrays Fred and Ginger as leading icons of the American screen romance and reveals the gender-bending secret story of how the skinny, balding first-generation Amer-Austrian from Omaha has managed to suddenly become *das Ewig Männliche* dancing with *das Ewig Weibliche*. *Bent Sørensen* has chosen the stylized and almost sanctified images of Jane Fonda and Elvis Presley as icons which express our desire as a public to idolize and worship something beyond our own selves. *Arno Heller* chronicles how each generation from the 1920s onwards has reinvented "Billy the Kid" as a figure of revolt: He first embodied a revolt against the social and political system, in the '50s and '60s against the establishment, in the '70s against the disruption of the counter-culture, until he finally served for the nihilistic and frenzied celebration of a Generation X in the '80s and '90s. *Louis J. Kern* discusses the origin and historical evolution of the Captain America superhero figure as the embodiment of adventurous patriotism and of reductionist versions of foreign policy objectives.

The Editors

On History, Memory, and Identity: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial as a *Lieu de Mémoire*

Birgit Schwelling

How do we identify icons? What makes a person, a site, an object, a monument, a memorial a significant sign in and for a culture? A useful indicator might be their appearance in different contexts, their utilization as a symbol in various mediated forms. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM) can be understood in such a way, because it is not only a commemorative site on Washington D.C.'s Mall, but its image is also replicated on postcards and souvernirs, and used in movies and novels. It is a sign that is, at least in the United States and for those who are familiar with this country, recognized without further explanation. Especially when used in novels, the VVM appears as an almost independent actor with great power.

Image 1

In Bobby Ann Mason's bestselling novel *In Country* (1985), the Vietnam Veterans Memorial helps Samantha, the main character in the book, to find herself. The Vietnam War seems to be the hidden

curriculum of Samantha's life. Her father was killed in Vietnam before she was born. She lives with her uncle, a Vietnam Vet himself, and she feels attracted to an older man who, like her father and her uncle, served in Vietnam. The problems characteristic of young women in their late teenage years are mixed with a strange restlessness caused by the silence in her familiy surrounding the Vietnam theme. Finally, at the end of the novel, Sam, her grandmother and her uncle take a trip to Washington, D.C. to visit the memorial. By looking for her father's name she finally finds her own name on the Wall: "SAM A HUGHES. It is the first on a line. It is down low enough to touch. She touches her own name. How odd it feels, as though all the names in America have been used to decorate this wall." (244-45)

Although it is not exactly the type of healing and reconciliation process that visitors to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and observers described over and over again, Sam's experience clearly echoes the intention of Jan Scruggs, the initiator of the memorial and a Vietnam veteran himself, to heal the nation and to bring closure to the trauma of Vietnam. Sam's visit at the memorial unravels the plot of her life, a symbol of the impact of the Vietnam War to America's culture and society even in the second generation after the war.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial also turns up in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* (2000). Roth comes out against the theme of healing and catharsis so popular in descriptions of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial experience. Lester Farley, a Vietnam Veteran, suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, with symptoms like flashbacks and uncontrolled aggressions. The members of the veterans's self-help group he joins are convinced of the healing capacities of the VVM[1], and they try to talk Lester into a visit:

> Louie was a brother to him, the best brother a man could ever hope to have, but because he would not leave him be about going to the Wall, because he was so fucking fanatical about him seeing that wall, Les had all he could do not to take him by the throat and throttle the bastard. Gimpy spic bastard, leave me alone! Stop telling me how it took you ten years to get to the Wall. Stop telling me how it fucking changed your life. Stop telling me how you made peace with Mikey. Stop telling me what he said to you at the Wall. I don't want to know! (248)

However, when the Moving Wall[2] is on view near their home town, Les is finally willing to go. When they reach the parking lot of the Ramada Inn Hotel in Pittsfield, Les needs Valium to make it out of the van. When he finally faces the Wall, he does not feel anything:

> Nothing happens. Everyone telling him it's going to be better, you're going to come to terms with it, each time you come back it's going to be better and better until we get you to Washington and you make a tracing at the big wall of Kenny's name, and that, that is going to be the real spiritual healing—this enormous buildup, and nothing happens. Nothing. Swift had heard the Wall crying—Les doesn't hear anything. Doesn't feel anything, doesn't hear anything, doesn't even remember anything. (252)

Les Farley now knows for sure that he is dead, not able to feel or remember anything. A serenity overcomes him that his buddies mistake for some sort of therapeutic achievement. But his reaction means quite the opposite: confronted with the Wall, he decides to kill his ex-wife and her lover.

The narratives Mason and Roth develop could not be more different. In Mason's novel the main character finally finds herself while visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. In the story Roth tells us quite the opposite happens. A former Vietnam veteran does not get over his uncontrolled aggressions and his feelings of guilt while facing the memorial but is lead to even more violence and destruction. However, both narratives have something in common. They share the assumption that the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has a tremendous impact on those who visit it.

Given that there are countless memorials in the world nobody ever pays attention to, the power of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is a fascinating phenomenon. First of all, it has developed into the most visited site on the Mall, Washington D.C.'s first tourist district and the place where the American nation conserves, recollects and honors its scientific, artistic and political heritage in museums and memorials. Furthermore, it is known for the remarkable practices that are developing around it: visitors not only touch the memorial and take rubbings from it but also leave all kinds of items at the memorial, among

them flags and letters, beer cans and photographs, unit insignia and MIA/POW (Missing in Action/Prisoners of War) pins, teddy bears and jungle fatigues. National Park Service employees collect these items every day and ship them to a huge warehouse in Maryland where they get sorted, catalogued and stored. MIA/POW groups set up tables at a prescribed distance from the memorial to inform the public on the issue of American servicemen still missing in Southeast Asia. While other memorials keep their visitors at a distance, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial seems to demand that the visitor makes contact and actively participates. The Wall, as the VVM is also called, is a living site because there are individuals and groups who have a strong *will to remember*. The MIA/POW groups try to preserve the memory of missing servicemen by selling items related to the issue: aluminium bracelets inscribed with the name of an MIA, flags and stickers with the MIA/POW emblem, literature from organizations like the League of Families of Servicemen Missing in Action (Berdahl 1994: 112).

A *will to remember* is the starting point for what Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire*[3]: sites that are part of the collective memory of groups, especially nations. They are means for situating the past in the present—to "block the work of forgetting" (Nora 1989: 19)—and they appear whenever a group intentionally remembers. Nora situates *lieux de mémoire* between history and memory. The two are in a "fundamental opposition" (ibid.: 8). Memory "is life, borne by living societies", remaining "in permanent evolution" (ibid.), taking "roots in the concrete, in the space, gestures, images and objects" (ibid.: 9) and it is linked to *milieux de mémoire*, understood as "real environments of memory" (ibid.: 7). History, on the other hand, is "the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer" (ibid.: 8). While memory is located in the "warmth of tradition" (ibid.: 7), history is distant, "an intellectual and secular production" (ibid.: 9). And, most importantly, memory according to Nora is long gone. Because it does not exist anymore, societies and other groups need *lieux de mémoire*. They are a kind of secondary memory, coming into being because modern societies are not able to live within memory any more. But *lieux de mémoire* are not pure history either. They are situated

between history and memory—"no longer quite life, not yet dead" (ibid.: 12)—and are produced by the push and pull between the two: "*Lieux de mémoire* are created by a play of memory and history, an interaction of two factors that results in their reciprocal overdetermination." (ibid.: 19).

Although Nora has been widely criticised for this assumption, especially for his definition of history and memory as opposing poles, I find his categories particularly useful for an analysis of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Especially his idea of *lieux de mémoire* as products of a push and pull between history and memory helps to explain some of the dynamics that developed between the visitors, the collectors and the MIA/POW groups. In the following I will concentrate on aspects that are related to these dynamics. A brief outline of some background information (premises, development, and design of the VVM), will be followed by an analysis of the communication between the visitors, the objects, and the collectors, drawing on Pierre Nora's theory of *lieux de mémoire*. Some remarks on iconicity, memory, and national identity will complete this reflection.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Premises, Development, Design

The story of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial begins with Jan Scruggs, a Vietnam Veteran who, in 1979, incorporated the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF).[4] Its specific and only purpose was to erect a national monument honoring the veterans of the Vietnam War. With his initiative Scruggs was trying to find an answer to the enormous void of meaning that resulted from the deeply controversial nature of the Vietnam War, its unpopularity, and the fact that the Armed Forces of the United States finally left Saigon defeated. Scruggs' concern was especially with the Vietnam veterans who faced severe problems not only during the war but also after returning home to the United States. Veterans came home to changing ideas about patriotism and heroism. Traditional homecoming rituals for returning soldiers like ticker-tape parades were not held; soldiers returning from Vietnam "slipped", as Berdahl paraphrases the situation, "into the

country's back door [...] and were ignored." (Berdahl 1994: 90) They were confronted with resentment and a society that wanted to forget the muddled war before it was even over.

Scruggs imagined a *veterans*, not a *war* memorial. His idea was to bring closure to the conflict around Vietnam by *healing* the nation. The most important task of the memorial was, as Scruggs noted, to "begin a healing process, a reconciliation of the grievous divisions wrought by the war" (Scruggs/Swerdlow 1985: 65). Beside the idea of healing, the monument was to be without political content, was to be funded with private contributions only and would have to list the names of all those killed in the war or who remained missing. After some difficulties, the campaign of the Fund eventually worked and by January, 1980, Congress authorized the memorial. The donations for the memorial clearly demonstrated to the Fund Organizers that there was a population that wanted to publicly remember the war, especially the soldiers who fought and died in it. The Fund decided to hold a juried competition which was announced in October 1980. They received 1.421 entries, and a jury of eight prominent architects and sculptors selected the winning design. In accord with contest rules, no names were attached to any of the proposals. Thus, when Maya Lin's design was selected in May of the following year, everyone was astonished to find that the winner was female, Chinese-American, and an undergraduate student of architecture at Yale University.

Maya Lin's design is made of panels of highly polished black granite. It lists all the names of the 58.156 men and women who were killed in the Vietnam war or remain missing. The list of the names is inscribed in chronological order of the death along two walls that rise at their vertex to ten feet, and that extend for nearly 500 feet. Both walls meet at a 125-degree-angle. Aside from the names there are only two more inscriptions:

> In honor of the men and women of the Armed Forces of the United States who served in the Vietnam War. The names of those who gave their lives and of those who remain missing are inscribed in the order they were taken from us.

Our nation honors the courage, sacrifice, and devotion to duty and
country of its Vietnam veterans. This memorial was built with private
contributions from the American people.

The first panel cuts only a few inches into the hillside, but each panel
is longer than the last and cuts more deeply into the ground, so that
visitors walk downhill towards the vertex on a path running its length.
As visitors exit, the panels diminish in size.

Although Lin's design was approved by the National Capitol
Planning Commission, the Fine Arts Commission, and the Department
of the Interior—the three institutions having to approve all construc-
tion on the Mall—bitter opposition to Lin's design emerged in October
1981. Critics, among them Tom Carthart, a member of the Vietnam
Veterans Memorial Fund himself and Ross Perrot, who donated a sig-
nificant amount to the Fund, characterized the design as "the most in-
sulting and demeaning memorial to our experience that was possible"
(Hess 1987: 265) and "a black gash of shame and sorrow" (Haines
1986: 5). The black colour of the stone was considered more mournful
than heroic, especially in the context of the white stone that is used
widely on the Mall. To many it seemed too clear an admission of de-
feat. It was not considered celebratory and heroic. The fact that Lin
placed it *in* the earth and not above was seen as feminine, not manly.
In short, the Wall was considered "too abstract, too intellectual, too
reflective" (Hass 1998: 15). Throughout January and February 1981,
conflicting sides argued and finally agreed to a compromise design
including a flagpole and a figural sculpture designed by Frederick
Hart. Hart's design is in the tradition of classic war memorials. It con-
sists of three modestly heroic soldiers who look to their right, towards
Lin's Wall. They function as a kind of entrance marker for those ap-
proaching the memorial from the southwest. As Kristin Hass in her
study on American memory at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial notes,
the compromise the Fund and the critics agreed upon "reflects the im-
possibility of finding a single design that could represent the Vietnam
War for all Americans" (Hass 1998: 18). Maya Lin, who strongly op-
posed the addition to her design, finally saw it as bringing the memo-

rial "closer to the truth". In her view what is memorialized is "that people cannot resolve the war." (Blair u.a. 1991: 276)

Hart's sculpture satisfied the critics, but it did not solve the problem of representation. As a reaction to the addition of the figures to Lin's design in 1984, Diane Carlson Evans, a female Vietnam Veteran, started the initiative for a Women's Memorial. Evans argued that she would have never initiated her project had Lin's design stood alone. But Hart's three men made the absence of women painfully visible to her and other female veterans (Hess 1987: 268; Marlin/Wetenhall 1989). Finally, in 1993, more then ten years after the installation of Lin's Wall, the Vietnam Women's Memorial was dedicated. It is, like Hart's *Three Service Men*, a very straightforward figural memorial in the style of the Pieta, consisting of four figures standing about 300 feet from Lin's Wall: an injured male solider, a nurse who holds him in her arms, a second woman, comforting the nurse and looking to the sky, and a third woman kneeling over medical equipment.

Interestingly, much of the opposition and negative reaction to Lin's design that surfaced prior to the construction of the memorial has quieted as a consequence of its overwhelming favorable reception by visitors. As Sturken notes, "the experience of Lin's work seems to have been so powerful for those who have visited it that negative criticism of its design has vanished" (Sturken 1991: 126). The memorial seems to work for everybody: for veteran and non-veteran, hawk and dove, young and old.

The main reason for the strong effect the memorial exerts on visitors seems to lay in the fact that it communicates with the visitors. Visitors do not keep at a distance from the memorial, but get into physical contact by touching it and by taking paper rubbings from the names. Many also have commented upon the reflexive quality of the granite, whereby the visitor sees himself mirrored among the names of the dead (Wilder 1989: 145). But the most important feature of the memorial, I think, is the chronological listing of the names. As Berdahl notes, the ordering "chronicles the escalating destruction of the Vietnam war, creating not a static monument, but rather a journey into

the past that begins by moving from a name in the directory to a name on a panel that contains all the others who fell on the same day." (Berdahl 1994: 89) Finding a name on the panels is impossible without either looking it up in the directories that are provided at the entrance or asking a park guide. This turns the viewer into an "active seeker" (Scott 1990: 39), into somebody who actively participates rather than consumes in a passive way. Once a name is found, the visitor is not only confronted with a single name, but with the story of a day, of a unit, or an event. Maya Lin's original intention was that the memorial should read "like an epic poem" in order to "return the vets to the time frame of the war" (Sturken 1991: 127). It provides the veteran, but also familiy members and friends who might have learned about events and names from letters, with "a spatial reference for their experience of the war, a kind of memory map. They can see in certain clumps of names the scene of a particular ambush, the casualties of a doomed night patrol, or the night they were wounded." (ibid.: 128) In a way, the wall repeats the stories of the war. It is, as Scott notes, "foremost a text". (Scott 1990: 38) Most importantly, this text is not closed, as in traditional war memorials, but open. As Wilder notes, it demands much from the reader in that it does not tell the visitor what to think but demands that he thinks for himself (Wilder 1989: 145).

The Visitors, the Things, and the Collectors

But visitors not only walk along the granite panels, touch the memorial, search for names, and take rubbings from it. They also leave things there. For Wilder, this signifies the visitor's part in the communication process (ibid.). Berdahl compares the VVM to a "sacred shrine, to which people come as pilgrims" (Berdahl 1994: 98). As at other pilgrimage shrines, visitors leave votive offerings.

On many days, hundreds of objects are left at the Wall—flowers and flags, medals, letters, photos, and a bewildering variety of other things, from marijuana cigarettes to beer cans to stuffed toys. (Allen 1995, Hass 1998) While the rubbing of and the seeking for a

name is intended by the design, no one ever expected that the VVM would become a magnet for these offerings. Originally, the Park Service classifies these objects as "lost and found". Later, they started to collect everything set down at the memorial and began to store these objects. As Sturken notes, "the objects thus moved from the cultural status of being ‚lost' [...] to *historical* artifacts." (Sturken 1991: 135)

At first, there was no concept linked to collecting the objects. Rather, the members of the Park Service, as they later stated, sensed that these offerings had a certain sanctity (Hass 1998: 22), that there was something about the objects that made them too important to be thrown away. Following Nora, this beginning of what later became the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Collection (VVMC) can be attributed to an insecurity about the status and the value of the items left. "The im-

perative of our epoch", Nora states, "is [...] to keep everything, to preserve every indicator of memory—even when we are not sure which memory is being indicated." (Nora 1989: 14) And while the items started to pile up in some Park Service storage facilities, the idea to create an archive came up. Eventually, in 1984, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Collection (VVMC) was founded to house and protect the artifacts from the Wall. Since then, the offerings left at the Wall are not only kept but stored, sorted and catalogued, and eventually placed in a temperature- and humidity-controlled warehouse in Glenn Dale, Maryland. Following Nora, the production of an archive can be seen as a next step. Not only do modern societies keep everything due to the inability to distinguish between things worth storing and things to forget, they also, Nora argues, "produce archives" (ibid.). For Nora, the archive has become "the deliberate and calculated secretion of lost memory. It adds to life [...] a secondary memory, a prosthesis-memory." (ibid.)

The "secondary memory" of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is not accessible to the public.[5] The curators of the VVMC argue that the collection should not receive too much publicity. They observed that since 1985, when word began to spread that the items left at the memorial were being saved, the objects left at the memorial began to change (Allen 1995). Before that time, most of what turned up was what curator Duery Felton calls "pocketables" (e.g. a beaded necklace or a swizzle stick) or "field expedients" (e.g. two cigarettes made into a cross). But soon after, the offerings began to look more elaborate and premeditated. The exhibition "Personal Legacy: The Healing of a Nation" that opened in October, 1992 at the National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C., even forced this tendency. Although the curators discouraged people from leaving things at the memorial deliberately so that they would be displayed at the Smithsonian by announcing a cut-off date for objects included in the exhibition (Hagopian 1995), many objects turned out to be more carefully assembled. Attached to a set of jungle fatigues, for example, was the following note: "Pants and shirt belonged to Chuck Louviere. Dedicated to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as part of a future

exhibit." (Berdahl 1994: 106) The curators of the collection also receive increasingly more inquiries from people who want to make sure their offering has made it into the collection (ibid.). Letters left at the memorial became more predictable in both form and content (ibid.: 115), and several persons have even asked if they can send an object directly to the warehouse (ibid.: 106).

From the curator's remarks one might conclude that they distinguish beween two types of objects left at the memorial: the type of spontaneous, unmediated offerings, and the type of items left to be saved in the warehouse, exhibited at the museum, or written about in the press. As Kristin Ann Hass notes, they are even concerned about the corruption of the collection by "inauthentic" objects (Hass 1998: 26): "They worry that if people read that it is acceptable to leave offerings and read that all the offerings will be saved forever, people will be more likely to bring things for the collection rather than for the dead or themselves." (ibid.: 25)

The curator's distinction between "authentic" memory and "inauthentic" practices of remembrance can also be found in other texts on the memorial, often articulated more in the form of an underlying assumption. To give only one example: Carlson and Hocking, who analyzed letters being left at the memorial, argue that some of these messages left are "pure", others are not. (Carlson/Hocking 1988: 204) The distinction they draw can also be seen in the following quote: "*Unfortunately* for future research, the Memorial collection has begun to receive considerable media coverage. [...] This could have a two-fold effect: *sincere* mourners could become reluctant to commit their reactions to paper, and others may decide to use the Memorial as a political platform, or a vast granite bulletin board." (ibid.: 214; emphasis mine)

Drawing again on Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*, one can argue that there is no such thing as an "authentic" memory. Nora dates the times of authentic memory back to the old days of "so-called primitive or archaic societies" (Nora 1989: 8). With the rise of modern societies, "pure" or "authentic" memory is definitely forever gone. One does not necessarily have to share the idea of past societies who

lived in "real environments of memory" (ibid.: 7) to agree upon that there is no such a thing as an "authentic" memory today. In other words, what we observe at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is "authentic" insofar as we are not provided with other forms of memory. Memory is never unmediated, but always influenced by its cultural frames. Rather than focussing on whether the things left at the memorial represent some sort of authentic memory or rather a predeterminded response to all kinds of influences, it may be more useful to concentrate on the exploration of the interaction between individual memory, collective remembrance and cultural representation.

Viewed this way, the collection as well as the MIA/POW groups who set up tables at the entrance to the memorial, to name only two examples, are frames that mediate how people remember at the memorial. The knowledge about the collection makes things left at the memorial more elaborate, the MIA/POW bracelet that is sold at the tables is the object most commonly left at the memorial. (Allen 1995: 100) They are only two of the many factors that script visits to the Wall.

To think about visits to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in terms of ritualized and mediated cultural practices is not to deny the authenticity of human interaction and emotions experienced there. As Daphne Berdahl notes, visits to the memorial can be understood as both "authentic" experiences *and* highly predictable cultural practices at the same time: "Letters to someone on the Wall, poems written about a loved one lost in the war, or tearful encounters between two veterans are undoubledly sincere and heartful expressions of emotion; they are now also the accepted and expected thing to do." (Berdahl 1994: 116)

What the curators and other observers of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial worry about turns out to be just what collective memory in "hopelessly forgetful modern societies" (Nora 1989: 8) is all about: highly susceptible to influences, always a process, dependent on a site and a group, located somewhere between the reflexive turn upon the past and the unself-conscious practice of tradition and ritual.

Iconicity, Memory, and National Identity

Having outlined some information on the premises, development, and idea of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, I took a closer look at the interactive and communicative practices that developed around the memorial, drawing on Pierre Nora's category of *lieux de mémoire*. The question still remaining open, however, concerns the connotations of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as an icon. What does the VVM symbolize, what does it refer to? I would like to suggest an answer that links the aspects of iconicity, memory, and national identity.

In her analysis of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Marita Sturken notes that the VVM has become "a central icon of the ‚healing' process of confronting difficult past experiences" (Sturken 1991: 119) Following this reading, the memorial symbolizes processes of "working through difficult pasts" that at the end of the day lead to "coming to terms with one's past". Sturken's interpretation is in line with the dominant narrative of "healing" that is reproduced in accounts over and over again, from the initiator's orginal intention over Maya Lin's artistic conversion of the idea to representations in literature and science and accounts from visitors' experiences.

I would like to argue that the healing theme is only one aspect of the iconicity of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Taking into consideration the described push and pulls between history and memory as well as some of the more recent developments at the Wall, it might be essential to broaden our understanding of what the Vietnam Veterans Memorial refers to.

As Allen notes, lately there came to be more participation by visitors who had no close connection to anyone named at the wall: "Boy Scout troops left wreaths for hometown heroes; a German sailor penned an antiwar message on his white cap." (Allen 1995: 100) Offerings unrelated to the Vietnam war accumulated: "More recently Operation Desert Storm yielded, among other things, a crop of yellow ribbon, a few signs that said NO BLOOD FOR OIL, and one that read GUYS, THIS TIME WE WON. Since then, the tokens of major

marches—pro-choice, pro-life, gay-rights—have regularly lined the wall." (ibid.)

Taking these developments into consideration, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial can be seen, for one, as referring to the functioning of modern memory itself: The push and pull between history and memory are clearly demonstrated in the dynamics that develop between the visitors, the objects, and the collectors. The fact that memory is never unmediated, always influenced by a variety of frames of remembrance is also reflected in the processes surrounding the memorial. In this respect, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is a self-referential sign.

In addition, the VVM seems to turn more and more into a site where not only the legacy of the Vietnam war is negotiated but also where problems relating to broader questions of self-image are generated. All kinds of issues are debated at the memorial: self-determination, heroism, the rights and wrongs of military engagement abroad, minority rights, and so forth. In this respect, the memorial refers to the broader theme of national identity, to the question of values and beliefs of central importance for American society.

Taken together, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is a place of communication, a secular Wailing Wall where the living communicate with the dead, where communication about issues that are central for the definition of national and other groups' identities takes place. It is a site where memory and identity are in constant production, always diverse, never completed, often contradictory, an ever-changing text on history, memory, and identity—a *lieu de mémoire* as "a site of excess closed upon itself, concentrated in its own name, but also forever open to the full range of its possible significations." (Nora 1989: 24)

Notes

[1] Actually, the visit to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is used in psycho-therapies. As Carlson and Hocking (1988: 210) note, a Pennsylvania psychiatric hospital brings disturbed veterans to the memorial for therapy sessions.

[2] On Veterans Day 1996, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund unveiled a half-scale replica of the VVM, designed to travel to commuities throughout

the United States. According to information available on the Fund's home-page (<www.vvmf.org>), the Moving Wall is made for visitors, especially Vietnam veterans, who cannot make the trip the Washington, D.C.: "The traveling exhibit, known as *The Wall That Heals*, allows the many thousands of veterans who have been unable to cope with the prospect of ‚facing the Wall' to find the strength and courage to do so within their own communi-ties, thus allowing the healing process to begin." Since its dedication, the Moving Wall has visited more than 150 cities and towns throughout the United States.

[3] *Lieux de mémoire* is a vast collaborative work on the national memory of France. The work is divided into three parts (*La République*, *La Nation*, *Les Frances*) and published in seven volumes (Nora 1984-1993). The theoretical introduction to the work has been translated into English (Nora 1989). All following quotes are taken from this translation. Because, as Nora (1989: 25) notes, the term *lieux de mémoire* has no English equivalent, I will stick to the French term. However, the nearest terms in English might be *site* or *realm*.

[4] Unless noted otherwise, dates and numbers are taken from Gessner (2000). Much of the description of VVM's charateristic features is based on personal visits to the memorial.

[5] From time to time, researchers seem to be given permission to visit the collection and review the VVMC log books (Hass 1998: IX).

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'In God We Trust' or,
How Dollar Bills Represent and Constitute the American Nation
—an Attempt in Cultural Iconography

Heinz Tschachler

This paper follows an impulse to show how a social phenomenon that is customarily framed as "economic" may be deepened by considering its wider cultural ramifications. Its underlying assumption is that the United States' national currency contributes in important ways towards constructing and reinforcing national identity. This, I am suggesting, happens primarily in two ways, through the use of the links that money forges among its transactors, and through the visual and verbal images on American paper currency, the topic proper of the present paper.[1] In terms of method, this paper follows the critical practice of cultural iconography. This practice, Larry J. Reynolds notes, owes a great deal to semiotics or, more specifically, to the study of signs which originated with Charles Sanders Peirce (5). Taking my clue from Peirce I argue that dollar bills, like all signs, convey meaning through a system of cultural codes and conventions. I also argue that dollar bills are iconic signs, which is to say that they are related to their referents by means of resemblance or analogy (Peirce 98-115). I will start off by making a few observations about the iconicity of dollar bills. Following this, I will put iconicity into the wider perspective of "invented traditions." Then I will articulate (in the sense of bringing together) iconicity and cultural hegemony. This will be followed by a discussion of the role of the national monetary icon in the formulation and performance of national identity. Finally, I will highlight what I see as major way stations in the history of the national monetary icon.

I. Iconicity

Dollar bills are representations both of money in the form of paper currency, and of the United States of America (the political entity) or, as well, of the American nation (the emotional fact) (see Doty; and Goodwin). From this follows that dollar bills may be usefully ana-

lyzed and described as a medium for the communication of national images and symbols. The transferral of meaning is of course culture-specific. For instance, the phrase "In God We Trust" that we see on the current one dollar bill means "United States of America" or "America" only to those who know that it is the national motto. By the same token, the two circles that we see on the reverse side ("verso" or "back")—the one featuring a picture of a pyramid capped by an eye and with the phrase "Annuit Coeptis" ("He [God] favored our under-taking") above it and the phrase "Novus Ordo Seclorum" ("New Order of the Ages") below it, the other featuring a stylized bald eagle, with arrows (for war) and an olive branch (for peace) in its talons, and the phrase "E Pluribus Unum" ("From many, one") emblazoned across a scroll and clenched in the eagle's beak—also mean "United States of America" or "America" only to those who know that the two circles represent the two sides of the Great Seal of the United States. The phrase "The United States of America," which appears at the top of the bill, thus serves both to determine and to overdetermine the verbal and visual images placed on the bill. (See illustration 1.)

Illustration 1

The obverse side ("recto" or "face") of the current one dollar bill most prominently features a portrait, framed in a lyre-shaped me-dallion or picture frame, of a mutton-jawed George Washington, the first president of the United States. Other iconographic details include

the seals of the United States Treasury Department and of the Federal Reserve Bank, two facsimile signatures, a serial number, the phrase "Federal Reserve Note," the sentence "This note is legal tender for all debts, public and private," and again, just to make sure there is no mistaking the semiological relation, the phrase "The United States of America." (See illustration 2.) Thus is established, in words and in image, through verbal and through pictorial symbols, the presence of the United States of America as a fiscal and/or monetary community. The statement referring to "legal tender" also summarizes the dominant United States fiscal theory: the national currency is good not only for its exchange value in the circulation of commodities but, first and foremost, for the paying back of two kinds of debts, the former incurred in commercial transactions, the latter in transactions between the government and the citizens, that is, in transactions involving taxes and interest incurred on government bonds.

Illustration 2

The current $1 bill is not only the most familiar denomination of paper currency. Because of its strange phrases and unmistakable lettering, its stolid aesthetics and esoteric touch, and its mark of "the Prince," the current one dollar bill has also been called "the most enigmatic of all American denominations" (Burrell 181). A French commentator even remarked that an "emblematic power emanates from it and transforms it into a potent political symbol" (Goux 115-16). As I will show, the dollar is a symbol of national cohesiveness

that binds together all Americans, as well as introduces them to all non-Americans. Usage makes it a sign of universal rather than of limited circulation, the common property of high and popular culture, both within the United States and outside of it, comparable to brand names like Coca Cola, Mc Donald, Microsoft, or Kodak.

In semiotic terms, the current $1 bill has all the qualities of a sign, that is to say, it clearly is a thing that stands for other things (such as money in the form of paper currency) and, more specifically, that shows a relationship between representation and object which determines the effect of the sign in the mind of the user (see Peirce 98-99). That effect, at least for Americans, may be summed up in terms of 'national identity'. The semiotic effectiveness (or valence) of dollar bills makes them comparable also to other signs that carry national specificity. "Dollar" signifies in pretty much the same way as the Eiffel Tower or the twin towers of the World Trade Center, as the Pyramids or the Great Wall, or else as Shakespeare, Dante or Cervantes, or Homer, or Napoleon. All of these names stand for much larger universes that could eventually become less familiar than the names describing them. As time passes, names acquire an even greater semiotic significance since they provide continuity in time and space. Thus "dollar" is the name-icon that encodes the history of the American nation for all Americans in past, present, and future. "Dollar" also means the United States of America, Americans and, as the name abbreviates and is made part of a visual sign, it reduces the notion of America and American culture to a single iconic sign. Much as the Pound is the symbol of British monetary sovereignty, and the Franc was recognized as the French sign and the Peseta as Spanish, the Dollar is the American sign.

Dollar bills, if they are to qualify as iconic signs, must be signs "by virtue of [their] own quality and […] of whatever else partakes of that quality" (Peirce 98-99). Additionally, dollar bills include any one of three subtypes of icons—images, diagrams, and metaphors. Images—which may be graphic, visual, perceptual, mental, or verbal— "partake of the simple qualities" of their objects. Thus their form reflects the object directly and concretely, as for instance in the portrait

of George Washington on the current $1 dollar bill. Diagrams are signs that represent the relations of the parts of their objects by analogous relationships among their own parts. In the Great Seal of the United States of America, for instance, the order of the thirteen stars as it were diagrams the order of the thirteen original colonies. Finally metaphors are signs that represent "a parallel in something else," often through an affinity that is only vaguely felt. One instance of metaphoric iconicity is the construction of a pictorial detail of the Great Seal, the eagle holding both an olive branch and arrows, in the following way: "This country wants peace, but we will never be afraid to fight to preserve peace" (Theo; and McLarty). All that said, for dollar bills to stand the test of iconicity there must be wide recognition of them as signs, contextual spread and representational use, survival of change over time, use in ritual behavior, accumulation of associations, the triggering of memory and nostalgia and, as well, disagreement about meaning—something that makes people fight over them, or use to negotiate identity. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there must be rich metonymic resonance, that is, the embodyment of associated ideas that allows dollar bills to deliver meanings beyond their utilitarian function as a means of payment into every context in which they appear.

II. "Invented Traditions"

The current $1 bill dates, respectively, from 1929, 1935, and 1957. Like other signs that carry national specificity, the "dollar" appeared only after the formation of the national state, that is, after this type of currency had become the national currency and, as well, a medium for the communication of national images and symbols. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries authorities were confronted with the necessity of maintaining legitimacy in the face of various domestic challenges to their rule. The solution was to instill in citizens a sense of collective identity. Accordingly, various elites in the employ of the central state engaged in designing a wide range of traditions for the purpose of buttressing and sustaining an "imagined

political community," to borrow Benedict Anderson's famous phrase (6-7). Generally in order to cultivate the allegiance of citizens, all kinds of memories, icons, and rituals that were capable of representing the nation's symbolic meanings were "invented"—from Memorial Day, which was first celebrated in 1868, to the national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner," which was officially adopted only in 1931. Perhaps the most obvious way in which national identity was constructed was through nationalist imagery. Images that would help inculcate a sense of belonging to the national community could be found on items such as flags, stamps, murals and paintings, and statues. And of course on the national currency, which according to Eric Hobsbawm is the "most universal form of public imagery" (281; see also Helleiner; and Gilbert).

As an example of the many ways in which a national currency can be linked to national identity, I offer the following remark by a congressman from Michigan, in 1874: "As surely as our flag represents […] the unity of these States, just so surely, sir, do the United States Treasury Notes represent […] the priceless value of these United States" (in O'Malley 83). These words not only illustrate the importance of interventions on behalf of the nation state. The iconography on the notes this Congressman referred to—the head of George Washington or a vignette depicting Columbus in sight of land—is itself a good example of the role of the national currency in the production (via the communication of national images and symbols) and reproduction (via their circulation) on a national scale of the integration of the American people. Thus my point here is that all dollar bills, past and present, may—as paper artifacts—be usefully analyzed and described for the "performance" of their value, that is, in terms of a medium for producing and reproducing, through verbal and visual images and symbols, an American national identity.

III. Iconicity and Cultural Hegemony

Overall the material symbolicity of dollar bills at one and the same time stands for and is part of a cohesive web of stories, events,

national symbols and rituals which, taken together, both constitute and represent what are believed to be the shared experiences in the nation's history. But to say that dollar bills represent the nation and/or the shared experiences in the nation's history is pretty much the same as to say that a photograph represents the object that it shows. In actual fact, this basic assumption about iconicity does not work in all cultural contexts. We all know that the iconography of dollar bills draws and has always drawn upon seminal images in the nation's history, such as, for instance, images of famous persons. Yet we only need to take a look at *what* persons have been considered famous to be able to conclude that "famous people" has really always meant "white men." To date the only woman to ever appear on a dollar bill has been Martha Washington, whose portrait was on the 1 Dollar Silver Certificate of the 1886 and 1891 series (Gilbert 69). Native Americans have been almost completely absent from American paper money, appearing only in bit parts, if at all. The lone exception has been the 5$ Silver Certificate of 1899, which had as centerpiece an Oncpapa Sioux Indian by the name of Tatokainyanka or Running Antelope (Standish 137). Other non-white persons have never made it onto the United States paper currency, except through their signatures (U.S. Department of Treasury Bureau of Engraving and Printing). Nor have immigrants (with the exception of Hamilton, who was an immigrant from the West Indies) or, following a congressional ruling from the Civil War years, any living person (Goodwin 244).

A similar domination of the national symbolic by cultural hegemony can be read from the events, classical images and allegories, such as Columbia or Victory or Concordia, or more modern ones, such as Steam or Electricity, from vignettes pertaining to history or tradition, or from reproductions of the famous paintings of Americana hanging in the Capitol at Washington or in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. All these events and images appeared on National Bank notes throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and, as one visitor to the U.S. said, made banknote-engraving "the only true American contribution to the arts" (in Goodwin 150; see also Friedberg and Friedberg 75-85, 332-33; and Shafer and Bruce II). One

example is the 50$ National Bank note of 1875, which features, recto, John Trumbull's "Washington Crossing the Delaware," and "Washington at Prayer," and verso, "Embarkation of the Pilgrims," from a mural by Robert W. Weir. (See illustrations 3 and 4.)

Illustration 3
(From Friedberg and Friedberg 332.)

Illustration 4
(From Friedberg and Friedberg 332.)

The cultural work of all these—exceptionally skilled and tasteful—depictions must be seen in their contributing, first to the acceptance of paper money on the part of the public at large and, second to its functioning as a circulating medium throughout the entire territory of the United States (and beyond). A great deal of care was therefore

taken to see that the bills on which these depictions appeared would become popular. The major strategy to make them popular was to make the depictions on the currency allude to established moral, social, and political values—social-darwinism, masculinism, racism, and nationalism. With all depictions being issued in behalf of the state, we can say that federal presence was invoked to help resolve all kinds of ambiguities of value and identity.

But we must turn to a dialogic model of the sign, one that, following Mikhail Bakhtin, includes an addresser-addressee relationship, if we are to explore further the significance of the United States paper currency for the creation and re-creation of national identity. As Dean MacCannell expresses the point, generally signs "mediate historically real social relations, and these relations are typically not between social equals" (425). Certain iconic signs, however, are special insofar as they "*permit humankind to subordinate itself to its own semiotic productions* by existing in a position of superiority to both addresser and addressee" (MacCannell 426, my italics). This means that at times addresser and addressee are not communicating so much as they are "coparticipating in a semiotic production in which they are mutually complicitous in the exaltation of an iconic image" (*ibid.*). Of course politicians and educators, government officials, policy makers and other cultural elites, by virtue of their direct involvement in the production of particular representations and thus in controlling the effect of the sign in the mind of the users, are somehow superior to the people at large. But even these forces of propriety maintain their superiority only by subservience to iconic sign production which, MacCannell contends, is the key to the icon's power to unite addresser and addressee in a "cult" (*ibid.*). As a result of this cultic unification there is always an articulation of the iconic sign that is antecedent to any interpretation or reading that might subsequently be performed. By the same token, readings within the cult are bent upon improving the quality of the production of the iconic image and, as well, upon rendering more total and secure the subordination of all participants.

IV. The Formulation and Performance of National Identity

In light of what has been said, the relation of the icon to what it represents must be described as dynamic rather than as static. This dynamics is also illustrated by the ways and means that have been used both to improve the quality of the visual and verbal images on the U.S. paper currency and to render more total and secure the subordination of all participants. As regards the production of the iconic image, this has been the responsibility of the United States Department of Treasury Bureau of Engraving and Printing since its creation in 1877. Another significant innovation has been the creation of the Federal Reserve System in 1913, in belated reaction to the financial panics of 1893 and 1907. Following the regulation of the amount and flow of the national currency for greater economic stability, another important step was the reduction in size of all dollar bills by twenty-five percent, from 7.42 x 3.13 inches to 6.4 x 2.61 inches, in 1929. The measure, which was coincidental with the October 1929 stock market crash and thus truly emblematic of the fall, was adopted in order to save paper and thus to cut down on the cost of production (the new size is probably also easier to handle and store). Also in 1929 came the complete redesign of all United States notes, together with the adoption of the portraits currently appearing on the various denominations of paper currency (Friedberg and Friedberg 119-24, 125-32, and 158). Other measures were adopted in the 1990s when American bank notes were enhanced with about a dozen new features to bust counterfeits, including chemical markers, holograms, microprinting, an embedded polymer strip, and the use of more colors, to upset photocopy machines (PageWise, Inc.).

The push for a currency overhaul had originally come from the Secret Service in the early 1980s (Goodwin 225-46, 247-54). But when the prototypes the designers came up with reached the White House, they were not well received. Tinkering with the dollar, many politicians thought, was pretty much the same as redesigning the flag. And when the bills were finally altered more than ten years later, the greenback stayed. As the Secretary of the Treasury, Mary Ellen

Withrow, told the *New Yorker*: "Green is the color of prosperity, and black is a good thing, too—it shows we're sound and solid and in the black" (in Goodwin 294). It yet remains to be seen how these forces of propriety and the public at large will respond to challenges to the national monetary icon on the part of special interest groups. One such group is called "The Coin Coalition." Its declared goal is to have all $1 Federal Reserve notes replaced with $1 coins, purportedly to cope with the rising prices of transit fares (The Coin Coalition). For vending machine companies dollar coins are likewise "terrific" (Lundstrom). Presently, there are two dollar coins in circulation, the Susan B. Anthony dollar and the Sacagawea dollar. As regards the former, it was minted beginning in 1979 but was never widely accepted, possibly for the reason that Americans tended to mistake it for a quarter. As regards the latter, in its behalf the United States Mint launched a costly, $67.1-million marketing campaign in 2000. Yet despite the three-year campaign, recent estimates say people use dollar coins in just one percent of dollar transactions. Possibly for that reason the United States Mint has quit circulating the new dollar coin for now. The General Accounting Office recommended that no money be spent on marketing, even though the government could potentially save up to $500 million annually, mostly on production, shipping and on account of the greater durability of coins (United States General Accounting Office).

All strategies in defense of the iconic image serve two purposes. The first is to suppress transformations, reshapings, disfigurements, revaluations, reconfigurations, or renewals of the content and the form of the national monetary icon. The second is to guarantee the retrieval in always identical ways of its formulation and performance. The role of the United States' national monetary icon in discursively constructing and reinforcing an American national identity is crucial even (or, especially) today. This role is evident from various web documents, which can be found in a variety of versions on private or organisational websites or on those of American schools. One such document is titled "The Dollar Bill." Subtitled "Proud to be an American—a dying tradition," it contains the following injunction:

"[W]hat is on the back of that dollar bill is *something we should all know*" (McLarty; my italics). Further down in the document we are told that "no one knows what the symbols mean." Consequently, visitors to the website are summoned to "tell everyone what is at the back of the one dollar bill and what it stands for, because nobody else will." A similar web document is titled "Dollar bill pictures and what they mean" (Theo). I have also found an almost identical document on the website of Kenston High School of Chagrin Falls, Ohio.

V. The History of the National Monetary Icon

   The web documents I have been referring to might also tell us (they do not, though) that already for the republic's founders money had been a means to formulate and perform a national identity. As a delegate to the Continental Congress expressed the point, the purpose of a genuinely American currency would forge "a new bond of union to the associated colonies" (in Goodwin 61). A good example of early American paper money in the employ of the national symbolic is the Massachusetts issue of August 1775, in which Paul Revere engraved on the back plate the motto "Issued in defence of American Liberty." The bill, whose denomination was still in shillings, also showed a Minute Man holding a sword in the one hand and a copy of the Magna Carta in the other. (See illustration 5.)

1775 was also the year when, in order to finance the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress authorized the issuance of currency. The currency became known as Continental Currency. Its notes were for all intents and purposes "the earliest symbols of the United States. Nothing else had arisen as a rebel icon. The Stars and Stripes was two years off; the sentiments Old Glory was destined to arouse were primarily nineteenth century. The national anthem had yet to be composed, the Liberty Bell hadn't been rung, nobody had ever given a July Forth oration, and the office of the president had yet to be invented, let alone a president elected.

Illustration 5 (Newman 43.)

All the power of political advertising was vested in the Continental dollar bill" (Goodwin 62-63, my italics). The actual money value of Continentals, which were redeemable in Spanish Milled dollars, was beside the point. Only two years after their adoption, ten dollars in Continental Currency bills was worth only one Spanish silver dollar; by 1781, the ratio was 1000 to 1 (Shafer and Bruce II 24). Ultimately the currency depreciated to a point where it cost more to print than it would buy. Jonathan Carver in *Travels in America* of 1778 comically stated that, "The Congress paper dollars are now used for papering rooms, lighting pipes, and other conveniences" (in Newman 15; see also 37). The depreciation of the

notes is also perpetuated in the colorful American colloquialism "not worth a Continental."

This episode suggests the conflicted meanings surrounding the issuance of American paper currency during the Revolutionary period. While building national identity made up one semantic network, other such networks were constituted by the desire for economic and political stability. Despite its patriotic beginnings, therefore, the monetary history of the United States is not a continuous narrative. Instead, there are many disjunctions and detours. Of particular interest is that as a consequence of the depreciation of the Continental Currency, the Continental Congress in 1785 adopted "one dollar" as the monetary unit of the United States. Distrust of paper money remained, though. This is best illustrated by the fact that the United States Constitution specifically denied the individual States the right to issue paper money (see Art. I, sec. 10, §1). Curiously, the Constitution also omitted from the powers retained by the Federal government the same prerogative (see Art. I, sec. 8, §5). After the Constitution was ratified, the coinage system of the United States was adopted. Of course there was still a demand for paper money, but with no uniform national currency around, whatever bank notes were brought into circulation were issued by private banks, such as the Washington Bank of Westerly, Rhode Island, whose 1$ note of 1800 was the first bank note to carry a vignette of George Washington. (See illustration 6)
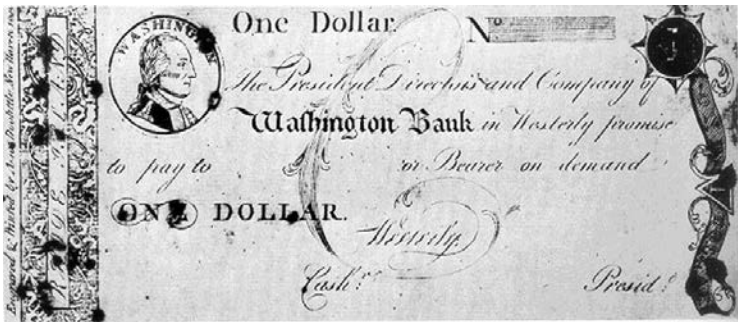
Illustration 6 (From Newman 400.)

Probably the most radical change came with the Civil War, when the Treasury Department was authorized to issue national bank notes to circulate as "legal tender" alongside other bank notes (Friedberg and Friedberg 14-16). With these notes—the famous "greenbacks"—for the first time in United States history a uniform currency circulated from sea to shining sea, underwritten by the hope that, as the federalist Senator John Sherman put it, it would promote a "sentiment of nationality" (in Helleiner 1411). Supporters of this policy would formulate a theory of value and identity drawn from nationalism and patriotic labor. That theory would find a visible expression for instance on the 5$ Demand Note of 1861, which shows, recto, a statue of Columbia on the left and a portrait of Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury (1789-95), on the right. (See illustration 7.)

Illustration 7 (Friedberg and Friedberg 321.)

Overall the consolidation of the United States' national currency through the nineteenth century was embedded in a grand debate around questions relating to money and value. At the root of the controversy was the paper money form, which—unlike coins struck in gold (i.e., "specie")—was not valuable in and of itself but merely representative of value (see Gilbert 60). This unpleasant truth spawned a variety of—sometimes hilarious—attempts to hide the fact that bank notes were merely "worthless tokens," or mere "symbols" of the real thing, gold (or, in other instances, silver). One example is make-belief specie, as in the case of many California bank notes, which actually

depicted American gold coins and thus were suggestive of the intrinsic value of precious metal, something that paper money clearly lacked (see Friedberg and Friedberg 133-35, 339). The controversy eventually took on the dimensions of Greek drama, with the "Greenbacks" in pitched battle against the "Gold-bugs." For the former (and thus also for our worthy Congressman from Michigan), symbolic money was as good as any money. For the latter, however, only gold was the uncontested general equivalent of all products. Its "intrinsic value" made it the "natural" money of the nation. The naturalist argument should make anyone suspicious. Indeed monetary politics in Gilded-Age and Progressive-Era America clearly correlated with racial politics. That is to say, as Michael O'Malley observed (377-86), hard money gold standard people tended to believe in the innate fixity of racial character, while greenbackers were more likely to be racial egalitarians who believed that racial characteristics were environmentally caused, hence mutable. By the same token, during the Reconstruction period many Southerners likened paper money to what they saw as specious bills of rights: "Diluting the money supply diluted the nation's blood, and elevating the freedman depreciated the value of whiteness" (O'Malley 381). Thus many Southerners demanded that paper currency be pegged to "authentic specie" (coin or precious metal) that had real value—like the scientific objectivity they saw in "species" or races (O'Malley 386).

   At least for a time, the "gold-bugs" carried the day. Probably their greatest triumph came in 1879 when, in the aftermath of the economic crisis of 1873-74, the gold standard was resumed. However, gold did not fulfill the grandiose expectations which the "gold-bugs" (or bullionists) had vested in it. The fluctuations of the value of gold on the international market ultimately led to its abandonment in 1933. At the same time the Dollar was devalued in order to attract more money from abroad. These measures need to be seen in the larger context of actively managing the national currency as a means to address problems of unemployment and economic growth. Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his first inaugural address of 1933 was quite explicit about his monetary policy. For one thing, he told his audience that the

United States had been shamefully betrayed by the "money changers" but that fortunately for America they had now fled "from their high seats in the temple" (in Lott 279). Roosevelt's rhetoric is telling. There is not only a commitment to (a Keynesean-style) economic nationalism (see Schlesinger, Jr. II: 253), but also to giving inspiration to a Depression-demoralized nation. The president's proclamation, also in the first inaugural address, that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself" (in Lott 278) is thus particularly poignant.

As regards the cultural work of the national currency, the abandonment of the gold standard in 1933 was crucial. Once the circulation of symbolic currency was no longer related to its successful redemption, the (tacit) acceptance of bank notes by the population or, at the very least, by the dominant majority, was again of considerable importance. In this project, currency iconography was a leading agent. To cut a long story short, in 1935 Roosevelt signed into law the design of the one dollar bill in its present shape, that is, complete with the portrait of George Washington *and* the Great Seal of the United States (Burrell 181-93; Goodwin 64-65). The new dollar bills were no longer as strident as, say, the triumphalist bills of the 1880s and 1890s. In fact, they were solidly dull-looking, with their tufts of laurel leaves, their scrolls and cobwebs, their table mirror portrait frame and the numeral 1 in each corner, all in stark contrast to the streamlined art deco artifacts and skyscrapers of the roaring twenties. On the other hand, the new dollar "no longer had to hoot and trumpet: America *was* the future." Thus the new dollar could easily be "unabashedly American, reflecting the point where history and myth collide" (Goodwin 287). Uniform across America, the new dollar was also "the perfect ingredient in the corporation paycheck […] an indispensable partner to Big Business" (Goodwin 287-88). Small wonder, then, that the new design was here to last. The only significant change since has been the adoption of the national motto, "In God We Trust," in 1957, a gesture by President Eisenhower to please the people who took their dollar bills seriously, like their flag and their pledge of allegiance (see Burrell 181-93).

VI. Conclusion

Thus when all is said and done we can return, once again, to the most basic principle in iconic representation, namely arbitrary hierarchy. According to this principle, the signified is always set above the signifier, and the sign above the addresser-addressee relationship. What is crucial is that this hierarchy cannot be derived from the logical structure of the sign itself. Rather, it is the product of a specific social organization, one that ritually elevates the icon over its cult. As MacCannell expresses the point, that elevation is "a requirement of organized group life, the basis for a collective agreement not merely on meanings but on the importance of certain meanings" (MacCannell 432). What this means is nothing less than that the form of semiosis in human communities is extremely powerful. For one thing, it maintains the collective agreement that in every arrangement of persons, deeds, gestures and objects, there is hierarchy. At the same time, however, there are practices that in principle and to a certain extent also in practice unite the privileged elites with the alienated, disenchanted, or disinherited underclasses. National currencies depend on being accepted by a large number of people and therefore have to win the consent also of the marginalized and the subordinated. Put another way, the acceptance and legitimacy especially of modern currencies depend on their ability to at one and the same time symbolize a community based on a political territory and transcend social contradictions. These two functions also form the fundamental articles in every contract governing the relations between the public and the private, that is, between the state and the citizens. In the case of the United States, this contract is based on the conviction that it derives its legitimacy from God—hence the phrase "In God We Trust." Both the contract and the special legitimacy are reinforced (but not guaranteed) by currency iconography, which, following Jean-Joseph Goux (19), can therefore be said to perform some kind of alchemy that transforms commodities or values into their equivalents and invests in pieces of paper values that the currency does not possess of its own accord.

Notes

[1] I am thus making a distinction between "money," which always concerns the measure of value, and "currency," which usually refers to the medium of exchange (and thus can as well refer to paper money). I also feel that a word might be in order on restricting myself to paper currency. Aside from the limited space in a conference paper, an important reason is that bank and government notes are generally much more iconographically loaded than coinage. Furthermore the absence of any precious metal in what is now the United States of America—gold was not discovered in any usable quantity until 1848, and silver even later—left Americans little choice. Like it or not, they had to rely on paper money. "Paper money alone," Richard Doty notes (91), would give the United States "the peculiar capital elasticity" it required for its development as a nation. And paper money alone, thanks to its "imagined" value, would play the most significant role in encouraging recognition of one's membership in the "imagined political community" of the American nation.

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Quoting Zapruder

Øyvind Vagnes

> During our negotiations, Zapruder said again and
> again how worried he was about possible exploita-
> tion of his 26 seconds of film. He told me about a
> dream he'd had the night before: He was walking
> through Times Square and came upon a barker urg-
> ing tourists to step inside a sleazy theater to watch
> the President die on the big screen. The scene was
> so vivid it made Zapruder heartsick. Later, while
> testifying before the Warren Commission, which
> was investigating the assassination, he wept as the
> film was shown. "The thing would come every
> night," he said of the dream. "I wake up and see
> this."
>
>   Richard B. Stolley[1]

I

The motorcade is turning onto Houston Street, and in the back
seat of one of the cars sits President John F. Kennedy, smiling and
waving to the crowds that have gathered along the road, his wife next
to him. The car disappears behind a road sign, then reappears, and the
president seems to be fumbling with his collar, clutching his throat,
while Jackie Kennedy is watching with increasing attention. He glides
slowly to the left, and then his upper body is jolted violently, his head
explodes in a spurt of blood, and his wife crawls across the back of the
car as a secret service man climbs up on it. She turns back and looks
for a moment in the direction of the now slumped partly invisible
body. Then the view is obstructed again by bushes and another road
sign before we can see the car speeding up, disappearing under the
overpass.

This is a short description of the images of what has become
known as "the Zapruder film," the 8 mm recording of the Kennedy
assassination in Dallas on November 22, 1963. However, it also

serves as a description of the early beginnings of Ant Farm and T. R. Uthco's film *The Eternal Frame*, into which a blurry black and white copy of Zapruder's film is edited.[2] The exposition cleverly suggests that Zapruder's images are quoted everytime we encounter them, and that they thus are *eternally framed*. The pun is certainly intended, for we are also eternally framed; we tend to forget the implications of such quoting, of what may be lost and what may be added in the process.[3]

Indeed, the only exception would have to be that very moment when Abraham Zapruder recorded the film, when the fifty-nine-year-old manufacturer of ladies dresses was the first to witness these images as they were in the making. The story of how it happened has become a contemporary legend.[4] In the rainy morning of November 22, 1963, Zapruder went to work in his office on Elm Street. Excited about the president's visit, he had nevertheless left his 8 mm camera at home, since the weather conditions did not seem to invite filming. At ten o'clock, however, the skies cleared, and when the sun broke through several of the people in his office who knew him to be an eager amateur flimmaker suggested that Zapruder should go home and get the camera. Undoubtedly, a film of the presidential visit would find a special place in his collection of home movies in the future. Zapruder went home, got the camera, and returned to his office, and after deciding not to film the motorcade from his window, as he had originally planned after reading about its route in the morning newspapers, he went down to nearby Dealey Plaza to find a better angle. After looking around a bit he settled on a concrete abutment in the pergola. He suffered from vertigo and was afraid to climb up, but his receptionist, who had found her way down to the plaza too, offered to hold onto his coat to steady him. They both climbed the pillar. At 12:30, the president's motorcade came down Houston Street and turned onto Elm Street. Zapruder kept filming the car the president was sitting in until it disappeared from view to the right, under the overpass. He never took his eye away from the telescopic lens that magnified everything he saw.

II

Zapruder's film has come to confront us with some of the central paradoxes of contemporary visuality, namely those that continue to revolve around what Walter Benjamin now famously referred to as the "reproducibility" of the recorded image.[5] Today we have come to encounter Zapruder's images in what has been called a "torrent of images and sounds."[6] Pictures are recycled endlessly in extensive "remediation" so that we inevitably watch the mediation of mediation.[7] It is through such recycling that the Zapruder film has been transformed by every emerging technological format that has succeeded the film; simultaneously, the proposed authenticity of the original as a record of controversial death has made it, in turn, evidentiary document with exhausted referential status and prized cultural commodity.[8]

The consequence of these movements and shifts is that the Zapruder film has become something of a contested symbol of the many contradictions at work in an age marked by a "pictorial turn,"[9] and as such, one that has attracted artists for more than forty years. It belongs to an exclusive group of notorious photographic images from the "filmed century,"[10] and its impact has been long known and much referred to. Zapruder has been called no less than "the most influential filmmaker" of the last half of that century,[11] and his film a "cinematic ur-text."[12] We have come to see it quoted not only inside movie theaters, on television, or in books we read, but also in various other more or less expected sites, so that it seems that the world itself "has become increasingly filmic," that it is "recorded, registered, and increasingly recognizable only as a series of mediated events."[13] The phenomenon of tourists as well as network professionals gaterhing in Dealey Plaza to line up and copy Zapruder's original climb onto the abutment, in order to quote his film as well as the making of it, and documenting that simulation by filming themselves and each other doing so, illustrates this. It can be observed in Dealey Plaza frequently, and to an extreme degree in the event of an "anniversary."

Artists, however, have engaged themselves in a different kind of quotation. In her Quoting Caravaggio, Mieke Bal suggests that art's

engagement with the past is "an active reworking."[14] According to Bal, "the work performed by later images obliterates the older images as they were before that intervention and creates new versions of old images instead."[15] In looking at contemporary art, Bal finds that works "demonstrate a possible way of dealing with 'the past today.'"[16] For example, the juxtapositions of Ken Aptekar's multisemic texts, which quote Baroque painting, make "the older works recede farther into the past," and such a reversal "puts what came chronologically first ('pre-') as an aftereffect behind ('post') its later recycling."[17] Bal sees this as a way of "doing history" that "carries productive uncertainties and illuminating highlights," as re-vision allows for what she calls "preposterous history."[18]

<p style="text-align:center">*III*</p>

Indeed, to the spectator who has just finished watching *The Eternal Frame*, the Zapruder film seems strikingly to present itself as an "aftereffect." The implications are, of course, that we reflect upon the way in which our own conceptualizations of the past are informed by our interaction with the visual. Increasingly, to remember is, as Susan Sontag points out, "not to recall a story but to be able to call up a picture."[19] The past is made in the present, and it becomes impossible to imagine the assassination of Kennedy "in the absence of the Zapruder images."[20] Significantly, any re-inscription, any process of editing or narrating, is *interpretative*; to quote is to re-represent.[21] We see Zapruder's images again and again, and, in the words of Marita Sturken, the "meanings continue to shift each time."[22]

The Eternal Frame's meditation on image and memory is ambitious. Not only does it invite its spectator to reconsider the relationship between editing and narrating, like earlier art had provocatively done before it,[23] it also addresses the inherent *theatricality* of the documentary image by staging the recording of the event as performance. The Ant Farm collective was originally a group of architects that dabbled in performance and video art. The combination was perfect for addressing the Kennedy assassination as visual phenomenon. If the

Zapruder film shapes the collective memory of the event, it is also bound to shape our imaginations and fantasies about it.[24] The filmic and performative aspects of *The Eternal Frame* depend on each other symbiotically, and define its ambiguous exploration of the documentary image. Hapless tourists and local visitors in the plaza confront what they come to believe is an official theatrical production arranged by the Kennedy museum, when in fact it is a simulation staged by a performance group. The motorcade repeats its route endlessly, while bystanders eagerly gather curbside for the spectacle. A number of the people who show up are moved by what they see and shed tears.

Significantly, the performance allows us to see the power of the gestic in the kind of documentary image that Zapruder's film represents. Kennedy's body glides, jolts, and these movements are etched in the mind of the one who watches forever. In *The Eternal Frame* we see the actors practice them repeatedly in a studio before they arrive in Dealey Plaza. They meticulously try to copy the aesthetics of the Zapruder film, because it ultimately serves as the key to luring bystanders to arrive at an almost cathartic sense of witnessing the authentic. To the spectator watching *The Eternal Frame*, however, the effect is the very opposite. We see historical reconstruction as theater.

Bal's analysis of contemporary baroque repeatedly addresses the significance of the gestic for how we consider visual quoting. Interestingly, Benjamin addresses the gestic as one of the key elements of epic theater.[25] According to Benjamin, "making gestures quotable" is a "substantial achievement," and this is because quoting *per se* "involves an interruption" of context.[26] When we see Hall thoughtfully applying make up before he is to perform as Kennedy, we sense that our interaction with the historical images of his death will be "preposterous." We witness a series of interruptions, in which the contorting body of actor Doug Hall represents the climactic moment when we recognize that the resonance of the Zapruder film depends so much on its movements, on spasmic death caught on film. President Kennedy, an icon that many would think of as immortalized in a culture where the borders between the entertainment industry and the political system only seem increasingly blurred, dies a very real death on film, but

simultaneously the moment is immediately symbolic. *The Eternal Frame* addresses the doubleness of the moment by quoting it endlessly through performing it.

<div align="center">*IV*</div>

Quoting the Zapruder film enables artists to address not only the Kennedy assassination specifically, but also contemporary visual culture more generally. The latter seems to be of more importance than the former, not least in the case of *The Eternal Frame*. There are pictures, W. J. T. Mitchell points out, that "refer to themselves," that "are used to show what a picture is." He calls them "meta-pictures."[27] These often show us the "representation of representation," and Mitchell considers such pictures capable of "picturing theory," of addressing pictures and picture-making in a theoretical way. [28] Among his examples is the Velázquez painting *Las Meninas*, an "encyclopedic labyrinth of pictorial self-reference."[29] As a piece that presents to us a simulation of the recording of documentary images, *The Eternal Frame* is as labyrinthic as the classical painting: it displays frames within frames, and re-situates the struggle of historical interpretation in a genuinely visual sphere. It addresses what Bal refers to as the central questions of visuality: "what happens when people look, and what emerges from that act"?[30]

The Eternal Frame suggests that we look to the past and simultaneously keep in mind the present in our considerations of "the image" and our shifting notions of it. It does so by performing what I would call "meta-quoting." Looking to the past in this sense means undertaking something like an archeological quest, acknowledging the fact that there is always another layer of images to be found. For on the surface, *The Eternal Frame* is a documentary film about a performance in Dealey Plaza on August 10, 1975, but we understand soon enough that it is not what could be considered a conventional documentary. Instead, it is more a film of all the events related to the performance, including those that lead to it, and some that followed it. In fact, *The Eternal Frame* turns out to be not merely about the recording of the assassination, but also about Kennedy's life and death

as image-performer, about a performance group dealing with that topic simultaneously through performance and film, and about the response they meet when acting as well as projecting. It is thus a film about theater, politics, and visuality, suggesting an uneasy relationship between those spheres; significantly, it achieves such a thing exactly by engaging its spectator in an experience that is neither entirely performance, nor film, nor documentary, and at the same time all of these. Clear-cut distinctions collapse. Insisting that what happens as well as emerges is always conditioned by a frame that is eternal, *The Eternal Frame* demonstrates the *game* to be eternal as well, so that the site in which the image is played out can be made visible in a new way before our eyes every time we watch.

<center>*V*</center>

Indeed, the exposition of *The Eternal Frame* invites us to consider its extensive quotation as a phenomenon that preceeds the era of the recorded image, one that can be traced "throughout the last several hundred years of Western visual representation."[31] Before we encounter the images of the Zapruder film, a statue of Kennedy's head that rests on an unseen table against a black background is being abruptly zoomed in, suggesting an analogy between the gaze and the bullet both aimed at Kennedy's head.[32] A voice over declares solemnly, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States has been the victim of an assassination." The statement is followed by audible response, by sighs of disbelief, and then by the copy of the Zapruder film, announcing death in its own way, silently reminiscent of some reel from an earlier era in the history of the recorded image, when gesture was everything, and not a sound was to be heard. We recognize that the images are not 8 mm, but a videocopy thereof, not only by the images we see, but also by the fact that they are dated graphically, NOVEMBER 22, 1963.

Etymology teaches us that the word "image" could once mean "statue," and thus The Eternal Frame invites recognition of how our conceptions of representation have always been shifting.[33] When

meanings of "image" in Latin began to appear gradually in English, it was first as "mental picture," "impression" or "idea," and "from that the later meaning of an impression that a person, institution, product etc. presents to the public, as in the phrase public image" developed. What draws the gaze to the statue is what draws it to the body in the car. The statue is a plastic expression, sculptural, spatial, but the images of it (as well as of the body in the car) are remediated as textual, we see them on a screen. By connecting these meanings of "image" in the exposition, and simultaneously opening up a gap between them, The Eternal Frame indeed reminds us what Abraham Zapruder really intended to record: John F. Kennedy, the "image" of celebrity, in its many shapes. The statue places Kennedy's head in a line that proceeds it, of heads found imporant enough to be given form through sculpture, and its function in the narrative is as keynote. As once celebrity invited a pose that was sculptured, it today invites a pose that is recorded. Zapruder, The Eternal Frame suggests, wanted for once to cast a star in his home movie, the contemporary version of a statue on the mantelpiece. When The Eternal Frame becomes a game, it is eternal in the way that it teases out new meanings of the word "image" in the narrative for us to consider.

When the film connects the image-making of Kennedy's life with that of his death explicitly, by adjoining the opening shot of the statue with the copy of the Zapruder film, the implication is that the public persona of Kennedy, "the Kennedy image," differed from that of earlier presidents in the way that it more than anything became "a product, an image designed both to express and elicit desire."[34] The consequences of that desire were unprecedented. Any consultation with biography or history confirms such a thing; not only did Kennedy recognize the latent power of images as such, equally important was his ability to grasp the *wider* implications of the power of an emerging imperative to visualize. That imperative brought visitors to Dealey Plaza in order to film and photograph him then, and indeed still brings visitors there today. Kennedy understood that his public image could be designed like cultural artefacts, but his success did not depend merely on the projection of recorded images, he also seemed to live

his life accordingly, as performer, and developed "various personae." He lived his life as an actor in the "filmed century," and died while acting. Thus, the impulse to project the "Kennedy image" was strategic, but the playfulness involved also betrays its genuine and particular artistry: in the course of a relatively brief period of time, the Kennedy team[35] developed a distinct iconography through consistent imaging—but also a new kind of performance, to the degree that his life has been referred to by a biographer as "a work of performance art."[36] The success of the Kennedy image, then, depended on this double quality: it had to be *performed* as well as *filmed*, it was acted, recorded, and watched on a grand scale.

When The Eternal Frame succeeds as the preposterous history of the recording of an assassination, it is because its makers realize what constituted the pull of Kennedy imaging. Its quoting, however, does not merely place what came after (The Eternal Frame) before what came first (the Zapruder film), it allows Dealey Plaza as well as any narrative about the asssasination to be recognized as sites of an ongoing struggle of interpretation.

Notes
[1] Richard B. Stolley, "Zapruder Rewound." Life (September 1998): 43.
[2] Ant Farm and T. R. Uthco, *The Eternal Frame*. 1975. The film has not been commercially released, but it has been widely exhibited. In 2004 the Berkeley Art Museum presented a retrospective exhibition, "Ant Farm 1968-1978," which toured internationally. A DVD release coincided with the exhibition tour, but it does not contain *The Eternal Frame* (Ant Farm Video, Facets Video, 2003).
[3] Roland Barthes's *Image-Music-Text* is still a classic on this subject (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977).
[4] The story is accounted in numerous articles and books. Although most of these versions are more or less similar, they vary slightly in the more insignificant details. See Richard B. Trask, *Pictures of the Pain: Photography and the Assassination of John F. Kennedy* (Danvers, Mass.: Yeoman Press, 1994); Image of an Assassination: a New Look at the Zapruder Film, a documentary film (Orlando Park, Ill.: MPI Video, 1998); and the well-researched and meticulously detailed David R. Wrone, The Zapruder Film:

Reframing JFK's Assassination (Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 2003). Trask and Wrone conclude differently on the implications of the images of the Zapruder film for what happened when Kennedy was killed. Whereas Trask's analysis suggests Oswald acted alone, Wrone's analysis suggests otherwise. What is of interest here is their accounts of Zapruder filming, which do not differ significantly.

[5] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Transl. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968): 217-251. For a comprehensive discussion of the essay, see Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Michael Marrinan, Mapping Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Digital Age (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

[6] Todd Gitlin, *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwhelms our Lives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001).

[7] "Each act of mediation depends on other acts of mediation. Media are continually commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media." David Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999): 55.

[8] For a detailed account of the film's history, see Wrone's book.

[9] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994): 11-34. With reference to Richard Rorty's Philosophy and the Mirror Mitchell proposes that the pictorial turn follows "the linguistic turn."

[10] Joel Black, *The Reality Effect: Film Culture and the Graphic Imperative* (New York: Routledge, 2002): 1.

[11] Tom Mullin, "Livin' and Dyin' in Zapruderville" (*Cineaction* 38, 1995): 12.

[12] Black, *Reality Effect*, 1.

[13] Ibid., 30.

[14] Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999): 1.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.: 6.

[17] Ibid.: 6-7.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003): 89.

[20] Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the Aids Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997): 29.

[21] Bolter and Grusin's Remediation offers an extensive consideration of the implications of such re-representation.

[22] Sturken, *Tangled*, 32.

[23] Bruce Conner's Report (1965) is a good example; see Art Simon's thoughtful analysis in *Dangerous Knowledge: The JFK Assassination in Art and Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992). Where Conner's film repeats a filmic sequence, The Eternal Frame repeats its recording as event.

[24] J. G. Ballard explored the implications of this in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, rev., exp., ann., ill. ed. (San Francisco: ReSearch, 1990).

[25] Walter Benjamin, "What is Epic Theater?" *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Transl. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968): 147-154.

[26] Ibid., 151.

[27] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 35.

[28] Ibid.: 63.

[29] Ibid.: 58.

[30] Bal, "Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture" (*Journal of Visual Culture* 2, no. 1 2003): 5.

[31] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 11.

[32] Figurative ivory carvings believed to be 30 000 years old were reported found in a cave in southwestern Germany in 2003 (Rex Dalton, "Lion Man Takes Pride of Place as Oldest Statue," in *Nature News Service* September 4, 2003. <http://www.nature.com/nsu/030901/030901-6.html>.

[33] Robert K. Barnhart, *Concise Dictionary of Etymology* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), s.vv. "image." An account of the various meanings of "image" can be found in the introduction to W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986).

[34] John Hellmann, *The Kennedy Obsession: the American Myth of JFK* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997): ix.

[35] The "Kennedy team" remains a loosely defined group, but Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy's speech writer, and press secretary Pierre Salinger

would be key figures. A number of photographers and filmmakers came to surround Kennedy almost constantly.

[36] Geoffrey Perret, Jack: *A Life Like No Other* (New York: Random House, 2001): 354.

Rip Van Winkle on the Stage: Myth and Icon of American Origins

Nassim W. Balestrini

Let me remind you of the famous story about a henpecked husband and father of two children who is singularly popular with every creature except for his wife and who prefers squirrel hunting, drinking, and Dutch colonial *Gemütlichkeit* to laboring on his farm. One of his excursions into the Catskill Mountains leads to the encounter with a strange creature shouldering a keg, and his good-natured willingness to help carry a load which promises exhilarating spirits results in his twenty-year sleep. Rip Van Winkle's return to post-revolutionary American village life on election day threatens to destroy his belief in his identity and in the stability of his happy-go-lucky world. After a brief uproar on account of Rip's supposed loyalist leanings, he returns to his old ways and toasts George Washington as willingly as he had toasted George III. Thus goes Washington Irving's tale of 1819, which brought him fame in England, on the continent, and at home among Americans who were eagerly searching for the moorings of their cultural identity.

The reception history of Irving's story and of his *œuvre* in general fostered the view of the author as a benign bachelor whose humorous tales for the entire family confirmed American values and traditions. Only since the 1980s have literary scholars studied Irving as a critic of the sociopolitical conditions of the 1820s.[1] But among the general public and in histories of American literature, he has remained the slightly sentimental, chuckling teller of tall tales from America's colonial past.

An important indicator of Rip Van Winkle's particular appeal is the immense number of stage adaptations of Irving's story since the mid-1820s—adaptations into spoken dramas with or without music, into operas and operettas, into plays or operettas for children, most recently in 1991. Also, the familiarity with the original narrative and with its most famous play versions inspired burlesques and parodies

which range from a play in Pennsylvania Dutch to a blackface minstrel show sketch. I have located the texts of over thirty adaptations and have found references to about six dozen plays, libretti, and related stage shows. Here, I am going to focus on a particular stage adaptation which continues to be remembered and celebrated today.[2]

Joseph Jefferson Becomes Rip Van Winkle

The career of the actor Joseph Jefferson III (1829–1905), the offspring of an American family of actors, cemented the interpretation of Irving's tale as possessing a heart-warming, yet somewhat piquant appeal to people of all ages. Just as critics have attempted to relate Irving's biography to his most famous fictional character, Jefferson consciously fostered a public image based upon the true embodiment of Rip's laudable qualities and the use of his less attractive features for humorous entertainment. His particular transformation of Irving's Rip merged with his own artistic and social status as an actor who, despite his association with the socially not accepted theatrical world and with the comic rather than the tragic genre, won the hearts of the American public and impressed them with ostensibly retaining his rustic simplicity after he had become a wealthy man. As his recent biographer Arthur W. Bloom writes, "Jefferson's lifestyle displayed the ambivalence of later nineteenth century America. He lived in the midst of romantic rusticity, but he lived in baronial splendor."[3] Similar to the actor's country boy image, which cohered with depictions of Irving as a representative of the hearty and wholesome rural America, Jefferson's insistence on the poetic and fairy-tale elements of his recreation of "Rip Van Winkle" fulfils the analogous function of enveloping controversial elements within the veils of aesthetic appeal.

Joseph Jefferson created a legend about the genesis and distinct characteristics of his *Rip Van Winkle*. The setting and the occasion of this creative process romanticize his artistic inspiration as well as his aspirations as a man who wants to 'make it' in the world.[4] In his widely read autobiography,[5] the discovery of Irving's story constitutes part of his desire "to be a star if I could."[6] Once Jefferson had recog-

nized his ability to make audiences both laugh and cry, he sought another role that would allow him to achieve the same effect: "I was looking for a myth—something intangible and impossible" (169).[7] Without explaining that his father had played Rip (ca. 1838–1840) and that he himself had played the role of Knickerbocker alongside his half-brother Charles Burke's Rip,[8] Jefferson describes his musing during a family vacation in an idyllic Pennsylvania village in the summer of 1859—the perfect rural setting for the development of a stage character like his Rip Van Winkle. In accordance with his desire for fame, he claims that reading a statement in which Irving applauds Jefferson's skill as an actor inspired him to re-read the story.[9] While Jefferson eventually does acknowledge the existence of earlier dramatizations, he first dismisses them, then qualifies this statement by saying that "Burke's play and performance were the best" (170). By opting for a three-act (instead of a two-act) version,[10] Jefferson intended to

> separate the poetical from the domestic side of the story. But by far the most important alteration was in the interview with the spirits. ... I arranged that no voice but Rip's should be heard. ... I was quite sure that the silence of the crew would give a lonely and desolate character to the scene and add to its supernatural weirdness. …. from the moment Rip meets the spirits of Hendrick Hudson and his crew I felt that all colloquial dialogue and commonplace pantomime should cease. It is at this point in the story that the supernatural element begins, and henceforth the character must be raised from the domestic plane and lifted into the realms of the ideal. (171, 172-73)[11]

Transplanting Rip to an "ideal" level complements the focus on the star actor who wants to enthrall his audience single-handedly.

After the failure of his first version,[12] Jefferson asked Dion Boucicault (1822–1890)[13] to revise the play. This new version premiered at the Adelphi Theatre in London on 4 September 1865 (Quinn 1:332), in New York on 3 September 1866, and in Boston on 3 May 1869.[14] While he continued to appear in other roles, Jefferson was most popular in his impersonation of Rip. Eleven months before his death, Jefferson presented his final public performance as Rip Van Winkle on 2 May 1904 at a matinee in Paterson, New Jersey.[15]

Boucicault's advice to Jefferson reflects the theater practitioner's experience of working will well-worn paradigms of popular plays. Instead of acknowledging the role of financial viability and wide-spread appeal, the equally well-versed actor Jefferson characterizes his own approach as that of a poet who wants to add "human interest" (173) to Rip's story. Once Jefferson asked him to revise the play, Boucicault claims to have suggested: "Suppose we sweep aside Washington Irving, and make *Rip* a young, buoyant ne'er-do-well, with a young wife and young child. Let him be the play-fellow of all the children, the lover of all the girls, a village bohemian. Let us carry that character through the first and second acts, and bring him out in the third aged in appearance, but fresh in heart, after his long sleep."[16] Jefferson, however, does not mention the question of age; he stresses that the play is to evade realism and instead capture its audience through its "poetry and fairy-tale element" (Jefferson, *Autobiography* 336). Following Boucicault's suggestion, the play presents young Rip as the great favorite of children and dogs and as a spirited dancer who can lift up and whirl around the village girls (I.i), but Jefferson's perspective on the final act transcends Boucicault's initial idea, as the following analysis will illustrate.

In short, the four-act version of Jefferson's play first introduces the conflict between Rip and his wife (triggered by Rip's drinking and his refusal to provide for his family) as well as the conflict between Derrick and his debtors, such as Nick Vedder (the innkeeper) and Rip. In contrast to this tense opening, Rip's entry establishes his carefree attitude, his love of children and dogs, and his disarming and heartwarming effect on others. The motif of Rip's toast clashes with his obviously unrealistic promise to stop drinking. The second act, which is set in and around the Van Winkle home, begins with a thunderstorm. Rip's daughter and Nick's son fearfully relate the myth of Henry Hudson's ghostly crew and its supposed return every twenty years. Noisy verbal and physical struggles between the inebriated Rip and his enraged wife abound in comic and melodramatic effects, only to culminate in Rip's departure. The brief third act presents the encounter between Rip and the Hudson crew. In the fourth act, Rip

wakes up, finds himself greatly aged, and returns to his village. Eventually, he and his family celebrate a happy conclusion to their trials.

Besides Boucicault's input, Jefferson integrated ideas from earlier drama versions and made significant changes with regard to plot and characterization.[17] Most importantly, he excluded politics and specific events in American history and rather focused on Rip as the star of the show and on his domestic situation. Rip's family life then becomes the arena for the conflict between evil villainy and good-natured roguishness. Jefferson uses sentimental *topoi* as well as features known from temperance plays, but he exempts Rip from any necessity to change his ways, because his consistently appealing character implies that he deserves empathy. Instead, Rip's wife—Gretchen Van Winkle—and Derrick figure as the villains,[18] only one of whom is reformed. Rip's daughter represents a sentimental victim until the melodramatic reversal of affairs makes her a happy bride-to-be. Consequently, her prospects confirm the social order as much as Rip's return to his now sanctioned habits rejects reform on his part.

Jefferson establishes sentimental patterns early in the play. The opening scene portrays Gretchen and her six-year-old daughter, Meenie,[19] as dejected figures, bent by work and worries: Dame Van Winkle appears as a washerwoman with her daughter beside her, thus prophesying Meenie's fate through her own pain inflicted by mammon and drink. Importantly, Gretchen makes Rip's tempter, Derrick, responsible for Rip's habits and for her own predicament: she explains that ten years ago most of the village belonged to Rip; in the meantime Derrick has corrupted Rip by lending him money and encouraging him to drink; and now Derrick owns most of Rip's former property, even Nicholas Vedder's tavern, that is, the place where Rip drinks and socializes instead of working. Thus, by making a person outside the Van Winkle family the real villain, the play diverts the impetus towards moral reform from the fun-loving Rip to the cunning Derrick, who eventually threatens all Van Winkles.

In addition to placing the villain outside the family, Jefferson revises the character of sentimental partings and reunions.[20] Rip's departure from his family home as well as his return to the village cast

him as a victim. In contrast, the suffering wife sends her husband away, because she cannot control her temper—she thus does not represent the silently suffering sentimental heroine. Upon his return twenty years later, she is still in the process of repenting her irascibility and gladly acquiesces to Rip's wishes. Jefferson's manipulation of the expectations which sentimental literature and temperance plays raise concerning social change and individual morality may explain the seeming inability of nineteenth-century audiences and critics to firmly place Rip in a moral spectrum. Nostalgia for a long-lost idyll and comic effects nullify the didactic impetus.

Emotional appeal veils the protagonist's responsibility for the disastrous effects of financial dependence and drink. As a first step, Jefferson reveals the contrast between the Van Winkles' formerly romantic bond and the current state of their marriage. Gretchen describes the wives and children of drinkers as being treated and as living like dogs. As if to exculpate Rip and vindicate her own desperate action, she thus prepares the audience for her choleric treatment of Rip's dog and for her expulsion of Rip from her house, which triggers Rip's—or rather Jefferson's—famous question: "Why, Gretchen, are you goin' to turn me out like a dog?" (419).[21] Jefferson thus instrumentalizes Irving's termagant Dame Van Winkle to replace the stereotypical female victim of sentimental fiction and of temperance plays with the expelled husband as victim.[22] The emotional appeal of Rip's exclusion from home and hearth thus overrides rational judgment of Rip's previous conduct. The addition of an implicit love triangle to the conflicts concerning money and alcohol abuse further stresses the star-crossed romantic attachment between Rip and Gretchen: the audience finds out that ten years ago Gretchen could have married Derrick; she hated his "miserly ways" (406) and wed Rip out of love.

The earliest stage adaptations of Irving's tale include a subplot which adds to the suspense of the melodramatic ending. One of the villagers, encouraged by his corrupt and money-loving son or nephew, persuades Rip to sign a contract in which he agrees to marrying his daughter to said son or nephew, unless the contract is cancelled within twenty years' time. What Rip does not know is the fact that his daugh-

ter is going to inherit a large sum from a wealthy aunt—which is the prize the prospective groom is after.

Jefferson modifies this contract motif in a manner which allows Rip to emerge as a shrewd hero, a hero of swift reasoning coupled with moral superiority over his antagonist, Derrick. When Derrick's nephew, Cockles,[23] arrives with a letter from his employer—a lawyer—Derrick realizes that, unknowingly, Rip has merely mortgaged rather than sold his land to Derrick. As Derrick owes the lawyer money, he thinks that he must make Rip sign a contract which would remedy his previous oversight. Thus, in Jefferson's version, the original contract between Derrick and Rip relates to financial dealings, not to Rip's daughter's future marriage. Only in the last act does the audience learn that Derrick has married Gretchen and that he wants Meenie to wed Cockles rather than the virtuous man she loves. At the end, Derrick and Cockles are defeated by their own plot when Rip produces the unsigned contract.

Like other adapters, Jefferson excludes Rip's son. In Irving's story, Rip junior is a copy of his father in terms of raggedness and laziness. Jefferson avoids such criticism of hereditary eccentricity, as his Rip Van Winkle must be an American mythical hero. Consequently, he depicts Gretchen as deservedly suffering for her treatment of Rip. In contrast, Meenie suffers undeservedly. In order to fulfill audience expectations and to equip Rip's return after his magic sleep with the necessary surprise effects, Jefferson complements Meenie with Nick's son, Hendrick. Antedating the Horatio Alger rags-to-riches ideology, Hendrick leaves the village in order to make a fortune and return to marry Meenie. The heart-breaking news of Hendrick's death at sea turns out to be wrong, and he returns in time to save Meenie.

Instead of adopting the hereditary laziness of the Van Winkle men as found in Irving's story, Jefferson presents Hendrick as a beacon of hope for a better generation of American men and husbands.[24] Education and a higher moral stance distinguish Hendrick both from the illiterate Rip and from his tavern-owning father. Only once Hendrick has read the contract to Rip and has thus revealed Derrick's

trickery does Rip decide never to sign the document. By implication, Hendrick saves the entire Van Winkle family from poverty, and he is determined to shun alcohol and to make more of his talents than his father (411).

In the final act, Jefferson drives home the point of Gretchen's transformation and the acceptability of Rip's habits: when the aged Rip appears in the village, Gretchen does not recognize him as her former husband. Mellowed by remorse and suffering under her second husband, Derrick, she invites the poor old man to her home to have a meal. She completes her characters reversal once she has recognized Rip, as she then encourages him to do as he pleases and as she "offers Rip [a] cup" (431) filled with an alcoholic beverage. Thus, Rip is not only a wealthy landowner at the end of Jefferson's play; he also reigns supreme in his household and indulges in his favorite pastime. Some of Jefferson's contemporaries criticized Gretchen's approval of Rip's drinking, which stands in stark contrast to her earlier condemnation of alcohol. In his autobiography, Jefferson relates that Harriet Beecher Stowe once asked him why Rip accepted the cup in the final scene. The actor replied: "Should *Rip* refuse the cup the drama would become at once a temperance play. ... it would take all the poetry and fairy-tale element completely out of it" (336).

This argument neither explains Gretchen's decision to offer the cup, nor does it render the play more coherent or logical. The celebration of Rip's return to unexpected fortunes rather goes hand in hand with the melodramatic tradition of a good heart rewarded—which, however, only makes sense, if Rip's goodness outweighs the havoc his drinking has wrought within his family. Despite the popularity of the play, critics continued to point out the paradox of praising Rip's good-heartedness without criticizing his "drunkenness, moral degradation and heartlessness."[25] Jefferson rejected such criticism as well as any sympathy which actresses impersonating Gretchen wanted to evoke. He is quoted as having instructed an actress whose portrayal of Gretchen he considered insufficiently shrewish as follows: "The little details of *Gretchen's* sufferings and all the things which grow out of *Rip's* wrong relationship with society are unimportant compared with

the great human study of a lovable ne'er-do-well who has become a living personality to the majority of American readers" (Bloom 124).

As indicated, the reversal of the attitude towards the effect and acceptability of Rip's drinking determines the ending of the play. Jefferson's concept of a poetical play disagrees with the logic of Irving's story in favor of keeping Rip the star of the show.[26] For instance, in act III Rip acknowledges his awareness of the Hudson myth. Yet, he neither recognizes the dwarf with the keg nor Hendrick Hudson, who invites him to share a drink. In Irving's tale, Rip remembers "figures in an old Flemish painting" (Irving, "Rip Van Winkle" 34) but does not identify the historical personages. Also, before he has grasped the twenty-year gap, Jefferson's Rip thinks that his daughter is six years old upon his return to the village, while he wonders whether his wife is alive after one night's absence (Jefferson, *Rip Van Winkle* 425). As in the encounter with the ghosts, wishful thinking determines Rip's response. He desires the specters' liquor as much as he nostalgically yearns for his daughter. The actor's insistence on the poetical and absolutely non-realistic quality of the play after Rip's encounter with the ghosts appears misplaced with regard to the final scene in which Rip triumphs not on a poetic, but on a plainly social and material level. The phenomenon of Jefferson as Rip indicates that here two myths— the personality of the fictional character and of his impersonator— merged and reinforced each other. Jefferson's argument concerning the poetic and mythical quality of his play becomes his license for the portrayal of a character who stands above real-life norms, even if Jefferson did all in his power to make this character a "living personality" in the minds of his audience.[27]

Critical and Creative Responses to Jefferson's Rip

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century theater critics are not primarily concerned with discussing the relationship between Irving's story and Jefferson's play. Rather, they focus on the actor's achievements and on the audience's reactions. Interestingly, some critics' comments on

characterization in the play version recall, perhaps inadvertently, assessments of Irving's work and character.

Critics convinced of Jefferson's unique achievement use two central arguments: the superiority of his play and performance to Irving's story as well as the actor's lovable character. From these writers' perspective, Irving's tale is a mere trifle which Jefferson raised to lofty heights of spirituality and inspiration.[28] In 1867, L. Clarke Davis goes so far as to claim that "In the play of 'Rip Van Winkle,' the scant material of Irving, borrowed by him from the German, is eked out by the skill of the dramatist into a play of moderate excellence, but admirably adapted to display Mr. Jefferson's peculiar powers."[29] Later in the article, Davis emphasizes Jefferson's acting as the superior creative act:

> Mr. Jefferson evolved and developed the character of Rip Van Winkle from a purely poetic conception, that had no existence except in the mind of the dramatist and in the genius of his interpreter. Its humor, pathos, and passion were, until Mr. Jefferson's rare talents moulded them into shape, dim and intangible as Irving's weird legend, or as the mists that enwrapped the sullen Catskills. (757)

Writing in 1894, William Winter hyperbolically projects exoticism, sentiment, detailed characterization, and a romantic poet-protagonist into Jefferson's *Rip Van Winkle*:

> The story of Rip Van Winkle is suffused with the wildness of gypsy life, and it arouses the imagination at the same time that it touches the heart. The familiarity and the ascendancy with which, in the contemporary mind, it has been endued, are attributable less to Washington Irving's sketch than to the influence of the actor, by whom the name of Rip Van Winkle has been written on the tablet of human affection, all over the world. Irving's sketch, while felicitous both in atmosphere and style, is but a faint and dim foreshadowing of Jefferson's vital creation. The regnancy of Rip Van Winkle, the fact that the character has become a part of actual life, is due to the stage. It had existed for centuries: it's never really lived until it was vitalised by the dramatic art. (Life and Art of Joseph Jefferson 173-74)

Winter then provides a brief overview of earlier dramatizations to prove that while "No thought, in particular, was expended by him [Irving] upon the character," playwrights and especially actors toiled to

turn "Irving's vagabond ... 'a thirsty soul,' who haunts taverns" into "the romantic and poetic vagabond of Jefferson. .... The hero of the sketch is an amiable sot: the Rip embodied by Jefferson is a dream-like, drifting, wandering poet of the woods" (174-75).[30] Winter wrote his narrative on the Jefferson family during Joseph Jefferson's life-time, and the eulogistic, even hagiographic, style conveys his agenda of elevating both the art and the artist of the theater.[31]

All critics describe the appeal of Jefferson's personality in combination with his characterization of Rip, even if—as the twenti-eth-century historian Barnard Hewitt acknowledges—the play is "a piece of dramatic carpentering, episodic, feebly constructed, and where it embroiders on the original plot completely conventional."[32] Jefferson's charisma then determined especially the contemporary opinions on Rip Van Winkle's 'real' character—a character which re-places the unpleasant aspects of satire with a sentimentalized romanti-cism for the common man. Jefferson's acting rather than the character he portrays became the object of admiration.

Because of its popularity, Jefferson's play invited parodies which banked on the audience's familiarity with the outline of Rip Van Winkle's story and with Jefferson's performance. As a result, bur-lesques also contributed to keeping Rip on the minds of English thea-ter-goers and to making Rip part of American everyday culture, espe-cially in the post-Civil War period. These parodies reduce plot and characterization to their basics, in order to then blow details out of proportion and to present a tour de force of allusions to contemporary theater culture. For instance, Rip Van Winkle functions as a vehicle for the battle of the sexes and for parodies of "high brow" culture, es-pecially of Shakespeare plays and of opera.[33] It is important to point out that the presence of Irving's tale at this extreme end of the enter-tainment spectrum is only part of the picture. Rip Van Winkle had entered the world of opera during the antebellum era, that is, before Jefferson's play, and Irving's protagonist has continued to reappear in dramatizations with or without music ever since.

Conclusion

Joseph Jefferson III successfully developed a mythical character that appeared both "intangible" and "impossible," as projected in his autobiography. He captured the imagination of generations of Americans who shared the desire for an American past peopled with archetypes that can be connected to national origins. Rip Van Winkle's supernatural experience may have been "impossible"; the waves of sympathy he triggered through comedy and sentimental appeal made him "intangible." Rip's good heart offsets all shortcomings and sanctions types of behavior which replace Benjamin Franklin's strict timetable and list of virtues with personal liberties that, in Rip's case, are rewarded in the same manner as hard work and restraint. Rip's lack of the latter capacities does not matter in light of Hendrick's model character and in light of the exaggerated villainy of others. This kind of mythmaking through the iconization of a fictional character—whose cultural validity is partially rooted in Washington Irving's national and international reputation—caters to an understanding of American colonial history which detracts attention from Puritan New England and the Founding Fathers and rather celebrates a lost world of, on the one hand, wild nature suffused with the ghosts of explorers and, on the other hand, pre-industrial and idyllic villages populated by good-hearted farmers. At the same time, this post-bellum Rip Van Winkle mythologizes the link to an American ruggedness which makes genteel expectations such as happy marriages and material comfort possible without stiff parlor conversation and without worries about class divisions. Ultimately, Jefferson's eccentric Rip warms the heart first, as a young man, through his youthful and manly spirit of independence and later through his grandfatherly forlornness and weakness, which he overcomes through the promise of a happy life as a prosperous patriarch.

Notes
[1] See especially Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky, *Adrift in the Old World: The Psychological Pilgrimage of Washington Irving* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988).

[2] This paper is an excerpt from my study of nineteenth-century American fiction adapted into drama and opera. One of the major chapters focuses on stage versions of "Rip Van Winkle" from the 1820s to the present. The book will be published by Peter Lang in the series "Mainzer Studien zu Amerikanistik" in 2005.

[3] Arthur W. Bloom, *Joseph Jefferson: Dean of the American Theatre* (Savannah: Beil, 2000) 146. Bloom also refers to Jefferson as "an icon of the Gilded age …" (xvii).

[4] Bloom describes Jefferson's story as "a Horatio Alger rags-to-riches saga of a young boy from a financially and socially impoverished family who rises to opulence and honor through hard work and his own abilities. It is the American story. Industry and talent bring wealth and success. In the end, the hero lives happily ever after, in opulent style, while still humbly attached to his rustic origins" (xvi). The same stereotype of the simple man who retains his closeness to his lowly origins was used in the United States during the first two decades of the twentieth century to promote Enrico Caruso (1873–1921) as a naturally talented opera singer incapable of artifice and arrogance (see John Dizikes, *Opera in America: A Cultural History* [New Haven: Yale UP, 1993] 397-99, 409). In the early 1850s, P. T. Barnum marketed the Swedish singer Jenny Lind (1820–1887) in a similar manner (see Dizikes 131-33).

[5] According to Bloom, Jefferson's 1888 autobiography was "immensely popular" (xvii). He also points out that Jefferson invented childhood memories which were to stress his allegiance to Abraham Lincoln. At the same time, the actor misrepresented the reasons for his absence from the United States during the Civil War and avoided any mention of Lincoln's assassin, the actor John Wilkes Booth, with whose family Jefferson was well acquainted (23, 110).

[6] Joseph Jefferson, *The Autobiography of Joseph Jefferson*, ed. Alan S. Downer (1888; Cambridge: Belknap, 1964) 168.

[7] In the introduction to the first published version of Jefferson's Rip in 1895, Jefferson even writes that "The Greeks knew him; the Germans made a home for him in their Hartz Mountains ...; and the genius of Washington Irving transplanted him to our own Kaatskills. Yates, Hackett, and Burke had each made him the hero of separate dramas and representations before I tried my hand upon the legend" (Rip Van Winkle as Played by Joseph Jef-

ferson: *Now for the First Time Published* [New York: Dodd, Mead, 1895] 9-10). Jefferson thus characterizes Rip as a universal and national, as an ancient and contemporary myth.

[8] Concerning Joseph Jefferson III's earlier experience with a different dramatization of "Rip Van Winkle," Odell writes: "We know that Burke was famous as Rip Van Winkle, long before his great half-brother, Joseph Jefferson, took up the part. Well, here, at the National, on January 7th [1850], are Burke as Rip, Jefferson as Knickerbocker ... There is something of an epic thrill in coming for the first time on an announcement of the appearance in that play of those two fratres nobiles." And he continues: "... Charles Burke returned (May 13th) as Rip Van Winkle, Jefferson still assisting as Knickerbocker …" (George C. D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, 15 vols. [New York: Columbia UP, 1931–1949] vol. 5:545, 549).

[9] "Irving had been to Laura Keene's Theatre [in New York] on September 30, 1858, and had seen him [Jefferson] act" (Bloom 89) the role of Goldfinch in *The Road to Ruin*, a comedy by Holcroft (see Bloom 425).

[10] Eventually, Jefferson created a four-act version by dividing act I into two acts. The version published in 1895 follows this pattern. On the original 1859 version which antecedes Boucicault's involvement, see Harold Brehm Obee, "A Prompt Script Study of Nineteenth-Century Legitimate Stage Versions of Rip Van Winkle," Diss. Ohio State U, 1961, 196-98. In his autobiography quoted above, Jefferson ignores the fact that some of the earlier versions also keep the spirits silent in Rip's presence.

[11] However, as will be discussed below, Rip's social and material situation at the end of the play raises doubts concerning this supposed exclusion of the domestic context.

[12] The manuscript of Jefferson's first version has not survived. Bloom indicates that the play was not successful (Bloom 90-92).

[13] The Dublin-born playwright Dionysus Lardner Boucicault wrote plays for London theaters as of 1837, also worked in France, and came to the United States in 1853 as an actor and writer. Of his 120 to 150 plays, *The Octoroon* (1859) is still frequently anthologized as an important antebellum play on racial prejudice. In addition to his popularity as a playwright and actor (especially in his Irish roles), Boucicault is remembered as fighting for copyright laws in order to improve the financial situation of playwrights.

[14] Moses wrongly claims that Jefferson and Boucicault started working on their version in 1861 (23). He also quotes Clark Davis's assessment as to who should receive credit for which parts of the play: "Act I.—Burke + Jefferson + Boucicault ending. Act II.—Jefferson. Act III.—Burke + Jefferson + ending suggested by Shakespeare's 'King Lear'" (Montrose J. Moses, Introduction, "Rip Van Winkle" [by Charles Burke], *Representative Plays by American Dramatists*, Vol. 3., ed. Montrose J. Moses [1921; New York: Arno, 1978] 17-26; 24). Jefferson confirms the allusion to King Lear (Jefferson, Autobiography 335). As indicated above, the Boucicault version as acted by Jefferson was first published in 1895.

[15] See Eugénie Paul Jefferson, *Intimate Recollections of Joseph Jefferson* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1909) 148.

[16] Dion Boucicault, "Leaves from a Dramatist's Diary," *North American Review* July 1889: 233. Jefferson's feelings concerning the London premiere of the play version as revised by Boucicault in 1865 recall the fate of many American actors and playwrights, for Jefferson considered success in London a secure path towards success in the United States (Jefferson, *Autobiography* 229-30). It is also interesting to note that Irving's Rip is indeed a relatively young man with small children, a man whom children and dogs love and whose selfless services all neighbors and their wives gladly accept (see Irving, "Rip Van Winkle," The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent., ed. Haskell Spinger, *Complete Works of Washington Irving 8* [Boston: Twayne, 1978] 28-42; 30). However, Irving's Rip does not appear as "the lover of all the girls," as envisioned by the playwright.

[17] As Boucicault's version of 1865 remains unpublished (Obee 198), I will base my comments on the play as developed further by Jefferson and as published under his name. For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to it as Jefferson's work, because critics agree that his acting and personality made the play what it is.

[18] On the villain in sentimental literature, see Winfried Herget, "Towards a Rhetoric of Sentimentality," *Sentimentality in Modern Literature and Popular Culture*, ed. Winfried Herget (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1991) 1-14; 5.

[19] In sentimental works, female or other victimized characters often bear names that stress their smallness and, thus, their vulnerability. The epitome of this phenomenon in American fiction is "little Eva" in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Meenie's name achieves this effect and

also complements the diminutive in her mother's name. Irving's decision not to give Rip's wife a first name defies any attempts at sentimentalizing her character in the original tale.

[20] On partings and reunions, see Herget, "Towards a Rhetoric of Sentimentality" 7.

[21] Obee points out that William Bayle Bernard, one of the "Rip Van Winkle" adaptors of the early 1830s, first developed "this turn of events … It is true that Boucicault strengthened the scene, at least it was stronger in the later Jefferson version, but the idea was originally Bernard's" (200).

[22] William W. Pratt's 1858 play *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room* (based on Timothy Shay Arthur's [1809–1885] 1854 novel *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, and What I Saw There*) bears significant similarities to Jefferson's drama, as the protagonist—Joe Morgan—, who has fallen prey to the insinuations of Simon Slade, does not heed his little daughter's entreaties to leave his tempter's bar. When the girl is injured, Joe vows to reform. The barroom owner dies at his son's hand, and the villagers shut down the saloon (see "Ten Nights in a Bar-Room," *Pasticcio and Temperance Plays in America*, ed. Dale Cockrell, *Nineteenth-Century American Musical* Theater 8 [New York: Garland, 1994] 115-81). Jefferson may have adopted the evil barroom owner and the young daughter into his dramatization, but neither does Rip's daughter die nor does Rip become a hero through moral transformation. Rather, the rustic fellow appeals to his audience by combining the jolly enjoyment of a communal drink (as stressed by his toast) with genuine love for his child. Thus, Gretchen figures as the antagonist who is 'morally reformed' into a submissive wife.

[23] A variant of the name "Cockles" occurs in Irving's "History of New York," in which the narrator compares the solitary fighter Peter Stuyvesant to "Horatius Cocles" (Washington Irving, "A History of New York: From the Beginning of the World to the end of the Dutch Dynasty," *History, Tales and Sketches* [New York: Library of America, 1983] 363-729; 716). Derrick's last name, Von Beekman, derives from the same book ("William Beekman, or rather Beckman" [663]).

[24] Hendrick's name, the Dutch variant of Henry which Irving also uses to transform the English explorer into an exclusively Dutch myth, contributes the Hendrick's characterization as a down-to-earth, virtuous, and courageous young man.

[25] Quote from a review in the *New York Times* of 17 December 1878 (see Bloom 125).

[26] One critic of the first London production remarked that twenty years are too short of a period for the massive change in Rip's appearance. Furthermore, Rip is the only character in the play who speaks in dialect, although all characters come from the same village (see Bloom 114-15).

[27] See Bloom's discussion of Jefferson's acting technique geared towards "produc[ing] the illusion of realism" (117) and "the illusion of psychological depth" (119) (for further details see 120-22).

[28] A less extreme variant of the same argument is Ludlow's claim that "the character, in my mind, as presented by Mr. Jefferson, was just what Washington Irving intended it to be" (Noah M. Ludlow, *Dramatic Life as I Found It* [1880; New York: Blom, 1966] 392).

[29] L. Clarke Davis, "Among the Comedians," *Atlantic Monthly* June 1867: 751. As Bloom points out, Davis was a friend of Jefferson's (Bloom 240). As in the case of Winter's account of Jefferson's life, which will be discussed below, Davis's praise needs to be read with his personal acquaintance with the actor in mind.

[30] Twentieth-century historians produced similar dismissals of Irving's source text. For instance, Wilson—who does not pursue the purpose of elevating the stage above fiction—presents an interpretation of Irving's story which ignores both the peritexts of the story and the context of the Sketch Book as a whole (Garff B. Wilson, *Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre: From Ye Bear and Ye Cubb to Hair* [Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973] 213-14).

[31] In her 1925 book with the telling title *The Romance of the American Theater*, Mary Caroline Crawford stresses that Jefferson heightened "the social and intellectual standing of the actor" (332) and supports this point by references to Jefferson's friendship with President Grover Cleveland and to Jefferson's two honorary master's degrees (332).

[32] Barnard. Hewitt, *Theatre U. S. A.: 1665 to 1957* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959) 202.

[33] These burlesques confirm Levine's analysis of parodies which were popular and which presupposed familiarity with their objects of ridicule (see Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* [Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988] 13-24). Also see the

following discussion of a mid-nineteenth-century burlesque of popular plays about the Pocahontas myth: William Brooks, "Pocahontas: Her Life and Times," *American Music* 2.2 (Winter 1984): 19-48.

Ideology and Art: Pocahontas in Three Early American Plays

Sämi Ludwig

"Pocahontas" is one of the most important icons in early American history; in many ways she is the first national allegory of the United States until the arrival of "Uncle Sam" after the Civil War (see Fiedler 65). This is why her representation has been important not only in poems and fictions but also in plays, the most public of art forms. As Michael Gilmore writes, the theater is "the most republican and propagandistic of the genres .... intimately tied to the civic sphere" (573). He suggests that "the theater was the closest to oratory and the world of men; it lagged behind the novel's identification with print and its receptivity to feminization" (573). This rootedness in the public domain turns the theater, and in our case early plays, into crucial manifestations of public significance, into vessels in which contemporary ideological issues are being negotiated. From a historical point of view, many of these old plays, especially if they deal with Indians, can provide crucial information on how the European settlers and the young United States saw themselves in a colonial and early postcolonial environment.

Unfortunately, early American drama is a sorely neglected field. Most English departments nowadays focus on fiction, maybe poetry, or film and popular culture, if they want to focus on values in the wider public domain. The teaching of American drama usually starts with the Nobel Prize-winner Eugene O'Neill—earlier plays are considered of little value: artificial realism, sentimental melodrama, closet drama, curiosities. The *Columbia Literary History of the U.S*. finds in them only "scant intrinsic literary interest" (Johnson 324). As a result of this, many of these plays are difficult to purchase in print nowadays. Teachable paperback collections for students are almost unavailable. Thus the Penguin collection *Early American Plays*, edited by Jeffrey Richards, is only sporadically available on the market.[1] If you are lucky to have a good library at your disposal, you can work with photocopies. This is a sad situation because many of these old plays deal with crucial issues: attitudes towards Indians, African

slaves, Europeans, suffrage, the Civil War, the West, the poor, alcoholism, the rich, the city, etc., etc. Here is the stuff on which one can build a civilization course. Some Americanists may know Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* (1787) in which he invents Jonathan the original Yankee, but most have never heard of Major Robert Roger's *Ponteach* (1766—a fascinating colonial play in which an English war hero who fought chief Pontiac finds himself torn between classicist literary clichés and a straightforward reporting of his frontier experiences) or of Moses Mordechai's *She Would Be a Soldier* (1809). The group of devotees to early American drama may be dedicated, but it is small.

My general point, which I also want to argue in this paper, is that we need not neglect aesthetics in order to appreciate many of these old plays, because many of them actively process the ideology of their own time. If we apply new historicist attitudes not only to early modern English drama and the "New American Studies" (which have mainly been preoccupied with fiction), but also to early American plays, we can find that they do very important cultural work. Moreover, that work happens not only, as Louis Montrose would suggest, "as a reciprocal concern with the history of texts and the textuality of history" (20), but also *in* the texts, in the very metaphors that define the conceptual structure of thought and argument. This is where cognitive linguistics (see Lakoff and Johnson) can be used to unpack ideology and analyze how certain images determine the very behavior of an icon under scrutiny. As I will show in my readings, "art" also influences "ideology."

The Pocahontas legend was from the very beginning connected with the theater. Richards writes that "people like Captain John Smith saw the New World as a theater on which to play their roles in history" (x).[2] He adds: "Captain Smith not only used stage language in his writing, but also fought a running battle in London with those who would mock his American exploits on the stage" (xi). Smith's is the founding text in a long series of representational elaborations of the Pocahontas myth that have tried to use this icon for their own purpose, a tradition of appropriation that has continued into modern times with the work of Whitman, Hart Crane, Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay,

John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*, multiple film productions and cartoons, best known among them the Disney Studios' *Pocahontas*.[3] From this wealth of material I have chosen to select three early plays as examples of the changing meaning of the Pocahontas icon, which has from the very beginning been unstable and contested. A comparative analysis of the different tellings of her life can therefore provide crucial insights into the changing value systems involved in the construction of American national identity. I will focus on different thematic points in each of the plays: on the theme of love in its different manifestations and ideological complications in James Nelson Barker, on strategies of symbolization made to justify the imperialist claims and entitlements of American nationalism in George Washington Custis, and on the destruction of the Pocahontas legend through parody in John Brougham.

"Werocomoco"

My first example is James Nelson Barkers *The Indian Princess; or, La Belle Sauvage. An Operatic Melo-Drame,* of 1808. This is the oldest stage version of the Pocahontas story—and it happens to be an opera. It was performed in New York, Charleston, Richmond, Baltimore, and even in London (Richards 110). Most surprisingly, the sheet music by John Bray (1782-1822) still exists and—even more surprising—there is an available recording by the Federal Music Society Opera Company conducted by John Balden. Listening to these tunes, which may to the layperson sound like early Italian opera with some Irish influences, gives one a better notion of the attitudinal sensibility and staging of this story.

In Barker's libretto Pocahontas personifies romantic feelings—already in the first encounter we find her sewing her bridal gown (124). Smith thanks her for his rescue with the exclamation: "Oh, woman! angel sex!" (134).[4] This emotional connection explains why, in his first encounter, John Rolfe tests whether Smith is really only "brother" to the princess: "Is Captain Smith dear to thee?" (139), and adds to Pocahontas' vocabulary the word "lover" by explaining: "I am

thy lover, dear princess" (140). She confirms this new self-concept: "If thou feelst the name as I do, call me as I call thee: thou shalt be *my* lover; I will be *thy* lover" (140). After having thus verbally rehearsed their roles, they kiss. However, their love is not primarily physical— Rolfe and Pocahontas speak together in elevated blank verse:

> ROLFE: To win thee from thy father will I come;
> And my commander's voice shall join with mine,
> To woo Powhatan to resign his treasure
> PRINCESS: Go then, but ah! Forget not—
> ROLFE: I'll forget
>   All else to think of thee!
> PRINCESS: Thou art my life!
>   I lived not till I saw thee, love; and now,
>   I live not in thine absence. Long, O! long
>   I was the savage child of savage Nature; (149)

There is more *Romeo and Juliet* in this encounter than an effort at miscegenation.

Substantial eroticism is delegated to the common folks in Barker, such as Pocahontas' lady-in-waiting, Nima, and the Irish foot soldiers who have come to America with the English masters. We find plenty of references to potatoes and their "beautiful brothers and plump sisters!" (123). This part of the stage action is full of sexual allusions and witty puns. Thus in one forest scene Robin sings loudly to overcome his fear and climbs on a tree when the Indians appear. Nima tells him that she takes him for a raccoon. To her question, "Are you a man?," Robin answers: "I'll convince you of it some day. Hark ye, my dear" (138). Or in a later scene Delaware, who has just recognized his niece Geraldine, who followed him to America, asks her maid: "Art of my blood?" Whereupon Larry answers for his girlfriend Kate: "No sir, she's of my flesh" (164). Significantly, Barker borrows from the more erotic elements in Smith's original, whose "women's entertainment at Werawocomoco" (*True Relation* 123 ff.) is told by Walter to his wife Alice:

> Her squawship's maids of honour were the masquers;
> Their masks were wolves' heads curiouly set on,
> And, bating a small difference of hue,

Their dresses e'en such as madam Eve had on
Or ere she eat the apple. (145)

During these "mad Bacchantes" a "beauteous Wolf-head … lit me
with her pine-knot torch to bedward" (146). What happened after-
wards remains in the dark: "… in this wilderness / The trees hang full
of divers colour'd fruit" (146). The "wilds of Virginia" (120) in Bar-
ker's opera are not really a place of danger, but much rather a kind of
"Forest of Arden" in which a group of love-sick Shakespearians are
frolicking.[5]

What is important in the narrative is that Pocahontas' romantic
infatuation makes her reject her Indian suitor. All creature of love, she
renounces bow and arrow and rejects the young Miami's hunting tro-
phies. The simple logic of her decision is stunning: She loves Rolfe—
"He is my lover; I am his lover" (141). Her identity is defined by this
new language of love, which reminds one in its simplicity of the dis-
course of Tarzan and Jane with inverted gender roles.

The complex contradictions of such a symbolic discourse of at-
traction are powerfully expressed in a statement made by the rejected
Indian suitor, who intends to eat up the heart of his rival: "Oh, my soul
hungers for the banquet; for then shall Miami feast on the heart of his
rival!" (154). We find in this imagery a symbolic inversion of Chris-
tian communion. The heart is recognized as the main rival. As the site
of Christian love it is to be destroyed and at the same time eaten up;
brotherly communion and community is impossible from the point of
view of the Indians, at least not on the conditions of the colonialists.
This kind of love is not a shared communion but a meal paid for by
the Indians. There is no equality—thus Nima tells Pocahontas about
being kissed by Robin: "Princess, white men are pow-wows. The
white man put his lips here, and I felt something—here—[*Putting her
hand to her heart.*]" (141). Again the heart imagery points to an un-
canny inversion in the manipulation of outside and inside.

Similarly, the medicine man in the opera observes: "Can the
enemies of your god be your friends? Can the children of another par-
ent be your brethren?" (153). His un-Christian argument actually an-
ticipates ideas of a kind critics have discussed much later in a post-

colonial discourse that deals with questions of "*nation*" and the symbolism of birth and group identity.[6] Barker here illustrates more than simple cannibalism; in his imagery, he deeply penetrates the conceptual metaphors which define the discourse of Pocahontas and illustrates how, in the rhetorical connections between love, conquering, and self-definition new realities are created. Significantly, the jealous Miami finally commits suicide because he cannot get Pocahontas.[7]

      Most significantly, Barker's opera ends with an unmasking scene in which two women disguised as men reveal their true identity. The guard Larry is confused by this young page who knows his girlfriend from Ireland so well that "all day we were together" and "close as two twin potatoes" (156). He goes, "Kiss me Kate," when he recognizes the disguise of his fiancée Katie Maclure, who has followed him to America. Couples are matching up to create harmony: Percy and Geraldine, Rolfe and Pocahontas, Walter and Alice, Larry and Katie, Robin and Nima. What is enacted here is a *gesture of familiarization* in which the known is recognized behind a foreign facade. The essence of home is confirmed and expanded. When the woman lover is an Other, her interiority is either defined by lower drives (Nima) or by the banal kind of colonizing language Pocahontas learns from Rolfe.

      Why is this love metaphor so important? Underwriting Barker's play is the basic gesture of the Pocahontas myth that the land, symbolized in the royal daughter, belongs to the white settlers as an act of her own choice. Hence the love metaphor is not as innocent as it seems, because it legitimizes colonization as a voluntary act of the virgin country herself. Through Rolfe's union with the princess it is possible to gain the Indian as an "adopted ancestor" in the "search for republican legitimacy in the new world" (Sollors 123). The Indian rival is not beaten by arms, but by the heart of the princess. This explains the course of history, the fact that America now belongs to the white people. The purity and formality of Pocahontas' love for Rolfe, which is mediated through duets of blank verse, indicates, moreover, that this marital union is to be considered of an abstract and allegorical nature and not as a model of racial amalgamation.

"Weorocomoco"

George Washington Custis' *Pocahontas; or, The Settlers of Virginia* defines itself as a "*national drama.*"[8] Written and performed two decades later (in 1830), it marks the imperialistic claims of the young American nation in much more ruthless ways. This manifests itself already on the arrival of the English settlers. Armor's arrow rather tends toward the language of hunting. Thus after a first, short encounter with Pocahontas and "the damsels of the savage court," John Rolfe exclaims: "What gone! why they have flitted away like fawns which start from the thicket to avoid the hunter's aim" (177). By comparing her to a deer, he invokes the hunting trophies of the former play's Indian braves rather than the discourse of love. Realizing Rolfe's infatuation, his companions already talk about owning the land, suggesting that "ye succeed your father-in-law Powhatan who they say is well-stricken in years and become king of these realms" (178). Master West is promised the "horse of state," and Master Percy "the viceregal seat in the government of the gold mountains" (178). "Allons, my noble vassals, allons," does Rolfe end the Act First. It is these kinds of maxims that motivate Custis' settlers.[9]

Particularly interesting is the scene of investiture in which Smith gives the Indian Chief Powhatan a crown and dresses him in a scarlet robe in order to make him a vassal of the king of England: "In the name of the most puissant James, I crown thee King. […] And I thus invest thee with the mantle of royalty" (179). This episode actually already occurs in John Smith's history.[10] The selection of the scene is remarkable because it is a *direct inversion* of what is supposed to have happened in the emblematic salvation scene of Smith by Pocahontas, a scene that since the 1970s many historians (foremost among them Philip Barbour) have associated with adoption rituals, coming to the conclusion that it probably had never been the intention of the Indians to execute Smith. Without himself understand this, he had participated in a political ritual and been made into a *werowance* of the Powhatan confederation, a kind of lower-level chief responsible for the colonists in Jamestown.

What is symbolized here is the competition of different discourses. Thus Powhatan responds: "I am also king; this is my land, you must come to me, not I to you" (179). Later the chief parodies this investiture by receiving Smith to his execution clad in the very same crown and mantle, "that I may receive the prisoner in the royalty of his own making" (189). Also his designated son-in-law, the brave Matacoran, thinks that this is an unnecessary ritual: "Why this idle pageantry of crowning him a king, who is a king already!" (180).

It is generally amazing to find that in a play so ideologically set against them, the Indians make some of the logically most convincing statements. Hence the same young warrior early on comments on the sentimental homesickness of a young colonist as follows: "[I]f you English so love your own country, why cross the wide sea to deprive the poor Indian of his rude and savage forests?" (173). In some Indian plays such negative statements by the negative figures often go beyond the control of the author. Thus Eugene Jones reports that some outspoken passages in *Metamora* got Edwin Forrest in trouble at a 1831 performance in Augusta, GA. The performance "received a storm of hisses," which made actor and manager realize that the "sentiment of the play was a positive protest against the policy which had deprived the Indians of Georgia of their natural rights and driven them from their homes" (66-67). Forrest was "openly charged with insulting the people of Augusta" (67). One lawyer is quoted: "Forrest believes in that d----d Indian speech, and it is an insult to the whole community" (67).

In this context one may wonder whether there is such a thing as an aesthetics of cursing in which the audience enjoys cleansing its own bad conscience. As Sollors writes: "Apparently, American audiences liked even the 'anti-white' curse scenes in the Indian plays—as if they had been blessings!" (124). He argues: "Inversions of curses into blessings come easily, as easily as transformations of ethnic slurs (such as 'Puritans') into sacred names" (124). One is reminded of our contemporary aesthetic tolerance of radicalism in which a daring rhetoric is often appreciated aesthetically but need not therefore be

taken seriously in the political sense. Criticism is coopted and the radical turns into a clownish entertainer. [11]

The Indian ancestor should be noble, courageous, and strong because these are qualities the settlers want to transfer onto themselves; yet at the same time, he has to be done away with because otherwise you cannot inherit his estate. Thus the Indian brave Matacoran finds his match in the old war horse Hugo de Redmond, whom he respects, letting him go without sword and shield but with a hand-shake (187). Later Hugo in turn spares the life of this "gallant enemy" (188). This suggests a compatibility of qualities. Still, Matacoran is rejected by Pocahontas. In in his "hopeless passion,"[12] he not only accepts his banishment from the American Republic but decides himself that he "will retire before them even to where tradition says, there rolls a western wave. There, on the utmost verge of the land," he wants to "erect his tumulus, crawl into it and die" (192). This statement is put into his mouth in 1830, the very year of President Jackson's "Indian Removal Bill" and the "Trail of Tears." It insinuates that the Indian is moving west out of his own will. An interesting element in this context is also the ancient tomb, anticipating his own, in which Matacoran and Powhatan conspire against the English. Its inscription "Madoc, 1170" points to "the first conquerors of this country" (183). This is Freneau's "Indian Burying Ground" with a twist. Not only are the Indians represented as dying out at a time when they are being killed, but the supposedly Christian dating also points to earlier colonization and thus questions any indigenous legitimation to land ownership. The decisive figure, the symbolic key to power, is Pocahontas. Matacoran had hoped to "receive the wreath from the hand of Pocahontas" (184)—an image which attributes to her a role that ultimately confirms the very symbolism of investiture favoring the English. For the English themselves, Pocahontas turns into a patron saint: an emblematic illustration of this can be found at the beginning of the third act, when Pocahontas introduces herself as "Pocahontas, the friend of the English" (185) and gains entrance into the English camp *because she is the watchword* they have chosen for themselves. Though she was not told, in her very identity she is a speech act that provides en-

trance. Her *key function* manifests itself metaphorically when the English in turn form a circle around her to defend her against the savage enemies. For them, the functions of inside and outside suspend each other.

We should also briefly mention comic elements in Custis's play which do, however, only come at the expense of the Indians. Thus Pocahontas' inquistive girl friend Omaya wants Namoutac, who has just returned from England, [13] to tell her about "English maidens"—what kinds of feathers they are wearing, and how they paint themselves on festive social occasions. We find here the motif of decadent fashion which at that time Americans usually applied to the English[14] projected onto the Indians. Wearing English clothes, the homecomer cannot again "become a son of Virginia" (176). Even the naming itself makes sure that this is not possible—Virginia is the name of the *colonized* new world.

Also as a warrior, Namoutac is a failure; in the wilderness, he is no match for Rolfe, with whom Omaya has to plead for the returning emigrant: "Oh, good Sir Cavalier, do spare poor Namoutac; his travels have turn'd his brain—he would not have behav'd so when he was only an Indian" (182). She observes that the contact with the English has made him demented. We find here an extension of the racist mulatto-motiv into a matter of degenerative intercultural contact.[15] The Indian can only be noble and brave *before* he has had contact with whites. As Berkhofer writes: "The authors of poems, plays, and novels generally conceived of the Indian as noble only before white contact or during the early stage of the encounter" (90).

The union between whites and Indians, the marriage of John Rolfe and Pocahontas, is only a minor issue in this "national drama." The emphasis is on the salvation of John Smith. Through plot manipulation, the *earliest* episode of the Pocahontas story is turned into the theatrical climax of the *last* act of the play. It ends with a scene in which the English all kneel down before Pocahontas, as if in front of a Madonna, and thank her, in parallel statements, for their rescue (Smith), for supporting England (west), for her personal love (Rolfe), and many other things. Rolfe is only *one* among the many adulators of

this national icon. Actually, we read in the preface that Master Rolfe was played by Mr. Ball, "a very young actor" (171)—which is another indication of his insignificance.

Significantly, it is Smith, who finally puts a golden chain around Pocahontas' neck, which she gladly accepts. This is a curious kind of wedding ring. Says the character Percy: "And bind two in thy golden shackle … and thou wilt unite the hands of those whose hearts have have long since been united" (191). Custis even makes Pocahontas say that she "will most cheerfully submit to wear the chain which binds her to the honour'd master of her fate, even tho' the chain were of iron instead of gold" (191). It is a chain Smith has received from "Charitza, the most peerless lady of the Old World," and now he gives it to Pocahontas in the New World (190). Like the eastern world, the western world shall be controlled by Europeans. What we have here is nothing less than an emblematic investiture into a gilded form of slavery.

Though Powhatan gets the closing words in the play, his voice has been usurped and his statements border on senility when he observes that "experience makes even an Indian wise" and is pleased to have the "privilege of giving away the bride" (192). As a history teacher he predicts a "long vista of futurity" of a "great and glorious American Empire, may we hope that when the tales of early days are told from the nursery, the library, or the stage, that kindly will be received the the national story of POCAHONTAS, OR THE SETTLERS OF VIRGINIA" (192). In this meta-commentary speaks the author. George Washington Custis offers us a masterpiece of dramatic manipulation, if we want to learn how literary images can justify political strategies. Even though there are some comic elements in it, our laughter in this play turns sour. This treatment of the Pocahontas story is no longer as light and innocent as Barker's opera was twenty years earlier.

"Woramocomoco"

In order to understand the further development of the Pocahontas figure on the American stage, we have to be aware that there is a

long history of the representation of Indians in the American theater, most famous among them John Augustus Stone's Metamora, whom the white settlers called King Philip, immortalized in the heroic performances of Edwin Forrest. Chief Logan is quoted in Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785); Tammany, the good Delaware chief, was celebrated in Julia Anne Hatton's opera and turned into the patron saint of the Tammany Society; Major Robert Rogers already wrote a play about Pontiac during his life time. Indians also appeared in many supporting roles, e.g., in Noah's *She Would Be a Soldier*—another opportunity for Edwin Forrest to stage himself. City folks were used to all of these images.

However, after the indigenous people, the real Indians, had been moved west by force, most of the contact on the east coast was with the images of Indians, with fantasy Indians of the imagination, or what Robert Berkhofer calls *The White Man's Indian*. With the approaching of the Civil War, the Indian became less important as a political topic and was replaced by discussions on slavery. Consequently, the heroic *image* of the Indian soon became the target of parodies, farces, and burlesques—a development which provided the American stage with a vital boost of creativity.

The grand master of this genre was the Irish immigrant John Brougham. Werner Sollors writes that "Brougham's burlesques have the markings of genius" (135). In 1847 he wrote *Metamora*, *The Last of the Pollywogs*, a parody on the most famous stage Indian. In the final scene the chief, played by Brougham himself, refuses to die. While the choir sings, "We're all dying, die, die, dying,/ We're all dying just like a flock of sheep," Metamora responds: "You're all lying, lie, lie, lying,/ You're all lying; I wouldn't die so cheap" … and decides to raise again from the dead: "Confound your skins, I will not die to please you" (quoted in Sollors 136). Here it is not the Indian who is made fun of but the image, the ridiculous cliché of the extinct noble savage. Behind the script a human being manifests itself who refuses to be a last Mohican—this is a man who wants to survive. Sollors comments: "While twentieth-century readers may misunderstand Brougham's broad humor, it actually humanized the Indian character

by portraying him in a less lofty manner. Brougham's burlesques, far from poking fun at the 'Indian character,' made audiences laugh at the imaginary Indian they had worshipped earlier" (136).

In 1855 Brougham wrote Po-Ca-Hon-Tas; Or, The Gentle Savage. An Original Aboriginal Erratic Operatic Semi-Civilized and Demi Savage Extravaganza being a Per-Version of Ye Trewe and Wonderfulle Hystorie of Ye Rennowned Princesse. This play stands for a further development and a third stage of the Pocahontas myth. It is a truly loose adaptation of the Pocahontas story, full of anachronisms, puns and the ironic negotiation of stereotypes and clichés. Thus in their conversations with John Smith, the Indians at Powhatan's Court quote chapter 5, section 3 of Hugo Grotius, the father of international law (1583-1645). And they speak Latin—"dum vivimus vivamus" (125). Degenerated to an advertising emblem, these Indians smoke the dhudieen, the Irish clay pipe, and fill the stage with smoke (126). This also has an influence on their politics: "Now that we have smoked ourselves to proper dizziness,/ Let us proceed at once to public business," states Powhatan, who was played by Brougham himself (125).

Significantly, Brougham experiments with questions of referentiality. Thus when the arrival of Captain Smith and his "band" is announced to Powhatan, he expects to see a "band" of minstrels. To his chagrin, he is being told that these strangers are from Castle Garden—which then was a newly-opened theater in the same district (126). *One* false referentiality (the mistrels) is replaced by *another* false referentiality (the arrival of actors). This way any effort to represent a unified and authentic reality on the stage, any attempt at realism, is made impossible. On the stage, historiography turns into a polyphonic projection. Yet Brougham leaves no sentimental illusions about the intentions of the colonists when he has Smith rhyme "My noble and approved good savage" to "we are come out here your lands to ravage" (129) and chase away the Indians with a gun shot (130). Instead of national heroes, as we would have it in Custis, here we get corrupt machine politicians, singing: "Grab away/ While you may;/ In

this game, luck is all,/ And the prize/ Tempting lies/ In the rich City Hall" (132)—a reference to the nororious "Tammany Society."

When we assess the cultural function of these old plays, we should not underestimate the entertainment factor. Colorful war dances and pretty Indian girls were crucial in this spectacular kind of theater with lots of feathers—this is actually an element that we already find in Barker's women's entertainment at Werocomoco (145) and also in Custis' Weorocomoco (179).[16] Brougham's Pocahontas is first presented in a dancing class at the Tuscarora Finishing Institution. The ballet teacher, called Kros-As-Can-Be, gives orders: "Heads up, backs straight, chests out, and shoulders square!" And later: "Do turn out your toes!" (137). Pocahontas' girlfriends have invented Indian names such as Di-Mun-Di (diamond eye), Dah-Lin-Duk (darling duck), or Lum-Pa-Shuga (lump of sugar). No wonder is Pocahontas associated with "*pok*ing fun" in this play (141). Yet the girls associate their drill with life in prison: "Schools but prisons are they say,/ Sing-sing away!/ Sing-sing away!/ We'll have a sing-sing holiday. &c." (135). New York's notorius Singsing prison was opened in 1828. In the1840s it had received a women's section.

The dancing lesson is interrupted by Smith, who immediately proposes to the princess: "And *pop* the question boldly?" Which is answered by Pocahontas: "My *pop* won't allow it" (139). Whereas other versions of the story turn to convoluted narrative construction in order to make Smith the main figure of the plot, Brougham simply changes the course of history and has Smith exclaim: "*Bancroft* be *ban*ished from your memory's shelf,/ For spite of *fact* I'll marry you myself" (139). This new historiography is a logical consequence of the development of the Pocahontas legend, which in the popular imagination has focused more on the relationship of Smith and the princess rather than her marriage to Rolfe.

As an alternative to Smith, John Rolfe is made impossible. Represented as Mynheer Rolff, this suitor is a combination of German and Dutch. He sings of sausages, sauerkraut and beer, and that "With Tyrolean fixins," side orders of "tracheotomous gymnastics," i.e., he yodels on the stage:

I wish from mein soul all de rocks round about
Would to sausages turn, and all the trees to sourcrout.
The ocean's vast bowl into lager bier roll
And I was an earthquake to swallow the whole." (145)

Says Pocahontas: "Such *suitor* is not likely to *suit* me! (143). She even asks the musicians in the orchestra pit to help her against Rolff's amorous advances: "Can you look calmly on/ and see thus shameful *Overture* begun" (146)? The fictional reality keeps on being undermined by meta-theatrical references to its own staging—a bantering kind of interaction resembling the dialogues we nowadays know from Late Night Shows.

We arrive at the famous scene of salvation because King Powhatan finally arrests his daughter's new *beau*: "Mr. Smith, you're in a fix/ With your Don Giovanni tricks" (141). He warns her of Smith, "whose very name's a *forgery*!" (143) and wants to make a lithograph of the Captain by putting a large stone on his head—notice that this is yet another reference to representationality, one in which making the image would kill the colonist! However, the Indian chief, who still intends to give Pocahontas to Rolff, is ultimately overpowered by a band of girls with bows and arrows, who call themselves the "Anti-marry-folks-against-their-will Society" (152).[17] We find that by the middle of the nineteenth century Pocahontas, the manipulated female figure and object of phallic settler phantasies, provokes feminist reactions. Already in 1838, Robert Dale Owen, the son of the famous English social reformer, had written a play on Pocahontas in which she became a spokeswoman for women's rights (Tilton 74). Actually, in many of these old plays there are women figures who want to wear britches, yet such feminine self-assertion is mostly the privilege of the European characters—as in the cross-dressing in Barker's *Indian Princess* mentioned above, where Kate is still tamed with "a grammatical kiss" (156). The most outspoken example of this tendency is probably Noah's *She Would be a Soldier* (1809).

What finally keeps Brougham's tale together is mainly a linguistic-conceptual kind of logic. Thus he ends the piece by having the protagonists play cards for the ownership of the princess because

Powhatan, who wanted to have Smith clubbed to death, is of course also the "Old King of Clubs"—literally a playing card. Smith of course wins the beautiful maiden, offering as a consolation to the "zwindled" Mynheer Rolff that he will have to wait for the accounts of later historians to get his bride: "And don't you be so downcast, you Dutch pump;/ All future history will see you righted" (155).

Brougham's *Po-Ca-Hon-Tas* is animated by discursive concepts. It tends to follow the logic of verbal punning. The actual referentiality implied therefore mainly refers to the contemporary urban environment and political concerns that preoccupied his audience at that time. False Indians and false Englishmen are replaced by what Werner Sollors sees as a destruction of racist myth and the celebration of a multi-ethnic kind of urban culture, creating through his humor "certain communities of laughter," the barbs of which were "not directed against only one group—each group gets its turn" (138). Hence no single cultural origin is privileged. In their introduction, the editors Meserve and Reardon write that Brougham "almost single-handely brought an end to the tremendously popular plays which celebrated the heroic American Indian" (xiv), that he "set out to reduce the Pocahontas legend to absurdity and succeeded admirably" (xv). This rhetorical achievement earns our admiration and respect. However, we also have to be aware of the representational limitations of such deconstructive strategies, because they no longer provide any points of contact with the real indigenous people. In order to learn about them, we have to look somewhere else, preferably in the discourses of Native Americans telling their *own* story.

What these plays demonstrate in a most entertaining way are the different stages in which the Pocahontas legend, and thus the meaning of the icon "Pocahontas," developed in the early American theater. We have to be aware of the fact that this character was only appropriated to the stage at a point when historians had already stylized her union with John Rolfe into the legendary origin of Virginia's aristocracy. Barker's first stage version is still preoccupied with this "mating" strategy of colonial legitimation, which is reflected in its emphasis on the theme of love and finding the right partner—who is

generally familiar and preferably aristocratic or/and white. Real sex is limited to the lower classes. Indians commit suicide (Miami) or learn the language of the colonizers (Pocahontas). Beyond this aspect, the *Indian Princess* already shows romantic influences. "Grammaticality" is supplemeted by emotional attachment. The core of the conflict is literally in Pocahontas' heart.

In a second step we find the development of a national discourse of imperialistic claims to power—which is the reason why references to marriage between settlers and Indians are strategically downplayed in the Custis version. We get miscegenation only in one minor character, who, significantly, is an Englishman of doubtful loyalty. The mood becomes more aggressive—arrows are used for hunting and war—and the humor is more instrumental. If Pocahontas volunteers her love in Barker's opera, Custis even makes the Indian volunteer his own removal west and his burial there. We find a strange combination of native heroism, which can be inherited by the brave settlers, and native dementia, which even celebrates being conquered.

I see Brougham's parody as a third step in which this strategy of disownment is layed bare in an arbitrary change of facts, i.e., in the explicit marriage of Pocahontas and Smith. In actions determined by punning, the legendary tale is deconstructed and robbed of its original referentiality. The connection to the old field of reference is severed and replaced by new references that cater to a city audience. What personally fascinates me about these three plays—and this is why I chose the title "Ideology and Art"—is the fact that they do not merely passively reflect a dominant "ideology," of their own period, but in their troping and choice of metaphors, i.e., in their "artistic" quality, they create substantial new concepts which do important cultural work—be it the sophisticated use of heart imagery with Barker, be it Custis' Madonna in chains, or Brougham's verbal punning in which the story by Smith turns out to be a "*forgery*."

Notes
[1] This collection contains Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* (1787), William Dunlap's *André*, James Nelson Barker's *The Indian Princess* (1808), Wil-

liam Henry Smith's *The Drunkard*, Anna Cora Mowatt's *Fashion*, George L. Aiken's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon* (1859). The only other collection currently available is John and Mollie Gassner's *Best Plays of the Early American Theatre, 1787-1911*, which treats *all* American plays before O'Neill as "early" theater.

[2] Hence we often find chapters in Smith's travelogues preceded by lists of the (English) "actors" in the "history."

[3] On film and cartoon versions of Pocahontas's story, see Louis Kern; a very extensive cultural analysis (lavishly illustrated) is provided by Klaus Theweleit.

[4] This is possibly borrowing from John Davis, where Smith calls Pocahontas a "sweet seraph" (Tilton 42).

[5] This pastoral element can also be found in Custis, where it is, however, contrasted by a sublime and savage world of dangers (182). Custis' Rolfe is already early on "in contemplation of the sublime and beautiful, which is everywhere to be found in the wild and picturesque scenery of these interesting regions" (177). For a discussion of the American pastoral, see Fiedler's chapter "Love in the Woods."

[6] See Homi Bhabha, ed. *Nation and Narration.*

[7] This is a typical example of what in 1705 the Southern historian Robert Beverly labeled as "Indian jealousy."

[8] Custis grew up in President Washington's household on Mount Vernon. Leslie Fiedler reports that he "used to deliver a Fourth of July oration each year in a Roman toga, and … lived long enough to become the father-in-law of General Robert E. Lee" (64).

[9] Says Smith on their arrival: "*Dieu et mon Droit*—[and translates himself] for God and our right" (175).

[10] In the *True Relation* Smith reports that Captain Newport had some difficulties crowning Powhatan: "But a fowle trouble there was to make him kneele to receaue his crowne. He, neither knowing the maiestie nor meaning of a Crowne, nor bending of the knee, indured so many perswasions, examples, and instructions, as tired them all. At last, by leaning hard on his shoulders, he a little stooped and *Newport* put the Crowne on his head; when, by warning of a pistoll, the boats were prepared with such a volly of shot, that the king start[ed] vp in a horrible feare, till he saw all was well.

Then remembering himselfe, to congratulate their kindnesse, he gaue his old shoes and his mantle to Captain *Newport*" (125).

[11] A good example of this is Ishmael Reed's antihero Bukka Doopeyduk in *The Free-Lance Pallbearers*, who experiences how a white audience enjoys being cursed: "I could not believe it, The audience was applauding its own doom" (77).

[12] Cf. Custis: "She has seen the strangers and no longer looks upon an Indian warrior with favour or regard" (184). Tilton has noticed "the irresistible sexual attractiveness of their charismatic leaders" in several American conquering narratives, which turns the woman into a "convenient scapegoat of the subjugation or destruction of her culture" (85). Matacoran's incompatibility manifests itself in the construction of his character through a metaphysics of oppositionality. Thus Pocahontas calls him a "fierce and vindictive prince" (175-76) and later he turns into a "fallen enemy" (Custis 192). These are attributes of the eternal antagonist.

[13] This figure is modeled on Namontack in Smith, a boy whom Captain Newport exchanged as an interpreter with Powhatan for the English boy Thomas Salvage and whom he took on a voyage to England.

[14] Cf. Tyler's *The Contrast*, or Anna Cora Mowatt's *Fashion*.

[15] In this respect it is interesting that Barclay, a survivor of the first colony, has children from an "aboriginal mother," a fact which is commented on by West, one of the new colonists, with the statement: "I don't like this renegado" (174). Percy calls this surviving mixed family the "wasted and withered stump" of the colonial tree (175).

[16] There may also be traces of the traditional English mask turned into new forms that moved on to variety entertainment and the "Rockettes" in *Radio City Music Hall*.

[17] In an earlier scene they had already planned a strike in school, comparing themselves with a famous contemporary prize boxer:

Strike! as the newest fashions do in Paris,

Strike! for your rights, your homes, and kitchen fires;

Strike! like a crowd of feminine Tom Hyer's. (148)

And Pocahontas had complained to her father: "The king who would enslave his daughter so,/ Deserves a hint from Mrs. Beecher-Stowe!" As a reason she cites that her father does not respect her "Women's Rights" (142).

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The Killing Icon: Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer

Allan Phillipson

> "See, heroes never die. John Wayne isn't dead, El-
> vis isn't dead. Otherwise you don't have a hero.
> You can't kill a hero." Mickey Spillane, Interview
> (1999) 5.

When it comes to fictional heroes, few have been more ex-
treme or mainstream than Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer. Hammer
burst into print in *I, The Jury* (1947), selling millions of copies and
making his creator the biggest-selling author of the 1950s. By the end
of that decade, Spillane held seven places in the top ten best-selling
novels of all time. Hammer has helped Spillane sell over two hundred
million books to date. He has also appeared in almost every other me-
dia: comic strips, commercials, record albums, radio serials, television
series and feature films. Hammer has become an icon—and in the
process he has disappeared.

In other words, Hammer's entry into the mainstream simplified
his character to the point where he no longer seemed to have one.
Hammer became a caricature: the big man with a big gun, a big car,
and lots of big women. Parodies began early with the 1953 film *The
Bandwagon*, featuring a "Rod Riley" thriller by "Mickey Starr"—in
which Fred Astaire struts as a super-tough private eye, while Cyd
Charisse stalks him as a spread-legged femme fatale. Spillane himself
contributed to the simplification, appearing for nearly twenty years in
Miller Lite beer commercials that spoofed the Hammer persona and
milieu.

It is hard to see the original Hammer through all the simulacra
that followed. Moreover, critics argue that the Hammer of the novels
is himself "a degenerate copy of Marlowe and Spade" (Biskind 55).
Nevertheless, by deconstructing both the icon that obscures him and
the critics who abhor him, I hope to rehabilitate a character who has
been dismissed too often as the "perversion" of the hard-boiled tradi-
tion.

1. Perversion: The Critical View of Mike Hammer.

Critical responses to Mike Hammer have been generally brief and dismissive. Reviewing *I, The Jury* in 1947, James Sandoe called it "a shabby and rather nasty little venture," while the *Saturday Review of Literature* gave the book only one word (repeatedly): "Lurid action, lurid characters, lurid writing, lurid plot, lurid finish. Verdict: Lurid" (Holland 2). These dismissals often contain a moral overtone, casting Spillane as a dangerous influence on readers and writers alike. Anthony Boucher was the most vocal of Spillane's early opponents, arguing in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (3 Aug 1947) that *I, The Jury* was "so vicious a glorification of force, cruelty and extra-legal methods that the novel might be made required reading in a Gestapo training school."[1] By 1952, Spillane had produced seven best-sellers; he then retired from publishing for nearly a decade. Despite this silence, his books continued to sell in enormous amounts, to the consternation of critics. In 1955, Philip Wylie concluded that "if millions of people are reading [his books] voluntarily the public must be losing its senses" (Pronzini 335).

Spillane's critics often try to marginalise him. They usually do so by comparing him unfavourably to Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Ross Macdonald—his rivals in the private eye genre. They then cast Spillane as a bastard offshoot of that hard-boiled dynasty, a withered branch that can bear no fruit. This tactic first appears in 1951, when Boucher dismisses *The Big Kill* as "the ultimate degradation of the [hard-boiled] school" (Collins 24). This approach slowly hardens—through repeated use—into a paradigm of how to treat Spillane. For example, in his 1970 survey of "The Hard-Boiled Detective Novel," George Grella sets up the triumvirate of Hammett, Chandler, and Macdonald, then dismisses Spillane in a single sentence: "A fourth figure…Mickey Spillane, grows out of the hard-boiled tradition but represents the perversion it has undergone in the hands of the inept and the unthinking" (106). Similarly, in 1974, William Ruehlmann argues that "Spillane carried the hard-boiled hero to his attenuated extreme" (90); like most of "Chandler's heirs," his effect was "degenerative rather than developmental" (89). Thus, from

erative rather than developmental" (89). Thus, from the general reactions of "nasty," "lurid" and "vicious," critics shifted into the specific assessment of Spillane's work as the degradation, perversion, and degeneration of a particular genre.

By the 1990s, this paradigm seemed set. Ian Ousby—in *The Crime and Mystery Book: A Reader's Guide* (1997)—mentions Spillane only as an afterthought.[2] In his otherwise comprehensive chapter on "The Hard-Boiled School," Ousby devotes twenty-six pages to Hammett and Chandler, then dismisses Spillane in the following subclause: "[T]he thuggery of Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer novels has nothing innocent, much less refreshing, about it—only a sour decadence" (117). Ousby immediately moves on to discuss Ross Macdonald at some length. William Marling, likewise, surveying "The Second Generation of Hard-Boiled Writers" (2001), minimises Spillane's contribution: "Spillane represents the reduction of the genre to pure action" (1). Finally, Peter Biskind (in an uncanny echo of Grella's vocabulary and approach) sets up a tradition of what he calls "the best noir writers," then sets Spillane apart: "Mickey Spillane…was a perversion of this tradition, and Hammer was a degenerate copy of Marlowe and Spade" (55).[3] He goes on to call Hammer "mean," "sordid," "sleazy" and "selfish," concluding that with the appearance of Mike Hammer "The age of the private eye had ended" (56).

In the face of this dominant paradigm, only a few dissenting voices have been heard; mainly that of Spillane's friend and co-editor, Max Allan Collins.[4] Collins has crusaded on behalf of his mentor in almost every forum, from interviews to introductions, from a book in 1984 (*One Lonely Knight: Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer*) to a documentary film in 1988 (*Mike Hammer's Mickey Spillane*). Collins sets out establish Spillane's reputation as a writer, setting aside his previous critics as "worthy of contempt" (85). However, his book consists largely of biography and plot summaries (detailing the action, characters and surprise endings of every Spillane story), punctuated by assertions that Spillane is a better writer than had been previously thought. Collins seems obsessed with ranking authors, most particularly in ousting Ross Macdonald—"a good writer, but not a great one"

(Interview 7)—from the triumvirate and replacing him with Spillane. In a recent interview, Collins asserted that there was "No Question. He is number three, after Hammett and Chandler. Anyone who doesn't recognize Spillane's *importance* is an idiot" (8). Indeed, Collins argues that much of Spillane's writing is "so vivid, so…poetic" that it is "outside the range of such highly respected tough guy writers as Hammett, Chandler, Cain and the various MacDonalds" (*One Lonely Knight* 84-5).

I am not interested in arguing whether Spillane is 'better' than Macdonald. One might as well argue that apples are better than oranges. Such judgements are entirely subjective, depending on one's mood and taste on any given day. Moreover, Collins' approach merely reverses the existing paradigm, setting up a binary transfer in which 'bad' becomes 'good'; 'nasty and lurid' turn into 'vivid and poetic.' As a part of this reversal, Spillane becomes not the perversion of a tradition, but its culmination, producing writing that is "outside the range" of anyone else. In both critical approaches, Spillane marks a dead-end point: the highest peak or the lowest trough.

Rather than simply accepting or reversing the dominant paradigm, I want to argue for an entire paradigm shift. In my view, Spillane represents neither a degeneration nor a culmination, but a crucial transition figure. He neither perverts nor perfects the conventions of the genre, but transforms them into something different. By subverting the private eye's treatment of the police, his secretary, and his detecting methods, Spillane provided some new options for the hard-boiled tradition.

2. Subversion: A New View of Mike Hammer.

Traditionally, hard-boiled detectives do not get on with the police. Consider Grella's assertion that "[t]he private detective always finds the police incompetent, brutal, or corrupt, and therefore works alone" (106). This generalisation takes no account of Hammer's close personal and working relationship with Pat Chambers, Captain of Homicide at the New York Police Department:

> Pat was tops in my book. A careful, crafty cop, and all cop…. Pat had a mind like an adding machine and a talent for police work backed up by the finest department in the world…. Pat and I had been buddies a long time…. It was a case of mutual respect, I guess. (The Twisted Thing 118)[5]

Spillane stresses this "mutual" relationship from the first chapter of his first novel. When Hammer greets Chambers at the start of *I, The Jury*, he remarks: "We'll work together as usual" (6). As he points out in *My Gun is Quick* (1950), Hammer has no qualms about working with the police:

> It isn't often that you see cops hobnobbing with private dicks, but Pat had the sense to know that I could touch a lot of places outside the reach of the law, and he could do plenty for me that I couldn't for myself. What started out as a modest business arrangement turned into a solid friendship. (161)

Such a "solid friendship" seems surprising in the world of noir, where private dicks usually meet cops only to mock their inadequate police work or to take a beating at their hands (or clubs, or saps, or guns). Spillane acknowledges the tradition, that "It isn't often that you see cops hobnobbing with private dicks," then proceeds to undercut it by having Hammer constantly meet Chambers for drinks or a meal, usually to confer over cases, evidence, ballistic tests, and relationships (in that order).

Hammer not only appreciates Pat Chambers, but praises the police force in general, particularly for their teamwork. He even concedes that "guys working separately" (such as the solo private eye) cannot achieve as much as the combined officers of the NYPD: "Pat, offices like yours are great things. You take one lousy little clew and make a case out of it…. You do more good than a million guys working separately" (*My Gun is Quick* 205). At one point, Hammer describes himself as part of that team, working together to catch a killer: "That's what the matter is with these cold-blooded killers; they plan, oh, so well. But they have to work all the angles themselves, while we have many heads working the problem out" (*I, The Jury* 139). Unlike the traditional noir detective, Hammer admires the police and admits

that sometimes he needs their help, expertise and manpower: "I wanted the police in on this thing. Where I was going was too much trouble for one person. Much too much. Even for me. The cops had the boys and the guns. They had the brains too" (*My Gun is Quick* 255). If the motto of one of Chandler's private eyes (Johnny Dalmas) was "Trouble is my business" (*Trouble* 8), then Hammer's might be 'Trouble is *our* business.'[6]

In addition to this teamwork, Hammer also praises "the real thinkers" on the force, along with their enviable "equipment" and "contacts":

> […] when you get…into the inner workings of the organisation you find the real thinkers. They have all the equipment in the world to work with and plenty of inside contacts. The papers rag the cops too much…. There was vice. As much as in any outfit, but there were still men like Pat that no money could buy. I would have been one myself if there weren't so damn many rules and regulations to tie a guy down. (I, The Jury 94)

This kind of statement occurs repeatedly in the Hammer novels, articulating a new respect for people in uniform that probably relates to the recent war, but also to a growing awareness that the corrupt cop had become a tired cliché. As Hammer says in *My Gun is Quick*, "People are always running down the police, but they're all right guys…. Sure, there are bum cops, too…not many of them" (231).[7]

From the first Hammer novel to the last, Spillane's attitude to the police remains consistent. While all of the above quotations come from books written in the late 1940s, the following is taken from one published in 1970:

> Cops are dedicated professionals…. They're in a tough, rough, underpaid racket with their lives on the line every minute of the day. They get slammed by the public, sappy court decisions and crusading politicians, but somehow they get the job done. (Survival…ZERO! 102)

This attitude comes as a shock to the hard-boiled reader whose expectations have been raised on Hammett's corrupt cops and Chandler's brutal Bay City Police, both of which put a whole new meaning into the phrase 'police force.' Neither author had much to say in favour of

police methods. Even by 1953, Chandler was still depicting a Homicide Department run by "a Captain…that solves crimes with the bright light, the soft sap, the kick to the kidneys, the knee to the groin, the fist to the solar plexus, the night stick to the base of the spine" (*The Long Good-Bye* 39). Spillane appears, therefore, as a crucial transitional figure between these early noir writers and later authors of police procedurals, such as Ed McBain. By constantly praising their teamwork and integrity, Spillane helped give some respect back to a group of men that so many hard-boiled writers had run down or despised as corrupt machiavellis or bumbling flatfeet. In the thoughtful, by-the-book figure of Captain Pat Chambers, one can see the seeds of McBain's Steve Carella or *Dragnet*'s Joe Friday.

The second hard-boiled convention transformed by Spillane involves his treatment of the private eye's secretary. Traditionally, "[t]he private detective always…works alone" (Grella 106); his secretary generally stays in the office, answers his phone, and looks decorative. William Ruehlmann even asserts that the hard-boiled detective has "a secretary who, as a domestic principle, is always unthreatening and always dull" (119). Ruehlmann was referring specifically to Hammer's secretary Velda—in a brief discussion of Spillane's *Kiss Me, Deadly* (1952)—and in this instance he could not be more wrong.[8] His description may fit Sam Spade's docile secretary, Effie Perrine, but it hardly applies to gun-carrying, man-beating, case-solving, ex-spy Velda.

From the start of the very first Hammer novel, the narrator asserts that Velda can look after herself: "[S]he had a private op's ticket and on occasions when she went out with me on a case, packed a flat .32 automatic—and she wasn't afraid to use it" (*I, The Jury* 11). Thus Velda is not only licensed to carry a gun, but she holds a private detective license, and helps her employer on investigations. At this stage, though, Hammer treats Velda primarily as a secretary, and she remains in this role until book three, when Hammer's license is revoked. In this novel, *Vengeance is Mine!* (1950), Velda comes into her own.

In the opening chapter, for instance, Hammer cedes all control to Velda, telling her that "from now on the business is yours" (358):

> You're the boss now…. I won't even tell you how to operate. You can call the signals and carry the ball yourself if you want to. I'll only stick my nose in during the practice sessions…. You'll find some signed blank cheques in the drawer for your expense account. (359)

Confident in her skills, Hammer gives Velda sole charge of the business, the money and—most importantly—the case. His only question is whether she is able to shoot someone; she says that she can, and gets his approval. This response contrasts markedly with that of Joe Gill (who appears in the next chapter), a nervous detective who dislikes guns. Hammer puts the same question to Gill, and remarks "Joe, you're a lousy detective" (371). So, for Hammer, the job is not about gender; it is about ability. A man can be "a lousy detective"; a woman can take charge and be a good one—in this area at least, Hammer does not distinguish along sexual (or sexist) lines. He may be conservative in some other areas, but in relation to Velda's detective work Hammer breaks the mould.

Velda justifies this faith in her when (at the end of the book), she pulls a hidden gun, kills a mobster and saves Hammer's life. He responds as follows: "'Shrewdie, regular shrewdie, aren't you?' I fingered the straps of the miniature shoulder holster she was wearing under the ruins of her jacket. 'You'll do as a partner'" (502). From this point on, Hammer accepts Velda as "a partner" and she works on cases—both alongside Hammer and by herself—in all of the books to come. For example, in *The Big Kill* (1951), Velda travels alone to Miami on the trail of a jewel thief; when she telephones Hammer to report her progress, she describes herself as his "business partner" (265). Of course, to the outside world, they appear to remain in the conventional 1950s roles of boss and secretary, but in Hammer's mind Velda is now his equal, and he treats her as such. By the time of *The Big Kill*, he is able to think of her as "[a] nice partner to have in the firm" (190).

This is not to say that Hammer does not suffer moments of doubt. However, when he does try to keep Velda out of a fight—as in

One Lonely Night (1951)—she responds with a cogent summary of female equality:

> Mike, there are men and women in this country. They made it together even when it was worse than now. Women learned how to shoot and shoot straight. They learned fast, and knew how to use a gun or a knife and use it right when the time came. I said we'd do it together….
>
> I waited a long minute before I said, "Okay, it's us. I want it that way anyhow." (One Lonely Night 103)

Hammer agrees, and just as well, because within five pages Velda saves his life by gunning down a hitman. Unlike most noir heroines, Velda does not exist merely to be rescued by the hero, but turns the tables and does the rescuing herself. Perhaps the key phrase, though, is Hammer's qualification: "I want it that way anyhow." After pausing to think, he conquers the patriarchal conditioning that made him try to 'keep the woman safe at home.' In that pause, Spillane reveals the gap—and the struggle—between what Hammer "wants" and what 1950s social norms tell him he ought to want.

To illustrate this point further, Pat Chambers represents a more traditional 1950s approach to women in work, as he criticises Hammer for sending Velda out on jobs. In Pat's view, police work is man's work, and Velda ought to stay in the office, safe behind the phone (like Effie in *The Maltese Falcon*, the archetypal secretary stuck on her boss). Pat's attitude becomes particularly strident in *The Girl Hunters* (1962), when Velda disappears on an assignment: "She had no business playing guns with hoods. But no, wise guy here sends her out. She has a P.I. ticket and a gun, but she's nothing but a girl…" (14). Chambers' opinion contrasts sharply with that of Hammer, who sees Velda as a capable detective. When questioned by a psychologist, Hammer defends Velda's right to work with autonomy: "'Velda was a pro. She carried a gun and had her own P.I. ticket.' 'And she could handle any situation?' I nodded" (25). Hammer repeats this view throughout the series. By the time of *Survival…ZERO!* (1970), he even admits to a fellow businessman that Velda just might be better than he is, and that if she left the firm his "enterprises" would all fall apart (68).

Of course, Spillane is not a feminist—he is too much a product of the 1940s to fit such a 1970s label—but his books do contain some questioning of conventional attitudes towards women. Moreover, Hammer's acceptance of Velda as a private eye seems groundbreaking for two reasons: on one level, it undercuts the dominant social expectations of the time; on another level, it subverts hard-boiled tradition, allowing Velda to enter what had previously been an exclusively male domain.[9] Velda, therefore, radically alters the position of the private eye's secretary. She also represents a break from the traditional treatment of women in noir fiction, where they generally get cast as femme fatales or helpless maidens. Spillane's novels mark a post-war departure from these roles, exploring a world where a woman can do a job as well as—if not better than—a man.

The third hard-boiled convention subverted by Spillane involves the private eye's methods of detection. In Grella's view, the noir investigator turns away from the logical deductions of his 'golden age' predecessors (such as Hercule Poirot or Lord Peter Wimsey): "He replaces the subtleties of the deductive method with a sure knowledge of his world and a keen moral sense" (106). Ousby goes even further, arguing that hard-boiled detectives always work through sudden discoveries made via (usually physical) confrontations: "Stirring things up rather than thinking things out is always their method" (99). While perhaps not "always" using this method, the private eye does tend to bounce from suspect to suspect like the world's most persistent pinball, until something or somebody cracks—usually the detective's skull, followed by the criminal's cover.

Spillane adjusts this tradition by allowing Hammer some use of the deductive method. For someone so renowned (and reviled) for violent behaviour, Hammer spends an unexpectedly large amount of his time just sitting and "thinking things out." Indeed, his logic and his brainwork are praised by many of the characters he meets. For example, Charlotte Manning tells him: "Your body is huge, your mind is the same" (*I, The Jury* 52). Marsha Lee is similarly impressed by his reasoning: "Her eyebrows went up in the slightest show of surprise…'I didn't know you were a philosopher, Mike'" (*The Big Kill* 260). In one

novel Hammer even outthinks a genius, and the genius (as is often the case with master criminals on the point of capture) is kind enough to tell us why, at length: "With your mind highly tuned to absorb, analyze and reconstruct criminal ways, your close association with the police and past experience, you have been able to run a parallel course with me and arrive at the destination at the same time" (*The Twisted Thing* 186).

Like Hercule Poirot, Hammer seems to have a better brain than anyone around him. Unlike Poirot, however—who only has to show up the dense Captain Hastings, the suggestible Inspector Japp, and various bumbling policemen—Hammer faces real competition. Pat Chambers (we are often told) has a brain like a prototype computer, continually filing and processing facts—yet he concedes that Hammer out-thinks him and often solves the apparently insoluble. Coroners, District Attorneys, medical experts and other detectives also have to concede Hammer's superior deductive skills.

When Ann Minor drowns in *My Gun is Quick*, for instance, the coroner is "positive she was a suicide" (249). Pat expresses his surprise at Hammer's denial—"I want to know how a pretty suicide like this can be murder" (249). Even handwriting specialists confirm her suicide note is genuine: "Not a trace of forgery. You can't break it, Mike" (251). There follows an almost stream-of-consciousness sequence as Hammer drives about thinking, then visits the scene of the crime:

> I turned toward the river, found a place to park and got out…. It was pretty if you only stopped to look at it, but when you looked too close and thought enough it made you sick.
>
> (She removed her hat, shoes, jacket…laid them down on the planks with her bag on top, and jumped in.)…
>
> I could hear the music going off in my head. It was always like that when I began to get ideas and get excited. I was getting a crazy, wild idea that might prove a point and bring Pat into it after all…. (252-53)

Hammer collects a sample of water from the river where the corpse was discovered. He then takes it to the police, and reveals an expert knowledge of physiology:

Why didn't you ask the coroner if it was the same stuff he found in her lungs? Not her stomach, mind you, but her lungs. When you drown you suffocate because that little valve in your throat tightens up the air passage to keep anything from running into your lungs. It doesn't take much to suffocate a person…just enough water to make that little valve jam. There's water in the stomach, but very little in the lungs. Go ahead, ask him.

Pat's eyes were ready to pop. His teeth bared…and he said, "You brainy bastard, you. (254)

Hastings probably thought much the same of Poirot—and Hammer's methods here mirror the latter's use of 'the little grey cells' (complete with a rather showy exposé). The water in Minor's lungs turns out to be tap water, with a slight trace of the soap from her own bath; she was murdered, then thrown in the river. At no point does Hammer confront a suspect, or chase someone, or go "stirring things up"—he simply thinks things through, examines the crime scene, and reaches his conclusion.

Hammer is by no means a golden age detective; this essay simply attempts to highlight some aspects of Hammer's character—such as his deductive skills (and his attitudes to Velda and the police)—that have gone largely unremarked. Those aspects have been overlooked partly due to Hammer's status as an icon—his position in the mainstream of popular culture. The character of Spillane's Hammer has been overwritten and (to some extent) overwhelmed by the films, comics, television shows, advertisements and parodies that have attached themselves to him. Weighted down by this proliferation of product, Hammer is drowning in the mainstream.

3. Which Version? Mike Hammer in the Mainstream.

First, a short definition of terms. Most critics place crime fiction on the boundaries—the edge of the stream—away from what they call the mainstream of 'serious' fiction. William F. Nolan asserts, for example, in his introduction to Dashiell Hammett's *Nightmare Town: Stories* (1999), that after Hammett wrote his crime novels "[h]e at-

tempted mainstream novels under several titles" (xv). Similarly, Ian Ousby argues that "in Hammett or Chandler crime fiction had at last found writers whose work could be judged by the same standards of seriousness routinely applied to 'mainstream' novelists" (116). In my definition, most of the latter would not be considered mainstream at all. Mainstream in this essay means popular, best-selling, iconic. Mainstream characters achieve a best-selling momentum that pushes them into the broad public consciousness via a variety of media. Thus Batman and Mike Hammer are mainstream detectives; Slam Bradley and Mike Hoolihan are not.[10]

There is an idea—prevalent among fans of 'alternative' music—that if something 'goes mainstream' it loses its soul. However, this response often has more to do with the way the product is summarised, advertised and marketed rather than the actual content of the product itself. Spillane has been the victim of such summaries, reduced like a stock to his most basic ingredients. For instance, Lee Server, in *Over My Dead Body—The Sensational Age of the American Paperback: 1945-1955* (1994), states that Spillane "wrote blood-and-sex-drenched mysteries of an unprecedented ferocity" (21). Spillane became (and remains) notorious for his treatment of these pulp standbys, and it suited publicists and editors to stress the controversial aspects of his writing. Consider the following introduction to a new Spillane story (actually ghost-written: Collins 129) in the pulp magazine *Fantastic* (Nov/Dec 1952):

> No modern-day writer is more widely cussed and discussed than Mickey Spillane. Critics regard him as most of us regard the atom bomb, leading magazines dissect him with unloving care.
>
> Why? Because the Spillane emphasis is on sex and sadism, his milieu the boudoir and the underworld, his men ruthless, his women svelte, passionate and immoral. That's why everyone hates Spillane—except his millions of readers and his banker! (Haining 122)

Advertising like this helped to make Spillane the best-selling author of the 1950s. It also led people to approach his work with an expectation of "ruthless" men and "immoral" women.[11]

However, this simplification of Spillane does not gel with the actual complexities of his writing and his characters. Hammer may be hard-edged, but he also feels fear, pain and self-doubt; he cries, he prays, he contemplates suicide. Even his relationship to women contains a few surprises; such as his attitude to Lola, a former prostitute:

> I don't give a damn what went on this year or last. Who the hell am I to talk anyway? If there's any shame to attach to the way you run your life, then maybe I ought to be ashamed. I've done the same thing you've done, but a man gets away with it. (My Gun is Quick 269)

Hammer as 1950s feminist trailblazer? In this extract, Hammer not only shows his awareness of sexual double standards, he undercuts and attacks them—hardly the "ruthless" macho sadism of the advertisements. As for the supposedly "immoral" woman, Lola responds that "I want it to be different with me, Mike. I'm trying so hard to be…nice" (269). The sensitive male and the "nice" female—two aspects of Spillane that advertisers and critics alike have chosen to ignore.

Consider the way that both have approached the iconic moment in Hammer's career. This occurs when—at the end of *I, The Jury*—he shoots a murderess in the stomach. The problem with iconic moments is that they can come to dominate our perceptions. Every cover of this book (and most of its later film posters) depict this moment. Critical perceptions, likewise, focus on this incident without acknowledging its surrounding context, viewing Hammer's whole character and career through this single action. Thus George Grella asserts that Hammer "invariably shoots the girl," that "Mike Hammer ha[s] an unfortunate penchant for shooting women in the belly" and that many Hammer novels "end…in the usual woman-shooting scene" (117). The question must be asked: has Grella actually read the Hammer novels he so blithely summarises?[12] For Hammer does not "invariably" shoot the girl; after Charlotte, and over the course of the next 12 books, Hammer never shoots another woman. Far from giving him a "penchant" for such events, Hammer spends the ensuing years agonising over his behaviour, haunted—both waking and sleeping—

by the memory of Charlotte, his love for her, and what he felt forced to do to her.

He may have responded to Charlotte's "How c-could you?" that "It was easy"—but this iconic statement (the quote cited most often in interviews, articles and websites about Hammer) can easily break away from its context. Like Rhett Butler's "I don't give a damn" in *Gone With the Wind*, the statement comes to stand for a whole character, at once iconic and misrepresentative. For it may have seemed "easy" at the time—simply keeping a promise—but on reflection Hammer realises how much the shooting has taken out of him. Looking back, he describes his action as "repulsive": "It killed my soul" (*The Twisted Thing* 62). Four years on, in *Vengeance is Mine!*, he still feels "scarred by something that should be finished but kept coming back" (416):

> My mind went back over the years—to Charlotte….
>
> It's no good…. God, if I ever have to hold a gun on a woman again I'll die first, so help me I will. How many years has it been since the yellow-gold hair and the beautiful face was there? It's still there and I know it's dead but I keep hearing the voice. (Vengeance is Mine! 463)

Hyper-sensitive to the loss of Charlotte, Hammer displays an emotional attachment and a capacity for self-analysis—"I shot her…and when she died, I died too" (416)—that contrast sharply with his reputation as an unreflective hard man.

The trouble with icons is that once they reach a certain saturation point, they become self-perpetuating. People know Mike Hammer—or think they do—without having to read the books. He becomes a group of clichés, easily summarised and reeled off in a list, without recourse to actual proof. Hence William Marling, in *Hard-Boiled Fiction* (2001), sums up Hammer as follows: "[H]e does not really solve crimes…. He is a chain-smoking, heavy-drinking, quick-shooting, two-fisted, anti-culture emblem" ("Mickey Spillane" 1). How many of these generalisations actually stand up to close scrutiny? We have already seen that Hammer does "really solve crimes," sometimes using the deductive method. As for "chain-smoking," Hammer smokes a lot by today's standards, but perhaps not by the standards of

the 1950s. A glance at movie stills from the period show most actors holding a cigarette. It is easy to forget, from the health-conscious present, that Hammer's was a time when even doctors recommended smoking. Menthol cigarettes were prescribed as a cure for sore throats, and advertisements on *The Shadow* radio show proclaimed that "Nine out of ten doctors prefer Camels." Marling's judgement seems anachronistic at best; it also ignores the fact that Hammer moves with the times and quits smoking in the later books.

Nor does Hammer seem particularly "heavy-drinking" (certainly not by the standards of Chandler's Philip Marlowe or Hammett's Nick Charles).[13] In the whole series, Hammer only gets drunk twice: once to facilitate the plot in *My Gun is Quick*; again, for similar reasons, at the start of *The Girl Hunters*. In fact, Hammer drinks and smokes as much as the characters around him—sometimes less. In the opening of *I, The Jury*, for instance, he turns down both alcohol (22) and cigarettes (40); hardly the behaviour of a heavy-drinker or a chain-smoker.

As for Hammer's much-vaunted violence, analysis of the books shows a man who tends to use his fists and his gun in self-defence. Certainly he uses them to full effect, but that is the nature of the hard-boiled genre. Nevertheless, one might deconstruct the gap between Hammer's reputation (*My Gun is Quick*) and his actual performance (not so quick). Hammer is frequently caught off guard and ambushed, usually in his own office or home. He is also gets outdrawn, and not just by hot young gunslingers. In *My Gun is Quick*, an eighty-year old who walks with a cane outdraws and outshoots him. Similarly in *The Snake* (1964), Hammer is out-manoeuvred by a septuagenarian: "*I didn't hear him either! He had come up the side of the hill on sneakered feet and stood there with a gun on us and I felt like the biggest fool in the world!*" (153). At the climax of *Kiss Me, Deadly*, Lily Carver gets the drop on Hammer with his own .45: "[S]he was faster than I was. The rod belched flame and the slug tore into my side and spun me around" (516). Despite his image, then, Hammer is not the fastest gun in town, and this adds an aspect of vulnerability to his character. However, most critics seem to ignore this element of kryp-

tonite and cast Hammer as a Superman with a gun. Steve Holland describes Hammer as follows: "If he needs it, his .45 can be in his hand faster than you can blink" (4). Like Marling's "quick-shooting" version of Hammer, Holland's version offers us reputation over actuality.

As for being "anti-culture," the only time Hammer criticises music is to dismiss rock and roll. He is a classical man, able to identify compositions on a first hearing, sometimes down to the actual opus: "*Pathétique* was still playing…. She had chosen a good piece. Symphony No.6 in B minor, Opus 74. Tchaikovsky should have stuck around to write another" (*The Body Lovers* 170).[14] Hammer's knowledge extends beyond the music to its history: not only does he recognise the symphony, he knows that Tchaikovsky died—possibly by his own hand—shortly after its first performance. Hammer also quotes poetry and plays, as well as making classical allusions; at one point he even creates an extended metaphor comparing himself to Ulysses and Velda to an enchanting siren and the magical Circe. His conclusion reveals the extent of his temptation: "'Now you know how Ulysses felt.' Now I knew. The guy was a sucker. He should have jumped ship" (*Kiss Me, Deadly* 363). In these quotations, Spillane mixes classical references with hard-boiled vocabulary, as if to show that one need not preclude the other; a character such as Hammer can embrace and appreciate both.

Close scrutiny of Hammer's character, therefore, reveals Marling's "emblem" to be a misleading simplification. However, emblems feed on themselves as their simulacra proliferate. In 1953 alone, versions of Hammer—all simplified and heavily censored—appeared on radio (*That Hammer Guy*), in feature film (Harry Essex's *I, The Jury* in 3D) and comic strip (*From the Files of…Mike Hammer*). In the same year, Hammer was parodied in *The Bandwagon*, reduced to a trenchcoat, a hat and a series of noir clichés; all performed in a bizarre ballet sequence entitled "Girl Hunt." Perhaps even more bizarre was Robert Aldrich's adaptation of *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955). Lead actor Ralph Meeker grimaces and bullies his way through the film, spitting out lines that never appear in Spillane's books, such as "What's in it for me?" This Hammer is indeed "anti-culture," torturing an opera-

lover by snapping his priceless Caruso record before his eyes. As Collins points out, Spillane's original novel "has been reshaped to make Hammer look worse" (147). The script turns Hammer into a mercenary thug, creating what the director himself describes as "an anti-Spillane picture" (Cameron 176).[15]

By the end of the 1950s there were enough Hammers to fill a hardware store. Record albums appeared in 1954 and 1958 (*Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer Story* and *Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer* respectively). *Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer* hit television in 1958, running for seventy-eight episodes; but without Velda and bowdler-ised beyond recognition. In a lighter vein, Walt Kelly (creator of *Pogo*) satirised Hammer in "Gore Blimey" by "Mucky Spleen," in which the hero gets arrested for shooting at slow-changing traffic lights. Later, Spillane even offered his own parody; producing the hat, the trenchcoat and "the Doll" (Lee Meredith) for nineteen years of Miller Lite beer advertisements. Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer had become a brand, a recognisable product, in spite of—and paradoxi-cally because of—all the different flavours being marketed under this label.

I offer myself as an example—and a victim—of this process. As I grew up in the 1980s, my idea of Hammer was formed by the television satire *Sledge Hammer!* Sledge Hammer (played by David Rasche) mugged and twitched through forty-one shows between 1986-88.[16] He kept his gun on a velvet cushion, he talked to his gun, he whipped it out at every opportunity and fired it at everything from a stuck window to a troublesome car. He even kept a gun target in his bedroom. This Hammer struggled to solve cases; other characters did most of the work, while he stumbled about as a parody of everything a detective should be. A gun-crazy madman with the sexual politics (and the brains) of a dinosaur—that was my Hammer. Of course, this was not Spillane's original, but the simulacrum heavily influenced my idea of what Mike Hammer must be like.

When I began reading about detective fiction in the 1990s, this view was crystallised by the constant critical hammering that Hammer received. Thus mainstream images and critical summaries led me—

and probably many others—to dismiss Mike Hammer without actually reading any of Spillane's books. The purpose of this essay has been to redress that balance. To that end, I have deconstructed the critical views of Hammer's character, his place in the hard-boiled genre, and his iconic status in the mainstream of popular culture. Perhaps Mickey Spillane is right when he says (in the quote that stands as an epigraph to this essay) that "You can't kill a hero." But it would seem from the mainstream treatment of Mike Hammer—and his fate at the hands of his critics—that you can still kill a hero's character.

Notes

[1] Strong words in those post-war years, but Boucher's strident response might be better understood in the context of his own career. Boucher is remembered now mainly as a critic, having worked for many years as a reviewer for the *New York Times*. He won the Mystery Writers of America's Edgar award three times for his critical work and—after his death in 1968—that organisation named its annual convention in his honour: the "Boucheron." However, prior to his rise as a critic, Boucher had struggled as a playwright (under his own name of William White) and as a crime novelist (using the pen names H.H. Holmes and Anthony Boucher). In the latter guise, he wrote whimsical tales about a devout, mystery-solving nun (Sister Ursula) and a chivalrous detective called Nick Noble; both temperamentally and commercially the opposite of Mike Hammer. None of Boucher's plays sold and, though he published seven novels, they were largely ignored. Turning to criticism in the 1940s, he went on to slam every Spillane novel that appeared.

[2] One might also contrast an earlier survey, Melvyn Barnes' *Murder in Print: A Guide to Two Centuries of Crime Fiction* (1986). In his twenty-page chapter on "The Hard-Boiled School," Barnes omits Spillane completely, effectively erasing him from the history of the genre.

[3] This drive to establish "the best noir writers" often results in stark value judgements. A striking instance of this can be seen in Carlos Clarens' *Crime Movies: An Illustrated History* (1980). Clarens attacks what he calls "the gloating sadism of Mickey Spillane" (240). He then asserts that A.I. Bezzerides (who adapted *Kiss Me, Deadly* for the screen) represents "A more legitimate writer" (240).

[4] Prior to Collins, the only dissenting voice was R. Jeff Banks, in "Spillane and the Critics" (1979). This article considers six works of criticism published between 1966-76, and concentrates largely on correcting errors of fact. Like Collins, Banks questions whether Spillane's critics have actually read his books: "we find they often misread" (301), Banks argues, going on to state that many of their assertions are "obviously wrong" and "inexcusable" (301). He urges critics to adopt "scholarly carefulness" (305), and to improve upon "what they have established as a (pitiful) standard" (305).

[5] *The Twisted Thing* is chronologically the second Hammer novel, written in 1948 but put aside until 1966. Originally entitled *For Whom the Gods Would Destroy*, Collins states that it was "shelved by Spillane when his publishers deemed it too farfetched (though the central idea of the story was fact-based)" (27). Spillane asserts that the book was rejected more because "they were still old time editors and they didn't like this new-style stuff…there's too much sex, too much violence" (Interview 3).

[6] Chandler is remembered mainly for his seven novels, all featuring private eye Philip Marlowe. However, prior to Marlowe's debut in *The Big Sleep* (1939), Chandler published sixteen stories in the pulps, featuring various private eyes (including Dalmas, Carmady and Mallory). All were prototypes for—and have much in common with—Marlowe; indeed, Chandler 'cannibalised' many of the stories, reusing plots and characters when he came to write the novels. To a certain extent, Chandler's various detectives can be seen as interchangeable; when his pulp stories were anthologised, Chandler even gave permission for some of the detectives' names to be changed to 'Philip Marlowe' (Hiney 292 n.20).

[7] The only corrupt police encountered by Hammer appear in a small town called Sidon in the rejected (and derivative) second novel, *The Twisted Thing*. Nevertheless, the crooked cops in this book are far outnumbered by honest cops who respect and are willing to assist the private eye. These officers—mainly from neighbouring towns, State Police and NYPD—help Hammer to clean up the Sidon force.

[8] Ruehlmann seems interested in *Kiss Me, Deadly* simply because the villainess burns to death, which he fits into a tortuous allegory of demon lovers and Salem witch hunts. In the process, he misdates the novel by two years (placing its publication in 1954), asserts that after the burning Hammer can

be "celibate" (ignoring the fact that Hammer has no sex in the novel at all) and shoehorns Velda into a role that patently does not describe her.

[9] While there may have been many female sleuths since the genre began, there have been few licensed female private eyes. Indeed, most critics place the invention of the latter in the late 1970s. Ian Ousby states that Marcia Muller's Sharon McCone (who made her debut in 1977) "is usually identified as the first" (182). Tony Hillerman expands this statement, arguing that: "Marcia Muller has won her way into the record books as the creator of the first well-known, fully licensed, totally believable, hard-boiled female private investigator" (665). Leaving aside the subjective matter of 'total believability'—which of us would pass that particular test?—all of Hillerman's descriptions apply to Velda's "first" appearance thirty years earlier in 1947. One might even argue that Velda (owing to Spillane's enormous sales) is much more "well-known" than McCone. Her presence in the Hammer series helped accustom a wide audience to the previously unseen sight of a female hard-boiled detective; rescuing men, killing villains and solving cases.

[10] Slam Bradley is a hard-boiled private eye who has featured in *Detective Comics* from its inception in 1937 through to the present day (though his character was 'retired' between 1950-80). Batman first appeared in *Detective Comics* in 1939 but—unlike Bradley—he moved beyond that niche market into the mainstream, appearing in every media from television shows to novels, from video games to plastic toys. Mike Hoolihan is the neo-noir detective in Martin Amis' *Night Train* (1997)—a novel and novelist that would seem to fit both Ousby and Nolan's definition of 'mainstream' and 'serious.'

[11] Similar advertising adorns the paperback reissues from the 1960s, in which Hammer gets reduced to a catchphrase: "MIKE HAMMER: COOLEST WITH A GUN / HOTTEST WITH A GIRL." This catchphrase appears on the front cover, while the back cover assures us that: "THEY DON'T COME ANY TOUGHER THAN MICKEY SPILLANE."

[12] A number of critics seem to dismiss Spillane without a careful reading of his work. The most striking recent example occurs in Gary Lovisi's article "Sex and Savagery in Pulp Crime Paperback Cover Art" (2001). Lovisi criticises the cover art of "Mickey Spillane's hard-boiled Mike Hammer paperback reprints from Signet Books. . . . On the cover of *The Long Wait* (Signet Book #932) it is Mike Hammer himself, bound and beaten, shirt torn and tied to a chair with a dishevelled woman in the foreground. What is her con-

nection to the scene? Is she Hammer's captor or companion?" (46-47). Neither: the man on the cover is Johnny McBride; *The Long Wait* is not even a Mike Hammer book.

[13] Nick Charles is the perma-drinking detective in *The Thin Man* (1932). Both Hammett and Chandler were alcoholics, and this often seems to be reflected in the drinking habits (and capacities) of their characters. This aspect of Chandler's detectives may involve a certain amount of wish-fulfillment on his part, as he usually remained sober while writing—apart from his years as a script-writer.

[14] For a list of Hammer's tastes in music and poetry, see Collins (35). Even Collins, Spillane's staunchest defender, admits "Culture would not seem to be something associated with Mike Hammer" (35)—this shows the strength of the icon, the popular image, the emblem that Marling describes.

[15] In a recent interview, scriptwriter A.I. Bezzerides asserted that "The book was shit. So I changed it" (Haut 170). He then lists some of the things he feels were "done badly in the book," including the following: "In the book, there was a detective with a girlfriend who was his secretary, and he adored her. The girlfriend screwed husbands so the wives could get a divorce. The detective screwed wives so husbands could get a divorce. I thought that was shit" (Haut 170). However—apart from Hammer's adoration of Velda—these events take place only in Bezzerides' script. In Spillane's novels, Hammer eschews divorce work, and Velda never sleeps with a client. Asked to comment on *Kiss Me Deadly* and the various Hammer films, Spillane stated in 1999 that: "I don't like any of them, because they don't read the books" (Interview 5).

[16] This ABC show derives its name from Mike Hammer, and satirises—amongst many other characters, films and television shows—the CBS series *Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer* (1984-85). The latter starred Stacy Keach, and was renewed as *The New Mike Hammer* (1986-87). Perhaps Hammer's most persistent simulacrum, Keach reappeared in the syndicated series *Mike Hammer—Private Eye* (1997-98). Spillane commented in 1999 that "no one's forgotten him, he's still on TV. Now we made the Guiness book of records, Mike Hammer has been on three different times with the same actor Stacy Keach, playing the same role. Now they're getting ready to go back for movies, and he's saying, 'I'm too old' and he is!" (Interview 2).

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Gertrude Stein: The Making of a Literary Icon

Teresa Requena

In 1996, the *New York Times Book Review* published a review of one of the latest biographies on Stein: *Sister Borther: Gertrude and Leo Stein* by Brenda Wineapple. The reviewer described Stein as "a cult figure, an icon" (Qtd. in DeKoven 482), a representative comment of a long tradition in literary criticism that has seen Gertrude Stein as an icon of Modernism, an eccentric with a difficult character, an extremely powerful Maecenas and a sponsor of young writers. Her one time friend and later bitter enemy, Ernest Hemingway, also promoted that vision in *A Moveable Feast*, where he wrote: "She wanted to know the gay part of how the world was going; never the real, never the bad" (25). Michael Gold, in his article "Gertrude Stein: a Literary Icon", also argues for a similar thesis and puts forward the extended view that she was a bored socialite:

> A leisure class, which exists in the labor of others, which has no function to perform in society except the clipping of investment coupons, develops ills and neuroses. It suffers perpetually from boredom. Their life is stale to them. Tasteless, inane, because it has no meaning. They seek new sensations, new adventures constantly in order to give themselves feelings. (209-10)

According to this perspective, Stein seemed to live a fascinating and a glamorous life in Paris that also included writing as a minor pastime. For decades, Stein has figured in literary histories as the mother of the "Lost Generation", as the great discoverer of writers, she was even given nicknames as "the mother goose of Montparnasse" or "Mama of Dada" (Kellner 3).

But how, then, did the iconic Gertrude Stein came into being? Several reasons can explain the process by which Stein was turned into an icon but at the same time central aspects of her life such as her true vocation of writer or her homosexuality were left out. On the one hand, this status of iconicity was undoubtly due the fact that she lived one of the most mythical periods in the history of the arts. As Ben-

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stock has noted, Paris was the artistic center at the beginning of the 20th century:

> Rarely has a time and place so captured the imagination as the Paris of these years. From our contemporary perspective, this period is set apart in the historical flux of the twentieth century, strangely removed from us and yet, curiously, still of interest. Our impressions of these years are marked as much by the sense of a self-indulged hedonism as by the record of an intellectual fervor. (4)

Certainly, the popularity that she eventually achieved, which in some periods of her life could be equated to that of a Hollywood star, did not seem to match the actual readership that she had for most of her career, making her the "best known unread writer in American literature" (Kellner 1). As Hobhouse explains:

> To the American writers who remained in Europe after the war, or who came throughout the early twenties to renew their relationship with the 'old world' and take advantage of the favourable rates of exchange for the dollar, Paris was known, among other things, as the home of Gertrude Stein. Her reputation was far greater than could have been guessed from the slender works of hers that were then known to the American literary public. Apart from Three Lives, which had been published in 1909, the Portraits of Picasso and Matisse, published in Stieglitz's Camera Work in 1912, and Tender Buttons, which appeared in limited numbers in 1914, little of her work was known. But numerous parodies of her writing had appeared in magazines such as Life and Vanity Fair, and together with her own short pieces published in these magazines, they created for her an important, though hardly understood reputation. (Hobhouse 96-97)

On the other hand, we can argue that Stein herself largely contributed to shape her public image as a "non-writer" and thus, indirectly promoted her more glamorous, social facet. The line of action developed in different stages: initially, her reputation did indeed rest on the notoriety of her extraordinary collection of art, which had been initiated by her brother Leo. When nobody had still heard of Cézanne, when Matisse or Picasso were just beginning their career, the Steins began to buy those "weird" pictures that would wallpaper the famous *atelier* at the *rue de Fleurus*. In Paris, brother and sister were soon

known by their eccentric taste. As Mellow explains: "[a]mong the French it was considered sport to visit the Steins at least once, just to see the incredible trash the two gullible Americans had hung on their walls" (14).

Time showed that they had had a good nose and their *atelier* would house one of the most famous art collections in history. As Hemingway described it, "[i]t was like one of the best rooms in the finest museum except there was a big fireplace and it was warm and comfortable" (Qtd. in Watson 10). In the main room, any visitor could admire the canvases of Picasso, Matisse, Cézanne or Gris, what Gertrude Stein used to call the "collection of the worthies" (Ibid. 10).

The celebrity of the collection made the Stein's home a required stop where—as the famous title goes—"everybody who was anybody" (Hobhouse) had to stop if they wanted to know the new artistic trends in Paris, or what artistic shapes would the new twentieth century take. As Stein put it in *Paris France* (1940), "[...] Paris was where the twentieth century was" (11). Ironically, the notoriety that Stein acquired with the art collection was to be the first burden that would prevent her from being recognized as a writer. Her image as an eccentric and patron, as discoverer of such painters as Picasso was firmly established few years after her arrival in Paris. Actually, she eventually displaced the popularity that her brother Leo initially had in Paris as both art collector and promoter of the Saturday evenings at 27, *rue de Fleurus*. As Shari Benstock explains:

> [Stein] very soon displaced her brother as the spokesperson on art and literature, placing herself at the center of the Saturday evenings at home, gathering the men around her while consigning the 'wives' to other rooms, where they entertained themselves or were entertained by Alice Toklas. Stein began promoting herself as the resident genius of the Left Bank. The Paris setting was soon important because Gertrude Stein was there—and she amply filled the space she had created for herself. (15)

There were, however, two more events that would shoot her to fame and at the same time obscure her facet as a writer: her participation in *The Armory Show* in 1912 and the publication of the *Autobiog-*

raphy of Alice B. Toklas in 1933.[1] The Steins participated in *The Armory Show* by lending some Matisse—one of them, the controversial "Blue Nude"—from their collection. It was, however, the publication of some of her Portraits during the event what attracted general attention to her unusual literary style. As Mellow explains, "[a]lthough the paintings that Leo and Gertrude had loaned were listed in Leo's name, it was Gertrude, […], who was singled out for notice. Like the Armory Show itself, she had become good copy" (210).

The mocking that would eventually make her one of the most acclaimed icons of unintelligible style begin at this time. Her brother had already dismissed her writing: "Leo Stein and many who came after him were to conclude that Gertrude's experimentation with linguistic convention was the result of her inability to deal effectively with language, so that she made her greatest weakness into her most 'remarkable' strength" (Benstock 152). Actually, Benstock suggests that Stein's friendship with Picasso substituted for the brother who openly showed his disgust for her writing. Thus, Picasso was a friend "[...] with whom she could discuss her theories of art and the literary experiments she was undertaking [...] Picasso apparently took Gertrude's work seriously, and the two established a method of dialogue that allowed each to discuss artistic method in terms of the other's métier" (Ibid. 153)

It was in the context of *The Armory Show* that criticism of her work spread beyond the literary circles and attained a public dimension where parodies of her texts became even more famous than the original texts themselves. The *Chicago Tribune* for instance, published a poem to "honor" Matisse's "Blue Nude": "I called the canvas Cow with Cud/And hung it on the line/Altho' to me 'twas vague as mud,/'Twas clear to Gertrude Stein" (Curnutt 4). In her autobiography, *What is Remembered*, Alice B. Toklas also refers to one of Stein's lines that were most parodied and became an emblem of her repetitive style, her "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose". Toklas explains: "[...] in *The New Yorker* there was a drawing supposed to represent the customs inspector saying, Gertrude says four hats is a hat is a hat" (144-45).

The attacks against Stein's style continued after *The Armory Show* and became especially incisive with the publication of one of her most experimental texts, "Tender Buttons" in 1914, when a combination of criticism of the text and direct personal assaults began to appear, creating a body of criticism that also contributed to her perception as a literary fraud, a socialite in literary disguise, for whom writing was not a serious activity but a pastime. As Curnutt has explained,

> Anti-Stein factions, [...], fixated on her corpulence, her burgeoning reputation as an egotistical preceptor, her mannish appearance, and her stylistic propensity for what was derisively dubbed 'baby talk.' While [some] celebrated Stein as the expatriate mater of modernism, the latter dismissed her as a 'self-advertiser of pseudo-intellectual antics' (3).

Other negative reviews of the time recurrently referred to the possible mental insanity of Gertrude Stein: "[n]ow the first thing to say—and most people say it—is that the woman is either a colossal charlatan or mad" (Robert Emons Rogers qtd. in Curnutt 18). Her body and her clothes were also object of discussion and criticism: "Miss Stein, as she has been seen in Paris, is described as a mountainous lady, wearing a voluminous (necessarily voluminous) monkish robe of brown, roped—where the waist should be—with a cord. (Anonymous qtd. in Curnutt 16). As Benstock has explained, "[...] many men have made jokes about her girth, her Roman haircut, her heavy masculinity, suggesting in their jests that Stein was a matronly and ridiculous imitation male, under whose skirts was the lumpy body a female with misplaced sexual impulses" (171).

At this point criticism had lost patience with the most experimental period in Gertrude Stein's career (DeKoven xxi). Critics like Edmund Wilson, for instance, whose *Axel's Castle* in 1931 had included Stein with other "eminent" modernists such as Yeats o Joyce, praised *Three Lives* but expressed in reference to other most hermetic works:

> [...] most of what Miss Stein publishes nowadays must apparently remain absolutely unintelligible even to a sympathetic reader. She has outdistanced any of the Symbolists in using words for pure purposes

of suggestion—she has gone so far that she no longer even suggests […] we are no longer supplied with any clew as to what kind of object has sunk there [...] Most of us balk at her soporific rigmaroles, her e-cholaliac incantations, her half-witted-sounding catalogues of numbers; most of us read her less and less. […]." (Qtd. in Bloom 17—18)

Stein had gone too far. Her writing began to be seen as ridiculous and plain automatic writing and she was accused of being a fraud:

[...] Miss Stein is a grandstand player. She permits her mentality to fatten in order to interest the pseudo-intelligentsia—the poetry clubs; the contributors to new thought magazines and their readers; incompetents who go in for futurism in painting or cubism in sculpture. Amy Lowell turned the trick before her, but Miss Lowell's Bible was the Oxford Book of Verse by comparison" (G. E. K. qtd. in Curnutt 28).

Paradoxically, Stein herself would confirm the image that part of the criticism had so much reinforced with the parodies of her writing and the comments on her behavior with the publication of one of her most famous texts, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in 1933. The memoir was written "[..] as simply as Defoe did the autobiography of Robinson Crusoe" (*The Autobiography*, 237), adopting the persona of Alice B. Toklas. When Stein finished the text, it was clear that she had written a potential literary success. He literary agent, William Aspenwall Bradley, felt enthusiastic at having a commercial text in his hands and wrote Stein saying: "[...] wild horses couldn't keep me from reading it at once" (Hobhouse 137).

The Autobiograhy was first published serially in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1933 and a year later, "Harcourt, Brace" published the first edition of the text. By 1935, four different editions had been issued and 11,400 copies sold. *The Autobiography* established Stein as one of the most popular literary personalities of the moment and gave her the opportunity to go back to her home country in 1934 in a lecture tour, where Stein found an unprecedented popularity and attention from the media. The celebrity of her account made her as popular as a Hollywood star. As his friend Max Ewing wrote her in a letter: "[...] you are more discussed in Hollywood these days than Greta Garbo" (Qtd. in Hobhouse 139).

There were true reasons to make such a remark since the popularity that both Stein and Toklas enjoyed while in the United States seems difficult to imagine for a writer and her partner. As Kellner explains:

Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas got treated like movie stars on the lecture tour: the Chicago police gave them a midnight ride in a patrol car from the homicide squad; the president of the University of Virginia presented them a gold key to Edgar Allan Poe's dorm room; the University of Chicago whipped up a seminar for her to teach; George Gershwin gave them a private piano recital; they dined with Charlie Chaplin in Hollywood, and they had tea with Mrs. Roosevelt at the White House (Kellner 1988 14).

During the stay in their home country Alice B. Toklas organized the details for the conferences and ensured Stein's demand that audiences would not number more than five hundred people. The figure might seem far-fetched but the truth is that at Columbia University there were a thousand people waiting to listen to Stein's comments on her writing (Hobhouse 161), proof of the popularity that Stein already enjoyed.

The success of *The Autobiography* was, as it has been referred to by Mellow, "a mixed blessing" (424). On the one hand, it gave her the wide recognition that she had been searching for all her life. On the other, it led to a profound identity crisis and a writer's block. As she explained in her second autobiography:

Since the Autobiography I had not done any writing, I began writing something, I called it Blood on the Dining Room Floor but somehow if my writing was worth money then it was not what it had been, if it had always been worth money then it would have been used to being that thing but if anything changes then there is no identity and if it completely changes then there is no sense in its being what it has been. Anyway that was the way it was (86).

The popularity of *The Autobiography* was followed by a period of sterility and Stein began to distinguish between writing for success or "outside" writing and serious or "inside" writing (Dydo 84). After the American tour, Stein became deeply worried by the effects that her

new status as a literary icon had on her both as an individual and as a writer. She explored this topic in her second autobiography, *Everybody's Autobiography*, where she referred to her public dimension and to the paradox that had always been part of her literary career: "It always did bother me that the American public were more interested in me than in my work. And after all there is no sense in it because if it were not for my work they would not be interested in me so why should they not be more interested in my work than in me" (1993, 51).

Stein was right in realizing that she was not acknowledged as the devoted and prolific writer that she certainly was and this is the vision that has prevailed in part of the literary world. As DeKoven has explained, a large part of criticism still sees her as an icon, not as a writer:

> Many writers on Stein have given us a clear picture of her as art collector, cultural celebrity, influence on the younger generation of writers. The bulk of Stein criticism, in fact, is biographical; her presence, her reputation, is really more that of a 'literary figure' than that of a writer. She is seen as someone whose life in literature—her influence, connections, history, remarks—is of greater interest than her writing. (xxii)

This is not to say that her writing is still dismissed, since recognition of her literary production has come in the last decades of the 20th century. As DeKoven has explained:

> Stein's major critics, beginning with Sherwood Anderson and Thornton Wilder have made powerful arguments for Stein's seriousness, centrality, importance to twentieth-century and American literary traditions. Harold Bloom opens his introduction to the recent Modern Critical Views volume on Stein with a categorical superlative: 'The greatest master of dissociative rhetoric in modern writing is Gertrude Stein.' (75)

Most critics agree that this recognition has to be related to the advent of modern theory, which saw in Stein's texts an already deconstructed writing and a literary practice that has a lot in common with French Feminist theories of writing, for instance. Other theoretical approaches have also emphasized her natural affinity with key con-

cepts within postmodernism such as the construction of self-referential meaning or the determination to show that reality is mediated and, therefore, political. In any case, in the last decades of the 20th century, Stein found a place in the history of literature in the United States. As Kellner noted in 1988:

> During the forty years since Gertrude Stein's death, about two dozen full-length critical studies of her work have been published, and her list of advocates and allies is distinguished; so we are well past the period when it was easy to ignore her out of bewilderment [...] much of her work is back in print, although her name was rarely mentioned in the college classroom forty or thirty or even twenty years ago. Now she has begun to turn up in American Literature anthologies, and The Library of American Literature [Sic.], […] has scheduled a Stein volume. (3—4)[2]

This recognition has been especially outstanding in relation to her fiction, where texts such as *Three Lives* have found their way into the university curriculum, while other literary genres such as her plays and, to a lesser extent, her poetry still await the recognition awarded to most of her fiction. Actually, it is commonly unknown that Stein wrote about seventy plays during her life and that some of them were staged and received wide critical attention and popularity such as *Four Saints in Three Acts*. Others, such as *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*, were the banner of a new generation of theater artists in teh 50s and 60s who saw in Stein the inspiration for creating plays that moved away from traditional dramatic conceptions. This was the case of the Living Theatre, for instance, the group that identified Stein as an inspiration for their own theatrical practices. In more recent times, playwrights and directors such as Richard Foreman and Robert Wilson have also acknowledged Stein's contribution to what we could term a postmodern theater practice. Such a forceful recognition of her contributions to the history of theater in the United States was slow to reach the academia and literary criticism. Even nowadays, her dramatic production is perceived as minor in comparison to her fiction and poetry, the areas that have traditionally attracted the attention of criticism. There is, however, indisputable evidence: Stein wrote about

a seventy plays and operas in a period of about thirty-five years.[3] Such evidence and her comments about her plays in her letters show that Stein's playwriting was never a minor occupation, quite to the contrary: it was a field for experimentation and Stein's plays and essays are a major contribution to twentieth-century developments in American drama. As she unabashedly put it, "[...] in this epoch the important literary thinking is done by a woman" (*The Geographical History* 211).

Despite this certain visibility, and as DeKoven has suggested, "[t]he old stereotypes never die" (482) as the opening review shows. A careful reading of both her literary production and her autobiographies reveals the extent to which Stein considered herself to be a serious and devoted writer. Actually, as Benstock has shown, Stein was never a true socialite: "[...] Stein chose carefully those with whom she shared her views, and the scenes of such exchanges was nearly always her home, where she felt comfortable among her paintings and manuscripts. She was rarely, if ever, seen in Montparnasse cafes; she seldom attended the literary occasions [...]" (17).

Proof of her devotion as a writer was her constant efforts to have her texts published, even her most "inaccessible" ones. This became a life project for both Stein and Alice Toklas, who continued with the task of having the unpublished manuscripts published after Stein's death. Stein showed the same discipline that she had for writing long hours at night in her efforts to find publishers. Thus, Stein paid for the publication of *Three Lives* and later on, in 1930, She and Toklas founded their own publishing house: Plain Edition. The story of the capital that they needed to put up Plain Edition reveals the extent to which publishing and, therefore, writing, was an important activity for Stein: "[w]hen Gertrude could not again find a publisher she sold the beautiful Picasso painting of the girl with a fan held in the air, which quite broke my heart. And when she told Picasso, it made me cry. But it made it possible to publish the Plain Edition" (Toklas 136).

The influence of the pictorial collection on Stein's aesthetic theory has also been commonly underestimated. The pictures were more than a fashionable display on the walls of the *atelier*; they had a

direct influence on her development as a writer. As she explained in *The Autobiography*, she wrote *Three Lives* under a picture of Cézanne, from whom she derived her theory of the present and of representing "the thing in itself" and not "in relation". For Stein, the reality of the 20th century—what she termed the present—was not the present of the realists or naturalists, whom she saw as belonging to a way of understanding art related with progress, narrativity or teleology that she described with the concept "nineteenth century". Stein, like other Modernists, defined her writing in opposition to the 19th century both as a chronological concept and as an aesthetic one.[4] In her own words, "I was there to begin to kill what was not dead, the nineteenth century which was so sure of evolution and prayers, and esperanto and their ideas" (qtd. in Gass 6). Art in the nineteenth century had copied from a model and established itself on a linear narrative: concepts that, according to Stein, had no place in the new century. Thus, against the narrativity and linear progression of the 19th century and such popular forms as the melodrama or the realist novel, Stein, in her effort to capture the "now" established close bonds between her writing and other major artistic developments of the beginnings of the 20th century. It was especially cubism and the work of Picasso that Stein related herself to. As she explains in *Picasso*, both Pablo Ruiz Picasso and herself were alone in creating the 20th century, since nobody was doing what they were doing in their respective fields, that's why there existed a natural affinity between their two projects.

Catharine Stimpson adds a further dimension to Stein's process of becoming an icon by noting how there was another essential element left out in the critical reception of Gertrude Stein: her homosexuality. In the same way that had happened with the process that we have described above, by which two Steins seemed to coexist in the critical appraisal of the writer, i.e. Stein the glamorous socialite vs. Stein the true and devoted writer, Stimpson argues that it is also possible to identify two Steins in relation to her sexuality: The "Good Stein" and the "Bad Stein", whose definitions rest on the following arguments:

Gertrude Stein began to write seriously around 1903. A decade later, she had a reputation, especially but not exclusively in avant-garde circles. As that reputation expanded to ever larger publics, it divided against itself. In a repetitive binary opposition, two 'Steins' competed for attention in an arena that Stein herself could at best partially control. One 'Stein' was the 'Good Stein,' whom the public liked. In 1933, it made a best-seller of her jeu d'esprit, The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas. After passing through the market, The Autobiography went on to please a second set of cultural gatekeepers: doyens of the syllabi, denizens of the college curriculum. [...] The second 'Stein' was the 'Bad Stein,' whom the public hated and ridiculed. The Bad Stein was guilty of a double transgression: first, and more blatantly, she subverted generic and linguistic codes; next, and more slyly, she subverted sexual codes. (309-10)

From this perspective, Stein's sexuality and linguistic transgression were aligned to constitute the hidden or dismissed Stein that was the object of ridicule in review after review. Once more, however, Stein herself contributed to this duality, since fame was achieved at the cost of hiding her own sexuality or by using what Stimpson has termed "the lesbian lie":

In a complex act of deception, confession and assertion, a misunderstood, under-published author is giving the public what she calculates it can take. Her gift demands that she handle a subgenre we insufficiently understand: the lesbian lie. This lie insists that no lesbians abed here [...] The author respects, and indeed shares, a reader's sense of decorum. At its finest, such decorum construes all sexuality as private and then begs private things stay in private. (310)

Stein never made public cause of her homosexuality and only two secondary sources refer us to her comments on the subject. One of them, by the undoubtly partisan Ernest Hemingway describes a conversation with Stein:

- 'You know nothing about any of this really, Hemingway,' she said. 'You've met known criminals and sick people and vicious people. The main thing is that the act male homosexuals commit is ugly and repugnant and afterwards they are disgusted with themselves. They

drink and take drugs, to palliate this, but they are disgusted with the act and they are always changing partners and cannot be really happy.'

- 'I see.'

- 'In women it is the opposite. They do nothing that they are disgusted by and nothing that is repulsive and afterwards they are happy and they can lead happy lives together.' (20)

The other testimony is the one offered by Steward, who also transcribed Stein's words on the subject, after having spent some days in Stein and Toklas' Summer residence at Bilignin:

[...] we are surrounded by homosexuals, they do all the good things in all the arts, and when I ran down the male ones to Hemingway it was because I thought he was a secret one. If Shakespeare had had a psychiatrist then we would never have had the plays or sonnets. I like all people who produce and Alice does too and what they do in bed is their own business, and what we do is not theirs. (56)

Apart from these indirect testimonies, Stein did not make public cause of her condition although there are periods in her writing that are openly erotic and clearly refer to the relationship between the two women, which as some critics have noted was established on quite traditional heterosexual roles. Benstock traces the beginning of this eroticism at the point when Leo left the *atelier* at the *rue de Fleurus* some time after Alice had moved in:

[Leo's leave] led to changes in Gertrude Stein's writing, which became openly sexual and erotic as well as increasingly domestic after the brother moved out. Examining the daily events and common objects of her home life, Stein made her homosexual marriage the subject matter for art, describing it in terms that suggested the heterosexual pattern for its roles: Gertrude as husband and Alice as wife. (157)

Alternatively, other critics such as Mellow and Bridgman have argued that Stein's experimentation is the actual result of her hidden homosexuality, a necessary codification of an unspeakable desire that could not be openly dealt with at the beginning of the 20th century. There is, however, something that is left out in this theory since, as Benstock has suggested, most of her most experimental pieces were not published contemporaneously with their composition (163). In any

case, Stein and Toklas refused to be identified with the women in the Paris lesbian communities in what Benstock reads as an "unwilling-ness to participate in a larger lesbian culture or in a more public dis-play of their attraction to women" (175).

Despite the evidence of Stein's devotion for writing she is still, for many, one of the most representative icons of early 20th century art but not a writer in capital letters.There was a price to be paid for being one of the most famous expatriate living myths in history: to be part of history as an influence on others not because of her own writ-ing. When she died in 1946 many thought—and many still think—that her artistic legacy lay in her influence on more conventional modernist literature rather than on her original contrbutions to the literature of the 20th century: "[...] when she died in August 1946 many observers of the literary scene assumed that her artistic legacy lay in the influ-ence she bore on more conventional modernist literature, whether Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* or Wilder's *Our Town*" (Curnutt 5).[5] Let's hope that such misperception is corrected in the near future.

Notes

[1] Stein wrote two more autobiographies that did not receive the acclaim of the first one: *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937) and *Wars I have Seen* (1945).

[2] *The Library of America* has published a second volume since Kellner's study: *Gertrude Stein. Writings 1932-1946.*

[3] There are significant discrepancies about the number of plays that Gertrude Stein wrote. The lists that different scholars provide in their studies show a difference of about thirty plays, which reflects the extent to which Stein pushed the limits of the dramatic genre, often writing plays that bore little resemblance to traditional dramatic form.

[4] Berry relates Stein's efforts to "kill" the nineteenth century to those of other modernists such as Ezra Pound or D. H. Lawrence (2).

[5] Stein died on 27th July and not in August as Curnutt writes.

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The Mammy/Aunt Jemima as an American Icon:
Toni Morrison Responds

Alice A. Deck

> In the distant future . . . a monument of brass or
> stone will be erected to the Old Black Mammies of
> the South, but what we need is present help, pre-
> sent sympathy, better wages, better hours, more
> protection, and a chance to breathe for once while
> alive as free women.[1]

These words of a former mammy and wet nurse in Athens,
Georgia in 1912 encapsulate the core of the conflict between white
and black American reactions to the iconic representations of the
black woman domestic in popular culture. On the one hand, the old
black southern mammy symbolized for whites self-sacrificing mater-
nal devotion and loyalty to the entire white family for whom she wor-
ked. African Americans, on the other hand, interpreted white Ameri-
ca's desire to erect brass or stone mammy monuments as manifestati-
ons of hegemonic limits on the economic and social development of
the entire black community by fixing the black woman into the role of
servant for white families. The prominent white citizens of Athens,
Georgia who led the "Black Mammy Memorial Movement" in 1910
lamented the passing of antebellum society. They intended to found
the Black Mammy Memorial Institute to provide industrial training for
black men and women. A cooking course for prospective black cooks
in white homes was a featured part of the planned curriculum. Similar
efforts in other southern states to memorialize the black mammy cul-
minated in calls to erect a mammy monument in Washington, D. C.
Prominent African American leaders at the time, such as W. E. B.
DuBois, angrily denounced white southerners' valorizing the ico-
nography of slavery because it lacked concern for the twentieth centu-
ry black woman's mothering role in her own home. In a 1912 essay in
Crisis 5, DuBois called for the protection of the black woman: "In the
midst of immense difficulties, surrounded by caste, and hemmed by
restricted economic opportunity, let the colored mother of today build

her own statue, and let it be the four walls of her own unsullied home."[2]

While a government-sanctioned monument in tribute to the old southern black mammy does not exist on the mall in Washington, D. C.[3], her corporate surrogate, the Aunt Jemima trademark, is emblazoned on processed breakfast food items (pancake mixes, syrups, frozen waffles), and baking goods (cornmeal and flour) that have been sold in American grocery stores for more than a century. During the first half of the twentieth century the Quaker Oats Company that makes Aunt Jemima products, developed an advertising campaign that featured figures like the old black mammy and the old black man counterpart Uncle Mose (or Rastus), the black butler. These caricatures of black domestics were depicted as dedicated solely to the service of white American families across the nation. This service included food preparation and dispensing hearty helpings of their own homespun advice about life. Aunt Jemima and Uncle Mose were jovial, loyal and often occupied a larger space in the frame of the advertisement than images of the products they were actually promoting. As the legendary superlative cook, Aunt Jemima's smiling face on the box of pancake mix served as a spiritual guide for the white middle class American housewife through the 1940's and 1950's. Even today, in the twenty-first century, the iconic representation of Aunt Jemima on the box of pancake mix, bottled syrup and various frozen breakfast items implies that the black woman cook is a labor-saving device for the American middle class.[4]

Many decades after large numbers of African Americans entered the business, education, legal and medical professions of the American economy, iconic representations of jovial black domestic servants are pervasive as corporate trademarks. In addition to Aunt Jemima, there's Uncle Ben on a brand of rice, Rastus on a brand of hot cereal, and a large black woman wearing braided extensions in her hair while mopping floors with a cleaning product. This persistent stereotyping continues to evoke intense responses from African American artists and intellectuals. Novelists, playwrights, and screenwriters in particular routinely interrogate stereotypes by "signifying" on them

in their own work. Signifying in this case is what Henry Louis Gates refers to as the process of repetition and revision of the stereotypes of blacks in white-authored texts, but with a signal difference.[5] As though following DuBois' 1912 charge to adulate the black mother in "the four walls of her own unsullied home," the iconic mammy figure in black-authored novels, plays, and films is a multi-dimensional character, set primarily within the black family and the larger black community.[6] Implied in black-authored texts is a condemnation of the economic exploitation of black domestics in white homes.

The novelist Toni Morrison salvages the iconic mammy figure in several of her novels because of older women in her own family whose clear understanding and belief in their own dignity and value as people inform her imaginary. It is their valuable intuitive knowledge, and their multiple skills as workers that are too often discredited as a stereotype:

> These women know what time it is by looking at the sky. It is the kind of information that normally one associates with a mammy, a black mammy. She could nurse, she could heal, she could chop wood, she could do all those things. And that's always been a pejorative word, a bad thing, but it isn't. That stereotype is bad only when people thinks its less . . . Those women were terrific, but they were perceived of as beastly in the very things that were wonderful about them.[7]

Toni Morrison's depiction of the mammy figure Aunt Jimmy in her first novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970) expands beyond an appreciative memorial to the thousands of historic southern black American women domestics. The novel urges the modern reader, especially the modern black woman reader, to emulate the old mammy's spiritual dignity as a means of meeting the challenges of life in a modern world.

"And the difference was all the difference there was:"[8] Morrison's Aunt Jimmy in The Bluest Eye

There are two women characters, Aunt Jimmy and Pauline Breedlove, who work as domestics in white households in Morrison's

first novel. Pauline works as a maid in the Fisher household in Lorainne, Ohio. Her life in this northern industrial community lacks any type of cultural support from other black women, and her marriage to Cholly Breedlove degenerates into a pattern of alcoholism and domestic violence. In the depiction of Pauline Breedlove, Morrison allows her to tell large parts of her own story in her own southern black dialect. We see from this that Pauline's artistic sensibilities—her passion for color and thoughtful design—were never developed; hence, Pauline channels this stunted individual creativity into her work as a maid in a white household. She internalizes white role models of feminine beauty and home management out of frustration and compensatory identification with that which is not available in her own black working class community. Her emotional neglect of her own black children in favor of doting on the Fisher child, her white charge, fosters their feelings of unworthiness.

Pauline exhibits the psychologically destructive effects of domestic servitude on a poor black woman. She has no inner resolve, no sustaining self esteem around which to build her life and that of her husband and children. Clearly, Pauline Breedlove does not exemplify the type of "terrific and wonderful" southern black earth goddesses/Mammies that Morrison admires.

In *The Bluest Eye* it is Aunt Jimmy that Morrison offers as a response to the iconic Aunt Jemima. Aunt Jimmy's very name echoes that of Aunt Jemima and invites a comparison to that popular icon. Significant differences are that Aunt Jemima is pictured in advertisements and on the box of pancake mix with a row of gleaming white teeth that brighten her broad smile; whereas Morrison's Aunt Jimmy is said to have only "four gold teeth" that she sucked as she ate "collard greens with her fingers" (132). The robust Aunt Jemima is always pictured energetically preparing and serving breakfasts to white Americans in their homes. The elderly, ailing Aunt Jimmy, lives in a black community in a small southern town, and in a small white-owned house that she rents. Morrison's Aunt Jimmy is shown interacting with a circle of women friends who, like her, once worked as servants in white households. Aunt Jemima's fictional biography never included

references to a black community, a black family, nor to a supportive group of black women friends. This presence or absence of a white or black family context surrounding Aunt Jemima and Aunt Jimmy, structures the differences in their ideological meanings.

When we first meet Morrison's character, she is introduced as the "Great Aunt Jimmy" of Cholly Breedlove whom she rescued from "a junk heap by the railroad" (132), where his own mother had thrown him four days after he was born. We learn that Aunt Jimmy beat Cholly's mother with a razor strap "and wouldn't let her near the baby after that" (132). She raises the infant Cholly by herself; choosing to name him Charles Breedlove after her own brother, rather than Samson Fuller after his alleged biological father. As she explains to Cholly, her deceased brother was "a good man," whereas "Ain't no Samson never come to no good end." (133) As one of the few people in the entire novel who respond to Cholly as a human being, Aunt Jimmy's choice of a name gives the abandoned male child a place in a maternal family line. Yet, the appellation "Great Aunt" simultaneously links and separates Jimmy and Cholly. Her heroic act of saving and avenging his life as an infant, renders her as his Great Aunt in the narrative action, but as his biological great aunt she is two generations removed from him (both laterally and vertically) in the family tree. This generational gap inhibits meaningful communication between Aunt Jimmy and Cholly. The irony of her choice of names for her young nephew, for example, is that he grows up to breed a family of two children that he was never taught how to love. As an adult he eventually comes "to no good end" like both the biblical Samson and his own biological father.

It is the careful rendering in *The Bluest Eye*, of the historical development of young black women into elderly matriarchs like Aunt Jimmy that distinguishes Toni Morrison's representation of the iconic mammy. Aunt Jimmy's generation of black women grew from young girls with furtive eyes, relaxed lips and slim necks into life "from the back door". Once there, they occupied the lower rung of the social ladder and obeyed orders from white adults and black men; but like goddesses, each recreated their low social rank in her own image.

"They ran the houses of white people and knew it." (138). This clarity in understanding their authority as domestics enabled them to get on with the task of performing their roles in southern society:

> When white men beat their men, they cleaned up the blood and went home to receive abuse from the victim. They beat their children with one hand and stole for them with the other. The hands that fell trees also cut umbilical cords; the hands that wrung the necks of chickens and butchered hogs also nudged African violets into bloom; the arms that loaded sheaves, bales and sacks rocked babies into sleep. They patted biscuits into flaky ovals of innocence—and shrouded the dead. They plowed all day and came home to nestle like plums under the limbs of their men. The legs that straddled a mule's back were the same ones that straddled their men's hips. And the difference was all the difference there was. (138)

Morrison's mammy figures are imbued with what she explains as "a feminine intelligence" that enables them to "look at the world as though we can do two or three things at once—the personality is more fluid, more receptive. The boundaries are not quite so defined." [9] As young women they are physically strong enough to fell trees, butcher hogs, load sheaves, bales and sacks, wring the necks of chickens, and plow all day. At the same time their touch is delicate enough to nudge African violets into bloom, rock babies to sleep, pat biscuits, and nestle under their men. This blending of masculine and feminine attributes is evident in Aunt Jimmy's name and in her hands. At her death, Cholly notices his great aunt's "long fingers with a man's hard nails, having done their laying by . . . now . . . dainty on the sheet" (139). In response to the stereotyped "sexlessness" of the mammy figure[10] in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, Morrison's sexualized black women domestics alternately nestle under the limbs of their black men or straddle their men's hips.

　　　The final line of this passage: "And the difference was all the difference there was", contains an ambiguity that suggests several possibilities. First that the women fully understood the difference in implication between tasks they had to do for white people, and those they did for their own black families. Thus empowered, they go about their work in silent obedience to their own self esteem as valuable

human beings. Another reading of "difference" in this passage, suggests that the black woman domestic's continual shifting between the social hierarchies of gender and race is the cause for the abuse and exploitation she silently endures. She moves between the realm of the white man, where she cleaned up the blood after he had "beaten [her] men", and that of her own home where she received "abuse from the victim". Here Morrison takes issue with Dubois's 1912 call for black women to build their own "unsullied" homes as a monument to their roles as mothers in the black community. DuBois failed to factor in the black man's role in the black household at that time, whereas Morrison's late twentieth century womanist interpretation of the black man's dehumanizing experience in America, shows that it has an impact on interpersonal relationships in the black household. She imbues her mammy figures with an unexpressed socio-political understanding of the effects of gender and race on black people's lives. As a group, mammies like Aunt Jimmy, Miss Alice and Mrs. Gaines did not allow sexist and racist ideologies to diminish their integrity. Hence, once again, their silent obedience to duty.[11]

As if in response to William Faulkner's two-word gloss on his mammy character Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929):"They endured"[12], Morrison carefully delineates the labor-intensive life that black women like Aunt Jimmy and her friends Miss Alice and Mrs. Gaines experienced. When Aunt Jimmy falls ill, her two friends gather to talk about "various miseries they had had, their cure or abatement, what had helped, "until their voices blended into a threnody of nostalgia about pain". (137) The pains they had endured included "childbirth, rheumatism, croup, sprains, backaches, piles" and "[a]ll of the bruises they had collected from moving about the earth—harvesting, cleaning, hoisting, pitching, stooping, kneeling, picking—always with young ones underfoot." (138) As though longing for the intimacy with their own bodies that pain provided, the three women "hugged the memories of illnesses to their bosoms. They licked their lips and clucked their tongues in fond remembrance of pains . . ." (138). Each pain they endured and scar left on their bodies mark their labored engagement in the world, and their having survived. While living with

Aunt Jimmy, Cholly often fell asleep listening to this "lullaby of grief" that "rocked him and at last numbed him" (139). He is seen but not heard in the presence of the elder women, in accordance with the custom of rearing children in southern black homes. Hence, he does not learn to appreciate all that his great Aunt Jimmy's generation lived through, nor does he glean much from their conversations that prove of use to his personal development. The women do not address their personal stories of endurance to him, and there is a missing generation (such as a mother or grandmother) in his life who might have served as an interpreter.

In an intense moment of grief and bereavement after her death, the fourteen year old Cholly is provoked to tears when an image of his Aunt Jimmy flashes across his mind. He remembers:

> [H]er four gold teeth, and the purple rag she wore around her head. With a longing that almost split him open, he thought of her handing him a bit a smoked hock out of her dish. He remembered just how she held it—clumsy like, in three fingers, but with so much affection.No words, just picking up a bit of meat and holding it out to him. And thenthe tears rushed down his cheeks, to make a bouquet under his chin. (159)

He appreciates Aunt Jimmy's self sacrifice on his behalf in the offering of meat she takes from her own dish. The fact that Cholly recalls her four gold teeth and purple head covering aligns Aunt Jimmy with royalty in his mind—someone worthy of his respect and admiration. Given his state of impoverishment following her death however, Cholly can only pay tribute to Aunt Jimmy with a bouquet of tears. Cholly does not recall any advice or guiding words of wisdom from Aunt Jimmy with which he could move into adulthood. Even the small amount of her money that he inherited did not sustain him for more than a few days after her death. Hence, Morrison implies that the old southern mammy in *The Bluest Eye* whose blessedness as a sustainer of life and whose collective identity was fostered by a supportive rural community of black women her same age, is of limited use for life in the northern, industrial cities to which Cholly, his wife Pauline, and

thousands like them would eventually migrate in search of employment.

Several cultural studies of the mammy concur that every aspect of her attire, but especially the bandanna tied around her head, signal her lowly social place as a menial servant.[13] Morrison's description, in contrast, suggests that the mammy's attire signaled her position as a free agent in southern rural America because she chose to wear specific garments. By the time women like Aunt Jimmy reach old age, it is with relief that they: "wrapped their heads in rags, and their breasts in flannel; eased their feet into felt. They were through with lust and lactation, beyond tears and terror. They alone could walk the roads of Mississippi, the lanes of Georgia, the fields of Alabama unmolested. They were old enough to be irritable when and where they chose, tired enough to look forward to death [. . .] They were, in fact and at last, free." (139). Their attire signaled their old age which in turn accorded them an aura of respect as earth goddesses that fended off potential molesters. Morrison insists, moreover, that synthesized into mammy's eyes is the greatest testament to her life in the south: "—a puree of tragedy and humor, wickedness and serenity, truth and fantasy." (139). Their lives did not afford them an inclination for joviality, and broad smiles. Exhausted, they patiently anticipate the ultimate repose that they have earned.

Conclusion

Toni Morrison's response to iconic representations of the Mammy/Aunt Jemima in American popular culture is to re-appropriate it and foreground the African American cultural context that is often excluded from white-authored novels. Morrison's Aunt Jimmy, Miss Alice and Mrs. Gaines did not live solely to serve the southern white family. The southern mammy's feminine intelligence enabled her to devote equal time between her own family and the white family she worked for. She did not love the white child in her care more than the children in her own family—no matter how distant the blood relationship[14] Moreover, Toni Morrison's mammy characters

in *The Bluest Eye* are fully sexualized women. Some bore children and lactated, while others just surrendered to their lust. Late in their long lives as laborers, their old bodies carried the physical signs: missing teeth, sagging breasts, body aches and sour stools. At her death, Aunt Jimmy had very little of material value to bequeath to her great nephew. As Cholly grieved, he longed for her silent, loving gestures, but he had learned little from her about how to live as a responsible adult. By this Morrison suggests the actual limitations of the old southern mammy as a useful guide for life in the northern industrial centers to which Cholly migrated.

Yet Morrison's southern mammy figure in *The Bluest Eye* retains her merits as an icon to the historical struggles and survival of the southern black woman in a white hegemonic society. Her fluid, receptive personality in Morrison's opinion, rendered her a "modern" woman long before thousands of black women migrated out of the south. The mammy for Toni Morrison is " a totally generous free woman. She's fearless. She is not afraid of anything. She has a few material things . . . She's available for almost infinite love. If you need her—she'll deliver. And she has complete clarity about who she is." (Moyers, p. 269) Such adulation aside, in several of her novels published after *The Bluest Eye* in which a matriarchal mammy appears, Morrison does not allow her to live. Pilate Dead in *The Song of Solomon* dies just when her nephew Milkman learns to love his culture and family, the cook Ondine who can barely stand on her feet after years of service to a white family in *Tar Baby*, anticipates her and her husband Sydney's death, Baby Suggs in *Beloved* dies before her granddaughter's ghost materializes to haunt 124 Bluestone Road. Furthermore, only Pilate and Baby Suggs are able to serve as spiritual guides after they die to their progeny. All of these deaths suggest Morrison's own ambivalence about the role of the mammy in the black family's future.

Notes
[1] "More Slavery in the South," *The Independent LXXII* (January 25, 1912): 197-198, as quoted in Beverley Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow: Atti-*

tudes Toward Black Women, 1880-1920 (New York: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1990): 4. I am indebted to Sherita Johnson, a doctoral candidate in the Dept. of English at UIUC, who first drew my attention to this book that proved invaluable to this project.

[2] W. E. B. DuBois, "The Black Mother," in *Crisis*, 5 (December 1912): 78. For a fuller discussion of the opposing African American opinions on southern white America's adulation for the black mammy, see Beverley Guy-Sheftall's *Daughters of Sorrow* (37-90), cited in note 1 above.

[3] During the first half of the twentieth century restaurants and eateries of various sorts located across the southern United States included the word "Mammy" as part of its name. One of the few such establishments still in operation is located on Highway 61, south of Natchez, Mississippi. Called "Mammy's Cupboard", it is a 28 foot tall replica of a black woman holding a serving tray, and wearing a large red hoop skirt and a bandanna around her head. It was built in 1940 by Henry Gaude and is still owned and operated by members of the same southern white family.

[4] Alice A. Deck, "'Now Then—Who Said Biscuits?' :The Black Woman as Fetish in American Advertising, 1903-1953," in Sherrie A. Inness, ed. *Kitchen Culture in America: Representations of Food, Gender and Race* (Philadelphia: U of Penn Press, 2000):69-93

[5] Kim Euell, "Signifyin(g) Ritual: Subverting Stereotypes, Salvaging Icons" in *African American Review* (3.4): 667-676.

[6] A few of the many black-authored texts that "signify" on the Mammy icon are: *Re/membering Aunt Jemima: a Menstrual Show* by Breena Clarke and Glenda Dickerson in *Colored Contradictions* (New York: Plume, 1996), *The Trial of One Short-Sighted Black Woman vs. Mammy Louise and Safreeta Mae* by Marsha L. Leslie (unpublished play), *A Raisin in the Sun* by Loraine Hansberry (1959), *Jubilee*, by Margaret Walker Alexander (1966), *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker (1982), *Like One of the Family: Conversations from a Domestic's Life* by Alice Childress (1937), and *Dessa Rose* by Shirley Ann Williams (1987).

[7] Anne Koenen, "The One Out of Sequence," in Danille Taylor-Guthrie, ed. *Conversations with Toni Morrison* (Jacksonville: U of Mississippi Press, 1994): 82.

[8] Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994): 138. All subsequent quotations from *The Bluest Eye* are from this edition, and specific page numbers will be given parenthetically.

[9] Bill Moyers, "A Conversation with Toni Morrison," in Danille Taylor-Guthrie, ed. *Conversations with Toni Morrison* (Jacksonville: U of Mississippi Press, 1994): 270.

[10] To cite Kim Euell, "Representing the antithesis of white womanhood, [the mammy] was strong, coarse, unattractive, and always asexual so as to present no threat to the mistress's position in the household." See her "Signifyin(g) Ritual: Subverting Stereotypes, Salvaging Icons" in *African American Review* (3.4): 672. See also Alice A Deck's "'Now Then—Who Said Biscuits'?: The Black Woman as Fetish in American Advertising, 1900-1950" cited in note # 4 above.

[11] I wish to thank my colleague Nancy Castro for her probing questions that helped me to develop this aspect of my discussion.

[12] William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (New York: Vintage Books, 1954): 427.

[13] See Alice A. Deck's essay cited in note # 4 above, and Kenneth W. Goings *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping* (Bloomington: Indiana U Press, 1994), M. M. Manring *Slave in a Box: The Strange Careet of Aunt Jemima* (Charlottesville: U Press of Virginia, 1998), and Patricia A. Turner *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994)

[14] Pauline Breedlove, the other black woman domestic servant in The Bluest Eye, does develop a preference for the white family for whom she works in the northern city to which she and her husband Cholly migrate. Pauline feels isolated from life in the city. She has no close black women friends, nor any family members with whom she can interact. The dismal living quarters that Cholly Breedlove provides for the family only serves depress Pauline. The gleaming white kitchens that Pauline works in are a much needed outlet for her artistic sensibility.

Cherished as well as Suspicious: Femme Femininities

Dagmar Fink

In her now famous book "Bodies That Matter" queer-feminist philosopher Judith Butler claimed that "the thought of sexual difference *within* homosexuality has yet to be theorized in its complexity."[1] Though in the meantime a lot has been written on sexual differences within homosexualities, or rather on sexual differences within queer sexualities, there are astonishingly few accounts of femme genders.[2] While the butch for example has not only within queer contexts become an icon of an empowering and subversive female masculinity, an icon also of "*the* lesbian" or fe/male queer, the femme receives little attention with regards to queer—not to mention: radical—genders. Instead, she is often seen as passing for straight or as performing a heteronormative femininity. The following therefore tries to outline the critical appropriation of femininities in femme genders. For, as Minnie Bruce Pratt puts it, "A femme is not a woman, at least not the woman people think. It's a case of mistaken identity."[3] Consequently Hanna Bordas, for example, identifies as "female-to-femme transgender".[4] A femme might be addressed as 'woman' within the binary logic of heteronormative gender. But she might also be known as male person to the authorities or she might be transgendered. At this point a general depiction will suffice: by femme I mean those that derive pleasure out of the performance of femininities, i.e. a performance that works with signs of a traditional heteronormative femininity in order to rework those signs from within the norm, to displace them, make use of them and empower the queer performer who positions herself as a sexual and desiring subject. Which is also to say that I regard femme femininities or *femme*ninities as queer genders.

Although I just pointed out that a femme isn't necessarily marked as 'woman' the following focuses primarily on the appropriation of femme femininities by those. For I am interested in interrupting a current trend within queer-feminist theories which analyze the transgression of heteronormative gender exclusively at sites of its obvious contradiction, that is, at sites where sex, gender, and the per-

formance of gender contradict each other in terms of a coherent heterosexual gender. Necessary and valuable as the analysis of drag queens and kings, cross-dressers, transgendered people, and the various female masculinities are, they all understand the transgression of heteronormative gender as contradictory performances of gender. Moreover, the recent focus on female masculinities alone, nourishes the misconception that only those genders that *cross* or are (diametrically) *opposed to* heteronormative genders are performative and subversive. As Laura Harris and Liz Crocker point out in their introduction to "Fem*me*. Feminists, Lesbians, and Bad Girls"[5], little has been written about the use of femininity as queer, subversive or radical by those marked as women. And most of the work on femmes is biographical or descriptive, there are hardly any attempts to *theorize femme*ninity or femmeness. Given this lack of theoretical approaches I will draw on the notion of gender parody as elaborated in the now canonical *Gender Trouble*[6] as well as *Bodies That Matter* by Judith Butler in order to represent *femme*ninities as specific queer genders, distinct from heteronormative femininity. To give a more vivid picture of that distinction I will also use a character of Melissa Scott's cyberpunk novel *Trouble and Her Friends.*[7] Certainly I could find femme representations in any literary genre. Yet, feminist science fiction has always been used to experiment with alternative representations of gender. And especially cyberpunk science fiction, where most of the major fights take place in the nets, knows of 'Bad Girls' with computers who are not "alien to femininity"[8], not to mention *femme*ninity.

Femmestory

There are differing accounts of the origins of a femme/butch culture, especially as regards the U.S. At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century lesbians (and gays and bisexuals and transvestites and …) were defined and, more importantly, began to define themselves as different from heterosexuals.[9] No longer a private matter exclusively, for many lesbians (and gays and…) sexuality became an important aspect of their identity. By the turn of the century, public

and semi-public lesbian contexts emerged in many metropolitan centers of the U.S. and Europe.[10] Next to the predominantly bourgeois and artistic salons of lesbian and bisexual women, bars and clubs appeared that centered on the explicit romantic and sexual interests of their customers. In Berlin, for example, a complex and differentiated lesbian culture developed[11], with clubs frequented mostly by bourgeois lesbians, clubs where mostly working-class lesbians socialized etc. Many of these clubs cultivated self-representations as 'Damen' (ladies) or 'Muttis' and 'Herren' (gentlemen), 'Bubis' (lads, boys) or 'Vatis' (daddies), which can be seen as the origins of a complex femme/butch culture. Many U.S. authors, however, start their femme histories with the lesbian bars of the 1940s and 1950s.[12] Kennedy and Davis, for example, argue that at the turn of the century lesbian communities had been upper-class exclusively and "negligible impact on succeeding generations of middle- and working-class lesbians who read Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* but little else."[13] Instead, Kennedy and Davis regard the Harlem Renaissance, because of the class mixture of people involved, as formative for working-class lesbian culture in the U.S. And the engagement in a femme/butch culture was not only a question of sexuality, it tended to be *class specific* as well: mostly working-class lesbians embodied those genders. Though it seems that at least in Weimar Berlin 'Bubis' and 'Muttis' could be found among members of any class, the roots of a femme/butch culture are working-class and succeeding generations of femmes and butches from the 1940s to the 1980s have been working-class predominantly.[14] According to Kennedy and Davis the 1940s lesbian bars—like most of the bars in the U.S.—had been racially segregated. But there had been femmes and butches among white lesbians, black lesbians, Chicana lesbians, Indian lesbians etc. Femme and butch, of course, meant different things in these different subcultures, since the various social classifications (sexuality, gender, class and race) mutually affect each other. All these (sub-)cultures developed codes and behaviors that enabled the representation not only of (pre-)femme and butch identities, but also of specific desires, and in so doing they made lesbian desire visible outside the bars as well.

Furthermore, femme and butch have been associated with certain *sexual positions*: femme on the one hand as the one who enjoys being fucked, as actively surrendering to the butch's lovemaking and thereby *enabling* the position of the butch, but also as someone who is sex experienced and aware of her lust as well as of her appeal. On the other hand the butch as fucker, as giving pleasure and fulfilling desires. The erotic interplay of femme and butch therefore rested (and perhaps still rests) on the femme enabling the butch to be seen as the one who actively seduces, with *both*—femme and butch—as sexual subjects.

The gender roles of the femme/butch couple of this period are described equally stereotypical: the butch as the one who protects—not only against the hostility of a homophobic society—the femme as providing comfort and emotional reassurance. During the 1970s femme and butch genders could therefore be denounced as repressive and patriarchal within lesbian feminism. The dominance of a white middle-class woman-identified—and no longer lesbian—feminism led to the production of sexual norms which banned certain sexual practices as well as sexually explicit language or explicit desire. But since the advent of writings by sex workers, SM activists and queer theorists in the late 1980s, femme/butch relationships and identities are constantly being reevaluated and theorized as a foundational part of queer political movements and cultures. Today it is no longer possible to identify femme or butch with a definite sexual position, there are femme fuckees as well as fuckers, and there are femmes who enjoy fucking at one time and being fucked at another. Furthermore femme and butch are now regarded as discrete genders. Not only are there accounts of femme-femme and butch-butch attractions, but numerous efforts to describe femme as a distinct position independent of a butch counterpart, as a desire for the performance of a femme gender have been undertaken.

The most persistent misconception of femme and butch genders holds that femme/butch relationships are copies of heterosexual relationships. Whereas butches are considered to be somewhat transgressive, femmes are being accused of performing a heteronormative

femininity. Harris and Crocker therefore argue, that while feminism's analysis of a traditional, stereotypical femininity as oppressive was useful for some women, "an understanding of the way femme femininity is subversive and empowering seems crucial for many women." (Harris and Crocker, An Introduction to Sustaining Femme Gender, p.3) And Joan Nestle, one of the first to deal with the "femme question", goes even further in her critique:

> …femmes became the victims of a double dismissal: in the past they did not appear culturally different enough from heterosexual women to be seen as breaking gender taboos, and today they do not appear feminist enough, even in their historical context, to merit attention or respect for being ground-breaking women. (Joan Nestle, "The femme question"; in: The Persistent Desire, p. 140)

In light of heteronormative femininity many femmes don't even appear properly or conventionally feminine, there is a wide variation of femme femininities across differences of style, class, race, age, body image, education, social contexts, etc. Performing femme is not only a matter of appearance, of dress and makeup, but an attitude, a style, a habitus and a set of behaviors used as codes of desire and gender. Thinking about femmes in terms of a heteronormative femininity furthermore makes it hard to account for male femmes and transfemmes. Also, the femme's specific desire for ambiguity can cannot be explained within this framework. S/he plays with 'appearing like' and 'not appearing like' at the same time, and while this play is serious, it is also ironic. In addition, this simultaneously 'appearing like' and 'not appearing like' *resists*—but does not *oppose*—heteronormative femininity, therefore its effect might be compared to an effect of irony, that Jonathan Katz found in John Cage's work: "… it opened up a *space of otherness that is not* understood as specifically *oppositional*."[15]

Within queer and lesbian communities, the attitude towards femmes is often more than a complicated one. Joan Nestle recounts that it has never been simple to represent a femme gender, neither in the lesbian bars of the 1950s, nor has it recently become easier to be read and acknowledged as femme. Deeply cherished, femmes have been devalued at the same time, and while "tremendous energy and

caring was spent courting" femmes, they were often regarded as only temporary or not 'really' lesbian.[16] While today it is possible to perform a femme gender without being hassled, femmes are still supposed to be invisible as queers or lesbians:

"It is ironic that the very visibility as lesbians that makes butches targets of homophobia in public space also makes them more visible as 'real' lesbians within lesbian communities." (Harris and Crocker, p. 2)

Parodies of Gender

For an understanding of femmes not as compliant with heteronormative femininity but as performing a specific, a femme femininity I will take up Butler's concept of gender parody which complicates the relation between supposed 'original' and 'copy':

> The notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities. Within feminist theory, such parodic identities have been understood to be either degrading to women, in the case of drag and cross-dressing, or an uncritical appropriation of sex-role stereotyping from within the practice of heterosexuality, especially in the case of butch/femme lesbian identities. But the relation between the "imitation" and the "original" is, I think, more complicated than that critique generally allows. […] As much as drag creates a unified picture of "woman" […], it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency. (Gender Trouble, p. 137)

While drag is here seen as a transgression of naturalized genders, Butler says nothing about femmes. But why should only drag and cross-dressing reveal the imitative structure of gender itself? Is only drag and cross-dressing an imitation of gender? Or does this revealing require the representation of the opposite of the expected? This can't possibly be the case, since this would imply that there is an initial coherence between sex and gender and the performance of gender, that there is a coherence between 'woman' and femme. Drag queens and

femmes use femininity in different ways. The drag queen's affectionate and devoted exaggeration is in excess of a stereotypical femininity, whereas the femme's serious play with femininity in most cases is not as flashy, and often ironic. She works with the irritation of 'appearing like' and 'not appearing like' at the same time. Still femme definitely marks a perceptible difference to heteronormative femininity. Therefore it is possible to reword Butler: Femmeninities reveal the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. In imitating gender, femmes implicitly reveal the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency.

Butler continues her examination of gender parody as follows:

> In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity. The notion of gender parody […] does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is of the notion of an original. […] To be more precise, it is a production which […] postures as an imitation. (Gender Trouble, p. 138)

Though, according to Butler, every gender is performative, not only gender parodies, the performativity of gender is easier to detect in the latter due to the displayed difference between sex, gender and the representation of gender. Just to sum up: To claim that gender is performative is to stress that nobody simply *is* or *has* a gender but that everybody *does* a gender. But to maintain that gender is produced does not mean that it is all play since it is produced within socially given norms that are developed in specific discourses, above all the hegemonic discourse of heterosexual gender. From the given set of gender norms some are continually adopted and reiterated. This citation of norms is to be seen as both a conscious as well as an unconscious action, which means that it holds the possibility of agency. In *Bodies that Matter* Butler defends her notion of performativity against those critics that read her concept as voluntarism:

> Performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative

modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a 'pure' opposition, a 'transcendence' of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure. […] The incalculable effects of action are as much a part of their subversive promise as those that we plan in advance. (Bodies, p. 241)

A description of Cerise, one of the two main characters in Melissa Scott's Trouble and Her Friends, serves as an example of this working with and against the norm, the femme's 'appearing like' and 'not appear like' at the same time:

Most of her look was already in place, her nails painted the hard dull-surfaced fuchsia that looked like the icing on a cookie, a flat, cheap color that worried the suits who saw her because they didn't know how she'd dare. She had painted her lips and cheeks and eyes the same hard color, shocking against the careful pallor of her skin, and the black of the chosen suit only intensified the effect. It was subtly wrong for her job, like the rest of her look—like all of her, wrong sex, wrong class, wrong attitude, most of all: the skirt a little too short, the jacket too mannish, with none of the affectations or compromises of corporate femininity. The heels of her shoes were painted the same stark fuchsia as her nails. (Trouble, pp. 67-68)

This representation of Cerise shows signs of traditional femininity: skirt, lipstick, nail polish, she is carefully dressed and made-up. From her picture we might also deduce a certain professional status that allows her to appear somewhat inappropriately. For she is also represented as subtly not meeting expectations—and thus provoking. The jacket is too mannish, while the skirt is too short, the color of lipstick, nail polish, eye shadow and rouge harsh and 'cheap'. Her play with normative femininity can therefore, with Marcella Stecher's words, be described as a 'working on two fronts'[17]: On the surface she meets the requirements of feminine stereotypes while she is deliberately not compliant with normative femininity at the same time. Her self-representation as a femme is challenging and daring, showing "none of the affectations or compromises of corporate femininity". The paragraph thus gives an image not only "of being implicated in that which one opposes", but also of "the turning of power against itself, to pro-

duce alternative modalities of power": the power of being subtly wrong, of—explicitly—not complying with gender norms, but playing with them and making use of them for one's own potent positioning. Cerise's repertoire is not limited to normative femininities, her representation also uses alternative femininities, like drag, when the color of the nail polish is compared to the icing of a cookie. By all these practices this *femme*ninity not only resists but also challenges heteronormative femininity—even though Cerise's 'otherness' is not in direct opposition to heteronormative femininity.

Though it is not possible to step out of heteronormative gender, the ideal is never fulfilled, the norm can never be totalitarian: "The practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production, but not for that reason fully determining. To the extent that gender is an assignment, it is an assignment which is never quite carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate." (Bodies, p. 231)[18] Furthermore, in trying to account for femme femininities as subversive genders it is important that Butler doesn't think about subversion in terms of transgression only, but also in terms of working the weakness in the norm:

> The resignification of norms is thus a function of their *inefficacy*, and so the question of subversion, of *working the weakness in the norm*, becomes a matter of inhabitating the practices of its rearticulation. The critical promise of drag"—read femme—"does not have to do with the proliferation of genders, as if a sheer increase in numbers would do the job, but rather with the exposure or the failure of heterosexual regimes ever fully to legislate or contain their own ideals. (Bodies, p. 237)

Going back to the representation of Cerise, the working of the weakness in the norm is accomplished by her subtly inappropriate/d[19] appearance. The resignification of heteronormative femininity in a femme femininity is represented, for example, through the coloring the text uses to characterize Cerise, or rather through the connotations the colors evoke. Cerise is the French word for cherry and cherries are mostly associated with a deep and supple—and sexual—red . The

color of her nail polish and of her heels is fuchsia, named after the bud
of a flower that has a reddish-pink color: it is the coloring not quite of
a femme fatale but of an exaggeration of a femme fatale. Plus, the col-
oring is not proper or conventional, but challenging and queer; there is
no soft and fruity red, but a shocking, daring, hard one. Signs, like
cherry, flower etc., that usually indicate the status of a (sexual) object
are thus turned into signs of a sexy subject.

With respect to femme and butch Butler therefore points out
that

> the idea that butch and femme are in some sense 'replicas' or 'copies'
> of heterosexual exchange underestimates the erotic significance of
> these identities as internally dissonant and complex in their resignifi-
> cation of the hegemonic categories by which they are enabled. Lesbi-
> an femmes may recall the heterosexual scene as it were, but also
> displace it at the same time. In both butch and femme identities, the
> very notion of an original or natural identity is put into question; in-
> deed, it is precisely that question as it is embodied in these identities
> that becomes one source of their erotic significance. (Gender Trouble,
> p. 123)

The femme's—and the butch's—eroticism is based exactly on the
knowledge *that* her gender is performative, that it is produced either in
the context of a scene with a desired object or in a powerful self-
representation as femme. The desire of femmes therefore is not a de-
sire for a gendered norm but rather a desire for ambiguity:

> As a lesbian femme explained, she likes her boys to be girls, meaning
> that 'being a girl' contextualizes and resignifies 'masculinity' in a butch
> identity. […] It is precisely this dissonant juxtaposition and the sexual
> tension that its transgression generates that constitute the object of de-
> sire. In other words, the object (and clearly, there is not just one) of
> lesbian-femme desire is neither some decontextualized female body
> nor a discrete yet superimposed masculine identity, but the destabili-
> zation of both terms as they come into erotic interplay. (Gender Trou-
> ble, p. 123)

Cerise: Representing Femmeninity

To give a more colorful picture of a femmeninity, I will concentrate in the following on the character Cerise—not so much to provide further theoretical explanations about femmes, but to work with the images of the text and its remarkable femme representations. Since Trouble and Her Friends is a cyberpunk novel, its characters act to a great extent on the nets. There Cerise appears as an icon: "Her current icon is known—a comic-book woman, all tits and hips and Barbie-doll waist, but done in one dimension only, exactly like a comic book, so that the shape is paper thin, absolutely flat from certain angles." (Trouble and Her Friends, S. 147)

The comic-book woman is consistent with Cerise's online-name Alice from Lewis Carrolls *Alice in Wonderland* und *Through the Looking Glass*, a character that can often be found in the context of female or feminist engagements with cyberspace. But not as the dumb, annoying little girl who is amazed by the wonders of this strange world, but as the image of a femininity that knows her way around computers and the nets, who is ingenious, unerring and competent. The icon parodies sexualized stereotypical femininities in being "all tits and hips", with a Barbie-doll waist. At the same time it is flat and unidimensional and thereby ironizing the stereotype as well as defying a simple voyeurism. It furthermore communicates a provocative attitude and the image of a 'Bad Girl'.

Cerise is challenging not only in the design of her icon, but also in her habitus and her specific, provoking femme eroticism, that need not be directed at another person, but can also be sheer auto-eroticism, or both. Should she feel like appealing to an object, she does so from a well-measured distance of which she controls the dimension at any time: "Cerise went back to her armchair, set her cup down and tucked her legs back under her. She could feel the narrow skirt straining, riding up on her thighs, and didn't care, was even mildly pleased with the effect. "I wasn't very happy with you," she said, and gave Trouble a wry smile." (Trouble and Her Friends, S. 212) She produces the refiguration of heteronormative femininity by utilizing

feminine codes to her empowerment, while at the same time she is working against these codes:

> Cerise was waiting more or less as she'd expected, sitting with her back to the west-facing window in one of the hotel's big armchairs, legs crossed, fingers steepled to proclaim she didn't have a weapon, and didn't need one. Trouble had never been fully sure whether the pose was bravado or misdirection, if there really was a palm-gun somewhere close to hand: Cerise had never owned a gun when they were together—there had been no real need, all the aggression had taken place on the nets, virtual violence where a woman could easily be as hard and tough as any man—but she had demonstrably known how to use one. […] Cerise smiled then, full lips quirking up into something like genuine amusement. She had gone back to dark hair, Trouble saw, jet-black hair that emphasized the alabaster pallor of her skin, and was stark contrast with the deep pink of her lips and nails. The black suit was expensive, top of the line, like the pink-heeled shoes. It jarred with the makeup, the hard cheap color flat as the icing on a cookie, but, as always, Cerise carried it off. (Trouble and Her Friends, S. 210f)

The image is that of a diva, draped in her chair with legs crossed and a carefully chosen outfit, who candidly demonstrates that while she does not carry a gun in her hands, she might have one handy and—if necessary—would know how to use it, should somebody try her. The alabaster pallor of her skin is accentuated not only by her black hair, but also by the striking, cheap color of her make-up—though the combination suits her marvelously. And, what's more, she is the *director* of the signs, be they trashy or otherwise, she controls the effect she has on her vis-à-vis.

To-be-looked-at is the stereotypical feminine position, a position that turns a person into an object and that controls a person. Cerise, on the contrary, gains power from being looked at, not only because she decides, when somebody might look at her and when not. Being looked at idealizes and pays tribute to her, while she is the one in control:

> She left the door open, worked her tight skirt down her hips, exaggerating the movements with deliberate anger, walked in tights and heels

and thin chemise to the suitcase that stood open on the dresser top. She found jeans and a T-shirt, and looked up again, to see that Trouble had disappeared from the doorway. She could see the other woman's reflection in the gray surface of the media center's monitor, however, and knew Trouble could see her, too. She stood still for a moment, then made herself move away, out of the line of sight. (Trouble and Her Friends, S. 217)

However, no pricey costumes or reckless heels are necessary to represent a *femme*ninity:

'You done with that?' Cerise asked, and Trouble turned to see the other woman standing in the bedroom doorway. She had changed into something like her old style, black jeans, nearly black T-shirt, black jacket, and walking boots, and the vivid makeup was a shocking contrast. (Trouble and Her Friends, S. 217)

The machine beeped at her before she had finished, and she went back out into the main room to give it another disk, buttoning her shirt as she went. It was a night for practical clothes, not display; she had chosen jeans and a plain shirt and a man-styled jacket, nothing to mark her either as a cracker or as law, just another of Seahaven's residents out for the evening. She inspected herself in the mirror, one eye still on the whirring transfer drive, and nodded to herself: she would pass." (Trouble and Her Friends, S. 252)

Even in casual clothes, in jeans, plain shirt and a man-styled jacket, Cerise is recognizable as femme, no masculine marker changes this. Be it visually, through an accentuating make-up, her *femme*ninity shows much more in her habitus, her attitude and her behavior. It might be a night for practical clothes, but they are chosen carefully to achieve the desired effect. Undisturbed and passing by, she puts on the required appearance, while she doesn't loose sight of the computer. She knows exactly what she wants to accomplish and pursues her goals with the various means required.

Passing for her does not mean passing as straight, what femmes are often accused of, it means if necessary passing as a 'normal' citizen, to be identified neither as a hacker nor as law. On the nets Cerise is extremely versatile, skilled and experienced. Persistent and unrelenting she pursues her target: "Cerise runs the net like a blood-

hound, head down on the scent of her own tracker. She sees it spark ahead of her, flickering red against the black-and-silver sky, follows its course along the datastreams. It was a good routine to begin with, and she has customized it, and knows her target intimately on top of that: it signals success within minutes, and she sweeps down to join it …" (Trouble and Her Friends, p. 247) She reaches her target, not 'like a woman', but by means of her skills, her knowledge, her experience and determination. There is nothing deceptive, devious or diffuse about her methodical procedure to allow for femme fatale connotations, rather the resolute actions of a hacking femme are represented.

"It takes blood and guts to be this cool, but I'm still just a cliché"[20]

I want to point out that the images I quoted and I drew to a certain extent represent the cliché of a femme. Neither does a femme necessarily have to be marked as 'woman', nor does she have to be a high-femme like Cerise. There are high femmes, practical femmes, road femmes, transfemmes, baby femmes, sluts, ladies, girlz, governesses, outdoor femmes, sexy kittens, bitches, country femmes, riot femmes, sex goddesses, cyberfemmes, serious mistresses, divas—to name just a few.[21] Partly this clichéd image of *femme*ninity is due to the narrative and rhetorical strategies of science fiction that works with concentrated images, with metonymies rather than with metaphors.[22] And since there are hardly any theorizing accounts of femme genders, I, furthermore, sought to draw a rather clear picture that as a result, at times, might be clichéd.

This being said, I, once more, want to stress that *femme*ninity is the effect of a willful production that postures as imitation, and thus marks the difference from the norm. For the performance of her gender the femme exploits traditional, stereotypical femininities as well as codes of drag queens and other femininities. The transgression of heteronormative gender she accomplishes not by *crossing* or *in opposition to* the norm, but by working *with, the weakness in* and *against* the norm. Her 'appearing like' and not 'appearing like' at the same time— in Jonathan Katz's words—opens up radical "a space of otherness"

that denaturalizes heteronormative genders. There is no need to abandon femininities in order to mark alternative, queer genders, femininities can be deliberately chosen und brought into play. But there is a critical need to analyze the differences between various femininities, the different ways by which femininities are produced. And there is a critical need to learn to see the manifold modes of transgressing heteronormative genders. It has been and still is necessary and useful to take a close look at the differences between butches, drag kings and ftms. Likewise it will be necessary to take a close look at the differences between femmes, drag queens, mtfs and other femininities for a differentiated picture of femininity to come into view.

Acknowledgements

Notes
[1] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. New York, London: Routledge, 1993: 240
[2] For example: Joan Nestle, *The Persistent Desire. A Femme-Butch Reader* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1992); Minnie Bruce Pratt, *S/HE* (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1995); Amber Hollibaugh, My *Dangerous Desires. A Queer Girl Dreaming Her Way Home* (Durham, London: Duke UP, 2000); Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold. The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York, London: Routledge, 1993); Laura Harris and Liz Crocker (Eds.), *Fem*me. *Feminists, Lesbians, and Bad Girls* (London, New York: Routledge, 1997); Chloë Brushwood Rose and Anna Camilleri (Eds.), *Brazen Femme. Queering Femininity* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002); several essays in Sally Munt (ed.), *butch/femme. Inside Lesbian Gender*. (London, Washington: Cassell,1998); Marcella Stecher, "Fetischistische Strategien: Lesbian Genders" (paper given at the Frauenhetz in Vienna, October 2002); Dagmar

Fink, "Alien to *Femme*ninity? Femme Genders in queer-feministischer Theoriebildung und Sciencefiction" (paper given at the Ringvorlesung "Ritualisierung von Geschlecht", Gender Kolleg der Universität Wien, 29. Oktober 2003); Sabine Fuchs, "Feminität—Sichtbarkeit—Erkennbarkeit. Lesbische Körperstilisierungen und die Rhetorik der Visualität." *Frauen Kunst Wissenschaft* 33 (2002): 56-63.

[3] Minnie Bruce Pratt, *S/HE*. Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1995: 52.

[4] Hanna Bordas in Kate Bornstein, *My Gender Workbook*. New York, London: Routledge, 1998: 257.

[5] Laura Harris, Liz Crocker (Eds.), *Fem*me. *Feminists, Lesbians, and Bad Girls*. London, N.Y.: Routledge, 1997

[6] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, London: Routledge, 1990

[7] Melissa Scott, *Trouble and Her Friends*. New York: Tor Books, 1994

[8] See: Marlene Barr, *Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory*. New York und London: Greenwood Press, 1987

[9] See Katharina Vogel, "Zum Selbstverständnis lesbischer Frauen in der Weimarer Republik. Eine Analyse der Zeitschrift ‚Die Freundin' 1924-1933." *Eldorado. Homosexuelle Frauen und Männer in Berlin 1850-1950. Geschichte, Alltag, Kultur*. Ed. by the Berlin Museum. Berlin: Fröhlich und Kaufmann, 1984, pp. 162-168; see also Davis and Kennedy (1993): 9.

[10] To tell the truth, I read about the German speaking countries, Paris and the U.S. Given the developments of metropolitan centers throughout Europe at that time, it is more than likely that similar public lesbian contexts emerged in other European metropolises as well.

[11] Vgl. Ilse Kokula, "Lesbisch leben von Weimar bis zur Nachkriegszeit." *Eldorado. Homosexuelle Frauen und Männer in Berlin 1850-1950. Geschichte, Alltag, Kultur.* Ed. by the Berlin Museum. Berlin: Fröhlich und Kaufmann, 1984, pp. 149-161; and Vogel (1984)

[12] See, for example, Nestle (1992) and Kennedy and Davis (1993)

[13] Kennedy and Davis (1993): 9. This argument seems especially problematic, since, at least in my reading, the upper-class narrator of *The Well of Loneliness* visits a working-class lesbian bar in Paris.

[14] Which might be the reason for Kennedy's and Davis's femme/butch historiography. Also, with regards to upper-class or bourgeois lesbian contexts of the turn of the century, self-representations as 'Garçonne', i.e. a more an-

drogynous femininity, became more prominent than femme- or butch-like self-representations. See Kokula (1984): 149.

[15] Jonathan Katz, "John Cage's Queer Silence or How to Avoid Making Matters Worse." (Emphasis mine)
<http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/KatzPages/KatzWorse.html>
(11/22/04). My thanks to Johanna Schaffer who pointed Katz's argumentation out to me.

[16] Joan Nestle "The femme question"; in: *The Persistent Desire*: 143

[17] Stecher (2002)

[18] On gender as a norm see also Butler 2004, especially chapter 2: "Gender Regulations"

[19] On the concept of the inappropriate/d other see Trinh T. Minh-Ha (ed.), "She, The Inappropriate/d Other," *Discourse* 8 (Winter 1986-87) and Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," in Grossberg, et al. (eds.), *Cultural Studies*. London, New York: Routledge, 1992: 295-337.

[20] Skunk Anansie, "It Takes Blood And Guts to be This Cool But I'm Still Just a Cliché." *Paranoid and Sunburnt* (1995), Sony Music

[21] This list was compiled for an event at the Marea Alta in Vienna, *Femme Exaltation*, by its organizers: Marcella Stecher, Birgit Freudenthaler, Evelyn Steinthaler, Viviana Gonzalez and Dagmar Fink

[22] Vgl. Lauretis 1980

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Fat and Class Prejudice: America's Two-Body Society

Greta Olson

Entering the United States at a major East Coast airport, the expatriate is struck by differences in bodies. A gulf of 50 pounds or more appears to separate the physiques of the people who service this large airport and the images of bodies on virtually every advertisement board that adorns its walls and every magazine cover that fills its newsstands: Those cleaning the bathrooms, pushing the baggage carts, running the security checks—often people of color—are by European standards alarmingly overweight if not obese. By contrast, those featured in the huge advertisements on the airport's walls and magazine covers present seemingly perfect or perfected, usually white, bodies. Next to celebrity magazines featuring the iconicized bodies of Britney Spears or Gwyneth Paltrow are an array of publications directed specifically at audiences interested in improving their physiques.

What's wrong about this picture? For the author of this essay who recently published a book about the cultural implications of eating disorders in America, it is the realization that anorexia and bulimia, despite some literature to the contrary,[1] remain problems and prerogatives of a relatively select and monied few. Overwhelmingly, the leading American eating disorder is the obesity which is disproportionately represented by those who struggle economically, those individuals whom I see working minimum low jobs at the international airport.

America is currently developing into a two-body society that mirrors the economic divisions between the privileged and the underprivileged. The increasing gulf between the affluent and mean wage earners that began during the Reagan administration has continued till today. As The Economist reports: "The wealthiest 1% of all households controls 38% of national wealth, while the bottom 80% of households holds only 17%" ("Inequality" 44). And George W. Bush's axing of the inheritance tax and reduction of capital gains taxes are measures likely to benefit only "the top 20% of households" thus increasing "the already wide gap between rich and poor" (45). The dis-

parity in wealth finds a compliment in divisions between unfit and hard-bodied Americans. The 'buff' body in its male and female variations stands in radical contrast to the increasingly obese bodies of the vast majority of Americans, who suffer not only from social stigmatization but also from health problems endemic to obesity.

In this article I am using the word "body" to describe the entirety of a person's looks. I do so because research has conclusively shown that the locus of beauty moved from the face to the body during the course of the twentieth century during which sweater girl contests and beauty queen pageants featuring bathing suit contests were first inaugurated (Brumberg *Fasting* 245-248). Moreover, the focus of television shows about beauty makeovers, heroicizing stories about incredible weight loss, and myriad magazines devoted to fitness is clearly on the body as the measurement of attractiveness and not the face. Being buff is prerequisite to attractiveness now, whereas having an attractive face is an important if secondary consideration.[2]

Dominant culture: the fattening of the majority but more of such for the poor

The current facts are that two out of three adult Americans are overweight—roughly 60 million people—, and one out of three Americans is obese, defined as being more than 30% on the BMI. Furthermore, the number of adults who are obese has doubled since 1980 (Moukheiber). Simultaneously, overweight and obesity are disproportionately frequent among poorer American populations, including rural whites, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans (Stearns 134-137, Foreyt 536-40, Stein 1, Paeratakul). In all racial and geographic population groups "women of lower socio-economic status […] are approximately 50% more likely to be obese" than wealthier women (*Surgeon's Call*). Hence there is both a gender and an income bias in the determination of who is seriously overweight in America. Documentation of childhood obesity further confirms that the rates of obesity differ along lines of race and ethnicity: Disturbingly, 10% more of black and Hispanic youth and children

were overweight than their white counterparts ("Obesity in America"). This figure suggests that if the current trend continues tomorrow's adult Americans will differ even more than today's do in terms of size difference as correlative of skin tone and lower income. Fat prejudice may potentially become even more coterminous with racial and class divisions than it is at present.

Why are the poor gaining more weight than their middle-class counterparts? Americans as a group have grown fatter since the seventies and appear to be growing heavier at an increasing rate. The well-documented palette of reasons for the gain include fewer and fewer meals being eaten at home, an increase in sedentary activity (particularly television viewing), decreased intervention by adults in children's and youths' eating behavior, the proliferation of fatty processed foods, and a move towards ever-greater portion sizes.[3] Efforts to improve the national diet in the past decade by boohooing fats and championing carbohydrates appear to have helped Americans to become fatter rather than more lean. Beyond these general factors, poorer Americans have grown more overweight than their better-off fellow citizens due to their limited access to safe, affordable, and attractive areas to exercise and their having been targeted as customers by fast-food franchisers.

A Public Health Research survey showed income to be the greatest factor in determining whether respondents had access to indoor and outdoor areas to exercise or not. Particularly lower-income women questioned in this study commented on the lack of sidewalks and near-by parks and concerns about safety as hindering their getting exercise (Brownson). Access to the culture of body forming cultivated by regular gym goers is again dependent on income. Those with yearly incomes above $75,000 account for 42% of the country's health club members ("Industry"). Where parents have fears about safety, the television is used as a pacifier to keep children from going outside. Research shows that every increased hour of television watching makes for the greater likelihood of obesity.[4]

A second factor in the disproportionate fattening of America's poorer populations is their being systematically targeted as customers

by the fast-food industry, as Greg Critzer among others has shown. Much of this industry's growth has been caused by its successful marketing of super-sized meal values. This more-food-for-less-money strategy to keep customers coming back for more has had an obvious effect on the weight of those who regularly eat in fast-food franchises for instance the inner-city poor, who have limited access to healthier sources of food. The intake of sugar and saturated fats increases enormously with every eaten fast food-meal (Critzer 115).

Lack of opportunities to exercise and buy unprocessed food, franchise targeting, the use of television sets as child caretakers—all of these factors have led to poorer Americans having become more and more rapidly overweight than wealthier citizens. Moreover, poor women are the members of the population who are most likely to be obese. Given that women are judged more punitively on the basis of their looks, the social status of economically disadvantaged, overweight women has been rendered doubly precarious due to these trends.

The cultural significance of being ripped: upping the ante in the fitness race

The emergence and solidification of a two-body society could not have taken place if only the general population, the poor foremost amongst them, was growing heavier. Other factors must exist to make the delineation between the large and the lean culturally significant and to reinforce a dominant message about the acceptability of fat and class prejudice.

One obvious expression of the increasing valuation of the idealized body has been the steady slimming of the female body ideal[5] despite the general growth of the American waistline. Not only has the idealized body grown thinner but it has also become more visible and more subject to supposed amelioration through plastic surgery and other radical techniques. A cultural signifier of personal and economic success, the lean body—particularly the idealized woman's body—is represented and over-represented ad nauseam.

Lists such as *People Magazine*'s annual 50 Most Beautiful People in the World and *FHM*'s annual 100 Sexiest Women document the American obsession with the body perfect. ABC's *Extreme Make-over* FOX's *The Swan*, and MTV's *I Want a Famous Face* all feature the transformations of their willing contestants into supposedly more physically desirable versions of their former selves. In all of these shows a narrow and, I would argue, a Caucasian ideal of beauty is striven for in which the supposedly perfected body is given center stage. Comparing the rosters of these shows contestants shows that these makeover series overwhelmingly feature white middle-class women; when women of color do participate, their noses are transformed into upturned Claudia Schifferesque appendages.

Participants in *The Swan* are worked over by plastic surgeons, personal trainers and dieticians for months to then compete against another contestant to see who has been the most successfully and completely changed from her—following the show's premise—formally ugly-duckling self. She who wins goes on to compete with the other episode winners in a season's end beauty contest. Lingerie and bathing suit competitions within the final beauty pageant reveal the obsession with the body that underlies this show and give viewers the opportunity to judge the women in minute comparisons as though they were plastic surgeons themselves. That a woman's inherent worth is determined by her looks and that women are in a constant competition with one another to please a masculinized gaze are prerequisite assumptions to *The Swan*. The show's website features follow-up stories on the series initial contestants that stress their romantic rather than their career success. Typical is the reporting about one contestant: "She was a size 18, now she's a size 8. She feels great and has found herself a boyfriend who cares for her very much" (*The Swan*).

Further confirmation of America's growing obsession with the perfected body is the proliferation of plastic surgery as well as the waning of embarrassment regarding the vanity involved in taking extreme measures to improve one's looks. Plastic surgery—once the recourse of the aged and wealthy—has become increasingly common, and procedures have been lowered in price. Breast reconstruction, for

instance, now costs a twentieth of that which it did ten years ago, and this has helped to render common procedures more and more routine for the middle class: "More than 79% of those who come under the knife now earn less than $50,000 a year" ("Pots" 71). Between 2000 and 2001 the rate of cosmetic surgeries performed on teens increased by nearly 22 % (Quart 114). One can hypothesize that the middle class expresses anxieties about social position by demonstrating its ability to improve itself visually through cosmetic surgery (118). An analogy can be made to Bourdieu's analysis of food expenditures among the French middle-classes in the seventies: he noted that foremen's families paid about the same amount for food as better-off executives in order to enjoy the social capital and class distinction that 'eating well' implies (*Distinction* 376). More specifically, Bordieu argues in a foot note to his essay on belief that cultural goods such as 'perfected' thighs serve as "instruments of distinction, first between the class fractions and then between the classes" ("Belief"). Choosing a new nose or slimmer thighs in the US demonstrates the ability to make social discriminations, to associate oneself first with a wealthier stratum of the middle-class and second in contradistinction to the economically disadvantaged. The remade body is evidence of both savvy about cultural delineations and a marker of comparative cultural rarity. The more 'perfect' the body appears, the more its owner will have a socially desirable position of cultural rarity attributed to him or her. However, unless one is chosen to participate in *Extreme Makeover* or *The Swan*, completely redoing one's appearance remains a financial impossibility for lower-class Americans. Yet, as the beauty standards inherent in these shows continue to be represented as the norm, the pressure to look like a participant will increase.

This trend is apparent in the increasing frequency with which celebrities who do not have work done are shamed in the media. Whereas Sharon Osborne is lauded in *People Magazine* because of her willingness to talk openly about the procedures she has undergone, Jessica Lange is criticized for not "get[ting] her crow's feet fixed" (Lipton 105). When the body and its parts are treated as significant

class markers, forms of deficiency are regarded as grounds for replacement or renewal.

Demonstrable evidence for the intensification of body concerns can also be found in the increasing specificity of corporeal techniques to shape the form through movement and resistance. 'Getting big' for men and 'getting toned' for women are representations of leisure time and the socially condoned volition to perform physical labor for no other purpose than to improve one's body. Muscles signify self-directed discipline as well as one's success in conforming to a normative aesthetics. That one works on one's physique or one's body parts suggests that these entities are products to be manufactured and completed. Whereas running on treadmills was once considered a severe punishment for prisoners in Victorian England, working out now signifies the freedom of the leisured to form bodies that are seemingly immunized against the effects of overabundant food, seated work, and lack of exercise in everyday life.

Another salient reason for the intensification of body concerns and the attendant solidification of a class system marked by body size has been the wholesale adoption of biological theories of sexual attraction in the popular press. Regularly cited as evidence for the importance of the pursuit of normative attractiveness are theories that insist on the universality of beauty standards, including facial features and body shape. Recently, the press has shown a particular infatuation with neo-Darwinian theories concerning sexual selection as popularized by the evolutionary psychologists Devendra Singh and David Buss. Buss has argued that sex differences in partner choice are universal across cultures and result from evolutionary processes. According to him these differences include men's preference for younger-looking women, because their looks signify greater reproductive potential (Buss 3). Similarly, Singh has argued that men in all cultures prefer women with hour-glass figures—because a big difference in hip and waist size supposedly denotes a high rate of fertility. The title of a *Newsweek* article collected on my desk betrays the uncritical acceptance of such reasoning: "Why don't women like square-jawed macho men? And what's all the fuss over J.Lo's bellybutton." Reporting on

men's supposedly inherent preference for "hyperfeminized" faces—full lips, wide eyes, small jaws, this article insists that these preferences are instinctual: "These features indicate fertility, and because they're biologically programmed, they're common to all cultures" (Hastings 55). Thus the cultural obsession with Jennifer Lopez's navel is explained by *Newsweek* with reference to Singh's theory about the universal appeal of curvy woman. The *Economist's* "Pots of promise: An industry driven by sexual instinct will always thrive," similarly explains women's willingness to pay high prices for beauty products and procedures on the basis of Buss's haven demonstrated that universally men's main criterion for mate selection is women's perceived sexual attractiveness ("Pots" 69).

When theories of selected evolutionary psychologists become the press's truths, our culture's current standards of beauty are reified. These include women's looking young, unlined, and lean. The economic underpinnings of these standards go unmentioned: a lean body is a form of social capital and a mark of class membership. While I have no interest in indulging in science phobia, I do want to point out that the media's undifferentiated reporting on biological theories of sexual attraction reinforces the dominant cultural message of look, and implicitly, class prejudice, not to mention sexism. Evidence that physical attractiveness is not related to the number of children women produce is ignored in such reports (Barnett 12), as it would interfere with the dominant message of lookism.

The ideology of fat prejudice

How is the ideology of fat prejudice reproduced in the private theater of consent, to borrow a phrase from Stuart Hall ("Signification" 100), in the living rooms and work streets of America? In the following I wish to try out a multi-causal explanation.

- The American ethos of individual responsibility precludes the idea that it is the state's responsibility to prohibit the sale of fast food in schools, to guarantee the poor access to exercise areas, or to monitor the public's diet. A prevailing American myth suggests that any

individual can attain whatever form of personal success s/he wants if s/he only desires this enough and is willing to work hard enough to achieve it. Apparent in every weight-loss add that features the protagonist in before and after pictures is the American faith in the individual as the origin and measure of her or his own success. Such weight loss narratives work along the same story lines of Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick* series about the shoe shine boy whose honesty and hard work helped him to remove himself from poverty to middle-class success. Any boy can become a Bill Gates if he tries hard enough and any woman can become as 'hot' as Catherine Zeta-Jones if she really applies herself. This myth helps Americans to ignore cultural reasons for the fattening of Americans and to blame those individuals—often those less well off—who fail in or do not enter into the beauty race.

- Part of the American credo of individualism is an inherent, if ill-founded, faith in social mobility. The ideological conditioning that allows Americans to ignore the economic realities of a two-body economy is reinforced by shows such as *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* in which an average-looking person is transformed into having near-celebrity looks. For their contestants, the prohibitive costs of plastic surgeries, personal trainers, and cosmetic dentists—not to mention lost work time—are covered by the network, suggesting that this Cinderella scenario is within everyone's grasp. Just as Americans' blithe confidence that they will be promoted in their work and will end up amongst the top earners in the country may keep them from addressing the institutionally-reinforced economic disparities in their country ("Inequality" 44-45), the belief that anyone may gain access to the corporeally fit segment of US society also helps to maintain the status quo. The wealthy have access to a variety of goods and practices—less processed more expensive foods, gym equipment and places to use it in, plastic surgery, personal trainers, new body-forming techniques—that are not accessible to the poor. However, as long as the illusion exists that any individual may attain a better body through hard work (and perhaps a bit of surgery sponsored by some network Fairy

Godmother), the accompanying faith in fairness can be maintained.

- A moralistic disdain for the fat has traditionally informed middle-class Americans' sense that 'those' people were simply lazy. As long as Americans have been dieting, fatness has been associated with a lack of effort and idleness (Sterns 149). Laziness continues to be the attribute that even small children first associate with the obese as well as dirtiness and stupidity (Strunkard and Sobal 417). These characteristics have informed class-prejudiced depictions of the poor since before the United States existed.

Some readers may object to my use of the heavily burdened term "ideology" in the above; I welcome them to substitute "dominant cultural meaning" in its stead. Stuart Hall's work on Althusser has re-interpreted the latter's thesis that ideology represents not real relations of production but what individuals imagine their relationship to these relations to be (Althusser 111). Instead, Hall has argued that ideologies are multiple, complex and changing symptoms of representation in which we are implicated even as we may seek to alter them ("Signification" 103). Moreover, in more recent formulations he has moved away from talk of ideology to a more generalized neo-Gramscian and neo-Foucauldian concept of power. Power works through representation and its changing meanings, through coercion as well as consent ("Spectacle" 261). In this section I have argued that there is a historical and mythic element to American fat and class prejudice which involves the belief in equality, mobility, and individualism as well as historical fat prejudice. Our cultural practices which include television series like *The Swan* support and reify this prejudice and work to solidify the current two-body visual economy.

Outlook

What can we expect in the future? My fear is that the waistline will become an even more important class marker in America. The disparity I see between body types in the airport will become an insurmountable gulf. The poor will continue to grow more obese and to

suffer from the prejudice associated with this state. They will also endure the economic disadvantages caused by health problems associated with obesity, including diabetes type 2, hypertension, arthritis, and breathing problems. Without access to places to exercise, socially-mandated cosmetic dental care, plastic surgery, liposuction or Botox shots, the economically disadvantaged will become all the more visually stigmatized: they will be separated from the economically privileged not only by girth but also by the lack of economic means to buy the new products and treatments that inevitably will be developed to combat (and abet) obesity.[6]

The media will continue to highlight the divide between beautified individuals who populate their shows and the less fortunate who watch them. Miraculous transformation stories about fat ducklings being turned into elegantly toned swans with the help of surgeons and stylists will proliferate in order to sustain the belief that every obese person might one day have the chance to move amongst those considered hot. Makeover shows such as *The Swan* will continue to emphasize racialized norms of beauty and the American belief that it is within every individual's grasp to become or be transformed into the beauty ideal. Moreover, these shows will enforce the cultural sexism that equates women with their looks.

If evolutionary psychologists continue to be cited in the mass media and class rooms as justification for its being every man's instinctual right to prefer a young-looking, fair, hourglass-shaped woman with full lips and shining hair, the reign of the conventionally beautiful and economically privileged will expand. Fat prejudice, now rampant although nominally subject to anti-discrimination laws, will become more socially acceptable on the basis of its being allegedly reproductively sound in evolutionary terms.

The dystopia I have been describing is an uncomfortable one. Unless the political implications of the socioeconomic division of body types are addressed explicitly, Americans may continue to believe that obesity is an unaesthetic health hazard caused by individuals' lack of will power and laziness. In fact, disproportionately high rates of obesity among the poor result from living conditions that do

not allow certain groups to eat healthfully or to exercise easily. Obesity is a class issue. The mirroring of America's enormous income gap in one group that can afford the means to be thin and one group that cannot reproduces and enforces class prejudice and will result in the double stigmatization of the poor.

Points of intervention

When I held this paper at the conference the question arose of what can be done to alter the current trend? Simply noting how predominant racial and class prejudices are reinforced by makeover shows and fitness techniques should not be an invitation to cultural pessimism or political passivity. How then can the ideology of class prejudice that is solidified around the marker of overweight be countered? How can this ideological field be re-articulated or transformed, to again borrow from Hall's terminology? I can offer no simple program here but a few suggestions:

- Every ideological chain of representations is simultaneously a point of potential struggle where the "society-in-dominance" (Hall 113)—here a society that encourages look and class prejudice, not to mention sexism—may have limits set to its ability to reproduce itself. Every effort to boycott shows like *The Swan* and every public effort to question the ideology behind such programming represents an effort to resist a prevailing cultural trend.[7] Actively struggling against the dominant cultural messages of class prejudice, racism, and sexism that inform this series is significant for those of us who live outside the United States, since at the time of this writing *The Swan* is being premiered in the UK as well as in Germany.
- While offering criticism of the ideology that informs *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan*, it has to be remembered that these shows enjoy very high ratings and offer tangible sources of pleasure to their viewers. The often visited forum on the website for *The Swan* as well as the beauty tips offered on the website for *Extreme Makeover* suggest that these shows have given rise to a symbolic community of viewers, who find some fantasy fulfilled or some

form of escapism in their viewing of these series and their actively commenting on what they see. Analyzing the source of the pleasure these shows provide to their viewers may be an important step to countering their messages of lookism and classism. (I am thinking here of Ien Ang's and Janice Winship's convincing work on the pleasurable aspects of watching *Dallas* and of reading women's magazines.) I suspect part of the viewer's pleasure rests in her taking on the role of being the agent of the scopophilic drive to judge the minutiae in the women contestants' physiques. She reverses then her role as the passive inevitable object of the active malculinized gaze.

- Those who judge shows like *The Swan* critically, like myself, must examine our own potential cooption in the dominant ideology of beauty prejudice. Whereas I suspect that the individuals who care to read this article would abhor and rebuke any articulation of bias based on class or race, they may be more accepting of and receptive to articulations of fat prejudice. To my regret I find that my own children make enormously derogatory remarks about the obese, remarks that they would never make about individuals who deviate from the visual norm for other reasons. As participants in a culture whose dominant message constantly cajoles us to remember the importance of looking young and remaining lean if we wish to enjoy personal and professional success, we may find our own prejudices about fat to run deep; they need to be confronted and eradicated with care.

- We need to actively counter the claims of evolutionary psychologists regarding sexual attraction as they are propagated in the media. Here I cite the work of the biologist and social critic Anne Fausto-Sterling (cf. References) as well as the critique of neo-Darwinian theories by Hilary and Steven Rose, a sociologist and a biologist, in *Alas, Poor Darwin: Arguments Against Evolutionary Psychology* (2000) as exemplary in this regard. These thinkers successfully refute biological theories about inherent sexual dimorphism and critique the cultural implications of the rhetoric of difference. They insist that analogies to animal behavior or the ar-

chaic human past are insufficient tools for explaining the complexities of mutable, culturally-bound gender behaviors.

In this essay I have reviewed changes in the American body, its representations, and cultural significance during the past twenty years. While the general population has gained weight, the poor have done so at a disproportionate rate, for which there have been manifest economic reasons. Simultaneously, the cultural significance of having a lean, worked on body has vastly increased. Mass media venues in which the supposed perfecting of the body is celebrated and, particularly women, contestants are presented as being in competition with one another as objects of visual transformation have proliferated. These forums reify the American fiction that the individual is solely responsible for his or her destiny, be it the shape of one's body or the size of one's bank account. Traditional associations of fat with laziness and lack of will-power which correlate to entrenched prejudices about the poor have remained. These factors have all contributed to the visual discrepancy between body types that I have observed in the US airport, a discrepancy that mirrors American economic divisions.

It is my wish that the status quo made visually evident in the airport may change, that the bodies I see there not be separated by a visual barrier of overweight that serves, one, as the equivalent of a class marker and, two, as socially acceptable grounds for prejudice. It is my wish to resist the solidification of our two-body society and the prejudice this society entails.

Notes

[1] See, for instance Thompson and Nassar.

[2] Brumberg uses girl's diaries to document the increase in body preoccupations in *Body Projects*. That body anxieties have now infected or affected men is manifested by the burgeoning market for beauty products for men, the rise of cosmetic surgical procedures being undertaken by men, and the phenomenon of so-called metrosexuals—heterosexual urban men who use beauty techniques such as body hair depilation once associated only with women.

[3] On overeating see Duenwald; on decreased intervention as compared to the French, see Stearns 137-146; on the increase of fatty, fructose-laden processed foods see Critzer 63-108 and Schlosser 239-243.

[4] Critzer analyzes the marketing of fast-food to the inner city poor, the use of television as a child-minder, and the refusal of researchers to address issues of obesity in minority populations for fear of encouraging bulimia and anorexia (109-126).

[5] On this trend see Cartwright's discussion of Devendra Singh's analysis of Miss America statistics (244-45).

[6] *Forbes Magazine* now features an article about hedging one's bets about whether Americans will grow less or more fat by investing in stocks for Bally Total fitness gyms and weight-loss service companies or for Nestlés and Mcdonalds The implication of this tongue-in-cheek article is that it behoves the investor to buy both kinds of stock: Americans will continue to fatten and they will continue to fit the glut ("Investing").

[7] See for instance, the petition to FOX to boycott *The Swan* ("Morality Television.") See also critical analyses of the cultural assumptions behind these programs in UK and German periodicals (Wood for the UK, and Von Rohr for Germany.)

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Trickster Tracks in the Works of Sherman Alexie

Jan Roush

> Did you know that in 1492 every Indian instantly became an extra in the Great American Western?
> Sherman Alexie

Two of the most readily recognized icons in the United States today are the cowboy and the Indian. Whether assuming such shapes as John Wayne, Geronimo, The Lone Ranger and Tonto, Gene Autry, Hopalong Cassidy, Crazy Horse, or Sitting Bull, these two images, more than most, are emblematic of western American culture and, more importantly, of the disproportionate balance of power between the colonizer and the native. From the time the first wave of colonizers hit the shores of what was to become the United States of America, pushing steadily west in an effort to tame the land, the cowboy (and all he represents) has had the upper hand over the Indian. What happens, though, when the colonized iconic group seizes control from the colonizer and subverts that icon for their own purposes? What happens when these subverted iconic images force an entirely new cultural perspective? That is what is happening in the United States today. Increasingly, Native Americans are taking the tools of the colonizer and using them to achieve their own voice, their own power. Nowhere is this revolution more evident than in contemporary Native American fiction and, particularly, in the works of Sherman Alexie. More than most Native American authors today, Alexie has achieved a voice that has made the American public aware of just what it is like to be Indian today, the heir of centuries of colonization, and he has accomplished this feat primarily through humor, alternately playing anger and humor against an often desolate backdrop of life on the reservation.

It has often been noted that humor--survival humor in particular--helped Jews survive the Holocaust. It might equally be said that such humor also has helped many American Indians survive their own Holocaust: annihilation, acculturation, assimilation, and, more re-

cently, relocation and termination--over a much longer period of time. David Stannard in *American Holocaust* states that, "The destruction of the Indians of the Americas was. . .the most massive act of genocide in the history of the world" (x). Current estimations of the impact of Europeans on the native population confirm the systematic attempt at eradication. Pre-contact, the population of tribes residing in North America has been estimated at around 145,000,000 for the hemisphere and 18,000,000 for those tribes living north of Mexico. By 1898, that population had suffered a 95% decimation with a theft of nearly three billion acres of Indian lands in the United States alone. Couple these statistics with those for the rate of alcohol or diabetes-related mortality on modern Indian reservations and it becomes obvious that such genocide continues.[1]

Given such statistics, then, without humor how else could Indians have survived more than 500 years of concerted efforts to wipe out two thousand indigenous cultures in North America? "How," asks Sherman Alexie, "do you explain the survival of all of us who were never meant to survive?" Survive they did, however, and humor was many times their vehicle.

Alexie's employment of humor in his writing reflects a long history of such use. Vine Deloria asserts in *Custer Died for Your Sins* that Indians used humor for centuries prior to contact with the dominant culture, employing teasing as a form of social control to gently bring offending members back into line with tribal mores (149). He notes that Indians have always found a humorous side to nearly every problem and that "the more desperate the problem, the more humor is directed to describe it" (149), especially through satire that would help awaken people and get them to act upon social injustices. What Alexie is portraying in his writing–whether in his poetry, his fiction, or his films--is that same historical use of humor but with a decidedly contemporary twist. Alexie is not using humor, as has been attributed to earlier, well-established Native American authors like N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, Leslie Silko, and Louise Erdrich, to "combat the feeling of helplessness in the face of events by portraying worlds in which relationship to society, personal choice, and action count."[2]

Alexie's use of humor is much more pervasive and integral to his writing; he takes on the role of Trickster himself as he romps through page after page of portrayals of Indians in all walks of life, on and off the reservation.

The qualities that are most often cited concerning Alexie's writing are his acerbic wit and devastating use of humor in order to point out the painful injustices of everyday Indian life. "Being Indian," Kenneth Lincoln notes of Alexie's fiction, "means you're hanging on for dear life, hanging in there with catastrophic humor, kicking back at sunset, staggering through the '49 to dawn, laughing your ass off and on again...."[3] "Being an Indian," Alexie says, "is a tough job. We don't really know what it is to be Indian any more. We've been making it up since you [Europeans] first arrived."[4]

What Alexie makes up are tales that most often portray the bleak aspects of contemporary Indian life in unsparing yet often lyrical accounts reflecting the legacy of centuries of persecution and obliteration: "Victor lay between his parents, his alcoholic and dreamless parents. . . ," (10) we find in "Every Little Hurricane," the opening story of *Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven.* "His mother and father breathed deep, nearly choking alcoholic snores. They were sweating although the room was cold, and Victor thought the alcohol seeping through their skin might get him drunk, might help him sleep" (9). In Alexie's poem "Elegies,"[5] we hear lines infused with the stark reality of reservation existence: "This is a poem for my oldest sister and her husband, who died in a trailer fire in Montana when a curtain drifted on wind and touched a hot plate left burning...." "This is a poem for my father, who has a sore on his foot that will never heal...." "This is a poem for my tribe, who continue to live in the shadow of the abandoned mine on our reservation . . ." (49). Alcoholism, diabetes, a poverty so severe that the only way to salvage a living is to sell one's heritage to nuclear brokers--this is life on the Rez. As Alexie notes, "The reservation waits for no one. Acre by acre, it roars past history, forgiving and forgetting nothing. There are moments here which can explain your whole life.... In the reservation Kmart, forty televisions

erupt in a 20th century vision: 500 years of bad situation comedies." (*Summer* 59).

Humor, however, can be an antidote to such bleakness, paving the way to survival, and Alexie demonstrates this again and again. "Humor," Alexie asserts, "is self-defense on the rez."[6] For instance, "You could be Indi'n," goes a current Rez joke, "if you think that the Basic Food Groups are Spam, commodity cheese, frybread, and Pepsi"--all vintage Alexie images throughout his writing: "Instead of remembering the bad things, remember what happened immediately before," the young Victor says in the short story "Because My Father Always Said He Was the Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play 'The Star-Spangled Banner' at Woodstock." "That's what I learned from my father. For me, I remember how good the first drink of that Diet Pepsi tasted instead of how my mouth felt when I swallowed a wasp with the second drink" (*Lone Ranger* 34). In *Smoke Signals*, Victor's mom, Arlene, is famous for her frybread; several scenes revolve around her talents: "Victor's mom makes the best fry bread in the world," Thomas tells Suzy Song. "It's so good they use it for Communion back home. Arlene Joseph makes some Jesus fry bread, enit? Fry bread that can walk across water. Fry bread rising from the dead" (74).

Alexie's humor has been described variously: "a quirky sense of gallows humor," said the *Bloomsbury Review;*[7] "black," "biting," "sarcastic," "caustic" are just a few of the many others. Joyce Carol Oates notes that Alexie's is a "funny, irreverent, sardonic but sentimental, rebellious postmodern voice...." Viewed against his "elder . . . contemporaries," she asserts that Alexie "is the bad boy among them, mocking, self-mocking, unpredictable, unassimilable...."[8] Even former President Clinton, appearing with Alexie on the taping of the Bill McNeil Hour, said, "Sherman, you're goddamn funny."[9] Often Alexie is compared to a stand-up comic and with good reason; in that capacity he debuted in April of 1999 at the Foolproof Northwest Comedy Festival and again, in July of that same year, at the Vancouver International Comedy Festival's opening night gala."[10] The patter that ensues whenever he is giving a reading or delivering a talk reflects that co-

medic timing; whatever the topic, his responses are delivered in the best Saturday Night Live style: On the war in Afghanistan he says: "It's the Jetsons bombing the Flintstones.... Is it because I'm Indian that I'm suspicious?" Asked about his reactions to the September 11th World Trade Center disaster, he muses, "I was leaving my gym in Seattle when a guy in a pickup truck pulled up on the street and yelled: 'Go back to your own country.' I laughed so hard. I tried to run after him to say, 'You first.'"[11]

Since he is both a prolific and an extremely creative artist who is equally at home in whatever genre he finds himself--in fiction or poetry, as screenwriter or stand-up comic-- such quips will frequently find their way into Alexie's fiction. For example, in the short story "Flight Patterns" from *Ten Little Indians*, an elaborated version of this incident becomes the core of a conversation between the Indian protagonist and his black cab driver.[12] Such creative reworking helps negate the possible downside of being noted merely for one's humor, a fact that Alexie is acutely aware of: "It's . . . a danger, though, with what I do," he says, "[because] people equate humor with a lack of seriousness. Because I'm funny, people think it's not insightful or not thought out or that I'm being flippant when I'm very serious about being funny. I'm very careful . . ; I know what I'm saying and the effect I want."[13]

Knowing exactly what he is saying and using it to stage particular nuances and shades of meaning in his writing pulls Alexie out of the category of stand-up comedians and places him into a more primordial one instead--that of Trickster. As his writing matures and he has become more adept in channeling his anger, Alexie has moved into a kind of mythopoetic prose that allows him to take the themes begun in earlier collections like *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* to new levels. That is not to say the anger, the sarcasm has disappeared; it is just more controlled, better serving his purposes as Trickster. In this, Alexie's work reflects the subtle, sociopolitical commentary one sees in contemporary Native American visual artists, whose works often display the same tricksterish characteristics that Alexie employs in his writing. Art critic Lucy Lippard has noted that

the double-meaning codes which are so much a part of bicultural literature are visible also in the art emerging from cultures that straddle two worlds.[14] In *Mixed Blessings*, an examination of the forms such art takes accompanied by the views of the artists who create these works, Lippard comments specifically on the ironic humor and subversive aspects of this creative process when she notes that these artists "hold mirrors up to the dominant culture, slyly infiltrating mainstream art with alternative experiences--inverse, reverse, perverse. These strategies are forms of tricksterism...." (199). Political activist and well-known Cherokee artist Jimmie Durham echoes Lippard's observation when he says, "As an authorized savage, it is my custom and my job to attack" (199).

Accounts of the Trickster figure appear in diverse cultures across North America, Africa, South Asia, and Oceania, but they are probably most closely associated with the narratives of the North American Indian thanks to the collecting work of anthropologist, Franz Boas, in the late nineteenth century and the later widely cited study by Paul Radin, *The Trickster*. Radin's classic definition identifies Trickster as simultaneously "creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself." According to Radin, Trickster is neither good nor evil nor does he possess any values, being totally at the mercy of his impulses--yet, says Radin, "through his actions all values come into being" (xxiii). What Radin's theory does not address, mainly because he overlooks the importance of the relationship between the narrator and his audience, is the inherent irony found in Trickster characteristics and resultant tales especially as these apply to North American Indian cultures, irony that on the one hand underscores the role of Trickster narratives used, as Barre Toelken has pointed out, "to make deep cultural values palpable"[15] yet on the other hand celebrates Trickster as "risk taker, rule breaker, boundary tester, and creator transformer."[16] It is this latter category that entertains the creativity of contemporary Native artists, regardless of what medium they are working in, and it is into this category that Alexie best fits--as much, that is, as any Trickster character can "fit!"

Noted Cree playwright Tomson Highway identifies the inherent importance of Trickster to Native American culture when he compares him to Christianity:

> In the same sense that Jesus Christ stands at the very. . .centre of Christian mythology, we have a character in our mythological universe, in our dreamlife as a people, who stands at the very centre of that universe, and that character is Trickster. That little guy, man or woman. . . , who essentially straddles the consciousness of Man and God, translates reality from the Supreme Being, the Great Spirit, to the people and back and forth. Without the spiritual health of that figure I think Indian people are completely screwed.

> I think it's up to us. . .as artists [to bring] back. . .that essential character, the Trickster [or else] I think we've had it. We're up shit creek.[17]

Where Highway focuses on Trickster as *character*, noted writer Gerald Vizenor focuses on the Trickster *process*, Trickster as "doing," not something that can be captured and frozen but rather something that is continually shifting and transforming.[18] Allan Ryan in *The Trickster Shift*, a groundbreaking study of "trickster discourse" in the works of Native American visual artists, interprets this transformative process thus: "The practice of imagining and imaging is as deserving of attention as the images imagined" (5). Significantly, it is in the juncture between these two interpretations of Trickster: Trickster as character and Trickster as process that a transformation which Ryan terms a "Trickster shift" takes place between artist/narrator/author and audience. Infused with irony, the event--and here the event may be a painting, a play, a story--precipitates a transformation in the audience's perception, a moment of awareness and understanding of cultural implications beyond their normal comprehension. That moment, that transformation, says Ryan, is what Trickster artists ideally are striving for, though it is as often missed or, at best, misinterpreted. In that moment of perception the viewer or reader will recognize that a formal, organized structure has been inverted by a playful presence, thus subverting the inherent power of the dominating structure.[19]

This process may be seen visually in works by contemporary Native artists, who often use their art to playfully invert such dominant, and entrenched, structures of ideas, much as Alexie does in his writing. Previously mentioned artist Jimmie Durham, for example, often incorporates ironic, subversive elements in his art. In fact, he and fellow artist Jean Fisher named their 1986 traveling exhibition featuring Native American artists "Ni Go Tlunh A Doh Ka," which in Cherokee means "We Are Always Turning Around . . . On Purpose," highlighting the contraries that underscored many of the included works (*Mixed Blessings* 199). Maidu artist Harry Fonseca has created an entire body of works known as the Coyote Series that features the trickster figure of Coyote in whimsical, contemporary settings wearing mod clothing like basketball sneakers or motorcyle jackets. His mixed-media work on canvas entitled "Shuffle Off to Buffalo," for example, highlights Coyote as a vaudeville hoofer, replete with top hat and tennis shoes, dancing across a stage bordered by miniature white buffalos. According to Fonseca, Coyote is "more than a trickster" who "encompasses all of human nature." Though Coyote might appear to be "playful and foolish," Fonseca says, "I never forget that he is wild, he is a dog, [and] he can bite very, very hard."[20] In examples such as these, irony--literally saying one thing and meaning another--is very much at play, because it is through irony that this juxtaposition, this Trickster shift, is centered. Using many different approaches, these artists are contextualizing Native American humor in order to redefine the humorless, negative image of the stoic, wooden cigar store Indian.

What artists render visually, Alexie does in his writing, embodying both Tomson Highway's and Gerry Vizenor's concepts of Trickster as Character, creating, "trickstering" if you will, to trigger transformations in thinking, subvert dominant structures. Hints of this transformative process appear in Alexie's works as early as *Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, the titles of the stories themselves being initial clues.[21] In "The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn't Flash Red Anymore," Adrian and Victor, with no more action than sitting on a couple of chairs watching Rez life go by in slow procession, manage to convey the daily irony of their world in

the portrayal of Indian youth who embody all the ills of Reservation life: diabetes, alcoholism, delinquency. In the midst of this deceptively normal scene, Victor muses,

> It's hard to be optimistic on the reservation. When a glass sits on a table here, people don't wonder if it's half filled or half empty. They just hope it's good beer. Still, Indians have a way of surviving. But it's almost like Indians can easily survive the big stuff. Mass murder, loss of language and land rights. It's the small things that hurt the most. The white waitress who wouldn't take an order, Tonto, the Washington Redskins (49).

Wham! The reader is suddenly forced to confront and reinterpret the realities of reservation life against a backdrop of historical betrayals. With a quick twist and thrust of humor, decades of thinking can be inverted, exposing new possibilities. "I am in the 7-11 of my dreams, surrounded by five hundred years of convenient lies," says the narrator of "Imagining the Reservation" (149). But what if those dreams could be inverted? *What if* "Crazy Horse invented the atom bomb in 1876 and detonated it over Washington, D.C."? *What if* "Columbus landed in 1492 and some tribe or another drowned him in the ocean"? (152). It is these "*What if's*" that trigger the ironic inversion, precipitating an entirely new cultural awareness that forces a reassessment of five centuries of historical interactions.

It is in his later collection of stories, *The Toughest Indian in the World*, however, that Alexie's trickster qualities become more fully realized, shown most clearly perhaps in the ambivalence of its reception, the *New Yorker* publishing two different stories from the collection but the New York *Times* panning it, for instance. People were unsure how to "read" it, a sure-fire characteristic of Trickster at play. In Trickster, says Lawrence Sullivan, " the double-sidedness of reality reveals itself,"[22] and it is that quality of suddenly seeing not just the "true" meaning–another reading--appear beneath the "false" or more obvious one but the two layered together as if in a double exposure (*Trickster Shift* 8).

The jarring effects of such ironical doubling pervade Alexie's writing throughout *The Toughest Indian*. An early example can be

found in the character of Low Man, the successful Indian author in "Indian Country," telling the Mormon convert parents of his former white lesbian love's new Indian fiancee that Jesus was a fag (142), or, similarly, with Wonder Horse and Sweetwater, the two carpenters in "One Good Man," arguing over the fact that Jesus must have been a really good carpenter because he could multitask (213)--both of these examples setting up and then playing off of readers' expectations of what is considered by many to be sacred, and thus inviolable, text. But Alexie probably has the most fun in this collection of stories using 118-year-old Etta Joseph in "Dear John Wayne" to "trickster" the cultural anthropologist, Spencer Cox, described tongue-in-cheek by Alexie as the "Owens Lecturer in Applied Indigenous Studies at Harvard University and author of seventeen books. . .focusing on mid-to-late-twentieth-century Native American culture, most specifically the Interior Salish tribes of Washington State" (190). With swift broad strokes of his imagination, Alexie incisively evokes echoes of a chapter in Vine Deloria's *Custer Died for Your Sins* that ironically describes anthropologists as one of the major plights of most American Indian tribes since the arrival of Columbus.[23] Here Alexie is at his Trickster best, subverting years of Saturday afternoon matinees in a version of the Wild West never seen before: John Wayne as Etta's sensitive lover and father of her 100-year-old twin sons. The anthropologist, not surprisingly, questions this example of oral tradition played out for him by Etta, wondering "how much of it is tradition and how much of it is lies" to which Etta replies, "If it's fiction, then it better be true." "How oxymoronic," the anthropologist says, and Etta agrees: "Yeah, kind of like saying Native American. There's an oxymoron for you." Trickster-like, the reel runs backwards, the braves are chasing the cavalry, and the day is won by the Indians.

"That the trickster and the clown have become major metaphors for the artist in this century with its increasing self-consciousness of the creative process is no accident," says Barbara Babcock. "They have been artists for a long time."[24] In contemporary North American Indian visual art, we find a whole chorus comprised of Trickster artists engaged in verbal and visual narratives that em-

body the best of what Gerald Vizenor has termed "trickster discourse": multileveled, open-ended, constantly evolving, and above all, playful. Such works reflect a comic worldview that Ryan in *The Trickster Shift* says is "characterized by frequent teasing, outrageous punning, constant wordplay, surprising association, extreme subtlety, layered and serious reference, and considerable compassion" (xii).

These same qualities are the very ones that distinguish Sherman Alexie's writing, writing that is further enhanced by sly, antic, dark humor used to draw attention to issues of survival and assimilation. Though at times a seemingly irreverent romp over Native landscapes, the stories that Alexie weaves embody the best of oral tradition. Like Trickster, Alexie is indeed to be admired for being a "risk taker, rule breaker, boundary tester, and creator transformer" (The Trickster Shift, 6) who manages, much as Coyote does in Navajo culture, to point out both cultural and societal truths in a palatable way. Even though his humor is often dark and cynical, through that comic worldview we achieve new insights about contemporary Indian life made bearable, and somehow more believable, with such comic relief. Native visual artist Jolene Rickard has said, "Indians continue to laugh. This tendency to break stereotypical stoic postures and goof on life is also a tradition of sorts."[25] Sherman Alexie, as artist, as creator, as Trickster, seems determined to make certain that tradition survives.

Notes

[1] Statistics taken from David Stannard, *American Holocaust* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1992): x, 257 and Henry F. Dobyns, *Their Numbers Became Thinned: Native American Population Dynamics in Eastern North America (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983):* 42, 342-43.

[2] "American Indians, Authenticity, and the Future" in Criticism, 10/23/97. <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~hoop/crit/crit-1.shtml: 9>.

[3] Kenneth Lincoln, "On Sherman Alexie" Modern American Poetry. <http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/a_f/alexie/onalexie.htm: 3>.

[4] University Newswire release, "Alexie Entertains GPAC Crowd at UNCP," (Univ. of North Carolina at Pembroke, April 4, 2002).

5 The Summer of Black Widows (Brooklyn: Hanging Loose Press, 1996): 51.

[6] Interview: "Juliette Torrez Goes Long Distance with Sherman Alexie." <http://poetry.about.com/li...true&COB=home&terms=alexie&PM=113_30 0>.

[7] Review of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* [The Book House of Stuyvesant Plaza, <http:www.bbny.com/staff/staff57.html>.

[8] Quoted on the back cover of Sherman Alexie's *The Toughest Indian in the World* (New York: Grove Press, 2000).

[9] Christine Colucci, "The Toughest Indian in the World Sherman Alexie Stabs America with Humor" *Many Voices* 1.8, (May 12, 200l), np. <http://www.anchoragepress.com/archives/documentd06d.html>

[10] From a review of Alexie's works in *Canku Ota* Newsletter, Issue 12, June 17, 2000.

[11] Georgia Pabst, "Alexie Sends Strong Signals: Writer Spares No Barbs" in the Milwaukee *Journal Sentinel*, March 9, 2002 <http://www.jsonline.com/enter/books/mar02/25632.asp>

[12] I have encountered this particular anecdote at least three different times: as quoted in the interview above, as part of a talk Alexie gave in Park City, Utah, in May 2003, and finally fictively transformed in the short story "Flight Patterns" (117) from *Ten Little Indians*.

[13] Torrez: 4.

[14] Lucy Lippard, *Mixed Blessings* (New York: Pantheon, 1990): 185.

[15] Barre Toelken, *The Anguish of Snails* (Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2003): 152.

[16] Allan J. Ryan *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999): 6.

[17] Highway, Tomson, as quoted in Ryan: *Trickster Shift*: 3-4. Of interest to this discussion is Ryan's note that in1986 Tomson Highway and other Native writers founded the Committee to Re-Establish the Trickster with the intent to reclaim Native voices in literature.

[18] Gerald Vizenor, ed., *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1990): 196.

[19] See here Mary Douglas's classic study of joke perception that Ryan uses as an analogy for this process. She says that the joke "affords opportunity for

realizing that an accepted pattern has no necessity. Its excitement lies in the suggestion that any particular ordering of experience may be arbitrary and subjective.... All jokes have this subversive effect on the dominant structure of ideas" (1968, 364-65).

[20] Quoted in the broadside for the National Museum for the American Indian's Indi'n Art Exhibit

<http://www.nmai.si.edu/press/releases/2003_05_07>.

[21] Titles in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* include such ironical doubling as "A Drug Called Tradition," "Crazy Horse Dreams," "The Fun House," "Jesus Christ's Half-Brother Is Alive and Well on the Spokane Indian Reservation," "The First Annual All-Indian Horseshoe Pitch and Barbecue," and "The Approximate Size of My Favorite Tumor.

[22] Sullivan, Lawrence, "Multiple Levels of Religious Meaning in Culture: A New Look at Winnebago Sacred Texts" *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 2 (2): 238-9.

[23] Deloria's chapter 4, "Anthropologists and Other Friends," is a classic example of irony at play in Native American humor as he sets out to prove how "Indians have been cursed above all other people in history [because] Indians have anthropologists,": 83.

[24] Barbara Babcock, "Arrange Me into Disorder: Fragments and Reflections on Ritual Clownbing" in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: RehearsalsTowards a Cultural Performance*, ed. John J. MacAloon (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984): 102-28.

[25] From the essay "Indian Humor" introducing the Smithsonian art exhibit on that topic. <http://www.conexus.si.edu/humor/index.html>.

Astaire and Rogers: Icons of American Screen Romance

Page Laws

The word "icon" is 'flava of the month' in discussions of American popular culture, both within and without academe. Perhaps celebrities achieve icon status when a critical mass of people can recite three famous quips about them. A surprising number of people, many born decades after it was said, can quote the 1930 assessment of Fred Astaire from an early Paramount screen test: "Can't act. Can't sing. Balding. Can dance a little." Two other widely recognized quips involve the couple, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, and their very couple-ness. There's Katherine Hepburn's remark: "She gives him sex. He gives her class." Quip number three is the pro-Ginger remark so beloved of feminists it has been made into a bumper sticker: "Ginger did everything Fred did, backwards and in high heels."

Is it the number of Ebay items that determines one's iconicity rating? Is it the number of cheesy commercials that rip off one's persona? You may have seen Fred dancing with a computer-generated vacuum cleaner a few years back. In fall 2003, Wendy's promulgated a 30-second TV ad featuring an unknown actor aping Astaire by dancing on desk tops and singing "Cheek to Cheek." The character was celebrating the heavenly qualities of Wendy's Chicken Strips. To indicate the iconic status of Astaire and Rogers worldwide, one might cite the example of the Frank Gehry-designed building in Prague with two asymmetrical glass and concrete towers, one leaning almost tenderly towards the other. The structure was immediately dubbed "Ginger and Fred" by Prague's citizenry.

In America, the two names are usually billed the other way: "Fred and Ginger." They existed independently, of course. Both had other partners and solo acting or dancing triumphs. You may remember Fred and Rita (Hayworth), Fred and Cyd (Charise), Fred and Judy (Garland), Fred and Leslie (Caron), Fred *und…und…und*. But you don't remember those linkages the way you remember Fred and Ginger. Somewhat to their own chagrin while they lived, Fred and Ginger became so tightly conjoined as a couple—an iconic couple—that more

than one critic has suggested we just eliminate the spaces and use an ampersand: Fred&Ginger—one word, one entity. The first wave of serious Astaire and Rogers critics, led by Arlene Croce, Gerald Mast, and Rick Altman have, in the words of Kathleen Gutto, "consistently defined the partnership...as the apex of heterosexual romantic dance" (26).

Frank Gehry's "Ginger and Fred" Building in Prague. Photo by Garrett Weinberg.

The word "icon" is flung about in popular media so freely nowadays that one need not work too hard to show that Fred and Ginger rate it. But what about the word "icon" as used in semiology or even its specialized denotation in religious art? Going back first to the study of signs, Charles Peirce says, " An Icon stands for something because it resembles it" (after Horanyi 59). Charles Morris follows suit saying, "an iconic sign…is any sign which is similar in some respects to what it denotes" (Morris 273). That's clear enough—and we can easily picture clicking on a computer screen icon of a tiny top hat and cane and having a program load up that purports to teach us how to dance like Fred Astaire. He made those items of clothing famous. They *resemble* his costuming. But the word's denotation changes in the case of people whom we deem to be themselves icons. Astaire is often called 'an icon of elegance and physical grace.' He was indeed

elegant and graceful. Astaire's persona (an entity carefully created by the skinny, balding actual man né Austerlitz whose father hailed from Austria) is so artfully suffused with those characteristics that when we hear those words "'elegant" and "graceful" we can indeed, in a favorable context, visually picture Astaire.

Eli Rosik's "triadic model" of acting may be helpful here. He speaks of "the actor (who produces the signs), the text (the set of images inscribed on his body) and [the] character (who exists only in the imagination of the spectator)" (113). Rosik continues, " …In producing a text the actor produces behaviors that are both indexes of himself, of his ability to produce iconic indexes, and indexes of the character he enacts. This double indexality is typical of iconic description" (115). We are familiar with the notion that certain actors—e.g. John Wayne or Arnold Schwarzenegger (the Governator)– seem to play themselves. Astaire is such a one—a highly self-reflexive artist who crafted his persona from elements of his own biography plus all his roles. Perhaps the best way to understand the use of word "icon" for movie stars is that so-and-so becomes an "icon" when he or she develops a persona so strong and compelling, that it kicks free of its individual incarnations and becomes utterly self-referential. Astaire is an icon resembling….Astaire.

Says critic Paula Cohen, "he is the Ariel of our cultural consciousness" (127). Even other dancers agree. Balanchine likened Astaire to Bach "for the range and depth of his expressiveness" (130). Nureyev pronounced him "the greatest American dancer in American history" (129). Baryshnikov ran out of superlatives, saying, "We are dancing but Fred –he's doing something else." Baryshnikov was speaking of Astaire's remarkable self-awareness as a dancer, an ability to deep focus that psychologist Neil Hurley attributes to an almost primitive sense of rhythm, a "bicameral mind" (after Hurley 78). Fred ranks number 19 of the 100 Greatest Movie Stars of All Time, as established by one of the better publications dedicated to taking the popular pulse: *Entertainment Weekly*. To put it in Saussurian or Metzian terms, the whole *langue* is immanent—in each and every *parole,* especially when the artist's work is viewed synchronically.

The series of the nine Astaire-Rogers musicals has this unified self-reflexive quality; so does each individual film; so does each individual microcosmic dance. On each level, we find analogous movement and drama—the arc of romantic courtship—desire and the aesthetic *jouissance* of imagined consummation. Arlene Croce, borrowing Fred's lyric from the song "Never Gonna Dance" calls each dance number, film and the whole film series "La Belle Romance, La Perfectly Swell Romance."

Although Rogers personally resented the idea that Astaire was a choreographic Svengali moving her about like a Trilby in high heels, Fred is the one most people tend to watch, the Yang we notice before the Yin. And yet Astaire plus Rogers paradoxically also represents the epitome of balance. In their most transcendent moments, Fred&Ginger represent Two Halves of the Same Soul, a Platonic Ideal of both Romance and utopian Gender Equity. He is *das ewig Männliche,* she *das ewig Weibliche* (with apologies to Goethe). But someone has to lead in a dance. Is not every binary opposition hierarchical, but particularly so if its gender or race-related?

Playing on Jacques Derrida's famous coined word *différance,* I propose a special portmanteau word specially dedicated to Astaire and Rogers. It is *différ-danse*—a complex and constant shifting of gender polarity and parity at the heart of the great Astaire/Rogers numbers. Male differs from female (even at moments when Fred looks fey); female differs from male; male *defers* to female; female defers to male. They are fated to be mated, but what fascinates us is the deferring, spinning, propulsive force of Desire itself: Eros Dancing.

Before moving on to a close reading of one of the great romantic duets "Let's Face the Music and Dance" from *Follow the Fleet*—1936—let us look quickly at two postmodern homages to the Astaire/Rogers myth. Astaire and Astaire/Rogers tributes run the gamut of pop culture from tacky to toney. Film homages include Fellini's *Ginger and Fred*, Herbert Ross' *Pennies from Heaven* as well as *Dancer in the Dark* (2000)*, Billy Elliot* (2000)*, The Mask* (1994), *Bogus* (1996), *Monsieur Barracuda* (1997) and others. There is even a

musical that opened on Broadway Dec. 4, 2003, called *Never Gonna Dance*—adapted from the 1936 Astaire/Rogers hit *Swing Time*.

Federico Fellini's Film *Ginger and Fred*—note the billing order he chose—has been seen by critics such as Millicent Marcus, as two films in one. One the one hand, It is a "bittersweet romance" between two very rapidly aging Fred and Ginger impersonators, played by frequent Fellini surrogate Marcello Mastroianni (Fred) and Fellini's wife Giulietta Masina (Ginger). Fake Fred's (Mastroianni) real name is Pippo and Fake Ginger's (Masina) real name is Amelia, and they were once in love. But Pippo's boozing and womanizing broke them up as an act and as a couple decades earlier. They have been asked to appear with a flock of other Felliniesque freaks and impersonators on a proto-Reality/Variety Show called "We Are Proud to Present." Fellini's film –like so many Astaire films—is, therefore, a backstage drama—depicting the arrival of the performers for the show, their housing in a slightly surreal Roman hotel, the rehearsal (or non-rehearsal), and finally the big appearance. There are two unmistakable allusions to *Top Hat* (1935). Masina's Ginger can't sleep because Mastroianni's Fred is snoring next door. In *Top Hat*, the film alluded to, the original Astaire renders Rogers sleepless by tap dancing in the room above hers. Fellini also jokes about the feathers from Masina's dress that make Mastrioanni want to sneeze. The latter bit is part of the backstage lore from the filming of *Top Hat* when the real Fred Astaire reportedly complained vociferously to the real Ginger Rogers about her costume shedding feathers all over him.

Besides the obvious homage to Fred&Ginger movies, the second most salient aspect of Fellini's film is its satirical attack on "TV culture," depicted in a Felliniesque bombardment of food and sex leading, the director himself implies, to modern Italians' total video addiction. Our clip shows Ginger and Fred's climactic TV appearance.

On the level of the plot, everything has gone wrong. A power outage (possibly caused, it is presciently suggested, by terrorists) has already interrupted the dance number once. Fred/Mastrioanni is getting crippling cramps onstage and is asthmatically wheezing and stag-

gering. He falls on stage, but, just like Fred in *Swing Time* (1936), he picks himself up, brushes himself off and starts all over again. There are an ineffable sweetness and tenderness in the scene that harken back to some essence of the original Fred and Ginger. An earthbound, almost desperate Mastrioanni even imitates Astaire's typical little shake of the head to signal an up-tempo section of dance. Equally striking is the tenderness in the impersonating couple's modified supported backbend.

A sketch of Fellini as puppeteer, making his pseudo-Ginger (Guilietta Masina) and pseudo-Fred (Marcello Mastroianni) do a dance.

Our second homage clip from *Pennies from Heaven* indicates even more strongly that Astaire and Rogers were a rare, one-time-only phenomenon. Director Herbert Ross sets his film during the Depression, but transforms the period by the caustic irony of his (and our) 1980's perspective. The fantasy world of *la belle romance, la perfectly* swell *romance* (Arlene Croce's term) is shattered. There is real poverty depicted in Ross' Depression; the Fred character, played by Steve Martin, has real and adulterous sex with the Ginger character, played by Bernadette Peters; 'Ginger' gets pregnant and has a real abortion—"real," that is, relative to this film's levels of fictionality and iconicity. This postmodern Fred is accused of a real crime, killing a blind girl, and the film threatens to

end on the gallows until the demand for a happy-end kicks in. The ending reminds one quite a bit of Brecht's 1929 *Dreigroschenoper,* a depiction of the Weimar-era Depression, made typically Brechtian and oblique.

Pennies from Heaven, however, depicts the ersatz Fred&Ginger couple in a movie theater shortly before Steve Martin's arrest for the murder. In it, they fulfill everyone's fantasy by stepping, first, onto the stage apron in front of the movie screen and imitating the 'real' Fred and Ginger at that moment *on* the screen, doing the "Let's Face the Music and Dance" number from *Follow the Fleet*. As the fantasy continues, the movie-house proscenium disappears and then we the audience and they—the pretend Fred&Ginger—have been transported into the Black and White world of the original film. The impersonated dance continues with great authenticity until—quite suddenly, there's an intrusion from yet *another* Fred and Ginger film—Fred's famous solo from *Top Hat*. A line of rather threatening male chorus members wearing top hats and waving canes, just as in *Top Hat,* begins to threaten the fake Fred and Ginger.

The intrusion of this darker fantasy into the ongoing lighter fantasy foreshadows the Steve Martin character's upcoming brush with death on the gallows.

Martin and Peters, imprisoned by *Top Hat* –style canes.

We come now to the original number that Ross was iconically imitating and ironizing at the same time: "Let's Face the Music and Dance."

Follow the Fleet, the 1936 musical in which this number is embedded, comes at the height of the nine-film series that had begun with *Flying Down to Rio* in 1933 and would end with *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle* in 1939. The overall mood of the film is the antithesis of this elegant number. Fred plays a gum-smacking sailor and Ginger plays a taxi-dancer who were once dance partners and once in love. Ginger was not ready to marry, so Fred joined the Navy. Now he's back in port and eager to rekindle his romance with Ginger. There is a second couple played by Randolph Scott, as a Navy Master Chief, and the actress Harriet Hilliard Nelson later made famous in the 1952-1966 ABC-TV series *Ozzie and Harriet.* Harriet Nelson and Ginger Rogers play sisters who own a ship they have just salvaged, going deeply into debt. The Fred Astaire character—the gum-smack-

ing sailor—suggests that they "put on a show" to pay the debt. The clip of the dance is part of this show-within-a-show. There is an audience depicted, and a proscenium stage with ship's wheels off to the side to establish that we are on a ship (rather than the obvious Big White Hollywood set that supposedly depicts, in turn, an interior of a Monte Carlo casino and then its roof.) Right! Through the magic of film we pass through the proscenium, it disappears, and we are in the world of the dance number.

This particular number was chosen for analysis, in part, because it is so remarkably self-contained—an entire mini-drama with its own beginning, middle and end. Fred has left his sailor self completely behind. The curtain opens on a sophisticated man gaming at a crowded table in some elegant casino. He is laughing, smoking. But suddenly, we note he has begun to lose. The flock of admirers he had as a winner evaporate—reassembling only when a new sucker comes along. A brief curtain tacitly marks the transition to Act Two in our mini-drama– this second scene being set on what looks to be the casino roof. There is an elegant sort of Art Deco structure with scrolled supports– perhaps housing unseen access doors to this roof. The mostly glass structure is brightly lit from within. We then see the same worldly man strolling about outside on the roof, not far from a low parapet likely guarding the roof's edge. The Fred character seems to have sought the outside air to recover his composure after his heavy gambling loss. He greets clusters of his fellow strolling socialites. One of them—a minor RKO player at this time—would become very famous later, also in a 1950's and 60's TV sitcom: Lucille Ball.

The socialites snub Fred. Note the exquisite timing of his greetings, each one icily declined by the snobs in turn. One declined greeting is mimed to a pizzicato of strings—a gesture of ironic regret so poignant that we realize the gambler so happy-go-lucky just moments before is being rapidly driven to despair. The poetic time compression is so remarkably efficient, that we find his next move— pulling a gun from his pocket– almost logical. He gives the gun a little two-handed shake of resolution and is raising it towards his own temple when, enter Ginger upstage right, her own face a mask of tragedy.

She is suddenly on the railing there at the edge of the roof! He is just as suddenly with her, pulling her back from the edge of oblivion. It is all one gesture—a dance catch ending in, incredibly enough under the circumstances, a dance spin. He reproaches her with a gesture of head-shaking disappointment that such a beautiful woman would try to take her own life. He then remembers he was about to do the same. He retrieves the gun from his pocket to show her—to comfort her that he, too, has been a fool to the point of desperation. All is conveyed in the way he tosses the gun carelessly in his hands. She reaches for it, Juliet seeking poison on Romeo's lips. He is suddenly serious and reproachful again. He tosses the gun away—overboard, off the roof. She's downcast. There's a transition, a waiting phrase or two in the music. He shows her his empty wallet, then tosses it overboard with an identical (and inimitable) devil-may-care gesture.

Astaire's inimitable tossing gesture in *Follow the Fleet*.

Astaire conjuring, back to camera.

Rogers caught up, fully enchanted.

Astaire's first leap.

The astonishing exit.

Her back is to him—it is a dance of turning backs—and she huddles against a rooftop buttress for support. On another cue from the strings, he eases effortlessly into song.

The song is built upon an idiom, a turn of phrase or *Redewendung*. To "face the music" in English means to prepare oneself for consequences, usually bad ones. To "face the music" is to steel oneself before receiving punishment. There is already a built-in irony, since music is usually a pleasant thing. This irony, built into the idiom itself, is expanded on by the great American composer/lyricist—Irving Berlin—by one simple new addition: Let's face the music and DANCE. The enhanced idiom has a new meaning: Let's not only make the best of a bad situation; let's defy the gods, and joyously dance our defiance. Astaire sings with ardor and moves in closer. The lyrics acknowledge the possibility of trouble coming, but the singer takes that possibility as a call to move quickly to pleasure before it is too late or "before the fiddlers have fled." "Fleeing fiddlers" presents an almost comically lofty alliteration. It is followed by a reiteration of the same warning: "before they ask us to pay the bill and while we still have the chance." Astaire employs a broad, almost British-sounding "a" --- "ask" and "chance." At the lyrics "soon we'll be without the moon"—phrased very deliberately to impress her with his urgency—he takes her by the arm. She, still bearing traces of her self-destructive trance, seems to relax ever so slightly and turns to face him. He pulls her into the full swing of the dance with a full turn that echoes the first turn when he pulled her off the railing. Now his back is quite daringly turned to us and the camera in order to face her. She is now the center of his universe.

He begins a series of mesmerizing, conjuring sways of his body and arms. He half-circles her. They join hands, but the tug of wills continues, now softened by the seduction of the dance medium. He pulls her away repeatedly from the general area (upstage right) where she tried to jump. He circles her, reverses the direction of his circling. There are side-by-side synchronous steps—he can trust her to the point of letting go of her arm now. Their separate and mutual arm extensions are visual echoes. At one point Ginger's heavily-beaded

sleeves actually hit Fred—another bit of behind-the-scenes lore—but he doesn't flinch. He steps on the slight rise above her—her guardian angel or her superior--- but soon returns back to her level to share her fate. She can now circle independently of him but returns willingly to face him, to face the music. She moves in and out of his encircling arms. They make small leaps in tandem. He twirls with his hand nearly on his hip, a gesture almost effete, almost feminine. As the dance builds to its crescendo, there is an oddly formal passage between them: they move one another's bodies in sliding arcs that result in parallel poses. His arms move her off to the side. Her arms then reciprocate to move him. They are retrieving one another from whatever doom separately awaited them. He does a balletic leap to the side—an *entrechat*—seemingly out of sheer joy at his deliverance, sheer exuberance. He does another one—still higher. It is only her attraction that pulls him back to earth, keeping him in the film frame. We know from the building music that it must be almost over. They are walking towards their inevitable exit—arm in arm—echoing all the significant dance/ walks in the whole scene. They both suddenly drop to one knee—as if felled by fate—but they rise back up together, and stretch back together as if warming up to attack their exit. There's more grand stepping together and then…the final surprise in an astonishing dance: the tossing back of their heads followed by a veritable plunge offstage and into Destiny, together.

French feminist critic Luce Irigary has a Lacanian term, the "sensible transcendental," which yet another critic named Summers-Bremner has applied to ballet. It is worth borrowing again to describe the unique blended form Astaire devised: "The sensible transcendental's main purpose is to facilitate exchange between the binaries by forcing a recognition of what they have in common" (Summers-Bremner 93). Summers-Bremner quotes a dance critic named Dempster to further explain her point: "In moments of dancing the edges of things blur and terms such as mind/body, flesh/spirit, carnal/divine, male/female become labile and unmoored, breaking loose from the fixity of their pairings" (after Summers Bremner 109).

In the Russian Orthodox Church there was once a fierce theological debate between the iconoclasts—who protested the use of icons in worship as a form of idolatry—and the iconodules who considered the reverence of such icons as a legitimate act of worshipping the saint depicted and, through him or her, God. Though Fred and Ginger do not deserve religious beatification—they were fallible, feisty entertainers trying to make a buck—I do tend to side with those iconodules who think Fred and Ginger, Ginger and Fred were unique, *einmalig*. We shall not see their likes again except in the form of impersonators. Fortunately the preserving nature of the film medium gives us iconic access—complex as it is—to the originals.

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Sacred and Profane Icon-Work: Jane Fonda and Elvis Presley

Bent Sørensen

Introduction:

This paper engages with iconicity as it manifests itself in cultural texts, across a wide spectrum of genres and media. Different text types and genres (among others films, photographs, manifestos and novels) circulate indiscriminately in the cultural sphere, and through a reading method which might be termed 'cultural iconology', one can analyse cultural texts about persons and phenomena of symbolic importance to 20th and 21st century people. Key to this approach is a charting of the various cultural and textual agents' icon-work.

Icon-work, as shown in the analyses below, is an interactive process where anyone can become a textual agent or producer, manipulating existing iconic texts, or creating new additions to the bank of already existing iconic representations of a given cultural icon. Based on some general theses—outlined briefly below—this paper aims to analyse collaborative and adversarial icon-work in two cases: Elvis Presley and Jane Fonda. Both these cultural icons originate from real people producing real cultural work—in the case of Elvis in the fields of popular music and film; in the case of Fonda in the fields of film, politics and self-improvement. In the process of producing this cultural work both persons have evolved into widely recognisable public figures, and have eventually lost control of their own images. They have entered the open field of cultural iconicity where others may contribute freely to the iconic status of these figures. This has worked to extend the lives of these figures beyond the span one might otherwise have estimated for them in an age of cultural acceleration. Both Fonda and Elvis are essentially figures of the 1950s and 60s, but today are perhaps more recognisable than ever.

The complex processes of icon-work have not previously been systematically theorised, and I cannot hope to do so exhaustively here. Still, the work may begin with the formulation of a set of theses regarding cultural iconicity, and that is my real starting point.

Theses

1. I propose that iconic representation combines two modes of representation: a stylised and a sacralised image of the person being iconised is presented. This duality originates in connotations of the word 'icon' from two spheres of use of the term: The commercial icon or pictogram which works through simplified representation (i.e. is stylised), and the religious icon which works through embellished representation and through symbolic detail (i.e. is sacralised). An example of this duality can be given in the case of Marilyn Monroe: In Warhol's silk-screens of her the face is represented as extremely stylised, with visual highlights of only those particular features of her that connote her role as Marilyn: Her lips, her eye-shade, and, most importantly, her beauty spot. In the well-known early *Playboy* nudes of Marilyn her body is sacralised through the use of luscious background colour and fabrics and a highlight of the very pinkness of her skin.

2. From the religious connotations of iconicity we as public inherit the position of worshipper. The need for icons is an expression of our longing for something beyond our own subject-hood, a desire to idolise. This need is no longer fulfilled in traditional religious ways, but has become transferred onto other manifestations of the extraordinary. From the industrial, service and information oriented connotations of iconicity we inherit the position of consumer. Both these positions are especially well served by dead icons, which offer no active resistance to commodification.

3. Iconicity places us, as viewers and readers, in communication, and communion, with the person behind the icon, but—since we are not ourselves icons—a passive role is enforced on us as viewers or voyeurs. We may resist this role, but we are doomed to re-enact it whenever we commune with an icon. The relation between icon and viewer is basically unequal. Iconicity entails a reduction of the person behind the icon (the iconic subject) to image, to object. Iconicity thus becomes a form of martyrdom as a reduction or, more appropriately, translation from individuality to symbol. This causes problems for persons who become icons while still alive, since they experience an

isolation from other people whom they only know as generic representatives of the voyeuristic gaze (the public, the audience, the fans—all terms for un-individuated masses). They must develop strategies for dealing with the public's icon-work, and these can range from extreme use of irony as the young Bob Dylan did (see D. A. Pennebaker's 1965 documentary film Don't Look Back), to attempts at total isolation from the public gaze which many contemporary celebrities employ.

4. A person who achieves icon status has to be recognisable to a large number of members of a specific group, whether that is a sub-culture (defined through age, race, class, belief etc.), a nation, or the global community: Iconicity presupposes immediate recognizability and familiarity. In apparent contradiction of the safety connoted by familiarity, the iconic person simultaneously has to be extraordinary, whether through his or her achievements, or through image. Some element of the person's appearance, life, story or activities has to transcend the familiarity of everyday life as lived by most of us: Iconicity presupposes transgression of normality. Ultimately, icon status is only achieved when the person imaged represents a combination of familiarity (which echoes in the word 'fame') and transgression of norms (often figured as 'cool').

5. The activities of the consumer of icons—in both senses of the word consumption—form what I term icon-work. It is convenient to subdivide this icon-work into two broad categories determined by the intention of the consumer, fan or icon-worker: adversarial and collaborative icon-work. By adversarial icon-work I understand the type of intervention which is aimed at destabilising or subverting the icon's function and meaning in the icon-worker's contemporary cultural reality. Icons, especially over-commercialised and over-familiarised ones, tempt people into actively resisting them, e.g. by defacing them or tampering with them (slander, rumour-mongering, gossip, satire and co-optation are all possible strategies): The formerly passive worshippers then become iconoclasts. Collaborative icon-work, on the other hand, may take the form of *homage*, imitation, worship and activities to preserve the memory of the icon, etc. This form of activity is often the work of the ardent fan or follower of the icon's original work.

Most icon-work comprises a mixture of adversarial and collaborative efforts. All of these activities, whether adversarial or collaborative, ultimately serve only to perpetuate the iconic person's status and longevity.

      6. Largely due to the increased commodification and availability of icons, the need for worship has not diminished throughout the last 50 years, despite the apparent secularisation of the post WW II-era. On the contrary there are now more icons than ever, and despite the general tendency towards cultural acceleration, many icons formed in the 1950s and 60s are still potent and present in the commercial and cultural sphere. Iconicity serves as a form of immortality (at least within a cultural or subcultural memory), yet, historically speaking, icons are always specifically situated and mean different things in different eras. Icons have a history, and not all icons are permanent, as witnessed by certain icons slipping out of a culture's memory after some decades. Most silent film icons are no longer remembered as iconic by the larger public, and even such apparent immortals as Rudolph Valentino no longer elicits any response from the current student population. This final paradox of iconicity between immortality and historicity leads us to the analyses of two figures whose iconicity is linked to the 1950s and 60s, but who both still live on in the American cultural memory.

Analyses

      1. Elvis Presley (whom for the purposes of this paper we shall presume dead) offers sterling examples of posthumous collaborative and adversarial icon-work. Sacralised images, as well as other fetishised representations of Elvis' body, proliferate. Brief analyses of Elvis as saviour and as object of consumption in (un)holy communion will be supplied in the following analyses. In opposition to dead Elvis a still living iconic figure such as Jane Fonda can be read as a chameleonic re-inventor of self, strategically attempting to shed layer after layer of her public personae: Barbarella, Hanoi Jane, Work-out Jane etc. All these past personae will, however, be shown to remain in

the public conscious as objects of fetishistic and adversarial icon-work, ranging from voyeuristic posters and web-sites devoted to Bar-barella, via urinal-art depicting Jane Fonda in several of her personae, to tribute sites celebrating Fonda as an icon of eternal (sag- and wrin-kle-free) female youth. It is notable that at least 13 biographies of Fonda have appeared, but that none of them are currently in print—perhaps suggesting that her frequent changes of image rapidly dimin-ish the shelf life of any potential biography.

Elvis Presley was a man of many comebacks and re-inventions of self. From his breakthrough as Rebel Elvis in 1956 to his death in 1977 he moved in and out of images and iconic figurations. His patri-otic duty done after a stint as Army Elvis with a regulation GI-Joe haircut replacing his youthful and rebellious duck tail, he re-entered his long and successful second public career as Hollywood Elvis, act-ing in 31 movies in the years from 1956—1969. In 1968 he staged a spectacular televised comeback as Leather Elvis, creating perhaps the most durable iconic expression after the original Elvis-the-Pelvis, who was too hot for live TV in 1956. In the Leather Elvis TV special Presley re-created his performance persona and re-established his credibility as a rock performer.

This success led to a triumphant long-term engagement in Las Vegas, initially selling out 57 consecutive performances, followed by many subsequent month-long bookings at the Las Vegas Hilton. Leather Elvis was transmogrified into Vegas Elvis of the increasingly outlandish costumes and accessories. Another satellite transmitted TV-special brought about the birth of Hawaii Elvis in January 1973, where world-wide audiences saw him as the consummate patriot wearing his American Eagle jump-suit and marvelled at his command of a near-hysterical audience. Then came the decline, the ever expand-ing jump-suits as Elvis' girth increased, and the inevitable death by burger-induced heart attack on August 16, 1977 in the isolation of Graceland, Elvis' magical wonderland retreat away from the pressures of a too complex, too confusing world.

In the several thousand *post mortem* iconic representations of Elvis (Post Elvis, if you like) that have appeared since then, and continue to appear, a move has occurred more and more towards a canonisation of Elvis as a religious figure. Vials of Elvis sweat can be bought on eBay, and scarves once worn by him are considered as precious Veronicas. In the airbrushed painting, "Sacred Heart of Elvis" by Christopher Rywalt (Image 1), this is extremely obvious. The painting is a complete borrowing from Catholic sacred iconography, as we note in the representation of the halo, and the sign of the benefaction Elvis performs with his right hand. The radiant heart that illuminates Elvis' chest appears to shine from within his holy body and to make his flesh transparent. Elvis is ready to embrace the viewer of the icon and bestow his blessings upon us.
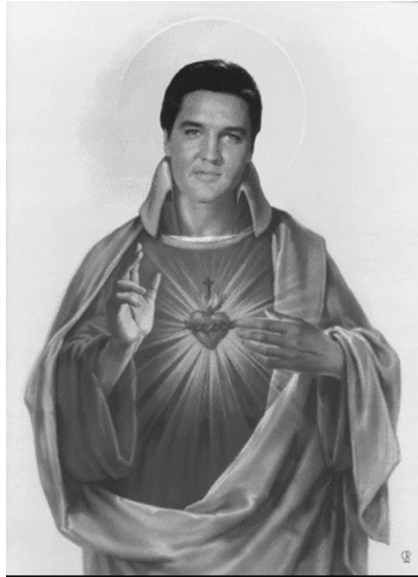

Image 1: Christopher Rywalt: *Sacred Heart of Elvis*

This image is found in numerous places on the Internet, usually accompanied by other renditions of Elvis in saintly or outright Christ-like scenes (see for example "Stations of the Cross of Elvis" at the same site) (Image 2). I have collected it from a site entitled, "The First Church of Elvis". The painting has also been used as cover art for the book, *Elvis After Elvis: The Posthumous Career of a Living Legend* by Gilbert Rodman, (Routledge, 1996), and is emblematic of the use of Elvis in crossover images between religious iconicity and cultural satire.
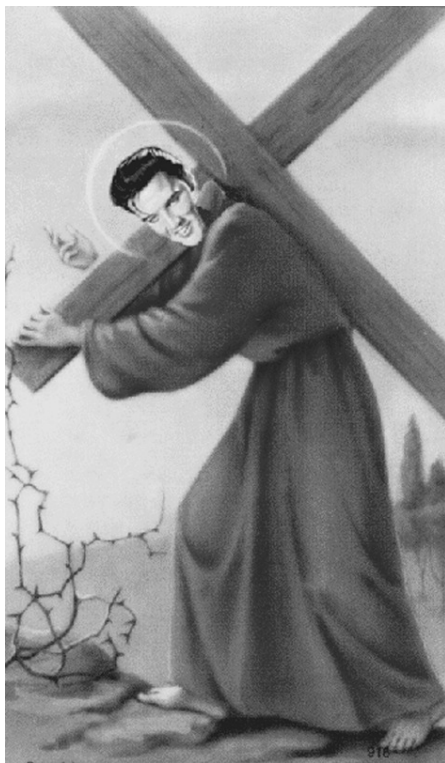

Image 2: Christopher Rywalt: Stations of the Cross of Elvis

The reader of the icon can approach it as a sincere object of worship, and potentially include it in a shrine of Elvis (similar to the one the protagonist of Laura Kalpakian's novel *Graced Land* (1992) constructs on her porch), or else regard it as a commentary on the inappropriate mixture of religion and fandom that Elvis seems to spark among his most ardent followers. The intention is not immediately apparent from the image itself, as Elvis' facial expression reveals little about the value the artist ascribes to the possibility of Elvis being a miraculous, saintly figure. In the image of Elvis as Jesus, carrying the cross, there is a greater misappropriation detectable through the presence of Elvis' signature grin and gesture of salutation, which seems inappropriate in the context of the sufferer's progression through the Stations of the Cross. These images teeter on the brink of adversarial

icon-work, but are still readable as tributes to the posthumous power of Elvis and Elvis' body—for those who believe.

With a text such as Holme and Hooligan's *Presleyburger Shock* (1977) (Image 3) we have a clearer case of adversarial icon-work. The text sarcastically depicts the turning of Elvis' body into a version of communion wafer of a kind more culturally appropriate for Elvis himself as well as for many of his worshippers: The burger. The satire is heightened by the suggestion that such Presleyburgers are consumed mainly by rock stars aspiring to attain Elvis' greatness through this extreme form of cannibalistic communion. It is not the common fan who eats Presleyburgers, but "rock aristocracy" who partake of the feast. Thus even an apparently clear-cut case of adversarial satire turns out to have a kernel of *homage* in it, since the suggestion seems to be that even the dead body of Elvis contains more true rock'n'roll than the living specimens of ageing rockers such as Cliff Richard possess.

PRESLEYBURGER SHOCK

Shock. Horror. They are the only two words to describe the latest report from our Pick of the Poseurs correspondent in America. The recently described sensational attempt to steal Elvis' body was doomed to failure from the start, reason being a successful snatch has already been staged. What's happened to the body? It now appears certain that it was minced down and turned into the most bizarre cult food of all time. Certainly 'Presleyburgers' have been selling to the New York and West Coast rock aristocracy at up to $1000 a throw. Unconfirmed reports suggest that a small consignment of frozen Presleyburgers have arrived in U.K. and that Cliff Richard ate one just before going on at his recent Dome gig.

P.O.T.P. reporters have questioned rock superstar Frankie Vaughn and though he declined to reply, his mouth was clearly seen to water. P.O.T.P. readers can draw their own conclusions.

The further we went with our probe the sicker this bizarre situation has turned out to be. It seems even more rare and more sought after 'Death Burger Specials,' made from the remains of James Dean can be bought. Those who have tasted this specialty said they are rather tough but tasty. They are thought to be authentic however, as they still contain bits of the car wreckage.

'Disneyburgers' are quite a different matter however, as they had the good sense to deep freeze him only twenty minutes after he had died. Walt Disney will have quite a surprise however when they wake him up in the year 2,000 AD and finds a couple of his arms and legs missing. —Anonymous text (by Ray Holme and Joby Hooligan) in *Pic of the Poseurs—Magazine for Modern Youth*, London, 1977.

Image 3: Holme & Hooligan: *Presleyburger Shock*

Both sets of iconic representations of Elvis have elements of the sadistic in them. The desire to cannibalise Elvis's body is overt in the latter example, but even in the religious iconography analysed above we detect a desire to inflict stigmata on the body of Elvis, and

of course to control Elvis as a translated, but permanently dead figure. Thus both texts objectify Elvis in their icon-work, continuing the reifying tendency initiated by the metonymic reduction of Elvis to pure Pelvis begun with his 1950s nickname. The transgressive element in both iconic texts is equally evident and foregrounded in the taboo breaking nature of the texts' flirtation with cannibalism and necrophilia, not to mention the sacrosanct playing around with Christian iconography and doctrine. The texts tantalise us by promising to dissolve the distinction between icon and worshipper and release us from our passivity as viewers of the icon: one by offering that we may eat Elvis, the other by offering that Elvis will protect us and eventually guide us to Heaven.

It should be added that many less ambiguous iconic representations of Elvis may be found, among them many evidently sincere tributes. There is a spate of mystery novels and comic books where Elvis is the hero and fights crime, much as the real Elvis once expressed a wish to do when hosted by President Nixon in the White House. Likewise, there are a number of images teaming Elvis up with other icons, especially Marilyn Monroe, whom icon-workers seem to particularly want to have a relationship with Elvis. Nowhere is this more explicit than in Catherine Deeter's image (1986) (Image 4), an illustration for Mark Shipper's book *How to be Ecstatically Happy 24 Hours a Day for the Rest of Your Life*. Here we have the two of them

in bed together—both reduced to their stylised icon-hood: Elvis as forelock, crooked smile and torso; Marilyn as smile, closed eyes, glossy lips, blonde hair and beauty spot, and both ecstatic either in anticipation of sexual union or as a result of already having consummated this union. This collaborative icon-work can surely only serve to also make the viewers feel happy, and possibly to entice them to buy this obviously potent volume which posthumously has cured two of the most notoriously depressed media stars in the American pantheon. Thus this iconic representation illustrates the consumer use Elvis can be put to, quite isolated from the core commerciality of the still burgeoning industry of re-packaging and re-releasing products actually featuring Elvis' voice or acting.

2. When Elvis "left the building" in 1977, Jane Fonda was nearing the height of her acting career. The following year she won her second Oscar for her work in *Coming Home*, a movie about the trials and tribulations of a returning Vietnam veteran. The irony of this role cannot be lost on anyone who has followed Fonda's political activism throughout the late 1960s and early 70s, where she earned the nickname "Hanoi Jane", due to her support of the North Vietnamese (Viet Cong) soldiers. While in Vietnam she was memorably portrayed on the seat of an anti-aircraft gun in full military gear, apparently ready to shoot down her fellow countrymen.

Image 5: Fonda in Vietnam

These images, and Fonda's refusal to ever apologise unreservedly for her anti-war and anti-American stance during the Vietnam War, have combined to create a lasting hatred of Fonda among many Vietnam veterans. Their adversarial icon-work has created some of the most provocative images of Fonda available.

But nothing in Fonda's early career as a pretty ingenue appearing in numerous lightweight Hollywood films (such as 1963's *Sunday in New York* and 1965's *Cat Ballou*) prepared her audience for her later transgressions. Her first signature role came when she was cast by her husband (from 1965 to 1973), Roger Vadim, in his 1968 sci-fi comedy *Barbarella* (Image 6). This movie is memorable chiefly for its loving display of Fonda's body in a number of sado-masochistic situations and settings, not least in the scene where the villain Durand-Durand attempts to kill Barbarella with an orgasm organ. The beginning of the movie shows Fonda's character awakening in her space ship, floating weightlessly in the cabin, which weirdly is a fur-covered, nest-like room. Barbarella is undressing and Fonda's bottom is caressingly displayed by the camera in slow motion. The reintroduction of gravity causes Barbarella to rudely land on said bottom, and marks the first instance of a sadistic probing into the charac-

ter's bodily state. The film has become a cult classic sparking several tribute web sites, as well as an imminent sequel featuring Drew Barrymore in the role of Barbarella. Posters displaying Fonda in Barbarella costumes with phallic weapons in her hand are sold at high prices on the Internet, especially from sites in France and Japan.

A curious intersection with contemporary American politics is created by the image and text on the cover of *Life* in March 1968 (Image 7), where a typical *Barbarella* still (by Carlo Babagnoli) is juxtaposed with several apparently related captions.

First, "The Deciding Days" (actually referring to the potential Rockefeller vs. Kennedy battle for the American Presidency in November 1964), where it seems Barbarella wielding her gun might legitimately have a say in the decision. Then, "3 ½ Super Powers", which obviously leads one to think of the arms race and wonder if Barbarella might be the ½ super power one had not previously heard of. But the real caption to the cover image is of course, "Fonda's Little Girl Jane", which continues the sadistic reduction of Fonda's character to that of a child—an altogether unsavoury association, considering the sexual display the character of Barbarella evinces in the movie.

At this point in the late 1960s and early 1970s Fonda was developing strong anti-war sentiments, coinciding with her relationship and next marriage (1973—1989) to outspoken anti-war writer and activist, Tom Hayden. She began speaking on college campuses and was arrested on a few occasions, which led to memorably iconic images, again displaying a Fonda in bondage—handcuffed, but extremely well made-up in Ohio 1970 (Image 8). In the mug shot taken after her arrest in Cleveland November 1970 (Image 9) she is seen in full make-up and wearing a lady-like wristwatch, simultaneously displaying a well-manicured fist in a strange imitation of a black power salute.


Images 8 & 9: Fonda arrested.

To briefly return to the infamous anti-aircraft image (Image 5), we there see Fonda surrounded by male figures, all with their attention riveted upon her, several of them poking objects or their hands in her general direction. It actually seems that Fonda is entrapped in the machinery of the gun, rather than being in charge of eventually discharging it. The male figures are attempting to manipulate her much in the same vein that Durand-Durand manipulated her in his orgasm machine. The sado-masochistic imagery duplicates itself again in the political and military context of this image.

Another example of iconic use of the politicised Jane of the 1970s, and again one that privileges the male, sexualised gaze, is found in Raymond Federman's postmodern meta-novel *The Twofold Vibration* from 1982. Here the novel's protagonist, 'the old man' (a rather 'dirty' old man, in fact), elopes from Buffalo, New York, "the armpit of America," (Federman, 32) to Europe with a thinly veiled Jane Fonda-like character, called June Fanon. This act is motivated by his assertion that "most of us live our politics in the past" (Fanon replies: "Or in the future") (79), and that "political understanding is but a series of second thoughts" (68). Both characters escape from radical political involvement in the counterculture of early 1970s USA: Fonda/Fanon is already planning the emotional depths of future film roles (her Oscar-winning performance in *Coming Home* (1978)); 'the old man' is dreaming of again winning a fortune in Monte Carlo. In the greater scheme of the novel, these future schemes and past reminiscences are more substantial than the characters' present activism. However, their trip evolves into a true journey of remembrance for 'the old man', taking him from the casino tables to the Nazi death camps, whereas Fonda/Fanon's political activism is really just a future oriented publicity strategy which only leads back to Hollywood.

Not only is Fonda's radicalism scoffed at in the novel, but her appearance is extremely sexualised, whereas her political speech consists solely of these words repeated thrice: "Hello There Fellow Bums" (43). It doesn't really matter what she says, since the entire audience is focussed on her body, not her words: "[S]he stood on the platform in a mini-skirt and leather boots, the style that year, her red-

dish hair flowing wildly in the breeze, legs spread apart in sensual defiance" (41). We recognise the representations of Fonda's body from her Barbarella persona in this description. 'The old man' enjoys sitting behind her on the platform: "having a splendid view of her intense liberal position" […] "legs provocatively spread apart" (42). The conflation between political position and sexual position is complete in Federman's witty satire of Hollywood activism. The novel shows that iconically Fonda of the 1960s and the 1970s cannot be kept separate in the public gaze, nor can the later images of her 1980s aerobic body be excluded from the iconography of long, spread legs, phantasmagorically evoked by Federman.

In the 1980s Fonda re-invented herself as an icon of youthfulness and fitness, choosing to project an image which belied her actual age. Her work-out programs on video (also available in book-form) laid out a potential route towards eternal youth for needy women, and Fonda's fame for the first time became truly international. The aerobics products continue to be a money-maker for Fonda, now supplemented with treatments, creams and other accessories. The trademark images associated with the aerobics products display Fonda doing stretches, splits and high kicks (Image 10) that all echo the body postures we already are familiar with from her glamour stills from the early sixties (long legs) and from *Barbarella* (exposure of buttocks and genital area). The inevitable association is sexual, and specifically masochistic. The
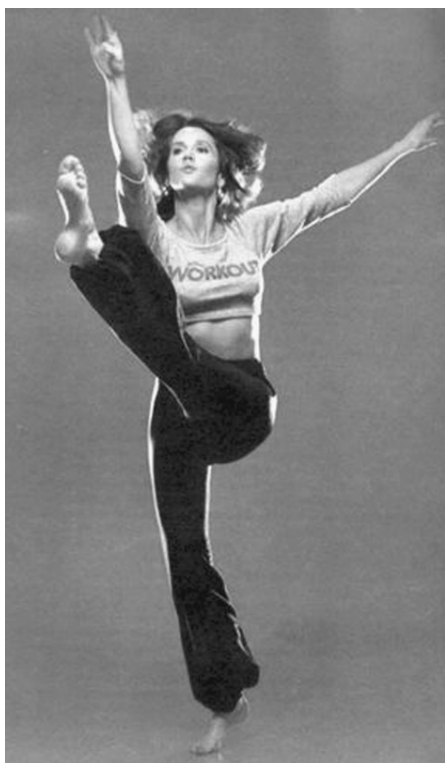
viewers of the images are invited to speculate about the pain such postures would inflict on their own bodies and must have inflicted on Fonda's as well. These images are therefore also ripe for adversarial icon work, deliberately emphasising the potential for sadistic overlayering of the masochistic subtext.

As always with Fonda, her choice of husband in this period seems designed to highlight her current involvement. Seen side by side with her 3rd husband (1991-2001), Ted Turner, the media mogul of Atlanta, she displays herself as a stylish lady, but one distinctly younger than him. She has even found a patriotic side to her personality as she has moved upward within the American establishment (Images 11 and 12).

Images 11 & 12: Fonda and Turner; Patriotic Fonda

The final icons we shall analyse in regard to Jane Fonda are those adversarial and sadistic images produced by vengeful veterans of the Vietnam War. On Mike Fatey's anti-Jane web site one finds a number of items of merchandise which express the seller's views of Fonda as a perpetrator of high treason. I here display two so-called "urinal stickers", meant apparently to be affixed to urinals in men's rooms and peed on (Image 13 & 14).

Image 13: Urinal sticker, Ohio image

This extreme humiliation is of course overtly sexual and violent in nature. This is further underlined by the captions using the word "Target", which evokes other missiles than urine drops, namely bullets from firearms. Especially the image featuring the concentric circles associated with a target in a firing range shows this association

to be intentional on the part of the icon worker. The sexual crudeness of the icons is of course increased by the fact that the "arm" pointing towards the representation of Fonda in the targets is the male penis. The viewer of the urinal target is being offered the opportunity to violate Fonda with his sexual organ. The round target image invites oral rape of the Fonda face (copied from her image at the anti-war speech at Bowling Green University), whereas the oval image, displaying Fonda in her workout outfit, invites rape of her genital area, highlighted between her open, stretched-out legs.

Image 14: Urinal Sticker (Aerobics)

This overt sadism is of course shocking, but before we condemn it outright, we should reflect upon the history of sado-masochistic representations of Fonda, some of them self-engineered by her, others created by her male companions and husbands, and note that sadistic images seem almost overdetermined as the form of consumption of choice of the body of "little girl Jane".

Conclusion

To conclude, I would claim that I have shown how these two cases reveal that iconic representations accumulate and form coherent streams of iconicity through the life and after-life of persons submitted to iconic treatment. Icon-work can be traced and categorized according to various forms of commodification and consumption—whether it be orally, as in the case of Elvis Presley, or, predominantly, genitally, as in the case of Jane Fonda. Both icons have re-invented themselves over and over in the course of their careers, but the patterns of iconic manipulation have in both cases remained strikingly stable. Elvis' has become metonymically associated with his own body parts in a stylising move, yet after his death the sacralised mode of representation has become fused with the oral, metonymic body representation, and this has created the close parallel between the Church of Elvis and the Church of Christ. Fonda's pattern of sado-masochistic roles has repeated itself with frightening regularity, and while sexuality has at times been a weapon for her in her apparent crusade against ageing and typecasting, she has also inadvertently cast herself in subservient roles inviting voyeuristic or sexually violent interventions on the part of her audience. The adversarial icon-work of angry revengists illustrates this pattern of vulnerability and victimisation all too clearly.

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List of images

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2. Christopher Rywalt: Stations of the Cross of Elvis (year unknown) <http://jubal.westnet.com/hyperdiscordia/large_cross_elvis.gif>

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Reinventing Billy the Kid: The Juvenile Delinquent as Icon

Arno Heller

In May 2003 Tom Sullivan, sheriff in Lincoln County, New Mexico, announced that his office, in cooperation with the State of New Mexico, would use DNA-testing, in order to prove true or false the rumor that Billy the Kid was not killed by sheriff Bill Garrett on July 14, 1881, but escaped to Texas, where he lived for another 70 years under the pseudonym Brushy Bill Roberts. The idea was to exhume the bones of the Kid in Fort Sumner and those of his mother Catherine Antrim in Silver City and compare the DNA. The Governor of New Mexico, Bill Richardson, promised to support the DNA investigation financially and morally: "Billy the Kid is an American legend," he said. "It is important that we historically uncover the true events."[1] After having solved all legal problems Sheriff Sullivan hoped to begin the ex-humation by mid-November 2003. The plan, however, did not work out. Billy's original grave in the Fort Sumner cemetery could not be located, because it was washed away by the great Pecos River flood of 1904. Skeletal remains that had come to the mud surface were reburied, and 28 years later a new headstone was erected in memory of the Kid, but nobody knew whether it was on exactly the right spot. Also Catherine Antrim's grave was relocated in 1882, when the Silver City cemetery was moved out of the town limits. Her bones were thrown together with those of others and cannot be identified any more. Moreover, in January 2004 both Fort Sumner and Silver City started a court trial against the disturbance of their historical cemeteries. Fortunately, all this did not do any harm to the Billy the Kid tourist industry in the Southwest, on the contrary the Billy the Kid Outlaw Gang (BKOG), an organization with thousands of members, is thriving more than ever, with (young) people willing to pay the annual fee of 25 dollars and subscribe to the *Outlaw Gang Gazette*. In the first week of August the Gang organizes the three-day pageant and outdoor drama "The Last Escape of Billy the Kid" in Lincoln, N.M., with masses of visitors coming from all over the U.S. [2]

Of all the Western icons Billy the Kid obviously is still the most popular. What accounts for his never-ending fame? There seems to exist a strange discrepancy between the Kid's historical unimportance and the tremendous quantity and intensity of reception he has received up to today. As Stephen Tatum has shown in his well researched book *Inventing Billy the Kid* (1982) hundreds of dime novels and popular novels, over 20 plays, several operas, more than 40 movies, over 20 biographies and thousands of comics, articles, and TV documentaries have been produced on the Kid.[3] What he lacks in historical substance, so it appears, has been compensated by a great amount of fiction, fantasy and myth. Each decade in the last 123 years has made ample use of the icon, though in strikingly different ways. Today this ongoing process of ideological reconstruction has become by far more interesting and culturally relevant than the historical figure itself. Nevertheless a brief outline of his life is necessary for a better understanding.

When one tries to establish concrete historical facts around the Kid's early life one soon runs into difficulties. Despite great research efforts the date and the place of his birth are still under discussion.[4] Most likely he was born between 1859 and 1861 in New York as Henry McCarty. His mother Catherine McCarty moved to Kansas City and later to Colorado, married the Civil War veteran William Antrim in 1870 and finally settled down in the new mining boomtown Silver City in Southern New Mexico in 1873. After a year she died from

consumption, the father, prospecting in various mining places, could not take care of his two sons and handed them over to foster families. Young Billy Antrim, left to himself most of the time, came under bad influences and committed petty crimes. When he was arrested after a laundry theft he escaped from jail and hit the road west. In Arizona he tried to survive as a cowboy, teamster, gambler and gunslinger. In 1877 he killed a man in self-defense at Camp Grant, was arrested, escaped again from jail, and drifted through Northern Mexico and Arizona under the newly assumed name William Bonney.[5] In the Dona Ana County near Mesilla he joined Jesse Evans and his notorious gang of rustlers and gunmen. When the law began to crack down on "The Boys," as they called themselves, they evaded to Lincoln County, 150 miles northwest of Mesilla. There they became allies of Murphy & Dolan Company, a monopolistic and corrupt group of business people and bankers. The gang stole livestock from the ranch of John Tunstall, a young English entrepreneur and rancher who had just started a store in Lincoln. Tunstall was supported by Alexander McSween, a banker employed by the famous cattle baron John Chisum. To Murphy & Dolan Tunstall's and McSween's activities were a great threat to their monopoly. They had McSween arrested on an embezzlement charge and in order to balance his alleged debts they had Turnstall's livestock confiscated by the biased sheriff William Brady. Tunstall struck back by exposing Brady's illegal acquisition of tax money in a district newspaper. At this time Billy was arrested for his taking part in the Tunstall rustling. Tunstall met the boy in jail, developed a liking for him or simply wanted to make use of his knowledge about the Murphy & Dolan activities. Instead of pressing charges against him he offered him a job on his ranch. Billy, the vagabond youth, seemed to have finally found his niche in the world. But he soon got entangled in the Lincoln County War, a wild feud between the two groups of rivalling ranchers, bankers and businessmen, fighting each other by way of gunmen gangs.[6] Murphy & Dolan was supported by the so-called Santa Fe Ring, a powerful syndicate of boosters, corrupt politicians, lawyers and sheriffs who were trying to get the New Mexico territory under their control. Tunstall was murdered by a

posse organized by two criminal henchmen of sheriff Brady, and the Kid shortly afterwards took part in the collective killing of the corrupt lawman. In a great number of gunfights and above all during the gruesome Lincoln schootout starting on July 15, 1877, in which the Lincoln county war reached its absolute climax, more than 50 people were killed.[7] The fight lasted four days; McSween barricaded himself in his house with "The Regulators," his group of hired gunmen, while Dolan, without any legal basis, received military assistance from Colonel N. A. Dudley, the commanding officer of the garrison at nearby Fort Stanton. McSween's house was set on fire, he himself was shot dead, but some of his men, including Billy the Kid were able to escape. When the news of the fight reached Washington, President Hayes declared a state of emergency in Lincoln County and implemented a fact-finding committee. The investigations were impeded or circumvented by District Attorney Thomas Catron and the Gouvernor of the New Mexico Territory Samuel Axtell. Nevertheless most of the facts finally came to the surface. McSween was posthumously exonerated, but the charges against the Dolan ringleaders were suppressed by the Santa Fe Ring. Only Billy the Kid, due to his involvement in the killing of Sheriff Brady, was singled out for trial and accused of first degree murder. Governor Axtell was removed from office and replaced by General Lew Wallace, the well-known author of the novel *Ben Hur*. In his attempt to stop the vicious circle of anarchic violence and counter violence he promised a general pardon to all people involved in the Lincoln war, including the Kid.[8] However, when the Dolan group continued to press charges against him, the governor did not stick to his promise. Although Bill wrote him several petitions and even had a secret appointment with him in Lincoln, the governor did not change his mind.[9] For him the affair obviously had become too precarious. Bill had to flee, moved from one hiding place to the other, joined a small gang of desperados and returned to his former rustling and gambling activities. In Fort Sumner he was drawn into a barroom fight and killed a gunman in self-defence. Finally he was tracked down by Pat Garrett, his former companion and newly appointed sheriff of Lincoln County. He arrested Billy with the help of local vigilan-

tes and put him in jail. Billy was brought to trial, not in Lincoln, but in the distant and friendless Mesilla. There he was sentenced to death by hanging by a bribed and biased court.[10] For all the killings that occurred in the Lincoln it was the only death sentence ever pronounced in this connection. Billy was brought back to Lincoln, where the hanging was arranged for May 13, 1881. A last plea for clemency to Governor Wallace remained unanswered. But once again the Kid did not give up; with the help of friends he escaped from the Lincoln Court House in a spectacular flight on April 13, 1881 in which he killed two guardsmen.[11] He returned to Fort Sumner and other haunts and took up his hide-and-seek game again. Although his friends urged him to leave the territory as soon as possible, he made no plans in that direction. Garrett once more relentlessly chased Billy, finally caught up with him in Fort Sumner and shot him point-blank in a midnight encounter on July 14, 1881.[12] The story goes that Billy had spent the night with Paulita, a sister of his host Pete Maxwell, who apparently gave away the Kid's whereabouts to Garrett, because he did not want his sister to get involved with the young outlaw. Billy was buried in the Fort Sumner cemetery by his mournful friends on the next day. His grave and also the Lincoln County war in general would probably have been soon forgotten if the Kid had not risen to the status of a national cult figure in the 120 years afterwards. Since the early 1930s his grave has become a kind of pilgrimage place for his fans and admirers. Today Billy the Kid tourism with its many museums, guided tours and shows has become big business in the various places in the Southwest where he lived.

Billy killed altogether four people in his short lifetime, two of them in self defense and two others during his breakout in Lincoln. Moreover he participated in five killings during collective shootings. There is no historical proof for the rumor that he killed 21 more men in gunfights. All in all, his record differs only little from those of other juvenile gunslingers in the west and it is surprising that he gained such tremendous fame. Already in his lifetime he was well-known in the Southwest because of the many sensationalist newspaper reports that were written about him.[13] After his death the public reaction was di-

vided. Most people were glad that the territory had been freed from the deadly outlaw, others felt that foul play was involved. Especially those who knew him personally, could not believe that this good-looking and easy going kid could have been such a monster. Billy had a rather fragile juvenile figure, blond hair, blue eyes, and an ever smiling face due to a slight distortion of his mouth. His genteel appearance and behavior, his posturing as a ladies man and protector of the poor and weak form a strange contrast to his reputation as a ruthless killer. But it may have been exactly this discrepancy that led to his amazing publicity. Contemporaries looked at him in a mixture of curiosity, horror and awe.[14]

Up to the turn of the century the Kid was demonized as a monstrous, evil criminal. Pat Garrett's biography, which he wrote and published with the help of Ash Upson in 1889, a few months after Billy's death, contributed a great deal to this negative image.[15] Moreover, Garrett fixed Billy's birthday on November 23, 1859, a fact that has never been verified by historical research. Garrett, as some historians assume, made his victim older than he actually was in order to hide the fact that he had gunned down not an adult but an adolescent youth. Also in other respects Garrett's book is unreliable, full of distortions and factual mistakes that had to be corrected by later historical research.[16] Its full title reveals its underlying intention: *The Authentic Life of Billy he Kid*, *the Noted Desperado, whose Deeds of Daring and Blood Have Made His Name a Terror in New Mexico, Arizona and Northern Mexico*. Garrett, out of a desire for self-defense, portrays Billy as a satanic figure in order to gain his readers' support. On the other hand he also shows admiration for his victim and makes his readers believe that he had to kill him almost against his will in fulfilment of his duty. Moreover, Billy's executioner stylizes himself as a celebrity who has liberated the Southwest from a great threat, celebrating the victory of law and order over anarchy and chaos.

The numerous dime novels of the time followed this line of perception. Seven popular booklets published immediately after Billy's much talked about death—e. g. John W. Lewis's *True Life of Billy the Kid* (1881)—concentrate on Garrett as the great hero who

had to master a great number obstacles and dangerous situations in order to hunt down his tricky opponent.[17]
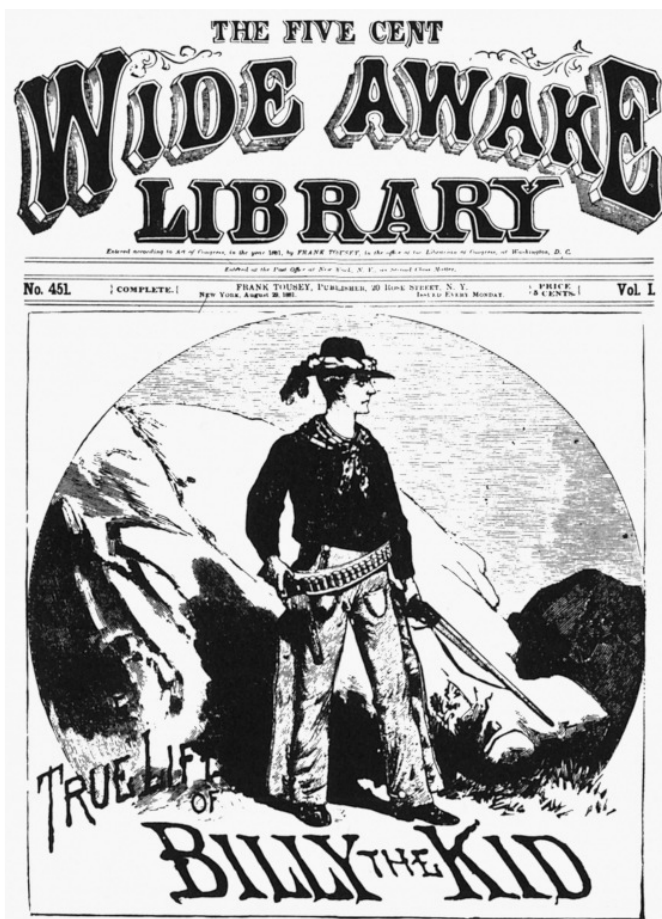
John W. Lewis's *True Life of Billy the Kid* (1881)

All this corresponded to a general sentiment in the U.S. at the turn of the century. Bestselling author Emerson Hough in *The Story of the Outlaw. A Study of Western Desperado* (1907), for example, praises the ways in which the frontier society dealt with lawlessness and disorder.[18] Hough wanted its vigilantism to be continued in a time when

waves of unrestricted immigration, social unrest, strikes and marauding capitalists were undermining the American system of values. The Kid's violent defiance represented to him the barbaric and anarchic freedom of the Old West, while Pat Garrett stood for the world of justice and responsibility. It did not matter that Garrett took the law into his own hands by executing Billy in cold blood, as long as it was in accordance with the moral law. Billy was as an obstacle to the arrival of civilization in the West and had to be discarded.

Only gradually did a different perception of the Kid begin to emerge in the 1920s when many of the concrete facts and circumstances of Billy's life were discovered by historians. Who was Billy the Kid really, people now asked themselves, a dark villain and outlaw or a misunderstood youth, underdog, rebel and scapegoat? His deprived youth, his rebellion against authority, his ability to cope with all difficulties, his gentility and geniality lent themselves for all kinds of fictionalizations. Harvey Fergusson's biographical article "Billy the Kid" (1925)[19] and Walter Noble Burns *The Saga of Billy the Kid* (1926)[20] are examples of this new trend. Both texts try to explain Billy's juvenile delinquency on the basis of negative impacts on his life—the early death of his mother, the indifferent and aloof father, the constant struggle for survival, the traumatic murder of his young boss and friend John Tunstall and the betrayal of Governor Wallace. These experiences and the frontier conditions in general induced the Kid to play the role of a morally legitimated bandit hero. Fergusson interprets the Kid as a misguided youth rather than a desperado. However ruthless and deadly he was, he did not rob banks or trains or kill people for money or power. Instead he fought against authoritarian powers that he felt to be corrupt and oppressive. Like the heroes in Zane Grey's novels, which became popular at this time, the Kid was a noble badman fighting for a just cause though with improper means. Also Burns's biography depicts the Kid as a basically romantic idealist, who was forced to act violently in order to survive in an unprincipled and oppressive environment. He was also a tragic figure playing the role of an anachronistic frontier knight in a time when the Old West was disappearing and "civilization" arriving.

During the Depression Period of the 1930s social criticism and the emphasis on a negative and inhuman environment moved into the center of the Billy the Kid reception.[21] His vengeance is now given a strongly social dimension. He is depicted not any longer as a mere victim or scapegoat of an injust fate, but as a socially motivated rebel and martyr, sacrificing himself for the poor and weak. In King Vidor's film *Billy the Kid* (1930)[22] he uses his deadly skills only for that purpose. He kills exclusively in self-defense, revenges insults and upholds a sense of justice against a corrupt legal and political establishment. The film builds up a strong contrast between an unarmed community of "democratic" new settlers whose only wish is to have enough land to make a living and an established "aristocratic" power-group of ruthless landowners and finance capitalists trying to defend their property with the help of hired gunmen. The Kid joins the settler families in their morally justified fight, corrects and avenges injustice and takes on the role of a redeemer figure. "Every killing you've done has been needed," Claire, the female protagonist of the film, exclaims, "You've made this town a decent place to live in."[23] Even the Kid's outward appearance is now adjusted to his new elevated position. He is not a rundown desperado any more, but a good-looking young man who distinguishes himself from his sordid environment.

The moviegoers of the time were invited to identify with the rebellious underprivileged youth in order to channel their own frustrations and aggressive sentiments against authoritarian power. At a time when gangsters, a well-bribed police, rapacious big business practices, corrupt politicians, judges and bankers were in control, people could more easily than before understand and accept the Kid's dilemma during the Lincoln war. After the Teapot Dome Scandal and at a time when Al Capone controlled a whole city the fight of the unprotected individual against organized crime and a corrupt bureaucracy was appealing to the American mass audiences. The Kid was admired as a morally justified protector hero who was allowed to use extralegal means to safeguard justice. The historical truth, e.g. Billy's own criminality, or his rustling activities and the random killing of cowboys it involved, was obviously less important than the new formula. Be-

tween the stock-market crash of 1929 and the outbreak of World War II the glorification of the Kid contributed considerably to the cult of the good badman or outlaw that dominated so many Westerns in the years to come. Alone in the early 1940s altogether 17 B-movies were produced which adopted the formula and featured a "Populist Kid."[24] In some of them the Murphy-Dolan monopoly was even equalled with fascism, with the Kid playing the role of a Southwestern Robin Hood, fighting for the rights of the disempowered. His antagonist Sheriff Pat Garrett, logically, now took on ever more negative features and became the absolute villain of the piece. A strange reversal had taken place: The former outlaw Kid was celebrated as the sympathetic hero, while the protector of law and order had become the ugly representation of a repressive society.

After the Second World War, in the fifties and early sixties, Billy's social idealization as protector and redeemer figure gave way to a differentiated, psychologically more complex approach. With the increase of historical research a great number of accurate works, biographies and novels were written.[25] They created a great amount of knowledge about the historical Kid and his background and by this demythologized the icon. William Keleher's *Violence in Lincoln County* (1957), Frazier Hunt's *The Tragic Days of Billy the Kid* (1956),[26] William Brent's *The Complete and Factual Life of Billy the Kid* (1964)[27] and Robert Mullin's *The Boyhood of Billy the Kid* (1967)[28] are outstanding examples in this context. In the film industry a similar development took place. Kurt Neumann's film *The Kid from Texas* (1950)[29] was the first to resurrect the juvenile outlaw as a tragically alienated outsider, Gore Vidal's teleplay *The Death of Billy the Kid* (1955)[30] depicts him as a manic depressive who is destroyed by the hypocrisy, dishonesty and cold disregard surrounding him, and in Arthur Penn's film *The Left-Handed Gun* (1958)[31] the Kid, played by young Paul Newman, becomes a Southwestern variation of James Dean's "rebel without a cause." The focus in all these films is on the Kid's troubled outsider self, a martyred and inarticulate youth who violently lives out his dehumanized personal code of justice. The same is true of Marlon Brando's *One-Eyed Jacks* (1961)[32], another projec-

tion of a brooding social outcast of society, for whom there are no social or ethical values left to fight for. Brando's Kid is the typical misfit-antihero of this time, the epitome of alienation, loss of identity, disillusionment and anxiety. He clearly corresponds to the dominating cultural criticism of the fifties, offered by books like David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd* (1956), or William Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1957). They lash out against an other-directed, regimented, standardised, conformist, materialistic, spiritually empty society, in which young individuals have little chance to integrate meaningfully in the adult world. Instead of growth and commitment they are thrown back upon their own isolated and rebellious selves. In the late sixties and seventies this existentialist approach continues and even absorbs new socio-political and cultural contexts. There is one interesting exception to this, however, which must be mentioned before returning to the main discourse: Andrew McLaglen's film *Chisum* (1970).[33] At first sight it seems to repeat the conventional romanticising and individualizing perspectives, but then a strange change occurs. Billy's fight for justice against a corrupt establishment surprisingly is taken away from him by the powerful and conservative frontier patriarch and cattle baron John Chisum, convincingly played by John Wayne. At the film's spectacular, completely unhistoric climax Chisum makes his huge cattle herd stampede through the town of Lincoln, putting an end to the shootout. Chisum kills his opponent, the scheming finance capitalist Murphy, in a violent fist-fight and by this establishes law and order. The Kid's violent stance, however morally justified it may be, is derided as a counterproductive lack of self-control. Beside the triumphant redneck Chisum Billy looks like an over-adventurous and careless juvenile lightweight and law and order represents a higher value than personal revenge. The film has been interpreted as a backlash of the emerging neoconservativism of the time, with John Wayne and President Nixon as leading mouthpieces, against the youth culture of the Sixties. As a matter of fact Nixon saw the film the night before he gave his famous speech about the Mansion murder, where he flagellates the widespread decline of the respect for law and order in the U. S.[34]

A vehement reaction to this debunking of a cherished icon followed suit in the same year. The dissolving counter culture struck back with Sam Peckinpah's film *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973)[35], probably the most artistic work ever produced on the Kid.

Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid (MGM, 1973)

The film concentrates on the final part of Billy's short life after the Lincoln county war. The two opponents—Pat Garrett, excellently impersonated by James Coburn, and Billy the Kid, played by pop music star Kris Kristofferson—are shown as prisoners of the same social environment. For both of them freedom of individual action have turned out to be an illusion. They act out codes of behaviour that have lost their meaning. Billy cannot extricate himself from his former des-

perado existence and Garrett, the ambitious careerist, becomes the tool of powerful players in the background. In his obsession to bring Billy down, he develops a strange symbiotic relationship with his victim.[36] The conflict of his divided self is visualized when after killing the Kid he directs his last shot against his own mirror image, indicating his spiritual suicide. By murdering the Kid he has killed that part of himself that was once young, wild and spontaneous. The binary opposition of Garrett and the Kid, which has been exploited so often in literature and film, now becomes an extended metaphor of America. In the last sequence Garrett is a forlorn outcast, riding into the desert, while an embittered young boy throws stones after him. The scene signals the end of the mythic Old West and on a methaphoric level the collapse of the counterculture symbolized by Peckinpah's Kid. Towards the end of the film Billy sits in front of a ramshackle house in Fort Sumner at sunset with the wind blowing dust through the air while in the background Garrett and his henchmen prepare their final move. Bob Dylan's nostalgic songs underline atmospherically the disenchantment of the early seventies, when the counterculture and its hope for a regeneration of the nation was petering out in the wake of Vietnam and Watergate.[37] As a matter of fact Peckinpah's original version of the film ends with Garrett's violent death in 1908, which makes the film appear as a kind of extended flashback. In the final shape of the film Peckinpah was ordered by the producer to cut this sequence.[38]

After 1973 no major film or novel on the Kid appeared for more than one and a half decades. It seemed as if Peckinpah's impressive work had ultimately exhausted the theme. In 1981, the centennial year of the Kid's death, he briefly appeared in the newspaper and TV headlines, when a truck driver stole his granite tombstone from the Fort Sumner cemetery and transported it to California. The Kid had an astonishing comeback, however, in 1988, when the box office success *Young Guns*[39] by Christopher Cain came out, followed two years later by *Young Guns* II. Cain casts the Kid as the leader of a gang of runaway juvenile delinquents and drug addicts gathered on John Tunstall's ranch. Tunstall, the benevolent English gentleman, tries to civi-

lize and educate the boys teaching them table manners and reading books. But when he is murdered in cold blood by Sheriff Bradie's men the boys form a violent revenge gang. The Kid, excellently impersonated by Emilio Estevez, and his outlaw gang create havoc in the Southwest before they themselves are hunted by the law. *Young Guns* is a fast moving action film, a "heavy metal western" as Emilio Estevez called it,[40] without developed dialogues or historical accuracy. It celebrates the group dynamics of unrestrained violence, unleashed by a decline of law and order under the impact of power and corruption.

Emilio Estevez as Billy the Kid

Young Guns II [41]continues in the same way although at a slower pace. Both films consist of a series of action episodes and heaps of dead bodies with ultra-violence functioning as an end in itself. In *Young Guns II*, directed by Geoff Murphy, even a new version of the kid story appears, when Billy is not killed at the end and Garrett fakes his death. The Kid escapes to Texas and starts a new life under the pseudonym of Brushy Bill Roberts, a man who actually existed, claiming to be Billy the Kid. So the fictionalizing process has run a full circle: the historical Billy has vanished but his icon image symbolically returns, once more blending reality, myth and fantasy.

This brief outline of the long-term, ever-changing presentation of a historical icon symptomatically reveals the underlying projection processes going on in popular culture. Billy the Kid, in the course of his over 120 years of reception, has been reinvented many times in different ways. In the 1920s he represented the revolt against authority and repression, in the 30s he functioned as a rebel against a corrupt political and legal system, in the fifties he was the epitome of alienation and disillusionment, in the sixties he embodied the existentialist outcry of the counter culture and in the 70s the despair about its final disruption. In the late eighties in the wake of *Young Guns* and *Young Guns II* the nihilistic frenzy of the no-future Generation X rediscovered the Kid, and a new fan club came into existence. Maurice Fulton is right when he says that the Kid's "true significance lies in the legendary figure into which the American people has chosen to make him" [42] The ongoing fictionalization and storification process of the icon is based on the filling of semantic blanks by subjective and also collective wishful projections. However different these projections may be, they always express a gesture of rebellion and escape. The rebellion against authority and the wish for ultimate freedom correspond with the imaginative wish to escape from the ordered everyday world and the pressures of modern life in a regimented bureaucratic society. The never-ending repetition of this process, constantly modified by changing cultural contexts has created the essential icon. Billy the Kid has indeed become a timeless figure and without any doubt he will continue to play his popular role also in the future in ever new variations.

Notes
[1] <http://www.aboutbillythekid.com/>
[2] <http://frontpage.nmia.com/~btkog/>
[3] Stephen Tatum, *Inventing Billy the Kid. Visions of the Outlaw in America, 1881-1981.* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1982): 54-6.
[4] Jerry Weddle. *Antrim is My Stepfather's Name: The Boyhood of Billy the Kid.* Historical Monograph, 9. The Arizona Historical Society, 1993. Frederick Nolan. *The Lincoln County War. A Documentary History.* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1992): 56-59.

[5] Jon Tuska. *Billy the Kid. His Life and Legend* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1994): 1-4.

[6] The following facts are based on Maurice G. Fulton. *History of the Lincoln County War. A Classic Account of Billy the Kid.* (Tucson: The Univ. of Arizona Press, 1997). Frederick Nolan, *The West of Billy the Kid*. (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1989).

[7] Tuska, *Billy the Kid*: 45-63.

[8] Fulton, *History of the Lincoln County War*: 299-301.

[9] Tuska, *Billy the Kid*: 67-71.

[10] William A. Keleher, *Violence in Lincoln County, 1869-1881*. (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1957): 173.

[11] Tuska, *Billy the Kid*: 98-99

[12] Ib.: 102-104.

[13] Stephen Tatum, *Inventing Billy the Kid: Visions of the Outlaw in America, 1881-1981*. (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1882): 37-40.

[14] Tuska, *Billy the Kid*: 16-17.

[15] Pat Garrett, *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid, Noted Desperado of the Southwest.* 1882. rpt. (Norman: Univ of Oklahoma Press, 1965).

[16] Tatum, *Inventing Billy the Kid*: 49-53.

[17] Ib.: 44-49.

[18] Emerson Hough. *The Story of the Outlaw: A Study of the Western Desperado.* (New York. Outing, 1907).

[19] Harvey Fergusson. „Billy the Kid," *American Mercury*, 5 (1825): 224-31.

[20] Walter Noble Burns. *The Saga of Billy the Kid*. 1926; rpt. (New York: Ballantine, 1973).

[21] Tatum, *Inventing Billy the Kid*: 97-101.

[22] *Billy the Kid* (M-G-M, 1930), directed by King Vidor.

[23] Tatum, *Inventing Billy the Kid*: 110.

[24] Ib.: 111.

[25] A summary and comprehensive bibliography can be found in Tuska, *Billy the Kid* in the chapter „Billy and the Historians," 109-151.

[26] Frazier Hunt. *The Tragic Days of Billy the Kid* (New York: Hastings House, 1956).

[27] William Brent. *The Complete and Factual Life of Billy the Kid* (New York: Frederick Fell, 1964).

[28] Robert Mullin *The Boyhood of Billy the Kid* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1967).

[29] *The Kid from Texas* (Universal, 1950), directed by Kurt Neumann, with Audie Murphy as the Kid.

[30] The Death of Billy the Kid (NBC, 1955) by Gore Vidal, published in David A. Sohn et. al. *Nine Modern Short Plays* (New York: Bantam Books: 1977), 1-32. A revised color film version, Gore Vidal's *Billy the Kid*, directed by William A. Graham was released in 1989.

[31] *The Left-Handed Gun* (Warner, 1958) directed by Arthur Penn, with Paul Newman as the Kid.

[32] *One-eyed Jacks* (Paramount, 1961), directed by Marlon Brando with himself in the role of the Kid..

[33] *Chisum* (Warner, 1970), directed by Andrew V. McLaglen.

[34] Tatum, *Inventing Billy the Kid*,:155.

[35] *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (M-G-M, 1973), directed by Sam Peckinpah.

[36] Tatum, *Inventing Billy t he Kid*: 159.

[37] Ib.: 162.

[38] Ib.: 160.

[39] *Young Guns* (20th-Century Fox, 1988), directed by Christopher Cain with Emilio Estevez in the role of the Kid.

[40] <www. aboutbillythekid.com>.

[41] *Young Guns II* (20th-Fox, 1990) directed by Geoff Murphy.

[42] Tatum, *Inventing Billy the Kid*: 223.

Captain America: From Iconic American Super Soldier to Anti Heroic, Conflicted Embodiment of Super Power

Louis J. Kern

The first comic protagonist to emerge as a new generation of superheroes was the extraterrestrial Superman (Detective Comics' (DC) *Action Comics,* June1938) who, in 1939, became the first character to have a title (*Superman*) devoted exclusively to his exploits. In his attitude towards U.S. foreign policy Superman was committed to the majoritarian position on the war--apart from a brief tour of military service by his alter ego, Clark Kent(*Superman*, #s 21-23, and 25), he maintained a consistent non-interventionist stance throughout W.W. II.[1]

If Superman's battles were overwhelmingly on the home front, the same could not be said of the legion of superheroes that emerged in early 1941 as the nation edged closer to war. *Flash Comics* created Captain Thunder (January 1940}, who metamorphosed into Captain Marvel when the character appeared in *Whiz Comics*, # 2 a month later. He joined the U.S. Army after America's declaration of war and was awarded his own book, *Captain Marvel Adventures,* the following year. He spent the remainder of the war in his costumed persona battling his nemesis, the super villain, Capt. Nazi, in another Fawcett Publications vehicle, *Master Comics*. Captain Marvel's costume, a red bodysuit and white cape was clearly derivative of Superman, but he remained a boy in a man's body.

Fawcett also created Minute Man (Master Comics, # 11, February 1941), billed as "the One-Man Army," who spent his war in the Army fighting crime and espionage on the home front. His costume was comprised of tight red trousers, a wide engineer's belt with a shield-shaped buckle bearing the monogram "M," and a bloused shirt seemingly fashioned from the American flag—flaring dark blue sleeves with white stars and a body with alternating horizontal red and white stripes. On the cover of the magazine appeared a symbolic flag icon in the form of a shield that bore the motto, "Be an American."

But certainly the most successful and long-lived embodiment of the American ideal first appeared in March of 1941 in *Captain America Comics* (Timely Comics, the immediate precursor of Marvel Comics).[2] Cap borrowed aspects of characterization and costume from his predecessors—Superman and Minute Man.

Like Superman, he had a mild-mannered and seemingly inept and maladroit alter ego—Steve Rogers--, who enthusiastically sought to enlist in the Army, but who was rejected as physically unfit and classified 4-F.[3] From Superman, too, came the essentials of his costume, red boots and a skin-tight blue full-bodysuit, designed to set off to best advantage the muscular development of the male body in peak physical condition. Where Superman's costume bore the emblematic "S" on its chest, the Captain's superimposed a large white star. By his second appearance, Captain America had acquired a tight hood with tiny white wings, that masked his upper face and was an integral part of his bodysuit. Superman's red cape and red jockey briefs were lost, although the conventional graphic representation of the character suggests that he wears matching blue briefs over his bodysuit. On his hood he sports a large white "A," and from his waist to his pectorals run alternating vertical red and white stripes (recalling Minute Man's striped shirt), these colors being echoed in the white lower arms of his suit and the red gauntlets he wears. His upper body and arms are armored, protected by a dark blue chain mail. Like Superman, the early Captain America also had to retreat from the public gaze to change into his superhero costume.

Like Minute Man, Captain America is earthbound and possesses no superhuman powers; he triumphs over his foes by sheer dogged determination, the skillful employment of a prepotent triangular shield (with vertical red and white stripes surmounted by a dark blue band bearing three white stars), lightning-quick reflexes, and an acrobatic, muscular body.[4] He spent 1941, like Superman and Captain Midnight, battling spies and saboteurs. Unlike either of these earlier prototypes of the all-American superhero, however, Captain America was the product of a secret process that sought to create the supreme soldier, and wartime service was his birthright.

In the foundation myth Rogers is recruited by Gen. Chester Phillips as a human guinea pig for a top-secret project, dubbed "Operation Rebirth," an experiment to develop the prototype for an army of super soldiers. Dr. Abraham Erskine, research director of the project and discoverer of the chemical agent of transformation, injects Rogers with a secret serum that chemically bonds with his blood, and when enhanced by radioactive rays, transforms him into an indefatigable being with superhuman strength. With the project manifestly successful, Dr. Reinstein (the secret alias of Dr. Erskine) names his creation and defines his mission as the nation's most symbolic superhero: "We shall call you Captain America . . . because like you, America shall gain strength and the will to safeguard our shores!"[5] But as the transformation is completed, a Nazi agent, who has infiltrated the secret experimental lab, kills Dr. Erskine, thus destroying the unwritten formula for the super soldier serum. Rogers quickly dispatches the Nazi, but in the struggle destroys much of the lab equipment, including the x-ray beam machine necessary for bonding the serum and human blood. The old Steve Rogers in dead; in his place stands a new American military superhero. But he must and will remain unique and isolate; his kind can never be reproduced.

Over the decades the origin myth has been recast many times as the artistic team has changed, but its narrative continuity has remained fundamentally unchanged. Thus, a long-running character like Captain America, who has appeared in various cross-over storylines, has been continually reinvented.   .

Perhaps the most extensive revisioning of the origin narrative, by the creative team of Roger Stern (writer) and John Byrne (artist) can be considered exemplary. In July of 1980, the final year of the Carter administration, beginning with issue # 247 of *Captain America*, Vol. I, "By the Dawn's Early Light," they conflated the mythic origins of the superhero with the classic American myth of the self-made man by providing hitherto unrevealed details of Steve Rogers' childhood.

In Stern and Byrne's retelling, Rogers becomes a recognizable Horatio Alger character—his father died when he was three-years old; as a young boy he worked as a newsboy in Lower East Side New

York; his mother, who took in laundry to support herself and her only child, died when he was seventeen. In the depths of the Depression, orphaned, with no relations and no resources, Rogers lives in a flop house and ekes out a meager living as a delivery boy. From an early age, he had retreated into an inner fantasy world as a means of escape from a life of deprivation if not quite desperation. Rogers has survived a cruel reality, then, by embracing an imaginary, alternative reality grounded in the cinematic fantasy of the archetypal swashbuckling adventure hero. In sum, Rogers' background makes him the ideal choice for the super soldier experiment—he is utterly alone, without friends or family, and he has already been living a double life during his formative years. But for the physical transformation, psychologically, socially, and temperamentally, he already has the ideal persona for the secret double life of the costumed superhero.

But perhaps most interesting in this retelling of the origin story is its stress on the eugenical potential of Rogers' transformation: Dr. Erskine declares him "a miracle of science," and promises that "one day . . . my serum will virtually wipe out disease . . . weakness . . . infirmity! Steven, you have become a nearly perfect human being!" [6] This plotline builds on hints in earlier versions of the origins story like the retrospective *Captain America*, # 109, "The Hero That Was," January 1969, where the superhero is described as "the most *perfect* physical specimen on earth"[7], and this construction is carried forward as canonical lore, establishing Captain America's superordination among other superheroes.

The darker side of the eugenical foundations of the super soldier project were explored in the "Sentinel of Liberty" series, where the origin myth introduces four competing candidates for the experiment—Rogers, a Jewish post-graduate student in physics (Harmon Furmintz), African-American, Jack Windemere, All-American footballer and Olympic athlete, and a white racist, Gilmore Hodge. Ultimately, only Rogers is left for the experiment. In the most recent retelling of the myth, *Truth: Red, White, and Black*, the darker details of eugenic sterilization and the intimate relationship between the American and Nazi eugenics programs are detailed, and we learn that there

was a parallel super soldier program being operated in a German concentration camp.[8]

In the current issue, *Captain America*, IV, # 17 (November 2003), "Cap Lives," the eugenic value of Cap's body becomes a central element in the plot of an alternative historical narrative in which Nazi Germany has conquered the world and New York City has been renamed New Berlin. The Red Skull, our hero's wartime nemesis and recurrent adversary throughout his career, commands the New Reich, the "new world order," and informs the captured Captain America of his plans to realize Hitler's dream of creating a master race:

> First, we will breed a race of supermen from you. Blond, Aryan supermen. With or without your cooperation. Then, we will carry out various other medical procedures to fully understand the workings of your modified biology.[9]

"Operation Rebirth" and "Project Super Soldier" are revealed as analogues of Nazi racialist programs. Military strategists, politicians, and experimental scientists of democratic as well as fascist states seek to use Rogers' body as a medium of eugenical transformation of the race, of achieving the ultimate physical perfection of the species. Though Rogers voluntarily submits himself as a subject of experimentation for the American and is threatened with coercion in the Nazi program, the anticipated results of both are identical. Then, too, this counterhistorical fantasy strongly suggests the identity of the Red Skull as Cap's *Doppelgänger*.[10] Finally, the use of the phrase "new world order" by the Skull links the totalitarian tradition firmly to the conservative Republican ideology of American world dominance, since the phrase was coined by President George H. Bush to describe his foreign policy goals, in an infelicitous if perhaps unconscious echo of Hitler's phrase "my New Order." In essence, postmodern America is envisioned as the *Doppelgänger* of Nazi Germany.

But what reveals the process by which the ingenuous Steve Rogers, the "Living Legend of World War II," was transformed into the blood brother of the notorious Red Skull? An approach to an answer to this question leads through an examination of the successive incarnations of the Captain America icon.

During W.W. II Cap fought with his sidekick, Bucky Barnes, alongside American troops.[11] Near the war's end Bucky is killed in an explosion when he and the Captain attempt to down a booby-trapped enemy drone aircraft.The Captain, because of his enhanced physique is thrown free and falls into the freezing waters of the North Sea. His body is cryogenically preserved until the 1960s, when it is discovered by Prince Namor, the Submariner, encased in a block of ice, being worshiped as a god by Arctic Eskimos.

During his two-decade absence from the annals of superherodom, his patriotic fighting spirit finds incorporation in several alter egos. Near the end of the war, President Truman finds a replacement for Cap—William Nasland, previously known as the Spirit of '76; as the new Captain America he fights (with a new Bucky) as part of the All Winners Squad. When Nasland is killed in preventing the assassination of congressional candidate John F. Kennedy in late 1946, the mantle of Captain America is taken up by Jeff Mace, already associated with the Liberty Legion as the costumed avenger, the Patriot. Mace shed the title of Captain in 1952 during the Korean War, and an anonymous Ph.D. in American history, who had written his dissertation on Captain America's life, assumed the role. Becoming the fourth post-icing incarnation of the superhero, he is forced by the government to legally change his name to Steve Rogers, to undergo plastic surgery to make him an exact physical replica of the original, and to accept the administration of super soldier serum (the formula of which has been discovered in old Nazi files), that without the supplementation of the radiation employed in the original transformation, eventually drives him insane. His creation in 1953 is too late for him to play an active role in the Korean War.[12]

In 1963, the Avengers discover a largely defrosted Captain America floating in the sea and successfully revive the progenitor of the species. Cap becomes the leader of the Avengers and an associate of S.H.I.E.L.D. (Supreme Headquarters, International Espionage—Law Enforcement Division) led by Col. Fury. In the 1960s Captain America battles a wide variety of megalomaniacal villains and sustains recurrent confrontations with the Red Skull and an array of Neo-

Nazi groups. Greatly disillusioned by the Watergate scandal, Cap refuses to any longer serve the government and relinquishes his title and costume. He continues to serve the cause of freedom and justice as the Nomad, "the man without a country." During his life as the Nomad, several substitutes unsuccessfully try to fill his boots, and he is forced to return to action in 1975.

More cynical and less institutionally loyal, he refuses to serve under direct governmental command, and again resigns as Captain America. Replaced by John Walker, the Super Patriot, Steve Rogers dons a new costume, a solid dark blue bodysuit with a matching "do rag" mask. Ultimately, Walker and Rogers battle for legitimate claim to the title of Captain America, and Rogers wins[13]. By 1994, the super serum has begun to break down and Rogers is dying; he becomes progressively weaker until he is totally paralyzed. An exo-skeleton is designed that provides artificial mobility for his body, but it is not until he receives a blood transfusion from the Red Skull that he is truly rejuvenated. During the 1990s, he continues his war against evil, but is branded a traitor for supposedly retailing weapons secrets. By 1998 he is finally able to redeem his honor and he resumes his stature as America's iconic superhero.[14]

As he entered the twenty-first century, Captain America became an increasingly conflicted and alienated embodiment of the nation's ideals. Some observers, however, have taken a reductionist approach to the icon of American ideals, equating the symbol with the realities of national policies, mistaking the signifier for the sign, which has been unremittingly emptied of its traditional signification in the postmodern period. Thus, Robert Jewett has identified the "Captain America Complex," equating the popular cultural icon with the national tendency to "zealous nationalism" and self-righteous justifications of interventionism. As his argument was summarized in its earliest statement,

> Captain America braves all to overcome the forces of evil! Like the United States itself, this favorite comic book hero embraces violence and destruction, and is "invincible" because the cause is just.[15]

This argument has recently been updated and greatly expanded in *Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism* that argues that " . . . Captain America had a tighter identification with the American nation than any other superhero. Above all others, he offers a key to the American civil religion as it came to be embedded in the country's popular entertainments."[16] Citing Topps "Enduring Freedom" trading cards set (2001), produced to palliate President George W. Bush's New War on Terrorism for the younger generation, its authors comment that, "in this fantasy world, which so much resembles comic books and adventure films, the presidency is in effect redefined as Captain America."[17] Given the power of the patriotic icon to sustain unproductive policy initiatives, they opine that

> Captain America is now in his sixties, and has faced humiliating fluctuations in the market for masked superheroes. Although he has recently been summoned one more time to protect the nation from danger, we suggest that the time has come for a dignified retirement.[18]

Through the conflation of a pop culture icon and national policy the continuous process of acquisition and divestiture of signifieds destabilizes the iconic signifier and renders its embodiment in the superhero unpredictable; a protean man necessitates a protean superhero. In the case of Captain America, he retains iconic fixity in his dedication to fundamental national ideals while he shows extraordinary flexibility in his reaction to national politics and policies; he can be read as conservative in his personal code and more liberal in his political critique.

Cap's code or creed is rooted in a sense of fair play that requires the defense of the innocent; it is essentially an old-fashioned masculine code of honor. It is grounded in his unshakable belief in the oppositional nature of freedom and authoritarianism. As the Captain himself expresses it,

> I'm no more a hero than any man who fights for JUSTICE, and FREEDOM, and BROTHERHOOD! So long as we cherish LIBERTY—so long as the bitter weed of TRYANNY can never take

root upon our shores—then ALL of us are heroes—and the dream which is AMERICA will long endure![19]

But despite his protestations of universalism and his elevation of Everyman to superhero status, our hero was not always so self-effacing. At the conclusion of *Captain America*, # 104, "Slave of the Skull," another nostalgic narrative involving the defeat of an eternally resurrected Nazism, he ostentatiously waves the flag, crying "let this be our answer to the scoffers and the doubters—to those who think Democracy has lost its resolve." At the end of the next issue, "In the Name of Batroc," when he risks his life to protect the common people (here identified as "the masses") by defusing a deadly Seismo-Bomb, he explicitly compares himself to Jesus Christ.

But then, conventional humility has hardly been the stock in trade of your average superhero. For the most part, Captain America's creed has corresponded to the generic superhero code as outlined by Richard Reynolds:

> Superheroes are by and large not upholders of the letter of the law; they are not law enforcement agents employed by the state. The set of values they traditionally defend is summed up by the Superman tag of "Truth, Justice, and the American Way." Sometimes the last term has been interpreted in a narrowly nationalistic sense; superheroes have on occasions become universal supporters of U.S. foreign policy. But far more often the third term has stood for the ideals enshrined in the U.S. Constitution. Superheroes have been better Americans--as the founding fathers would have understood the term—than most of America's modern political leaders.[20]

How has Captain America understood his duty in relation to defense of the "American Way" over the last six decades? In the first instance, both in his alter ego and his superhero persona, he served the nation honorably in the struggle against Fascism in Europe. A moralistic patriot, he objected to being exploited as a propaganda symbol; nevertheless, he sold war bonds in full costume. According to one version of the multiple iterations of the myth, Cap is deeply disillusioned by the end of the war and troubled by secret decisions taken by strategic policy makers at the highest level that he sees as violative of de-

mocratic procedures. So, when he is summoned to an audience with President Truman on 7 August 1945, he refuses his Commander in Chief's direct order to appear by his side and to thereby demonstrate his support for the use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. "I cannot, and will not," he declares, "in good conscience, support this decision. I won't have any part of it." Since Truman cannot afford the public expression of opposition by the Captain, he calls in a sinister Sgt. Fury, who "solves" the President's "problem" with his "patriot" by brainwashing Steve Rogers. "Operation Sleeper" erases all memory of his superhero identity, and while the super soldier serum in his blood prevents him from aging, he is moved from place to place and job to job for two decades.[21]

Frozen or brainwashed, the real Captain America remained outside the arena of national affairs for two decades, maintaining his state of inactivity during the virulent McCarthy years and the Korean War. Though in some versions of the myth revived in 1953, he overcomes his inertia too late to see service in the Asian war. Having awakened to a new geopolitical reality in the 1960s, his politics remains about a decade out of date as he anxiously casts about for a Cold War enemy as worthy as his erstwhile totalitarian adversary.

One story, "Cap Goes Wild," is illustrative of both the nefarious communist menace and Cap's identity crisis in the Cold War years. The villain, a recognizable Chairman Mao, has devised a conspiratorial plot to undermine the reputation of America's most beloved superhero by manufacturing a robotic Life Model Decoy, an exact replica of Captain America. The Captain ultimately defeats his body double, but in facing this robotic counterpart, has been forced to confront the repressed darker side of his own personality. His identification with the LMD double is underscored when we learn at the end of the tale that the technology for the development of the decoy was essentially part of a secret S.H.I.E.L.D. project—"Operation Replica." SHIELD allowed the Red Chinese to steal its prototype in order to test the formula, to serve as the project's guinea pigs. Both Captain America and his machine double are products of transformative experiments undertaken by a secret American government, and the super-

hero is still being manipulated by the shadowy forces that lie beyond and beneath the nation's democratic institutions.[22]

Increasingly, as his consciousness of the divergence of American policy from American ideals is confirmed, Captain America retreats into nostalgic revelry—repeatedly fighting the nation's enemies from the "Good War," especially the Red Skull and generic forms of totalitarianism—and focusing his attention on the home front—coming to be identified as "America's greatest crime fighter" and "the living legend of World War II."[23]

During the Vietnam war, Cap did not see military service in Southeast Asia, and his only activity in the area was implicitly critical of American policy. In his first Vietnam adventure, the Captain undertakes a solo, Rambo-style mission into a Viet Cong stronghold to rescue a downed American helicopter pilot, who has been abandoned by his country. But his motivation for the mission is personal, not political. Jim Baker, the chopper pilot, is the brother of a man who saved Steve Rogers' life during W.W. II, and Cap is repaying a debt of honor. His other foray into the Southeast Asian jungle is also a rescue mission—the liberation of Dr. Robert Hoskins, who is a central figure in the peace negotiations to end the war, "a SYMBOL . . . a fighter for PEACE in a land at war . . . a HEALER, amidst the carnage and the pain!"[24]

Though he clears his mission (that meshes neatly with the goals of the anti-war movement) with the State Department, it is clear that Cap is acting in his capacity as a private citizen. The overwhelming majority of readers who registered their opinions in letters to Marvel Comics in these years, wanted to see Captain America stay out of Vietnam. As one reader wrote in 1971, Cap " . . . simply doesn't lend himself to the John Wayne-type character he once was," insofar as it would be difficult to "see any of our [comic] characters taking on a role of superpatriotism in the world today."[25]

The breakdown of American consensus ushered in the age of the anti-hero that greatly problematized the identity of the generic superhero. As Captain America confronted the new moral world of postmodern America, he began to doubt his relevance, to see his em-

bodiment of a specific kind of American idealism as quaint and out-moded. In *Captain America*, # 122, his *crise de conscience* is clearly stated. "I'm like a dinosaur in the Cro-Magnon age," he laments,

> who's outlived his time. This is the day of the anti-hero—the age of the rebel and the dissenter! It isn't hip to defend the establishment—only to tear it down! And in a world rife with injustice, greed, and endless war—who's to say the rebels are wrong? But I've never learned to play by today's new rules! I've spent a lifetime defending the flag and the law. Perhaps I should have battled less and questioned more![26]

For Cap, the wake-up call came with Watergate, and from that period we can date the emergence of a postmodern, dualistic persona for the Captain—one the transfigured anti-hero and the other the nostalgic recidivist of the "Good War."

In the Marvel treatment of Watergate, Steve Engelhart's multi-part story (1973-74), that played out as the details of administrative involvement and cover up, the impeachment, and the ultimate resignation of Richard M. Nixon (9 August 1974) were unraveling, Cap discovers a vast plot by the Secret Empire, seeking fascist control of the U.S. government. The conspiracy is directed by a right-wing fanatic, Quentin Harderman, through a front organization called the Committee to Regain America's Principles (CRAP). Ultimately, in the culminating issues of the storyline, the Captain traces the plot to the Oval Office and confronts an unrepentant president frustrated by the limitations of democratic legalities. The man who is and is not (self-professed) a crook, commits suicide before a stunned superhero. The editorial text of this scene underscores the profound sadness and disillusionment of America's symbolic embodiment: "This man trusted the country of his birth. Like millions of Americans, each in his own way, he has seen his trust mocked! And this man is Captain America."[27]

In post-Watergate issues Cap sets aside his patriotic togs and becomes the Nomad. When he resumes his iconic status in the wake of the Iran hostage crisis, the creative team of Roger Stern and John Byrne developed a storyline in which he is nominated for president by both parties, reflecting a crisis of leadership and profound discontent

with the democratic system.[28] Then, in an eerie prolepsis of 9/11/01, the winner of that election (Ronald Reagan) is dispatched by a nuclear device that simultaneously destroys most of Manhattan. This marks the second time a sitting president has been killed off in a Captain America story in six years.[29]

Since 9/11 the Captain's disillusionment has deepened and he has begun to even question the verities of the wartime policies of his youth and the integrity of his own creation. The key recent series have been "Enemy," (Marvel's direct response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11) "Warlord," "Truth" Red, White, and Black," and "The Extremists." While the "Enemy" series reaffirms the populist strength and unity of the American people—"We're going to make it through this— we, the people. We share—we are—the American dream," Cap declares--, his experience searching for bodies amid the rubble of the World Trade Center only further depresses him.

He is issued a CAT(Casualty Awareness Tracking) tag by SHIELD at the outset of his mission to seek out and destroy master terrorist Faysal Al Tariq, only to discover that the terrorists have the same technology. Having killed Al Tariq (his record is certainly better than the government's), he seeks answers from the government about the tag technology, but shadowy figures deny him access, citing the need to protect "national security." He registers his alienation from the security establishment by declaring, "I'm here to protect the people and the dream—not your secrets."[30]

In pursuit of the secret, Cap is sent to Dresden by Col. Fury, and during that visit, confronting the ghosts of the past, he has an epiphany regarding American policy in the "Good War."

> You didn't understand what we'd done here—until September the Eleventh. Before then you would have said we were doing what we *had* to do—to defeat Hitler and the Nazis. Crush the Axis. End the *evil*. But now—what do you see? February Thirteenth and Fourteenth, 1945. These people weren't soldiers. History repeats itself. Like a machine gun. A *madman* lights the spark—and the *people* pay the price.[31]

In "The Extremists," Cap confronts the domestic terrorist, Inali Redpath, who intends to spark a revolution to avenge the wrongs vis-

ited on Native Americans by the American government, and who commands an army of super clones, replicants of Cap and his old sidekick, Bucky. In the course of defeating Inali, who has offered him a central role in the restitutive revolution, Inali catalogs the nation's crimes against his people, thereby revealing the hollowness and hypocrisy of America's most cherished ideals.[32]

Racial discrimination, exploitation, and dehumanization of ethnic minorities are also the central themes of "Truth: Red, White, and Black," a sequel to the Captain America origin myth. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, at Camp Cathcart, a secret Military Intelligence experiment goes forward. The Black soldiers of the camp are chosen to participate in an experimental program to determine whether "our methods apply to the *inferior* races,"[33] and Sgt. Lucas Evans' platoon is chosen as guinea pigs. The rest of two battalions of Black soldiers from the camp are massacred in cold blood to assure there are no witnesses. In the experimental trials one soldier spontaneously combusts, but the bulk of the platoon is transformed into super soldiers. Ultimately, only one, Isaiah Bradley, survives to become the Black Captain America. He reads about Steve Rogers in a comic book and concludes that the Army had gotten access to the pilot program and then sought to create its own super soldiers.

Bradley, scheduled to participate in a secret operation with Steve Rogers, appropriates the Captain America costume and becomes the first Captain America to go into combat in Europe, liberating a Nazi concentration camp—Schwarzbitte, and destroying its medical experimentation lab (intended to suggest the medical atrocities of Josef Mengele) that was developing the German super soldier prototype under Dr. Koch.

In a series that lays bare the hateful stereotypes and discrimination suffered by African-Americans and that posits the genocidal racist actions of the U.S. Army, the white Captain America finally discovers the existence of the Black one, and tracks him down in the Bronx. Unlike his experience of two decades of suspended animation, Bradley was court-martialed in 1943 for stealing Cap's costume and sentenced to life in Levenworth, where he spent seventeen years in

solitary confinement before being pardoned by President Eisenhower in 1960. The secret soldier serum left Isaiah sterile, and combined with years of physical neglect, led to mental deterioration. When Cap finds him, he has the mentality of a little boy. In the postwar years,Bradley received only regular VA benefits, since the Army refused to recognize physical and mental damage caused by a program that did not officially exist.[34]

Over the four decades since he was thawed from the ice, American culture has undergone as transcendent a transformation as the frail Steve Rogers underwent in becoming Captain America. The false assurances of liberal consensus and unity of ideals were revealed as empty of substance by the nation's experience of war in Southeast Asia and the shadow of shame cast on the electoral system by the Watergate scandal. Captain America, the iconic embodiment of America, experienced the trauma of those years both in his alter ego persona, Steve Rogers, and in his symbolic manifestation. He became more self-conscious, more introspective. He was consumed with guilt for the death of his young partner, Bucky Barnes, and troubled by his inability to pursue a normative heterosexual romantic life.[35] Though he has on occasion participated in meliorative and didactic projects—the war on drugs, for example—he has become much more the realist than the naïve idealist and moralistic zealot of his earlier career.[4]

In an era of paradoxical isolationist/interventionist unilateralism in foreign policy, Cap has become more the compassionate universalist, reconceptualizing his role as not merely the guardian of American values, but of the freedoms of all mankind. His new found knowledge of the contradictions and excesses of Cold War policies and the mistreatment and degradation of subject populations of color throughout American history in the name of the nation's high-sounding ideals, have created a sense of shame, that has lent his character a new humility. He no longer finds it comfortable to serve as the agent of a government whose secrecy and amorality he finds repugnant. His character has finally matured; he thinks of his country not only with love but with great sadness and disappointment. As the title

from a series of *Captain America*, III, #s 45-48, put it, his was an "America Lost."

His death was recently reported yet again (*Captain America*, III, # 58), but appears to have been greatly exaggerated, for he has most recently been resurrected in the ongoing series, "Captain America Lives Again," created by Dave Gibbons and Lee Weeks. It recaps the origin myth through the medium of Excelsior News in order to "salute the RE-BIRTHDAY of America's FAVORITE son—CAPTAIN AMERICA!"

But he is reborn into an alternative historical reality in which the Nazis have conquered the world and his wartime enemy, the Red Skull, rules New Berlin (formerly, New York City). This plot line suggests that Cap has been unable to come to terms with a post-Vietnam, post-Watergate America, and that he only feels comfortable with the moral certainties of a simpler time. This new Captain America is the old one redivivus; like the nation that that created him, he is unable to escape the formative experience of twentieth-century America.

Just as Cap has been unable to find his way in the new geopolitical world of the last two decades, the nation's foreign policy has been adrift, coming more and more to resemble the fantasy world of its comic book icons—from Reagan's Star Wars project and "Evil Empire" to George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil"—national policy has modeled W.W. II and has been unable to awaken from the nightmare of the past to face the very real challenges of the present on their own terms.

The paralysis and bankruptcy of national policy is aptly reflected in the newly resurrected Captain America. But his saga permits of another reading: Abused, betrayed, and scapegoated during much of his postwar career by those in whom he had implicitly placed his trust as the guardians of liberty, he has been deeply disillusioned and alienated. It would not be difficult to imagine our superhero as yet another of the nation's walking wounded from its legacy of conflict—a victim of post-traumatic stress disorder. His retreat to a more comfortable and safe reality, a realm of moral certitude in his most recent in-

carnation would be a natural response to the erosion of the very ideals he so fervent believed he stood for.

Perhaps it may yet turn out that Cap is schizophrenic; that his unreconstructed consciousness resides in one incarnation (perhaps even existing in an alternative space-time continuum) while the more sensitive, mature, and morally complex hero, more in touch with his inner humanity, is embodied in another. Unless there are indeed again two Captain Americas, and unless the "real" Cap proves less dogmatic, less zealously patriotic, and more understanding of cultural differences (as he gave promise of being before his most recent adventure), he will remain an icon of a politics that seems to have been frozen in the ice with him and to have spoiled when they were exposed to the air and defrosted. Despite or because of being the personification of the American Dream, which has proved so elusive to so many, he will become increasingly irrelevant to the consciousness of a rising generation and will cease to be an icon of authentic American idealism, or even a pop icon, for that matter, and be seen rather as a petrified monument to the failure of American vision.

Notes

[1] Superman did not totally escape wartime concerns and politics, however. An occasional issue was specially reprinted for Armed Forces distribution overseas (# 28), and Hitler and Tojo appeared together on the cover of # 17.

[2] An even more blatant exploitation of historic symbolism was the heroic *Uncle Sam*, that ran as a quarterly feature comic during a brief two-year run beginning in the Fall of 1941. Not until it was absorbed by another DC vehicle, the eponymous *Blackhawk* in 1944, did the now superceded avuncular character see significant action overseas. Uncle Sam was brought back for an encore during the bicentennial year in *Freedom Fighters*. The cover of # 9 (June 1977) is a nostalgic retrospective on W.W. II, the central focus of which is a towering figure of Uncle Sam prostrating the original Captain America figure (identifiable by his triangular shield) by way of a vigorous two-fisted assault. As he knocks Cap down, he says, "Take that, you shield-slingin' traitor! I'm the SYMBOL OF AMERICA!" Their iconic rivalry clearly reflected the corporate rivalry for dominance in the superhero market of their respective publishers—DC and Marvel Other contemporary personi-

fications of American fighting spirit included Major Liberty, the Defender, and the American Avenger, all in *U.S.A. Comics* (published by Timely Comics, 1941-45).

[3] Clark Kent, Superman's alter ego was also classified 4-F, but only because during the eye exam he thoughtlessly used his x-ray vision and failed the test.

[4] Mark Oehlert, "From Captain America to Wolverine: Cyborgs in Comic Books, Alternative Images of Cybernetic Heroes and Villains," in Chris H. Gray, *The Cyborg Handbook* (New York: Routledge Pr., 1995): 219-31, considers Cap "the first constructed genetic cyborg" (224). Certainly, the postmodern Cap has increasingly assumed cyborgian embodiment as his masculine superhero identity has become less self-assured and more ambiguous. *Captain America*, # 1 (March 1941).

[5] In a recent revisioning of the origin saga, "complete and unexpurgated, with many never-before revealed details," Steve Rogers designs his own costume (initially *with* cape) and calls himself the American Eagle, and then Mr. America. His birth date is identified as July 4, 1917. See *The Adventures of Captain America, Sentinel of Liberty*, I (Marvel Comics, September 1991). Though overwhelmingly a male world, women joined the war effort among the ranks of superheroes (following the lead of William Moulton Manson's Wonder Woman [origin *All Star Comics*, # 8, December 1941; her own book, *Wonder Woman*, mid-1942]) Miss America appeared (mid-1942), soon to be joined by Miss Patriot (*Marvel Mystery Comics*, #s 49 and 50), who was the female counterpart to the Patriot, who had emerged in issue # 21 in 1941. Miss America fought alongside the second incarnation of Captain America late in the war (*All Winners Comics*, # 19), as did the Blonde Phantom in the postwar years (Ibid, second series, # 1 [August 1948]). Captain America himself would not appear in Marvel Comics until issue # 80 in the post-war years (1947).

[6] See *The Adventures of Captain America, Sentinel of Liberty*, I, # 1, "First Flight of the Eagle" (September 1991).

[7] Reprinted in David A. Kraft, Captain America: The Secret Story of Marvel's Star-Spangled Super Hero (Chicago: Children's Press, 1981), 45.

[8] *Truth: Red, White, and Black*, I, # 7, "The Blackvine" (July 2003).

[9] *Captain America*, IV, # 17, "Cap Lives," ("Captain America Lives Again," Pt. 1, November 2003).

[10] We learn that the Red Skull's body has been cloned from Captain America's and that the super serum flows in his veins in *Captain America: Operation Rebirth* (Marvel Comics, 1995). Like Cap, too, the Skull has spent twenty years after the conclusion of W.W. II in suspended animation, retarding the normal aging process. In *Captain America*, # 115, "Now Begins the Nightmare" (July 1969), the Red Skull is able, through the use of the Cosmic Cube, to occupy the body of Captain America, while he is trapped in the Skull's body. Their essential identity is made flesh here.

[11] On the cover of the first issue of *Captain America* Cap lands a right cross to Hitler's jaw. Six months before Pearl Harbor, he prevents the destruction of the U.S. Pacific Fleet. See *Comic Book Heroes Unmasked* (History Channel video program, Fall, 2003).

[12] See *Captain America Comics*, #s 74 and 75 (1949-50), "Captain America's Weird Tales," and #s 76-78, and <www.geocities.com/Captain> America's History, 1. The Watergate issues were *Captain* America, #s 173-76 (May-August 1974). Cap became the Nomad in # 180 (December 1974) and returned as Captain America in # 184 (April 1975).

[13] The new Super Patriot (the original appeared in *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD*, # 13 in 1968) appeared in *Captain America*, I, # 323 (November 1986). Steve Rogers' assumption of an anonymous superhero persona to clear Captain America's name after an accusation of treason may be traced in the four issues of "Man Without a Country" (April-July 1996). An earlier treason plot involved his collaboration with the Red Skull, but Cap's actions were solely designed to save New York City from annihilation. See *Tales of Suspense*, # 91 (1967). Another traitor story is "Who Calls Me Traitor," *Captain America*, # 127 (July 1970).

[14] Robert Jewett, *The Captain America Complex: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), dust jacket commentary.

[15] Robert Jewett and John S. Lawrence, *Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 32.

[16] Ibid.: 39.

[17] Ibid.: 9. The authors expanded their argument to the Iraqi war and postwar occupation in "Captain America Takes on Iraq," *Tikkiun Magazine* (Jan.-Feb. 2003).

[18] *Tales of Suspense*, # 91, "The Last Defeat" (July 1967).

[19] Richard Reynolds, *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology* (Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1992): 74.

[20] See the ironically titled *Captain America*, II, # 3, "Patriotism" (January 1997). Cap's objection to exploitation of his patriotism for propagandistic star appeal may be found in *Adventures of Captain America, Sentinel of Liberty*, II. .

[21] *Captain America*, I, # 106, "Cap Goes Wild" (October 1968).

[22] The "living legend" phrase became the appositive complement of the name Captain America on the masthead of the title page of each issue in the *Tales of Suspense* series beginning with # 69 (September 1969). For an early use of the phrase, see *Captain America*, #8, "Ruby of the Nile" (Oct. 1941), 13.

[23] The Vietnam episodes are found, respectively, in *Tales of Suspense*, # 61, "The Strength of the Sumo" (January 1965), and *Captain America*, I, # 125, "Captured in Vietnam" (May 1970). The quotation is from p.4 of the latter.

[24] Bradford W. Wright, Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001): 244.

[25] *Captain America*, I, # 122 , "The Sting of the Scorpion" (February 1970.

[26] *Captain America*, I, # 175, "Before the Dawn" (July 1974). The key issues in the Watergate series were #s 173-76 (May-August 1974). See also Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, 245. Steve Engelhart has confirmed that it was his intention of killing off Nixon in this story. See <www.perpetualcomics.com>, "Tony's Online Tips," Friday, 4 April 2003. Harderman=H.R. Haldeman, and CRAP=CREEP (the Committee to Re-Elect the President) are transparent historical glosses.

[27] *Captain America*, I, # 250, "Cap for President" (October 1980).

[28] *Avengers*, I, # 267, "Time—and Time Again" (May 1986).

[29] *Captain America*, IV, # 4, "Warlords—Never Give Up" (September 2002).

[30] *Captain America*, IV, # 5, "Warlords—Above the Law" (October 2002). Conservative Reaction to the terrorist issues was virulent; Cap was accused of treason, of selling out America's traditional values. See Michael Medved, "Captain America, Traitor?," *National Review Online*, 4 April 2003.

[31] *Captain America* IV, # 8, "The Extremists," Pt. 2 (March 2003).

[32] *Truth: Red, White, and Black*, I, # 1, "The Future" (January 2002).

[33] See *Truth: Red, White, and Black*, I, # 7, "The Blackvine" (July 2003). Marvel Comics president, Bill Jemas, said this series was intended as "a

tribute to black soldiers," and to reflect the Tuskegee Experiment (1932-72) in which the U.S. government left syphilitic Black men untreated in order to study the course of the disease. See "Marvel Reveals First 'Captain America,'" <www.theolympian.com>.

[34] Attracted to many women over the years—Betty Ross, FBI agent, an unnamed member of the French resistance, SHIELD agent # 13 (Sharon Carter, his longest, most intimate relationship), and a woman identified only as "Connie" on the cover of *Captain America*, III, # 44 (August 2001), --, Cap's failed love life has left him an isolated loner. He proposed to Ms. Carter but his insistence that she leave SHIELD led to their breakup. Steve Rogers is depicted as married to a "Peg" and seems to have totally forgotten his secret identity in *Captain America*, II, # 1, "Courage" (November 1996). He comes out of his reverie or retirement in this issue to fight as a vigilante against yet another incarnation of Nazi tyranny, and his family life is forgotten.

[35] See *Captain America*, I, # 1, "The Drug Wars" (April 1994), and *Captain America Goes to War Against Drugs*, I, # 1 (1991).

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Greta Olson

Greta Olson teaches at Freiburg University. She is the author of *Reading Eating Disorders: Writings on Bulimia and Anorexia as Confessions of American Culture* (Lang, 2003) and has, with Monika Fludernik, co-edited *In the Grip of the Law: Trials, Prisons and the Space Between* (Lang 2004). Her published essays include work on, narratology, gender studies, the eighteenth-century English novel and Shakespeare as well as several articles on current American culture and literature. She is at work on her second book *Criminal Animals from Shakespeare to Conrad and the Rise of Positivist Criminology*.

Allan Phillipson

Allan Phillipson studied at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, Canada), where he completed a PhD thesis on New Zealand poetry and poetics. He has published some poetry, as well as articles on Victorian social history, ecocriticism, tourism, New Zealand literature and film. Current research interests include literary furniture and detective fiction. He now lives in the south-west of England, and teaches at the WEA in Exeter.

Teresa Requena

Teresa Requena teaches U.S. culture and literature in the English Department at Universitat de Barcelona since 1996. Her research interests focus on nineteenth-century U.S. literature and twentieth-century U.S. theater. She wrote her Master's thesis on the work of Adrienne Kennedy and her Ph. D. thesis analyzes the theater by Gertrude Stein.

Klaus Rieser

Klaus Rieser teaches film, cultural studies, and U.S. culture at the Department of American Studies at the University of Graz, Austria. His research has most often focussed on questions of immigration, ethnicity or gender (masculinity) in film.

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Jan Roush is director of the American Studies Program at Utah State University, where she is an associate professor in Folklore and American Studies. Her major research interests are in Western American and American Indian Literature and family and gender lore.

Birgit Schwelling

Birgit Schwelling is an assistant professor in the Department of Kulturwissenschaften at Europa-Universität Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), Germany. She holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from Freie Universität Berlin and was a Fellow of Max Weber Kolleg at the University of Erfurt. Her publications revolve around issues of political culture, collective memory studies and 20th century history of Germany. Her most recent book (*Politikwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft*, Wiesbaden 2004, ed.) connects political with cultural science.

Bent Sørensen

Bent Sørensen is Assistant Professor of English at Aalborg University. He teaches 20th and 21st century American literature and cultural studies in the Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies.

He has written and published on authors such as Edgar Allen Poe, T.S. Eliot, the Beats, Nella Larsen, J.D. Salinger, John Updike, Douglas Coupland, Van Morrison, Bret Easton Ellis, Cormac McCarthy, Raymond Federman, Jacques Derrida; and issues such as 'the cultural semiotics of the "X "', 'generationality and generational novels', 'images of Europe in literature', 'adaptation', 'American icons', '9-11', 'Tourette syndrome as a post-modern trope', etc.

Heinz Tschachler,

Heinz Tschachler, an Associate Professor of English and American Studies at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria, is author of *Ökologie und Arkadien*, of *Lewis Mumford's Reception in German Translation and Criticism*, of *Prisoners of the Nominal*, an essay on the disciplinary unconscious of international American Studies, and of *Ursula K. Le Guin*. He has also published essays on cultural studies, cultural criticism, North American fiction, science fiction, utopian literature, and on discursive constructions of national identity. In addition, he has edited three books on cultural studies, *Dialog der Texte*, *Experiencing a Foreign Culture*, and *The EmBodyment of American Culture*.

Øyvind Vågnes

Øyvind Vågnes teaches at the Department of English, University of Bergen, Norway. Research stays include Georgetown University, 2001-2002, and University of Washington, 2004. His dissertation, to be completed in 2006, is an analysis of the recycling of the images of the Kennedy assassination in culture. His most recently accepted essay is "Chosen To Be Witness: The Exceptionalism of *9/11*." In 2003 he published a work of fiction in Norwegian, *Ingen Skal Sove I Natt*, a novel (Tiden Norsk Forlag).

This book investigates the ontology as well as the social and cultural impact of US icons. American Studies scholars from various nations have come together to explore origins, maintenance, and manipulation of icons and to trace their hegemonic as well as subversive impact. Icons experience mutation, modulation, adjustment, and diversification until they either fade or join the pantheon of core US icons, becoming almost eternal.

Contributions include analyses of iconic figures such as Billy the Kid, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, they cover stereotypes from obese bodies via Aunt Jemima to iconic femmes, and they examine material icons such as the Dollar Bill, the Zapruder footage of the JFK assassination or iconic sites like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.