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Being Cultural

Edited by Bruce MZ Cohen

University of Auckland

This book is dedicated to
June Macfarlane Cohen
Art historian, communist, and proud daughter of
Scotland

Through culture seems to lie our way, not only to perfection, but even to safety.

(‘Culture and Anarchy’, Matthew Arnold)

The traditional culture of a society will always tend to correspond to its
contemporary system of interests and values, for it is not an absolute body of
work but a continual selection and interpretation.

(‘The Long Revolution’, Raymond Williams)

Despite what they say graffiti is not the lowest form of art ... it’s actually one of
the more honest art forms available. There is no elitism or hype, it exhibits on
the best walls a town has to offer and nobody is put off by the price of
admission.

(‘Wall and Piece’, Banksy)

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Preface

I like edited collections, always have done. When I was a sociology undergraduate at Teesside Polytechnic, deciding on a book acquisition worthy of my grant money, it was inevitably an edited text which won out. As important as I now know academic monographs to be (I have written one myself — this is purely coincidental), edited collections can cover more ground and give a wider range of perspectives on each issue covered. You can dip into chapters on the bus home and if you come across a duff chapter you can move on to a more exciting one. (For the record, some of my favourite edited collections are Robert Burgess's *Field Research: A Sourcebook and Field Manual*, Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton's *The Subcultures Reader*, and John Storey's excellent *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*). This book is designed as a natural starting point for further study — think of a theory or topic in cultural studies and you should be able to find it here. Each contributor to this book was given the following remit: outline the basics for an undergraduate audience, include some of the major theories which inform the study area, give the student a general overview, but also include some interesting departures, new developments or updates on the theory.

The idea for this collection came from teaching courses on cultural studies and popular culture in sociology. There are some good sociological and critically informed edited volumes out there, yet some omissions are nevertheless evident. Study areas within cultural studies continue to grow and change. On issues such as the body, television or digital media, for example, the collections were sometimes out of date. I also felt that some of the topics which are crucial in cultural studies — such as celebrity, technology, sport, or videogames — were often ignored or covered only briefly. The obvious solution was to develop my own edited collection. The book you are now reading is the result. I invited contributions from authors whose work was already drawn upon in my courses as well as academics who were writing in new areas of cultural studies. This collection then, is also a mix of both established and emerging topics in the field.

Edited collections are like greatest hits albums. I hope that readers find something significant or memorable from each topic studied and will go on to check out the extended versions at the end of each chapter. Welcome to *Being Cultural*!

Acknowledgements

This collection was a mammoth undertaking and would not have been possible without being able to draw on the experience, guidance, support and generosity of others. I would like to thank my former Head of Department, Tracey McIntosh, who allowed me the time and space to finish the editing of this book. Tracey always supported and believed in this work, she is truly a saint! We have a great department, and I also want to take this opportunity to thank all those colleagues who asked about the book's progress, sympathised as the chapters piled up on my desk, and occasionally consoled me with a beer or two (especially Colin, James and William). Thanks to Luke Goode, Nabeel Zuberi and Chris Rojek who offered some very helpful advice on the editing and publishing of student-orientated texts. My good friend Tony Mitchell also produced words of wisdom on editing books and the strategic management of contributions. Our former sociology Subject Librarian at the University of Auckland, Philip Abela, offered some really useful advice on styling and consistency issues. Adam Craigie assisted with some of the editing duties towards publication; a summer scholarship from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Auckland allowed this to happen. I would also like to thank all at Pearson, including Helen Cox (Acquisitions Editor) and Alex Wakelin (Development Editor), who never doubted the significance of this book. All hail Geoff Stahl, academic, DJ, and producer of quality art including the front cover of this book (Pet Shop Boys meets New Order maybe?). I am eternally grateful to all the contributors in this collection — maybe it was a leap of faith for you all but hopefully one worth taking. Thanks also to all friends and family in England, Germany, Australia and New Zealand who added their cheer and support to the project. Appropriately, the music of the Editors kept me going over the last couple of years. Hadischa is the cat currently sitting on my keyboard. And lastly, Jessica Terruhn, my girl from Berlin: I thank you for your invaluable comments on my own chapter drafts, for your help with the final proofing of the book and construction of the all important index, as well as for taking the super photos, not to mention your love, support, and for being the voice of sanity, *Ich liebe dich, Schatz!*

Part I: Introduction

Introduction to Part I

Bruce Cohen

As with any area in the social sciences and humanities, an appropriate starting point for the study of culture should be a critical examination of definitions. This is not only carried out to accurately record the content and boundaries of the area of study but, more importantly in sociology, to highlight the often contested nature of such definitions and, by inference, to begin to problematise the topic. Such an examination often brings to the fore some of the fundamental issues for sociologists in exploring societal interactions and processes. For example, a brief examination of, say, crime or health reveals that rather than being static, neutral and objective categories, such definitions are subject to negotiation by those with the power to define and enforce their views of 'criminal activity' or 'health' and 'illness' on others (including, in this case, the criminal justice system and the health services). The time devoted in this first section to discussing competing definitions of 'culture' and the implications of these definitions is testimony to just how problematic such terminology can be. As I argue in Chapter 1, it is necessary for students within cultural studies to develop what C. Wright Mills calls 'the sociological imagination'. In short, students need to question common-sense and taken-for-granted assumptions about culture and society, while at the same time being able to place information, ideas and theories within their appropriate social and historical contexts. This is demonstrated in my chapter with reference to the industrial revolution and the conservative theorists; the rise of commerce and mass production was seen as not only a threat to 'authentic' culture, but also to the general moral development of society. Cultural conservatives support an elitist definition of culture which demarcates what we now understand as 'high culture' from 'low' (or 'popular') culture.

John Storey extends this discussion in Chapter 2, outlining the challenge to the conservative theorists from Raymond Williams' inclusive, 'social definition' of culture. Through such a definition, culture is redefined to include popular culture texts such as television and film as well as 'elite' texts such as ballet and opera. Noting the influence of semiotics and Gramsci's theory of hegemony on Williams' ideas (and later, on the work of Stuart Hall), Storey's chapter makes the critical point that the fundamental questioning of language and signification by Williams necessarily means that power becomes the primary object of sociological study in cultural studies. This focus on culture and power is developed further in Chapter 3 with David Inglis's investigation of the art world and definitions of 'art'. Drawing on some fascinating historical detail, it is

demonstrated that labels such as ‘artist’ and ‘great works of art’ are constructs of early modernity, a reaction by the Romantics to the emergence of industrialisation. As Inglis makes clear in his chapter, this was an attempt by such cultural producers to hold on to their economic and social privileges as the market replaced the traditional system of patronage. Here again we see notions of ‘art’ and ‘high culture’ closely tied to privilege and status, as well as the power of those to define and reinforce some cultural artefacts as worthy and others as worthless. Inglis concludes his discussion by reiterating the point that the production and consumption of culture can only be fully understood with reference to the broader social structures and hierarchies within society.

1 Cultural Studies and Sociology

Early developments and keywords

Bruce Cohen

- Sociology's contribution to the field of cultural studies focuses on the structural processes and conditions of producing and consuming cultural artefacts in a capitalist society.
- Definitions of 'culture' are highly contested; they range from an inclusive definition involving the knowledge, beliefs, customs, values and artefacts of a given society to exclusive definitions which draw on the dichotomy of 'high' and 'low' culture.
- Conservative theorists believe 'culture' to be a static and measurable category; it is argued that forms of 'high' culture — and with them, society as a whole — are in danger of being undermined by the mass-production of forms of 'low' culture which will be eagerly consumed by the masses.
- The work of Raymond Williams seeks to rescue the working class from elitist notions of culture by refocusing cultural studies research in the direction of the everyday practices and lived experience of ordinary people.
- It is concluded that while elitist notions of culture remain dominant in Western society, sociologists need to question these taken-for-granted assumptions and investigate the power relations inherent in such constructions.

Introduction

This chapter introduces students to some of the important issues and terminology which will help to ground the sociological study of cultural studies and popular culture. This includes a discussion of the deeply contested nature of 'culture', a word that Raymond Williams famously described as 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language' (1983: 87). Definitions are appropriate starting points for sociological discussion and the chapter takes time to note some of the keywords that are often encountered in the area, such as 'cultural text', 'authenticity' and 'resistance'. Some time is also spent considering the rise of industrial capitalism and mass production in the nineteenth century. It is crucial for students to understand the fundamental social, economic and political changes that resulted from the industrial

revolution and the rise of industrial society. The development of machines and processes which could mass produce items led to the emergence of ‘mass culture’ (or ‘popular culture’). The effects that mass-produced ‘culture’ had on Western society has formed a key debate within cultural studies between the cultural conservatives (such as Arnold and Leavis) and ‘culturalists’ such as Williams. This debate is the focus of the second half of this chapter.

Sociology and cultural studies

There are many ways of studying cultural artefacts and behaviour within the arts and humanities. For instance, anthropologists explore the signification of specific cultural practices (such as religious ceremonies) to better understand the collective meanings of a social group or society; in contrast, academics in media studies focus more on the representations highlighted within specific forms of art and culture such as photography, film and music. While different academic disciplines may approach cultural studies with a different emphasis, it should also be acknowledged that there is a lot of cross-over in these study areas and approaches. Sociology’s contribution to the field has tended to analyse the structural processes and conditions of producing and consuming cultural artefacts in capitalist society. Within such analysis, emphasis is placed on how ideas about ‘culture’ are made intelligible and meaningful by different socio-economic groups, as well as the consequences this can have for understanding wider societal processes. In this way, sociology is less concerned with debates over representations of art and culture than with their significance in reproducing social and economic inequalities within society (or, conversely, in challenging and resisting such inequalities through the processes of cultural production and consumption). Fundamentally, sociology questions the taken-for-granted and common-sense assumptions we have about culture. As Giddens (2001: 2) reminds us:

[s]ociology is the study of human social life, groups and societies ... It teaches us that what we regard as natural, inevitable, good or true may not be such, and that the ‘givens’ of our life are strongly influenced by historical and social forces.

Therefore, when sociology students approach the study of culture, there is a need to constantly question who is benefiting from certain cultural formations, which notions of culture appear to dominate public discourse, and, in contrast, which voices are marginalised from such debates and for what reasons. At the same time, such discourse and meaning-making always needs to be placed and understood within its particular historical and social context (see Mills 2000). We will now further this discussion by focusing on the competing definitions of ‘culture’.

Defining ‘culture’

A standard dictionary definition of ‘culture’ usually draws our attention to the knowledge, beliefs, customs, values and artefacts of a society or of a specific group of people within that society. Oxford Dictionaries Online (2011), for example, defines culture as ‘the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society’. This is a common-sense view of culture: people in New Zealand might talk of their ‘national culture’ and question what ideas, customs and social behaviour define them collectively as ‘Kiwis’, or specific groups may be referred to as having a separate culture in that society (for example, the ‘Pacific Island culture’). Through investigating different ideas, customs and values of ‘cultures’ we can better understand other nations and peoples; ideas and behaviour which may at first appear quite strange and peculiar to us (such as praying to Mecca five times a day in Saudi Arabia or eating insects in Thailand) can be explained through reference to a range of ‘cultural practices’. Such an understanding of ‘culture’ is typically used in anthropological studies; for example, an early definition from Tylor in 1891 (cited in Billington et al. 1991: 2) stated that culture was ‘that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society’. Similarly, for Lewis (1961: 76) culture ‘is the integrated system of learned behaviour patterns characteristic of the members of a society. It constitutes the way of life of any given social group.’

- A **cultural text** can be regarded as any physical manifestation of what is considered by a given society as ‘culture’ (regardless of notions of ‘high’ or ‘low’ culture). Thus, in cultural studies, ‘text’ is not only books or magazines, but all cultural artefacts (including, for example, works of art, YouTube clips, adverts, items of clothing, iPods, posters, television programmes, the *haka*, podcasts, SNS sites, frozen food, football, and so on).

This common-sense notion of culture, however, alerts us to some of the problems inherent in such a broad definition — firstly, it implies that culture can be just about everything in a society, and, secondly, it ascribes a fundamental difference (or ‘otherness’) to those to which the word is applied, though such differences between people and groups may be more imagined than real. Anthropological studies emerged with the colonial project; it attempted to document and explain to European colonists why other people were not like them (significantly, why other people were not as ‘civilised’ as European society believed itself to be) (for more on anthropology and colonialism, see for example Lewis 1973). Colonisation then, was supported by beliefs of ‘cultural

difference' and an inferiority of other peoples' cultures. Subsequently it was through the attempted annihilation of such opposing attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that colonial powers sought to reinforce their rule. For example, the introduction of Christian religions and a colonial system of education to many parts of the globe and, simultaneously, the forbidding of indigenous communities to speak their native languages or perform their traditional practices instilled the idea that European culture was the one true set of values and beliefs by which all societies should live. Even the introduction of European sporting traditions to the colonies was seen as an important way of instilling indigenous peoples with European values (see Smart, in this volume). Such ideas of disseminating 'cultural imperialism' continue today, for example with Joseph Nye's (2004) notion of 'soft power'. Nye advocates the imposition of American culture (including forms of US popular culture, such as mainstream Hollywood films) on other nations to facilitate the long-term adoption of American values and beliefs. Nye believes that the earlier adoption of such a policy would have fostered better foreign relations and aided the US in the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In fully understanding the common-sense view of culture then, we need to be aware of the historical and political dimensions through which the term has been made meaningful. Language does not develop in a social vacuum, rather it is formed through societal interactions and processes. In Western society, these dynamics are often imbued with power — the interests of some groups become dominant in defining concepts that we then take to be the 'correct' (or common sense) meaning of a given word. This issue becomes clearer when we consider the original use of 'culture' and its adaptation by industrialised societies.

- **Culture** is a highly contested term in cultural studies. It can be broadly defined as 'the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society' (Oxford Dictionaries Online 2011). In contrast, the conservative theorist Matthew Arnold felt that culture was 'the best that has been thought or said in the world' (2009: 6). Such an elitist notion of culture was later challenged by Raymond Williams (1961: 41) who stated that culture should be seen as a whole 'way of life' of different groups of people. The chapters from John Storey and David Inglis that follow this one discuss the definitions of 'culture' and its significance to sociology in further detail.

The word 'culture' comes from the Latin word *colere* (literally meaning 'to cultivate'), and was initially used as a term in agriculture and horticulture (as it still is in biology today) to signify a development or progress of a seed, plant or organism (usually under controlled or measured conditions). Yet by the nineteenth century the word was also associated with the development or improvement of people within society. This idea of 'culture' continues today:

we might, for example, refer to certain people as being ‘cultured’; the reason we know that they are ‘cultured’ is that they regularly visit ‘cultural events’ such as art galleries and classical concerts, they also read serious literature from authors such as Tolstoy, Shakespeare and Swift. These cultured people, in contrast, avoid ‘popular’ events such as rock gigs or trips to the local multiplex to watch the latest Hollywood blockbuster — there is no ‘culture’ in such activities. This concept of the ‘cultivated’ individual or group forms the central debate over definitions for cultural theorists. As Jenkins et al. (2002: 27) clarify, although ‘culture’ today,

can often describe the activities of a generalized people (as in ‘Asian American culture’), it has also remained an ideological tool. Here, ‘culture’ signifies the cultivated or more elite realm of the educated classes as opposed to the debased world of the lower classes, the realm of the popular.

To better understand the debates over this conception of ‘culture’, it is necessary to outline the historical context and development of ideas which eventually led to the establishment of cultural studies as an academic discipline. The sections that follow establish the arguments of Matthew Arnold and F. R. Leavis as key writers in the cultural conservative tradition; this school of thought is highly critical of the spread of mass culture within society. In contrast, the final section briefly surveys some of the main ideas of Raymond Williams. It will be shown that Williams’ alternative conceptualisation of ‘culture’ has had a lasting effect on cultural studies work, resulting in a heightened focus by cultural theorists on forms of popular culture.

Industrialisation and mass production

The industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought about significant and lasting changes in Western society which are still felt today. As the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm (1968: 13) puts it, ‘[t]he Industrial Revolution marks the most fundamental transformation of human life in the history of the world recorded in written documents’. Facilitated by new technological processes (such as steam power, metallurgy, and chemical synthesis), industry replaced agriculture as the main source of production. England was the first country to become fully industrialised and, as a result, the economic, social, cultural and political life of the nation changed dramatically. With a change in the social structure of society, social class replaced the traditional feudal hierarchy of peasantry (or ‘serfs’), landed aristocracy and the monarchy. The power of the aristocracy began its slow decline, as the economic and political power of the merchant classes (the burgeoning middle class) increased. Peasants were freed from their traditional ties to the land so that they

could move to the cities and work the new machines. From this reorganisation of labour, a solidified working class emerged.

A social class was defined by Karl Marx (1976) as a group of people who had a common relationship to the means of production. In the emerging capitalist society there were two main classes: the industrialists (or ‘capitalists’) who owned the new means of production, and the working classes (or ‘proletariat’) who worked the means of production — the proletariat earned their living by selling their labour to the capitalists. According to Marx, the relationship between the two classes is one of fundamental conflict and struggle over power and resources: while the capitalists get richer exploiting the labour of the proletariat, the workers stay relatively poor (see for example Bedggood 2007: 133–4). Marx concluded that until the workers took control of the means of production — through a workers’ revolution — this situation would remain unchanged.

- For conservative theorists, the term **popular culture** is an oxymoron. While ‘popular’ is often used to suggest something ‘widely favoured’ or ‘well-liked’, when it is associated with the idea of ‘culture’, there is a pervading sense of this form of culture being ‘low’ or ‘base’ (Williams 1983: 236). This is often contrasted with the supposed merits of forms of ‘high culture’. Some major developments in production and forms of popular culture in the last two centuries have included the telegraph (1800s), the mechanised printing press (1810), photography (1820s), the penny press newspapers (1830), film (1878), radio (1900s), television (1925), mobile phones (1973), personal computers (c.1973), and the internet (c.1988).

Following widespread agitation by the working classes and other disenfranchised groups in mid-nineteenth century England, the Reform Bill was passed in 1867. This law doubled the proportion of the population who could vote and enfranchised a large section of the working class (Marcus 1994: 166). In 1870 the Education Act was passed; this saw the introduction of compulsory schooling for the first time. The English working class had gained important concessions from middle class society and was now better educated than ever before. The population could now read and write; a necessity for the continued development of industrial society, but also a concern for many social commentators. The development of the mechanised printing press in the early part of the nineteenth century led to the first mass-produced literature (for example, newspapers and books) in history (McLuhan 1962: 124). The possibility of ordinary people consuming mass-produced products had begun.

Cultural conservatism

Among those concerned at the radical changes caused by industrialisation was school inspector, poet and essayist Matthew Arnold (1822–1888). Outlined in his classic book, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Arnold's main concern was for the 'moral' and 'spiritual' future of society; it appeared to him that the very essence of 'civilisation' was under threat from the machines. While industrialisation might have led to more prosperity, the expansion of the British Empire, and the general (if slow) improvement in living conditions of the population, what had happened to the *soul* of society? Despite being a deeply religious man, he was aware that religion could no longer unite people in a society that appeared increasingly profane. With the increasing economic and political power of the middle classes, and the constant clashes with the working classes, Arnold argued that there was no spiritual leadership of the nation; the needs of capital and labour had meant that the previous overarching guiding principles of society had been lost. He famously lambasted the middle classes as 'philistines' and the working classes as 'barbarians' — while the middle classes believed it was 'everyman for himself' (Arnold 1994: 51), the working class were 'beginning to assert and put in practice an Englishman's right to do what he likes' (1994: 52). The long-term result of this lethal concoction, he argued, would be anarchy.

- For a cultural text to be considered **authentic** it has to be 'genuine, natural, true and pure' (Barker 2004: 9). Similar to the conservative theorists, Adorno (see Kellner, this volume) argued that the traditional 'folk culture' of the peasantry — such as folk songs and artisan crafts — was a 'lived' and uncorrupted form of culture; it was therefore 'authentic'. In comparison, the mass-produced culture of industrial society was standardised and formulaic. This 'popular' culture had no intrinsic meaning to it, it was not *of* the people, and was therefore 'inauthentic' culture. Similar to the contested nature of culture, the application of the label 'authentic' to any given text remains problematic in cultural studies — the word is often used to denote the supposed worth of high art and culture at the expense of forms of 'low' (or 'popular') culture.

The solution for Arnold was the education and promotion of culture to the masses; culture should act as the moral and spiritual guide for society. 'Culture' for Arnold was 'the best that has been thought or said in the world' (2009: 6). Arnold felt such culture should possess both a 'high truth' and 'high seriousness' (such as the works of Shakespeare and Milton). He insisted that society needed to be led by an educated intelligentsia who would act as the protectors and promoters of such culture (through identifying what 'the best that

has been thought or said in the world' was, and making it accessible to the masses, including through the education system). Only through culture, 'a study in perfection' (Arnold 1994: 31), would real growth in society be possible. Thus it was argued that only intellectual and emotional development could drive society forward, rather than economic growth and the demands of business.

Arnold's seemingly elitist notions of culture were avidly taken up by writers and literary critics in the late nineteenth century. Although he did not concern himself in his writings with popular culture such as paperback novels and newspapers, the development of photography and film at the end of the century encouraged critics to ruminate on the possible 'distinctions' that society should make between Arnold's 'good' culture and industrial society's 'bad' culture. Cultural critic F. R. Leavis (1895–1978) is the most prominent of writers who followed Arnold's conservative critique of culture, developing his ideas in the twentieth century, witnessing the progression of new forms of popular culture including film, radio and, later, television.



Figure 1.1 Pounamu (jade) jewellery: the commercialisation of folk culture?

Leavis solidified the conservative approach to culture in a number of books including *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1930). Before industrial society, argued Leavis, there had been a golden age of 'organic community' with a 'living culture' (Leavis and Thompson 1933: 1); in the middle ages there was a minority culture of the educated elites, and, in contrast, an authentic, common 'folk culture' of the ordinary people (the peasantry). This 'folk culture' is described by Leavis as folk songs and folk dances, handicraft products, as

well as the use of language. This 'old popular culture' (Leavis and Thompson 1933: 2) had something more to it than the mass-produced popular culture that developed with industrial society; it was 'an art of life, a way of living, ordered and patterned, involving social arts, codes of intercourse and a responsive adjustment, growing out of immemorial experience, to the natural environment and the rhythm of the year' (Leavis and Thompson 1933: 1–2). In contrast, industrialisation had replaced such authentic folk culture with 'inauthentic' mass-produced culture (or popular culture) such as newspapers, advertising, paperback novels, photographs, radio, film, television, and popular music. The masses had thus become alienated from their own culture.

Like Arnold, Leavis saw culture and commerce as binary opposites, commerce was the key threat to culture. Here we see the formulation of the high-low culture dichotomy in the conservative theory: mass-produced culture is 'low' culture (or 'popular culture', as it is now more commonly known), this is mediocre, dull, mundane entertainment that can be enjoyed by the uneducated and uncritical 'low-brow' hoards. In contrast, 'high culture' is art, literature, music and intellectual thought which few can create or even appreciate (Leavis particularly referred to the literary works of Dante, Shakespeare, Baudelaire and Hardy as examples of 'high culture'; in contrast, the novels of Charles Dickens and Laurence Sterne were considered as mass-produced and worthless 'low culture' for the masses). Leavis argued that attempts to make culture accessible to the masses (for example, through mass education) had failed, this had led instead to falling standards in society. Following Arnold, Leavis also called for leadership from experts on high culture. Rather than attempting to teach culture to everyone, Leavis argued that society should promote excellence in education, academia and culture for a privileged few. In *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* he states,

[i]n any period it is upon a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends: it is (apart from cases of the simple and familiar) only a few who are capable of unprompted, first-hand judgement. They are still a small minority, though a larger one, who are capable of endorsing such first-hand judgement by genuine personal response ... Upon this minority depends our power of profiting by the finest human experience of the past; they keep alive the subtlest and most perishable parts of tradition ... In their keeping ... is the language, the changing idiom upon which fine living depends, and without which distinction of spirit is thwarted and incoherent. By 'culture' I mean the use of such language. (Leavis 1930: 3–4)

In Leavis' view, culture needed to be rescued from commerce, and this could only be successfully achieved by the leadership of a minority capable of adequately appreciating high culture and separating it from low culture. Thus,

for conservative theorists, there is a need to be ‘discerning’ and ‘discriminating’ in approaching any cultural text, to be able to assess its real cultural ‘worth’ for society.

There are two chief criticisms of cultural conservatism that can be highlighted here. First, the work of Arnold and Leavis suggests that culture is a static and measurable category; the canon of high culture can be accurately identified throughout history and will never be subject to the changing tastes or whims of a given society. Drawing on just a few examples we can see that this conceptualisation of culture is problematic. For example, Shakespeare (1564–1616) — arguably the world’s most famous playwright and a beacon of high culture for conservative theorists — wrote plays for a mass audience; the work was not considered to be of particular cultural value until his plays were re-evaluated in the eighteenth century. The waltz, jazz music, and Andy Warhol’s art are further examples of cultural texts which are now considered a part of high culture while previously all have struggled against claims of being inauthentic or debased forms of culture. Leavis himself later reconsidered his view of Charles Dickens’ novels, suggesting they should also be part of the canon of high culture. These examples demonstrate that we cannot divorce the idea of ‘culture’ from the specific social and historical epochs in which such definitions and distinctions are made. Far from being static then, ‘culture’ is a fluid category which changes over time. This is why sociologists often refer to culture as being a *social construct*; that is, culture has no intrinsic meaning outside of the wider social and political values which are embedded in such ideas.

A second criticism emerges from the first. Cultural conservatism is unashamedly elitist; according to Leavis, only an educated minority can truly identify and comprehend what ‘high culture’ is. Yet when we consider that culture is not a static and measurable concept, we then have to ask who decides and who benefits from such definitions of culture. These questions are most effectively answered with reference to unequal power relations within capitalist society; that is, the high-low culture dichotomy privileges the powerful over the powerless in society. In this way definitions of culture can be used, for example, as a discriminatory tool by the bourgeoisie to separate high status leisure activities from the debased and worthless popular entertainment of the masses. As just one example, the author recently attended a presentation at the University of Auckland on opera and oysters (Goldie 2010). The speaker began his talk by stating that *we all know* that we *should* like opera and oysters, we know that they are *good for us*. He then proceeded to outline how people might better climatise themselves to liking both through such behavioural modification techniques as only eating oysters when one is in a good mood and so on. Here we see the reinforcement of bourgeois notions of high culture and a denial of the power relations involved in the establishment of such definitions. In contrast, we can argue that opera and oysters actually have no intrinsic value but have been

imbued with cultural meaning by the middle classes (attending the opera is now a relatively expensive leisure activity, and involves a range of certain social customs and norms more familiar to the middle classes; oysters are a relatively expensive cuisine with a subtle taste, which is not preferred by all). Consequently, there is no reason why we should like opera or oysters, they are *not* intrinsically good for us, however the dominant meaning in capitalist society is that these activities denote such things as class and status, something we are constantly told that we *should* aspire to.

While noting some of the fundamental problems within cultural conservative writings, the above example is salient in demonstrating the ongoing high–low culture dichotomy that continues to be played out in society today. We tend to take such ideas as the ‘cultured’ individual or a person who has ‘no culture’ for granted in our common sense understandings of what culture is. This is something that sociologists have for a long time challenged. The origins of such challenges in cultural studies — and indeed the start of formal academic study within the area — can be found in the work of Raymond Williams and his challenge to the elitist conceptions of culture, which will now be outlined.

Raymond Williams and working class culture

The formal beginnings of cultural studies as an academic discipline can be found in the work of Raymond Williams (1921–1988). A committed socialist from a working class background, Williams’ cultural analysis departed from cultural conservatism by placing formulations of ‘culture’ within their wider social and historical contexts. This was a questioning of elitist conceptions of high culture in industrial society, a society based on fundamental inequalities between the owners and workers of the means of production. Fundamentally, within capitalist society, the bourgeoisie have the power to enforce their definition and meaning of ‘culture’ on the masses. In the famous Marxian phrase, ‘[t]he ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force’ (Marx and Engels 1998: 191). As Garnham (1998: 601) has pointed out, in questioning the ‘ruling ideas’ on culture, Williams attempted,

the revalidation of British working class or popular culture against the elite, dominant culture. [His analysis] was situated within the context of a class structure formed by industrial capitalism and an increasingly commercialized system of cultural production, distribution, and consumption.

As Bourdieu was later to note in his book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984), culture is a site for class distinction in which arbitrary texts become imbued with particular meanings by the ruling classes to

denote ‘good’ and ‘bad’ ‘taste’. In contrast to the high–low definitions of the cultural conservatives, Williams suggested a ‘social’ definition of culture. Instead of culture being ‘the best that has been thought or said in the world’ (Arnold 2009: 6), ‘culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour’ (Williams 1961: 41). The idea that culture can be ‘ordinary’ is a key departure from earlier conceptions, and suggests that popular culture — previously considered as ‘inauthentic’ and ‘low brow’ — should be taken seriously by academics, both in terms of the production and the consumption of such texts. As Williams (1961: 41–2) further states, an analysis of culture which draws on such a definition,

is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture. Such analysis will include the historical criticism ... in which intellectual and imaginative works are analysed in relation to particular traditions and societies, but will also include analysis of the elements in the way of life that to followers of ... other definitions are not ‘culture’ at all; the organization of production, the structure of the family, the structure of institutions which express or govern social relationships, the characteristic forms through which members of the society communicate.

- Some disciplines in the humanities are concerned with the study of the **aesthetics** of cultural texts. This is a focus on the question of the art and beauty of a given text. As Barker (2004: 4) has noted, cultural studies in part arose as a critical response to such attempts to universally separate art from non-art, ‘good works’ from ‘bad works’, high culture from low culture; sociologists criticise the inherent subjectivity and elitism which informs such a focus on aesthetics. While Raymond Williams (1983: 31–2) understands the emphasis that the philosophy of aesthetics seeks to make, he argues that the result is ultimately damaging as it attempts to displace, exclude, and marginalise the commonplace or the utilitarian in culture.

This analysis of culture then, is one which broadly calls for a sociological analysis of cultural texts, especially the analysis of popular culture within capitalist society. We need to question the taken-for-granted notions of high and popular art and culture within society, and be able to analyse the meanings of such texts with reference to the processes of production and consumption as well as social and economic relations in late modernity. Williams’ work laid the foundations for British Cultural Studies (see Lewis and Lewis, in this volume) and continues to be a chief influence on cultural studies research today. The idea that we should, for example, take television soap operas such as *Coronation Street* (1960—present) or *Shortland Street* (1992—present) as seriously as

Picasso's paintings, or films on the working class condition such as *A Taste of Honey* (1961) as seriously as Shakespeare's plays, or the working class anger of the Sex Pistols music as seriously as Beethoven, has primarily developed from Raymond Williams' insightful social critique of culture.

- In cultural studies, **resistance** is often conceptualised as active opposition to the culture industry (see Kellner, in this volume). As Barker (2004: 178) remarks, '[h]ere, resistance arises where a dominating culture is seeking to impose itself on subordinate cultures from without. Consequently, resources of resistance are to be located in some measure outside of the dominating culture'. Subcultural activity, for example, can be seen as resistance to dominant consumerist values (see Bennett, in this volume). Likewise, 'cultural jamming' (see Stahl, in this volume) and the establishment of 'knowledge communities' (see Jenkins, in this volume) may also be conceptualised as forms of resistance to the dominant ideology within cultural texts.

Conclusion

To fully understand 'culture' students need to invoke the sociological imagination. This entails a questioning of definitions and distinctions made on the basis of cultural classifications in capitalist society. This chapter has surveyed the beginnings of the study of culture in industrial society by drawing on the important work of the cultural conservatives and Raymond Williams. While elitist notions of 'high' and 'low' (or popular) culture remain dominant in Western society, as sociologists we need to question these taken-for-granted assumptions, and investigate the power relations inherent in such constructions.

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2 'Culture' in Cultural Studies

John Storey

- Cultural studies works with an inclusive definition of 'culture'.
- Cultural studies defines culture as a system of signification organising social practice.
- The principal object of study in cultural studies is the relationship between culture and power.

What is 'culture'?

Cultural studies works with an inclusive definition of culture. That is, rather than study only what Matthew Arnold famously called 'the best which has been thought and said' (2009: 6; see also Leavis 2009), cultural studies is committed to examining what Raymond Williams called 'all forms of signification' (1984: 240). This is a rejection of the Arnoldian/Leavisite mapping of the cultural field into culture/minority culture and anarchy/mass civilisation (see Storey 2009). The first, culture/minority culture — consisting of 'great art' and, crucially, the ability to appreciate 'great art' — demands serious consideration. While the second, anarchy/mass civilisation — supposedly consisting of the remaining degraded mass culture — requires little more than a fleeting sociological glance, remaining long enough to condemn either the culture made *for* the 'masses' or (as in most versions) the culture *of* the 'masses'.

Against the Arnoldian/Leavisite division of the cultural field into the culture/minority culture of an elite and anarchy/mass civilisation of the masses, cultural studies works with a definition of culture developed by Williams. Writing in 1961, he proposed the social definition of culture, in which culture is defined as:

a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture ... the characteristic forms through which members of the society communicate. (Williams 2009: 32)

This definition is crucial to the development of cultural studies as an interdisciplinary project for three reasons. First, it 'democratically' broadens the Arnoldian/Leavisite definition of culture, producing a more inclusive definition, in which instead of culture being defined as a body of only 'elite' texts and practices (for example, ballet, opera, the novel, and poetry), it is redefined to include *as* culture: television, cinema, pop music, advertising and so forth. Second, culture as a particular way of life further broadens the definition of culture. So, for example, rather than culture being television as text, culture is embodied in the particular way of life that is involved in, say, the production, circulation, and consumption of television.

In some accounts of the development of cultural studies these two aspects of the social definition are usually noted and the discussion ends there. However, there is a third element in Williams' definition, one I think that is far more important for the intellectual formation of cultural studies than the other two. That is, the connection that is made between culture and signification. The importance of a particular way of life is that it 'expresses certain meanings and values' (Williams 2009: 32). In addition, cultural analysis from the perspective of this definition of culture 'is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit in a particular way of life' (Williams 2009: 32). The emphasis in discussions of this passage is always on a particular way of life, but in my view, the idea of cultures as networks of meanings that are performed and made concrete in practices of everyday life makes a far more significant contribution to cultural studies. Moreover, culture as signification organising social practice is not reducible to a particular way of life; rather it is fundamental to the shaping and holding together of *all ways of life*. This is not to reduce everything to culture as signification, but it is to insist that culture defined in this way should be seen 'as essentially involved in *all* forms of social activity' (Williams 1981: 13).

While there is more to life than signifying systems, it is nevertheless the case that 'it would ... be wrong to suppose that we can ever usefully discuss a social system without including, as a central part of its practice, its signifying systems, on which, as a system, it fundamentally depends' (Williams 1981: 207). In other words, signification is fundamental to all human activities. Sometimes, it is the most important aspect of the activity, at other times it is overshadowed by more functional aspects. Poetry is more obviously about signification in a way that, say, eating appears not to be. However, we know that together with the biological aspects of eating, what and how we eat is organised by signification (there is a culture of food consumption). Moreover, we also know that eating, as a human activity, has a variable history of signifying different things: civilisation, modernity, Westernisation and class difference for example, and that each of these different ways of signifying organised a different social practice of eating (see Montanari 1994). Culture, therefore, as defined by cultural studies, is not something restricted to the arts or to different forms of

intellectual production; it is an aspect of all human existence. As Stuart Hall (1997: 2) explains:

[c]ulture ... is not so much a set of things — novels and paintings or TV programmes and comics — as a process, a set of practices. Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and exchange of meanings — the 'giving and taking of meaning' — between the members of a society or group.



Figure 2.1 Cultural artefacts: a signification of social practice

According to cultural studies, cultures do not so much consist of, say, art objects. Rather, cultures are the shifting networks of signification in which, say, art objects are *made* to exist as meaningful objects. For example, if I pass a name card to someone in China, the polite way to do it is with two hands. If I pass it with one hand, I may cause offence. This is clearly a matter of culture. However, the 'culture' is not really in the materiality of the card or in the gesture of passing, it is in the network of signification that binds together the card and the gesture. In other words, there is not anything essentially polite about passing the card with two hands; using two hands has been made to signify politeness. Nevertheless, there is something very important that we have to notice here: signification is not free floating, it is embodied in a social practice, which can, in turn, produce real material effects (politeness or offence). As Williams (1977: 34) insists, 'signification, the social creation of meanings [is] a practical material activity'. Similarly, as Karl Marx (1976: 149) observes, 'one man is king only

because other men stand in the relation of subjects to him. They, on the contrary, imagine that they are subjects because he is king'. This relationship works because they share a culture in which such relations are meaningful. Outside such a culture, this relationship would be beyond meaning — difficult to understand and hard to accept as natural. Being a king, therefore, is not a gift of nature (or of God), but something constructed in the networks of signification we call culture; it is culture and not nature (or God) which gives these relations meaning, makes them signify, and, moreover, by signifying they materially organise social practice.

To share a culture — according to this preliminary definition — is to interpret the world, make it meaningful and experience it as meaningful in recognisably similar ways. So-called 'culture shock' happens when we encounter radically different networks of meaning; that is, when our 'natural' or 'common sense' is confronted by someone else's 'natural' or 'common sense'. As we noted earlier, although eating may well be the satisfaction of a biological need, people can easily be shocked and disturbed by how and what people eat in another part of the world — they are shocked and disturbed by what is in effect the culinary culture of another people.

Culture and power

So far I have focused on culture as a system of shared meanings that organise practice. This is more or less how culture tends to be presented in early cultural studies. It is only after the introduction of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony into cultural studies in the 1970s that cultural studies fully recognises that signifying systems consist of both shared and contested meanings. Moreover, it is when cultural studies embraces the concept of hegemony that it locates culture and power as its principal object of study in cultural studies.

Gramsci (2009: 75) uses hegemony to describe processes of power in which a dominant group does not merely *rule by force* but *leads by consent*: it exerts 'intellectual and moral leadership'. Hegemony involves a specific kind of consensus, a consensus in which a social group presents its own *particular* interests as the *general* interests of the society as a whole; it turns the particular into the general. Hegemony works by the transformation of potential antagonism into simple difference. This works in part through the circulation of signification, meanings that reinforce dominance and subordination by seeking to fix the meaning of social relations. As Williams (1977: 110) explains:

[hegemony] is a lived system of meanings and values ... It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people ... [It is] in the strongest sense a 'culture' [understood as signification organising

social practice], but a culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes.

In other words, hegemony is a culture that involves the attempt to saturate the social with meanings that support the prevailing structures of power. In a hegemonic situation subordinate groups appear to actively support and subscribe to values, ideals, objectives and so on, which *incorporate* them into the prevailing structures of power: relations of dominance and subordination. However, hegemony, as Williams also observes, 'does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged' (Williams 1977: 112). Therefore, although hegemony is characterised by high levels of consensus, it is never without conflict; that is, there is always *resistance*. However, for hegemony to remain successful, conflict and resistance must always be channelled and contained — re-articulated in the interests of the dominant (see Hall 2009; Storey 2009).

There are two conclusions we can draw from the cultural studies concept of culture as a system of signification organising social practice. First, although the world exists in all its enabling and constraining materiality outside culture, it is only in culture that the world can be *made to signify*. In other words, signification has a performative effect; it helps construct the realities it appears only to describe.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1979, 2001, 2009) have had a significant influence on cultural studies. They use the word 'discourse' in much the same way as cultural studies uses the word 'culture'. According to Laclau and Mouffe (2009: 144–45):

[i]f I kick a spherical object in the street or if I kick a ball in a football match, the *physical* fact is the same, but *its meaning* is different. The object is a football only to the extent that it establishes a system of relations with other objects, and these relations are not given by the mere referential materiality of the objects, but are, rather, socially constructed. This systematic set of relations is what we call discourse.

Cultural studies would mostly call these systematic relations culture. However, both positions share the view that to stress the discursive or the cultural is not to deny the materiality of the real. Again, according to Laclau and Mouffe (2009: 145), the discursive character of an object does not, by any means, imply putting its *existence* into question. The fact that a football is only a football as long as it is integrated within a system of socially constructed rules does not mean that it ceases to be a physical object.

In other words, objects exist independently of their discursive or cultural articulation, but it is only within discourse or culture that they can exist as meaningful objects in meaningful relations. For example, earthquakes exist in the real world, but whether they are:

constructed in terms of 'natural phenomena' or 'expressions of the wrath of God', depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence. (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 108)

This way of thinking about culture and/or discourse is obviously not without its critics. Catherine Gallagher, for example, is critical of the cultural studies definition of culture. As she explains:

[t]he puzzling thing about these writings ... is their almost programmatic refusal to tell us what culture is not. 'Nature' was once its most widely agreed-upon opposite, but since the category of nature is now itself often perceived as culturally created, even that broad distinction has been weakened. (Gallagher 1995: 308)

Yes, nature is a cultural construct, but this does not mean that rivers and mountains do not exist. Williams had been aware of this type of objection since as early as 1961, noting that it makes it:

impossible for us to assume that there is any reality experienced by man into which man's own observations and interpretations do not enter ... Yet equally, the facts of perception in no way lead us to a late form of idealism; they do not require us to suppose that there is no kind of reality outside the human mind; they point rather to the insistence that all human experience is an interpretation of the non-human reality ... We have to think ... of human experience as both objective and subjective, in one inseparable process ... We create our human world. (Williams 1965: 36, 54)

To argue that culture is best understood as a system of signification organising social practice is not a denial that the material world exists in all its constraining and enabling reality outside signification. As Williams (1979: 67) makes very clear, 'the natural world exists whether anyone signifies it or not'. But what is also absolutely the case is that the material (or the natural) world exists for us — and only ever exists for us — layered and articulated in signification.

The second conclusion we can draw from the cultural studies definition of culture concerns the potential for struggle over meaning. Given that different meanings can be ascribed to the same 'sign' (that is, anything that can be made to signify), meaning-making (that is, the making of culture) is, therefore, always a potential site of struggle. The making of meaning is always entangled in what

Valentin Volosinov (1973) identified as the 'multi-accentuality' of the sign. Rather than being inscribed with a single meaning, a sign can be articulated with different 'accents'; that is, it can be *made to mean* different things in different contexts, with different effects of power. The sign, therefore, is always a potential site of 'differently oriented social interests', and is often in practice 'an arena of ... struggle'. Those with power seek 'to make the sign uni-accentual' (Volosinov 1973: 23): they seek to make what is multi-accentual appear as if it could only ever be uni-accentual.

When 1960s soul band *The Four Tops*, for example, sing 'It's the same old song, but with a different meaning since you've been gone' they illustrate what Volosinov means by the multi-accentuality of the sign. The song tells the story of how words and music that once signified a loving relationship have now been re-articulated to signify only pain and regret. Nothing about the materiality of the song has changed (it's the same old song), but what has changed is the context in which the song is heard and made meaningful (with a different meaning since you've been gone). A new context has produced a new meaning, but the new meaning has a constituting effect: the new context generates a new social practice (sadness, regret, and accompanying forms of behaviour).

In other words (in a less danceable discourse), a text is not the issuing source of meaning but a site where the articulation of meaning (variable meanings) can be produced as it is re-articulated in specific contexts. We continually acknowledge the multi-accentuality of the sign when we describe an interpretation as, for example, a feminist reading, a queer reading, a post-colonial reading, or a post-Marxist reading. In such instances, we implicitly acknowledge that the text in question has been interpreted (or 'made to mean') from the critical perspective of a particular reading practice.

Gender identities are also an example of the multi-accentuality of the sign. Masculinity, for example, has real material conditions of existence (we might call these 'biological') but there are different ways of representing masculinity, different ways of making masculinity signify. Therefore, although masculinity may exist in biological conditions of existence, what it *means*, and the *struggle* over what it means, always takes place *in* culture. This is not simply an issue of semantic difference, a simple question of interpreting the world differently. The different ways of making masculinity mean are not an innocent game of semantics, they are a significant part of a power struggle over what might be regarded as 'normal' — an example of the politics of signification. In other words, it is about who can claim the power and authority to define social reality to make the world (and the things in it) mean in particular ways and with particular effects of power. Therefore, rather than engage in a fruitless quest for the true or essential meaning of something, cultural studies fixes its critical gaze on how particular meanings acquire their authority and power. This makes

culture and power the primary object of study in cultural studies. As Hall (1997: 4) explains:

[m]eanings [of culture organising social practice] ... regulate and organise our conduct and practices — they help to set the rules, norms and conventions by which social life is ordered and governed. They are ... therefore, what those who wish to govern and regulate the conduct and ideas of others seek to structure and shape.

In other words, meanings have a 'material' existence in that they help organise social practice, they establish norms of behaviour. My examples of masculinities and the passing of name cards in China are both examples of signification organising social practice. Moreover, as Hall indicates, those with power often seek to regulate the impact of meanings on social practice. In other words, dominant modes of making the world meaningful are a fundamental aspect of the processes of hegemony. As Hall (2009: 123) makes clear:

[t]he signification of events is part of what has to be struggled over, for it is the means by which collective social understandings are created — and thus the means by which consent for particular outcomes can be effectively mobilized.

Conclusion

On the basis of Williams' redefinition of culture, cultural studies have gradually come to define culture as the production, circulation, and consumption of meanings. Moreover, we cannot think of culture as a system of signification organising practice as something which happens after reality has occurred, because it is through culture, as an embedded and embodied signifying system, that the reality of ourselves, the reality of our society, is constituted and contested — and always entangled in relations of culture and power.

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3 Sociology of Art and Culture

David Inglis

- Sociology examines the relations between ‘culture’ and ‘society’.
- Cultures are regarded as different ways of constructing reality.
- Culture is shaped by, and shapes, forms of social power and hierarchy.
- Sociology interrogates ideas to do with ‘art’ and ‘artists’.
- Sociology examines the social relations involved in cultural production and consumption.

Introduction

This chapter is about ‘culture’ — what it is, what it does, and why it is so important. Yet the word ‘culture’ can refer to many different things, including the activities of a particular group of people (for example, goth culture), the typical ideas and norms to be found in a particular place (for example, French culture), the attitudes and ways of doing things characteristic of a particular sort of social world (for example the culture of business organisations), and the greatest works of art that humankind has ever created (such as the symphonies of Beethoven, the plays of Shakespeare). The term ‘culture’ thus can refer to wildly different sorts of things. It is frequently noted by scholars that ‘culture’ is a word that is notoriously difficult to pin down. Just as culture seems to be everywhere you look, it also seems to slip through your fingers when you try to get hold of it.

Back in the 1950s, the American anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1963) reviewed all the various meanings of ‘culture’ they could find: the result was 164 different definitions. The literary scholar Raymond Williams (1976) famously noted that ‘culture’ was one of the most complex words in the English language, having a series of meanings that had changed much over time. Among contemporary meanings of ‘culture’ are firstly, ‘high culture’ (meaning great works of art and the values they embody), secondly, personal refinement (such as when we speak of a ‘cultured person’), thirdly, cultural objects (such as books or films, including products that people think of as being part of ‘popular culture’), and fourthly, the ‘whole way of life’ of a particular group of people (for example, New Zealand culture). Rather confusingly, the word ‘culture’ can refer simultaneously to ‘high culture’ *and* ‘popular culture’, to the ways of

thinking and valuing characteristics of *everyone* in a particular society, and the capacities of specific *individuals* (both ‘ordinary’ people and those seen as especially talented ‘geniuses’) who produce ‘great works of art’. Clearly the word ‘culture’ refers to a multitude of things today. It is seemingly inescapable but also needs to be used with great caution.

This chapter is about how sociologists of various types think about culture, and how they see it as connecting to social relations and social order. The relations between sociology and the idea of culture are quite complicated (see Inglis and Hughson (2003) for an extended treatment). What I will offer here is a succinct depiction of some of the main issues that sociology has focused on as regards the cultural elements in human life, and how social life shapes, and in turn is shaped by, ‘culture’. Another way of saying this is: in what ways do sociologists think ‘culture’ and ‘society’ are related to each other? In contemporary ways of thinking, the word ‘art’ and all it refers to, are closely connected to culture (indeed, one understanding of ‘culture’ sees it as being the same as ‘art’ — see Williams 1976), so this chapter will indicate how sociology thinks about ‘art’ too.

We will first look at some of the ideas contemporary sociology inherited from classic sociological thinkers. We will then examine how sociologists think about how cultural products, including artworks, are made, before examining the crucial domain of cultural consumption, and what it reveals about wider social circumstances.

Classical starting points

Different kinds of sociologist have varying views about ‘culture’, ‘art’ and ‘society’, and how they relate to each other, but almost all types of sociologists agree on this point: that without what we call ‘culture’, human societies could not operate, indeed, could not exist. Sociologists of all varieties recognise that humans are a ‘culture-creating’ and ‘culture-using’ species. Humans living together in specific social patterns (conventionally called ‘societies’) create particular sorts of ideas and attitudes, and ways of symbolising these (such as pictures, written language and spoken language). These ideas, attitudes and symbols make up what is usually called ‘culture’ (Inglis and Hughson 2003).

So *humans make culture* but it is also the case that *culture makes humans* too. What this means is that each individual’s thinking and acting is profoundly shaped by the ideas and attitudes (the culture) of the social group (or groups) they grow up in and live their lives within. An individual is never just a purely biological organism, but rather a creature whose thoughts and activities are very much shaped by the cultural forces around them, such forces being creations of

the group(s) — and more broadly, the social order(s) — within which the individual lives. Even the physical body is shaped profoundly by culture. The ways in which a person holds themselves, walks, moves, blows their nose, goes to the toilet and so on, are all very much shaped by the cultural norms of the group they grew up in as children or live within as adults (Mauss 1973).

Different sorts of sociologists debate the degree to which cultural forces shape human biology and biological instincts, but all are agreed that culture has a profound effect on all persons, especially in terms of how they view the world around them and what sense they have of themselves. Much sociological thinking in this regard owes a huge debt to the eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1999, first published in 1787). His philosophy sees each object in the world as having two separate manifestations — on the one hand, there is its *noumenal* side, which is its essence and which exists beyond human perception, and also its *phenomenal* side, which is the object as it appears in human perception. Kant regards the human mind as playing an active role in organising the world that the human being perceives. The mind shapes the phenomenal aspect of things, and thus constitutes the world as we perceive it. Kant (1999) argued that all human minds are alike, and hence the world as perceived by me is the same world as perceived by you — or by anyone else — because our minds process the world in the same ways. However, as sociology developed in the nineteenth century, it shifted away from this universalist view to the claim that there is no noumenal world, only a phenomenal one. Different groups of people are seen as possessing ‘their own’ culture, and it is through this cultural lens that the world not only is *perceived*, but is in fact *constituted*. Simply put, culture shapes each person’s perceived reality.

One of the great works of classical sociology, Émile Durkheim’s (2001) *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, is an application and adaptation of these notions. Durkheim (2001) argues that the perception of the world around individuals is rooted in the cultural structures of the particular groups or societies to which individuals belong. Thus it is the set of ‘collective classifications’ — which define what is good and bad, right and wrong, moral and immoral, and so forth — that make up the group’s ‘culture’. They specify what is perceivable and not perceivable for the members of the group.

Out of this position comes one of the main tenets of sociology today, the notion that all forms of ‘reality’ are cultural fabrications, produced by social conditions (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Particularly important here is the notion that it is a social group’s language which above all shapes how they perceive the world around them. In sociology, as well as other disciplines, the Kantian ideas of the early twentieth century Swiss linguist Ferdinand Saussure have been very influential in this regard. For Saussure (1959: 112), ‘without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula. There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is

distinct before the appearance of language'. That is, the 'reality' perceived within a particular linguistic community is solely a product of language. Language does not point to or reflect a pre-existing reality. Instead, language, the pre-eminent cultural form, creates 'reality', as it is perceived and experienced by the people who use that language.

Such views are also shared by anthropologists (Kuper 1999), but arguably the distinctiveness of sociology rests in the strong emphasis it puts on how 'culture' is connected to different forms of 'social power'. It is one of the central claims of sociology that most forms of human association are hierarchically ordered: there are groups with more power, and groups with less power, and the former endeavour to control the latter. The precise way in which people are hierarchically ordered varies from context to context. Sometimes it is due to primarily inequalities of wealth (rich at the top, poor at the bottom); sometimes it is to do with ethnicity (people of one ethnic group at the top, other ethnic groups at the bottom); often it is to do with sex and gender (men in dominant and women in subordinate positions); and very often it is a mixture of all these factors as well as others (for example, the most powerful people in contemporary Western societies are arguably those who are rich, upper class, white and male). Inequalities among people with regards to power, wealth, prestige and status are all thoroughly bound up with culture. It is the culture of a group that creates these inequalities, seeks to justify them, and also can serve as a resource for challenging them.

For the sociologist, then, culture has both conservative and subversive aspects: it can help maintain existing social inequalities over time, or it can play a role in overturning them, creating new forms of social organisation. Thus particular types of social order ('societies') create specific sorts of cultures; but those cultures can help maintain or change the very social orders that have made them. Sociologists as politically varied as Parsons (1951) and Bourdieu (1990) have emphasised culture's *social order-preserving* capacities, while others have focused more on culture's *socially transformative* abilities (for example those following Gramsci 1971). Whatever the emphasis, all are agreed that both social order and social change create culture, and culture can promote either the social status quo or social transformation; that is, the preservation or alteration of patterns of social inequality.

So far we have seen sociology's twin emphases: on 'reality' being constructed through cultural forms (especially language) that are themselves produced by social organisation, and on social order being organised around power relations. The two themes come together in the idea that culture — and the 'realities' different cultural contexts construct — is itself fundamentally shaped by, and expressive of, social power relations and hierarchies. In the work of two of the most influential classical sociologists, Karl Marx and Max Weber (Löwith

1993), the contention that culture constitutes reality is yoked to the assertion that it is powerful social groups who define cultural categories. Cultural forms — ways of thinking, symbols, cultural products which embody such symbols — are regarded as thoroughly shot through with social power relations. No cultural form is ever ‘innocent’, for each expresses, in a more hidden or more overt way, forms of social power. These are ideas taken up in diverse ways by later thinkers such as Pierre Bourdieu (1992) and Michel Foucault (1984). The interrogation of cultural forms and forces as to what they tell us about, how they express, and how they are implicated within, forms of social power, is perhaps the most distinctive aspect of the sociology of culture and art.

Producing culture

Sociology’s emphasis on how reality is culturally and socially constructed, and how such processes are very much bound up with social power relations, are brought to bear in a key concern for sociologists today, namely how culture is made, and what ramifications the means of making it have for wider social relations. Ever since the pioneering work of the German thinkers Adorno and Horkheimer (1992) in the 1940s, sociology has been concerned with how cultural forms are made on an *industrial* basis in modern society. In Adorno and Horkheimer’s view, the rise of modernity as a radically new type of social order involved a move away from ‘folk culture’ (that is, culture arising organically from social relations within particular groups) towards ‘mass culture’ (cultural forms, such as films, records and TV shows, not made *by* the people but *for* the people). Instead of people making their ‘own’ culture, such as making music at a community dance hall, culture becomes primarily made by a group of specialist producers in the entertainment industries, such as record and film producers. The entertainment industries are truly industries because they mass-produce cultural forms — culture is now made in factory-like conditions, just like other consumer goods such as cars and washing machines. Adorno and Horkheimer (1992) had a very negative view of what they called the ‘culture industry’, believing that these fabricated cultural goods usually required no thought or effort on behalf of the mass audience at which they were aimed. Today, the sociology of cultural production operates with a more open and nuanced sense of how ‘creative industries’ make cultural products (Hesmondhalgh 2007), yet critical perspectives on the potentially socially destructive effects of contemporary media are still proposed by authors working in the Adorno and Horkheimer tradition (for example, Jameson 1992).

Adorno and Horkheimer (1992) drew a strong contrast between the psychologically numbing products of the culture industries (pre-eminent among which at the time were Hollywood films) and psychologically stimulating works of art (such as avant-garde works by composers like Stravinsky and artists like

Picasso). This division between mass or popular culture on the one side (evaluated negatively), and art or high culture on the other (evaluated positively), has been subjected to much criticism since Adorno and Horkheimer's time. Most sociologists today see this divide as embodying assumptions we can no longer easily accept, because such assumptions are typically those of the upper middle classes (people who 'love art'), and sociology cannot naively reproduce in its own thinking the cultural dispositions of one particular social group (Gans 1974).



Figure 3.1 Sculpture on display: who benefits from such work being labelled as 'art'?

This awareness has been partly due to the work of sociologists of art influencing the wider field of the sociology of culture. These authors have typically pulled apart the idea of 'art' as being somehow special and elevated above both other cultural forms and the rest of society. In the contemporary West, common sense says that certain objects are regarded as being clearly and identifiably 'artistic' in nature. It seems that a play by Shakespeare or a painting by Van Gogh is so obviously 'art' that this goes without saying. Some things are just obviously 'artistic' and others are not. Sociology tries to break with such common-sense understandings. Instead, sociologists argue that no object has intrinsically 'artistic' qualities. 'Art' and 'artwork' are labels put onto particular objects by particular people, such as those who have an interest in the object being labelled that way (Becker 1984). This labelling process might be quite unintentional and unconscious on behalf of those doing it. Nonetheless, the labels 'art' and 'artwork' are never neutral: some individuals or groups always stand to gain in

some way by a particular object being labelled as 'art', and another object being denied that label. Sociology therefore sees 'art' as always thoroughly bound up with politics, meant here in its widest sense, referring to conflicts and struggles between different social groups. What counts as 'art', and what counts as not-art, rests not in objects themselves, but in the social contexts and competing definitions of reality proposed by different social groups.

The same applies to who gets labelled as an 'artist' and who does not. To be labelled today as an 'artist' brings many advantages with it, such as power, status and possibly wealth. There is a lot to be gained or lost depending on whether a person gets defined as an 'artist', and whether a large number of people accept that label. Sociologists argue that the idea of the 'artist' which is dominant today — the idea of a highly gifted person, possessed of their own unique vision, who produces 'great works of art' — is a relatively recent and purely Western invention which first appeared in early modernity (Williams 1981). Before this time, the very concept of 'artist' did not exist. The notion of the artist as some type of 'genius' is a relatively recent construction, with Beethoven in the early nineteenth century being one of the first individuals to be labelled this way (DeNora 1995). The intellectual and cultural movement of that time (known as Romanticism) invented a new cult of the artist, seeing this figure as possessed of semi-divine qualities. The Romantics created these ideas in order to protest against what they saw as the increasingly dreary nature of life in rapidly developing industrial-capitalist society, a social order seen to be based around the search for profits rather than human or religious values (Hauser 1982). The 'artistic genius' was set up as the hero who would struggle against this dehumanising society. So laden with these sorts of assumptions is the word 'artist' that most sociologists today prefer to use the more neutral phrase 'cultural producer' to describe people who make cultural objects, and 'cultural production' to replace notions of 'making art'.

The Romantics were also largely responsible for developing the idea of 'art' as a special, almost holy realm, that stands outside and above of ordinary society but the irony here was that the new type of person called the 'artist' never actually stood outside of — let alone above — wider society. During this period, the institution of patronage — where the painter, sculptor, composer or poet was directly commissioned by a buyer to produce a particular piece for them — went into decline. People now labelled 'artists' were increasingly compelled to produce works for a market in which their wares might or might not be bought (Zolberg 1990). The new view of the uniquely talented artist, estranged from wider society, is thus connected to the relatively insecure conditions of employment faced by many 'artists' from this time onwards.

This raises the issue of the social and (especially) economic relations that the artist (cultural producer) has to operate within. Far from standing above

mundane social relations, sociologists see cultural producers as thoroughly embedded within them. For example, the ‘production of culture’ perspective, which is an important school of thought in US sociology of culture today, tries to demystify what happens when an ‘artist’ makes ‘art’ by seeing this process as entirely comparable ‘to the humdrum production of ordinary objects’ like hairdryers or tables (Coser 1978). The ‘production of culture’ school also endeavours to locate the cultural producer within networks of social relations. Doing this does not just stress the limitations placed on those individuals by other people, but also identifies the enabling aspects of the social relationships they operate within. As Becker (1974: 767) remarks:

[t]hink, with respect to any work of art, of all the activities that must be carried on for that work to appear as it finally does. For a symphony orchestra to give a concert, for instance, instruments must have been invented, manufactured and maintained, a notation must have been devised and music composed using that notation, people must have learned to play the notated notes on the instruments, times and places for rehearsal must have been provided, ads for the concert must have been placed, publicity arranged and tickets sold ...

This ‘de-centring’ of the ‘artist’ demonstrates that ‘art’ is always collectively rather than individually produced, even if the idea of the ‘artist’ dominant today suggests the making of art is a completely individualised process. The making of art always takes place within ‘art worlds’ (as Becker puts it) or ‘fields of cultural production’ (as Bourdieu puts it). In his classic book, Becker (1984) showed that *Art Worlds* are very much characterised by ‘gate-keeping’ practices, with powerful players, both institutional (such as major galleries) and individual (such as well-known art critics), constantly labelling and re-labelling certain persons and objects as ‘artists’ and ‘real art’ or their opposites. In a vision that stresses more the unconscious and semi-conscious reasons compelling such people to see and act as they do, Bourdieu (1993) regards the ‘field of cultural production’ as a site of constant conflict and struggles between more powerful and less powerful groups. Far from a placid world of individual creation, the world of art is seen by sociologists to be very like those contexts where other forms of cultural production occur, such as film and television — worlds characterised by constant conflict between different people, each struggling to maintain or increase their relative position in the field. The Romantic view of the artist as lonely genius is comprehensively stripped away.

Consuming culture

Having looked at how art and culture are produced, we can now turn to how they are *consumed*, ‘cultural consumption’ being the favoured term among

sociologists for how individuals and groups read, watch, listen, and otherwise receive and respond to cultural products.

For the sociologist, cultural consumption practices are patterned, in that they reflect, and can help sustain, wider social hierarchies. Contemporary sociology here follows the claim of Karl Mannheim (1956: 184) that in societies where ‘the political and social order basically rests upon the distinction between “higher” and “lower” human types, an analogous distinction is also made between “higher” and “lower” objects of knowledge or aesthetic enjoyment’. In other words, in a society where there are different social classes which are hierarchically ordered — upper classes at the top, middle classes in the middle, lower classes at the bottom — then there will be a ‘high culture’ associated with, made by and consumed by elites, and a ‘low culture’ associated with and consumed by (although not necessarily made by) the lower classes. The distinction between ‘high culture’ (or ‘art’) and ‘low culture’ (popular or mass culture) is ultimately based on the divisions between social classes, between dominant and dominated, rulers and ruled, people who are socially defined as being ‘refined’ and those defined as being ‘crude’ (this is the view set out at length in Bourdieu 1992).

The contemporary American sociologist Paul DiMaggio (1986) has examined the historical creation of the separation between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture. He has looked at how, from the nineteenth century onwards, such cultures were defined to be different from each other, and how that difference was reinforced by keeping each culture separate from the other (such as containing them in separate physical locations of display and consumption). At the start of that century, there was not a clear distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultural forms. Productions of Shakespeare appeared in the same theatres as variety shows involving comedians, clowns and jugglers, and performances of Mozart could share the bill alongside folk music and popular ballads. However, by the end of the century, the upper classes in Western countries had marked off a distinctive cultural territory now called ‘the arts’. Museums, concert halls, galleries and other places for ‘high culture’ were erected, with only cultural forms defined to be real ‘art’ being allowed in. This was how special (and specialist) ‘art worlds’ were created, aimed almost exclusively at middle- and upper-class consumers. Such places became like temples or churches — places to look at and listen to ‘art’ in hushed and reverential ways.

According to the influential account of Pierre Bourdieu (1992), it was in this way that the ideas of ‘art’ and ‘high culture’ were reinforced, making them seem natural and inevitable, even when they were not natural but in fact social fabrications. In addition, such ideas came to shape profoundly the cultural consumption patterns of the higher social classes, involving activities like going to art galleries and the opera. The lower classes meanwhile, if not actively

excluded from such locations, felt they would be uncomfortable within them, and so excluded themselves. The consumption of ‘mass culture’ (the products of the culture industries) came to seem ‘natural’ for the lower classes to consume, even though this had nothing to do with nature and everything to do with how social order and culture were organised hierarchically.

According to Bourdieu (1992), an individual’s cultural consumption is very much dictated by how much ‘cultural capital’ that person possesses. That in turn is highly influenced by childhood socialisation, both home-life and school-life. Someone who is socialised in a typically upper or upper-middle class domestic situation will have the products and activities of ‘high culture’ all around them — like piano or ballet lessons — and so will feel comfortable with such forms of culture in later life. However, someone who was not brought up in such a way will feel much more uncomfortable with such things, either wanting to be part of such a life but feeling intimidated by it (the characteristic fate of the lower-middle-class person) or perplexed by it and wanting to reject it (the likely attitude of working class people). The less cultural capital one has, the more one will think poetry is a waste of time and opera is unpleasant noise.

Bourdieu also argued that the same sorts of processes happen in formal education (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). He argued that the more of a typically upper- or upper-middle-class education a person experiences (such as going to an elite private school), the more cultural capital they will possess and the more they will like ‘art’ and dislike so-called ‘mass culture’. Conversely, the more of a typically working class education a person has (such as going to a poorly resourced state school), the less cultural capital they will have, and so the more they will find most ‘art’ pointless and pretentious, and the more likely they are to embrace ‘mass culture’ like television game shows and soap operas. Thus a person’s tastes are never purely individual in nature but are strongly socially shaped, particularly by childhood and adolescent socialisation, into the cultural dispositions typical of the social class of their parents. Whether or not a particular cultural product — be it a Picasso or a Bruce Willis film — ‘speaks’ to you or repels you, is to a very large degree dependent on your social class background and the amount of cultural capital it has given you.

For Bourdieu (1992), this is one very important reason why social inequalities get reproduced in contemporary societies. The higher classes consume cultural products that are socially defined as being more refined and legitimate, whereas the lower classes consume products that are defined — especially by the higher classes — as crude and illegitimate. This gives the higher classes a great deal of cultural power to exercise over the lower classes, this is part of the overall class struggle whereby the dominant classes retain control over the dominated classes.

Bourdieu's ideas are currently the most influential ones in the sociology of cultural consumption (Gronow 1997). However, they are highly contested, being variously described as outdated (having originated in the 1960s), too deterministic (that is, they reduce acts of cultural consumption far too strongly to a person's class background), and leaving little room for personal idiosyncrasies or non-class-based tastes (Lahire 2010). How consumption can be seen as a creative and even socially resistant act (de Certeau 1984) is a consideration mostly absent from Bourdieu's vision.

The liveliest debate in this field today concerns the issue of the 'cultural omnivore' (Peterson and Kern 1997). Advocates of this idea claim that cultural distinctions between high and low culture are not as clear-cut as Bourdieu claimed, that social classes do not simply have 'their own' cultures any more, and that people today are, on the whole, more culturally 'omnivorous' in that they blend and mix together different sorts of cultural forms in new and eclectic ways (for example, watching soccer *and* going to the opera). However, those following Bourdieu respond that only upper-class individuals, possessed of relatively high levels of cultural capital, can engage in these mixing-and-matching forms of cultural consumption, whereas lower-class individuals lack the necessary resources, especially as regards having enough cultural capital, to do this (Inglis 2005).

The debate about cultural omnivorousness rages on. What it points to is how cultural consumption patterns reveal broader issues of social structure and hierarchy. Do we today live in 'late modernity' (Bauman 2000), where individuals are freer than ever to create their own identities, or in a primarily class-based social structure that would be familiar to our grandparents? Whatever the answer, part of it will be provided by the sociological analysis of art and culture. Ultimately, the sociology of art and culture is never just the study of cultural production and consumption, however interesting these may be in themselves. It is always in one way or another about posing questions concerning broader social patterns, the ways in which human life is organised, and how social hierarchies either are maintained or are transformed. The sociologist of art and/or culture is the sociologist *par excellence*, seeking to discern the broader social picture by examining fine-grained cultural details.

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Part II: Key Theory

Introduction to Part II

Bruce Cohen

As one of my colleagues is fond of saying, ‘without social theory you are walking through life blind’. Social theory is a set of ideas which attempt to explain how and why structures, interactions and processes in the social world have developed historically and continue to exist today. If we are to gain a more coherent and systematic understanding of society and its workings we need to be able to understand, articulate and apply social theory to it. Cultural studies have drawn on a number of key theories which are outlined in the chapters that follow. Students should be aware that, while sets of theories or ‘schools of thought’ are grouped together due to distinct commonalities in the approach of individual scholars, this is an artificial categorisation which can, at times, hold together some divergent interests and ideas. It is also worth noting that this section does not include *all* of the important theory within cultural studies, rather it presents the main macro-theory on the subject; that is, the theory can be generally applied across the discipline and to most, if not all, sub-topics in cultural studies. Additionally, there are important scholars who have written and developed more specific theoretical ideas within certain areas (as we shall see in the third part of this book). Nevertheless, the theory presented here comprises the backbone of the discipline, theory that scholars writing on particularly sub-topics will tend to mirror or develop in their own work.

Douglas Kellner begins this section by surveying the classic work of the Frankfurt School and their Marxist critique of the culture industry in Chapter 4. For the Frankfurt School, capitalist ideology was disseminated through mass-produced culture such as films, popular music, and radio and television programmes. These standardised and formulaic items of popular culture ‘duped’ the masses into passive acceptance of a society built on fundamental class inequalities; the culture industry promoted a ‘false consciousness’ amongst the workers where conformity and commodity fetishism replaced the possibility for critical examination of real-life chances in such a society. With media culture continuing to operate in the interests of giant corporations and advertising firms today, Kellner argues that the Frankfurt School’s ideological critique still remains highly relevant.

In contrast, the work of British Cultural Studies’ scholars offered a set of challenges to the highly determinist approach of the Frankfurt School. As outlined by Jeff Lewis and Belinda Lewis in Chapter 5, British Cultural Studies was strongly influenced by neo-Marxist writers such as Althusser and Gramsci. Rather

than following a traditional Marxist analysis which conceptualised power as wholly concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie, such neo-Marxists saw power as often ‘negotiated’ between social classes. While the bourgeoisie maintained total authority and control of the ideological state apparatus, they were sometimes forced to give up elements of their power to the working classes so as to maintain their overall dominance in capitalist society (for example, we now occasionally see people from working class backgrounds achieving senior roles in public and private sector organisations as well as in politics). Building on Raymond Williams’ challenge to elitist notions of ‘culture’, this idea of ‘negotiated’ power led to a blossoming of research on audience interactions with cultural texts, both in terms of the reception of media texts from the culture industry as well as the potential for the ordinary people (particularly the working classes) to produce their own cultural texts — these texts were conceptualised as ‘texts of resistance’ to hegemony. As Lewis and Lewis note, these developments led to the formal beginnings of cultural studies as an academic discipline and the significant research undertaken by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). The authors rightly state that the CCCS was an institution that ‘exerted an influence on the humanities and social sciences that was vastly disproportionate to its size and local constituency’.

One of the CCCS’s most significant contributions to cultural studies is their work on youth culture and subcultures; their subcultural theory is surveyed by Andy Bennett in Chapter 6. Following the British Cultural Studies’ neo-Marxian conception of culture, subcultures were seen as an authentic text of resistance. The ‘spectacular subcultures’ of the mods, rockers, teds, skins and punks were a collective response and appropriate solution by working class youth to their alienation from both post-war consumer society and their ‘parent culture’ (that is, their working class roots). While such theory continues to be debated within youth cultural studies, Bennett draws our attention to alternative approaches to understanding youth cultural groupings brought about by the fragmentation of the cultural sphere in late modernity. ‘Post subcultural’ theory has seen the rise of a number of alternative conceptual approaches including ‘neo-tribe’, ‘scene’, and ‘lifestyle’. Rather than being class-based, static and authentic groupings of resistance, these approaches suggest we should now consider youth groupings to be fluid, apolitical, and centred on shared practices of consumption.

Arguably the most famous piece of CCCS research on subcultures was Dick Hebdige’s work on the punk subculture. Hebdige’s book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) remains a classic and highly influential piece of work for scholars in sociology, youth studies and related fields. Influenced by semiotics, Hebdige argued that the punk subculture appropriated items of consumer culture and subverted them through their use of style; that is, the meaning of the object was altered to symbolise a resistance to hegemonic society (the classic example was the safety pin — it was theorised that the punk

subculture symbolically subverted the dominant meaning of the mundane safety pin through wearing it as an item of body jewellery, in this way the subculture was rejecting the hegemonic notions of consumer society). Chapter 7 gives a detailed introduction to semiotics — the science of signs — as it is used in popular culture. As Merja Bauters points out, media texts such as films, television and radio programmes, and advertising can be regarded as similar to a language; there are levels of meaning which can be imbued in a given word or phrase. These ideas on the signification and meaning of cultural texts were a strong influence on British Cultural Studies' scholars and remain an important influence in cultural studies today.

In contrast to the mainly modernist social theory of the previous chapters, in Chapter 8 Laurence Simmons discusses postmodern theory and its influence on cultural studies scholars and cultural texts. Challenging the 'grand narratives' of modernism by suggesting that recent cultural forms constitute a decisive aesthetic and ideological break, our attention is drawn to a number of key writers on the subject including Jean Baudrillard, Fredric Jameson and Jürgen Habermas. While the arguments of postmodernism in many academic disciplines may now appear (ironically) out of date, students should be aware that in the study of culture, such ideas remain of some significance to cultural producers as well as cultural theorists.

This section on key theory is rounded off with a very interesting contribution from Nick Perry on cultural studies in Australia and New Zealand. Unlike the Frankfurt School and British Cultural Studies, for example, Perry points out in Chapter 9 that we cannot speak of some mythical 'Australasian tradition', rather what is shared are certain commonalities in our cultural studies academies. One of these is a pragmatic and policy-orientated approach to research — for example, the Australia academy has been particularly active in 'cultural precinct' initiatives, performing research that considers the cultural, leisure and consumption needs in the regeneration of city centres. Other commonalities include a critical engagement with indigenous texts and the continuing effects of colonialism, as well as what Perry terms 'cerebral larrikinism'. The chapter concludes by realistically examining the implications of a lack of size of the cultural studies academy in New Zealand compared to its bigger cousin to the west. While it was not an explicit intention of this book, it is nevertheless hoped that something significant has been added to New Zealand's size and contribution to the discipline through the present publication.

4 The Frankfurt School and the Culture Industry

Douglas Kellner

- The Frankfurt School developed an interdisciplinary social theory combining sociology, psychology, cultural studies and political economy to produce a Critical Theory of contemporary society.
- The Frankfurt School's ideology and cultural criticism critiqued the key functions of culture and ideology within contemporary capitalist societies.
- The dialectics of culture mean that culture could be both a force of social conformity and opposition.
- The Frankfurt School critiqued mass culture and the culture industry, as well as aesthetic reflections on the emancipatory potential of high art.
- Within the context of critical social theory, the Frankfurt School offers approaches to the study of culture and communication which engage the political economy of culture and communication, the analysis of texts, and the study of audience reception.

Introduction

The term 'Frankfurt School' refers to the work of members of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (Institute for Social Research) which was established in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1923 as the first Marxist-oriented research centre affiliated with a major German university. Under its director, Carl Grünberg, the institute's work in the 1920s tended to be empirical, historical and oriented towards problems of the European working class movement.

Max Horkheimer became director of the institute in 1930, and gathered around him many talented theorists, including Erich Fromm, Franz Neumann, Herbert Marcuse and T. W. Adorno. Under Horkheimer, the Institute sought to develop an interdisciplinary social theory that could serve as an instrument of social transformation. The work of this era was a synthesis of philosophy and social theory, combining sociology, psychology, cultural studies and political economy in order to produce a Critical Theory of society, hence the Frankfurt group were subsequently identified as 'critical theorists'. The inner circle of the group were radicals and Jews; thus, with the rise of Hitler and fascism in Germany, these

intellectuals emigrated to the US in 1934. They initially set up an Institute at Columbia University, but later dispersed, with many going to the West Coast and others returning to Germany after the Second World War.

The Frankfurt School's analyses of the functions of culture, ideology, and the mass media in contemporary societies constitute one of its most valuable legacies. The critical theorists excelled as critics of both so-called 'high culture' and 'mass culture' while producing many important texts in these areas. Their work is distinguished by the close connection between social theory and cultural critique, and by their ability to contextualise culture within social environments and struggles. In particular, their theory of culture was bound up with analysis of the dialectic of Enlightenment (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972). Culture — once a refuge of beauty and truth — was falling prey, they believed, to tendencies toward rationalisation, standardisation, and conformity which they saw as a consequence of the triumph of the instrumental rationality that was coming to pervade and structure ever more aspects of life. Thus, while culture once cultivated individuality, it was now promoting conformity, and was a crucial part of 'the totally administered society' that was producing 'the end of the individual' (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972).

Their analysis of the fate of culture in modernity was part and parcel of the Frankfurt School's pessimism concerning the rise of the totally administered society in its fascist, democratic state capitalist, and state communist forms. Yet the group continued to privilege culture as an important, and often overlooked, source of social knowledge, as well as a potential form of social criticism and opposition. As Adorno (1967: 30) once wrote:

[t]he task of [cultural] criticism must be not so much to search for the particular interest-groups to which cultural phenomena are to be assigned, but rather to decipher the general social tendencies which are expressed in these phenomena and through which the most powerful interests realize themselves. Cultural criticism must become social physiognomy. The more the whole divests itself of all spontaneous elements, is socially mediated and filtered, is 'consciousness', the more it becomes 'culture'.

This passage points both to the Frankfurt School's critical theory position that administered culture was coming to play ever more fundamental roles in social production and reproduction, and to the position that analysis of culture can provide crucial insights into social processes. Critical theory thus assigned a central role to cultural criticism and ideology critique precisely because of the key functions of culture and ideology within contemporary capitalist societies. This focus on culture — which corresponded to some of the Institute members' deepest interests — took the form of a systematic inquiry into the different types, forms, and effects of culture and ideology in contemporary capitalist societies. These ranged from

theoretical reflections on the dialectics of culture (which are the ways in which culture could be both a force of social conformity and opposition), to critiques of mass culture and aesthetic reflections on the emancipatory potential of high art.

Dialectics of culture

In addition to pioneering attempts to develop a sociology of literature, the Institute was among the first to apply the Marxian method of ideology critique to the products of mass culture. Whereas critical theorists like Horkheimer and Marcuse rarely analysed artefacts of mass culture, others like Adorno and Lowenthal developed both global theories and critiques, while carrying out detailed studies of what they came to call the ‘culture industry’. Adorno began the Institute critique of mass culture in his 1932 article *On the Social Situation of Music* (Adorno 1978), and he continued it in a series of studies of popular music and other forms of mass culture over the next decades (see Buck-Morss 1977). Adorno initially criticised popular music production for its commodification, rationalisation, fetishism, and reification of musical materials — thus applying the key neo-Marxist social categories to culture — as well as the ‘regression’ in hearing produced by popular music. The framework for his critique was thus the Institute theory of the spread of rationalisation and reification into every aspect of social life and the resultant decline of the individual.

A remarkable individual on the margins of the Frankfurt group, Walter Benjamin, contested the tendency to sharply separate ‘authentic art’ from mass culture and to valorise one at the expense of the other. For Benjamin (1969), mechanical reproduction (his term for the processes of social rationalisation described by Adorno and others in the Institute) robbed high art of its ‘aura’ — that is, the aesthetic power of the work of art related to its earlier functions in magic and religious cults — and undermined its status as a spiritual object in the religions of art celebrated in movements like Romanticism or in ideals such as ‘art for art’s sake’. In these cases, the ‘aura’ of the work derived from its supposed authenticity, its uniqueness and individuality. In an era of mechanical reproduction, however, art appeared as commodities like other mass-produced items, and lost its special power as a transcendent object — especially in mass-produced objects like photography and film with their photo negatives and techniques of mass reproduction. Benjamin experienced this process — which he believed to be irreversible — ambivalently:

[f]or the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an even greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the ‘authentic’ print makes no sense. Yet the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total

function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice — politics. (Benjamin 1969: 224)



Figure 4.1 Mechanised reproduction: a threat to the ‘authenticity’ of cultural artefacts

While Adorno tended to criticise precisely the most mechanically mediated works of mass culture for their standardisation and loss of aesthetic quality — and celebrate those works that most steadfastly resisted commodification and mechanical reproduction — Benjamin saw progressive features in high art’s loss of its auratic quality and its becoming more politicised. Such art, he claimed, assumed more of an ‘exhibition value’ than a cultic or religious value, and thus demystified its reception. Furthermore, he believed that the proliferation of mass art — especially through film — would bring images of the contemporary world to the masses and would help raise political consciousness by encouraging scrutiny of the world, as well as by bringing socially critical images to millions of spectators. Benjamin (1969: 236) wrote that:

[b]y close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so

that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling.

Benjamin claimed that the mode of viewing film broke with the reverential mode of aesthetic perception and awe encouraged by the bourgeois cultural elite who promoted the religion of art. Montage in film, its 'shock effects,' the conditions of mass spectatorship, the discussion of issues which film viewing encouraged, and other features of the cinematic experience, produced, in his view, a new sort of social and political experience of art which eroded the private, solitary, and contemplative aesthetic experience encouraged by high culture and its priests. Against the contemplation of high art, the 'shock effects' of film produce a mode of 'distraction' which Benjamin believed makes possible a 'heightened presence of mind' and cultivation of 'expert' audiences able to examine and criticise film and society (Benjamin 1969: 237–41).

In some essays on popular music, and later in his famous studies (with Max Horkheimer) of the culture industry, Adorno attempted to provide a critical response to Benjamin's optimistic appraisal of the socially critical potential of popular art. In a 1938 essay, *On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening*, Adorno analysed in detail the various ways that music performers, conductors, instruments, technical performance, and the arrangement of works were fetishised, and how this signified the ways that exchange-value was predominating over use-value in musical production and reception — thus pointing again to how capitalism was able to control aspects of life once resistant to commercial concerns. In Adorno's (1982: 281) words:

[t]he works which are the basis of the fetishization and become cultural goods experience constitutional changes as a result. They become vulgarized. Irrelevant consumption destroys them. Not merely do the few things played again and again wear out, like the Sistine Madonna in the bedroom, but reification affects their internal structure. They are transformed into a conglomeration of irruptions which are impressed on the listeners by climax and repetition, while the organization of the whole makes no impression whatsoever.

In this situation, musical listening regresses to mere reaction to familiar and standardised formulas (Adorno 1982: 285), which increase social conformity and domination. Regression closes off

the possibility of a different and oppositional music. Regressive, too, is the role which contemporary mass music plays in the psychological household of its victims. They are not merely turned away from more important music, but they are confirmed in their neurotic stupidity, quite irrespective of how their musical capacities are related to the specific musical culture of earlier social phases. The assent to hit songs and debased cultural goods belongs to the same complex of symptoms as do those faces of which one no longer knows whether

the film has alienated them from reality or reality has alienated them from the film, as they wrench open a great formless mouth with shining teeth in a voracious smile, while the tired eyes are wretched and lost above. Together with sport and film, mass music and the new listening help to make escape from the whole infantile milieu impossible. The sickness has a preservative function. (Adorno 1982: 287)

Adorno's infamous attack on jazz should be read in the context of his theory of musical fetishism and regression (1967: 119). For Adorno, the often faddish taste for jazz also exhibited features of fetishism, reification, and regression that he observed in other forms of popular music. Contrary to popular belief, Adorno argued, jazz was as standardised, commercialised, and formulaic as other kinds of popular music and encouraged cultural conformity (to dominant models, tastes and so forth) in its devotees as much as other forms of mass culture. Its seeming spontaneity and improvisation are themselves calculated in advance and the range of what is permissible is as circumscribed as in clothes or other realms of fashion.

Adorno and Horkheimer also attempted to counter Benjamin's optimistic appraisal of the progressive elements of film through the critique of Hollywood film production. Film in the culture industry was organised like industrial production and utilised standardised formulas and conventional production techniques to mass-produce films for purely commercial — rather than cultural — purposes. Films reproduced reality as it was and thus helped individuals to adjust and conform to the new conditions of industrial and mass society: 'they hammer into every brain the old lesson that continuous friction, the breaking down of all individual resistance, is the condition of life in this society. Donald Duck in the cartoons and the unfortunate in real life get their thrashing so that the audience can learn to take their own punishment' (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972: 138). Finally, films 'are so designed that quickness, powers of observation, and experience are undeniably needed to apprehend them at all; yet sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts. Even though the effort required for his response is semi-automatic, no scope is left for the imagination. Those who are so absorbed by the world of the movie — by its images, gestures, and words — that they are unable to supply what really makes it a world, do not have to dwell on particular points of its mechanics during a screening. All the other films and products of the entertainment industry which they have seen have taught them what to expect; they react automatically' (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972: 126–27).

During the late 1930s and the 1940s when Adorno was developing his critique of popular music (and culture), he was working with Paul Lazarsfeld on some of the first academic studies of the communications industry, and thus was being exposed to some of the more debased and commercialised forms of popular music (Adorno 1969). Yet while the Frankfurt School theorists generally criticised mass culture, they did not surrender the belief in the emancipatory potential of high culture. In an

important essay titled 'The Affirmative Character of Culture', Herbert Marcuse (1968) provides a dialectical analysis of bourgeois high culture and the ways in which it is both a vehicle of emancipation and of mystification of existing social reality. In his view, culture provides a higher compensatory realm for escape and diversion from the cares of everyday life, as well as a refuge which preserves higher ideals and claims to freedom, happiness, and a better life denied in the existing organisation of society. Hence, bourgeois culture is 'affirmative' of higher cultural ideals which provide both ideological and potentially critical and emancipatory functions.

Many later analyses of 'high culture' within the Frankfurt School preserved this tension, seeing both regressive and progressive elements within the aesthetic dimension. Yet the group tended to ascribe the higher, more progressive functions of culture to 'art' (namely, 'high culture') and its more debased ideological functions to mass culture. 'Authentic art' for Critical Theory contained a preserve of both individuality and happiness, as well as a source of critical knowledge. Further, an 'element of resistance is inherent in the most aloof art. Resistance to the restraints imposed by society, now and then flooding forth in political revolution, has been steadily fermenting in the private sphere' (Horkheimer 1972: 274). Horkheimer (1972: 275) argued that art resists incorporation in the existing society while providing standards and ideals which can criticise its limitations:

works of art — objective products of the mind detached from the context of the practical world — harbor principles through which the world that voice them appears alien and false. Not only Shakespeare's wrath and melancholy, but the detached humanism of Goethe's poetry as well, and even Proust's devoted absorption in ephemeral features of *mondanité*, awaken memories of a freedom that make prevailing standards appear narrow-minded and barbarous. Art, since it became autonomous, has preserved the utopia that evaporated from religion.

Horkheimer celebrates the classics of bourgeois high culture as 'authentic art'. With the advance of industrialism and mass society, however, the private sphere and the individual to which bourgeois art appealed have become steadily menaced, as has the family which provided a sphere of intimacy and support. With the rise of industrial society, the family in turn loses its power and 'even well-to-do parents educate their children not so much as their heirs as for a coming adjustment to mass culture' (Horkheimer 1972: 276). At this point, Horkheimer (1972: 277–78) presents a critique of mass culture that will characterise the Institute's work:

[t]he gradual dissolution of the family, the transformation of personal life into leisure and of leisure into routines supervised to the last detail, into the pleasures of the ball park and the movie, the best seller and the radio, has brought about the disappearance of the inner life. Long before culture was replaced by these manipulated

pleasures, it had already assumed an escapist character. Men had fled into a private conceptual world and rearranged their thoughts when the time was ripe for rearranging reality. The inner life and the ideal had become conservative factors. But with the loss of his ability to take this kind of refuge — an ability that thrives neither in slums nor in modern settlements — man has lost his power to conceive a world different from that in which he lives. This other world was that of art.

Mass culture for the Institute merely reproduced the status quo and thus helped to reproduce personality structures which would accept the world as it is. High culture, by contrast, is conceptualised as at least a potential force of enlightenment and emancipation. For Adorno, however, only the most radically avant-garde works could provide genuine aesthetic experience. Against the false harmonies of kitsch and affirmative art, Adorno defended the ‘de-aestheticization’ (*Entkunstung*) of art, its throwing off of the false veils of harmony and beauty in favour of ugliness, dissonance, fragmentation, and negation which he believed provided a more truthful vision of contemporary society, and a more emancipatory stance for socially critical art. In Adorno’s view, art had become increasingly problematic in a society ruled by the culture industry and art markets, and to remain ‘authentic’, art must therefore radically resist commodification and integration. This required avant-garde techniques which would enhance art’s shock-value, and its critical, emancipatory effects. In his volumes of critical writings, Adorno always championed precisely those most negative and dissonant artists: Kafka and Beckett in literature, Schoenberg and Berg in music, Giacometti in sculpture, and Celan in poetry. Through de-aestheticisation, autonomous art would undermine specious harmonisations and reconciliation with the existing world, which could not legitimately take place, Adorno believed, until the world was radically changed.

Yet the Frankfurt School is probably best known for their critiques of mass culture and communication, a topic we now turn to in their theory of the culture industry.

Critical theory and the culture industry

The origins of the critical theorist’s approach to mass culture and communication are visible in Adorno’s early writings on music (see above), although the Frankfurt group did not really develop the theory of the culture industry until their emigration to the United States in the 1930s. During their exile period from the mid-1930s through the 1940s, members of the group witnessed the proliferation of mass communications and culture and the rise of the consumer society, experiencing at first-hand the advent to cultural power of the commercial broadcasting systems, President Roosevelt’s remarkable use of radio for political persuasion, and the ever-growing popularity of cinema during a period in which from 85 to 110 million Americans paid to see ‘the movies’ each week. Further, they experienced as well

the wide-spread popularity of magazines, comic books, cheap fiction, and the other flora and fauna of the new mass-produced culture.

From their vantage point in California during the 1940s — where many of their exiled compatriots from Germany worked for the film industry — Adorno and Horkheimer were able to experience how business interests dominated mass culture and could observe the fascination that the entertainment industries exerted within the emerging media and consumer society. Marcuse, Lowenthal, and others, who worked in Washington during this period for the Office of War Information and the US intelligence services, were able to observe government use of mass communications as instruments of political propaganda (see Kellner 1998). The critical theorists thus came to see what they called the ‘culture industry’ as a central part of a new configuration of capitalist modernity which used culture, advertising, mass communications, and new forms of social control to induce consent to and reproduce the new forms of capitalist society. The production and transmission of media spectacles which transmit ideology and consumerism through the means of allegedly ‘popular entertainment’ and information were, they believed, a central mechanism through which contemporary society came to dominate the individual.

Adorno and Horkheimer adopted the term ‘culture industry’, as opposed to concepts like ‘popular culture’ or ‘mass culture’, because they wanted to resist notions that products of the culture industry emanated from the masses (that is, from the people). They saw the culture industry as being an administered culture, imposed from above, as instruments of indoctrination and social control. The term ‘culture industry’ thus contains a dialectical irony typical of the style of Frankfurt School critical theory: culture, as traditionally valorised, is supposed to be opposed to industry and expressive of individual creativity while providing a repository of humanising values. In the culture industry, however, culture has come to function as a mode of ideological domination and social control rather than of humanisation or emancipation.

The culture industry was perceived as the culmination of a historical process in which technology and scientific organisation and administration came to dominate thought and experience. Although Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) carry out a radical questioning of Marxism and the development of an alternative philosophy of history and theory of society in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, their theory of the culture industry provides a neo-Marxian account of mass media and culture which helps explain both the ways in which the culture industry reproduce capitalist societies and why socialist revolutions failed to take place in these societies. In this sense, the Institute theory of ‘culture industry as mass deception’ provides a rebuttal both to Lukács’ theory of revolution and ‘class consciousness’, and to Brecht’s and Benjamin’s belief that the new forces of mass communications — especially radio and film — could serve as instruments of technological progress and social enlightenment which could be turned against the capitalist relations of

production and could be used as instruments of political mobilisation and struggle (Kellner 1989).

For Adorno and Horkheimer, by contrast, these new technologies were used as instruments of ideological mystification and class domination. Against Lukács (1972) and others who argued that capitalist society necessarily radicalised the working class and produced class consciousness, Adorno and Horkheimer could argue that the culture industry inhibits the development of class consciousness by providing the ruling political and economic forces with a powerful instrument of social control. The conception of the culture industry therefore provides a model of a technically advanced capitalist society which mobilises support for its institutions, practices, and values *from below* making class-consciousness more difficult to attain than before. Using Gramsci's terminology (1971), the culture industry reproduces capitalist hegemony over the working class by engineering *consent* to the existing society, and thus establishing a socio-psychological basis for social integration. Whereas fascism destroyed civil society (or the 'public sphere') through politicising mediated institutions, or utilising force to suppress all dissent, the culture industry coaxes individuals into the privacy of their own home, or movie theatre, producing consumers-spectators of media events and escapist entertainment who are being subtly indoctrinated into dominant ideologies.



Figure 4.2 Mass culture: standardised and formulaic

For the Frankfurt School, mass culture and communications therefore stand in the centre of leisure activity, are important agents of socialisation and mediators of political reality, and should thus be seen as major institutions of contemporary societies with a variety of economic, political, cultural and social effects.

Furthermore, the critical theorists investigated the cultural industry politically as a form of integration of the working class into capitalist societies. The Frankfurt School theorists were among the first neo-Marxian groups to examine the effects of mass culture and the rise of the consumer society on the working classes, the class that were to be the instrument of revolution in the classical Marxian scenario. They also analysed the ways that the culture industry and consumer society were stabilising contemporary capitalism and accordingly sought new strategies for political change, agencies of political transformation, and models for political emancipation that could serve as norms of social critique and goals for political struggle.

Like every theoretical conception, the notion of the culture industry was a product of its historical period and its insights and limitations result primarily from the fact that it theorised features of a past historical conjuncture. The Institute's conception of the role of mass culture and communication was first shaped in the period of Nazi Germany where they witnessed Hitler's extraordinary use of mass communications and fascist spectacles. Obviously, the experience of fascism shaped the Critical Theorists' views of the rise of a behemoth state and cultural apparatus combined with an eclipse of democracy, individuality, and what they saw as authentic art. And in exile in the United States, they observed President Roosevelt's impressive use of the media and the propagandistic uses of the mass media during World War II. Consequently, political use and control of the media during conditions of warfare, with an enlarged wartime state and subordinate wartime economy, coupled with capitalist control of the entertainment industries, provided the historical roots of the Institute model of the culture industry as instruments of social control. Indeed, the media under this type of militarised social system and war conditions — whether liberal-democratic, fascist, or state socialist — tend to be rather one-dimensional and propagandistic. Moreover, the Critical Theory model of the media and society also rather accurately described certain dominant trends and effects during the post-World War II Cold War period when the media were enlisted in the anti-communist crusade and when media content was subject to tight control and censorship — a situation signalled by Horkheimer and Adorno's allusions to 'purges' (1972: 123).

Critique and contemporary relevance

The culture industry theory was thus developed in the United States during the heyday of the press, radio, and cinema as dominant cultural forms; it was published just before the first wave of the introduction of television, whose importance Adorno and Horkheimer, and other members of their group, anticipated. Not only did the Critical Theorists provide an early model of critical communications research, but they were also among the first to see the importance of mass communications and culture for social theory, and influenced some of the early

attempts to incorporate such themes into critical social theory, influencing C. Wright Mills, David Riesman, Jürgen Habermas, and other social theorists to see the multiple functions of the media and mass communications in contemporary culture (see Kellner 1989).

The critique of the culture industry was one of the most influential aspects of Critical Theory, and its impact on social theory and on theories and critiques of mass communication and culture accounts in part for the continuing interest in the Frankfurt School today. Yet from the beginning, critiques of the Institute's theory of mass culture appeared which stressed the similarity of the Critical Theory analysis to conservative critics of mass culture, and which condemned them for their cultural elitism (see discussion in Kellner 1989, 1995).

Despite its limitations, which I shall outline in this section, the Frankfurt School theory of the culture industry contains several novel features and makes many important contributions to the study of mass communications and culture. Critical theory conceptualises culture and communications as part of society and focuses on how socio-economic imperatives helped constitute the nature, function, and effects of mass communication and culture. By conceptualising these important social forces as part of socio-economic processes, Critical Theory integrates study of culture and communication with study of the economy and society. And by adopting a critical approach to the study of all social phenomena, Frankfurt School critical theory is able to conceptualise how the culture industry serve as instruments of social control and thus serve the interests of social domination.

On the whole, later critical approaches to the media and culture tended to separate communications research from study of mass culture, thus failing to provide a unified account of cultural production, distribution, and reception (see Hammer and Kellner 2009; Kellner 1995). Consequently, critical theory is more than a piece of history because it contains a unified and critical approach to the study of culture and communication within the context of critical social theory that engages the political economy of culture and communication, analysis of texts, and the study of audience reception. Likewise, its mode of cultural criticism situates artefacts of analysis within the context of their social environment, and uses social theory to help interpret cultural artefacts, while using culture to help decipher social trends and processes. Their use of psychoanalytic theory leads them to decipher cultural works as exhibiting traits of individual and social psychology, as well as socio-historical content. Yet despite its contributions, there are serious limitations to the Frankfurt School model, for much of their criticism of popular culture limits itself to denunciation of its ideological features. Since much in popular culture deserves and demands severe condemnation, critical theory ideology critique provides some useful tools for cultural criticism, though also suffers some limitations.

In contrast to the mode of condemnatory criticism associated with Critical Theory, radical cultural criticism today should develop more complex strategies and should attempt to develop a more multi-dimensional approach to mass culture. Rather than seeing its artefacts simply as expressions of hegemonic ideology and ruling class interests, it is more useful to see popular entertainment as complex products that contain contradictory moments of desire and its displacement, articulations of hopes and their repression. In this view, popular culture provides access to a society's dreams and nightmares, and contains both ideological celebrations of the status quo and utopian moments of transcendence, moments of opposition and rebellion, and its attempted containment. Recent studies of popular culture also perceive how social struggles and conflicts enter into works of popular entertainment, and see culture as a contested terrain rather than a field of one-dimensional manipulation and illusion (Kellner 1995; 2010). For example, Kellner (1995) argues that contemporary media culture reproduces social struggles about politics and ideology, gender, race, class, sexuality and other key issues, and has oppositional and critical potential, as well as reproducing dominant ideologies.

Contemporary critical theories of culture and communication must therefore be able to develop more complex methods of cultural interpretation and criticism that pay attention to and conceptualise the contradictions, articulations of social conflicts, oppositional moments, subversive tendencies, and the projection of utopian images and scenes of happiness and freedom that appear within mainstream commercial culture. The classical critical theory approach, especially Adorno's work, generally limits itself, however, to attacking the ideology and purely retrogressive effects of radio, popular music, films, television and so forth. Moreover, there is a tendency to postulate a passive audience that is the object of ideological domination, resisted, however, by theorists like Benjamin discussed above.

British Cultural Studies, by contrast, postulates an active audience that can produce its own meanings and uses for media culture (Hall et al. 1991). Further, contemporary cultural studies has expanded the critique of ideology to include gender, race, sexuality, and other dimensions of media texts (see Hammer and Kellner 2009; Kellner 1995). By contrast, Adorno's model of the culture industry does not allow for the heterogeneity of popular culture and contradictory effects, instead straitjacketing popular culture in the form of reification and commodification as signs of the total triumph of capital and the total reification of experience. To be sure, much popular culture (such as top 40 music and certain blockbuster Hollywood films) lend themselves precisely to Adorno's categories and critique, though as suggested, certain forms of oppositional music, film, and television resist his categories and require a more complex approach to cultural interpretation and critique.

Contemporary critical approaches to media culture should thus not simply limit themselves to denouncing bourgeois ideologies and escapist functions. Even conservative media culture often provides insights into forms of dominant ideologies and sometimes unwittingly provides images of social conflict and opposition. Studies of Hollywood films, for instance, reveal that this form of commercial culture exhibits a conflict of representations between competing social ideologies over the last several decades (Kellner 2010; Kellner and Ryan 1988). Particularly, in the period from around 1967 to the present, a variety of competing ideological standpoints have appeared in mainstream Hollywood film. Consequently, there is no one monolithic, dominant ideology which the culture industry promotes, and indeed the conflicting ideologies in contemporary culture industry artefacts point to continuing and intensifying social conflict within capitalist societies.

Yet in an era of media concentration in which giant corporations own media empires which are dedicated to profit and advance the interests of media corporations, the Frankfurt School theory of the culture industry continues to be relevant. Moreover, since media culture continues to operate in the interests of giant corporations and advertising firms, the Frankfurt School ideology critique continues to be relevant. Yet ideology critique should be expanded to encompass gender, race, sexuality, religion, and other determinants of identities which are often produced in media culture. Finally, a critical posture toward media culture is necessary in developing critical media literacy which engages the politics of representation and empowers individuals in relation to the media, enabling critique, interpretation, and the further making of media products from media materials of the contemporary era. Thus, while the Frankfurt School critique of the culture industry needs to be expanded and reconstructed, it is still relevant in societies dominated by corporate media and the consumer society.

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5 British Cultural Studies

Culturalism and beyond

Jeff Lewis and Belinda Lewis

- British Cultural Studies scholars began their work with an emphasis on the relationship between culture and power, and moved beyond simple Marxist models.
- The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) focused on how the media contributed to social knowledge and the conditions of power.
- The CCCS was focused on a politically positioned mode of study where the media were considered in terms of political processes and language systems.
- The CCCS and its major affiliate, Raymond Williams, pioneered a new way of thinking about social groups, mediation and the very nature of 'culture'.

Introduction

For Raymond Williams, one of the founders of a distinctive cultural studies discipline, the concept of culture was forged in the complex interchange of European history, language and intellectual traditions:

[c]ulture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. This is so partly because of its intricate historical development, in several European languages, but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought. (Williams 1976: 76)

Williams, among other notable British intellectuals, attempted to draw these 'incompatible systems of thought' into a more coherent and integrated scholarly framework. While the most identifiable and productive congregation of these ideas and interests developed in the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the early 1960s, a desire to understand and analyse culture reflects wider social trends that were occurring across the Western world. The

emergence of a distinctly British mode of cultural analysis, therefore, is set within the confluence of national and transnational intellectual and social trends.

Chris Rojek (2003) argues that the emergence of a distinctly British (or more precisely *English*) mode of cultural analysis emerges out of specific historical and political conditions, including changes in workforce, education, sexuality and concepts of youth culture. Emerging through the horrors of the Second World War, the Cold War and the threat of nuclear annihilation, Britain's rising generations nevertheless embraced a new social and cultural optimism during the 1950s and 1960s. Shifting away from the old authority structures and knowledge systems that had produced such devastation across the world, British teenagers, in particular, adopted new cultural styles and ways of thinking about society and their heritage. This optimism and innovative energy was carried into the universities, particularly by a new generation of scholars who were the first in their families to undertake tertiary-level education.

In many respects, the emergence of cultural studies as a new academic discipline is a direct effect of this optimism and its cultural innovations. The presence of students from working class backgrounds in the university, in particular, contributed to a reappraisal of the very nature of social 'class' as a component of social knowledge, and the politics of learning. Marxism, with its focus on the material conditions of life, certainly contributed to this reappraisal: it was recognised that powerful social groups excluded less powerful groups from education and hence material opportunities, privilege and wealth.

However, Marxism, of itself, never adequately addressed important questions of culture, other than in broad philosophical terms which describe the symbolic dimensions of life (superstructure) as merely reinforcing the defining conditions (base) of economy and class oppression (Lewis 2008: 62–4; Marx and Engels 1970). The Marxist interpretation of class oppression, while informative, tended to treat this new generation of scholars and their families as somewhat helpless victims of oppressive social control; this description, however, was only partially satisfying for a rising generation that was exploring new cultural and political options through the exercise of their freedom and agency. Indeed, it is precisely this tension between social control and the possibility of freedom that emerged as a central intellectual and scholarly theme for the post-war generation. It was simply not enough to describe the world in terms of material oppression and the uneven distribution of power and pleasure. This new generation wanted to understand themselves, their own dignity, and the exact nature of power itself. Beyond a blanket state of oppression and material privation, these new scholars sought to understand the ways in which individuals and social groups might exercise power and construct a life that was valid and meaningful.

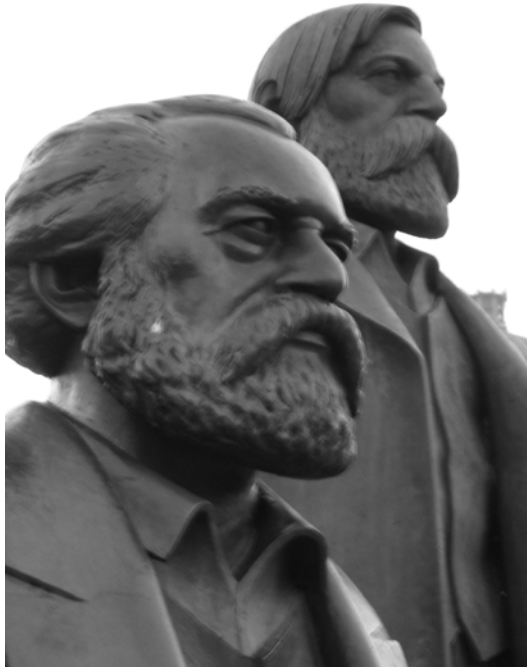


Figure 5.1 Karl Marx (1818—83) and Friedrich Engels (1820—95)

Indeed, as numerous historical accounts of the discipline have noted, the British cultural studies scholars began their work with a clear interrogation of the relationship between power and culture (see Gibson 2007; Lash 2007; Lewis 2008). In order to elucidate this relationship, the British cultural studies scholars moved beyond a simple Marxist model, drawing together a range of disciplinary paradigms through an innovative analysis of working class and popular culture, the media and notions of meaning. While focusing on the contributions of specific individual scholars, this chapter explains how British cultural studies shaped the discipline and its analytical agenda through the 1960s and into the present.

The foundations of British Cultural Studies

During the nineteenth century, England became the primary world industrial and economic power. Even so, the immense wealth generated by industrialisation was not evenly distributed and many people in England lived through appalling conditions of squalor, environmental degradation and community dislocation. The rise of 'Romantic' literature, philosophy, music and art was in many respects a response to these conditions. British authors as diverse in their interests as Samuel Coleridge, Matthew Arnold and Thomas Carlyle contributed

to a new form of idealism which was based on humanist principles, aesthetics and various kinds of reformist cultural politics. Along with other social reformers of the time, such as Charles Dickens, these writers believed that human redemption was only possible through the exercise of reason and the artistic imagination — both of which contributed to the more generalised advance of human civilisation. Like their German counterparts, who lionised human transcendence in terms of *kultur*, many of these British writers adapted the concept of ‘culture’ or ‘being cultivated’ to describe a more refined state of human consciousness.

These ideals might seem to have been mobilised at the beginning of the twentieth century with the consolidation of universal suffrage, public education and mass literacy. In this context, the admission of F. R. Leavis (1895–1978) and Q. D. Leavis (1900–82) at Cambridge University after World War I (1914–18) is notable on two counts: first, it announces the entrance of a new social class, the lower middle classes, into the highest levels of British educational and intellectual life; and, secondly, it forecasts a significant change to the focus and curriculum of university study. The discipline of English literature was brought out of the margins and placed at the centre of the liberal arts education. The Leavises, along with a number of other young scholars of the time, brought to the humanities, and to British intellectual life generally, a fresh approach to social investigation; one which embedded social knowledge in moral and aesthetic elevation. As the nineteenth century Romantic poet and scholar Matthew Arnold had insisted, humanism, liberalism and moral improvement were all facilities of ‘culture’ and cultural knowledge: for Arnold and other Romantics, ‘culture’ was thus the predicate of refined knowledge and moral purity.

While at one level the arrival of the lower middle classes and their moral-humanist mission might represent the expansion of England’s democratic landscape, their vanguard concept of culture also announces a new form of social discrimination. The very idea of cultural elevation, articulated in humanist philosophy and refined aesthetics, privileges certain forms of textual and artistic expression over others — specifically, high art over those forms of ‘low art’ that were usually associated with the industrial, urban working classes. This high-low dichotomy was situated within a social hierarchy that privileged the creators, critics and consumers of high art (literature, philosophy, fine art, classical music). On the other hand, the higher classes and ‘intelligentsia’ barely recognised the social or cultural value of the so-called ‘low art’ forms — popular literature, music hall, cinema and popular music.

The increased numbers of university students from lower middle class backgrounds in the early twentieth century might have weakened this dichotomy. However, the entrance of the lower middle classes into the

university was viewed more as an ascent to intellectual and moral salvation, a pathway out of the demeaning and de-humanising effects of industrialisation. Thus, F. R. Leavis (1948) could imagine this salvation in the very best of human culture in the lineage of morally ascendant English literature — *The Great Tradition*. This tradition and its notion of culture excluded the texts, rituals and meaning-making of the ‘great unwashed’, though it could nevertheless provide a pathway to redemption for all British citizens. The great unwashed, that is, could also walk the pathway to education and moral redemption, as they cast off the vulgarity of their social conditions and embrace the light of cultural elevation.

The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies

Ultimately, the Leavisite privileging of high culture became the focus of a cultural studies critique. However, both Queanie and Frank Leavis contributed significantly to the evolution of liberal arts education and a textual studies methodology that was later adapted for the analysis of popular culture and the popular media. Indeed, and as Douglas Kellner (1997) has argued in relation to the Frankfurt School’s contribution to the development of cultural studies, the Leavisite model introduced new possibilities and mechanisms for thinking about culture as embodied in text. The scholarly literacy that was advocated by the Leavises and others who worked in the new liberal arts education facilitated a methodology of critical thinking that would be mobilised by the next generation of young radical scholars who moved into the universities following the Second World War.

Having said this, however, the Leavisite liberal arts model lacked the political force that was evolving through the twentieth century in Continental European philosophy and sociology. Following the Second World War (1939–45) and the further expansion of the university admissions pool, many students from the working classes looked to sociology and political science for more potent explanations for war, social hierarchy and the exclusion of their own class from the privilege of learning, economic security and cultural recognition. At the same time, there was also a growing sense of radical disengagement with previous generations, their values and modes of cultural expression. Many younger people questioned the authority of a generation that had led them into war and the prospects of nuclear annihilation. Moreover, this authority was infused in cultural values and tastes that privileged high art over the younger people’s own urban culture which was increasingly morphing into a new and more transgressive adolescent style.

Thus, a new generation of young thinkers was far more interested in the lifestyles, music and literature of the urban dwellers. In the rising tide of yet

another world catastrophe, the Cold War, these young scholars were seeking different explanations and a new and fresh perspective on the world. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, a significant cohort of these scholars sought to elucidate the conflux of power and culture in ways that were radically different from the Leavisite generation and significantly different from the Marxist framework that viewed the working classes as mere victims of social oppression.

The constellation of these social trends and new modes of thinking found particular expression at the University of Birmingham, one of England's newly established, post-war, urban universities. The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) was established in 1964 under the directorship of Richard Hoggart. Freed of many of the constraints of Britain's elite universities, the Birmingham Centre focused its research, at least initially, on Britain's working class heritage and radical political traditions. The location of the Centre in the old industrial city of Birmingham provided both a legitimacy and cultural contiguity that connected the researchers to the subject of their study. While focusing on postgraduate research and publication, the Centre's key personnel wanted to remain connected to their urban working class culture without surrendering to the bourgeois context of 'the university' and its elite traditions.

This focus on working class culture and on the concept of culture itself led ultimately to an interest in the media and the ways in which the media contributes to social knowledge and the conditions of power. Unlike other research centres that focused on the media and communications research, however, the Birmingham group did not apply a science-based, quantitative research method. In this respect, the Birmingham Centre was clearly influenced by the textual studies methods of the Leavis generation, as well as the conceptual work of Raymond Williams and the more diverse structural anthropological approach adapted by the Centre's second director, Stuart Hall. To this end, the Centre deviated significantly from the positivist and 'disinterested' model developed in US media scholarship and in the UK at the Leicester Centre for Mass Communications Research.

Birmingham had no interest in generating a 'pseudo-objectivity' but was focused on a politically positioned mode of study which was designed to explore media and culture in terms of complex relationships of power and human agency. Thus, while recognising that social elites and the mass media could exert enormous influence over a nation's citizenry, the Birmingham Centre also wanted to dignify their subjects — especially their working class subjects — with a degree of freedom that facilitated the expression of culture and autonomous identity. Thus, the Birmingham Centre focused their research on the lived experience of their subjects: through a complex theoretical and methodological communion of textual analysis, anthropology and neo-Marxist

analytical frames, the Birmingham Centre scholars sought to illuminate the culture and everyday experiences of their subjects. In this way, the Birmingham Centre treated the media as a fundamentally ideological and cultural entity. Their meaning-making processes were essentially and inescapably problematic, rather than assumed, as in the theoretical premise of the Leicester approach.

Through the work of Williams and Hall, in particular, the media were considered in terms of political processes and language systems. Drawing their influences from French language theory, as well as Marxist theory, the Birmingham scholars regarded culture as a diffuse matrix of linguistic and ideological relationships. Text, textual meanings and culture functioned reciprocally, necessarily implicating social differentials of power and knowledge. Under Hall's directorship, the work of the Centre and its students diversified, exploring an ever-widening corpus of cultural phenomena and applying an ever-widening set of methodologies. Moving beyond the exclusive parameters of the 'working class', these studies included Dick Hebdige's (1979) anthropology on youth culture, David Morley's (1980) ethnographic work on television audiences, and Angela McRobbie's (1991) engagement with feminism and teenage magazines.

Richard Johnson replaced Stuart Hall in 1979 and took a more restrained approach to the diversifying field of the Centre's work. As an historian, Johnson was a little sceptical of some of the ethnographic work in which the Centre was engaged. Jorge Larrain replaced Johnson in 1987 and oversaw its transformation into a standard university department, teaching undergraduate programmes and suffering significantly reduced research funding. After the resignation of Larrain in 1991, the department had a succession of heads including Michael Green, Ann Gray and Frank Webster. Prior to this conversion, the Centre never had more than three full-time staff at any one time yet managed to produce an extraordinary volume of work and publications.

Working class voices

In many respects, the Birmingham Centre and its major affiliate, Raymond Williams, pioneered a new way of thinking about social groups, mediation and the very nature of 'culture'. The combination of politics, history, textual analysis and anthropology generated a new and innovative approach to the ways in which different social groups construct culture, cultural texts and cultural practices. While leading to a broader problematisation of these modes of cultural formation, these foundations began with a re-focus on the industrial, urban working classes and their own self-generating texts and practices. One of the earliest analyses of British industrial working class culture was carried out by Richard Hoggart, the first director of the CCCS. In *The Uses of Literacy* (1958),

Hoggart explores the relationship between working class culture and folk culture, and the ‘imposed’ and ‘external’ culture of mass-produced popular texts. Unlike Leavis, Hoggart is interested in the fabric of industrial and urbanised working class experience; like Leavis, however, Hoggart maintains a deep suspicion of externally contrived cultural production, most especially as it floods into the creative quarters of the working class community. Graeme Turner (1996) argues that Hoggart’s own working class background and his experiences in teaching literature to adults from his own social background helped maintain his interest in the conditions and culture of his class. While this is probably true, there is an ambivalence in Hoggart’s work, a certain abstraction, which clearly demonstrates his uncertainties and subliminal doubts about the treasure of working class culture. In many respects, this ambivalence is a symptom of the abstraction itself, the need to record the very immediacy and spontaneity of the cultural practices of the working class community. But it also reflects a sense of alteration, of loss, the very thing which Hoggart regrets but of which he is necessarily a part.

This nostalgia for the pre-World War II working class culture, the culture of his childhood, tends to skew Hoggart’s sensibilities. Indeed, his repudiation of popular culture — American popular music, jukeboxes, popular novels — refers both to the superficiality of the texts themselves and to the threat these texts pose to the maintenance of the class and its culture. That is, American jukebox culture constituted an allure, a distraction, for the youth who were to inherit the deep traditions of the industrial, urban working class culture. While Hoggart believes the working classes and their codes of practice and morality are sufficient to withstand the invasion, there remains a distinct sense of foreboding in his writing, a mood of dread that derives as much from his ‘bourgeois’ intellectual training as from a loyalty to his cultural heritage. Indeed, there exists in Hoggart’s work a profound and occasionally puritanical suspicion of America and American popular culture, a fear of its superficial and sensual engagements, a fear of its glitter and surface glamour. Like the Leavises, Hoggart seeks a nobility that could be projected as a universal moral paradigm. His disappointment with contemporary youth and the mutating effects of introduced culture reflects a utopianism that spreads well beyond his repudiation of institutional power and obsessive consumerism.

More so than Hoggart, who retained some residual if ambivalent affiliations with Leavisite textual values, E.P. Thompson’s monumental study *The Making of the English Working Class* (1980) represents a substantiation of a critical link between cultural theory and politics. Like the French Annales School of historiography, Thompson sought to articulate the lives, as well as the social and political conditions, of the common people. Thompson’s work, however, is not satisfied with a mere wresting of history from the control and interest of elite groups. Rather, he seeks to produce a history of the working class themselves,

one which is experiential and vested in everyday practices and everyday culture. That is, Thompson's historiography avoids the sorts of sentimentalism and nostalgia that are evident in Leavis's provincialism, and which can be seen in traces in Hoggart's comparative study of pre- and post-World War II working class England.

Moreover, Thompson's project is not merely descriptive. Beginning from the perspective and experiences of the industrial working class in the period leading up to the 1830s, Thompson seeks to explain its condition and cultural formation in terms of the progress of capitalism. While he had resigned from the British Communist Party by the time of the book's publication, he demonstrates a significant allegiance to Marxist conceptions by which class is defined as 'a social and cultural formation arising from processes which can be studied as they work themselves out over a considerable period' (Thompson 1980: 11). This 'making' of a class, Thompson explains, 'happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs' (Thompson 1980: 8–9). This description engages an anthropological approach to human groups with Marxist precepts. It is comparable to the Chicago School approach to social mapping in that it seeks to explain processes and identity through complex associations and influences. It is unlike Chicago sociology in its focus on class and on the political context in which class is formed.

Thompson, thereby, diverges significantly from Raymond Williams' approach to culture, which focuses on the capacity of people to produce an organic, interactive and consensual whole. Williams, himself a novelist as well as a scholar and essayist, articulated many of the theoretical problems that persist in cultural studies today.

The son of a Welsh collier, Williams taught in adult education in the post-World War II period and, like Hoggart, sought to integrate the Leavisite methodology with a left-wing political perspective. Between 1946 and 1960 Williams' involvement with the adult education journal *Politics and Letters* demonstrates an increasingly sophisticated interest in the whole idea of culture. In many respects *Culture and Society* (1958), one of the most important books in the development of British cultural studies, represents a flowering of this effort to understand the relationship between literature and politics. Williams employs the technique of close textual reading, but he is most concerned to illuminate the context within which the literary text functions. Reflecting the Leavisite inheritance, Williams describes a literary work in terms of its cultural context — including, importantly, its historical context. While not surrendering the text to the possibilities of meaning dissonance, as we would see in the approach advocated by Jacques Derrida (1979; also Lewis, 2008: 122–32), this approach

provides a foundation for linking a text to the cultural politics in which it was constructed and ultimately read.

In this way, Williams' account of the literary history of Britain is fundamentally liberated from the confinements of Romantic idealism which explains meaning in terms of a miraculous conjuration of immanence and civilisational transcendence. Of course Leavis himself would acknowledge that an author works within a context, but for the Leavisite tradition the 'genius' of the author is always a contingency of moral and spiritual elevation. Society is filtered by the author's imagination so that the narrative of the novel or poem becomes ahistorical, a moral and spiritual entity that denies the immediacies of historical context. A text, for Williams, was necessarily a contingency of social relationships, including relationships of power.

Of course, Marxist scholars like Georg Lukács (1968) had developed an alternative to the Leavisite position, though there is no strong evidence that Williams had access to this critical Marxist perspective. Terry Eagleton (1978: 35–40) has argued that Williams' work, in fact, lacks a truly socialist perspective as it remains faithful to Leavisite notions of nostalgia and provincial Romanticism. While it is true that Williams fails to confront the issues of industrialism directly, it is also true that he conveys in his writings generally a desire for justice and social equality. Significantly, he remains caught between the notion of culture as an aesthetic category (literature specifically) and culture as a generative and ubiquitous set of everyday practices (the anthropological notion of 'way of life'). To this extent, *Culture and Society* (1958) does not quite resolve or abandon the Leavisite perspective, and we find the same ambiguities in his more elaborated attempt to define culture, *Keywords* (1976). Williams' conclusion to the entry on culture reflects his own ambivalence toward the value of 'high' modes of expression and intellectual aspirations, against the more egalitarian social modes of culture:

[i]t is significant that virtually all the hostility ... [to the notion of culture] has been connected with uses involving claims to superior knowledge (cf. the noun INTELLECTUAL), refinement and distinctions between 'high' art (culture) and popular art and entertainment. It thus records a real social history and a very difficult and confused phase of social and cultural development. It is interesting that the steadily extending social and anthropological use of culture and cultural ... has, except in certain areas (notably popular entertainment), either by-passed or effectively diminished the hostility and its associated unease and embarrassment. (Williams 1976: 82)

From *The Long Revolution* (1965) to *Culture* (1981), Williams demonstrates his desire to converge these definitions, identifying culture as the organisation of

complex relationships ‘between elements in a whole way of life’ (1965: 63). Popular arts remain regrettably poor quality, Williams maintains, but there is no special place for the ‘arts’ as a privileged and transcendent discourse, as Coleridge, Arnold and Leavis had claimed. Rather, Williams treats the arts as practice or ‘elements’ within the complex of the whole way of life. In *Culture* (also titled *The Sociology of Culture*), in particular, Williams seeks to elucidate a sociology which engages fully with the popular arts and the media. In the later works, especially, Williams is interested in the social conditions and social relationships that inform and surround the arts through the operation of ideology (Williams 1981: 26–30) and institutions. He remains untouched, however, by the influences of French structuralism, and even in an important book like *Television, Technology and Cultural Form* (Williams 1974) there is a certain failure to appreciate the full implications of his analysis of contemporary popular media. For example, while Williams points to the unique conditions of television programming and institutions, and while he incisively attacks technological determinist and effects analysis of television, he remains distinctly suspicious of television’s intent and popularity.

From culturalism to transculturalism: expanding the horizons

While Williams and other early cultural studies scholars struggled to free themselves from the high-low art dichotomy, the CCCS’s second director, Stuart Hall, extended the theoretical horizon of these discussions. In particular, Hall introduced into British cultural studies the writings of the French neo-Marxist theorist Louis Althusser (1971) and his concept of ideology. Briefly, Althusser defined ideology as the difference between the way people imagine their circumstances and how things really are. This approach to ideology extended Marx’s original definition, creating opportunities for a study of power, language and popular media — which are all implicated in the construction of individual and social imagining. Again, the issue of social control and agency emerges through these analyses, particularly as Hall seeks to explain culture in terms of various forms of media and textual representation. In his own history of this period, Hall contends that British cultural studies is necessarily implicated in the politics and postulates of Marxism; indeed, Hall argues that cultural studies exists ‘within shouting distance of marxism, working on marxism, working against marxism, working with it, working to try to develop marxism’ (1996: 265). For Hall, the theoretical interests of Marxism and Cultural Studies were never perfectly matched, most particularly because Marxism fails directly to address the key concerns of cultural studies: culture, ideology, everyday practices, language and the symbolic.

Thus, through the work of Stuart Hall, Birmingham cultural studies turned to the ideas of structural anthropology and Althusser to explain the problem of language and power: '[t]he power involved here is an ideological power; the power to signify events in a particular way' (Hall 1982: 69). But for Hall, with his particular interest in popular media texts, the Althusser-cultural studies nexus remained problematic. Hall's own experiences as a West Indian immigrant might seem to have complicated his willingness to accept the structuralist explanations of power. That is, ethnicity seemed to add a further dimension to the Althusserian notion of domination, which tends to locate power in the relatively closed categories of social class. Ethnicity, migration, social mobility and the shared product of popular culture seemed to create for Hall a more complex social scenario than could be explained by Althusser's notion of ideology. Unlike Hoggart, Williams and Thompson, Hall was not part of the British working class heritage, and the inclination of Birmingham theory to aggregate the particular experiences of so many people, communities, rituals and practices into the one, distinctly British, symbolic system seemed overly reductionist to him. If nothing else, it placed Hall himself on the outer of the theoretical and analytical activities of the Centre; it marginalised him as a social being.

It is reasonable to conjecture, therefore, that Hall's own experience of being outside the mainstream of working class politics sensitised him to the limitations of Althusser's notion of dominant ideology. In either case, the significant and continuing problem with Althusser's account of ideology is that it really leaves no space for agency and resistance, since ideology appears to be a system of complete power that precludes any possibility of alternative thinking. That is, because ideology is so infused in an individual and collective consciousness, there is no space in human imagining for genuine resistance or freedom. Ultimately, therefore, Hall rejects Althusserian ideology, preferring Antonio Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony' which gives some space for the negotiation of power and the possibility of human agency within a context of social leadership.

Thus, while ideology suggests a blanket social domination based on class, hegemony suggests a complex and incomplete system of social domination that is negotiated through a range of social fields: in this way, 'race' and ethnicity' may be part of a series of power formations that cannot simply be marshalled and homologised under the single rubric of class-based ideology. In his account of the move from structuralist to Gramscian cultural analysis, Hall specifically notes that Marxism and its derivatives remain decidedly 'Eurocentric' and hence homogeneous (1996: 269). In his co-authored book *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (Hall et al. 1978), his own ethnicity becomes fore-grounded as he provides a view of culture which emphasises localism and subversion, as well as active participation in the mediation of people's lives. While race has not been a central theme in Hall's writings, there

can be little doubt that the absorptive interests of nation and national culture represented in the works of Hoggart and Thompson would be of less concern to him than the interplay of hegemony and power. While this is partly due to Hall's own fascination with theoretical problems, it is also a measure of his interest in the broader constitution of culture which is not vested in class and nation but which is engaged through much more expansive cultural and textual formations. Thus, Hall quite self-consciously releases the concept of culture from both its national and class boundaries, as he ultimately acknowledges that all human groupings are capable of generating culture.

Hall's contribution to cultural studies is therefore significant on two grounds. First it takes seriously the notion of the text as a cultural product, leaving behind the Leavisite ambivalences of Hoggart and Williams. Hall's repudiation of Eurocentrism clearly rejects the residual claims to civilisational hierarchy that is imbued in the high-low art dichotomy. For Hall, all texts are valid objects of cultural analysis as all bear the markings of cultural politics and power. Secondly, Hall's focus on the media and the diverse source of cultural texts admits a more complex vision of power and the ways in which different social groups negotiate within and across national boundaries. This is a highly significant move in cultural studies, as it acknowledges that a society is made up of many different social groupings that may or may not be consonant with any dominant social values or imaginings. Under Hall's leadership and influence, the work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and its alumni began to focus on a more diffuse constituency of power and social groupings — women, blacks, youth, gay groups and other marginalised people.

Conclusion: the British legacy

There is little doubt that the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies exerted an influence on the humanities and social sciences that was vastly disproportionate to its size and local constituency. The cultural studies that was generated through the Centre and its affiliates became a template for re-considering the ways in which social groups generate texts and meanings within a broader context of 'negotiated' power, hegemony and various forms of ideology (see Gibson 2007; Milner 2002). Certainly until the translation of French poststructuralism, and particularly the work of Michel Foucault, cultural studies was largely constituted around the British-Birmingham model. Hall's interest in French structuralism was certainly an important pathway for other British scholars like John Fiske (1989), who brought French semiology into the cultural studies vernacular during the 1970s and 1980s. Among others, Fiske delivered a somewhat self-conscious populism to cultural studies, invoking a postmodern politics which emphasised the virtues of everyday practice and the emancipatory potential of sexuality and desire (see also de Certeau 1984). While

Fiske's work has been severely impugned by critical scholars like Jim McGuigan (1992) and Douglas Kellner (1995), the focus on everyday life, popular media and celebrity contributed to the expansion of new spaces for the study of power, pleasure and meaning-making which continue in cultural studies today (Lewis 2008).

Even so and as intimated above, the British legacy has been somewhat overshadowed during the past two decades by the astonishingly pervasive influence of Michel Foucault (for example, Foucault 1977) and his extension of our understanding of power. For Foucault and his post-Marxist (poststructuralist) conception, there is a micro-physics or 'biopolitics' of power that functions through all human social exchange processes. Going further than Gramsci's idea of 'negotiation', Foucault considers power in terms of its effects on the individual body. Tony Bennett (1995), a British cultural studies scholar, adapted a particular part of this idea in order to generate a more 'pragmatic' and useful cultural studies method, one that focuses on 'governmentality', social management and policy. Based principally on Foucault's final writings and their somewhat underdeveloped theoretical grammar, this governmentality approach attempted to discipline cultural studies through a simpler and more pragmatic approach to power. These scholars tend to treat Foucault's notion of 'governmentality' as the literal exchange of power between governments and the 'culture industries', examining the ways in which policy in particular affects the lives of ordinary citizens.

In effect, this somewhat strange permutation returns cultural studies to its very beginnings, at least inasmuch as it redirects scholarship toward the reversal of social injustices that are constituted through social division. The foregrounding of policy, however, seems to betray the more profound possibilities of cultural studies and the scholarly treasures of social defiance, open space and innovation. While cultural studies has its own distinctive intellectual and institutional heritage, the emergence of the discipline also represents a remarkable and radical cultural irruption. Williams, Hoggart, Thompson and Hall were leading a revolutionary charge, a new way of thinking that confronted itself with the very spectre of its own anarchic and disruptive potential. The foundations of cultural studies could never guarantee the survival of the discipline, as it was based entirely on the most profound challenge to power and its self-realisation in culture — including and most especially the power of the academy and its institutional hegemony. To this end, cultural studies remains connected to the dangers of political inversion, scholarly anarchy and the possibility that culture does not exist at all.

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6 From Subculture to Post-subculture

A critical overview of contemporary youth cultural studies

Andy Bennett

- This chapter summarises the critical tenets of subcultural and post-subcultural theory.
- With a focus on style, youth ‘subcultures’ were originally conceptualised by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) as a response to social and economic changes in working class communities.
- Subsequent critics of the CCCS have suggested we should rather see youth cultural groupings as lifestyle choices based around consumption practices.
- Following the emergence of the internet and other digital technologies, the chapter offers some observations on potential future directions for youth cultural studies.

Introduction

Between the early 1970s and late 1990s the academic study of youth culture was heavily dominated by the concept of ‘spectacular subculture’. Emerging from the cultural studies work of theorists based at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), spectacular subculture was interpreted as a cultural form within which the historical process of class struggle, which had begun with the industrial revolution, continued. This struggle was theorised as persisting through working class youth’s appropriation and symbolic re-working of fashion items and other consumer products as objects of resistance against the ruling hegemony of late capitalist society. Despite its dominance as a theoretical framework in the study of youth culture, subcultural theory was not without criticism. This ranged from claims that subcultural theory failed to properly engage with issues of gender and ethnicity, through to critiques of the methodologies employed by subcultural theorists in their investigation of subcultural groups. Finally, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, a major paradigm shift occurred in the form of the ‘post-subcultural turn’; the concept of subculture and its class-based explanations of youth cultural identities was

challenged by a new group of youth culture researchers who argued that postmodern shifts in society and increasing consumer reflexivity were breaking down distinctions of class, gender and race, thus giving rise to a new 'post-subcultural' era of youth.

The purpose of this chapter will be to review and evaluate the key tenets of subcultural and, latterly, post-subcultural theory as these have characterised the academic study of style and music-based youth cultures. As the chapter will illustrate, despite the prominence of post-subculture as a significant departure in the field of youth cultural studies, debates concerning the viability of post-subculture and the critical legacy of subcultural studies continue. The chapter will address some of the main issues and arguments to have emerged from this debate, including: the challenge to post-subcultural studies as little more than a neoliberal discourse that attempts to gloss still-rampant issues of class inequality and racism in late capitalist social contexts; the lack of a cohesive theoretical basis or central school of thought among subcultural theorists; the reliance on small-scale empirical studies and primarily qualitative data. The chapter will conclude by considering what steps might need to be taken by researchers working within this paradigm to deal with and resolve criticisms of a body of work that, while raising critical questions about the nature of youth and youth culture in contemporary society, continues to lack a substantive empirical basis upon which to establish its conclusions.

Subcultural theory and the CCCS

The concept of subculture acquired ready usage in research on patterns of youth leisure and style through the work of the Birmingham Centre for the Study of Contemporary Culture (see Hall and Jefferson 1976). Borrowing 'subculture' from the Chicago School, where it had been used to construct a sociological explanation of youth deviance (see for example, Becker 1963; Merton 1957), the CCCS adapted the concept as a means of providing an interpretation of the stylistic responses of young working class males in post-Second World War Britain. According to the CCCS, post-war British youth subcultures, by dint of their quasi-gang structure, were illustrative of continuing expressions of class-based solidarity among working class youth. Such continuing manifestations of working class consciousness, argued the CCCS, undermined the comments of observers who suggested that post-war affluence was creating a classless society. According to Clarke et al. (1976: 47–8),

[t]here is no 'subcultural solution' to working-class youth unemployment, educational disadvantage, compulsory miseducation, deadend jobs, the routinisation and specialisation of labour, low pay and the loss of skills. Sub-cultural strategies ...

'solve', but in an imaginary way, problems which at the concrete material level remain unresolved.

Key to the theory of subcultural resistance developed by the CCCS was the cultural Marxism of Italian neo-Marxist Antonio Gramsci. While Gramsci (1971) believed that social change on the scale envisaged by Marx was unlikely to occur in the advanced capitalist societies, he also argued that social control in any absolute sense became more difficult to maintain, the social relations of late capitalism being characterised by a constant struggle between conflicting class interests. The result, contended Gramsci, was a shift in the basis of power in capitalist society. The ruling class were no longer able to maintain power purely on the basis of their economic dominance but also had to exercise it 'in moral and intellectual terms' (Bennett et al. 1981: 198). Gramsci refers to this process as 'hegemonic rule', hegemony expressing the dominant system of ideas and beliefs through which the ruling class is able to exert power over society. According to Gramsci, the hegemonic order is susceptible to challenges from below. Although such challenges are in themselves incapable of usurping the ruling class from their dominant position they can, nevertheless, produce a 'crisis of authority' (Bennett et al. 1981: 199).

Drawing on this idea, the CCCS suggested that working class youth subcultures represented pockets of resistance to the ruling hegemonic order. Through appropriating the stylistic resources of the burgeoning youth fashion market (see Chambers 1985) and using them as visual markers of collective group identities based on traditional working class sensibilities (such as neighbourhood, 'territory', or 'turf'), subcultures issued challenges to dominant institutions, such as law enforcement agencies and educational institutions; subcultural style was theorised as a clear indicator of resistance against the conformity demanded by the latter. Moreover, according to Phil Cohen (1972), subculture also symbolised a defence of working class community *per se* in the face of the break-up of traditional working class communities due to post-war slum clearance and the relocation of residents to new housing estates.

The CCCS work, both in relation to youth and broader aspects of working class culture, became highly influential on the development of cultural theory. Crucially, it provided theoretical tools for moving beyond the pessimistic reading of mass popular culture offered by Frankfurt School writers, such as Adorno and Horkheimer (1969), and mass cultural theorists, notably MacDonald (1957). The CCCS regarded working class consumers not as passive recipients of mass cultural products, but rather saw the potential of such consumption to act as a lever for forms of hegemonic struggle. Subsequent post-CCCS work on youth by Hebdige (1979) provided a more elaborate interpretation of young people's use of style and other resources in what Hebdige referred to as semiotic guerrilla warfare. Using Lévi-Strauss's (1966) concept of bricolage and Barthes'

(1977) concept of signifying practice, Hebdige considered how the visually spectacular image of punk rock in late 1970s Britain resonated with the socio-economic climate of an industrial nation in decline. According to Hebdige, punk's appropriation of domestic items such as safety pins and lavatory chains from their normal everyday contexts and reassembly on the surface of the body, combined with the subversion of conventional norms of fashion — for example, the ripping of clothes for effect and the positioning of zip fasteners on the outside of garments — signified the socio-economic dislocation of Britain at this time.

Unsettled accounts

Despite its considerable influence on academic accounts of youth culture, the subcultural theory of the CCCS was contested by a number of theorists. For example, McRobbie and Garber (1976) pointed out that the CCCS made no consideration of the relationship of girls to youth subcultures. Although perhaps male-centred, it was argued, subcultures were by no means 'exclusively' male. Female membership of subcultures was clearly evident (for example, teddy girls and modettes), and thus, it was argued that young women warranted consideration by youth researchers. Similarly, McRobbie and Garber (1976) identified a teeny-bopper culture among teenage girls which, although confined to the domestic space of the home, was argued to constitute a form of subcultural activity in itself. Waters (1981), in noting the London-centred nature of the CCCS research, criticised its failure to examine other local variations in leisure- and style-based youth cultures. This view was echoed by Gary Clarke (1981), who suggests that the metropolitan focus of the CCCS excluded any consideration of the stylistic responses of youth in the provinces. Clarke also questioned the CCCS's claim that the 'so-called' working class youth subcultures at the centre of its research were indeed exclusively, or even primarily, as working class as the CCCS maintained. The premise of class-based membership of subcultures, argued Clarke, was always a supposition of the CCCS rather than an empirically proven fact.

The above observation links to another point of criticism directed at the CCCS, notably its lack of empirical engagement with members of youth subcultures themselves. According to Stanley Cohen, this in itself severely undermined the validity of theoretical claims made by the CCCS in relation to the significance of youth cultural style as a symbol of resistance. Thus, observes Cohen: '[w]e do not know what, if any, difference exists between indigenous and sociological explanations . . . In the end, there is no basis whatsoever for choosing between this particular interpretation and any others' (1987: xvii). To a large extent, this failure to engage with members of youth cultural groups was underpinned by a belief among CCCS researchers that uncovering the *reality* of class experience

of subcultures was only possible through a process of theoretical abstraction that exposed the structural processes of oppression that weighed down on working class communities. One theorist who departed from this approach was Paul Willis. In his celebrated study *Profane Culture*, Willis (1978) presented the findings of empirical work with both a group of working class motorbike boys and a group of middle class hippies. In the course of the research, Willis posed questions to each group about their preferences in music, style, drugs and so on. Again, however, in analysing the data, Willis (1978) employs a theoretical device referred to as 'homology' that essentially re-reads the ethnographic data as a by-product of underlying structural determinants (Bennett, 2002). Thus, as Harris (1992: 90) observes in a critical reading of Willis's approach:

[homology] has become famous as an account of how particular items reflect the structured concerns and typical feelings of a group, as, say, the black leather jacket does for bikers. Each homology arises from an 'integral' process of selection and cultural work on an object or item, in a complex dialectical way, naturally. As a result, current members of a group are not subjectively aware of these structural meanings, embedded in the history of the black leather jacket in previous cycles of provision, transformation and resistance.

Ultimately, the identification of such inherent problems with subcultural theory prompted significant questions about its theoretical and empirical viability. Consequently, during the late 1990s, the study of youth culture underwent what could be defined as an 'ethnographic turn' in an attempt to address questions relating to the subjectivity of individual social actors that remained unanswered in the CCCS studies. In the same period, a new vogue for postmodernist theory, combined with increasing interest in sociology and cultural theory around issues of the body, identity and reflexivity, took the study of youth culture in a radically new direction in which not only the tenets of subcultural theory but also the very concept of 'subculture' itself was subjected to scrutiny.

Post-subcultural theory

The term 'post-subculture' was first used by Redhead (1990) as a means of describing what appeared to be an increasing mix and fluidity of subcultural styles at dance music parties during the late 1980s and early 1990s (see also Redhead 1993). However, the term was more extensively developed and deployed as a theoretical framework for the study of youth culture by Muggleton (2000). Combining elements of Weberian and postmodern theory, Muggleton identified the emergence of post-subcultural youth as the by-product of an increasingly fragmented everyday cultural sphere. To some extent, argued Muggleton, this was a product of new levels of risk and uncertainty that

weakened the hold of traditional bonds, such as class, community and family. However, at the same time, suggested Muggleton (2000), an increasing emphasis upon consumerism and a proliferation of consumer goods also contributed to the post-subcultural identities of youth whose consumer choices were increasingly steered by reflexive individualism rather than through group allegiance rooted in notions of class, neighbourhood and community.

The emergence of post-subcultural theory rapidly gave rise to a new era of youth cultural research and scholarship that clustered around a series of key conceptual approaches: neo-tribe; scene; lifestyle.

Neo-tribe

The concept of 'neo-tribe' was originally developed by Maffesoli (1996) as a means of theorising what he perceived as a new, postmodern form of sociality based around temporal and inherently unstable groupings. Maffesoli's aims were twofold. In the first instance he was concerned to counter the emphasis on the 'death' of the social and concomitant rise of individualism central to the work of theorists such as Beck (1992) and Baudrillard (1983). According to Maffesoli (1996), although the combined effects of de-industrialisation, risk, and postmodernism have contributed to a process of social fragmentation, the effect of this has not been not to remove social bonds completely but rather to transform them (Bennett 2005). Postmodernity, argues Maffesoli, has produced new forms of 'neo-tribal' bonding based around affective and temporal forms of collectivity, such as the weekend crowds that gather at sporting events and in shopping malls. According to Maffesoli (1996: 98) the tribe is 'without the rigidity of the forms of organization with which we are familiar, it refers more to a certain ambience, a state of mind, and is preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form'. This point is further emphasised by Hetherington (1992: 93) who suggests that tribalisation involves 'the deregulation through modernization and individualization of the modern forms of solidarity and identity based on class occupation, locality and gender ... and the[ir] recomposition into "tribal" identities and forms of sociation'.

Neo-tribe has more recently been applied in work on popular music audiences, notably in two empirical studies of contemporary dance music conducted by Bennett (1999) and Malbon (1999). Central to both studies is the contention that the apparently fluid membership of the dance club crowd is indicative of a new, neo-tribal sensibility inspired both by the fragmentation of youth style and the fragmented text of dance music itself (a product of studio sampling and the mixing or 'mashing' techniques employed by DJs: see Langlois 1992). There are arguably a number of reasons why neo-tribe presents itself as a more viable model than subculture when considering the importance of music and stylistic

affiliations in contemporary social life. Most importantly, it allows for new ways of understanding how and why people are brought together in such affiliations. In contrast to subcultural theory — which argues that individuals are ‘held’, if not ‘forced’, together in subcultural groups by the fact of class, community, race or gender — neo-tribal theory allows for the function of taste, aesthetics and affectivity as primary drivers for participation in forms of collective cultural activity (Bennett 1999).

Scene

Primarily applied in studying the relationship between youth culture and music (a significant exception here is Irwin’s (1977) work on surfing scenes), ‘scene’ is considered a viable alternative to subculture due to its transcendence of collective identity rooted in pre-existing notions of community based around class, tradition and so on; alternatively, scenes are argued to express new forms of collectivity based around mutual patterns of taste in music and associated forms of material culture. Music scenes embrace a broad range of activities including music-making, production and promotion, as well as the necessary infrastructure of physical resources such as venues, clubs, rehearsal spaces, recording studios, and record/music shops needed to sustain such activities (Stahl 2004). A further aspect of scenes that give them a distinctly neo-tribal character is the multiplicity of spaces in which scene activity takes place. Thus, according to Straw (1991: 379): scenes often transcend particular localities ‘reflect[ing] and actualiz[ing] a particular state of relations between various populations and social groups, as these coalesce around particular coalitions of musical style’.

More recent work has developed Straw’s (1991) notion of music scenes as multiply articulated, transgressive phenomena. Important in this respect is Peterson and Bennett’s (2004) introduction of a three-tier model of music scenes. This comprises the already familiar terms ‘local’ and ‘trans-local’ scene, but adds a new category in the form of ‘virtual’ scene. As this term suggests, virtual scenes utilise internet communication technology, thus allowing geographically dispersed fans to interact online. As Peterson and Bennett (2004: 11) observe,

[w]hereas a conventional local scene is kept in motion by a series of gigs, club nights, fairs, and similar events, where fans converge, communicate and reinforce their sense of belonging to a particular scene, the virtual scene involves direct net-mediated person-to-person communication between fans ... This may involve, for example, the creation of chat-rooms or list-serves dedicated to the scene and may involve the trading of music and images on-line.

The notion of the ‘virtual’ scene thus opens up a new means of conceptualising scene membership, not as a necessarily face-to-face activity but one that is conducted primarily, if not exclusively, in the virtual spaces of the internet (see also Bennett 2004).

Lifestyle

The concept of ‘lifestyle’ was initially applied by Max Weber as a means of exploring the relationship between patterns of consumption and articulation of social status in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century urban contexts (see Chaney 1996). American sociologist Thorstein Veblen subsequently adopted ‘lifestyle’ in work addressing issues of wealth and status among the emergent leisure classes of the United States during the same time period (see Chaney 1996). In ensuing years, lifestyle became more readily associated with market research on patterns of consumption. However, during the early 1990s it re-emerged as a conceptual framework in sociological and cultural research due to the ‘cultural turn’ (Chaney 1994) in these fields of research. This brought with it an increasing focus on cultural consumption as a basis for the construction of identities and lifestyles in a context of what Giddens (1991) referred to as ‘reflexive modernity’. A central figure in this resurgence of lifestyle theory was British sociologist David Chaney (1996) who put forward a critical distinction between ‘lifestyles’ and ‘ways of life’. According to Chaney, lifestyles are ‘creative projects’ which rely on ‘displays of consumer competence’, while ‘ways of life’ are ‘typically associated with a more or less stable community [and] displayed in features such as shared norms, rituals, patterns of social order and probably a distinctive dialect’ (1996: 97, 92). The model set out by Chaney subsequently informed applications of lifestyle theory in youth cultural research, for example in work by Swedish sociologist Reimer (1995) and British sociologist Miles (1996; 2000). Thus, in examining patterns of cultural consumption among youth during the mid-1990s, Miles (1996: 36) argued that late modernity had witnessed a ‘transition from pragmatic and unified sub-cultural identities into a shifting mosaic and juxtaposition of styles’.

Criticisms of post-subcultural theory

The post-subcultural turn has been highly influential in the field of youth cultural studies, generating a number of studies including two dedicated anthologies (see Bennett and Khan-Harris 2004; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003). At the same time, however, a series of criticisms have been directed at post-subcultural theory. A number of theorists have argued that post-subcultural theory’s emphasis on fluidity and reflexive individualism overlooks more established instances of youth cultural practice that appear grounded in more

subculturally orientated codes. For example, in his research on goth style, Hodkinson (2004: 147) argues that while goth 'did exhibit certain indications of movement, dynamism and flux ... these did not prevent it from retaining a relatively substantive overall form'. As such, maintains Hodkinson (2004), goth constitutes one example of a contemporary youth cultural formation for which 'subculture' offers a more accurate method for examining its internal cohesive structures than post-subculture.

A further criticism of post-subcultural theory focuses on its allegedly celebratory stance in relation to aspects of cultural consumption. Thus, it is argued, cultural consumption comes to stand for the very universe by which post-subcultural youth establishes its identity, shopping for fashion items and associated accessories in a 'supermarket of style' (Polhemus 1997) oblivious to the former socio-political contexts of commodified mod, hippie, punk and other 'subcultural' fashions. Blackman (2005) advances this criticism, suggesting that in its dominant focus on patterns of consumption among post-subcultural youth, little scope exists for an analysis of the relationship between the politics of style and deeper political considerations. Thus, according to Blackman, in theorising youth culture as increasingly fragmented and individualised, post-subcultural theorists collectively 'ignore the collective response by young people over the past 10 years at festivals, raves and at anti-capitalist demonstrations where diverse and unified forms of subcultural identities and affiliations have performed rituals of resistance' (Blackman 2005: 14).

The post-subcultural turn has also been criticised for its lack of attention to aspects of class and social structure in relation to youth and the formation of youth cultural identities. Taking issue with post-subcultural theory's central argument that cultural consumption offers new pathways for young people to construct reflexively articulated lifestyles that do not correspond in any straightforward way with class background, critics suggest that such an interpretation overlooks continuing patterns of socio-economic inequality and the impact of this on access to consumer goods and products (Roberts et al. 2009). According to Shildrick and MacDonald (2006: 136),

[t]heoretically, [post-subcultural] studies have aligned themselves with postmodern thinking and tended to downplay — and sometimes ignore — the significance of social divisions and inequalities of power in young people's cultural lives ... By focusing in on the most obviously stylistic forms of contemporary youth culture (whose adherents might be argued to be predominantly drawn from more advantaged social positions) these studies are less likely to be able to uncover evidence of how class, and other social divisions, delimit youth cultural possibilities.

To date there has been little in the way of a formulated response to criticisms on the part of subcultural theorists. Nor has there been any sustained attempt to apply the post-subcultural turn in a more global context, research thus far tending to draw on relatively small data sets drawn from small, localised studies.

The future of youth cultural research

Notwithstanding the problems that have been identified with post-subcultural theory, there can be little doubt that it has had a significant impact on youth culture research. Most importantly, post-subcultural theory's focus on cultural consumption and reflexivity have opened up a series of new debates around the nature of youth identities in contemporary social contexts. Such debates have not served to displace structural readings of youth and youth cultural practice. However, notions of class, gender, ethnicity and so on are no longer readily accepted as socially ascribed, or 'given', categories. Rather, there is an increasing understanding of the need to examine and evaluate such categories within a range of local and global influences, including community and geographical location, as well as encompassing patterns of leisure, consumption and lifestyle.

At the same time, there is an increasing awareness of other factors which are serving to problematise previously dominant representations of youth cultural practice, notably in relation to access to internet communication technologies and other forms of digital media. The internet, in particular, offers opportunities for new, trans-local and global forms of communication, and affective bonding between youth. As such,

... we can no longer take it for granted that membership of a youth culture involves issues of stylistic unity, collective knowledge of a particular club scene, or even face-to-face interaction. On the contrary, youth cultures may be seen increasingly as cultures of 'shared ideas', whose interactions take place not in physical spaces such as the street, club or festival field but in the virtual spaces facilitated by the internet. (Bennett 2004: 163)

The notion of youth cultures as mediated collectivities is one that is likely to become increasingly central to youth cultural research, and a field of study which will yield further debate regarding the relative merits of subcultural and post-subcultural perspectives as a means of investigating the relationship between online and offline youth identities (see for example, Robards and Bennett 2011).

A further developing area of youth cultural research that has also been influenced to a significant degree by the post-subcultural turn focuses on issues

of youth and ageing. Central to this body of work is the contention that the stylistic and aesthetic practices once firmly associated with youth culture as category circumscribed by age, are increasingly multi-generational (Bennett 2006; Holland 2004). Critical in this respect is the way in which ageing individuals reflexively refine and develop stylistic and aesthetic sensibilities acquired during their youth with the effect that they become more permanent features of lifestyle sites and strategies (Chaney 1996) articulated over the life course.

For example, in his work on ageing punks in the UK and Australia, Bennett (2006; forthcoming) observes how many first-generation punks, now in their forties and fifties, have absorbed the DIY (do-it-yourself) and anti-mainstream ethos of punk to the extent that this extends far beyond an expression of style and/or musical taste, to inform a range of things from choice of work/career to relationships with partners and children. Similarly, Holland's (2004) study of ageing 'alternative' women examines how even as the latter are seen to tone down their visual appearance as they grow older, this is done in a way that facilitates the continued articulation of an alternative identity. Finally, Taylor's (2010) research on ageing members of the Brisbane queer scene considers how, through their continued participation in the queer club and music scene activity, older queers are able to negotiate and resist hetero-normative constructions of ageing, domesticity and adult behaviour.

As these brief examples serve to illustrate, if the field of youth cultural studies was once firmly focused around the cultural practices of those in their teens and early twenties, more recent research is illustrating the transition of youth culture from an age-based phenomenon to an ideologically and aesthetically constructed one.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the development of contemporary youth cultural studies. This began with an examination of the adoption and adaptation of 'subculture' by the CCCS for the study of style-based youth cultures that had emerged in Britain and elsewhere from the mid-1950s onwards. Various studies associated with subcultural theory were considered before going on to discuss some key criticisms of the approach. Attention then focused on the emergence of post-subcultural theory as a response to some of the theoretical and methodological problems that had been associated with subcultural theory. Following a discussion of key concepts and theories associated with the post-subcultural turn, together with consideration of some critical readings of this body of work, the chapter concluded by offering some observations about possible future directions in youth cultural studies.

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7 The Contribution of Semiotics to the Analysis of Popular Culture

Merja Bauters

- The main points and concepts of structural semiotics (such as sign, code, text, and myth) are discussed and explained.
- The different models used in the analysis of cultural events and issues (for example, the ‘semiotic square’ and the ‘signification chain’) are presented with brief examples.
- Using examples from popular culture (such as corporate logos) demonstrates how structural semiotics allows for a more sophisticated analysis of cultural texts.
- The dynamic and pragmatic approaches are presented to help explain how the shortcomings of structural semiotics can be overcome. These concepts and models include the *icon*, *index* and *symbol*, as well as different Interpretants on the Phaneroscopic categories.

Introduction

Semiotics is concerned with communication as well as the ascription of signification to things in the world; it is commonly defined as the *science of signs*. The field of semiotics is often divided into two divergent traditions stemming from the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. The work of Louis Hjelmslev and Roland Barthes, for example, follows the ‘semiological’ tradition.

Sadly, in the study of popular culture, semiotic methods and concepts are still often only utilised to allow critical analysis of visual representations and offer interpretations of a given sign structure, including the uncovering of ‘myths’ (or dominant meanings) which may lie behind such representations. This approach to semiotics draws heavily on linguistic concepts and models when investigating social phenomena. For instance, Lévi-Strauss elaborated on the concept and idea of myth, kinship rules and totemism; Lacan structured and explained the unconscious; Barthes developed the model of myth (1977, 1985, 1987), and Algirdas Greimas (1987) researched and described the grammar of narrative in

the form of the 'semiotic square'. Therefore, researchers have commonly referred to forms of popular culture such as films, television and radio programmes, and advertising posters and campaigns as *texts*, and the activity has been referred to as the 'reading of the texts' (Fiske and Hartley 1978). Media has been regarded as similar to *language*. The systems have been studied *synchronically*, as a snapshot, rather than *diachronically*, as an evolution over time. Some refer to the *grammar* of media rather than the language. The grammar and relations are emphasised by Günther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2001). From a socio-semiotic perspective, for instance, Robert Hodge and Kress (1988: 1) have stated that 'the social dimensions of semiotic systems are so intrinsic to their nature and function that the systems cannot be studied in isolation'. Inevitably there has emerged a need to study the dynamic and processual nature of signs, interpretation and embodiment. More holistic and adaptive approaches are used to enable a broader view of the field of visual artefacts and meaning-creation especially in the field of popular culture. The approaches are often interdisciplinary. This means that the relation of the interpreter and the environment (or the *context*), the history of the signs, and the function and role of emotions in the process are taken into account.

Paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures within semiotics will be now discussed, starting from the description of signified and signifier as well as *denotation* and *connotation*. Furthermore, the concepts of *code*, *text*, and *myth* will be covered. The concepts related to Saussure's works are presented first. The discussion on the main *structuralist concepts* relies heavily on the works of Daniel Chandler (2001/3).

Structural semiotics

Saussure's model of a sign is *dyadic*. The sign can be defined as being composed of: a *signifier* often referred to as *the form, which the sign takes*; and the *signified*, which is seen as *the concept which the sign represents* (Saussure 1983: 67). It is the relation between signifier and signified that creates *signification*. They are associatively linked in the mind of the perceiver. As Saussure (1983: 66) notes,

[a] linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern. The sound pattern is not actually a sound; for a sound is something physical. A sound pattern is the hearer's psychological impression of a sound, as given to him by the evidence of his senses. This sound pattern may be called a 'material' element only in that it is the representation of our sensory impressions. The sound pattern may thus be distinguished from the other element associated with it in a

linguistic sign. This other element is generally of a more abstract kind: the concept.

Saussure's model denied the reference to objects existing in the world. Namely, the signified was not identified directly with a referent but to the concept in the mind of the perceiver. For example, seeing the word 'car' refers to the idea of a car in the mind of the receiver, which can be a car brand (such as Volvo, Audi, Ford, Renault, Daewoo, or BMW) that the receiver uses as a base for forming the idea of what 'car' means to them. Hjelmslev used the terms *expression* and *content* to refer to the signifier and signified respectively (Hjelmslev 1961: 47ff). The distinction between signifier and signified has sometimes been equated to the familiar dualism of form and content, and is often interpreted as the material (or physical) form of the sign. The signifier is something which can be seen, heard, touched, smelt or tasted. This often seems to imply that meaning can be derived or extracted from the form without the process of interpretation (Chandler 1995: 104–6). However, in Saussurean terms, signs refer primarily to each other (Saussure 1983: 121). No sign makes sense alone but, rather, in relation to other signs, thus the meaning of a sign emerges from its relations to other signs in the system. The *relations* refer to its position and placement in the axis of *paradigm* and *syntagm*. The paradigm suggests the possibility of signs to have multiple meanings. For example, in language, one signifier can refer to many signified things, and one signified thing may be referred to by many signifiers (such as synonyms). Within this context, the signs of the same paradigm set are structurally replaceable with another sign. Using one signifier rather than another from the same paradigm set creates the meaning of a text. In Barthes' fashion system, the decision of what garments one combines will create a different style and meaning, for example one could choose a bonnet, cap, scarf, bearskin or a hat with a jacket and the style and meaning would be different. Wearing a baseball cap with a leather jacket could signify a fighter pilot, but the same baseball cap with a jogging jacket may suggest an athlete. Thus, the cap as a signifier has many different meanings depending on the combination of other garments worn with it. A syntagm, is a combination of signifiers which forms a meaningful whole, for example in a sentence or — in a case of other systems than language — a separable unit of analysis. The combinations of signs in a syntagm are made within a framework of explicit and implicit syntactic rules and conventions. Syntagms are usually referred as sequential. However, syntagm can be a spatial arrangement as well. Spatial syntagmatic relations are often used in the analysis of photographs, paintings, drawing and cinema. The syntagm and paradigm are also associated with the concept of *intertextuality*. The conventions have been interpreted to imply arbitrariness and agreement of interpretation; for example, the arbitrariness of the link between the signifier and the signified (Saussure 1983: 67). People have different ways of doing things that can be seen as conventions; for example, in popular culture, certain groups dress and act in a particular way (an often used

example is the punk or goth subcultures). These ways of acting and dressing are said to be created through the group's agreement of how to act or dress. However, most of these conventions are related to the demands, values and pressures the surrounding environment creates. For example, the safety pin placed on the cheek in the punk subculture can be seen as representing a disregard for the values and conventions of society. However, the same safety pin consequently comes to represent the punk subculture itself. The values and meanings of society in 2011 have changed from the early days of the punk subculture. Thus, nothing is fully arbitrary; it always depends on the historical moment, environment and people involved. However, Saussure (1983: 73) later admitted that 'a language is not completely arbitrary, for the system has a certain rationality'. He continued that,

[t]he fundamental principle of the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign does not prevent us from distinguishing in any language between what is intrinsically arbitrary — that is, unmotivated — and what is only relatively arbitrary. Not all signs are absolutely arbitrary ... *any means of expression accepted in a society rests in principle upon a collective habit, or on convention.* (Saussure 1983: 130, 68, emphasis added)

Crucially for an examination of popular culture then, Saussure admits that signs are dependent on social and cultural habits, and therefore signs are not socially neutral. The sociality aspect brings along the concepts of denotation, connotation and code. Barthes developed the ideas of denotation and connotation further. *Denotation* tends to be described as *the literal, obvious or commonsense meaning of a sign*. A particular word may have connotations. For instance, it can have sexual connotations (consider words such as 'screw' or 'bang'). Meaning includes both aspects: the denotation and the connotation. The term *connotation* is most often thought to *promote associations arising from the socio-cultural and personal background*. These kinds of signs are *polysemic*. This means that the signs allow for multiple meanings to be created. Barthes employed and modelled Hjelmslev's notion that there are different aspects or *levels of signification* (Barthes 1987; Hjelmslev 1961: 114ff). The first level of signification is denotation. At this level, the sign is formed of a signifier and a signified. Connotation occurs at the second level of signification. This level uses the denotative sign as its signifier and attaches to it another signified. This process creates what is known as a *connotation chain* or *signification chain*. The connotation chain is used as an analytical model in research on popular culture phenomena. Such analysis has been carried out by Beasley and Danesi (2002). Their analysis on adverts in the 1990s (for example, adverts for Remy Martin cognac) describes how the connotations from one sign and its meaning flow forward to other meanings. Usually Beasley and Danesi trace these kinds of signification chains to ancient myths involving such characters as Zeus, Hermes, and so on. However, such chains can be found without referring to ancient

myths. For example, nearly any alcohol adverts use young stylish or trendy people drinking some kind of alcohol, being wanted by others, forwarding ideas of sexual potential and even fame. Here we already see chains of connotations happening. For most semiotic analysis of popular culture phenomena, both denotation and connotation involve the use of *codes*. Such codes are seen either as related to the arbitrariness of the signifiers and, thus, emerging from the rules of the text (from a structural viewpoint), or as emerging from the diversity of interpretation, emphasising the importance of cultural and historical contexts (as argued by socio-semioticians). Related to connotation is what Barthes (1987) refers to as *myth*. Myths are usually associated with classical fables about the exploits of gods and heroes, but also to metaphors. Using Hjelmslev's model, Barthes argues that the orders of signification within denotation and connotation build up ideology; that is, a myth about the world (Fiske and Hartley 1978: 43).

In contemporary use, myths and metaphors are seen as being closely related to each other — both serve the need to organise and conceptualise issues and things within a shared culture. For Barthes, however, myths make the values, attitudes and beliefs of the dominant culture appear natural, normal, self-evident and common sense (Barthes 1977). According to socio-semioticians such as Johnson and Lakoff (1980: 3) metaphors are 'pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature'. Popular culture phenomena are still mostly analysed using or adapting Barthes' model of the myth. The model is constructed of three levels of signification. These levels are used as scaffolds, and they are not always clear-cut. The first level is denotative. It is representational and relatively self-contained. The second level is connotative. It reflects expressive values, which are attached (or associated) to a sign. In the third level, the mythological or ideological signification comes into view. For example, if we saw a beer advert that stated it gave a 'full smooth taste', the first level meaning would then be that the beer tastes smooth and full, but in the connotative level it could mean that the beer is strong in the amount of alcohol still tasting full. The third level would bring along the ideological aspect and the social demands, thus meaning that drinking this particular beer could represent masculinity, independence, status and so on. At this level, the sign reflects major culturally emergent worldviews such as masculinity, femininity, freedom, individualism, objectivism, educational status issues, power values, and so forth. Following the structuralist ideas of deconstruction and construction, the semiotic analysis (or unveiling of myths) attempts to deconstruct the ways in which codes operate within particular popular texts. The aim is to reveal how values, attitudes and beliefs are supported while others are suppressed and down played. There is no one set of values or beliefs that is always under investigation. What is found and what is described depends on the historical period, the popular culture text under

investigation and the particular society in which such semiotic analysis is taking place. In addition to the model from Barthes, Greimas' (1987) *semiotic square* (which also follows a narrative and structural semiotic approach) has been employed to discover the contrary pairs of concepts of the topics under analysis for grasping the attitudes and values connected to the investigated topic or event (Chandler 2003). Somewhat reducing the use and original meaning of the semiotic square, it can be described as a square, which has in the upper-corners an opposition between two concepts. For example, students investigating how people relate to different sources of water could put 'fresh water' and 'waste water' in the opposite upper-corners of the square. These two concepts then could have in the lower part of square their 'not values' (in this case, 'not fresh water' and 'not waste water'). Consequently, finding concepts that would indicate what is not exactly fresh water or what is not exactly waste water, provides insight into how people value the issues investigated (in this case, how they value water). The results that might be highlighted, for instance, could be that 'not fresh water' would be tap water and 'not waste water' would be sea, rivers and so on (in other words, natural waters that are not drinkable but are not waste water either). The concept of the semiotic square has become popular, especially in applied semiotics.

Applied semiotics

For Jean-Marie Floch, the semiotic square is interesting in its ability to organise the conceptual universe coherently, although the conceptual universe is not recognised as rational. In *Visual Identities* (2000) and *Semiotics, Marketing and Communication* (2001) Floch used market research data to formulate the possible significations and abstract conceptual planes of the elements of artefacts; in other words, the worldview, lifestyle and values people associated with the concepts found in the elements. These elements are different depending on the investigated issue and area, for example what kind of ideas and values are being related when we look at pocket knives? Already the naming of the knife and how it is utilised tells us something about how the person using the knife sees life or his/her way of being. Consider the French knife and the Swiss army knife — what comes to mind? Practicality, aggression, a weapon, or maybe another idea? In their analysis and description of media semiotics, Bignell (2002) and Danesi (2002) describe the effects and usage of myths, as well as its associations with the idea of connotation and signification chains. Both semiotically analyse advertisements and company logos. Danesi (2004: 263–65) describes the Apple logo as a clearly iconic sign, which is filled with religious symbolism, suggesting the story of Adam and Eve. More specifically it represents the story of eating the apple that contained forbidden knowledge. The logo, through its tautology (that is, the word 'apple' and the image of an eaten

apple), reinforces the symbolic association of allowing access to forbidden knowledge (namely, only through the Apple computer will the user gain access to the most important knowledge). However, this interpretation is an example of the potential problem of over-interpreting the meaning of signs, into which many semioticians stumble: the designers of the Apple logo have claimed that the religious genesis story was not an influence when they created the logo. Eco (1977) sees a possibility in *double connotations* of sign functions in stable social conventions. The double connotations in sign functions have been further employed by Beasley and Danesi (2002) in their argument that different interpretations can be derived from advertising, that multiple readings are possible. The signification or connotation chains are, though, based on the idea of linear connotations or association-building on top of each other. The possibility to take into account the changes in context and the embodied nature of interpretations (which might promote multiple signification chains) was not considered by such semioticians.

Important contributions have also come from Mick et al. (2004). They have given an overview of the semiotic-based research approaches to marketing and consumer studies. Mick et al. note the lack of acknowledgement of the processual nature of analysed events and the reductionist use of the Peircean concepts of icon, index and symbol. This means that most use the categorisation of icon, index and symbol without understanding that one never has a sign that is only an icon, index or symbol. That is, signs have all of these aspects present in them, but one aspect usually dominates. The domination from icon to symbol may change according to the historical period, environment and goal of use. For example, on beer labels in Finland there exists an iconic and indexical sign of award stamps that beers have achieved by winning beer-tasting contests. This meaning of the sign has changed into the symbolic meaning of a drink category, for example beer being distinguished from other alcoholic drinks, or the sign being seen as simply a decorative element. However, the process, embodiment and change of signs appearing in cultural artefacts and the changing interpretations of such artefacts have been less of a focus. As Jaan Valsiner (1998: 236) has pointed out:

[i]t is remarkable that traditional semiotics — as a science of signs — has largely ignored the issue of the dynamic process of its construction of the phenomena it attempts to reflect ... the study of time-based transformation of cultural symbols has been largely missing.

If the signs and the interpretation process are studied from a holistic point of view, the challenge of taking into account the relation of the interpreter to the environment (context) — as well as the function of emotions in the process — requires an interdisciplinary approach.

Dynamic models and methodologies

Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of semiotics gives a unifying point of view to the development of temporal consensus in the interpretation processes within the course of time. The description presented here is based on a communicative reading of sign theory following Bergman's understanding of Peirce's theory of signs (2004: 228–33). The sign is a mediating vehicle of understanding and communication and not so much a question of the class of things. Signs refer to something and the reference is always understood in some respect. Therefore, a sign cannot be defined by certain characteristics that belong to the entity as such, but it is explained by *its relations*; that is, a sign is a matter of acquired triadic form.

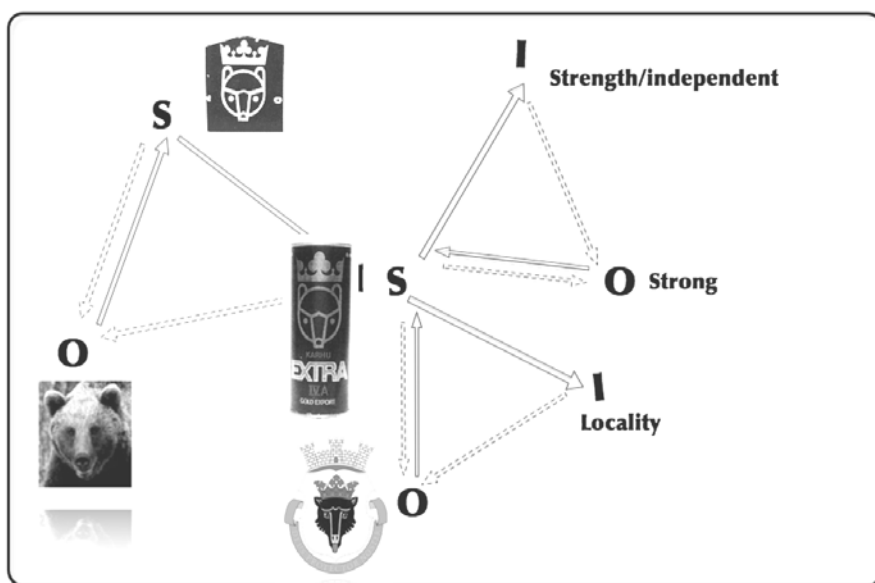


Figure 7.1 The sign action process with multiple interpretations

In Figure 7.1 can be seen the forming of the multiple meanings of one sign. Let us start from the sign vehicle of the bear's head, which was a logo of a beer brand in Finland in the 1960s. The first meaning is the particular beer brand (Karhu) — the can presented in the middle of the figure. This interpretation is a sum of the relations between the sign vehicle (the bear's head with crown) that is an icon of a real bear, but also a symbol of the brand, and the relations of the sign vehicle and the real bear (as the object of the sign vehicle) to the interpretant — the sign. With time, other meanings were derived from the signs such as the beer brand acting as the sign and its object being the coat of arms of the Finnish town of Pori (the image of the bear with crown and blue laces around it, in the lower part of the figure). The relation between the old sign and

the object was indexical (referring to the town of Pori), but it was also iconic (representing the bear) as well as symbolically referring to the brand. The new meaning deriving from these relations was locality; that is, the beer was the beer of the area; it was the beer of the drinkers' hometown. It was *the local beer*. It is also possible to present another meaning, where the dominant feature of the old sign is strength. Namely, strength of the bear and strength of the beer, thus the object of the sign is strength, which is indexical and symbolic. The meaning from this within a particular period and societal setting was independence. The people consuming this brand felt that they were independent and communicating their independence by drinking this particular beer brand.

As can be seen from the above example, signs develop over time; they are fluid rather than static. As Bergman puts it, 'semiotic signs are not bound in an atemporal system, but develop constantly as new relations and interpretations become connected to them' (1999: 29). Peirce (1931/58: volume 5, paragraph 484) himself explains semiosis as follows:

... by 'semiosis' I mean ... an action, or influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of three subjects, such as a sign, its Object, and its Interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs. [Sêmeiösis] in Greek of the Roman period, as early as Cicero's time, if I remember rightly, meant the action of almost any kind of sign; and my definition confers on anything that so acts the title of a 'sign'.

Semiosis can be viewed from different aspects; that is, if the focus is more on the manner, the sign stands for the Object (aspect of representation). If the emphasis is on the influence of the Object upon the sign and of the sign upon the Interpretant, the relational terms are from the aspect of determination. Mediation, then, arises from the aspect of communication and it covers both aspects. Mediation replaced representation in Peirce's sign definition when he adopted the communicative perspective (Bergman 2004: 252). As can be seen from the above example of Karhu beer, it is important to understand these two aspects of multiple-meaning formation. It helps to analytically understand which relations and which signs act as dominant ones in a certain time period and societal context. For example, the early signification of independence is no longer the dominant meaning of the beer as societal values have changed. To be an independent, self-reliant person is not 'cool' any more. The coolness has shifted to being more sociable and being able to cooperate with others. To be able to analyse how this affects the interpretation of the signs requires the understanding of how the object constrains and allows different relations between the sign vehicle and the Interpretant. Today, the beer's logo and label have changed, but the object 'strength' is still the same. However, the interpretation of this relation has been refined towards being able to enjoy stronger, full taste beer in a social situation without excessive drinking.

The interpretation is connected with the Phaneroscopic categories, which explain the different (but still indivisible) aspects of Interpretants. The Phaneroscopic categories describe the fundamental way that interpretation process occurs. It has basically two views: the individual and the societal. In the individual, on the level of Firstness, there is the Emotional Interpretant that mediates the feelings and emotions, on the level of Secondness there is the Energetic Interpretant that mediates the actual actions, and on the level of Thirdness there is the Logical Interpretant that requires intellectual appreciation and can cause a change in habit (Bergman 1999: 45; Peirce 1931/58, volume 4 paragraph 536). Thirdness cannot manifest itself without Secondness and Firstness — emotions, feelings and experiences are always involved in habits, in reflection and in interpretation. Sometimes the emotions can dominate the process of semiosis and only the Emotional Interpretant is reached. Still, the Emotional Interpretant can promote Thirdness and create a habit. The societal level includes the following Interpretants — Immediate, Dynamical and Final Interpretants (see Bergman 2004: 370–86). The Immediate Interpretant (aspect of Firstness) does not carry out any actual interpretation or action, but only harbours the potential to do so and holds the common sense of the term's meaning (Bergman 1999: 44). The Dynamic Interpretant (aspect of Secondness) is the effect that the sign causes, or it can be a sum of similar experiences. The Final Interpretant (aspect of Thirdness) can hold a notion of habit; that is, the tendency of the sign to represent itself. It may be regarded as a temporally agreed way in which a particular group understands the sign's representation. These aspects of the societal and individual are important analytical tools for understanding the effect of the environment in the process of the interpretation of signs. For example, the analysis of Karhu beer highlights the potential for multiple interpretations — it was mentioned that societal change had an effect on the individual interpretations, changing them from locality to strength. To go deeper into these kinds of effects and interpretations needs conceptual tools, which the Phaneroscopic categories enable. In summary, the Emotional Interpretant is an Interpretant's feeling caused by the sign. Some signs are considered to produce only an emotion. For example, this could be an advertisement that is unable to arouse anything else in the viewer but an emotion — irritation, for instance — rather than an action. The Energetic Interpretant is an action produced by a sign. For example, seeing a cigarette logo may make one automatically take a cigarette, even though the desire to smoke has not arisen yet. This would not be a habit of smoking as such, but just a reaction. Although in this case the habit of smoking lies behind it; say, a habit of smoking to reduce anxiety. Here, the sign manages to produce a reaction. The Logical Interpretant can be said to be the conceptual sign that requires the intellectual appreciation of the meaning of the sign; that is, the character of thought (Peirce, cited in Bergman 1999: 45). The Logical Interpretant includes the change of a habit (Peirce 1931/58: volume 4, paragraph 536, and volume 5, paragraph 476).

If we use again the cigarette example, it could be possible to reflect upon the habit of smoking to reduce anxiety and, in the end, this could proceed to a change of habit in favour of another means of anxiety reduction. The constant circular process unites humans with their *Umwelt* (environment), meaning that both the external and the internal dialogues occur and feed on each other by semiotic mediation. This spiral involves both of Peirce's divisions of Interpretants: the individual and the societal level of Interpretants. This kind of unity constantly produces diversity at the level of activity in the construction of signs (Valsiner 1998: 281).

Conclusion

This chapter has briefly outlined the main strands of structural semiotics and its usefulness in analysing popular culture texts. The problems and issues involved in the actual process of semiotic analysis have also been discussed. The structural semiotic conceptual tools and models tend to focus on the snapshots of different structures of symbolic and value systems. As one potential solution, the adapted and applied semiotic methods were also described (for example, the uses of the semiotic square and signification chains for revealing myths). However, these methods still ignore the context; namely, the physical and social context where the investigated cultural events and issues occur. To provide an applied solution, the dynamic and pragmatic semiotic approaches were presented through Peirce's theory of signs. It was pointed out that the use of icon, index and symbol should take into account the forming of the meaning of the signs. In other words, semioticians should acknowledge that these are aspects of the sign based on the relations between the object, sign vehicle and the Interpretant. Furthermore, to systematically analyse the investigated cultural issues, dynamism has to be involved. The Phaneroscopic categories (Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness) provide a conceptual tool box to name, understand and describe the different interpretations, and to take into account from where these emerge, how they change and how they may form into habits and conventions.

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8 Postmodernism and Popular Culture

Back to the future or forward into the past?

Laurence Simmons

- This chapter debates whether postmodernism is an artistic style or a period of history.
- The relation of postmodernism to modernism is explored and whether it constitutes a radical break or simply a mutation of modernism.
- Postmodernism argues that we can no longer believe in the grand narratives of history.
- The chapter examines why there are no originals but only copies in postmodern media.
- A focus for the discussion here is the importance of popular culture to postmodern cultural forms.

We walk backwards into the future, our eyes fixed on the past.
(Maori proverb)

Introduction

Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985) opens with the subtitle 'Somewhere in the 20th Century' and ends with the lyric refrain 'Someday soon...' from the popular samba *Watercolour of Brazil* (1939). During the course of the film, it becomes impossible to distinguish between these two locations of time, making the task of locating the story in some identifiable frame of reference unfeasible. The film gives us a simultaneous past and present, as well as a 'back to the future'. Gilliam has admitted that he wanted the architectural look of his film to evoke neither the past nor the future, but the world as it would look if the whole of the twentieth century had been compacted in a single moment of 'the timeless present' (cited in Mathews 1987: 31). Although *Brazil* is meant to be futuristic, its gadgets of the future (such as computer consoles) simply echo gadgets of the past (such as old-fashioned typewriters); its workers watch *Casablanca* (1949) and B-movie westerns on their mini TV-computer screens; the costumes are vintage Hollywood fashions from the 1930s and 1940s; the large eagle statue at

the entrance to the Ministry of Information recalls Nazi insignia; the ubiquitous public posters ('Don't suspect a friend — Report him!') copy the style of World War Two posters in Britain; and finally the title song *Brazil* — successfully recorded in English by Xavier Cugat — dates from 1939. The film's hero, Sam Lowry, has a bevy of modern automatic gadgets designed to make his life easier but, as he prepares to go to work, his coffee machine pours coffee on his toast and the alarm clock malfunctions and causes him to be late.

The failure of the project of modernity that these glitches suggest and *Brazil*'s striking visual style (for a film made over 25 years ago) — its integration of previously separate cultural genres (the mixing of high and low art as well as the combination of distinct genres, such as melodramas and science-fiction films), the loss of a sense of history and its dislocated temporality (manifest in a desire for nostalgia), combined with a euphoric attachment to surfaces or depthlessness (found in the brightness and predominance of the image) — evoke what has come to be called a 'postmodern perspective'.

Postmodernism is a complicated term, or set of ideas, one that has only emerged as an area of academic study since the mid-1980s, and although it is often poorly understood it is almost impossible to avoid in our media and everyday discussions. Postmodernism is hard to define in part, because it is a concept that appears in a wide variety of disciplines or areas of study, including art, architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, philosophy, communications, fashion, and technology (Appignanesi and Garratt 2003). Although most commentators acknowledge that postmodernism is involved with the development of popular culture in the late twentieth century, it is hard to locate it temporally or historically, because it is not clear exactly when postmodernism begins, or indeed if it has begun at all. Like Gilliam's film, perhaps the easiest way to start thinking about postmodernism is by thinking about 'modernism', the movement from which postmodernism seems to grow or emerge. Modernism has two facets, or two modes of definition, both of which are relevant to understanding postmodernism.

Critical recognition of modernist forms includes a number of texts produced in the latter half of the nineteenth century; but the movement seems to crystallise in the artistic movements of the early decades of the twentieth century, a period that is generally referred to as 'high modernism'. Instances would include Surrealism, Dadaism, Cubism and Futurism in the arts; the literature of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Marcel Proust and Thomas Mann; the poetry of Wallace Stevens, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot; the plays of Bertolt Brecht; and in architecture, the International Style associated with Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe. If there is a commonality to be identified across these multiple strands of modernism it is the urge towards experimentation and innovation, whether this takes the form of Woolf's 'stream of consciousness', the bricolage of Eliot's

The Waste Land, Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* (estrangement effect), or Mies van der Rohe's industrial steel-framed, plate-glass boxes.

Whereas in the past modernist poetry, literature, architecture and art embodied the capacity to scandalise or shock its consumer through the perceived radicalness of form as much as actual content, modernist works have now become so many dead letters, welcomed into the canon, the museum and the market. In this sense postmodernism's own position in relation to modernism would be one in which it constituted a decisive break with the latter, a position involving the argument that the modernist project had somehow failed and that it (postmodernism), was now more experimental and self-knowing than the work of Woolf and Joyce, who themselves had once transformed 'realist' art.

But this argument assumes that postmodernism, as Marxist critic Fredric Jameson (cited in Foster 1985: 113) rebukes, is 'just another word for the description of a particular style'. However, it is also, as Jameson insists, 'a periodising concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order' (cited in Foster 1985: 113). For Jameson that 'new type' of life involves the emergence of a post-industrial consumer society. His argument obviously still assumes that modernity no longer exists; we are no longer 'modern', but, of course, nobody told us until postmodernism came along and pointed it out. Much debate has ensued in the course of attempting to date or periodise the precise emergence of the postmodern, the nature of its relationship to its ostensible predecessor, modernism (that is, does postmodernism constitute a radical break with modernism or is it a contemporary 'mutation' of modernism?), and the value — positive or negative — one imparts to postmodern modes of cultural production. It is clear that postmodernism is haunted, as will be this chapter, by the question of time.

In 1966 Susan Sontag wrote that she could discern a 'new sensibility' in the cultural field, one important consequence of which was 'that the distinction between "high" and "low" culture seems less and less meaningful' (1966: 302). Twenty years on, comparative literature scholar Andreas Huyssen wrote of how the bridging of the divide between mass culture and modernism had become a 'measure [of] our own cultural postmodernity' (1986: 57). For cultural theorist Iain Chambers, postmodernism had to be understood as a 'symptom of the disruptive ingression of popular culture, its aesthetics and intimate possibilities, into a previously privileged domain' (2002: 216). Whether postmodernism is understood as a 'new sensibility' or cultural style or a new historical moment, popular culture is constantly cited as the terrain on which these changes can be mapped. So just how are these ideas of postmodernism so prevalent in our everyday (popular) culture? One example might be the merging of 'high' art and popular music: the English 'pop artist' Peter Blake designed the cover of the

Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) and the American pop artist Andy Warhol designed the cover of the Rolling Stones' album *Sticky Fingers* (1971). But more recently it has been the wide-ranging changes in technologies, global communication and interconnection, the rise of the Internet, cell phones, intercontinental travel, the ever-expanding abilities to mobilise across the planet and the ability to participate in 'live' events happening in different corners of the globe that are constantly changing our current vital conditions. In this shifting environment, it is true that concepts need to be continuously reshaped and redefined. The proliferation of evidence of new and different ways to live life and the mounting diversity of 'world-views' are dissolving the philosophical project of the West, whose ultimate goal — from the pre-Socratics to the moderns — has been to find the 'truth' hidden behind our representations. The Internet has propelled this phenomenon by detailing the exploding variety of tastes, beliefs, sexual inclinations, opinions and political tendencies documented daily by millions through blogs, homepages, social networks or video cameras that broadcast this diversity in real-time and for everybody. As a result, the historical and radically diverse character of human beings and their culture(s) is being exposed as it has never been before, and it is precisely this exposure to a complex, ever-expanding and centre-less web of beliefs that has opened further possibilities for the particular point-of-view that is called the 'postmodern perspective'.

I propose to introduce the nature of the debates around the term, and how it has been used in different disciplines and at different times, by focusing on a number of prominent thinkers whose works are foundational to postmodernism. This exploration will also reveal that postmodernism is not simply some form of fashionable thinking — here today and gone tomorrow — but represents a serious intellectual engagement with the issues of our time and in our world.

Jean-François Lyotard (1924—98)

'Postmodernism' first widely entered critical discourse in 1979 with the publication of *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* by French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard. In what has become one of the great slogan-definitions of postmodernism, Lyotard declared, 'I define postmodern as incredulity towards meta-narratives' (1984: xxiv). What are meta-narratives? Totality, stability and order, argues Lyotard, are maintained in modern societies through the means of 'grand narratives or 'master narratives', which are stories a culture tells itself about its practices and beliefs, including especially those inherited from the modern European Enlightenment tradition. A 'grand narrative' in much of Western culture might be the story that democracy is the most enlightened (or 'rational') form of government, and that democracy can and will lead to universal human happiness. Every belief system or ideology has

its grand narratives according to Lyotard; for Marxism, for instance, it is the idea that capitalism will collapse in on itself and a utopian socialist world will evolve. We might think of grand narratives as a kind of meta-theory, or meta-ideology (that is, an ideology that explains an ideology, as with Marxism); a story that is told to explain the belief systems that exist about human purpose, progress and reason. Lyotard argues that all aspects of modern societies — including science as the primary form of knowledge — depend on these grand narratives. In contrast, postmodernism, which is marked by an attitude of suspicion towards the status of knowledge in Western societies, is the critique of grand narratives, an exploration of the awareness that such narratives serve to mask the contradictions and instabilities that are inherent in any social organisation or practice. Postmodernism, in rejecting grand narratives, favours ‘mini-narratives’, stories that explain small practices, local events, rather than large-scale universal or global concepts. Postmodern mini-narratives are always situational, provisional, contingent, and temporary, making no claim to universality, truth, reason, or stability.

As the subtitle of Lyotard’s book suggests, postmodernism is concerned with questions of the organisation of knowledge. In modern societies, knowledge was equated with science, and was contrasted to ‘narrative knowledge’; science was good knowledge, and narrative was bad, primitive, irrational. Knowledge, however, was good for its own sake; one gained knowledge, via education, in order to be knowledgeable in general, to become an educated person. This is the ideal of the modern liberal arts education. In a postmodern society, conversely, knowledge becomes functional — you learn things, not to know them, but to use that knowledge, and, as we all know, educational policy today puts emphasis on skills and training, rather than on a vague humanist ideal of education in general (Skilbeck et al. 1994). Not only is knowledge in postmodern societies characterised by its utility, but knowledge is also distributed, stored, and arranged differently in postmodern societies than it was in modern ones. According to Lyotard, the advent of electronic computer technologies has revolutionised the modes of knowledge production, distribution, and consumption in our society (indeed, some might argue that postmodernism is best described by, and correlated with, the emergence of computer technology, starting in the 1960s, as the dominant force in all aspects of social life) (1984: 3 ff.).

Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007)

In an interview in 2004, French thinker Jean Baudrillard declared: ‘[p]ostmodernism for me is nothing. I do not worry about this term. I am very exhausted with postmodernism’ (cited in Sim 2004: 43). Of course, Baudrillard’s disclaimer is itself postmodern in the very richness of its irony.

For Baudrillard, the ‘derealisation’ of reality was the principal characteristic of postmodern culture, a derealisation that is paradoxically produced by an attempt to capture reality and represent it in systems of signs. For Baudrillard this produces a ‘hyperreality’ in which signs and images float free of any reference of ‘the real’. Another way of saying this is that in postmodern society there are no originals, only copies — or what Baudrillard calls ‘simulacra’ (1994). You might think, for example, about painting or sculpture, where there is an original work (by Picasso, for instance), and there might also be thousands of copies, but the original is the one with the highest value (particularly monetary value). Contrast this with music recordings, where there is no ‘original’, as in painting — no recording that is hung on a wall, or kept in a vault; rather, there are only digital copies, by the millions, that are all the same, and all sold for (approximately) the same amount of money. Another version of Baudrillard’s ‘simulacrum’ would be the concept of virtual reality, a reality created by simulation, for which there is no original. This is particularly evident in popular computer games that involve simulation such as *SimCity* (1989), *SimAnt* (1991) and *SimHealth* (1994), for example. Further evidence for the ubiquity of media hyperreality and that there is no longer a distinction to be made between a ‘real’ event and its media representation, can be deduced from the fact that characters in television soap operas regularly receive letters from the viewing public making them offers of marriage, sympathising with their difficulties, and offering them new accommodation. Television doctors and lawyers commonly receive requests for professional advice and help. Baudrillard describes this as ‘the dissolution of TV into life, the dissolution of life into TV’ (1983: 55) and media academic John Fiske claims that postmodern media no longer provide ‘secondary representations of reality; they affect and produce the reality that they mediate’ (Fiske 1994: xv). According to Jim Collins — who uses an analysis of the television series *Twin Peaks* for his argument — television is the ‘quintessence’ of postmodern culture, with *Twin Peaks* mobilising its genres to move audiences in the same scene from moments of parodic distance to moments of emphatic intimacy, continually overturning audience expectations in polysemic play (see Allen 1992: 341 ff.).

At the heart of Baudrillard’s attraction to cinema (another quintessential postmodern medium) is its participation in the order of simulacra, and he suggests that Hollywood film’s hyperfidelity to the real is paradoxically achieved at the expense of its own cinematicity. For Baudrillard, any attempt to preserve or recreate the real is always doomed to failure and so cinema’s attempt to achieve a correspondence with the real through ‘its naked obviousness, in its boredom ... in its pretension to being the real’ (1994: 46) simply results in a perverse hyperreality. Francis Ford Coppola’s film *Apocalypse Now* (1979) is another example of the order of simulation. It is the case, suggests Baudrillard, that because of its testing of technological ‘special effects’, the Vietnam War

(1965–1975) was like a film before it was filmed. So Coppola's film 'is really the extension of the war through other means, the pinnacle of this failed war, and its apotheosis'. War and film thus implode ('the war becomes the film the film becomes war') — finally providing the US with a simulacral victory in Vietnam and erasing the historical truth of its actual defeat (1994: 59).

It is this sense of a reality completely pervaded by cinema, and resulting in the apprehension of the real *as* film, which has become a key metaphor for the postmodern. Not surprisingly then, in a very postmodern fashion, Baudrillard's theorisation of simulacrum, simulations and hyperreality has itself been assimilated back into versions of popular culture. In an early scene of *The Matrix* (1999), hacker Thomas Anderson (a.k.a. 'Neo' played by Keanu Reeves) opens a copy of Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994) to a chapter entitled 'On Nihilism'. But we see that the book is hollow for it serves as Neo's hiding place for the computer programs he sells on the black market. So, in an exquisitely self-reflexive turn, it seems that Baudrillard's theory of simulation provides much of the inspiration for this popular film, which illustrates and explores the premise that our reality as humans is a simulated reality created by sentient machines.

Fredric Jameson (b.1934)

In contrast to Lyotard, Jameson does not see the postmodern cultural product as a continuation of modernism, instead, like Sontag and others, he insists that contemporary culture is a result of 'the eruption of the popular into high art' (Roberts 2000: 150) and the erosion of the distinction between high and low culture. Jameson's engagement with postmodernism is most fully elaborated in what is his most widely read and influential text, an article initially written in 1984 for the *New Left Review* and later collected in a volume with the same title: *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991).

Jameson sees evidence of postmodernism's eventual cultural ascendancy as beginning to emerge most strikingly in the late 1960s and early 1970s (although instances of what we would now call postmodern 'styles', notably in architecture — Jameson draws here on the architectural writings of Robert Venturi and colleagues (1972) and Charles Jencks (1977, 1986) — began to emerge in the period immediately following World War Two). In this sense, the emergence of postmodernism as a cultural mode of expressing a specific economic logic is seen as coinciding with the end of the long post-war boom, prompted in no small part by the oil crises of the early 1970s, where the exorbitant price hikes demanded by OPEC-producing countries fed an inflationary spiral that eventually plunged the world's economies into recession. The early 1970s, according to Jameson, marked the expiry date for modernism

as a potent cultural and artistic force and what we call postmodernism emerged as a cultural or, in Marxian terms, superstructural mode of expressing and representing in architecture, literature, art, philosophy, and cinema significant shifts and transformations in hitherto existing social, political and economic conditions. Among these conditions we could cite:

- The collapse of 'actually existing' communism in the Eastern bloc;
- In Western social formations the replacement of predominant postwar economic theory and the welfare consensus associated with Maynard Keynes, in favour of free market deregulation, privatisation and neoliberalism;
- The move to a so-called 'post-industrial' media, information and service-based economy accompanied and underpinned by those forms of technology that, on a personal or individual level, now strike us as indispensable to the way we perceive the world and act upon it (for example, laptops, cellphones, iPods, high definition televisions, and gaming consoles);
- Decisive shifts and transformations in the relations between labour and capital including the creation of a flexible (international) labour market, the increasing ubiquity of temporary contracts, and the waning of trade union membership and influence;
- New forms of urbanisation and urban planning involving efforts to reclaim or redevelop the now degraded spaces of the inner city.

Jameson believed that architecture was 'the closest constitutively to the economic' (1991: 5) and his most cited example of the postmodern nexus of these forces is the Westin-branded Bonaventure Hotel in downtown Los Angeles (built by architect and developer John Portman) which from a distance, and looking up, resembles a truncated spaceship — a series of cylindrical towers around a central core (1991: 39–44). This association is enhanced by the hotel's external glass elevators, which appear like the infrastructure of a gantry. Jameson uses the term 'hyperspace' to describe the tall atrium of the hotel, which in four of its aspects represents the expression of anti-modernism: first, the rejection of a straight line in the circulation system of the hotel epitomises the quality of a new spatial aesthetics of functional irrationality. Second, the exterior of the building — the hyper-reflective mirror-like wrap — distorts the image of the surroundings thus disengaging the building from its environment. Third, the escalators and elevators are not merely means of circulation but also potent symbols of movement in space. Fourthly, the atrium 'hyperspace' purposefully toys with our perception of inside-outside relations. What makes the architecture of the hotel postmodern is precisely that it is neither pure style

nor pure expression of economic forces. It is a world unto itself. The Bonaventure no longer attempts

as did the masterworks and monuments of high modernism, to insert a different, a distinct, an elevated, a new Utopian language into the tawdry and commercial sign system of the surrounding city, but rather ... seeks to speak that very language, using its lexicon and syntax that has been less emblematically 'learned from Las Vegas'. (Jameson 1991: 39)



Figure 8.1 Postmodern architecture: an expression of anti-modernism

It is perhaps no coincidence, then, as Jameson has pointed out, thinking of Lyotard, that the emergence of the postmodern coincides with grandiose proclamations involving the end of things: history, ideology, master narratives. All of which suggests that postmodernism, much like modernism itself, wants to do away with the old, the outmoded, the anachronistic in favour of different, if not new, modes of representation and thought, corresponding to a subjectivity now construed as decentred and fragmentary against modernism's self-containedness. Thus postmodern cultural objects manifest certain textual characteristics that are distinct or distant from — or even in opposition to — those generally attributed to modernist works: for Jameson these involve the eliding of distinctions between notions of high culture and popular culture; the use of pastiche; a 'schizophrenia', depthlessness, and a 'weakening of historicity' (1991: 22 ff.). Rather than a culture of pristine creativity, postmodern culture is a culture of quotations, a culture of images and surfaces

without ‘latent’ possibilities, and postmodern texts do not simply quote other (modernist) texts or historical moments, they randomly cannibalise them to the point where any sense of critical or historical distance ceases to exist — only pastiche remains. In one of Jameson’s favorite examples, the nostalgia film — examples of which can include *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *Brazil*, *Back to the Future* (1985), and *Blue Velvet* (1986) — does not aim to recapture or represent the real past, rather it offers what he calls a ‘false realism’ (what Baudrillard would call ‘simulations’), and Jameson insists that our awareness of the play of stylistic allusion ‘is now a constitutive and essential part’ of our experience (1991: 20). This displacement of history by style relates to Jameson’s discussion of schizophrenia as a feature of postmodern texts. The schizophrenic, Jameson claims, experiences time not as a continuum of past-present-future but as a perpetual present in which conventional selfhood (a sense of self located within a temporal continuum) is lost to the discontinuous flow of perpetual presents.

The schizophrenic experience, in which the subject is no longer able to ‘unify the past, present, and future’ of their ‘psychic life’, involves, what Jameson refers to as ‘a waning of historicity’ (Jameson 1991: 22 ff.) in which history becomes de-contextualised, its chronologies and genealogies thoroughly scrambled, and, thus, emptied of their historical specificity, significance and depth. Postmodern depthlessness has other formal consequences for cultural production, not least what Jameson refers to as the disappearance of personal or ‘signature style’. If subjectivity is understood as fragmentary and schizophrenic, then it becomes difficult to talk about individual cultural producers in terms of the inimitable, the singular, or the incomparable. This being the case, postmodern cultural production is characterised by appropriation, copying and pastiche: ‘the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture’ (1991: 18).

Fredric Jameson’s version of postmodernism is widely recognised, influential and contested in equal measure. It is worth mentioning in passing that Jameson is entirely ambivalent about the usefulness of postmodernism as a concept in as much as its very classification is flawed in the sense that attempting to bring together the disparate threads of this particular mode of cultural production equates to systematising the non-systematic, of attempting ‘to take the temperature of the age without instruments and in a situation in which we are not even sure there is so coherent a thing as an “age”’ (1991: xi). Jameson’s position on postmodernism has sometimes been taken as critical in the pejorative sense of the term; that is, it is assumed he finds little of value or merit in postmodern forms of cultural production. Jameson’s position is, rather, that it makes little sense and does critical engagement few favours if we persist in coding postmodern cultural production in terms of either the laudatory or the deplorable. Jameson’s central argument is that the cultural and textual forms

specific to postmodernism constitute modes of representing the lived reality of a particular historical period; that is, the moment of late or advanced capitalism.

As we have seen, in various forms, one of the major premises of postmodernism is that it represents a critique of ‘meta-narratives’ and marks a crisis in the narrative of modernism. There is, however, little agreement about the *narrative of the postmodern itself*. If the postmodern is not a period of history but a disruption of historical periodisation, then postmodernism cannot simply be a narrative like this, it does not simply happen after modernism but is a series of problems present in the formation of modernism itself — a sort of rewriting of modernity, which has been going on already within modernity. As Diane Elam writes: ‘[p]ostmodernism does not simply happen after modernism but is a series of problems present to modernism in its continuing infancy’ (1992: 9). It is this issue that has been taken up by two further theorists.

Jürgen Habermas (b.1929)

In his essay *Modernity: An Unfinished Project* (initially given as an address upon the receipt of the Adorno Prize in 1980), Habermas sets out to salvage Enlightenment rationality. The project of modernity consisted in ‘efforts to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic’. The aim being ‘the rational organization of everyday social life’ (Habermas 1981: 9). For these reasons, Habermas argues, modernism is an unfinished project that in the interests of social justice and intellectual freedom should be brought to completion. He continues his critique of postmodernism in a later book, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987), arguing that postmodernism contradicts itself through self-reference as it presupposes the very concepts it seeks to undermine: freedom, subjectivity, or creativity. Postmodernism is thus an aestheticisation of knowledge and possible only because modernity had separated artistic values from politics in the first place.

Gianni Vattimo (b.1936)

For Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo the end of modernity is ‘the epoch in which simply being modern became a decisive value in itself’ (1992: 1) and he maintains the new tradition of postmodernism does not want to forsake the possibility of a rational critique. Vattimo suggests that by assuming — as Lyotard does — that we are now in a new (postmodern) condition as a result of the confutation of the systems of historical and rational legitimation upon which modernity founded the explanation of reality, we precisely build yet another ‘master narrative’, prolonging metaphysical thinking by imposing a new truth

upon an old one that was dismissed as inadequate. In order for postmodernity to step out of this conceptual loop and legitimise itself, it must rethink the tradition of modernity without attempting to overcome it (Vattimo 1988). According to Vattimo, it is ‘the logic of modernity itself that hampers us when we try to speak about postmodernity’ (2004: 49). The logic of modernity is ‘the logic of linear time,’ but, he continues,

if there is one thing that constitutes the essential content of the idea of postmodernity, and also its logical possibility, it is the negation of this unilinearity of historical time. We are not postmodern because we come after modernity, nor because, having arrived later ... We are postmodern because these dimensions, which were always temporal and axiological for modernity, no longer have meaning for us. (Vattimo 2004: 49–50)

Conclusion

This reading of others’ readings of postmodernism has been perpetually troubled by the task of identifying the historical conditions or circumstances that enabled, or at least contributed to, the emergence of postmodernism. As we have seen, most commentators try to come to terms with postmodernism’s relation to modernism, its putative predecessor. This relation seems key to determining the ideology of postmodern cultural forms and the perception — not least on the part of postmodernism itself — that these forms are constitutive of a decisive aesthetic and ideological break, or a moment when everything changed. It is as if, perhaps rightly, the very characteristics of postmodernism — nostalgia and retro-styling, the recycling of genres, the placing of styles in new and unfamiliar contexts, the self-referential questioning of beginnings and endings and questions of time — precisely define attendant critical disagreements concerning the usefulness or validity of employing the term postmodernism itself. Perhaps we can go one more time back to the future in order to come forward into the past.

In 1940, at the end of his life in his last surviving piece of writing, literary critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin devoted the ninth of his *Theses on the philosophy of history* to a meditation on an image of an angel by the artist Paul Klee. In Benjamin’s vision the figure from Klee became an angel of history, sucked into the future by the storm of progress, his face looking back towards Eden. In a well-known passage, Benjamin writes:

[t]here is a picture by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. It shows an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at. His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned

toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before *us*, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm. (Benjamin, 2003: 392)

In what might be called a proto-postmodernist stand that is itself evidence that the postmodern always already lies within the modern, Benjamin breaks with the classical Enlightenment model of the philosophy of history; namely, the theory of progress where history is a unilinear, homogeneous and continuous process capable of self-fulfilment. In contrast to this philosophy of history Benjamin suggests the image of his *Angelus Novus*. Two details of the angel of history call for our attention: the eyes and the wings. The angel has his gaze turned back, toward the past. It is a gaze of horror, shaken, frightened by what he sees. The angel sees a catastrophe, a pile of debris that grows incessantly; while what *we* see is a chain of events with its logic and its explanation. The angel is set to fly for he has his wings open, but he cannot draw them together to beat the air. The power of the stormy wind of progress does not let him close his wings and it propels him forward, toward the future, a future that the angel turns his back upon. In Benjamin's view, the past that really matters is the one that is not present. For historicism, the past is the substance of ideology that legitimates the present and facilitates relations of domination and power. But Benjamin grants the past new meaning; it is a special past, which must reveal a new dimension of history.

The intertwining of past and present, the experience, as Benjamin describes it, of being drawn through life backwards is inherent in the Maori concepts of *mua* and *muri*. The word for the past in Maori is *mua*, which may be understood as 'the way we face'. The past always moves ahead of us for guidance, while *muri* the word for 'the future', translates as 'the left behind' or the unknowable. The past is always there to be remade in the contemporary world. Indeed, the well-known Maori *whakatauki* (proverb) urges that 'we walk backwards into the future, our eyes fixed on the past'. Walter Benjamin must have had something like this in mind when he insisted of his angel that, '[t]he storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm' (2003: 392).

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9 Australian and New Zealand Cultural Studies

The antipathies and ambiguities

Nick Perry

- The antipodes should not be thought of as a place but as a relationship.
- In Australian cultural studies, national, empirical and conceptual questions arrive together.
- ‘Cerebral larrikinism’ is one way of describing (and incidentally approving of) the distinctive idiom of some of the most accomplished Australian work.
- Two key axes of the Australian version of cultural studies are populism and policy-relevance, presented in a form that challenges any assumption of an American/British hegemony.
- In New Zealand there are individual contributors, but nothing comparable to Australia’s institutionalised pattern.

Two representations by way of a preface ...

Sydney, Australia, 1994, via Indiana University Press, USA: in his *Virtual Geography* (1994), the Australian cultural critic McKenzie Wark invokes the experience of viewing a series of mediated global events (the first Persian Gulf War, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Tiananmen Square demonstrations, and the 1987 Wall Street crash). By posing the question of just how they might be understood from a location in Sydney, he goes on to construct a distinctively antipodean conception of cultural studies.

Christchurch, New Zealand, 2010, via Sky News, UK: viewers are informed that a major earthquake measuring 7.1 on the Richter scale has struck Christchurch, New Zealand’s second largest city. However, the report is presented from a Sydney location in which the imagery in the background is of that city’s globally entrenched iconography — namely, its Opera House and Harbour Bridge. So how might this news story be interpreted by audiences in London, Baghdad, Berlin, Beijing or New York?

... and an observation by way of a post-script ...

New York, USA, 2008, via HBO TV comedy series *Flight of the Conchords* (2007–2009): this series, which screened in the time slot left vacant by the departure of *The Sopranos* (1999–2007), features the fictional experiences of two young New Zealand musicians in the Big Apple. A tourist poster on the office wall of the New Zealand deputy cultural attaché reads ‘New Zealand: It’s Not Part of Australia!’

The idea of the antipodes

The term ‘Australasia’ refers to that geographical region which plausibly provides for Australia and New Zealand to be bracketed together. The two countries are also linked through their both having recent histories and ongoing legacies of colonialism, common histories that have not, however, always meant that they have a history in common. Both countries participate in an economic system and trading relationship that is progressively more integrated and that provides for the unrestricted movement of both capital and labour between them. They each retain distinct but in each case distinctly Western forms of political jurisdiction — and they do indeed have some cultural characteristics in common which may justify the employment of the term ‘culture area’ as a way of signifying such affinities. Yet what their respective versions of cultural studies nevertheless reveal is not just that there are also cultural and institutional differences between them, but also that those differences are understood to matter.

Their more-or-less-shared geographical location on the world map may nevertheless provide an appropriate starting point from which to approach their cultures. This is hinted at by the fact that the more than 2000 kilometre-wide Tasman Sea which separates the two countries is colloquially referred to as ‘the ditch’. Examples of texts which both recognise and seek to bridge this divide include combined essay collections on respectively, Australian and New Zealand histories (Neumann et al. 1999) and films (Mayer and Beattie 2007; Verhoeven 1999). More formally, the two countries are identified and brought together not by their relation with each other but by the idea of the antipodes. This ancient classical term was made manifest and material by the voyages of discovery attendant upon the expansion and development of the world system. What also gets mobilised by the global framing of this term are nuanced north/south versions of the binaries associated with and made familiar by, the contrast between east and west — that is up/down, civilised/natural, familiar/exotic, self/other and so on.

Tara Brabazon (2000) is concerned to probe for, and to question, any presumption that British experience or perspectives might somehow serve as a reliable guide to Australian and New Zealand culture. Ross Gibson (1992)

theorises Australian ‘strategies of seeing’ in his *South of the West*. Sociologist Peter Beilharz (1997), in his study of the Australian cultural historian Bernard Smith, forcefully builds on Smith’s argument that: a) the antipodes should not be thought of as a place but as a relationship, and b) that the cultural traffic between centre and periphery is in *both* directions. Beilharz (2009) has recently revisited and extended this claim before an American audience so as to include the work of McKenzie Wark (1994, 1997) and myself (Perry 1998) as, respectively, representatives of Australian and New Zealand media studies and cultural criticism who share such a perspective. Thus Wark’s (1994: xiv) not entirely whimsical suggestion that ‘[w]e no longer have roots we have aerals’ and ‘[w]e no longer have origins we have terminals’ offers a media-derived permutation on, and elaboration of, the Smith/Beilharz theme. If, that is, the question of ‘just who is “we”?’ is allowed to remain indeterminate.

These studies challenge the tendency to see antipodean conditions and experiences as idiosyncratic and, as such, acknowledged perhaps, but otherwise contained in and through a series of footnotes to models and perspectives that derive from the major centres of cultural production (that is, America and Europe). Such centres are of course cognisant of empirical distinctiveness, but because it is theoretical abstraction that travels, they are nevertheless predisposed to be conceptually absolutist. They are typically receptive to, and may even require novelty, but concerned to consolidate purportedly general models and maintain control; mindful of difference, but prompted to subordinate material singularities and semiotic localism to abstract virtuality. In an echo of E. P. Thompson’s (1978) polemic against Althusserian forms of analysis such antipodean theory is therefore characteristically impelled to engage with, interrogate, re-work or render problematic those theoretical claims which tacitly efface the specific conditions of their production. Thus far from being idiosyncratic, the antipodean is paradigmatic in insisting that theory should always be put in its place. Thus when the young heroine of Lewis Carroll’s (1929: 4–5) *Alice in Wonderland* wondered whether, as a consequence of falling through the earth, she would find herself amongst ‘[t]he Antipathies I think ... Pray tell me Ma’am is this New Zealand or Australia?’, she has proved to be more prescient than he ever anticipated.

Nation and ambivalence

One important strand that is discernible within Australian and New Zealand cultural studies is this predisposition to foreground difference, contestation, and processes when linked to an emphasis on the local and the national. It typically works, however, to challenge any assumption that there is something stable, unified or essentialist about those notions of nationhood under whose signs a given set of cultural practices take place. Such a combination is the thematic of

the Graeme Turner (1993) reader on Australian cultural studies and is echoed in New Zealand in Roger Horrocks' (1995) essay on strategic nationalisms. It is also clearly discernible in Richard White's (1981) breakthrough text on *Inventing Australia*. This book displayed a theoretical turn that would subsequently resonate with Benedict Anderson's (1983) classic analysis. This was blended with a distinctively local tone, register and subject matter in and through which issues of nationhood were explored as, for example, in his account of the meaning of the FJ Holden (the classic Australian car). The subsequent expansion, both in the range and in the theoretical sophistication, of analyses of popular culture during the 1980s provides a context for Simon During's (1990: 139) assertion — and nuanced elaboration — that in 'writing in a First World colony like Australia, one ought to be nationalistic'. Or compare McKenzie Wark's (1997: 4) acknowledgement that, notwithstanding how much an 'I Still Call Australia Home' Qantas airline television commercial might invite deconstruction, he nevertheless clearly recognises and obliquely approves of its ability to keep working on him.

At one level, such provocations can be said to share an affinity with, 'I am the sugar in your tea', the opening remark made at the plenary of a UK History Workshop conference by Stuart Hall, the West Indian-born scholar who is the doyen of British cultural studies. Tea, in its turn, being that once exemplary metaphor for an otherwise unexamined notion of Englishness — a metaphor whose material referent was, and is, typically grown in Ceylon, Sri Lanka. Hall's remark is akin to, albeit less challenging than, the observation of a Salman Rushdie (1988: 337) character that, '[t]he trouble with the English is that their history happened overseas, so that they don't know what it means'. The thread that links them both to the Australian examples is their explicit invoking of 'the national' as a significant but problematic and contested category that is to be neither naturalised nor patronised.

Thus, that substantial component of the Australian cultural studies field which foregrounds the national is distinguished by more than its specific objects of inquiry. Empirical and conceptual questions typically arrive together. The dominant axes of the latter are populism and policy relevance, understood not as an improbable couplet, but as antinomies that contributors to the field are typically concerned to both acknowledge and walk a line between. Thus even a spirited defender of, and enthusiast for, an Australian-inflected populism such as John Docker (1994), nevertheless draws policy conclusions in, for example, setting himself against local content quotas on Australian television. His particular endorsement of populism is shaped not just by his hostility to Frankfurt School pessimism (made evident in his initiation of a long-running, but inconclusive, debate in the journal *Arena* during the 1980s) but also through his receptivity to Bakhtin's (1984) notion of carnival. In a reworking of de Certeau's (1984) account of everyday life, one time British expatriate John Fiske

also staked out his support for a celebratory and populist conception of active and selective consumers, viewers and readers, by identifying such practices as evidence of resistance, most unequivocally in his sole-authored *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989) rather than in the layered ambiguities of the more locally focused and co-authored *Myths of Oz* (Fiske et al. 1987). Ien Ang is otherwise critical of cultural nationalism in all its forms, but in her methodologically innovative work on television viewers (Ang 1991, 1995) this notion of taking such practices seriously becomes the basis for questioning the received version of the audience.

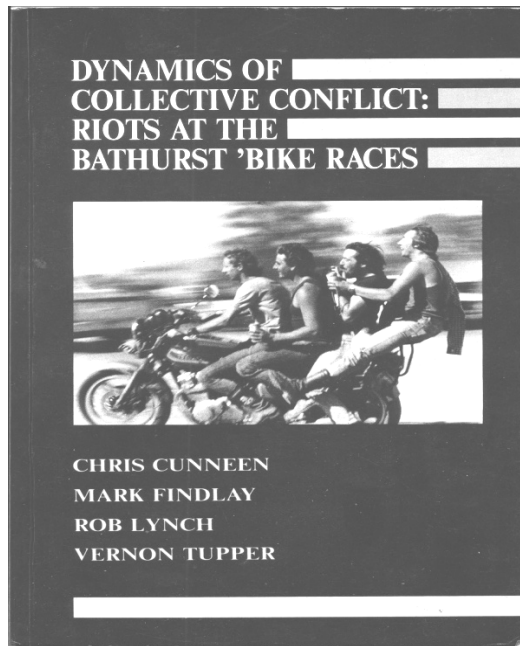


Figure 9.1 Cerebral/Larrikins? Cerebral — four authors of a text; Larrikins — four riders on a bike.

In some of the most influential Australian contributions, such ambiguity, together with knowingly promiscuous and selective readings of European theory, is elevated to something akin to a methodological principle (see Lewis 2004). This is signalled by Graeme Turner's (1993: 1) prefacing of his own cultural studies reader with a quote from Meaghan Morris' contribution to the Grossberg et al. (1992) conference collection. She wryly observes that: '[i]n the Australian context I'm working in, the bottom line is really a question mark'. This finds a New Zealand echo in *How to be Nowhere*, the title of cultural critic, curator, novelist and poet Ian Wedde's (1995) first collection of essays, and which thereby knowingly plays with the New Zealand setting of Samuel Butler's novel *Erewhon* (1927). The global relevance of this theme is hinted at

by Jean Baudrillard's (1988: 58) reference to a 'man who got on the wrong plane and found himself carted off to Auckland, New Zealand instead of Oakland, near San Francisco'. For Baudrillard, the man's brief, heroic status and subsequent flurry of media interviews exemplifies American pop artist Andy Warhol's now famous notion that in the future everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes. The idea of Auckland as a semiotic mistake rather than a global city aspirant is, moreover, invested with a further level of meaning by an acerbic remark of Gertrude Stein's (cited in Adair 1992: 189), when she cryptically observed of Oakland that 'there is no "there" there'.

In what follows it should become evident that Australia does appear to occupy an altogether more assured, if nevertheless assuredly mythological, place in the American imagination than does New Zealand. Without wishing to reinforce such a mythology it is nevertheless tempting to identify — and to commend — a characteristically Australian idiom at work within the noteworthy singularity of Morris' literary style when it is viewed from the New Zealand side of the Tasman. It is discernible in her feminist-inflected identification and incidental appropriation of something of value in so apparently masculinist an Australian social institution as 'mateship' (Morris 1992) and in the compelling plausibility of her authoritatively unruly reading of the 1986 Australian film *Crocodile Dundee* (Morris 1988). The term 'cerebral larrikinism' seems apt. This is first of all because the unsettling internal contradictions of this oxymoron insinuate something beyond, and other than, the more conventional critique of the gendered narrowness, closure and essentialism of the larrikin image of Australia. Second, because Australian social science provides instances of detailed empirical studies (such as Cunneen et al. 1989; Metcalfe 1988) that serve to interrogate the conventional meanings of that image in the process of investigating those who purportedly exemplify it. Again, the flurry of Australian commentary and debate around *Crocodile Dundee* (for example, Bell and Bell 1993: 193–94; Brown 1994; Crofts 1993; O'Regan 1988; Turner 1994: 108–18) turned on what its hybridised, knowingly ironical, larrikin/frontiersman had to say, or could be made to say, about the relationship between a purportedly Australian identity and a presumption of American hegemony. Almost two decades later, the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy (2001–03) prompted a New Zealand counterpart to this commentary (Margolis et al. 2009) in noting how the New Zealand landscape was reconfigured as Middle Earth, thanks to the combination of an English mythology, American money, New Zealand government tax breaks, bravura digital effects, and the enthusiasm of local tourism operators.

Institutional context

Although the stylistic and intellectual independence of Morris' (1988, 1992) engagement with the local and the national may be informed by an ambivalent relation to the academy, it assuredly cannot be reduced to it. It is nevertheless of relevance that Australian society and culture is able to provide the institutional density and support for intellectual activity that is not axiomatically co-extensive with university employment and academic protocols. Thus what the contributions of authors such as Docker, Morris and Wark incidentally indicate is how, by way of contrast with New Zealand, sections of the Australian press, magazines and other media do routinely allow for and shape the tone of public intellectual work and debate. Moreover, a number of key figures within Australian cultural studies have alternated between Australian, US and UK academic posts in a direct accordance with the Beilharz/Smith notion of the cultural traffic being in two directions. To this should be added the extent to which Australian cultural studies have also been a beneficiary of the expansion of the university system during the 1980s. Thus what at that time were recently established institutions, such as Griffith University in Queensland and Murdoch University in Western Australia, proved receptive to contemporary objects of inquiry such as popular culture, and established internal patterns of organisation that facilitated cross- and post-disciplinary linkages. The fact that cultural studies initiatives are not limited to the major cities of Sydney and Melbourne, but are also associated with Brisbane and Perth, has both enriched and diversified the pattern of Australian work. Together with reform-minded scholars in the traditionally organised universities, departments within former colleges of technology and further education such as University of Technology, Sydney, Queensland University of Technology, Western Australia Institute of Technology/Curtin University and the University of Western Sydney have also become significant contributors.

That this expanding and distinctive Australian version of cultural studies might differ from and present a challenge to any presumption of an American/British hegemony was evident from the Australian contributions to the University of Illinois conference (Grossberg et al. 1992) that served to acknowledge the field's American 'arrival'. Such national distinctiveness is granted formal recognition by American cultural theorist Fredric Jameson (1995) in assessing the Australian essays in the book of the conference. Yet whereas he says of Canadian theorising, 'it is clearly the situation of Canada in the shadow of the US media empire that gives our neighbors their epistemological privilege' (Jameson 1995: 617) no such imprimatur is granted to the Australians. Rather he imperiously suggests that these 'noisiest detractors of "grand theory" ... may owe something to the idiosyncratic and anarchist roots of Australian radicalism'. This is,

however, home to ‘an even more sinister variant of this otherwise harmless anti-intellectualism’ (in the shape of British expatriate cultural theorist, Tony Bennett!) that ‘may have some relevance in a small country with socialist traditions, but is surely misplaced advice here’ (Jameson 1995: 624–25). This collapsing together of a particular version of ‘here’ with a purportedly general conception of theoretical work foregrounds the distinctive form of marginality available to left intellectuals in the US. What it thereby effectively — but not therefore epistemologically — privileges is that culturally specific blending of cognitive autonomy and professional insulation (also known as ‘the three thousand critics ideology’, because of the community in question’s self-sufficient production of texts for which it is both the audience and the judge). Such a pattern is made possible by the sheer institutional density of the US higher education system. Far from being anti-theoretical, Australian scholars have been early and selective adopters of European theory, albeit theory of which Jameson may not approve. For example, they are responsible for the Semiotext(e) translations into English of Jean Baudrillard (1983a, 1983b), for one of the first English language collections of essays on him (Frankovits 1984) and for the best exposition and extension of his ideas (Butler 1999). And Paul Patton and Meaghan Morris (1979) published the first English translation of Foucault’s writing on power and knowledge.

The title of Tony Bennett’s (1992) essay was *Putting Policy into Cultural Studies* and had its grounding in the Institute for Cultural Policy Studies that he headed at Griffith University. It, and the establishment of the Institute’s journal (*Cultural Policy*), anticipates the series of papers that would appear as *Culture: A Reformer’s Science* (Bennett 1998). Bennett’s theoretical emphasis was shaped by the Foucauldian notion of governmentalities and a distinctive feature of his empirical and conceptual work has been on the museum as an institution (Bennett 1995). However, it should be emphasised that such specific characteristics occupy a place within a much broader Australian pattern. This (contested) pattern consciously foregrounds policy issues, the role of the state and matters of political economy in relation to the culture industries, albeit with a full awareness of globalisation as ‘the elephant in the room’. Thus in a series of edited collections, Suzan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka (1987/8) monitored the erratic fiscal, economic and aesthetic trajectory of Australian film. The emphasis of Stuart Cunningham’s *Framing Culture* (1992) was on television. Tom O’Regan followed up his account of Australian television culture (O’Regan 1993) with *Australian National Cinema* (1996), which was knowingly constructed as both an elaboration of the notion of a national cinema and a problematising of it. A policy orientation is a constituent feature of Australian feminism as, for example, in the femocratic perspective of Anna Yeatman (1990) who has held posts on both sides of the Tasman (see Wilson and Yeatman 1995). Most recently, in a development that is broadly coextensive

with the transition from analogue to digital, this cultural policy focus has — arguably — now mutated into issues in and around the notion of creative economies (see Cunningham 2008: 215–65). Arguably, in that this reformist movement is not without its critics (for example, Miller 2009).

Indigeneity as theory and as subject matter

In the Australian context it thus makes sense to refer to a distinctive cultural studies tradition that has both local and international significance. In New Zealand there are individual contributors (such as Bell 1996; Lealand 1988; Perry 1994; Wedde 1995, 2005) but nothing comparable to the now institutionalised pattern that is in evidence on the other side of the Tasman. What is evident, however, is that in order for the notion of New Zealand cultural studies to become something achieved rather than aspired to, engagements with issues of ethnicity are paramount (for example, Mohanram 1999). Moreover, even without the contrast between the New Zealand state's official bi-culturalism and Australia's multiculturalism, it will perforce be inflected differently. So that there is, for example, no New Zealand counterpart to Ghassan Hage's (2002) anthology on Arab Australians and citizenship and, conversely, there is no Australian counterpart to Manying Ip's (2009) work on Maori/Chinese relations.

There is, however, a 'classic' of Australian cultural studies that is remarkable for its interpretation of Australian Aboriginal communities in action. Eric Michaels' work within those communities blends the theoretically significant, the locally grounded, the empirically informed and the deeply engaged. Michaels' (1994: 99) account of the Warlpiri people's 'invention' of television, serves to make evident both its singularity and its general relevance for the development of alternative models of communication systems. In documenting their resourceful, 'unauthorized, unfunded, non-commercial and illegal' appropriation and adaptation of television technology, Michaels' study eschews a media-centric approach in favour of assigning theoretical priority to the community's own differentiated conception of everyday life and their pursuit of a cultural future that is congruent with, and thereby capable of reproducing, their kinship-ordained patterns of information control. Likewise, his study of, and implication in, the development of, and international art market for, Western Desert Aboriginal paintings both maps the complexities of the associated systems of exchange and questions the categories (originality, authenticity, individual authorship, and property rights) through which they are conventionally understood. Such an incidental traversing of the high/popular culture contrast is symptomatic of the series of challenges that he and they offer to the received versions of cultural interpretation. This is acknowledged in *Communication and*

Tradition, a special issue of the journal *Continuum* (O'Regan 1990) devoted to Michaels' work and writing.

In New Zealand, the differences in the historical trajectory and the terms of the struggles between coloniser and colonised, between Maori and Western culture, has prompted a range of influential analyses (for example, Sharp 1990) but there are no immediate correlates to Michaels' studies. There are, however, suggestive affinities with film-maker Barry Barclay's (2003) concept of Fourth Cinema as it is made manifest in his writings and films. Thus Barclay's conception of the collective character of film-making involved getting participants 'used to thinking as a crew handling tribal treasures, rather than hero directors getting material for a story' (cited in Murray 2008: 27). Fourth Cinema represents an effort to think through, and to construct, films whose structure recognises, confronts and, in his phrase, 'talks in' the distinctive conditions of an indigenous peoples who are a minority in their own land. It is thus a conceptually distinct and globally relevant articulation of the local against the dominant conception of national. Hence, his book *Our Own Image* (Barclay 1990) explores how the very process of film-making might be informed by a concept of indigeneity that is distinguished by pre-existing habitus, contemporary technology and an envisaged future culture pattern. This is revealed not just in and through the distinctive content of his films, such as the way the camera dwells on such communally and ritually significant activities as the preparation of food. It also emerges in the rhythm and pace of the editing, in the conception of the audience, in the constructions both of voice and silence, in the recourse to parallel narratives and in the matter-of-fact privileging of collectivity. The subsequent establishment of the Maori Television Service in 2004 gave material shape to Barclay's (1990: 78) observation that,

I am not talking about minority programmes directed at a minority. I am talking about a minority being confident enough to talk in its own voice about whatever it chooses and as it does so having a feeling that the talk will be of importance to others who wish to drop in.

New Zealand and the 'too few hierarchies' problem

There are New Zealand university courses on cultural studies, but no departments, and the first collections of readings did not appear until 2004 (Bell and Matthewman 2004; Smith and Wevers 2004). An initial attempt to establish such a pattern at Massey University sought to model itself on the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. What began in the early 1980s as the *New Zealand Cultural Studies Working Group Journal* subsequently became *Sites* in 1984. Until its demise in 2000 it was important as an outlet for

contributors from a range of social science backgrounds who were in various ways responsive to the idea of cultural studies (when revived in 2003, the new series version was repositioned as a more or less orthodox anthropology journal). *Sites* emphasis on social science is echoed in the Bell and Matthewman (2004) collection.

The nearest equivalent to emerge from within the humanities at the beginning of the 1980s was *AND*, a theory-oriented Auckland English department initiative explicitly limited to four issues (that is, *AND 1*, *AND 2*, *AND 3*, *AND 4*), followed by *Antic* in the second half of the decade, and the art and architecture journal *Interstices* at the beginning of the 1990s. *AND* co-editor Alex Calder (2004) would subsequently argue that cultural studies never really took off in New Zealand, but that something of its spirit is nonetheless discernible if you know where to look (that is, not primarily in the academy, but in the museums and galleries). From such a perspective the Wedde and Burke (1990) arts-inspired anthology becomes prescient and the thematic emphasis of the Smith and Wevers (2004) collection becomes salient.

If there is a single strand which runs through all of these contributions, then it is not a shared perspective, theoretical allegiance or a subject matter in common. It is instead the way they make manifest the endemic problem of (too) few hierarchies. This is a problem familiar to New Zealand artists and musicians seeking to make a living in the absence of the requisite market size, institutional density and critical mass (such as with *Flight of the Conchords* (2007–2009), whose concept was first offered to, but turned down by, the New Zealand national broadcasting company Television New Zealand). In the context of the placement of locally focused academic work this has meant that there are typically only one, or perhaps two, outlets in any given field of study. Intellectual work in the cultural studies field that is outside, or at a tangent to, university employment is altogether more thinly distributed and precarious than in Australia, so that the stylistic and substantive differences that may be opened up by occupying such alternate locations are foregone. Ian Wedde is just such a rare practitioner, and the contribution of his essays and criticism to local cultural studies is incidentally indicative of how the field might be enriched were it not for such institutional constraints and the intractable problem of size. Thus although Jameson may refer to Australia as a ‘small’ society and Australian academics may routinely invoke marginality as a characteristic of their location, their country nonetheless has five times the population of New Zealand. It is a difference which makes a difference.

Acknowledgement

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Part III: Key Issues

Introduction to Part III

Bruce Cohen

The plethora of issues covered in this section is testimony to the expansion of cultural studies and popular culture into many different areas of our social lives, as well as the increasing impact they have on processes of production and consumption in Western society. The first part of this section examines the crucial issues of gender and ethnicity in cultural studies. Both Tracey Jensen (Chapter 10) and Nabeel Zuberi (Chapter 11) draw our attention to the importance of structural theory, as well as the potential impact of poststructural writings. While traditionally there has been a focus by theorists on how cultural texts reinforce marginalisation and reproduce stereotypes of the ‘other’ in capitalist society, poststructural scholars have argued that such texts have an emancipatory potential. Jensen examines these arguments with reference to the increasingly popular genre of ‘make-over’ ‘reality’ television programming. She argues that, rather than challenging the normativity of gender and class relations, the texts are individualised around the ‘failing’ participant and organised increasingly without reference to any social relationships. While students also need to consider the reception of such texts by marginalised groups (as well as the active participation and construction of their own cultural texts), as Jensen and Zuberi suggest, the continued existence of gender and ethnic inequalities within Western society should make us cautious when claims are made for the elimination of such inequalities within cultural texts.

A different aspect of ethnic identity and material culture is discussed in Chapter 12 when Claudia Bell investigates Pakeha (broadly defined as locally born white New Zealanders) identity and ‘kiwiana’. Kiwiana are locally mass-produced cultural items that distinctly reference New Zealand. As Bell demonstrates, despite appropriation by advertisers and multi-national companies, the artefacts maintain a nostalgic value of the local that resists globalisation. Following on from Zuberi’s chapter, it is interesting to note the primacy given to kiwiana in the construction of national identity, while ‘Maoriana’ (that is, objects which draw their design or decoration from traditional Maori symbols and artefacts) is, in comparison, marginalised.

As levels of consumption in Western societies have dramatically increased over the last fifty years, the body has become one of the newer sites for exploring the consumption of popular culture. As Meredith Jones acknowledges in Chapter 13, this work traditionally drew on a feminist critique of the regulation and control of women’s bodies through cultural texts. However, with the growth in

sports, leisure and lifestyle activities, diet and weight-loss programmes, fashion and clothes shopping, and plastic surgery (among many other cultural texts), new theoretical debates have emerged. These include Foucault's ideas on 'biopower', and scholarship on the 'posthuman' by Haraway and others. Yet Jones returns at the end of her chapter to discuss the general representation of the body in popular culture — certain bodies are privileged in the texts while others are absent. 'Popular culture,' she concludes, 'is a powerful force not only because of what it depicts but also because of what it leaves out'; a highly salient point for better understanding the issues of consumption (Chapter 14) and advertising (Chapter 15) in cultural studies.

Despite consumption being a ubiquitous part of everyday life, as Catherine Reynolds points out in Chapter 14, it has become the most obvious evidence of inequality in capitalist society. A key aspect of understanding consumption in cultural studies then, is the *meaning* the consumption of popular culture texts have for individuals and groups in forming and reconstructing identity in Western society. Often our perceived 'need' for the latest mobile technology is imposed via advertising and the character of consumer capitalism more generally. This topic is investigated in more depth by Geoff Stahl in Chapter 15. Drawing on the work of Raymond Williams, Stahl argues that adverts imbue products with 'magical' qualities to make them more appealing to consumers (for instance, the marketing of diamonds as a symbol of romantic love). The 'reading' of adverts brings us back to the study of semiotic processes; as Stahl rightly notes, 'we live in a society of signs where advertising and branding play an important role in everyday life'. Advertising, branding and the general marketing of products increasingly draws on the use of celebrities, an issue that is explored by Chris Rojek in Chapter 16. While three types of celebrity are discussed by Rojek, he argues that it is the 'celetoid' — 'an ordinary person of no perceptible talent who acquires durable fame' — that has gained prominence in late capitalist society. This is due to the increasing power of the media, and its support and promotion of celebrity culture. Rojek argues that, in sociologically analysing celebrity culture, students would do well to look beyond an assessment of 'talent' (or lack thereof) of celebrities to consider the commercial dynamics of the media in the creation and promotion of such people. The commercial dynamics associated with celebrity culture is also very much a part of global sports culture, as Barry Smart outlines in Chapter 17. While sport and games were for a long time considered as cultural pastimes and an escape from the world of work, Smart demonstrates how modern sport has been appropriated by commercial interests and ultimately, through global processes, become 'imbued with corporate values and subject to the logic of capital accumulation and profit maximisation'.

The globalisation of culture has been assisted by a number of technological developments within the areas of communication and travel. Technological

artefacts such as the radio, the television and the internet, as well as the automobile and the aeroplane, have dramatically shaped and altered Western society, socially as well as economically. The relationship between technology and popular culture is investigated by the author in Chapter 18. I argue that to fully understand technology we need to conceptualise it as a ‘technological framework’ of knowledge, ideas and processes which involve social actors and economic interests. This is a fundamental questioning of the determinist view of technology as naturally progressive and value-free. Through an extended discussion of the German electronic band Kraftwerk and the notion of the ‘industrial sublime’ it is demonstrated that, as with technology, popular culture texts need to be contextualised with reference to wider social and economic processes in capitalist society. This issue is continued in subsequent chapters with specific reference to the changing nature of television and cinema as well as the rise and impact of digital media.

In Chapter 19, Amy West surveys the cultural theory which has developed to understand and explain the increasingly popular genre of ‘reality’ television. What does such programming suggest about our relationship to popular culture in late capitalist society? While mindful that the global demands of business rather than art or culture are driving such television, West also notes the potential of reality programming to promote audience interactivity and elements of digital convergence. Such ideas are heavily influenced by Henry Jenkins’ work on fandom, audience participation and convergence culture. Chapter 20 reproduces a chapter from his book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006). Due to the increased consumption of popular culture texts across multi-media platforms, Jenkins argues that the traditional power of corporate media is being challenged by the active participation and grassroots creativity of ordinary consumers. Influenced by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies’ research on texts of resistance, Jenkins’ writings have offered a significant challenge to the more determinist accounts in cultural studies.

Continuing the theme of fandom somewhat in Chapter 21, Adrian Danks discusses the survival of ‘cinophilia’ — that is, the love or passionate interest in cinema, film and film criticism — in the digital age. While classic Frankfurt School theory targeted film as a primary mass-produced text with which to ideologically control the masses, Danks makes the highly relevant point that cinophilia has actually encouraged democratic participation in cinematic processes, sometimes offering an active resistance to the culture industry. The rise of digital media may have facilitated a new engagement with cinophilia rather than a decline in critical participation. This potential for emancipation and consumer resistance through digital media is explored in detail by Andrew Whelan in Chapter 22. A focus on digital technologies, Web 2.0 and social networking sites demonstrates that there is both a revolutionary potential to

challenge the needs of capital and global media, as well as distinct dangers posed by what Michael and Michael call ‘überveillance’: for every WikiLeaks there is also a Google, trawling our personal information and online searches, and selling the data to advertisers. Adam Craigie draws our attention to these concerns in his case study of the social networking site Facebook in Chapter 23. Facebook has become a useful communication tool for over 750 million people worldwide, and can facilitate certain forms of social capital and active participation with other popular culture texts. Nevertheless, Craigie argues that consumers severely underestimate the surveillance and privacy aspects of freely giving personal data to what is, after all, a business corporation. Like Google, Facebook has been notorious at ‘data mining’ personal data for commercial interests. Again, it is demonstrated that technology is never value-free and will often be shaped by the needs of enterprise and capital.

Alongside the rise of digital media has been the rise of videogames — an area of popular culture which has been sadly overlooked by sociology for a long time. Noting that the videogames industry is now worth more than Hollywood, with just three companies monopolising the console industry, Eli Boulton and Colin Cremin seek to address this omission in Chapter 24. Drawing on Huizinga’s theory of play, it is argued that, unlike other forms of visual culture, consumers of videogames have to be active participants with the text, on the basis that they have a more active role in *generating meaning* from the game they play. While not ignoring the ideological imperative within cultural texts, the authors suggest that the potential for free play — even within mainstream games such as *Grand Theft Auto 4* — means there is the potential for resistance to the hegemonic narrative. Students might also consider the potential for resistance offered by gamers’ access to open source code, which can see participants creating their own videogames.

From the struggle over meaning within videogames, this section ends with a discussion of the struggle over space and place. As Fiona Allon reminds us in Chapter 25, ‘all social relations, including cultural identities and practices, are spatially organised and distributed’. These can be virtual and global spaces as well as local, public spaces. Such spaces become sites of struggle and contestation within capitalist society; subcultures contest the ‘appropriate’ meaning and use of public space, while other social groups form common identities around certain geographical places. In considering the cultural practices and multiple meanings imbued in space, place and identity, Allon reminds us that such categories are never finished or settled but constantly ‘in process’; they are fluid and mutable, just as culture continues to be.

10 Gender, Popular Culture and Postfeminism

Tracey Jensen

- Key shifts in gender relations have occurred in the move to a late-modern ‘post-traditional’ society such as the receding power of social structures and the rise of individualism and the ‘project of the self’.
- ‘Postfeminist’ culture emphasises the discourse of choice, agency and empowerment.
- Feminism has been assumed, revised and at times been undermined by postfeminist culture.
- One key format of postfeminist culture — the makeover paradigm — reproduces gender and class normativities as it assumes participants are ‘failing’ and must be ‘re-made’.

Introduction

This chapter explores shifting meanings and articulations around gender and examines how gender has been remade in contemporary popular culture. It charts the social and historical impact of feminism upon the cultural terrain, in terms of the challenges it levelled at gendered representation, objectification and the male gaze. Some social theorists have situated these feminist challenges within wider cultural transformations, including gay identity politics, female autonomy, contraception, and the mainstreaming of psychoanalysis. Others have critically assessed the ways in which gender is made and remade within sites of popular culture, with specific attention paid to television and makeover culture. Discussing the work of social and cultural theorists, this chapter explores the cultural shift towards ‘postfeminism’, a cultural sensibility in which gender has become reconfigured as an active, individualised, flexible bodily property. Women, in these accounts, are no longer assumed to be passive objects for the male gaze, but instead are newly hailed as subjects and owners of their bodies, and as sources of feminine power. This hailing process has been described as ‘subjectification’, in which subjects (specifically women) are constructed as active, desiring and keen to develop ‘technologies of sexiness’. By way of illustration, this chapter explores examples from popular culture which demonstrate subjectification, particularly *Sex and the City* (1998–2004). The

chapter then looks in more detail at one particular case study cluster of postfeminist popular culture, makeover television, which remakes gender through transferring expertise about techniques of the self. A number of feminist scholars and academics have explored this realm of popular culture in order to make arguments about how gendered anxieties have, if anything, resurfaced with regards to the self, the body and the intimate sphere. Far from being erased, this body of work suggests that gendered anxieties have been transformed and perhaps re-essentialised, through comic terms, irony and the quasi-therapeutic language of healing.

Post-traditional society

Second-wave feminism, a women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s, demanded that women receive equal pay, control over their reproductive destinies and freedom from repressive domestic arrangements. Second-wave feminists sought to extend the political rights that the first wave had fought for and challenged social and cultural notions of what it was to be a woman. Second wave feminists argued that women are not objects to be gazed at by men or passive vessels for the enactment of male sexuality, that women should have the right to control their reproduction and that they should be socially, economically and culturally equal to their male counterparts. Consciousness-raising and collective mobilisations popularised the idea that 'the personal is political' and brought the domestic and intimate lives of women and men into public and political space (see Evans 1995).

These political mobilisations challenged the privatised discourse of love and relationships, in which the family home was considered a 'haven in a heartless world' and marriage and procreation was considered the only respectable path to adulthood. The post-World War II generation of men and women were obligated to conform to narrow gendered ideals, through a sense of social duty and economic convenience, but also through cultural narratives; women were expected to be passive and dutiful wives, and men were expected to be strong but silent breadwinners. Feminism challenged these cultural narratives and proposed new ones.

Exploring the significant rise in cohabitation, same-sex relationships, single parenthood and divorce in Europe, many social theorists have suggested that feminism has been successful and that our cultural world is now best seen as 'post-traditional', characterised by individual choice, not social obligation. Sociologist Anthony Giddens argued in *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1993), that our experiences of love, sex and intimacy are totally mediated by the cultural narratives that are available to us. In this and in earlier work (see for example, Giddens 1991) he has argued that in the post-traditional moment, the

individual is relatively severed from older ties of kinship, reproduction and generation and is free and responsible to manage his or her own destiny.

In Giddens' (1991, 1993) analysis, these gendered expectations have not only been challenged by feminism, but also by sexual identity politics (for example in the sexual rights movement around homosexuality and other non-normative expressions of gender, sex and sexuality) by the mainstreaming of psychoanalysis and by the growth of contraception. These social and cultural changes have been instrumental in engineering a new cultural narrative, which Giddens (1993) calls the 'pure relationship'. In this narrative, relationships are no longer concerned with convenience or duty, but with friendship and intimacy. Pure relationships mark a new era of relationality, which is characterised as elective, negotiated, individualised, plural and varied. Relationships have become 'plastic' in the sense that they are now arranged on an emotional as opposed to institutional basis. They have become a significant component of the 'project of the self', in which the subject reflexively and self-consciously interrogates their past, present and future in order to best answer the question 'how shall I live'?

These shifts have been conceptualised as a shift from community and social institution to the self in terms of a 'choice biography', in which we create our identities through our relationships and in which we narrate our lives to ourselves and to others as exercises in communication, choice and honesty. Ken Plummer (1995) explored the growing variety of cultural narratives around sex and identity ('sexual stories'), from the 'coming-out' story of homosexual awakening, to the 'recovery from abuse' story of reconnecting with one's sexuality. Plummer argued that we all use these narratives to construct a sense of ourselves as subjects, and that with each re-telling the potency of the narrative deepens. In *The Normal Chaos of Love* (1995), Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim propose that love is the 'new religion' and the 'new class struggle', in the sense that it is relationships, rather than social position or religious belief, that are the principal social spaces where we struggle with anxieties and manage late-modern risk and opportunity. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) are certainly less optimistic than Giddens about how creative late-modern subjects can be in this self-narration. They point, for example, to conflicts between the labour economy and childcare and the subsequent costs to subjects who must navigate such conflicts. In more recent work (see for example Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001) they have explored in more detail some of the problems of 'individualisation' and the alienation and isolation for subjects who have become unanchored from traditional community life. Nevertheless, they do share with Giddens a sense of the subject who enjoys personal liberation from institutional pressures.

In these sociological accounts, twentieth century shifts in categories of gender and identity are taken as indications of the receding power of social structures and the rise of individualism. The twenty-first century subject is imagined to be the result of processes of self-narration, choice and empowerment, and the proliferation in popular culture of therapy and self-help texts and techniques are taken as a marker of 'reflexive modernisation'. Women in particular are seen as the 'emotional revolutionaries', whose self-conscious and reflexive self-invention is assumed by these accounts to herald a new era of empowerment and to have beneficial effects for both women and men. How compelling is this idea? How is gender constituted in cultural texts and representations? What do these reconfigurations of gender mean in cultural terms?

In the next section I explore some of the complex and contradictory gendered cultural narratives that have emerged in one important example of popular culture, *Sex and the City*, with regards to this self-made and empowered subject. I also examine the responses from feminist theorists, who have problematised the assumptions of 'reflexive modernisation' and of the emotional revolutions described by social theory. They have done this by drawing attention to the ways in which 'postfeminist' cultural texts tie subjects to gender in ever more pernicious ways.

'Postfeminist' popular culture

There are a number of key popular culture texts which have initiated thoughtful and insightful discussions around gender and feminism; these have included books/film franchises such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), lifestyle, celebrity and 'lads' magazines such as *Heat*, *Cosmopolitan* and *FHM*, and weblogs such as *Belle de Jour*. It would be impossible to review the broad range of popular culture that has pushed debates forward, and so I concentrate on one important example. *Sex and the City* began life as a series of newspaper columns in the *New York Observer* by Candace Bushnell, before being turned into an enormously successful television programme which broadcast for six seasons (1998–2004) and finally produced two major Hollywood films (2008, 2010). The franchise focuses on the lives of four women who live in New York and who are navigating their romantic and sexual lives in a context we might recognise as 'reflexively modern'. Their lives and problems are narrated by Carrie, a newspaper columnist, whose professional output is concerned with intimacy and relational questions, including the new breakup rules, the ethics of faking an orgasm and the forbidden allure of secret sex.

Thematically, *Sex and the City* treads familiar feminist terrain, exploring issues of how to balance career and love, motherhood, compromise and female friendship. The four women (Carrie, Miranda, Charlotte and Samantha) are

richly drawn characters, and while they drift in and out of relationships and commitment, they remain broadly independent of their partners; their principal relationships are with one another. Importantly, they are 'postfeminist' characters in the sense that they enjoy, feel emboldened by and entitled to the privileges of choice that surround them. They feel anxiety as women, certainly, but these anxieties are not caused by an absence of choice but, rather, *which* choice to make.

Cultural texts such as *Sex and the City* have garnered complex responses from feminist cultural critics. Some have argued for an optimistic view of these texts, as finally offering frank accounts of female sexuality and dealing with issues of intimacy and power that have proved difficult to solve. In her work on popular fiction, Imelda Whelehan describes such texts as being 'in dialogue with feminism' (2005: 5) albeit not directly with feminist theory or activism. She suggests that we see them as part of a new 'anxious genre' which is playful and pleasurable around gender, sexuality and intimacy issues, but nevertheless normalises and assumes angst and unease. Cataloguing and ruminating over the real and imagined flaws of the men they are dating, disclosing every detail of their intimate lives to each other over brunch, the *Sex and the City* characters illustrate the complexity of postfeminist anxiety. The genre offers pleasurable opportunities to cement the bonds of their friendship, but it also generates a sense of unending inadequacy.

Others have made more pessimistic readings; pointing to the ways in which such representations have undermined feminism itself by suggesting it is the cause of women's unhappiness. Susan Faludi (1992) discusses these shifts as part of a broader 'backlash' against feminism which began in the 1980s, and claims that these are not simply ambivalences but outright hostility to feminist politics. The backlash against feminism has taken many forms: caricaturing feminists as sexless, bitter killjoys and thought-police; implying that women feel a secret guilt about wanting marriage and children; representing men as emasculated by hyper-successful women. *Sex and the City* has certainly explored these themes too. Indeed, although cultural texts such as *Sex and the City* challenge and play with the content of female respectability, they do nonetheless reinstate (new) notions of gendered respectability. Jane Arthurs (2003) suggests that *Sex and the City* rejects moral discourses around virginity and instead considers women to have the right to pursue their sexual satisfaction, to have multiple partners and to enjoy sex outside marriage. Yet this moral discourse is simply replaced with aesthetic discourse, demonstrating a new preoccupation with 'taste', lifestyle and cultural capital. 'Virtue' as a source of feminine capital may have disappeared here, but it has been replaced by 'sexiness'. The body, bodily discipline, sexual knowledge and experience — what Hilary Radner (1999) has termed 'the technologies of sexiness' — have become the new principal sources of gendered capital.

Significantly, *Sex and the City* centres upon consumption (wearing the ‘right’ clothes, going to the ‘right’ bars, having sex with the ‘right’ men), pointing to the commodification of female autonomy. Perhaps we cannot easily read this new anxiety as either pro- or anti-feminist, but rather as a complex reworking of feminism, which revises and co-opts (and sometimes negates) feminism in more complex ways. These cultural texts might be seen as representing the reinvention of romance for consumer culture (see Gill and Herdieckerhoff 2006). Such reinventions are not without their limits, and they inevitably return to the very conventions of marriage and respectability which they initially eschew. The sexual liberation of *Sex and the City* is haunted by the continual struggle and desire to find and keep a man and by the deep unhappiness that comes with being a ‘singleton’; Carrie’s refusal to be tied down is narratively recouped by her eventual marriage. As such, Janet Cramer (2007) suggests that *Sex and the City*, in particular, represents the perfect marriage between postfeminism and new traditionalism.

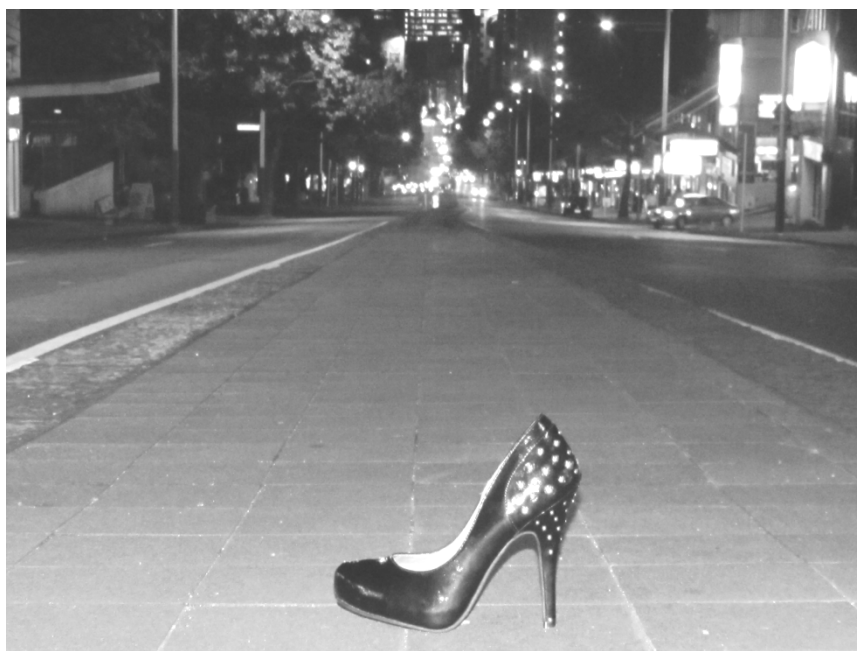


Figure 10.1 Shoes and the city

One of the most lucid explanations of these postfeminist complexities comes from Angela McRobbie (2004b), who sees this relationship between culture and politics as one of a ‘double entanglement’; the goals and principles of feminism are taken for granted and assumed to have been reached, even as ‘the feminist’ is repudiated and dismissed. Feminism is just not sexy. The term ‘postfeminism’ first began to gain social and intellectual currency in the 1980s and has been

used to signal a range of transformations across feminism and across culture. These have included the notion of a shifting political agenda for feminism, a move to include ethnic minority and working class women among other groups seen as hitherto excluded from the feminist project, and even as a backlash against women and against feminism. Rosalind Gill (2007) argued that, although these multilayered definitions of 'postfeminism' might be considered a signal of vibrant debate, cultural scholars do need to unpack postfeminist culture as a critical object for study. She usefully unpacks the 'sensibilities' of postfeminist culture, highlighting the entanglement within it of both feminist and anti-feminist themes and the assumption that feminism has been successful (and is thus no longer required).

As Gill (2007) demonstrates with examples drawn from across popular culture, postfeminism as a sensibility conceives of femininity as a bodily property, whereby being in possession of a 'sexy body' is the principal means to achieving femininity. Correspondingly, women's bodies are scrutinised, evaluated and monitored to an intense degree and as never before, and cultural space has become sexualised. What is distinctive about postfeminist sexualisation is that women are not objectified as passive and mute, but rather are constructed as active seekers of their own pleasure, as sexually desiring subjects. This might — surely — be read as a triumph of feminism; yet when we look more closely at what the 'sexually liberated woman' means, Gill argues that it differs little from pre-feminist (and often quite misogynist) fantasies. It is particularly significant that the postfeminist milieu emphasises the discourse of choice, agency and empowerment; women, it is implied, make the choices they do because it suits their liberated interests to do so. Gill (2007) notes that any notion of politics is evacuated and that all practices are simply read through the lens of 'pleasing oneself'.

These postfeminist sensibilities are amply demonstrated in what has become one of the most popular cultural formats, which first appeared in the late-twentieth century; the makeover television programme, to which I will now turn. The makeover format has become a highly significant cultural form, first emerging in the 1990s and initially confined to style and fashion segments on daytime television. The subsequent 'makeover takeover' (Moseley 2000) extended into home décor, gardening, childrearing, sexual relationships and, at perhaps the most extreme end, the refashioning of the entire physical body through cosmetic surgery. Participants who are deemed to be 'failing' in fields of personal conduct, style and comportment submit themselves to retraining from experts, and the resulting process of transformation forms the staple narrative of each episode. The makeover paradigm highlights some of the complexities of postfeminist self-narration, particularly within the context of consumerism and consumption.

Anxiety and failure in the makeover paradigm

The invitation to be ‘reflexively modern’, as outlined by the social theorists discussed earlier, is an invitation to be continually seeking ways to improve, re-invent, better oneself and transform one’s practices of living. One of the most significant, and obscured, aspects of much postfeminist culture is around gender as it is intertwined with social class and social difference. The women in *Sex and the City* and other such texts are professional, middle class and cosmopolitan, and their sexual autonomy is tied up with their abilities to consume. What we can see clearly in postfeminist culture is both the silencing of social class and the compulsion to be upwardly mobile. The makeover paradigm provides one example of the exhaustive capacity of postfeminist culture to offer opportunities to pursue this mobility through reinvention.

One significant example of the intertwining of new expressions of gender with social class can be seen in the UK makeover show *What Not to Wear* (2001–05). Hosted by the comfortably upper-class Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine, this makeover show demonstrated the ease with which popular culture has integrated social difference into its lexicon. The pair ridiculed and mocked their participants in ways that drew extensively upon their cultural capital of good ‘taste’ and ‘style’.

Woodall and Constantine expanded three conventional bodyshape categories (pear, apple and hourglass) into an impressive twelve (adding brick, skittle, lollipop, vase, cornet, goblet, cello, column and bell). If we adopt a Foucauldian perspective to look at these categories — that is, interpreting the systems we use to divide, categorise and know the world as embedded within structures of power and domination — they would seem to echo nineteenth-century taxonomies of race, the pseudoscience of craniology and other offensive bodily and facial stereotypes such as ‘the Jewish nose’ or the hypersexualised body of the Hottentot Venus (see Gould 1985). Reinvention and transformation is recast as a matter of identifying one’s body shape and learning how to ‘make the most of it’ through ‘good’ rather than ‘poor’ consumption choices (for example, buying clothes that disguise bodily ‘flaws’, learning how to ‘correctly’ accessorise and so forth). This requires a transfer of ‘expertise’ from television hosts who have effortlessly accrued such knowledge and are willing to teach failing subjects, on the condition that participants willingly submit to derogatory comments, teasing and even rampant cruelty (McRobbie 2004a).

Some scholars have seen the processes of transformation offered by the makeover paradigm as reconstituting bourgeois femininity as a cultural ideal that can never quite be reached by working class subjects. This paradigm reintroduces social class without naming it as such and without seriously attending to issues of economic justice or equality. Beverly Skeggs (2005) has

argued that makeover television amounts to a visual cataloguing of working class women as tasteless, ungovernable and excessive. Angela McRobbie (2004a) has argued that *What Not to Wear* promotes class antagonism between women, through its celebration of 'symbolic violence' upon makeover participants.

In their ambitious examination of the makeover paradigm, Valerie Walkerdine and Jessica Ringrose (2008) argue that this format offers viewers the complex pleasures of abjection, in which the ungovernable and tasteless makeover subjects are ritually 'cast out' and pronounced disgusting and shameful. The unfolding process of abjection, however, is never clean or final, and viewers are haunted by the possibility that they too might be disgusting or shameful. Abjection might go some way to explaining the formulaic repetition across episodes and across genres; it is never complete and never finished. As Walkerdine and Ringrose (2008: 242) suggest, 'the drama of abjection is being played out nightly in living rooms around the nation' and femininity in particular seems to offer 'limitless' possibilities for transformation apparently without end. The anxiety produced in this process can also be seen in the profitable publishing franchises that accompany the television programmes which offer, for an additional cost, the cultural knowledge that promises to guarantee respectability and good taste in a handy reference guide.

The limitless capacity of the makeover paradigm can be seen in its own somewhat self-referential shifts. Where Trinny and Susannah showed women how to *disguise* their problematic bodies, there has been a move more recently towards teaching women how to *love* those same problematic bodies; this too, however, requires transformation and succumbing to expertise. I want finally to consider another makeover programme, *How to Look Good Naked* (2006–08), and through that to reflect upon the possible future contortions of a format which has shown a remarkable ability to remake itself.

How to Look Good Naked follows a familiar narrative, yet in this case the central object for transformation is not only a wardrobe or a sense of style, but the intimate relationship that participants have with themselves. What is being 'made over' is one's own self-esteem. This is not necessarily a new component to the transformation process in postfeminist popular culture, but its *centrality* here is, I would argue, a novelty. Subjects undergo a range of activities to effect this transformation. In a gesture that partially recognises the impact of bodily dysmorphia, women are asked to estimate their position in a line-up of differently sized, underwear-clad women on the basis of how they judge the size of their own breasts, bottoms or stomachs. Women are restyled by stylist Gok Wan, who shows them how to 'work' their best assets and deflect from their anxiety-inducing areas. The programme engineers a collapse between external and internal judgements, between the surveillance of others and the self-

surveillance and policing of oneself. This collapse refuses to consider meaningfully the significance of cultural norms upon the judgement of bodies, and instead recasts individual anxiety and lack of confidence as a failure to love oneself. Yet, to 'feel good' about oneself, these cultural norms must be followed, even heightened and intensified. As Wan says of one subject, 'to look confident on the inside, Sonya's got to look a million dollars on the outside'.

In what is frequently the most emotional segment, the women take part in a naked photo shoot, coaxed by both Wan and the professionals who are drafted in to catch their best angles and protect their modesty. Each episode culminates with the initially self-conscious woman 'strutting her stuff' on a public runway (temporarily installed in a shopping precinct) wearing lingerie and killer heels. As an enormous print of their naked portrait is unveiled to the whooping glee of the shopping crowd, Wan asks the participant the climactic question, 'Do you look good naked?' She answers, always, with a triumphant 'Yes!'

How to Look Good Naked certainly operates as a more sympathetic programme than makeover predecessors such as *What Not to Wear*. Gok Wan is kinder and demonstrates a good deal more empathy towards the participants than the fashion experts Trinny and Susannah of *What Not to Wear*. He tells his 'girls' that they are 'beautiful', 'stunning' and he often makes explicit references to unrealistic media representations of women as contributing to their negative self-perceptions. However, the cultural critique is fleeting; the principal path to personal fulfilment is not to challenge unrealistic representations but to find the confidence, in Gok-speak, to 'work it' — 'to look confident on the inside, Sonia's got to look a million dollars on the outside' — to seek and develop self-esteem through flaunting oneself. The quasi-therapeutic language and logic of postfeminist culture is highly important in this programme, for example with Wan encouraging women to send in pictures of themselves in their underwear, or even naked, in order to 'empower themselves'. These invitations draw on the therapeutic and even feminist-inflected languages of healing — respect yourself, accept compliments, change your self-perception and so on — but within a sexualised context and according to the dictates of postfeminist culture that requires women to be 'up for it'.

In many ways, Gok Wan operates as a 'safe queer', as the stylishly homosexual girl's best friend; an important parallel with the US makeover show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003–07) in which five gay men make over a scruffy and domestically inept heterosexual man for the benefit of his long-suffering girlfriend. Wan's queerness insulates him from potential criticisms of sexually objectifying women. Although he frequently grabs and fondles the breasts and bottoms of his 'girls', it is rendered harmless and fun. He freely uses comic terms to refer to body parts — breasts become 'bangers' or 'breasticles' and flabby stomachs become 'spare tyres'. His queerness becomes a kind of capital

to be deployed and his homosexuality blurs into homosociality; he is 'one of the girls' rather than a figure of masculine judgement.

In the 'extra-textual' spaces that surround and enrich culture, Gok Wan's own narrative is disseminated and impacts upon the meanings that circulate around *How to Look Good Naked*. The child of working class Asian immigrants, Gok's complex relationship to whiteness and to social class is obscured by the broader attention given to his own self-invention, from unhappy fat teen to glamorous gay man. His narrative is recast in terms of his eventual success in self-governance, self-surveillance and self-monitoring through his learning how to 'work it'. The politics of transformation offered by Wan, and across the makeover paradigm, is not organised on a collective basis or through activism, resistance and challenging normativity. Rather, it is an intensely personal journey, and organised increasingly without reference to any social relationships save that of the participant to herself.

Conclusions: hijacking or incorporation of feminism?

The shifts in popular culture towards the postfeminist sensibilities described in this chapter demonstrate the changing gender relations of late-modern, post-traditional societies. The late-modern subject is now considered to be free from the old certainties of social class, geographical location and rigid kinship systems and obligations. Some social theorists have seen these freedoms in positive terms, as liberation of the individual from institutional pressures and an indicator of the success of feminism. Concepts such as 'plastic sexuality', 'pure relationships' and 'choice biographies' are deployed to suggest that the individual is in charge of his or her own destiny.

As reviewed in this chapter, there is a significant amount of cultural analysis which regards these shifts in popular culture and representations in less positive terms. These feminist scholars have pointed to the replacement of moral discourses with other aesthetic discourses which are just as divisive for women. Others have pointed to the shifts from external surveillance and judgements to internal, self-policing by women themselves, and have argued forcefully that these were not the goals of feminism. Whilst individualisation theorists have interpreted the proliferation of self-help, advice and makeover culture as a positive marker of the individual's right to choose how to live, feminist scholars have argued that this indicates how anxiety has been normalised and commodified. The trade in symbolic competencies, skills and social scripts can be seen most clearly in makeover culture, which has incorporated and transformed feminist language and rewritten it for an individualised consumer. Perhaps the most significant impact of the rise of 'plastic sexuality' is that it is through practices of sexualisation, above all other practices, that we are

constituted as subjects. Self-esteem, for example, is reduced to the issue of whether one looks good naked. Ariel Levy (2006: 44) remains pessimistic about this elevation, and disconnect, of 'sexiness' as a competency to be learned, stating:

[t]hat women are now doing this to ourselves isn't some kind of triumph, it's depressing. Sexuality is inherent, it is a fundamental part of being human, and it is a lot more complicated than we seem to be willing to admit. Different things are attractive to different people and sexual tastes run wide and wild. Yet, somehow, we have accepted as fact the myth that sexiness needs to be something divorced from the everyday experience of being ourselves.

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11 The Racialisation of Culture

Nabeel Zuberi

- This chapter opens with the relationships between the concepts of race, ethnicity and racism in cultural studies and media studies.
- It grounds the academic research on race and ethnicity in social and political movements, government interventions in culture, and developments in the cultural industries.
- Social constructionist or discursive approaches, and the concepts of *racialisation* and *racial formation*, are presented as ways to approach specific cultural forms, practices and historical contexts.
- The concept of *articulation* opens up analysis of the interactions between race and ethnicity and other forces and categories in cultures.
- The chapter concludes with the contested idea of the *post-racial* in contemporary culture. This section makes links between approaches to new media technologies and the historical development of race and racism. Some of the weaknesses of social constructionist approaches are raised by theories of assemblage and affect.

Race, ethnicity and racism

Race is premised on the categorisation of bodies as phenotypes; that is, on biological variations such as skin colour, shape of nose or eyes, texture of hair. *Ethnicity* classifies humans on the basis of cultural differences, such as language, nationality, customs or religion (Erikson 2010). In contemporary (multi)cultural discourses, ethnicity seems to have greater currency. Race now appears the more old-fashioned term, though it is in fact the more modern concept. The two words do the work of establishing differences between humans, in terms of self and other, us and them, this and that group. The cultural analysis of race and ethnicity reveals the mutual dependencies and power relations between subjects collected into these categories, with and without their 'choice'. People identify with these designations, since they also encompass shared histories and experiences, knowledges and structures of feeling. As terms, race and ethnicity are multivalent, contested, and therefore subject to change.

In common use, the boundaries between the vocabularies of race and ethnicity are intertwined through countless cultural forms and practices. Race may be defined by blood, but ethnicity carries notions of kinship often based on bloodlines (or family genealogies). While watching the cricket World Cup in 2011, for example, I noticed an Australian television commentator (Ian Chappell) say that the Sri Lankans are a ‘race’ that ‘like to have a good time’, and a New Zealand commentator (Dion Nash) say that the Pakistani team belong to a ‘race’ that ‘responds to strong leaders’. These statements referred to ideas about national character, usually tied more closely to ethnicity than to biology. As Stuart Hall (1997: 8) states, race is a ‘floating signifier’. It is not a language, but functions like a language that creates typologies, demarcates the inside from the outside of the body politic in changing historical contexts. Whether one’s appearance is ‘brown’, ‘quite black’ or ‘disgustingly pink’ (to use Hall’s ironic examples), race is only meaningful because it is relational, rather than capturing any racial or ethnic essence.

Race and ethnicity are often attached to that bugaboo term *racism*. Racism is the fixation with biological and/or cultural differentiation of humans as part of the domination of some populations over others. At its worst, racism motivates and sanctions the killing of others, or their death by neglect. But if one way of conceptualising culture is as ‘everyday life’ (see Williams 2009), then racism is also very ordinary, repetitive and institutionalised. Philomena Essed (1991: 3) writes that ‘the concept of everyday racism counters the view ... that racism is an individual problem, a question of “to be or not be a racist”’. She argues that everyday racism involves ‘systematic, recurrent familiar practices’ that can be ‘generalized’ through ‘socialized attitudes and behavior’ and ‘cumulative instantiation’. Essed’s research provides a model for understanding everyday racism that integrates the experiences, subjectivities and narratives of people at its receiving end (Essed 2001). Ordinary gestures disempower subjects and groups, and pass off routinely without much discussion in the public sphere or the mainstream media.

Hegemonic discourses tend to state how tolerant, inclusive and ‘not racist’ the nation and its majority have always been, though as Teun van Dijk (1992: 92) has demonstrated, these denials of racism employ multiple strategies of discursive and cognitive defence and attack. They refuse to recognise structures of power that distinguish and discriminate to serve the domination of certain groups. They use a vocabulary that veils race, referring to such discourses as ‘cultural values’, ‘political correctness’, and most paradoxically, ‘equal treatment’, given their complicity in unequal treatment. Certain racial/ethnic controversies boil intermittently to the surface of broad public attention. Writing about the bullying of Bollywood actor Shilpa Shetty during the 2007 season of UK reality television series *Celebrity Big Brother*, for example, Damien Riggs

and Clemence Due (2010: 269) argue that by using euphemisms for racism such as ‘cruel’ and ‘offensive’, the show’s host was

complicit in the relationships of power which enable racism to continue unchecked by not naming it as a relationship between privilege and disadvantage, whereby those of us who occupy privileged locations within racial hierarchies stand to benefit from them, regardless of our individual intent.

Today’s ‘reality’ media incorporate the ‘racial controversy’ as a way of generating hype for ratings-driven networks (public and private) that are willing to have their talent throw a few racist remarks into the public sphere and risk some ‘blowback’. These racist eruptions are not aberrations, but closely related to the more pervasive or ambient racism.

Racism is heterogeneous and endemic to micro- and macro-social relations. Today it tends to refer more to cultural differences than biological distinctions to stake out the incompatibility of populations, or toleration of them. But even with cultural racism, recourse to the body is never far away. Sentiment about groups deemed significantly different often focuses on corporeal attributes, behaviours and genetics, whether they be disliked, desired, or both: they are dirty or cleaner; beautiful or ugly; more or less sexual; likely or not likely to be intelligent, law-abiding, or violent. Les Back and John Solomos (2009: 21) have noted that ‘the central feature of these processes is that the qualities of social groups are fixed, made natural, confined within a pseudo-biologically defined culturalism’. In other words, racism constructs nature and culture to service its repressive social imagination and reproduce its social relations.

Race and ethnicity in the cultural academy

Much of the scholarship on race and ethnicity is grounded in activism against racism, and the social movements and political organisations of historically disempowered populations. The growth in culture-related studies of race and ethnicity can be situated in the geopolitical shifts and debates associated with nationalism and colonialism, imperialism and decolonisation, civil and human rights, globalisation and multiculturalism. Pedagogy and research on these subjects is the result of ongoing struggle and negotiation between different groups and educational institutions. The ‘cultural turn’ in the social sciences, state interventions in culture, and the promotion of the cultural or ‘creative’ industries, have all encouraged the production of knowledge on cultural difference, whether it be centred on cultural policy, culture as everyday life, or the production and consumption of culture as goods and services (Fornäs et al. 2007).

The traditions of pragmatic criticism and policy-oriented research in cultural studies invite us to examine institutional cultures. For example, Sara Ahmed (2007: 254) writes that in the contemporary university, '[w]ords such as "diversity" might allow the organization to accumulate value, by re-branding itself as being diverse or even as being committed to diversity without, as it were, doing anything. Or they might not.' At the level of teaching and research, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994: 6) have argued that the cultural studies field is 'often devoid of substantive multicultural content' and privileges the 'Anglo-Western world', with cultures and intellectual approaches from large parts of the globe consigned to 'area studies'. Nevertheless, the disciplines and interdisciplinary fields of the humanities and social sciences have produced an expansive literature on the politics of representation in the arts and media. This work has explored (i) how racially and ethnically marked communities and subjects have been represented in cultural texts, (ii) how they have interpreted and negotiated these representations, and just as importantly, (iii) how they have represented themselves in their own cultural production (see, for example, Naficy 2001; Smith 2011). These questions have been part of broader enquiry into the distinctive ways populations are legible, visible and audible in the mediated public sphere, and to what extent they are absent, silent or marginalised. However, as John Downing and Charles Husband (2005: 202) state, '[t]he exponential growth of critical literature exposing the flawed representation of ethnicity in the media has certainly not been matched by an equivalent effort to explicitly define what the ideal multi-ethnic media environment should look like'.

Racialisation and racialised formations

Critical scholarship examines race and ethnicity as forms of knowledge. The concept of *racialisation* describes the processes through which race is socially constructed. David Theo Goldberg (1993: 150) writes that, 'an epistemology so basically driven by difference will "naturally" find racialized thinking comfortable; it will uncritically (come to) assume racial knowledge as given'. This statement does not suggest that we discard race as an analytical category, but continually scrutinise its contested meanings. Such social constructionist arguments posit that racialised and ethnic discourses have tangible effects in the world. Racism may not be the primary focus, as researchers employ diverse methods to investigate how race and ethnicity matter in many cultural practices and registers. Race and ethnicity are neither necessarily 'good' nor 'bad'. Michael Omi and Howard Winant (2002: 123) argue that 'the effort must be made to understand race as an unstable and "decentered" complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle'. They use the term *racial formation* to define 'the sociohistorical process by which racial categories

are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed’ (Omi and Winant 2002: 124). We cannot assume, however, that the discourses of race and ethnicity necessarily develop according to a progressive, evolutionary narrative in which unjust and destructive forms of racial and ethnic thinking are replaced by more enlightened perspectives.

Antonia Darder and Rodolfo D. Torres prefer to use the term ‘racialized’ rather than ‘racial’ to describe a social formation, because it emphasises the ongoing processes of racialisation. Given the history of race as a conceptual weapon, ‘racial’ is always in danger of positing an objective and static view of social identities. Darder and Torres (2004: 146) contend that race-relations sociology — which developed in order to understand the ‘problems’ between different ethnic groups — ultimately takes race for granted as an organising category, and therefore ‘implies that racialized groups constitute a monolithic social category’.

Cultural studies aims to historicise and situate racial discourses. Theories and empirical research cannot be simply transposed from one context to another, or made universal. The way race and ethnicity ‘work’ in one location and at one historical moment may not be applicable to another place and time, or to another set of humans. Particular discourses will be in force in any location due to its specific multiethnic history. But ideas also cross territorial boundaries. The migration of peoples and the mobility of meanings with them and through communication technologies mean that we inhabit a matrix of local, national and transnational discourses related to race and ethnicity. As Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2007: 189) points out, ‘global multicultural’, especially channelled and networked through transnational media, generates ‘flexible acculturation’, which ‘deploys flexible methods (switching codes, mixing codes, and alternating circuits of affiliation) towards the general aim of belonging and being at home in the world’. Our racially and ethnically inscribed ‘resources’ come from far away, as well as close to home.

Articulating race and ethnicity in cultural formations

What we need are ways of understanding race and ethnicity that try to come to terms with the complexity of racialised social formations, without, on the one hand, privileging race and ethnicity as the only determining factors, and on the other hand, not understating their importance either. In much of his work in cultural studies, Stuart Hall draws on the concept of *articulation* — a term which he appropriates and develops from Marxist theory — to describe the close relationship, but also the relative autonomy, of race in relation to the socio-economic category of class. According to Hall (1980: 341), race is ‘the modality in which class is “lived”’. Hall emphasises that articulations are linkages that are not to be taken for granted, but are actively made, broken, and remade

differently in specific contexts. Articulations are contingent. In other words, there is no necessary fixed relationship between race and class. Partly due to Hall's influence, articulation has become a key concept in cultural studies. It forces us to think of race in relation to other categories, not only class, but gender, sexuality, nation and so on. There has been substantial and heated academic debate on the intersections between race and class. Darder and Torres, for example, argue that an emphasis on race undermines a critique of class relations in which a working class made up of many different ethnic groups is racialised differentially to suit the requirements of capital. So-called identity politics organised around racial and ethnic lines are sometimes seen as undermining the class struggle.

But the dimension of class has remained essential to the study of vernacular or popular cultures. Eric Lott's *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993), for example, looks at the dynamics of cultural appropriation in the white mimicry of black culture in the United States over the last two centuries. Arguably American popular music owes much of its sonic texture and performance styles to African-American music culture as shaped by white American racism. Elvis Presley caused some anxieties in 1954 when his recorded voice was mistaken for a black man's on the radio. Minstrelsy continues to haunt contemporary pop culture. As Dodai Stewart (2011) suggests of a 2011 French fashion magazine photo spread in which Beyoncé Knowles appeared with her face darkened:

Beyoncé's skin looked a lot *lighter* in L'Oréal ads, and women like *Aishwarya Rai Bachchan* and *Gabourey Sidibe* had their faces lightened for magazine covers, and black models are so rarely seen on designers' runways, the message we're getting from the fashionistas is that it's bad to actually *have* dark skin, but totally cool to *pretend* you have it.

The finest comedic example that shows how racism (in the United States) is about socialisation, and not simply about individual antipathies, is a fake news item sketch from *Chappelle's Show* (2003) in which African-American comedian Dave Chapelle plays Clayton Bigsby, a blind 'white supremacist' who doesn't know he is black. After removing his white Ku Klux Klan hood at a racist rally due to the request of his soon-to-be stunned audience, he eventually accepts the fact he is black, and divorces his white wife because she is a 'nigger lover'.

Feminist theorists have long argued that social categories like race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality need to be analysed together, but also that they do not line up together in a tidy 'intersectionality' (Yuval-Davis 2006). Strange bedfellows and stark contradictions are actually quite common. For example, arguments for the rights of women can be used as weapons against other ethnic/national

groups, as with justifications for the war in Afghanistan based on arguments for the freedoms of Muslim women (Bhattacharyya 2008).

Articulation also suggests how various forms of racial and ethnic essentialism are actually composed of many elements and forces, rather than being singular as they often project; the racially pure nation is in fact a ‘mongrel’ or hybrid creation. Racial categories also change. White Europeans wrote and talked about the Irish and Jews as ‘black’ for much of their history. The state apparatus and civil society in many nations have turned religious groups such as Jews and Muslims into racialised or ethnic communities. Such categorisations discipline other subjects, but they may also be used by them. Defining racial and ethnic identities can be a temporary measure or ‘strategic essentialism’; that is, the ‘strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest’ (Spivak 1987: 205). For example, in the 1960s and 1970s, ‘Black’ was as much a political category as a racial one, which helped to construct and affiliate political, economic and cultural movements in the African diaspora, whether they were in the Caribbean, the Americas, or the United Kingdom. The inadequate categories foisted upon subjects by government and the media, such as ‘Asian’ or ‘Pacific Islander’, may also enable the organisation of coalitions for social change. In that sense, modes of identification and dis-identification, and the ways in which they fluctuate, might tell us more than a focus on identity.

Articulation also helps us make sense of the varied and contested use of racial and ethnic stereotypes in many kinds of representation. While we should critique the limited images and typologies of racial and ethnic groups, ironically, the identification of ‘bad’ stereotypes can be as reductive as the object of its criticism. The meaning of a stereotype depends, after all, on the context of its use, on the narratives in which it is located, and the style in which it is performed (consider the use of stereotypes in ethnic comedies such as New Zealand television shows *bro’Town* (2004–9) and *A Thousand Apologies* (2008)). The point of view or perspective of a cultural text may be reflexive or ironic in its use of stereotypes, in order to question rather than perpetuate them. Can one unpack the typologies without reproducing them? Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994: 201) argue that, ‘[t]he focus on individual character also misses the ways in which social institutions and cultural practices, as opposed to individuals, can be misrepresented without a single character being stereotyped’. They call for an emphasis on the ‘orchestration of discourses’ in texts, which ‘allows us to compare a film’s discourses not with an inaccessible “real” but with other socially circulated cognate discourses forming part of a continuum — journalism, novels, network news, television shows, political speeches, scholarly essays, and popular songs’ (Shohat and Stam 1994: 215). Ideas about race and ethnicity are fashioned through narrative structures and other discursive strategies as much as specific figures.

However, the flexibility of race, released by the concept of articulation, raises some troubling questions. If race is a floating signifier, can it float free of its previous meanings, especially those meanings associated with racism? The study of race seems to be driven by a paradox. We can accept that the concept of race is a human construction that imposes illegitimate, or at the very least, questionable regimes of difference on members of the same species. But if race is a fiction (often signalled by academics placing the word in quotation marks), then why keep the concept at all, since it has surely helped to sustain racism? Should not scholarly work aim to eradicate the idea of race in our efforts to combat and even end racism?

The cultural politics of the postracial moment

I raise these questions because of the currency of the term ‘post-racial’ in contemporary cultural theory and popular discourse. In November 2010, the online journal *darkmatter* put out a call for papers for a special issue on ‘post-racial imaginaries’. The editors stated that ‘[p]ost-race requires us to question in new ways the precepts of race thinking, positing the end of race as a point with which to think racial futures.’ They acknowledged the ‘multiple registers of post-race talk’, and suggested a few areas of enquiry that signal the post-racial, such as ‘the shifts from race to ethnicity, cultural difference and multiculturalism’, ‘Obama and the politics of anti-racism’, ‘Utopia and the end of racism’, ‘After whiteness’, and ‘Digitalization, bio-technologies, genetic engineering and racial mutations’ (darkmatter 2010).

The concept of the ‘post-racial’ is highly problematic if it suggests that racism has ended. Kent A. Ono (2010: 228) argues that ‘[p]ostracism is the perfect elixir to help society forget about the icky historical abomination known as racism. It is one part cultural condition and one part political strategy’. While inviting us to think of a world without ‘race’, postracism attempts to ‘reverse the gains of antiracist and civil rights struggles and to continue old-style racism garbed in new clothes’ (Ono 2010: 228). David Theo Goldberg reminds us of what threatens to be ‘buried alive’ if we strip race (or ethnicity) free of racism completely: the ‘residues of racist arrangement and subordination — social, economic, cultural, psychological, legal, and political’, the ‘historical horrors racially inscribed’, and their ‘attendant expressions of racial grief and group melancholia, on one side, and racial self-assertion and triumphalism, on the other’ (Goldberg 2009: 1–2). We can respond to *darkmatter*’s suggestions, and Ono and Goldberg’s critiques by looking backwards to grasp the continuities in racialised and ethnic discourses. But we should also try to understand how new cultural forms and practices modify the ways in which race and ethnicity are configured.

There continues to be some debate about the specific origins of race as a concept, since population differentiation and hierarchies can be traced back to ancient cultures in Greece and Egypt. Prejudice, discrimination, slavery and death for belonging to particular groups were well established in a transnational economic system before European ascendancy (Abu-Lughod 1989). From the fifth to fifteenth centuries, interpretations of Biblical scripture increasingly shaped antipathies towards non-Christian populations, conceived as separate and inferior branches of the family tree of man. Most accounts claim that race becomes a systematically defined and defining concept in European modernity. A key moment in the historiography of race is the Iberian Inquisition in the late 1400s, which used blood tests to determine purity of identity, and resulted in the torture, execution and deportation of Jews and Muslims. The conquest and genocides of indigenous populations that followed Christopher Columbus' landing in the 'new world' in 1492 marked the beginnings of European colonialism, settlement and imperial expansion. Race categories were integral to the Enlightenment's instrumental rationality and control of nature (Banton 1998). The racial theories developed in philosophy, history, the biological sciences and emergent social sciences like anthropology, provided the ideological foundations for European domination and the exploitation of others and their resources (Bernasconi 2000). European states and mercantile interests forcibly displaced Africans in an Atlantic slave trade that lasted 400 years, transplanting and killing millions during transportation (Walvin 2007).

In his influential work *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978) argues that representations in writings and the visual arts provided the academic and artistic discourses that justified imperial rule over Asian territories and peoples, captured in the mythologies of European imaginations. The idea of the West was formed, with an Occident set in opposition to, but actually dependent on, its visions of the Orient and the South. Typologies, structures of narration and fantasy, and 'imaginative geographies' contributed to this projection of the East. Europe thought of itself as the natural centre of the world and the primary force for world development. The world was to be made in its image. This narcissism was linked to the normative subjectivities and perspectives of white(r) people, and to the privileged status of whiteness (Frankenberg 2007). The psychic dimensions of racialised thinking cannot be forgotten. As Ono (2010: 231) points out, in today's postracism, films and television programmes — including those with 'liberal' and ostensibly anti-racist messages, such as *Avatar* (2009), *Invictus* (2009), *Grand Torino* (2008), and *Mad Men* (2007–11) — deploy 'encounters with marginal others' to develop the identity of their central white protagonists. Sanjay Sharma and Ashwani Sharma (2003: 9) have also argued that 'ethnicity is now pivotal to a refashioning of the Western subject'. In contemporary orientalism, they suggest that 'the troubled discourse of liberal multiculturalism is ambivalently split and *caught* between the celebration of

cultural diversity and a heightened manifestation of cultural racism' (Sharma and Sharma 2003: 8). We inhabit

a media culture eager to consume ethnicity, valorizing it as the symbolic triumph of a (humanist) cosmopolitan subject in a post-ideological age. The turn to 'ethnicity' in commodity culture parallels the shift to a mode of multicultural governance, where ethnic diversity and cultural harmony is the horizon through which racism and social conflict is managed and controlled. (Sharma and Sharma 2010: 9)

In the analysis of culture we should seek to connect how desires for otherness are at the same time linked to keeping others in their 'proper place'.

In one of his 1975–6 lectures for the series *Society Must be Defended*, Michel Foucault (2003: 239) contends that 'war was regarded, initially and throughout practically the whole of the eighteenth century, as a war between races'. Foucault saw differences between groups as part of the struggle for power in any society, but he argues, during the nineteenth century these antagonisms were re-organised in *biopolitics*, a technology of power focused on amassing and organising populations. This took place alongside disciplinary practices designed for individual bodies. The formation of state racism involved forms of knowledge such as the census, which divided populations on the basis of its racial categories. According to Foucault, the modern state of the nineteenth century continued the old sovereign right to put to death enemies, but under the newer auspices of protecting the life and purity of the national population from the biological threat posed by other races (Foucault 2003: 56).

Patricia Clough suggests that we are witnessing the forging of a new type of biopower for a new kind of body, the *biomediated body*,

which allows the raced body to be apprehended as information. Here the very technologies of surveillance and security, which presently operate to race populations, do so by monitoring bodily affect as information, ranging from DNA testing, to brain fingerprinting, neural imaging, body heat detection and iris or hand recognition. (Clough 2008: 19)

In a mediascape increasingly organised through digital networks and social media, the rapid and widespread circulation of cultural material charged with racial and ethnic meanings is one focus of interest for researchers. In adapting Omi and Winant's idea of 'racial formation' to 'digital racial formation', Lisa Nakamura suggests that we need to move away from traditional, more static modes of analysing visual objects to greater emphasis on their meaning as users interact with them (Nakamura 2008: 17–18). The photographs of torture and other prison abuse at Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad, Iraq, that were released in

2004 reminded Susan Sontag of ‘the photographs of black victims of lynching taken between the 1880’s [sic] and 1930’s [sic], which show Americans grinning beneath the naked mutilated body of a black man or woman hanging behind them from a tree’. But she also points out that in ‘our age of infinite digital self-reproduction and self-dissemination’, the Abu Ghraib pictures were ‘less objects to be saved than messages to be disseminated, circulated’ (Sontag 2004). Controversies such as the Abu Ghraib photographs, the Muhammad cartoons published by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, and the Quran burnings in the United States also present challenges for comparative and transnational analyses of racialised and ethnically marked cultural dynamics. Studies will have to be attentive to the temporalities and flows of these globally distributed representations, the relationship between their interpretations in different places, and the responses and interactivity of different actors.

Challenges to social constructionist approaches to race, to a hermeneutics of representation, and to intersectional models of racialised and ethnic identity come from theories of assemblage and affect. Jasbir Puar argues that while the intersectional model of identity ‘presumes that components — race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, religion — are separate analytics and can thus be disassembled, an assemblage is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space and body against linearity, coherency and permanency’ (Puar 2007: 212). An assemblage model is more open to shifting identifications and greater indeterminacy. Arun Saldanha (2006) argues that social constructionist approaches tend to think of race as a problem of epistemology and discourse, and so neglect the materialities of bodies, events and spaces, which need to be understood in phenomenological terms. The desire to focus on how race is *known* discursively repeats the separation of human and nature. He therefore calls for a qualified return to the biological. This turn also suggests that theories of race and racism have to more concertedly address the power relations between humans and other species (Castricano 2008). Assemblage theories also offer opportunities to consider the specificities of media technologies, their audiovisual interfaces, platforms, formats, and forms, as they put differences into play and interact with humans. The emphasis on affect draws the analysis of race and ethnicity to structures of feeling and emotions that are not just personal, but generated and circulated collectively (Fortier 2008: 7).

The critical discourse that the ‘post-racial’ has already fostered indicate that race talk continues to be vital, rather than ‘after the fact’ of race or racism. There is no end, only more research questions and methodologies in the struggle to understand the myriad ways in which race, ethnicity and racism run through culture for creative and destructive purposes.

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12 Pakeha Identity and Material Culture

Claudia Bell

- As globalisation increases cultural flows, many distinctive features of local culture have been jeopardised.
- Objects and practices that have been distinctive to local culture are often re-valued and take on new meaning.
- Material culture may be a useful venue in the analysis of social change.
- New Zealand museums and private collectors accessioning 'kiwiana' are the focal point of this discussion.
- Collectors and curators assembling such artefacts are re-telling the national story.

Introduction

This chapter explores current practices in New Zealand of conserving and recasting material evidence of cultural uniqueness. Those once trivial items that constitute kiwiana have become a significant category in post-colonial expression of place. 'Kiwiana' refers to popular cultural items that distinctly reference New Zealand. 'Maoriana' is a subcategory of this; objects which draw their design or decoration from traditional Maori symbols and artefacts.

In the face of declining numerical and political dominance of the Pakeha population, and the deluge of cheap generic imported goods, there is an increasing valuing of everyday objects that distinctly express Pakeha culture. This has manifested itself in two ways addressed here: firstly, the growing incorporation of twentieth-century 'kitsch' kiwiana and Maoriana into museum collections. Clearly, the original prosaic meanings of the objects have migrated. Curators have re-interpreted these items in their narratives of nation. Secondly, the mounting private collecting of kiwiana; numerous collectors are seriously committed to rescuing, displaying and investing in kiwiana. Auction houses and trademe.co.nz are significant dealers. In both of the above cases, the items concerned include everyday household objects created by manufacturers (for example, Crown Lynn, and Fun Ho!), tourist souvenirs (representing nation or region) and folk-art — handmade non-commercial items by hobbyists. Material cultural artefacts and their inherent socio-political symbolism, as well as their

meanings when embedded in the domestic environment, are largely unexplored arenas of investigation in post-colonial cultural studies. This investigation is an attempt to penetrate that gap and articulate a comprehension of the everyday expression of culture and nation in New Zealand.

Globalisation and local culture

As globalisation increases cultural flows, many of the distinctive features of local culture have been jeopardised. Homogenisation and hybridisation of goods deny difference. Today, when many of the same material items can be found everywhere, objects that are idiosyncratic to a culture take on new meanings.

This chapter explores current practices in New Zealand of conserving and re-evaluating material evidences of Pakeha cultural uniqueness. ‘Pakeha’ generally refers to locally born white New Zealanders, the term evolving from its earliest meaning of ‘non-Maori’. Not all of those who qualify for this categorisation agree with its usage, some preferring ‘New Zealander’, ‘European’, ‘Caucasian’ or ‘Kiwi’ (Spoonley 2005). ‘Kiwi’ is a very common conversational self-reference. Kiwiana is part of the culture of our everyday lives, including the material and non-material artefacts and activities — ‘folk culture’ — that distinguish New Zealand culture. However, the term kiwiana is most frequently used to refer to particular items from New Zealand’s material cultural heritage (especially from the mid-twentieth century) which have been adopted as icons. ‘Maoriana’ as a subcategory of kiwiana refers to items which incorporate traditional Maori symbols. This appropriation of indigenous authenticity is a key element in the assertion of local cultural distinctiveness, a practice dating back to early tourism in New Zealand (O’Connor 1998). That kiwiana’s symbolic biculturalism has not been borne out politically is not visible in the arena of material commodities. Those once-trivial items that constitute kiwiana may now be read as a significant category in post-colonial expression of place. In this chapter I revisit this arena of popular culture, exploring its migration to a new status as desirable collectable.

The materiality discussed in this chapter restates majority group identity. Spoonley explains that this is the group generally most associated with nation-building projects. He observes that identity assertion has become increasingly problematic, particularly in settler societies, which have been constructed by immigration but dominated culturally, politically and economically by ‘white’ groups (Spoonley 2005: 99). Yet while Pakeha largely maintains its dominant position in New Zealand, in the larger world it constitutes the merest smidgen of the global population of an estimated 6.8 billion. A miniscule population at the bottom of the globe, New Zealanders are persistent in their drive to show their idiosyncratic selves and space to the world. Just four million people could so

easily be overlooked. That New Zealanders inhabit a distinctive physical space on the globe that can be visualised — skinny islands that sprawl south from 34 to 47 degrees latitude — facilitates awareness of difference. New Zealand is small and remote, but easily located on a map. There are also numerous vigorous international branding campaigns around sports events and tourism to ‘put us on the map’.

But Pakeha also need the self-assurance that indeed we are unique. Many cultural products contribute towards fulfilling this need, such as music, films and literature. Kiwiana still persists as the stable category of symbols of nation: items that are traditional, so therefore more authentic and ‘supportive of a conception ... of a distinctive national cultural identity’ (Shuker and Pickering 2009: 275). A quick Google search yielding over 560,000 websites using this word attests to its currency.

Methods and approach

Taking a qualitative cultural studies approach, fieldwork for this research involved visiting kiwiana collectors and museum curators throughout New Zealand. I viewed collections, and interviewed the collectors/curators about the meanings, to them, of both the act of collecting and of kiwiana. The collectors/curators told me stories about the items, often as much about where they found the pieces as about their original manufacture. They located their tales within familiar social contexts — flea markets, junk shops, school fairs — indicating those tenacious national social practices of recycling domestic objects, and of bargain hunting. The processes of collecting were as much an illustration of engagement with everyday folk culture, as were the collections themselves.

This chapter is presented in five sections. It begins with a brief socio-historic background of kiwiana and its role in the expression of Pakeha primacy, then an introduction to some of the theoretical issues that drive this discussion. Two venues demonstrating the currency of kiwiana are briefly summarised: museums and private collections. These illustrations are followed by a concluding discussion on materiality as an expression of post-coloniality.

Background

Belich describes New Zealand in the first three-quarters of the twentieth century as ‘an ideological and economic (though not necessarily a cultural or social) semi colony of Britain’, yet ‘in denial about this fact’ (2001: 11). Certainly economic dependence and references to Britain as ‘home’ support his point. By

mid-century there was populist talk about endeavours to ‘break the colonial umbilical cord to Britain’ — this very term, through its reference to particular ancestry, demonstrating assumptions of Pakeha primacy.

In the 1950s, New Zealand imposed import restrictions on many goods, in support of local manufacturers. The response to those trade policies was the development of commodities specifically for the internal market. Everyday items from that era have become ‘kiwi classics’, or ‘kiwiana’: toys, ceramic tableware, grocery items and company logos. These were everyday cultural artefacts; the first mass-produced incarnations of kiwiana. Though domestic items were considered modest in comparison to more sophisticated manufactured goods from elsewhere, these were symbolic of New Zealand beginning to forge both its autonomy and individual style. As Kuiper observes, ‘[i]t is an interesting intellectual development particular to the middle of the twentieth century that national identity [was] no longer ... sought in myths of origin but in unique, locally grown features of New Zealand life’ (2007: 173).



Figure 12.1 The Buzzy Bee: an iconic example of kiwiana

Barnett and Wolfe described kiwiana as ‘humble artefacts of popular culture [that] have been taken to an added lustre, appearing simple and honest and reflective of a less pressured society’ (1989: 15). In *Kiwiana: The Sequel* (2001) they noted that their initial effort had ‘excavated a [then] largely overlooked source of national identity’ (Barnett and Wolfe 2001: 9). Many of the original

tangible kiwiana objects are still present in antique and second-hand shops, and as accumulated mementoes of the post-war baby boomers. That post-war period has been remembered by many of that generation as an idyllic, innocent time; the economy was stable, the rate of home ownership was high, and there were few other immigrant groups living in the country apart from those from the United Kingdom and the Pacific Islands. The national narrative was male, Eurocentric and royalist. This was well before the social challenges of race politics and feminism of the 1980s. Within every society there is another: that collective memory of past epochs and eras, triumphs and tragedies, and of a previous romanticised or mythologised state. In Pakeha New Zealand there remain strong cultural memories of Pakeha dominance.

From the mid-1970s import controls were gradually eased. New goods arrived on the domestic market, competing with the locally manufactured items, which began to be seen as prosaic and old fashioned. Consumer tastes changed (Monk 2006: 133–34). Local goods were largely relegated to the realm of kitsch: a trivial materiality nevertheless imbued with sentimental familiarity and nostalgia (Bell 1996).

By the 1990s, kiwiana items began to be utilised as symbols of nation in both government projects (for instance, on postage stamps — this is ongoing, and includes the current two *Kiwi Stamp* series, with its depictions of very familiar imagery such as kiwifruit, fish and chips, number eight wire, etc.) and in commercial advertising. This could be described as mobilising the vernacular from folk culture to popular culture. The recurring utilisation of kiwiana motifs in the marketing of diverse consumer goods (for example, hamburgers, soft drinks, cars, and building materials) served to underline their place in popular consciousness. Global companies such as McDonald's and Toyota appropriated kiwiana symbols to localise their goods, an amalgamation fulfilling both economic and cultural functions. Through this commercial strategy, corporate nationalism directly fed into the exercise of cultural power (Falcous 2007: 377). Consumers' recognition of those everyday mid-twentieth century items as recast by the culture industries implied a national culture in common. As Fedorak observes, popular culture shapes and reflects cultural ideals, and represents changing social realities (Fedorak 2009: 1). Kiwiana affirmed Pakeha primacy, as 'outsiders' such as new immigrant groups (for example, migrants from Asia and Africa) could not connect with these artefactual remnants of a post-war nation (Bell 2004). Kiwiana provided a highly visible semiotic and material underpinning of Pakeha myths about hard work, ingenuity, innovation, adaptability and independence. These items stayed familiar through their constant representation and repeated usage, matching Fedorak's notion of popular culture as the 'mirror of cultural dynamics' (Fedorak 2009: xv).

Now, from under a deluge of imported cheap consumer goods, kiwiana objects are being rescued by collectors. It is as if Pakeha, a numerically declining proportion of New Zealand's population, are scrambling to conserve evidence of their own past.

Materiality and nation

The story of kiwiana's migrating meanings illustrates that material items are implicated in the wider socio-cultural processes which instil them with value. To recall Bourdieu (1984), objects become meaningful and powerful as components of the broader cultural, social and economic fields in which they circulate; the material world is mobilised in wider struggles for meaning. Further, Baudrillard (1981: 38) reminds us that, 'through objects, each individual and group searches out his or her place in an order, all the while trying to jostle this order according to a personal trajectory'. Meskell (2004: 249) explains that studies of materiality cannot simply engage with the qualities of objects themselves, but in the dialectic of people and things, as humans selectively create their own object worlds. The study of human subjects' relations with material culture is a central component of everyday life studies (Highmore 2000: 295). Everyday life practices include the expressing of self in relation to others, including that concept used to define global difference: nation.

Fundamental to my discussion are Bourdieu's notions of consumer culture and identification. He explains that material culture becomes mobilised in the search for meaning. The acquisition of material goods fulfils 'a social function of legitimating social differences' (Bourdieu 1984: 7). Hence material culture plays an imperative role in identity assertion and social positioning. Clifford (1988: 220) explains that collecting and displaying,

are crucial processes of western identity formation. Gathered artefacts — whether they find their way into curio cabinets, private living rooms, museums of ethnography, folklore or fine art — function within a developing capitalist system of objects. By virtue of this system a world of value is created and a meaningful deployment and circulation of artefacts maintained.

He recalls Baudrillard's statement that 'the environment of private objects and their possession (collection being the most extreme instance) is a dimension of our life which, though imaginary, is absolutely essential' (cited in Clifford 1988: 97). In short, every one of us, by the specific items we consume and with which we surround ourselves, is *performing* ourselves — both who we are biographically and socio-historically, and in our fantasies and chosen projections of ourselves. As Miller (1998: 277) reminds us, consumption is recognised as

the main arena through which people control the definition of themselves and their values.

The theoretical scaffold of cultural consumption enriches an investigation of how items in the material world are activated to proclaim identity. Inherently and simultaneously history, commerce, nostalgia and authenticity are addressed. The readily recognised local items discussed here appear to provide a secure point of reference which some perhaps fear may be fading in contemporary postmodern society (Kessous and Roux 2004).

Private collectors

There are many serious collectors looking for vintage kiwiana. For them, every flea market, second-hand store or antique shop is a potential treasure trove. Trademe.co.nz (the New Zealand online auction site) and auction houses provide other purchasing opportunities. 'But Trademe takes a lot of the fun out of it', I was told,

TV programmes like *Antiques Roadshow* make people think their odds and ends are worth money, so it is harder now to find great bargains in flea markets and junk shops. I always loved that sheer amazing good luck of finding things, that excitement and surprise. It doesn't happen so much now.

My visits to private collectors of kiwiana throughout New Zealand in 2009 and 2010 led me to individuals who really do inhabit what Gordon refers to as a 'saturated world' (Gordon 2006). As kiwiana environments, their homes ranged from the artfully curated and sparingly staged, to the joyfully crammed and chaotic. Some specialised in very specific categories, such as Fun Ho! toys, sturdy vehicles for outdoor play, first manufactured in the 1930s; or Crown Lynn ceramic ornaments or homeware. They clearly experienced great excitement and delight from both the process of collecting, and the ownership of collections. Gordon's summation is fitting: 'a quality of childlike openness or wonder is part of it [collecting], as is the attitude of playfulness, expressiveness and creativity ... Objects in a sense are brought into the body boundary and used as an extension of self' (Gordon 2006: 3). One collector told me, 'You don't just sit them on a shelf. I move them around, rearrange them, dust them. Objects that fit into the hand almost become part of you.'

Every collector told me some version of the same story: that these are important relics of New Zealand's national history which must be valued and conserved. Their observations reflected Levin's account of the human desire for a sense of place, to connect with a locale, to understand it, identify with it, and enjoy its

distinctiveness (Kyvig 2007: 2). ‘You can’t get these things anywhere else in the world’, one collector reminded me, ‘that makes them pretty unique and special.’

Other dimensions of pleasure included some sort of community acknowledgement of their expertise. Several were occasionally invited as guest speakers to local clubs and galleries to talk about their collections. They had also featured in newspaper or magazine stories. This attention assigned them a particular identity in the community. Some lamented the local museum’s lack of interest in their accumulated objects. They were convinced that eventually museums would lust for their collections.

Money (2007: 357) reminds us that the home is where material culture is contained and displayed. It increasingly becomes ‘the site for both the appropriation of the outside, public world, and the representation of the private, inside world’. Curating an environment or styling one’s self: these are activities of arranging, re-arranging, updating and upgrading material goods into continuously revised expressions of individuality. Thus consumers articulate their own personalities in that life-long autobiographic construction enterprise (Bell and Lyall 2002). These practices exemplify ‘the mutability of things in recontextualization’ (Thomas 1991: 27). The context of kiwiana objects, once purchased, is an implicit engagement with the construction of identity of the corporeal self and the home. Those processes demonstrate Baudrillard’s ‘moment’ when ‘human beings and objects are indeed bound together in a collusion in which the objects take on a certain density, an emotional value’ (Baudrillard 2005: 14). Self-identity construction and maintenance are everyday projects, alongside that larger collective project — the search for unique expressions of nationhood.

Museums: ‘It’s all right here!’

‘This is the story of our manufacturing, our food production, our work and play. It’s all right here!’ The director of a small local museum told me this, as she showed me the extensive collection of kiwiana. Her enthusiasm reflected Levin’s commentary on the imperative for museums to express localised past as a ‘vital component of the identity of a place’ (Kyvig 2007: 3). As Reno adds, physical objects can only endure as ‘condensed symbols of social history because of the reverence and care’ directed at preserving them (Reno 2009: 30). That same museum featured many items reflecting local Maori culture, but these were displayed in a separate space. The Maori pieces were older, with no indication of the place of Maori within New Zealand society in the twentieth century. There was no popular culture that represented Maori everyday life. It was as if Maori were embedded in an anthropologist’s past, whilst Pakeha had learnt the practices of industrial progress. The Pakeha items had prominence. I

found this same phenomenon at many local museums, justified on the grounds that 'Pakeha families donate more stuff', and 'most visitors are Pakeha'. The overarching goal seemed to be to display a respectable, productive Pakeha culture (Bell 1996); a best-behaviour representation of local forebears.

In one museum a wall of Buzzy Bees was playfully entitled 'Flight of the Buzzy Bees'. These wooden pull-along toys were first produced in 1939, with continuous sales since then. Variations in details in those museum pieces showed that more than one manufacturer had been involved in their making. 'In lots of ways these sum up who we are: free spirited, colourful, fun,' I was told by the gleeful curator. She omitted to mention the Chinese manufacture of these toys, or recent attempts to turn them into 'character' merchandise.

In larger museums, kiwiana is also readily apparent. Canterbury Museum's newest permanent attraction is the famous Flutey Paua House, formerly a quirky kiwiana attraction in Bluff. Over thirty years, the late Flutey couple welcomed more than a million people into their private home, to view their idiosyncratic décor. This faithful replica of their modest suburban house with hundreds of iridescent paua shells (*haliotis iris*) arranged over the living room walls is by far the most visited part of the museum. The museum's education programme foregrounds kiwiana as a theme of school children's museum visits. The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington also has kiwiana exhibits, including 'Golden Days'. Arranged to resemble a junk shop, nostalgia and history intertwine as visitors draw from their own associations with the miscellaneous redundant household items on display (Bell 2006: 23).

Any exhibition of local vintage items provides a means of sharing values, activities and styles of life in a more concrete and enduring way than by spoken language or written text. As Dant (1999: 2) explains, people establish meaningful relationships with objects. The objects are not just inanimate things; they embody 'the social relationships that gave rise to them through their design, the work of producing them, their prior use, the intention to communicate through them and their place within an existing cultural system of objects'.

The history of objects can be read as a history of material progress, of economic development. Material culture, while often investigated in popular cultural studies as the expression of the subjective self, can also provide fruitful readings into the sense of nationhood. As globalisation amplifies cultural flows, many distinguishing elements of local culture have become potentially vulnerable to permanent loss. Homogenisation and hybridisation of goods refute difference. Today, when similar material items can be found everywhere, objects that are idiosyncratic to a culture adopt new meanings. Goodrum explains that the consumer landscape, physical, metaphorical and symbolic, is a crucial site in the construction of meaningful identities. The collection of once-redundant artefacts

offers ‘a rich seam from which to mine a range of debates over processes of self-signification and the cultural construction of meaningful identities’ (Goodrum 2005: 23–5). In New Zealand attitudes to items which explicitly represent the nation have plainly evolved to a new phase.

Clifford points out that the history of both public and private collections is central to an understanding of how those social groups that invented anthropology and modern art have appropriated exotic things, facts and meanings. He states that, ‘it is important to analyse how powerful discriminations made at particular moments constitute the general system of objects within which valued artefacts circulate and make sense’ (Clifford 1988: 98). In the case of kiwiana, curators are re-interpreting these items in their fabrications of narratives of nation. The Flutey Paua House is a supreme example. The once eccentric hobby of one household has taken on significant celebrity. The Canterbury Museum press release describes the exhibit and its accompanying movie: ‘the film explains the kiwiana phenomenon and how a Bluff couple with an unusual living room came to be New Zealand icons’. The Exhibitions Manager states that, ‘the collection had been saved from being lost to the nation’ (Canterbury Museum 2008). Kiwiana performs as a marker which continues the process of national identity preservation and promulgation.

Conclusion: objects and post-colonial identity

Kuiper asserts the following potential benefits of more extensive study of Pakeha folk life in New Zealand: an appreciation of local vernacular, cultural heritage, and the reiteration of populist myths that help to sustain identity (Kuiper 2007). The study of Pakeha object relations has a significant contribution to make in understanding post-colonial identity formation and change. This chapter concludes that a significant and visible part of national identity maintenance is being actively and consciously undertaken by collectors and museum curators. Their affirmations reiterate those meanings and practices through which social identities and institutions are conserved over time.

We can rejoice that Pakeha New Zealand’s long-standing ‘cultural cringe’ about local identifiers is over. We now occupy an era of overt statement of national pride through the display of artefacts and embellishments which blatantly communicate a quintessential ‘New Zealand’. Vintage collectibles are happily exhibited in peoples’ homes, alongside reinterpretations of kiwiana and Maoriana in new upmarket designer merchandise (Bell, forthcoming). Familiar local symbols and motifs of nation are proudly worn on garments, accessories and jewellery. Kiwiana turns up daily in the media-sphere, as images in commercial advertising, as accessories photographed in *Home* magazine features, and in local television programming.

In Bourdieu's analysis, consumer goods are intrinsic to the social arenas in which struggles over identity and positioning take place. He refers to 'the transmutation of things' which raise the 'differences inscribed in the physical order of bodies to the symbolic order of significant distinctions' (Bourdieu 1984: 174). Hence the material world is used in the negotiation of cultural and social relationships.

Choosing kiwiana demonstrates the power individuals have to inscribe cultural meaning onto objects, and through that, onto themselves. This is a strategy through which social actors makes sense of the world, enhancing awareness of their own place within it. Money refers to this dynamic as the 'interplay between individual subjectivity and context' (2007: 357). To achieve social lives, 'objects need symbolic framings, storylines and human spokespersons', explains Lynch, '[s]ocial identifiers ... in turn, need to be materially grounded in order to gain temporal and spatial endurance' (2009: 79–80). For individuals, accumulating individual cultural and aesthetic capital is an ongoing agenda. Their homes are sites for signification. Kiwiana has become a 'guidepost' to orient the individual in both space and time. Such self-defining includes an affirmation of nationhood. New Zealanders purchasing kiwiana are expressing nationality through consumption practices. At this site, consumption and nationality intersect. The early items we now refer to as kiwiana were commonplace and accessible. Their original integration into everyday life positions them, retrospectively, as 'classic kiwiana'. Their reassessment today as valued collectables assigns them a revised status. That they now represent the nation in both domestic collections and official museum displays illustrates a convergence of biography, aesthetics and history.

This chapter has been an illustration of the drive of post-colonial communities to construct an identity (During 2005), in this case through a specific materialisation of distinction. It has focused on the vital interplay between the material and social worlds, showing how folk culture and popular culture have influential roles in national identity affirmation. That kiwiana *can* persist with such vigour demonstrates that these items have indeed acquired social meaning. We can read this reclaiming as a deliberate assertion of re-valuing the local — however modest — and an achievable expression of resistance to the homogenising potentials of globalisation. This is a proudly post-colonialist position.

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13 The Body in Popular Culture

Meredith Jones

- Bodies are shaped and created by culture.
- ‘Makeover culture’ is a significant part of popular culture and is clearly expressed by cosmetic surgery.
- Feminist theory, along with Foucault’s ideas of ‘biopower’ and ‘techniques of the self’, are useful theoretical tools with which to analyse the body and popular culture.
- In postmodernism, the presentation, transformation and maintenance of the body are connected to the formation of identity.
- In popular culture, bodies are commodities used to gain status. Body parts can also be consumables, able to be purchased via practices like gym-work or cosmetic surgery.
- Images in popular culture glorify and highlight some kinds of bodies (for example, the young, able-bodied and beautiful) while ignoring or condemning others.
- The ‘posthuman’ body is often located in the future or in science fiction, but it is argued in this chapter that we are all posthuman already.
- Corpses and the ‘living-dead’ (such as vampires) are enjoying a renaissance in popular culture; despite their otherness they are subject to the same imperatives of beauty and youth as other represented bodies.
- The meanings of body modifications vary according to place and time, as do ideas of what is ‘beautiful’ and what is normal or abnormal.

Introduction

The human body is more than biological: it is also shaped and defined by cultural practices. Even babies are not neutral but are partly created by cultural factors like medicine (for example, pre-natal care and caesarean section) or social mores (such as pink for girls and blue for boys). This chapter focuses on how the body is a part of popular culture, and on how popular culture and the body are mutually creative. Throughout, I use examples from analyses of

cosmetic surgery in order to illuminate more general points about the body in popular culture.

Cosmetic surgery has an ancient history but in the last few decades has undergone a massive boom (Gilman 1999; Haiken 1997; Jones 2008). We now see cosmetic surgery everywhere, whether we are explicitly aware of it or not. Cosmetic surgery is intimately connected to practices such as gym-work and dieting as well as to the media, fashion and celebrity (Blum 2003: 145–87). It is apparent on the faces and bodies of almost all film and television actors and is increasingly deployed by politicians and other celebrities. Indeed, if you are in the public eye it is now notable if you have *not* had cosmetic surgery (for example, Diane Keaton, Jamie Lee Curtis and Dame Judi Dench are all known for eschewing it). In other work, I have suggested that cosmetic surgery is part of ‘makeover culture’ (see Jones 2008). The idea of makeover is found in many of popular culture’s discourses where it is applied to a range of body and lifestyle practices. My broad argument is that makeover culture is a state where *becoming* is more desirable than *being*. A makeover paradigm valorises the *process of development* rather than the idea of completion. I argue that good citizens of makeover culture must be seen to be constantly altering and improving themselves. Very often in popular culture this process is demonstrated on the body.

Popular culture is not a strict category and can be defined in a number of ways. It is often understood as that which nearly everyone has access to: it surrounds us in an everyday context (Sellnow 2010: 2) and includes media such as television, magazines, film and advertising, as well as leisure or self-improvement activities such as gaming, going to the gym, eating ‘fast’ food, dancing, clubbing and dieting. Popular culture is also often understood as so-called ‘low’ culture as opposed to ‘high’ culture. However, such terms are value-laden and supported by elite groupings; such differentiations are neither helpful nor adequate (see Anne Cranny-Francis 1994: 5–9). Cultural theorist Simon During (2005: 193) offers a more useful definition of popular culture: ‘[s]ince, in most of its forms, popular culture is committed to immediate pleasure, it wraps its seriousness in entertainment. However powerful and insightful it might be, its first requirement is — generally speaking — to be consumable now.’

There has been a steady rise in depictions of bodies in popular culture over the last few decades and, alongside this, a solid scholarly interest in the body has emerged. Academics are increasingly writing about the body in relation to technology, media, entertainment, labour and the emotions. Many theoretical traditions and innovations have contributed to this move, with perhaps the most important being feminist theory, which examines sex, gender and sexuality and centralises the body in debates about identity and experience. Feminists such as

Simone de Beauvoir (1989), Judith Butler (1990), Germaine Greer (1970), Elizabeth Grosz (1994) and Donna Haraway (1991) have worked to show how the female body has been represented, suppressed, worked upon, seen as 'other' and marginalised. It was Simone de Beauvoir who wrote the famous line '[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (1989: 267), by which she meant that mere biology cannot account for the position that women hold in society: that they are also created according to gendered norms and social and cultural influences. While these authors mainly write about women in so-called 'Western' societies, many of their most important insights — such as the examination of social institutions and practices, including but not limited to the law, the labour force, medicine and the family — can usefully be applied to all women.

Interacting with feminism, works by French philosophers such as Pierre Bourdieu (2001), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) and Luce Irigaray (1993) have influenced the growth of interest in the body. The most important of these is Michel Foucault, whose writings about disciplinary power, medicine and sexuality are hugely influential (for an excellent essay on Foucault and feminism, see Bordo 1999). Foucault argues that power is not just imposed from above (by the strong upon the weak) but is rather a dispersed force that operates on many levels (Foucault 1975, 1977, 1986a, 1986b, 1986c, 1988). He shows that we often take for granted relations between bodies and culture, but that close examination will always reveal that they are entwined in myriad complex power relations.

Foucault developed the idea of 'biopower', which Danaher et al. (2000: 64) describe as 'technologies that were developed at the same time as, and out of, the human sciences, and which were used for analysing, controlling, regulating and defining the human body and its behaviour'. The term biopower can cover instruments of control and regulation as diverse as census collections, vaccinations and road traffic rules; in popular culture it can be used to understand the regulation of bodies via such 'tools' as fashion, beauty, entertainment and leisure. In his later work, Foucault demonstrated that we discipline *ourselves* using what he called 'techniques of the self' (1988) and suggested that we undertake this self-discipline not only in order to conform or to be considered beautiful or 'normal' (for a detailed discussion of how we define 'normal', see Canguilhem 1989), but indeed in order to be happy. Foucault (1988: 18) therefore argues that in all societies exist

... techniques which permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this is a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on.

In terms of the body and popular culture we could argue, using ‘Foucauldian’ terms, that practices like dieting, gym-work and being fashionable are examples of biopower *and* examples of techniques of the self: through them we are controlled and categorised, but we also choose to use them to gain power and to experience enjoyment as the owners of ‘successful’ or better-presented bodies. The texts and discourses through which those techniques are ‘sold’ to us (such as magazines, television programmes, and advertisements) are also examples of power at work on our bodies, and are often derided as such. However, when analysing and considering how these texts work it is also important to keep in mind During’s definition of popular culture — that it is primarily *enjoyable*. It is this interlocking of power and desire (or suppression and enjoyment) that is at the heart of many Foucauldian analyses of popular culture. Cultural studies scholar Anne Cranny-Francis (1994: 75) writes that:

... popular culture is about formulating questions, about the kind of society we have, and the kind of society we might want, about the discursive configurations in which we all, as individual members of that society, are enmeshed and must negotiate, in the constant (re)production of ourselves as subjects.

When thinking about popular culture and bodies, I suggest that it is useful to follow During, Foucault and Cranny-Francis in order to see how we might be ‘producing’ our own bodies. On our screens, in our daily lifestyle practices and in printed media we witness struggles to define which bodies belong and which do not, which bodies are ‘correct’ or ideal and which are considered abnormal or ‘other’. Thus, questions of inclusion and exclusion, discrimination, sexuality, class and ethnicity are crucial to our analysis of popular culture and the body.

The postmodern body

Many philosophers and social theorists have considered the body in the context of postmodernism. Postmodernism is both a set of theories and a range of cultural aesthetics such as fragmentation, the importance of surface and appearance, simulation, playfulness, collage, digitalisation and an abundance of information (see Jameson 1991). If we apply postmodern concepts to the body in popular culture we see that the body is constantly broken into a series of body-parts (think for example of how people focus on building up their ‘six-packs’) where its surfaces and appearance are highlighted rather than its capabilities or feelings. Alongside this fragmentation there is a corresponding reconstruction of the body through fashion, cosmetics and body modification.

Figure 13.1 below, taken on a London tube station platform in 2010, demonstrates postmodern themes. On the right is an advertisement for the reality television show *Seven Days*, where diverse residents of the London suburb of

Notting Hill have their lives documented for a week (Studio Lambert 2010). The poster is a collage of many different faces: there is no one solid body or identity here, rather the message is one of fragmentation and amalgamation with a focus on surface and appearance. On the left is an advertisement for Max Factor that features a collection of make-up, each container of eye-shadow or lip-gloss blown up to human-sized proportions. Without a human model, the make-up and its packaging stand in for the body. The message here is not simply that blush will pinken cheeks but that a coherent identity can be manufactured with the right appearance-enhancing products. In line with this I suggest that cosmetic surgery bodies are inherently postmodern. They are fragmented: individual body parts are focused on, one at a time; people seeking cosmetic surgery rarely choose a whole body type but rather define the kind of lips, cheeks, or breasts they want. And yet cosmetic surgery is often sold as a way to help people feel psychologically ‘whole’ or ‘complete’ (Jones 2008: 50–55). Thus it metaphorically breaks the body into pieces before reassembling it into a ‘better’ — or more acceptable — whole.



Figure 13.1 The postmodern body: fragmentated and reconstructed

There is a strong strand in postmodernism that argues identity can be manufactured or self-invented. This is intimately connected with the presentation of the body and the ways that we shape, decorate and position it. Fashion theorist Joanna Finkelstein writes that popular culture ‘functions as a toolkit for shaping identity’ (2007: 12). Madonna is the exemplar of a

postmodern persona: she has played with many identities in her long career, but always via her body's appearance and performance. Lady Gaga, following in Madonna's footsteps, tweeted to her fans about her debut album: '*Mons†ers* have 6 Grammy Nominations + Billboard Award "Artist of the Year." Thank you for fighting for artistic freedom + *self-invention*' (Lady Gaga 2010), thus acknowledging the ongoing construction of her persona via appearance and performance.

Identity, consumption and fashion

Much discourse in popular culture — especially in advertising — suggests that we are always lacking and in need of some sort of makeover, be it a new car or a freshly smoothed face (see Jones 2008: 13–14). A classic example is the long-running L'Oréal slogan 'Because we're worth it' (<http://www.loreal.com>). The slogan endorses individual value while simultaneously implying that personal worth cannot be properly realised without the purchase of certain products.

Consumption is a dominant part of contemporary life. We now purchase goods in abundance, not for their practical uses but rather for what they say about our lifestyles and for the qualities that we believe they will endow us with; for example, sexiness, desirability and sophistication (Miller 1987). In this schema the body is not only a marker of status via accoutrements like clothing and transport devices, but also via its own appearance through which it demonstrates that it has been attended to by professionals such as dentists, personal trainers, stylists, hairdressers, beauty therapists and even cosmetic surgeons. Thus the body becomes a canvas on which wealth can be displayed, and upon which a lack of capital (namely being poor) becomes obvious.

The importance of body improvement (not just maintenance) is of central concern in a culture that has a heightened idealisation of youthful and beautiful bodies (see Orbach 2009; Wolf 2002). Hardly anyone actively cultivates an image that is old, decrepit and ugly (of course we need to remember that the definition of these states is entirely culturally relative). Fit, healthy, beautiful and youthful bodies hold more value than others; in this case then, the body itself becomes a commodity, something that can be 'traded' and used to gain status (Baudrillard 1998; Featherstone 1982; Shilling 1993).

The cosmetic surgery body is a very clear commodity. It is one of the most obvious purchasable bodies in popular culture, with surgeons' websites advertising prices for alteration of various body parts, and credit companies and banks even offering special loans for cosmetic surgery (see <http://www.cosmeticsurgery.ozquote.net>). While bodies that have been altered with cosmetic surgery emphasise the importance of surface that postmodern

culture values, reality television shows like *Extreme Makeover* (2002), *The Swan* (2004) and *Bridalplasty* (2010) promise that, through a change in appearance, the entire self will be transformed. Popular culture in this instance teaches us that the body is far more than a vehicle for self-expression; it is a means by which to transform identity (Giddens 1991: 81).

Fashion is a set of practices linking consumerism, identity and popular culture. Fashion is no longer reserved for the very rich who can afford bespoke shoes and haute couture. Cheap manufacturing in China and other developing nations means that new clothes are affordable every season (or even every week). In popular culture the clothed body has become a vital part of identity, self-expression, belonging, social class and status (McNeil et al. 2009). The rise of fashion blogs like Scott Schuman's *The Sartorialist* (2005) make mini-celebrities out of fashionably dressed people on the street — this is interesting because these presentations are of both digital bodies (see digital section below) and fashionable bodies. In a Foucauldian sense, fashion is a form of disciplinary power: in order to be fashionable we must adjust our bodies with diet and exercise, work to keep up to date via magazines and other forms of pedagogy, and, most importantly, earn and spend money. The fashionable body must be both commodity and consumer in order to be valid.

Fashion and cosmetic surgery are also closely linked to each other. Not only do many models and actors — the people we see in media wearing über-fashions — undergo cosmetic surgery, but cosmetic surgery itself has its own fashions, with certain 'looks' dropping out of favour as new ones are introduced and adopted. The increase in use of 'non-surgical' procedures such as fillers and Botox has allowed cosmetic surgery to move more clearly into the realm of fashion (which, by definition, undergoes constant change) because they are cheaper than surgery and their effects are temporary — thus, the results they create can be changed from year to year (see Jones, forthcoming(a)).

The body in images

Popular culture is infused with mass-produced images — in film, television, digital spaces, urban spaces and print — so much so that Jean-Louis Comolli has described modern life as 'a sort of frenzy of the visible' (1980: 122). Much of our information, especially our entertainment, is now conveyed through glossy, high-quality pictures. We tend to forget that this was not always the case; globalisation and digitalisation have infinitely sped up the production and dissemination of images in the last two decades.

The bodies that appear in popular culture's mass of images are overwhelmingly young and slim (they are also more often than not white, although this is

gradually changing with the rise of black megastars like Beyoncé and P. Diddy (Sean Combs)). Bodies in popular culture are also usually coded as heterosexual and middle class. Male bodies tend to be visibly muscular, while female bodies are slender. It is rare to see androgynous, aged, homosexual, disabled or overweight bodies — a fact that Lady Gaga acknowledged when she sarcastically replied to a question about her weight loss, ‘pop stars should not eat’ (Grigoriadis 2010). When ‘other’ or non-mainstream bodies do happen to be represented, it is usually in contexts that highlight their differences, even when they play heroic parts. The reality television programme *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003) where a team of gay men teach straight men how to live more fashionable lives, or the action film *Red* (2010), where a group of ageing hit-men (and women) go back to work, are good examples. Non-slim bodies, especially if they are female, are rarely presented as anything other than deviations that need to be disciplined, although there are some notable exceptions such as the neo-punk singer Beth Ditto who refuses to be put into such categories (see Clements 2009). So it is important to consider the slim, young bodies that dominate images in popular culture as being significant for what they are *not* as well as for what they are.

French theorist Jean Baudrillard (1995) takes the discussion of images in popular culture one step further. He argues that contemporary life is now a series of simulations (copies or imitations) and *simulacra* (what we are left with when there have been so many ‘copies of copies’ made that we lose sense of any original). He insists that in our media-saturated world there is nothing ‘authentic’ any more and that what we think of as ‘real’ has been transformed. For example, we might feel that our experiences are not wholly realised until they are photographed and posted on Facebook, or we might feel that we are more familiar with the psyches of television characters than with people we actually know. Cosmetic surgery bodies can also be theorised as simulations of a kind (for example, aiming to have Angelina Jolie’s lips or Jennifer Aniston’s cheeks is a desire to actually *be* a simulation).

In terms of images, cosmetic surgery, like many other contemporary processes or activities, has its own visual language in popular culture. It is usually shown in the visual frame of before/after, which shows no process and makes transformation seem to have happened by magic. Reality television shows like *Extreme Makeover* (2002) have changed this a little through their focus on actual surgery. Although hardly graphic and always maintaining a gloss on what are essentially rather gruesome operations, these programmes have opened up the space *between* before and after. Thus we see how one of popular culture’s visual languages is evolving (Jones 2008: 16–18).

Bodies in popular images are increasingly ‘Photoshopped’. Photoshop is computer software used to edit images — it allows images to be cropped or

extended and, in terms of the body, is often used to make skin tone more even and figures slimmer. Many people reading a glossy magazine or looking at a billboard would now *expect* that Photoshop has been used. ‘Body-image’ — the ‘mental image of the body as it appears to others’ (Featherstone 2010: 193) — is said to be affected by mass media images: a commonly accepted cultural belief is that we see faces and bodies that have been ‘perfected’ in Photoshop, then compare our own bodies and faces, and feel inadequate as a result (Featherstone 2010). Media are often blamed for disseminating images of bodies that are unattainable, supposedly provoking a range of personal and psychological problems, such as eating disorders (Bordo 1997). However, I suggest that our relationship with images is far more complex than such a direct correlation implies; most people who have been brought up surrounded by mass-produced images have developed sophisticated forms of visual literacy that allow them to differentiate ‘media-bodies’ from the bodies that they actually live in (see Jones, forthcoming(b)).

The healthy body

Campaigns targeting prevention of heart disease, cancer and diabetes, the plethora of advertisements for vitamins, ready-packed ‘healthy’ foods and exercise or weight-loss programmes, along with reality television programmes such as *You Are What you Eat* (2004) and *The Biggest Loser* (2006) are significant in popular culture. Their messages are pedagogical, meaning that they aim to teach us how to achieve and maintain healthier bodies; in a Foucauldian sense they encourage us to be self-controlled via certain techniques of the self. The overarching lesson they impart is that health is a personal responsibility. We are each accountable for having regular check-ups, for not smoking, for exercising and for eating properly, while people who choose not to do so are marked as abnormal, burdening society, and possibly in need of radical intervention. Environmental and social impacts on the body such as pollution, the effects of poverty, or even individual biological variations are rarely considered in such contexts.

As far as healthy bodies go, cosmetic surgery would seem at first glance to have nothing to do with this part of popular culture as it involves surgery and general anaesthetic, both of which can have serious side effects. However, we often see health and beauty being conflated in popular culture: the (false) notion that beautiful people are healthier is put forward by gym advertisements that feature attractive — rather than merely fit — models and by the overwhelming belief that slimness equals healthiness. Further, cosmetic surgery is often sold as a means by which to gain *mental* health, by ‘revealing the real you’ or improving self-confidence (Blum 2003; Fraser 2003; Jones 2008).

Posthuman and digital bodies

The ‘posthuman’ body is usually depicted in popular culture as a ‘body of the future’, merging the organic with technologies like robotics, genetics or computers (Hayles 1999). This body may also be imagined as a fusing of human/animal as with the character Spiderman, or human/alien as with the character Ripley in the *Alien* films (1979–1997), or as the merging of the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’ as seen in the films *Tron* (1982), *The Matrix* (1999) and *Avatar* (2009). Posthuman bodies are often represented as monstrous or abhorrent (Graham 2002), with such texts addressing our fears and anxieties about new technologies. The film *Death Becomes Her* (1992) imagines a potential dystopic end-result of cosmetic surgery, while in the world of glossy magazines celebrities who are deemed to have had ‘too much’ cosmetic surgery (for example, Cher or Heidi Montag) might be labelled ‘plastic fantastic’, implying that they are more artificial than real and therefore posthuman. The pornographic actor Lolo Ferrari, who was famous for having the largest breast augmentations in the world, had her implants designed by an engineer and is an extreme example of a real-life posthuman (Jones 2008: 129–49).

However, ‘posthuman’ does not have to be restricted to works of science fiction or speculations about future grotesque bodies, it can also be used to describe more mundane examples like people who have developed muscles using gym equipment or who play sport or do yoga using a *Wii* console. People with pacemakers, bionic ears or breast implants could be described as posthuman. Cybertheorist N. Katherine Hayles (1999: xiv) suggests that merely using a computer to interact with others makes us posthuman: ‘[a]s you gaze at the flickering signifiers scrolling down the computer screens, no matter what identifications you assign to the embodied entities that you cannot see, you have already become posthuman’.

Thus, someone who conducts much of their social life using Facebook might be called posthuman, as might someone who spends a great deal of time in the virtual world of *Second Life* (2003) or in the online role-playing game *World of Warcraft* (1994). The fact that we do not tend to think of such bodies as posthuman attests to the fact that the definition of ‘normal’ is constantly changing. For example, Louise Brown, the first baby born as a result of in vitro fertilisation (IVF), was represented in 1978 as posthuman and was labelled ‘the test-tube baby’ (*Time* 1978) and called a ‘SuperBabe’ (*Nature* 2008). The technological aspects of her conception were highlighted and *Time Magazine*’s cover featured an image of a test tube being touched by the hand of God, with no mother or womb in sight. Today, with more than ten thousand IVF births occurring per year in Australia alone (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009) and IVF treatment almost standard for those with fertility troubles, babies

conceived using IVF are rarely thought of as ‘posthuman’ or even as particularly technologically enhanced. Thus the ‘posthuman’ is a movable category, often applied to the new and unknown. As philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2006: 197) writes:

... in the historical era of advanced postmodernity, the very notion of ‘the human’ is not only de-stabilised by technologically mediated social relations in a globally connected world, but it is also thrown open to contradictory redefinitions of what exactly counts as human.

Posthuman bodies, whether fictional or real, are boundary-crossers. They allow us to question the dualities of nature/culture, biological/manufactured and animal/human. This last category signals a post-humanism that has recently come to the fore because of increased concerns about the environment, global warming, extinction of species and (mis)treatment of animals (Castricano 2008). Such posthuman scholarship examines human links with other forms of life (rather than with technology), often emphasising a potential harmony between humans, animals and the planet (Haraway 2003). It is perfectly demonstrated in the film *Avatar* (2009), where digitally enhanced embodiments are combined with themes of inter-species harmony and the joys of being ‘one’ with the environment.

‘Digital bodies’ are closely related to the idea of the posthuman (Bell 2001). The ways that we have taken up digital media have called into question previously unquestioned divides between sender/receiver, audience/producer and author/reader. Because so many of us now blog, Facebook and tweet, media theorists argue that we live partly digital lives and that we are in a continual process of self-designing and self-narrativising (Bell 2001).

The film *The Matrix* (1999) offers a view of digital bodies that is utterly dystopic and yet full of wonder. It describes a hellish virtual world created by digital technologies. However, the most powerful and enjoyable bodies in the film are not ‘real’: inside the virtual world (the matrix) bodies can dodge bullets, jump buildings and perform extreme martial arts. This film, produced in the early years of the new digital age, and other more recent ones like *The Social Network* (2010) express the profound ambivalences that we have to ‘being digital’ (Negroponte 1995). This is a state that we find seductive, a state many of us enjoy hugely, and yet one that makes us scared of losing touch with the ‘real world’.

Monsters and the (un)dead

The huge rise in recent years of vampire, werewolf and zombie fiction is linked to notions of the posthuman but also to ideas of history, tradition and continuity. In the *Twilight* books (Meyer 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008) and films (2008, 2009, 2010), the heroine (Bella) strongly wishes to be a vampire. Once this desire is fulfilled she has superpowers, is more or less immortal, and her senses are hugely heightened. Thus an ancient terror (the vampire) is re-dressed as an improved or über-human. Recent vampire novels such as *Let the Right One In* (Lindqvist 2004) and television series like *Ultraviolet* (1998) and *True Blood* (2008) have also departed from depicting vampires as monstrous fiends, instead focusing on their desires to be integrated into human society (Waller 2010). This re-casting of the vampire may symbolise a culture more prepared to integrate difference — Nina Auerbach argues in her beautifully titled book *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1997), that each age creates the vampires it needs. However, despite vampires currently enjoying a more integrated status, it is worth noting that they are usually depicted as young and beautiful — in other words, in popular culture, vampires are more desirable than fat or old people — and thus the question of what bodies in popular culture are *not* is again as important as what they are.

The dead body or the corpse is another significant ‘other’ body in popular culture. Until the mid-twentieth century people died at home and their bodies were laid out in front parlours for visitors. Death was part of life. But in contemporary culture death is institutionalised — we tend to die in hospices or hospitals before being put in mortuaries and then cremated or buried. Open coffins are now rare. Perhaps we are compensating for this loss by aestheticising the dead body in popular culture. Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century there has been a phenomenal rise in the depiction of corpses in television dramas. Programmes like *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000) and *Six Feet Under* (2001) feature corpses in every episode. However, as with the depiction of vampires, this new visibility is highly edited; these corpses are rarely unattractive or overweight, and they suffer few of the indignities (such as body leakage) that real corpses do. Significantly, the dead bodies in such programmes ‘speak’ — they have narrative roles. So, via popular culture, the corpse has moved from being a private body to a public one, an ugly one to a beautiful one, a silent one to a speaking one.

Body modifications and Pornification

Body modifications such as tattoos, piercings, brandings and scarifications once signalled difference, deviance and criminality (Atkinson 2004), but have

recently come to express quite different things in popular culture such as belonging, being fashionable, individuality and control or ownership of the body (Pitts 2003). It is always worth keeping in mind that different cultures value (or abhor) different body modifications, and also that the definition of ‘body modification’ can be very broad. Some body modification practices are culturally endorsed while others are pathologised and condemned. Anne Balsamo (1996) argues that all body modifications are used to indicate status, class, gender, subculture, education, knowledge, belonging and beauty, but only insofar as they relate to specific cultures and historical moments.

In our own cultural moment the sexualisation or ‘pornification’ of popular culture (see Meyers 2008; Nikunen et al. 2007; Rutherford 2006) is closely integrated with certain body modifications. Pornification refers to the ‘mainstreaming’ of pornography, where nudity, sex and sexual references in popular culture have become commonplace. One body modification that has been directly influenced by pornification is the Brazilian wax procedure (where all pubic hair is removed), which was standard in pornographic images for at least a decade before becoming mainstream. This is an interesting example of a body modification that has changed its meanings dramatically — once a way of marking the bodies of sexual performers (with all the accompanying stigmas), it is now seen by many as simply a part of ‘good grooming’. Like the facelift on older women, the Brazilian is now commented upon when it has *not* been done, as happened when Kate Moss appeared with pubic hair visible through transparent underwear on the cover of a French magazine (see Photo Magazine 2010, cover image, and the discussion forum at <http://www.gossiprocks.com/forum/magazines-photoshoots/135875-kate-moss-photo-magazine-france-september-2010-a.html>).

Conclusion

With the adoption of new technologies and the development of new texts and genres, popular culture is constantly morphing. Definitions of normal/abnormal and beautiful/ugly bodies change according to time and place, and are intricately connected with what is represented in popular culture as ‘natural’ or ideal. While there are countless fruitful ways to think about popular culture and the body, applying the categories presented above to an object of study, be it a particular kind of body, a certain practice, or a text or discourse, is a good way to begin. And as I have argued, popular culture is a powerful force not only because of what it depicts but also because of what it leaves out. Thus, a good scholar will consider bodies both inside and outside of its frame, bodies that are both in the spotlight and hidden by popular culture.

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14 Consumption, Culture and Change

Catherine Reynolds

- This chapter explores how consumption may speak to or convey various aspects of our character, taste, gender and social status. What does our consumption say about us? What do we think about the consumption of others?
- Variations on these questions have formed key points of contention that have animated sociology, anthropology and cultural studies.
- This chapter considers these differing perspectives, drawing on the relatively new subdiscipline of consumption studies as well as situating ideas about consumption in a historical perspective.

Introduction

In Western democracies consumption forms part of a range of activities that make up the framework and routines of our everyday lives. We shop for clothing, food, and other household or personal items, for ourselves and others. We socialise over breakfast, lunch, coffee, dinner, and drinks. We go to concerts and plays, watch movies, listen to music, and attend sporting and other cultural events. We work in organisations that consume, and which produce objects and activities that are consumed in turn. We use various modes of transport, travel, and partake in a rich and diverse range of ‘hobbies’. Consumption is a ubiquitous aspect of our everyday practices — it can be fun, but it can also be stressful, and a mundane, irksome chore.

As part of the activities that constitute our daily routines, consumption as a generic practice is easy to take for granted, to carry out without really consciously considering what it means or entails. Our consumption nevertheless impacts on the world in a range of ways. The goods we use come from somewhere; their production has a substantive effect on the world, as does their use and disposal. The impact of each of these stages is also generally very difficult to determine. Intricate networks and processes are involved in producing the goods we consume: in affluent Western societies mass consumption is difficult to avoid — very little is now handmade, grown or produced locally. Many of the products we consume are produced by global

corporations, which are themselves situated in a web of relationships involving financial institutions, governments, trade networks, and distribution and supply chains. Businesses need to make a profit and reduce costs as much as possible in order to survive. Product development, advertising and branding is central to this process, as is political lobbying (according to the Centre for Responsible Politics (2011), in 2009, US\$3.5 billion was spent on lobbying in the United States).

Our consumption is subject to a range of targeted strategies on the part of businesses, as well as various policies and programmes on the part of government, all aimed at regulating, fostering and managing individual, household and business consumption. Meanwhile governments themselves are also huge consumers, and produce goods and services that are consumed in turn. However, when we as individuals consume we also do so in a manner which involves habits and patterns of behaviour that are embedded in extraordinarily complex cultural and social norms. We partake in consumption that reflects our habits and tastes — what we consume is an expression of our likes, dislikes, and a broad range of interests and motivations. Our consumption occurs within the context of our network of relationships, which are themselves situated in relation to larger societal ideas and debates about which practices are, and are not, acceptable. Consumption in this sense goes beyond any singular act of purchase. In consuming we express a social outlook that in turn constitutes material culture: collectively, our individual consumption choices shape the fabric of the world in which we live.

Consumption has played a key role in many disciplinary concerns from cultural studies and sociology to economics, and arguments about consumption run through many influential theoretical accounts. For Marx, the Frankfurt School, and other post-Marxist theorists consumption is the most obvious evidence of inequality under capitalism — the consuming ‘haves’ as opposed to the ‘have-nots’. As an embodiment of popular culture and culture more generally, consumption is also the focus of disciplines such as anthropology. In cultural studies, consumption has been caught up in debates about identity; questions have been asked about the extent to which consumption can be considered as a bona fide expression of self/society, and perhaps even evidence of subcultural ‘resistance’ to dominant societal norms or capitalism *per se*. These accounts, in turn, are often weighed against arguments about the extent to which consumption in affluent societies is shaped, co-opted and determined by factors such as advertising. In this, differing disciplinary concerns and perspectives have ensured consumption has been the topic of a range of quite heated debates.

When considering these debates, it is important to keep in mind how our understanding of consumption has changed markedly over time. It is also important to note that it is only recently that ‘consumption studies’ has become a

recognised field of study in its own right. While consumption formed a central conceptual category for many older accounts and disciplinary fields, it was also generally taken as given. As recent research has emphasised however, even defining consumption is not as straightforward as it might seem at first blush.

Defining consumption

When we think of consumption, the exchange of goods and services for money usually springs to mind. But what of the consumption of a housewife's labour by her family? What of how we consume and use goods and services time and time again? Every time we play a song we have purchased we consume it. Then there are the clothes we wear, the season pass to the pool or gym, the calls we make on our mobiles and so on. Consumption is clearly not just restricted to shopping and the moment of purchase. To further complicate matters, anthropology as a discipline now often considers consumption in terms of 'material culture'. Here the built environment, the items we see around us, the services we use and so on, are all a result of human production, and are by extension consumed. However, if we talk of consumption in this way, consumption and the act of consuming can become so broad as to refer to almost anything.

Another way of thinking about consumption is to weigh it against what it is not — a purer, less fiscally compromised form of social relationship somehow abstracted or removed from our existence under capitalism. This stance became fairly popular over the latter part of the twentieth century, and remains so with various theorists and commentators today. But differentiating between sociality and consumption is not always so easy; as is evident in the case of housewives as primary caregivers, a lot of consumption is carried out with solicitude for others in mind. Though not always: in *Freedom* (1988: 92) Zygmunt Bauman points out the prevalence of sex tourism and sweatshops.

Consumption, luxury and lust

Despite the difficulty in pinning down precisely what consumption might be, theorists and social commentators have had quite a lot to say about it, and over the centuries consumption has been subject to a range of vehement moral discourses. In the Bible, Satan tempted Eve to commit the original sin — the consumption of an apple from the Tree of Knowledge (Sekora 1977: 24). Consumption here was responsible for Man's expulsion from Eden; for centuries



Figure 14.1 Detail from 'Adam and Eve' by Lucas Cranach, the Younger (1515–86)

Biblical doctrine represented consumption as impious and ungodly. St Paul denounced the love of money as the root of all evil (St. Paul, I Tim. 9:10); in the Middle Ages luxury was considered one of the seven deadly sins. In the influential medieval poem *Psychomachia: The Battle for the Soul of Man* (c. AD 405) there is an allegorical battle between the Christian Virtues and Vices — here luxury is personified as a woman, who at first beguiles and seduces the Virtues, but is then defeated by another female Virtue, 'Sobriety'. This verse is casually sketched with brutal, gruesome relish: the poem's warnings about Luxury (as 'Luxuria') and other Vices subsequently inspired carvings, statues, and frescoes on churches throughout superstitious and largely pre-literate Europe. One of the most horribly graphic of the statues (see Figure 14.2) depicts Luxuria in anguish, a demon spitting toads in her direction, one already poised repugnantly at her vulva, while snakes bite or suckle her breasts.

Ideas about luxury and consumption over this period have a clearly gendered complexion, featuring claims about flaws associated with women's intrinsic nature and moral character. This bias against women's consumption was a regular element of accounts from the late Middle Ages, with many novelists and social commentators transposing consumption with femininity, depicting it as a sign of weakness, pettiness, temptation, seduction, immorality, and corruption. In the eighteenth century, texts such as Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (2003) connected consumption with a decline of masculine martial spirit

related in turn to a more general national decline. In another correlation between negative feminine qualities and consumption, Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* (2007) positions the heroine's vices (closely associated with consumption and a lack of sexual restraint, in this case adultery) as leading to a sad and troubled death.



Figure 14.2 'Luxuria' at Saint-Pierre in Moissac, France

Such perspectives were not anomalies. Disparagement of women's consumption was a regular feature of popular magazines such as *Punch* throughout the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. Complaining of a similar tone adopted by the American press, in 1732 a female correspondent to the *Pennsylvania Gazette* wrote, 'I have several times in your paper seen severe reflections upon us women, for idleness and extravagance, but I do not remember to have once seen any such animadversions upon the men' (cited in Breen 1993: 256). This selective criticism remained throughout the 1800s — dandies and flâneurs were renowned for and even identified by their consumption practices, yet at the same time maintained a distinctive misogyny which disparaged women's consumption. Even in the modern vernacular this gender bias remains — the 1999 film *American Beauty* portrays masculine consumption of items such as red sports cars as positive and liberating; feminine consumption of household furniture as oppressed and oppressive.

Consumption and the cosmological order

One final striking feature of this older period is that for many years consumption was regulated by law according to class, with ‘sumptuary’ laws existing across Europe from the Middle Ages, in some countries even up until the 1850s. Goods policed included the colour and material of clothing that could be worn by specific classes, the types of food that could be eaten, even the number of horses allowed to draw carriages. Sumptuary law was a tangible, legal marker of societal status: it was closely tied to the notion of a social hierarchy, a class system set in place by God. Here religious and political doctrine subscribed to and promoted the notion of a ‘divine order’ — God’s ‘great chain of being’, with sumptuary law being represented as part of the natural cosmological order, the legal embodiment of God’s grand design (Huizinga 1990).

From the 1650s, trade began to expand dramatically in countries such as England and the Dutch Federated States, and new types of goods became increasingly available which often fell into a ‘grey’ area as far as sumptuary law was concerned. As this trade developed, so too did alarm about shifting class boundaries and transgressions against the ‘proper’ order. As a new mercantile class grew and obtained increasing financial and political power from the late 1600s, the degree and tone of the hostility towards consumption among commentators intensified (Berry 1994). Much of the consumption then criticised we would now consider rather banal. For instance, tea was then considered a luxury item, so valued it was kept under lock and key. In elite households the used leaves migrated down the social ladder to end up in the scullery, used many times over. Similarly, *café-au-lait* originated from servants selling used grinds to street vendors who then mixed the grinds with watered-down milk and sold the resultant drink on the street. Critics thought working class consumption of such items ‘a shameful waste of money’ (Shammas 1993: 178). Yet while working class consumption caused an outcry, the type of ‘luxury’ being denounced often also began to vary according to the political orientation, preconceptions and motivations of specific critics. The criticisms nevertheless had a very real impact: in 1724 over 90,000 people were arrested in London for sumptuary law violations. Half a century later, the writer Smollett still supported hanging as an appropriate punishment for such transgressions (Sekora 1977: 110).

The vehemence directed toward consumption over history makes curious reading. Governments now encourage us to spend, to think of spending as good for the economy, as contributing to our national health and well-being. In America, consumption has even been positioned as a patriotic duty, with President George W. Bush stating on 11 October 2001 that, ‘we cannot let the terrorists achieve the objective of frightening our nation to the point where ... people don’t shop’ (cited in *The Independent* 2001). By way of contrast, 250 years ago the term consumption was associated with the fatal wasting disease we

now call tuberculosis (Porter 1993). Clearly ideas about consumption and consumption practices have changed over time. Smoking, for instance, once signified glamour and style. Now the latest controversial anti-tobacco advertisements in France play suggestively with the image of young smokers pandering to tobacco company executives, with statements such as 'Fumer, c'est être l'esclave du tabac' (smoking, is to be the slave of tobacco). Over hundreds of years, changes in the manner in which we purchase, use and dispose of goods have come about as a result of, and in conjunction with, changing social, economic, technological, and legal norms and practices. Yet, while in affluent societies we largely take consumption as given, as with the response of the tobacco industry to challenges to its products, ideas about what consists of acceptable levels of consumption and acceptable consumption practices have not evolved via any smooth teleology. Political economists such as Adam Smith and David Hume began defending and promoting consumption from the mid-1700s (Appleby 1993; Hirschman 1977), but the emerging theoretical and practical acceptance over the last few hundred years developed side by side with arguments that tied consumption to society's moral and spiritual decline.

'Our melancholic consumerist malaise'

Contemporary critics would no doubt reject many of the motivations and prejudices of their predecessors; they share a similar rancorous tenor, but the former differ in seeing consumption largely as a product of motivations such as emulation and greed exacerbated by the character of life under modern consumer capitalism. Consumption is portrayed as empty, lacking any worthwhile characteristics, part and parcel of a deeply flawed understanding about what is or should be valued in terms of how we engage with material culture and other people. Many of these arguments involve a set of fairly reductive assumptions about consumption and consumer consciousness — a common theme is that we devalue others via our consumption and diminish our own humanity in the process. Much of the consumption that occurs is positioned as worthless, and critics tend to dismiss out of hand the 'variety of human satisfactions sought through the market' (Appleby 1993: 162). Consumption offers only transitory, superficial fleeting satisfactions, but obtaining these fleeting satisfactions becomes a sick compulsion, with people becoming addicted to partaking in an empty process that leaves them perpetually dissatisfied, unable to understand let alone recognise how their 'real needs' have become misshapen and deformed.

Many of these views form only a part of wider, intricate and sophisticated critiques of modern capitalism: at the risk of doing a disservice to the conceptual richness of these accounts, in relation to consumption a simple overview supplies the general theme. For Marx, '[t]he extension of products and needs

becomes the ingenious and calculating slave of inhuman, artificial and imaginary cravings' (cited in Heller 1974: 50). For Simmel, products 'call forth an artificial demand' (Miller 1994: 68). Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* maintains that 'products indoctrinate and manipulate' (1972: 24); and Adorno and Horkheimer's famous critique of the 'culture industries' positions popular mass market consumption as part of a growing 'falsity' of beliefs about *need* across the general population — it is part and parcel of a new 'administered culture' involving 'indoctrination and social control' (Kellner 1989: 130–1). In the latter half of the twentieth century these, and similar arguments about false consciousness were fostered by a new focus on mass media and the role of advertising: in *Decoding Advertisements*, Judith Williamson (1978: 9) positions advertising as speaking to a 'real need ... falsely fulfilled'. Consumption that occurs as a result of advertising offers only 'perpetual unfulfillment', but simultaneously serves to 'obscure and avoid the real issues of society, those relating to work: to jobs and wages and who works for whom' (1978: 47).

More recently in *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (1998), Bauman maintains consumption is responsible for bringing about a decline of culture and the pollution of proper social relations. He cites other theorists who similarly regret our 'melancholic' consumerist 'malaise' (Carroll, cited in Bauman 1998: 82), and 'the development of an artificially created and subjective sense of insufficiency' (Seabrook, cited in Bauman 1998: 94). In *Affluenza* (2006) the Australian theorist Clive Hamilton adopts a similar tone. Here consumption diminishes our intrinsic capacity for human engagement and interaction. It is false, irrational desires generated by emulation and competition over status that drive today's consumer society. In *Excess: Anti-Consumerism in the West* Kim Humphrey outlines many similar recent accounts, noting that 'rarely has a month gone by over the last ten or fifteen years without a new book being published on the perils of working, borrowing and spending' (2010: 17).

What all these positions share is a deep concern about inequality and the quality of life in privileged Western countries under late modern capitalism, and they have grounds for that concern. You, Jones and Wardlaw (2010) have calculated that in 2010 around 22,000 children under five died every day due to malnutrition and other poverty-related diseases. The United Nations *Human Development Report* (1998: 2) — which focuses on changing consumption patterns — notes that:

[g]lobally, the 20% of the world's people in the highest-income countries account for 86% of total private consumption expenditures — the poorest 20% a minuscule 1.3%. More specifically, the richest fifth:

- [c]onsume 45% of all meat and fish, the poorest fifth 5%.
- [c]onsume 58% of total energy, the poorest fifth less than

4% ...

- [o]wn 87% of the world's vehicle fleet, the poorest fifth less than 1%.

These figures reflect a stark reality: consumption clearly *is* the most obvious evidence of an egregious basic inequality in access to material culture and resources.

By any measure consumption in affluent countries, including Australia and New Zealand, is grossly bloated in comparison. But is consumption itself wholly responsible for inequality? In *Grundrisse* (1974: 94) Marx wrote of capitalism being a system predicated on production and consumption, but he also noted the crucial role of distribution and exchange. However we define it, consumption does not in itself determine how we organise society's mechanisms of distribution and exchange, although along with production it forms an intrinsic component of that system. For while poverty and starvation are a result of *not enough* consumption, globally this is not a matter of there not being enough food. Most of the world's edible grain is used to feed animals, with cattle alone eating enough to feed 8.7 billion people (Spencer 1996: 341).

The manner in which goods are produced, distributed and consumed certainly occurs amidst and contributes to abject poverty, malnutrition, and appalling income inequality. Human rights abuses also take place insofar as many goods are produced using sweatshop labour, where people (including children) work long hours for often a fraction of what the product they are making actually sells for. Cruelty to animals and escalating levels of environmental devastation are other factors, as recent documentaries such as *Food Inc* (agribusiness), *End of the Line* (over-fishing) and *Gaslands* (gas mining) all too graphically illustrate. Most global emissions come from a relatively small number of countries, namely the US, China and the European Union. However, per capita, Australians still have one of the largest ecological footprints in the world, producing more greenhouse gases in 2009 than any other developed country (Cubby 2010; World Wildlife Fund 2010: 39). This amount has only increased in recent years, yet even in 2003 Australians generated eight times more greenhouse pollution than the Chinese, person for person, and 170 times more, per capita, than people in Bangladesh (Climate Change and Development Roundtable 2007). New Zealand's contribution to global emissions is only 0.3 percent, but per capita this is still five times higher than China's (Whitehead 2007).

These statistics are alarming, and although scientific consensus recognises climate change and the environmental impact of consumption as issues of global concern, studies suggest people can also 'feel overwhelmed by appeals to save the planet' (Trentmann 2007: 3). Gay Hawkins notes that environmental

discourses ‘can perpetuate the very relation to nature they seek to challenge: alienated distance and disinterest. When the exploitative force of economic power and human destruction is so overcoded why bother contesting it? You may as well just keep shopping’ (2006: 9). By way of contrast, one recent Australian report, *Sustainable Consumption: Young Australians as Agents of Change* (Bentley et al. 2004: 2), is positive about the desire on the part of young people ‘to minimise their impact on the Earth’. However, the authors note that this ‘concern does not necessarily translate into personal action’, with young Australians often feeling as if their personal action cannot achieve any real impact (2004: 3, 31–50). At the same time many ‘did not appear to understand how their own behaviour contributed to environmental problems’ (2004: 33).

Consumption as an integral aspect of human sociability

One notable aspect of the critical accounts of consumption throughout history is that they have had very little impact at a general societal level, and have had ‘little political resonance’ (Kellner 1989: 162). Consumption remains subject to the opprobrium of many commentators, yet from the 1970s this began to change as theorists in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and cultural studies began to examine consumption in more detail. One influential account by Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods* (1996), positioned goods as having a language with symbolic significance, where the meaning of various consumption items can be ‘read’ and ‘interpreted’, with those meanings directly connected to conscious, sometimes semi-conscious values of the person using the good. Tastes derive ‘from the social structure’, and the meanings associated with various consumption practices are ‘arranged in vistas and hierarchies that can give play to the full range of discrimination of which the human mind is capable’ (Douglas and Isherwood 1996: xxvii, 44). Consumption here is regarded as an integral part of human social relations, where tastes and preferences cannot be reduced to motivations such as emulation and status competition, but deserve more considered analysis.

Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (1984) — another celebrated account of consumption practices — also analyses the meanings associated with various goods. Unlike Douglas and Isherwood however, Bourdieu focused on the effect of class, and carried out a huge number of surveys and interviews which charted a significant statistical relationship between individuals’ tastes, preferences and their social location. Drawing on the results, Bourdieu argued that ways of classifying and ascribing value are produced in the context of class, with people internalising and reproducing patterns of behaviour, capacities, and awareness of cultural codes across generations. Upbringing and education generate particular ways of viewing the world, and shape the tastes and skills individuals bring to

bear in all their consumption practices. As with Douglas and Isherwood, Bourdieu here gestures strongly toward goods as having a rich *social* meaning, however he emphasises how that meaning is constructed, with moral valuations of taste being arbitrary, including hierarchies which emphasise the worth of 'high culture' and denigrate popular culture. At the same time, however, Bourdieu implies his subjects 'misrecognise' the effect of societal power relations: in other words, the values they themselves place on the practices they undertake do not tell the whole story.

Many responses to the Frankfurt School in the 1970s questioned the extent to which people could be considered so wholly determined. Similar concerns have also been raised in relation to Bourdieu (Jenkins 2000: 152). Two other noted contributions around this time — Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) and Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988) — attempted to deal with the issue of determinism by proposing that subcultural groups demonstrated agency by using heterodox consumption practices to subvert and replace the dominant societal meanings attached to goods with their own. This new emphasis on subcultural resistance to consumer capitalism and consumer culture *through consumption* was a novel departure, and various other theorists began to consider consumption as a far more complex and integral aspect of human sociability.



Figure 14.3 The punk subculture: resistance to capitalism through consumption?

As cultural studies increasingly began to emphasise the worth of studying popular culture through the 1970s and 1980s, particular consumption practices came to be seen as indicative of various aspects of identity and identifications,

and this in turn connected with a new theoretical interest in the body, desire, curiosity, novelty, creativity and play. Cultural studies itself has a wide-ranging interdisciplinary orientation that values the complexity and ambiguity of the 'everyday'; considering consumption practices now appears central to this focus. However, analysing consumption in terms of resistance has resulted in criticism even within cultural studies itself. Stanley Cohen for instance, has noted that identifying resistance has tended to require arbitrary decisions and value judgements about precisely what constitutes resistance. Such judgements can become 'massive exercises of decoding, reading, deciphering and interrogating' (1980: ix) about what may be taking place 'at a level beneath the consciousness of the individual members' of these groups (1980: xiv), with their actual motivations, views and intentions being left out of the equation. Other theorists have noted that focusing on pleasure, 'resistance' and reappropriation also runs the risk of disregarding the impact of wider political systems and practices of power which can shape and influence meaning.

Given the longstanding critical accounts of consumption, the new positive approaches also often generated rather polarised and fruitless debates about the extent to which people express their *own desires* and their *own identity* through consumption, as opposed to the extent to which those desires are imposed via advertising and the character of consumer capitalism more generally. What tended to get lost in this rather narrow focus is that goods come from somewhere, their production has an impact on the world, as does their use and disposal.

Consumption in everyday life

Consumption studies is a relatively new sub-discipline, however in recent years there has been a tremendous amount of new research, particularly in the UK. Many of these new accounts stress that consumption is a fluid, contextual *social* phenomenon, and that '[c]onventional attacks on consumerism backfire if they assume consumers are manipulated and have "false needs" or if they imagine a return to some mythical "natural" way of life' (Trentmann 2007: 3). Many note that critics of consumption often disregard the impact of what they themselves consume, and position only the needs of *others* as excessive, false and manipulated. Miller, for instance, argues that the 'bogy of a deluded, superficial person who has become the mere mannequin to commodity culture is always someone other than ourselves' (2001: 229). Others observe how 'vocabularies of blame' are used to shift 'responsibility onto other actors' (Malpass et al. 2007: 243).

In terms of the environmental impact of our consumption vis-à-vis achieving change, recent research suggests that focusing on individual choice is actually of

'limited value' (Trentmann 2007). One of the key issues, as Elizabeth Shove has identified, is that consumption is largely structural in that it reflects habits and patterns of behaviour embedded in various social norms which have developed over decades, and are subject to the 'creep of convention' (2003: 2). On a larger societal level habits do undergo continual change. Our individual everyday habits and routines are not always easy to alter however, especially given the extent to which they are grounded and based in longer-term processes, which include technological change. As Malpass et al. (2007: 243) note:

consumers are often effectively 'locked-in' to certain patterns of consumption by the material infrastructures of modern, urban living ... the commitments that people have to certain consumption behaviours might be deeply held emotional, affective ones that cannot be sloughed-off just like that.

Shove herself situates patterns of consuming as part of 'a collective enterprise held together by social expectations, cultural conventions, and material constraints' (2003: 7). She notes much consumption is inconspicuous insofar as it is concerned with everyday comfort, cleanliness and convenience, pointing out that '[a]round half the energy used in the world is used in buildings and much of that is devoted to keeping people comfortable' (2003: 3). Unfortunately this inconspicuous consumption is 'a realm ignored by studies of consumer culture that are enthralled by the significance of immediate visual clues to social meaning' (Shove and Warde 2002: 247).

What are we to make of this approach? Our common-sense understanding of consumption is influenced not only by our everyday practices, but also by a diffuse yet powerful and rich range of discourses that have been shaped over centuries. While sustainability and ethical considerations have recently achieved greater import in public debate, this has yet to translate into mainstream consumption practices, or evoke effective policy responses. Regardless of these discourses, as Humphrey points out in *Excess: Anti-Consumerism in the West* (2010: 134):

the things and experiences available for purchase within affluent nations, and globally, demonstrably *enable life*, giving it a practical, communicative and embodied material richness. In this sense, we are neither conditioned nor forced to consume, but do so in human response to the fact that the things and experiences our money can buy allow us to live in, enjoy and shape the world in certain ways.

Yet even considering consumption in this more empathetic way, it is still easy to disparage the consumption of others, especially when they do not share our taste or values, especially given there is such appalling inequality evident in access to goods and resources on a global level. Writing from America where 'it is easier

to take concepts like “overconsumption” and “affluenza” seriously’, Wilk (2001: 248) argues that consumption *is* a moral issue; a ‘moral debate about consumption’, he states, ‘is an essential and ancient part of human politics, an inevitable consequence of the unique way our species has developed its relationship with the material world’.

Meanwhile, despite the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stating that the existence of global warming is ‘unequivocal’ (Pachauri 2009), a new conservative politics appears intent on creating doubts in the minds of the general public about climate science and scientific consensus. In *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (2010) Oreskes and Conway detail how in both cases the aim has been to prevent government regulation which might curtail the operation of the ‘free’ market. In the face of the huge amount of money given over to political lobbying in the United States by large corporations with an interest in casting doubt on climate science, it remains to be seen how public sentiment and public practices change in years to come.

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15 Advertising

Mapping the ‘new and improved’ mediascape

Geoff Stahl

- Advertising can imbue goods with ‘magical’ qualities that make them more appealing to consumers.
- There have been five important phases of advertising: ‘product-oriented’, ‘product-symbols’, ‘personalisation’, ‘market segmentation’ and ‘the postmodern brand’.
- We live in a society of signs where advertising and branding play an important role in everyday life.
- ‘Culture jamming’ is one form of resistance, but even this semiotic warfare still plays by advertising’s rules.

Introduction

In an essay written not long before he retired, cultural studies scholar Raymond Williams claimed that advertising could be characterised as a ‘magic system’. By this he meant ‘a highly organised and professional system of magical inducements and satisfactions, functionally very similar to magical systems in simpler societies, but rather strangely coexistent with a highly developed scientific technology’ (Williams 1980: 171). This framing of advertising locates its power as manifest in elaborate symbol-making systems, but also sees it as deeply enmeshed in social, institutional and technological networks. We can, for example, think about advertising as working its ‘magic’ in many different ways, such as the comfort found in shopping rituals (colloquially referring to it as ‘retail therapy’), the meanings given to material things, the auratic power found in symbols of well-being and narratives of self-improvement, and the seductive promise of transformation. In order to interrogate important aspects of advertising’s magical power, this chapter will outline a selection of perspectives taken on advertising and consumer culture, drawing from sociology, anthropology, communications, media and cultural studies. The chapter will address notions of consumption and consumer culture in its distinctly modern form, and provide an outline of advertising as it has unfolded over the last 150 years, highlighting its relationship to consumer culture in the process. Using particular examples, this discussion will also draw attention to the ways in which advertising as a mode of communication, discourse, and a set of

manipulable and powerful symbols serves as a complex tool that continues to mediate between people and the world of objects in the context of contemporary consumer culture.

How modern consumer culture works, and advertising's role in ensuring its smooth functioning, has been a question a number of thinkers have considered using a variety of perspectives. Outlined below is a selection of examinations of consumer culture which point to the different ways advertising has been situated within it.

Commodity fetishism

Karl Marx (1818–1883), writing in the nineteenth century, did not deal explicitly with advertising. However, his work on the nature of social relations in capitalism has provided us with a useful framework for exploring how commodities function in everyday life. For Marx, there are two systems of value that determine how objects circulate in capitalist culture; one is 'use-value', the other, 'exchange-value'. We can use the example of a hammer to make clear the distinction between the two. Hammers have a certain utility, meaning they are a tool that we can use, for example to drive a nail into a wall or a piece of wood. This is their use-value. However, unless we fashioned the hammer ourselves, we would have to buy one. It has a price attached to it, which allows it to sit alongside other hammers in the marketplace from which we then choose the desired tool. We need to buy that hammer from a shop, giving it what Marx (1887) refers to as its exchange-value. That value (meaning the price) can be higher or lower as determined by a number of factors: cost of materials, labour, packaging, delivery to point of purchase, advertising costs and so forth. Exchange-value, unlike use-value, is not intrinsic to the hammer. Exchange-value only makes sense in relation to other objects of the same class (such as other hammers) and is set by its market context.

Exchange-value and use-value are two concepts Marx developed to examine contemporary commodity culture in the context of nineteenth-century capitalism (Marx 1887). A related term, one that gets us closer to advertising's role in shaping our relationship to the world of goods, is found in his work on 'commodity fetishism'. We can use the example of diamonds to understand how this concept fits with advertising. Up until the twentieth century, diamonds had no real exchange-value other than as rare stones that were often in the possession of a very wealthy minority, such as royalty. Certain companies such as De Beers — who had interests in numerous mines in South Africa and a virtual monopoly on the diamond trade — had by the 1920s begun to market diamonds as the preferred stone for wedding rings. Advertising campaigns in Hollywood tabloids at the time saw diamonds associated with certain celebrities

and personalities whose star power lent diamonds a new form of cultural resonance. Not long after this, diamond sales began to increase. The success of these kinds of campaigns culminated in the 1940s, when De Beers devised an enduring slogan: 'A Diamond is Forever' (see Newbury 1989; Roberts 2007).

However, this image of the diamond as symbol of romantic love has lately been tarnished. Diamonds have a long and bloody history, tied to wars, exploitation and murders in a number of African countries which is exemplified in the film *Blood Diamond* (2006), as well as in numerous campaigns designed to raise awareness of the politics of diamond mining (Campbell 2002). More pointedly, the mystification of diamonds through their coding as tokens of marriage makes the dangerous and exploitative physical work used in diamond mining — what Marx generally refers to as 'congealed labour' — disappear once they enter the market (Marx 1887). Diamonds as romantic icon circulate in a different regime of value, and become invested with new kinds of social meaning and value, extracted now not only from the mine but also from the dirty and fraught social context of mining. This process of mystification has gradually unfolded through decades of advertising muscle. The manufactured desire for diamonds neatly crystallises commodity fetishism, giving them 'magical' qualities. Diamonds take on a talismanic quality, in that we are led to believe that a diamond will make a marriage complete, that this stone represents the literal materialisation and culturally sanctioned sign of romantic love.

As the case of diamonds suggests, the seeming ability of commodities to transform our lives is central to the imperatives that drive advertising. Advertising frames commodities in such a way that they take on a life of their own, abstracted from the context of their production, addressing us in such a way as to make us aspire to something else, through declarations that they will help us achieve socially desirable goals (whether a change in lifestyle or simply hair colour). The commodity fetish on the one hand promises completion, and, on the other, defers gratification. The consequent feeling of loss, the failure of the commodity to make us whole, produces the kind of anxiety that forms the cyclical, and cynical, logic of consumer culture. Advertising has at its roots this fundamental paradox: to ameliorate as well as aggravate this anxiety.

Advertising and the material world

While the transformative power ascribed to material goods in the form of commodity fetishism is important to understanding how advertising functions to lubricate the channels of commodity circulation, there are other notable ways we can consider the power of advertising and its impact on the world around us. For example, it is possible to consider advertising sociologically and anthropologically, rather than economically; that is, in terms of individual — as

well as social — needs and desires. In this respect, a distinction needs to be maintained between basic needs, such as food and shelter, and manufactured desires, such as the need to feel good about oneself and to be socially accepted. The role of identity formation (our sense of our selves) and social ascription (how we relate to others) are important underpinnings of advertising, which seeks to blur the distinction between needs and desires. Advertising speaks to both circumstances through its double address, targeting not only the individual viewer but *many* individual viewers at the same time. The impact of advertising on our sense of self, how we map out our status across a range of social milieu, and how we might signal our desire to belong, are not contingent upon ingesting advertising in its purest ideological form, however. Simply put, we do not buy everything we see advertised. Nor do we necessarily aspire to become everything we see in advertising. To suggest, for example, that images of thin women in advertising result in a desire for women to be thin reduces adverts and our relationship to them as one of unreflective imitation and ignores the complex constellation of forces and influences that determine not only how we consume advertising but also how it may or may not dictate our actions. Advertising is much more complex than this in terms of its effects, and these can be tied to issues such as class, gender, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation (of course these very distinctions have been mined by advertisers as just more niche markets for their products, as evident in terms like the ‘pink dollar’ (Kates 1999)).

The complex interplay of social, cultural, institutional, and economic forces which come to bear on advertising has led a number of scholars to consider its impact in different ways. One such model for understanding advertising, consumer culture and the agency of the consumer can be found in rational choice theory (Thompson 1990). Certain scholars have suggested that advertising functions to provide information about commodities in a crowded marketplace. It does the labour of looking for us. Rather than seeing them as mindless automatons, it assumes that consumers are rational agents, who make informed choices about what products best suit their needs. This is often referred to as ‘consumer sovereignty’, which suggests that consumers have a great deal of power in shaping the market and how it regulates supply and demand (Becker and Murphy 1993). Advertising is about persuading the consumer, who supposedly weighs his or her options about products in the marketplace according to both the force of argument in an advertisement and its enticement. John Thompson (1990) has discussed advertising under rational choice theory as having two central components: the rational core and the emotional periphery. The rational core is the argument of the advert and the emotional periphery is made up of the cultural connotations accruing to the images we see. A successful advert manages to balance both. Taking the example of an advert for perfume which shows an image of young lovers in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Thompson (1990) suggests that we are not led to believe that

buying this perfume will have us transported to Paris (which would be irrational). Instead, the success of its argument (in persuading the consumer to buy this perfume) rests upon the pleasant associations we have with Paris (such as romance, love, sophistication and so forth).

The anthropologist Grant McCracken (1990) posits another way to think about consumption and the possible role advertising can play in shaping it. For him, this is not an explicitly ideological role, but rather is tied to the character of what is often referred to as material culture. He takes an example from the experience of eighteenth-century essayist Denis Diderot (1713–1784). A friend had given Diderot a new robe. After wearing it for a short while, he began to realise that everything else in his study seemed pale and drab in comparison to its radiance. Diderot gradually replaces other things in his drawing room to match the newness of his robe. McCracken highlights this desire to acquire new things as part of the logic of self-transformation, noting the way in which we are drawn to the newness of objects, but also hang on to material objects as a way of making sense of the world. We literally objectify our tastes by surrounding ourselves with material things that reflect them (such as furniture, art, music, clothes, etc.). As much as they are tools to carve out an identity — which advertisers certainly capitalise on — they are also material things that act as ballast, allowing us to resist the desire to constantly reinvent and transform ourselves. In this way, those things we buy may in fact work against the imperatives of advertising, which strives through the rhetoric of novelty to make everything appear shiny and new. In response, advertisers have targeted our tastes in more specific ways, fine tuning their attempts to mediate between our sense of self, our social selves, and the world of material things.

Advertising has constantly adapted and adjusted to social, cultural and technological change as they have impacted upon consumption, and in many respects has determined the shape of those shifts. As the following section illustrates, contemporary advertising is bound up in the changes modern consumer culture has undergone in the last 150 years. For this reason, the protean nature of advertising, and its shifting relationship to consumer and material culture, is important to map out historically in order to understand its current incarnation.

Phases of advertising

The modern culture of consumption and advertising practices with which we in the Western world are familiar began to solidify in the nineteenth century (Williams 1982; Sassatelli 2007). William Leiss, Stephen Kline and Sut Jhally (1986) argue that this early phase of modern consumer culture needs to be located within a historically specific political economy, system of

communication and set of social practices, a phase that anticipates the shape advertising takes over the course of the twentieth century. Their work brings together Marx's notion of commodity fetishism and a form of semiotic analysis that provides a useful critical framework for analysing advertising and its history. For them, advertising has developed from the late nineteenth century until present day, as a mutable discourse bound up in what they refer to as an 'articulated communications system', where each phase can be identified by the ways in which advertising strategies bring together 'products, persuasive strategies, and media channels' (Leiss et al. 1986: 126). They develop four phases which characterise advertising in the twentieth century, following which we can discuss a fifth, contemporary phase.

According to Leiss et al. (1986) the first phase of modern advertising, the 'product-oriented approach', encompassed a period roughly from 1890 to 1925. They suggest that developments in national advertising campaigns were tied to the appearance of advertising agencies, with their own codes of conduct, developments in graphic design and a focus on information about the product, rather than previous forms of framing which served to simply 'announce' the product. Now information would be used in a rhetorical fashion, to persuade the consumer as to the virtues of one product over another. The second phase, characterised by 'product symbols', builds on some of these techniques and begins to influence new media forms, such as radio and broadcasting policy. Approximately spanning the years 1925 to 1945, this phase of advertising was characterised by more focus on audience research and psychological profiling. The use of photography in magazines meant that the 'wordy' characteristics of adverts could now be played down, with other associations made through the composition of image-centred adverts. No longer is performance an essential component of product selling; instead, the image does the work of providing preferred associations designed to appeal to anxieties about social status.

The post-World War II period, 1945–1965, marks Leiss et al.'s (1986) third phase, which they refer to as 'personalization', during which time advertisers began to explore television as a new mass medium. Here celebrities could showcase products, and advertising could work its way into storylines. Advertising agencies of the vintage represented recently in the television show *Mad Men* for example, further refined marketing techniques, and began to employ people 'in the know' in order to connect with more specific demographics. The fourth, and final, phase that Leiss et al. (1986) address is 'market segmentation', which spans approximately the mid-1960s until the mid-1980s. The focus of television on specific markets is further refined, and product placement becomes more pronounced in film. The markets are not understood in terms of 'personality' any more, but rather a selection of activities that make up a 'lifestyle'. It is also a phase characterised by an awareness of audiences who

are media-savvy enough to ‘see through’ advertising, which has since become even more characteristic of advertising. The ‘knowing wink’ that lets the viewer in on the joke (the idea that ‘we know you know this is an advert’), or the imbrication of pop culture references in adverts and the entrenchment of advertising within popular culture, sets this phase apart from earlier ones.

We can use their criteria to nominate a contemporary advertising phase, where the articulation of technology, systems of communication, social demographics, discourses of transformation, and a political economy of consumption can be considered. We can call this phase ‘the postmodern brand’, which runs from approximately the mid-1980s until present day. It is tied to the emergence of new media (especially the internet), a focus on more diverse markets (notably: young people, youth culture, and the cult of youth), the merger of advertising and popular culture, and the popular diffusion of entrepreneurial discourses. In order to lay out some of the defining elements of this phase, it is necessary to refer to the work of one of the more important scholars to consider how consumer culture has shifted over the latter half of the twentieth century: French sociologist Jean Baudrillard. His work has introduced another layer of complexity to the world of advertising and consumer culture. In his thinking, ‘things’, and material culture, seem to disappear or, more precisely, get transformed into signs and symbols such that they in fact appear ‘hyperreal’; that is, more real than the things themselves. Baudrillard (1998) suggests this happens due to changes in the contemporary mediascape where television, film, popular music and the internet (which publicly emerges in 1995) work to remove us from the ‘real’, even at those points where they work hardest to recreate it. For Baudrillard, this is a symptom of a consumer culture dominated by the sign, where exchange-value mediates and thus dominates social relations, and where increasingly what is exchanged are signs to mark out status in a lifestyle culture dominated by signs of ‘health’, ‘upward mobility’, ‘success’, ‘ambition’, ‘aspiration’ and so forth. He suggests ‘our society thinks itself and speaks itself as a consumer society. As much as it consumes anything, it consumes *itself* as consumer society, as *idea*. Advertising is the triumphal paean to that idea’ (Baudrillard 1998: 193). For Baudrillard we live in a society of signs — filled with signs of consumption and the consumption of signs — where advertising has formed the frenzied grammar of everyday life.

We can recognise aspects of Baudrillard’s thinking when we consider the postmodern brand as it is articulated across a range of contexts. The brand exists as a particular set of signifying practices that fit very neatly into a culture dominated by signs. Alison Hearn (2008) suggests it is ‘understood to stand for a distinct form of marketing practice intended to link products and services with resonant cultural meanings through the use of narratives and images’ (Hearn 2008: 199). Branding is not about the product *per se*, but rather a set of attributes that can be spread across an assortment of products. Take a brand such

as Apple, for example. The company can use its marketing of an array of digital devices to reinforce those qualitative dimensions which are taken as a mark of its distinctiveness. The materiality of Apple products in the form of their design applied to iPods, iPads, iPhones and Powerbooks has become a set of identifiable and desirable signifiers, such as portability, sleekness and streamlined, which coalesce to form the Apple brand. These qualities can be applied across all of its products, lending to Apple goods brand coherence and unity which can be used to generate an assurance of quality and, it is hoped, brand loyalty. The brand is not the product, but rather a signifying container that holds a number of products produced by the same company, lending a corporate imprimatur through an aura of associations and qualities.

Beyond material culture, branding takes on many different forms in the contemporary mediascape. For instance, if in previous advertising phases celebrities were used to market products through appearances in adverts, or even hawking the product on television, today the dominance of popular culture by celebrities, including those who are famous just for being famous (for example, Paris Hilton), points to a more nuanced form of branding which is much more explicitly about managing the semiotics of the public self. A celebrity's public persona, onscreen image, and his or her off-screen self tends to be conflated in the mediascape, and thus their status as viable celebrity depends on their ability to maintain their currency in terms of relevance, but also in strategically deploying their brand-image as a form of capital. Let's take the comedian Bill Murray's role in the film *Lost in Translation* (2003). In Japan to shoot a television commercial for whiskey, Murray plays an actor using a strategy a number of actors — including Murray himself — have adopted to manage their own brands. Here in Japan, they can use their brand-image to explicitly sell products locally and get paid for it, without tarnishing the credibility of their brand in other national markets. Notable here, is that Murray is also doing a number of other things, including demonstrating to us his reinvention as a serious actor, resonating now with the cultural power of transformation, and doing so in the context of a film which is also selling contemporary Tokyo, albeit as an impenetrable 'exotic' locale.

The selling of the self in the form of manipulating and managing signification to better position oneself in a global marketplace reveals strategies that extend also to the selling of places, such as cities like Tokyo. This is a significant aspect of contemporary advertising (for more on the history of tourism and place marketing, see Urry 2002). The branding of place draws upon myths, stories, characters, local heroes, natural features or some combination of all of these. What is required to brand the area is assembling the right kind of connotations, assuring that the preferred associations are generated in a manner deemed to best represent the enticing character of the chosen area. To take a recent example, for

the past decade New Zealand has been running a campaign made up of still images, commercials and a behind-the-scenes documentary, based on the slogan '100% Pure' (Tourism New Zealand 2010). Across a range of adverts, the country's natural landscape (including mountains, beaches, rivers and lakes) is framed and promoted through their consumption in the form of mountain climbing, white-water rafting, kayaking, skiing, hang-gliding, camping and tramping, targeting the 'outdoorsy' lifestyle tourist (in contrast, New Zealand cities are absent from this campaign). Critics, however, have suggested that the pristine image presented in this long-running series of adverts misrepresents the country (Pearce 2009; Tandy 2006). They raise questions regarding what is not represented, such as the poisoning of New Zealand's riverways by the dairy industry, the contentious nature of indigenous land claims, and the large carbon footprint left by those very same tourists. Far from being pristine, clean and green, critics suggest that the sort of mythologising put forward here masks a host of issues that suggests the New Zealand brand is far from '100% Pure'.



Figure 15.1 Branding New Zealand: building mythologies of 'Middle Earth'?

'Selling places' is an important way to understand the idea of the brand and its ability to imbue an area with a set of preferred associations (Ward 2000). Taking this facet of branding, along with its role in promulgating celebrity culture, we can also consider branding as having a more complex role to play in the contemporary mediascape. Hearn (2008) builds upon the idea of promotional culture in order to consider the emergence of the 'branded self' as a revamped

idea of the individual, caught up in new technological forms and dense mediated webs of production, distribution and consumption (see also Wernick 1991). We can take the idea of the brand as a signifying container and apply it to notions of a contemporary self in online contexts. Many internet sites — such as YouTube, MySpace, and, more recently, Facebook — encourage individuals to construct an online identity (for example, YouTube's slogan is 'Broadcast Yourself'), encouraging an entrepreneurial approach to our sense of self. Each of these social network sites allows an individual to tailor content in a way that allows a certain online subjectivity to develop. We may have content available only to our closest friends and family, or we may choose to make all of it public. We can craft our online identity in different ways on different sites, which means that rarely are two online presentations of ourselves the same. The way in which we 'brand' ourselves across these diverse sites gives the appearance of coherence to our online subjectivity.

It could be argued that the ability of users to generate content on social media sites is an important tool for navigating through those virtual spaces and social networks which are becoming an important part of our everyday life. To have control over as well as generate the content of our identity is a noteworthy dimension of social media's appeal and power. In this context, discourses of creativity, entrepreneurialism and transformation begin to dominate how we publicly construct our online biographies. To be both a producer and consumer signals a notable shift in how media is used today but this very act of producing and promoting ourselves online needs to take in to account how the internet functions to interpellate us, as a market, audience, and community. Our online branded selves are sold back to advertisers and other corporate interests at the very moment we are busily constructing them, and as recent issues regarding privacy on Facebook indicate, we have no idea how that information is being utilised by third parties (Opsahl 2010). Like the diamond, our personal information exists now as a commodity, the basis of 'data mining' for unseen interests (Elkins 2007; Singel 2010) This complicates how YouTube, MySpace, Twitter and Facebook function, where users are not only producing content, constructing a promotionalised, branded self, but are also consuming the promotional selves of others, thereby socialising a virtual space where *signs* of commitment (in the form of status updates, 'liking', and commenting), are the preferred currency. The intense sociability masks other more insidious activities over which we have little control. As Hearn (2008: 201) reminds us, 'the branded self is a commodity sign; it is an entity that works and, at the same time, points to itself working, striving to embody the values of its working environment'.

Resisting advertising

The postmodern branding phase is characterised also by another development, one that attempts to undermine or challenge the ubiquity of advertising and the commodification of everything (including ourselves). Interventions into advertising's dominance of the contemporary mediascape have been more frequent over the last two decades. Advertising's dominance of the contemporary visual landscape has been challenged by a number of activists, artists and pranksters who have chosen to use the language of advertising against itself. Over the last two decades, one of the more predominant forms of intervention has taken the form of 'culture jamming' (Lasn 1999). This consists of refashioning an advertisement, either with the addition of new text in order to undermine the intended message of the advert, or in the form of a parody. Activists, who have tackled billboards and other outdoor forms of advertising, often undertake the former intervention. The latter finds its strongest articulation in the pages of the magazine *Adbusters*. For more than twenty years *Adbusters* has been advocating for attacks on consumer culture in the form of parodies of adverts for Camel Cigarettes, McDonald's, Nike and other large-scale corporations (see <http://www.adbusters.org/gallery/spoofads>). They use clever graphic design strategies to mimic the original ad in order to call in to question the demands made by advertising in the service of consumer culture. They are postmodern in this respect: media savvy enough to play the game according to its rules, but not believing in it, using the grammar of advertising against itself. As with the impact of advertising itself, it remains unclear whether the message gets across to its intended market (which is the everyday consumer), or if it simply serves to satisfy a small niche of cultural rebels whose interventions are quickly neutralised and absorbed by consumer culture.

Baudrillard (1998) argues that there is no way out of the society of the sign. Even by engaging in semiotic warfare, you are only playing the game according to advertising's rules, and it is quick to neutralise any threat. This sort of cultural pessimism does not lend itself well to critiques like culture jamming. We can, however, read culture jamming symptomatically. While it remains a dominant feature of the contemporary mediascape, advertising has also fallen victim to its own success in ways that culture jamming makes apparent, even if only momentarily. The semiotic swagger of advertising and its hegemonic power of absorption suggests that in the end it will remain a central part of our everyday lives. As outlined here, advertising's myriad forms, its diffusion across the mediascape, deeply embedded in technologies, the discourses of everyday life, as well as social relations and cultural practices, are evidence of that.

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16 Celebrity

Chris Rojek

- This chapter discusses the characteristics, organisational features and consequences of celebrity culture.
- Three types of celebrity are identified in this chapter: ‘ascribed’, ‘achieved’ and the ‘celetoid’.
- It is argued that, in late modernity, the celetoid — an ordinary person of no perceptible talent who acquires durable fame through what I call the ‘PR-media complex’ — has become ubiquitous.
- After a summary of relevant literature, it is concluded that students can best theorise the rise of celebrity culture when it is related to the rise of the PR-media complex and, consequently, the needs of capitalist society.

What is celebrity?

Over the last decade the academic study of celebrity has grown substantially. Several books have been published, a number of national and international conferences have been held, the subject has featured in many academic articles, and the publisher Taylor & Francis has established a dedicated journal — *Celebrity Studies* (2010) (Cashmore 2006; Marshall 2006; Turner 2004). More academics and students are studying celebrity than ever before. This chapter examines the meaning of celebrity, the reasons for the rise of celebrity culture, and the personal and social consequences of this culture.

Celebrity may be defined as the possession of wide social distinction and esteem. There are three main types (Rojek 2001). ‘Ascribed celebrity’ refers to the social distinction and esteem that derives from occupying a recognised position in the social hierarchy. Kings, Queens, Dukes and Duchesses are ascribed celebrities. So are the children of famous people such as Connor Cruise, the adopted son of Tom Cruise, or Fifi Trixabelle, Peaches and Pixie Geldof, the children of Bob Geldof. Ascribed celebrity is an involuntary form of fame that is typically based on bloodline. Thus it is unlikely that Prince William or Prince Harry would have fame were it not for the fact that they are heirs to the British throne.

‘Achieved celebrity’ refers to the acquisition of fame by virtue of the public demonstration of talent and the attainment of accomplishment. Jonah Lomu, Pete Sampras and Cristiano Ronaldo are globally famous sports stars; Chris Martin, Beyoncé and Kanye West are international recording superstars; and Angelina Jolie, Hugh Jackman and Johnny Depp are instantly recognised movie stars. Each has attained celebrity by reason of their talent and dedication.

More recently, a third type has gained prominence in celebrity culture. The ‘celetoid’ is an ordinary person of no perceptible talent who acquires fame by media exposure. A distinction should be made here between short-life and long-life celetoids. A short-life celetoid is topically famous and does not possess enduring fame. A lottery winner, a hero who foils a terrorist attack or the tallest man in the world, may fill newspapers and television news shows one day and be forgotten the next.

A long-life celetoid is an ordinary person of no perceptible talent who acquires durable fame. Leading examples are the reality television star Jade Goody and the *American Idol* contestant William Hung. Goody, who died in 2009, dominated British reality television for seven years; and Hung, who sang Ricky Martin’s ‘She Bangs’ on *American Idol* with such exacting ineptitude that Simon Cowell was moved to proclaim, ‘You can’t sing, you can’t dance, so what do you want me to say?’, has gone on to record albums, appear on chat shows and has a website (williamhung.net) dedicated to him. Long-life celetoids are renowned for their impudent bravado. Although they have no recognised talents or accomplishments they appear to be totally uninhibited about expressing their ordinariness in public.

Ascribed celebrities are pre-eminent in traditional societies where social power is hereditary and political power is based in a clan or kingship system. The subsistent nature of these economies does not generate sufficient wealth to support significant levels of upward social mobility. For the same reason, media categories are not well defined. Therefore, platforms to generate non-ascribed fame are either under-developed or have not yet been born and, due to this, instances of achieved celebrity are low.

Achieved celebrity is associated with the rise of capitalist society. The creation of a significant economic surplus produces opportunities for upward social mobility. That is, it supports a system of mass communication, it requires labour to be geographically mobile and it allocates appreciable sums to civil society, especially the entertainment sector. Achieved celebrities do not rise without reason. On the contrary, specialised enclaves of commercial culture exist to discover, hone and polish people of unusual talent and accomplishment. These enclaves are located in the public relations industry, entertainment management and the media.



Figure 16.1 Achieved celebrity: film actor Clive Owen

I propose to use the term ‘PR-media complex’ to refer to the aggregate of these relations. Moreover, I will use the term ‘cultural intermediaries’ to refer to the personnel dedicated to presenting celebrities to the public. These personnel include managers, publicists, personal fitness trainers, manicurists, stylists, chefs and entertainment lawyers. Although the public is used to thinking of celebrities in terms of a one-to-one relationship between the star and the ‘star gazer’, the truth is that achieved celebrities are always preceded, advised and surrounded by an invisible team of cultural intermediaries dedicated to presenting them in the best possible light.

Celetoids are also the product of urban-industrial-democratic society but crucially, the seat of their fame rests upon the media rather than natural talent or acquired accomplishment. They are ordinary people who are positioned by the PR-media complex in communication platforms that boost their public profile.

Some commentators argue that the rise of celetooid culture represents the triumph of democracy. For now ordinary people, rather than kings and queens or superstars, occupy a prominent field of media attention (Hartley 2009). While there is some truth in the argument that the replacement of ascribed celebrities with celetooids represents growing media interest in everyday culture, it is wrong to attribute this solely or pre-eminently to the progress of democratic forces. Celetooids are selected, packaged and relayed to the public by television channels engaged in a ratings war. Their high current profile in popular culture owes

more to traditional models of labour exploitation. That is, celestoids are employed by television channels as labourers designed to attract mass audiences. The publicity that they generate creates a surplus in the form of advertising revenue and also increases the economic value of programmes to media producers. Reality television celestoids are paid nothing, but their publicity value is often appreciable (Andrejevic 2004).

Why has celebrity become ubiquitous?

A variety of explanations for the prominence of celebrity culture have emerged. They can be organised into supply and demand side models of celebrity.

Supply side models

Supply side models explain celebrity as the result of power structures that place individuals before the public as objects of esteem and social distinction. Thus, in traditional society, the power structure of dominant clans and kinship groups, generally allied with religion, identified ascribed celebrities as people of note and fame. In urban-industrial-democratic society the main supply source of celebrity is the media. The expansion of achieved celebrity culture and the rise of celestoid culture are explained as the inevitable product of the enlargement of the media in everyday life. The greater the outlets of media communication, the more achieved celebrities and celestoids will figure as objects of public attention and interest.

Supply side models present celebrity as the result of manipulation by powerful groups, such as wealthy families or the PR-media complex. Usually, the public is presented as the passive object of manipulation. Edward Bernays (1928), the father of modern public relations, argued that the public is essentially inert and directionless. It requires leaders to give direction and purpose. For Bernays, the science of public relations consists in determining public wants and preoccupations, through various forms of opinion research, and assembling figures of esteem with whom the public can empathise and admire. The celebrities to which Bernays referred were primarily political leaders. But his approach to public relations can be extended to all aspects of celebrity culture.

Supply side explanations, then, perceive public wants and needs as plastic and regard celebrities as PR-media constructed figures of esteem. They hold that the moral purpose of celebrity is to enhance the democratic values of urban-industrial society. However, figures of esteem may also be used to promote anti-democratic values or merely to generate revenue. For this reason, Bernays (1947) and his followers preached eternal vigilance as the price paid for the moulding of public opinion.

Critical accounts of supply side models point out that, on the whole, celebrity is presented as a form of social control rather than a means of resistance or opposition (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979). Economically, celebrity lifestyle and product endorsement boosts commodity culture by encouraging the consumption patterns of ordinary people to emulate the stars. Politically, Hollywood diverts the workforce into non-challenging forms of organised amusement and thus blocks collective agitation for empowerment and distributive justice. Psychologically, celebrities are depicted as living a frontier existence in which gigantic wealth, social opportunities and political influence are normalised. The gulf between them and ordinary men and women is so vast that the social position of the latter as passive consumers is cast and accepted as fate.

Demand side models

Demand side models focus upon the needs or wants of consumers as the causes of celebrity culture. In particular, celebrity is connected to the search for meaning.

In terms of the management of emotional intelligence and emotional labour, celebrities are theorised as playing the parts of role models and unofficial life coaches. A crucial inter-linking concept that needs to be referred to here is *para-social communication*. This term was introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956) to apply to the illusory face-to-face relationships produced by television. Chat and talk show hosts, soap stars, newsreaders, news reporters and other television celebrities became stars in the living room. The interaction is one sided and driven by the performer who is selected and employed by the television channel. Some forms of celebrity behaviour are emulated and internalised by viewers. Para-social communication can produce significant levels of emotional involvement between the audience and the celebrity. Pinsky and Young (2009) refer to the 'mirror effect' produced by celebrity culture. The irresponsible, risk-taking behaviour of celebrities is reflected in the conduct of fans. In some cases, especially where viewers are isolated and vulnerable, para-social relations can supplant primary relations (with family, friends and community). That is, celebrities can become the main external source of emotional support and dependence.

As Horton and Wohl (1956) note, para-social relations have several unusual characteristics that are not present in ordinary social encounters. They involve low levels of reciprocity. While viewers can make their views known through phone-ins or letters, para-social relationships with television stars do not permit strong mutual feedback links. In addition, celebrity interaction is biased. The reason for this is that celebrities do not present exactly as people but as

personas. That is, they come to para-social encounters as constructed personalities. The persona is the product of the labour of cultural intermediaries on exposure management and the celebrity's view of the characteristics of presentation that will achieve high impact factors with the public. Notwithstanding the biased, non-reciprocal character of para-social relationships it is clear that celebrities may be readily accepted by viewers as a friend, counsellor, comforter or role model. In social conditions where levels of geographic and social mobility are high, para-social communication offers a sense of social continuity. Television celebrities are dependable, regular presences on the airwaves. Sociologically, celebrity culture challenges our conventional notions of socialisation and belonging.

Bourdieu's (1984) concept of *habitus* refers to the frameworks of meaning, vernacular and patterns of practice that enable us to have a coherent, informed view of the world. He identifies the family, community and schooling as vital crucibles of *habitus*. It is necessary to add celebrity culture to this list. In societies organised around networks of global telecommunications, celebrity culture provides patterns of idealised behaviour which meaningfully shapes identity, association and practice.

In recent years the emergence of 'celanthropy' has extended this function in striking and interesting ways. Celanthropy refers to the celebrity-led involvement in philanthropic endeavours. Thus, Bob Geldof and Bono have made a *cause célèbre* of tackling hunger and inequality in Africa; Oprah Winfrey has opened a girls' school for deprived children in Johannesburg; George Clooney is involved in fieldwork relief in Darfur; Madonna's *Raising Malawi* charity is dedicated to ending extreme hardship and poverty in Malawi; and Angelina Jolie is the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) Goodwill Ambassador.

Strictly speaking, the involvement of celebrities in charity and relief work is not new. What is new is the public expectation that superstars have a responsibility to engage in humanitarian and environmental work as proxy leaders for the silent majority. The role of achieved celebrities in fundraising, agenda setting and networking between political and business leaders is now widely accepted as a responsibility of the seriously famous. Engaging in this work has the capacity to increase the celebrity impact factor with the public. Additionally, humanitarian work by celebrities enable the public to act out frustrated wishes to make a difference in solving global problems of inequality, injustice and environmental decay.

Celanthropy raises a set of critical issues for students of celebrity culture. To begin with, since celebrities act as the unelected representative of the people, the basis of their legitimacy is not transparent. Several critics argue that fame is no

guarantee of effective problem solving. Theroux (2006) has criticised Bono for unwittingly misdirecting aid money to Africa. Instead of investing the money in long-term infrastructural reform of the electoral and transport systems, it has been absorbed in high-profile, publicity-friendly activities of famine relief. Theroux calls for a more balanced strategy for the distribution of relief funds for Africa, and explicitly condemns Bono for being ill informed and naïve.

For charity campaigns, stars are assets in attracting publicity and funds. The *Look to the Stars* charity website (www.looktothestars.org) lists Bono as supporting 29 charities; George Clooney is involved with 21 charities; Sting has 22; Angelina Jolie has 24; Elton John has 35; and Annie Lennox has 33. In literature of celebrity product endorsement, the term *celebrity vamping* refers to the over-development of celebrity endorsement of commodities (see for example, Jack 2007). If celebrities develop a portfolio of commodity endorsement that is too extensive it becomes subject to the law of diminishing returns. The same applies to celanthropy. If celebrities over-extend involvement in a charity portfolio that is too diverse and wide, public sympathy is likely to decline.

But this is to draw attention to problems of exposure management. To come back to the demand side point at issue, para-social communication positions celebrities as significant agents of emotional intelligence and emotional labour in popular culture. They fulfil the demand for ‘big citizens’ to act on the world stage to redress inequality and injustice, and they act as role models and life coaches for star gazers. Incidentally, ‘star gazers’ are distinct from ‘fans’. A fan develops a leisure career and internalises a dedicated identity with respect to a given celebrity. A star gazer is a person who follows celebrity news regularly without developing a focused interest, a leisure career or internalising a dedicated identity.

Another contribution that celebrity culture makes in the popular culture of meaning is to cover the rift left by the decline in organised religion. Celebrity culture is now the milieu in which religious recognition and belonging are now most widely performed. Fan behaviour at rock/rap concerts and film premieres is akin to the collective effervescence and emotional transport of religious ceremony. Some celebrities are credited with powers of clairvoyance and healing, which is one reason why crowds often want to touch them when they appear in public. Sites of celebrity birth and death have become modern tourist pilgrim routes, much as physical settings associated with the saints defined routes of medieval pilgrimage. Similarly, just as saintly relics were, and are, exalted and coveted, there is a huge international market in celebrity autographs, locks of hair, clothing and other validated possessions.

For some strata in the public, the frontier existence of celebrity is layered with qualities of the sacred. To propose that celebrity culture has simply filled the gap left by the waning of organised religion is over simplistic. To be sure, some celebrities do present their beliefs as having the power of messianic intervention and healing. For example, in proselytising Scientology, Tom Cruise submits that '[w]e are the authorities on getting people off drugs, we are the authorities on the mind, we are the authorities on improving conditions ... we can rehabilitate criminals ... [w]e can bring peace and unite communities (quoted in Ward 2011: 129).

Scientology may use many devices from religious revivalism, but it does not claim powers of divination or miracle. Tom Cruise does not claim for himself extraordinary or supernatural powers. The language he uses certainly contains religious references to transformation and purification but it does not invoke a deity or deities. Compared with traditional organised religion no claim of divine inspiration or the gift of grace is made. On the contrary, the devices of persuasion that Scientology employ would be familiar to most personnel in the PR-media complex. That is, it pinpoints common causes of concern, delineates principles of social inclusion and exclusion, and designates a leader or code of practice to attain integrity and purification.

Nonetheless, in cultures that have been historically moulded by the Christian belief system and where this system is in decline, celebrity culture is an avenue in popular culture that enables stars and audiences to act out rituals of collective certainty and exchange, and develop symbols of purification and transcendence. Celebrity cultures do not replace traditional religion, but the elective affinity that the cultural practices have with religious belief allow people to retain quasi-religious experience in an age dominated by science, technology and public relations.

The consequences of celebrity culture

The media is frequently condescending about celebrity culture. It holds that this culture is responsible for deep social malaise. The main characteristics of this condition are an exaggerated and widespread preoccupation with social impact, the nurturing of the desire for acclaim and reward over and above achievement, and an unbalanced interest in social relations with surfaces over depth. It goes without saying that this media reaction is contradictory. For just as the media condemns the culture of celebrity, it profits from it and expands it through news items, special features, op-ed (editorial opinion) pieces, documentaries, interviews and various other items of journalistic data.

Putting this to one side, media reaction and the public disquiet related to it, suggests that contemporary society is subject to 'fame attack'. That is, a psycho-social pathology that produces negative social tendencies and types of dysfunctional behaviour. This attack is the unintended consequence of the pre-eminence of the PR-media complex and the enlargement of networks of para-social communication. The relevant social transformation is that primary relationships based in face-to-face relationships with families, friends and communities are being supplanted with secondary relations involving figures of esteem on radio, television, film and the internet.

Social psychologists argue that vulnerable and isolated people now suffer from personality disorders and various other morbid systems related to dependencies on celebrity culture. McCutcheon, Lange and Houron (2002) have coined the term 'celebrity worship syndrome'. This refers to a type of obsessive-compulsive behaviour involving general states of disassociation and borderline events. Non-pathological borderline events include: devoting excessive non-work labour to tracking celebrity news, monitoring rumours; imitating the physical appearance of stars; adopting celebrity catchphrases; writing obsessively to celebrities; and visiting the addresses or other physical settings associated with the stars.

These forms of behaviour may appear quirky and occasionally cranky to others. They are also related to narcissistic tendencies as star gazers identify over-closely with the stars of their choice and develop a sense of entitlement, self-worth, mania and a preoccupation with life full of incident and emergency. However, generally, they do not lead to the disruption of primary relations, the involvement of policing or clinical intervention.

Pathological forms of celebrity worship syndrome are quite different. The main categories are stalking and self-harm. Stalking involves intrusive attention, contact or surveillance that causes distress to the victim. It covers physical attack, being followed, having notes pinned to property, receiving unwanted gifts or unwanted telephone calls, e-mails or letters. The murders of John Lennon, Rebecca Schaefer and the Mexican Tejano singer, Selena, were all fan related. In addition, stalkers have received jail sentences, probation or referrals to psychiatric hospitals for harassing Richard Gere, Jodie Foster, Madonna, Steven Spielberg, Uma Thurman, Keira Knightley, Miley Cyrus, Britney Spears, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Janet Jackson, Kirsten Dunst and many others.

Stalking is the result of narcissistic fantasies focused upon an unattainable external object. It is perfectly normal for people to desire external objects that they do not have. However, in the case of stalking, respect for the independence of the external object is erased. The stalker acts as if he (or she) has an entitlement to control and possess the external object of desire. Celebrities are in

the high risk category for stalking because the PR-media machine portrays them to the public as super-glamorous figures. Para-social forms of communication reinforce relations of presumed intimacy between an audience and the star. This condition is intensified by the constant stream of details relating to the private lives of celebrities released by the PR-media complex. Star gazers are deluded into believing that they have preferential or intimate relations with celebrities and are unable to draw the line between reasonable and unreasonable conduct.

Self-harm refers to cases of self-mutilation, attempted suicide and suicide related to celebrity dependency. Star gazers may engage in this behaviour when a) a celebrity dies, b) they realise that the social distance between the celebrity and themselves can never be bridged, or c) they over-identify with vicissitudes of the star's career, so that a crisis for the star is translated into a crisis in their own lives.

Social psychologists estimate that up to one-third of the population have symptoms of some form of celebrity worship syndrome (McCutcheon, Lange and Houron 2002). This supports the proposition that celebrity culture is now as much a part of *habitus* as family and community. Further, it adds weight to the more controversial argument that the centrality of para-social communication in contemporary Western society means that primary relations are being supplanted by secondary relations.

The social reaction to celebrity culture does not end with an account of the issue of celebrity worship syndrome. The question of social malaise extends to celebrities. To put it directly, celebrities are also regarded to suffer symptoms of fame attack. Fowles (1992) has compared mortality data pertaining to 100 US celebrities and compared it with the average for the US population. He found that celebrities have lower levels of life expectancy. In 1992 the average death rate for Americans was 71.9 years. For celebrities it was 58.7. More recent work compared survival rates of celebrity musicians and matched them to general health data in Europe and North America (Bellis et al. 2007). It reports that pop stars who experienced 3–25 years of fame have significantly higher levels of mortality (more than 1.7 times) than demographically matched populations in the UK and USA. The higher mortality rates found by Fowles (1992) and Bellis et al. (2007) are explained as a result of high stress, high-risk environments in which the use of alcohol, drugs, travel and hazardous behaviour is higher than in the mean population. The conclusion is that fame can be a killer.

Fame is associated with gigantic economic reward, sexual opportunity, political influence and cultural acclaim. These experiences are from ordinary. Psychologists argue that the acquisition of fame is associated with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). The main features of this condition are a grandiose sense of self-importance, vanity, an acute sense of entitlement and a

supercilious, arrogant manner. Pinsky and Young (2009) argue that the highly public dysfunctional and self-destructive behaviour of celebrities like Lindsay Lohan, Britney Spears, Nicole Richie and Paris Hilton are textbook examples of NPD. Other recent examples of celebrity behaviour that appear to suggest an exaggerated sense of entitlement, arrogance and grandiose self-importance, include Winona Ryder's conviction for shoplifting US\$5,500 worth of goods from a Beverly Hills department store in 2002; Charlie Sheen's arrest for criminal mischief following an incident of domestic violence in 2009; Mel Gibson's anti-semitic outburst after being arrested by police for a traffic offence in 2006 and his menacing phone calls to his partner Oksana Grirorieva in 2010; and Tiger Woods, who initially denied allegations of adultery, before making a damaging public apology to the media in 2010.

Conclusion

Although celebrity is often portrayed in progressive terms as bringing groups, cultures and generations together, the crux of the relationship is social inequality. The essence of the star is to be categorically distant and remote from ordinary people (Castles 2008). In his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Rousseau (1984: 114) observed, '[h]e who sings or dances the best, he who is most handsome, the strongest, and most adroit or the most eloquent becomes the most highly regarded'. This is an embryonic statement of what we now call achieved celebrity. For as Rousseau goes on to remark, the inequality of talents and accomplishments is the basis for economic division and social domination. In this sense, fame is universal in the human condition. There will always be someone who sings or dances the best, is most handsome, strongest, most adroit and most eloquent.

For students of culture, the main challenge is not to address the nature of talents. It is to examine how accomplishments are developed, judged and distributed. First and foremost this is a question of the representation and coding of celebrity. In Western capitalist society this requires us to focus deeper attention on the role of the PR-media complex. Today, and for some time past, this is the gateway to fame. While it is true that the internet offers new opportunities for building celebrity through cooperative, non-commercial forms of labour, it would be foolish to regard the PR-media complex as anything other than pivotal (Ewen 1996).

Celebrity is a source for good as well as the seed of social malaise. The same mechanisms of coding and representation that bring Mother Teresa and Nelson Mandela to our attention transmit the antics of Paris Hilton, Kanye West, Lindsay Lohan and Pete Doherty. Bernays (1928) was right in holding that a society organised around print and telecommunications requires leaders and

opinion-makers that are different in kind from traditional society. Most concretely, ordinary people now recognise figures of esteem to possess talent and accomplishment rather than, or in addition to, the privileges of birth. Bernays portrayed this as a straightforward matter of finding the right leader to articulate and refine the scientifically calibrated opinions of the majority. He regarded any deviation from this default position to be a matter for the ethical code of the PR-media complex to address. At best this is a complacent position. At worst, it is an outright falsehood. Celebrity culture is not simply the reflection of talent and accomplishment. The gloves of the PR-media complex bring talent and accomplishment out of the cold, assess the wants of the audience, and construct celebrity personas that are positioned to reap high-impact responses from the public. The aim is to engineer high-impact ratings with the public as a tool to enhance product placement campaigns, encourage ordinary people to submit to informal celebrity life coaching which bears on consumption patterns, and brutally perpetuate the gap between the frontier existence lived by the famous and the lives of the masses so as to achieve political compliance.

At the same time, students of celebrity culture who conclude that the role of the PR-media complex is all that needs to be evaluated miss the point. Just as those who contend that talent and accomplishment will always out, misunderstand the nature of modern celebrity. The days have long since gone when an ascribed celebrity may stand before the public and be confident of being recognised as a figure of esteem. People of talent and accomplishment may never be recognised as achieved celebrities — not even if the *Pop Idol* or *Got Talent* franchises select and process them without getting them to the next round. Short-life and long-life celestoids would be of no public note without the PR-media complex. The intersection of individual talent, accomplishment, presumed intimacy and impudent ordinariness with the commercial dynamics of the PR-media complex — which of course reflect considerations of the state, cultural and subcultural groups — is where the cultural study of celebrity is most fruitfully located.

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17 Global Sport and the Cultural Economy of Late Capitalism

Play, spectacle, and profit

Barry Smart

- The growth of modern sport is bound up with processes of economic development, colonisation, cultural diffusion, and globalisation.
- Professionalisation and commercialisation have resulted in the ‘play-spirit’ being eroded as sport has been transformed into a serious business, into a commodity for consumption as ‘entertaining spectacle’.
- Sports fans are increasingly cast as consumers of live or media-represented sports events, sport merchandise, and product marketing by corporate sponsors — in all major professional sports, expanding global markets constitutes a priority.

Introduction: globalisation and the cultural economy of modern sport

Modern professional sport has existed for well over a century. After taking root in a limited number of sports in Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century, professional sport spread in the course of the twentieth century across the world to encompass virtually all areas of competitive sporting endeavour, a corollary of which has been a growing commercial ethos, exemplified by increasing interest from commercial corporations, sponsors and communications media, and the development of sport into a major industry — a lucrative business with a significant global profile and presence (Cornwell and Amis 2005; Smart 2005).

Most, but not all, modern sports have their cultural roots in Europe, a good many in England, which has been identified as the most significant cultural setting for the early development, nurturing, and diffusion of modern sports (Elias 1986). From the late nineteenth century, along trading routes travelled by merchants, businessmen, engineers and other workers, as well as through processes of colonisation and settlement by servicemen, their families, administrators,

teachers, and all the other support staff and personnel who migrated to overseas territories, modern sports were transported around the world as part of the cultural cargo carried by global flows of people (Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001; Smart 2005). Association football, now widely regarded as the world's most popular sport, 'the people's game', provides one appropriate example. Reflecting on the period from 1870 to the mid 1920s Giulianotti and Robertson (2009: 7) describe how the game spread from England along trading routes through processes of cultural diffusion, how the game was 'taught, organized and popularized' and 'became embedded within the popular cultures of Europe and South America, and in "Europeanized" parts of Africa, Asia, and North America', and eventually came to be designated 'the only truly global game' and envied for its universal appeal (Annan 2006).

Cultural diffusion, a seemingly unavoidable corollary of processes of colonisation and settlement, also led to cricket, which has a long history and deep roots in the English countryside and is arguably 'the world's first modern team sport' (Marqusee 2010), becoming firmly established in a number of 'colonial' countries which subsequently attained full membership status in the International Cricket Council, notably India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, South Africa, West Indies, Australia and New Zealand (Birley 2000; Kaufman and Patterson 2005). However, cricket was not merely an incidental part of the cultural cargo of colonisation, it was regarded by 'empire-builders as part of the necessary civilising process they were bestowing on untamed lands and their uninstructed peoples' (Birley 2000: 164). Lord Harris, formerly Under-Secretary for India in Lord Salisbury's UK Government, on becoming Governor of Bombay in 1890, declared that he intended to continue to dedicate himself, as he had in England, to the 'promotion of cricket' and added that the noble game had 'done more to consolidate the Empire than any other influence' (Birley 2000: 164). Yet while cricket might have once embodied quintessentially English values and been regarded as highly conducive to the education of 'oriental people on western lines', along with other modern sports it has been subject to significant and continuing processes of economic and cultural transformation. With the benefit of hindsight we can see that the promotion of cricket in India has proven to be a great success, so much so that by early in the twenty-first century India was acknowledged to be 'the epicentre and champion of the modern game', the most significant source of world cricket's revenues (accounting for some 70 per cent of the total), and widely, if not universally, regarded as the leading influence in and on the game (Marqusee 2010; Wilby 2009). Yet the way cricket has become increasingly subject to the globalising cultural economy of late capitalism has also aroused considerable concern, leading one critic to comment that the game's traditions are being rapidly eroded:

[g]lobalisation, in sport as in economics, can be cruelly destructive of tradition. It favours mass production over craft skills, and

international brands over long-established local names. Through TV and the internet, cricket, like football, can now reach a global audience, and the instant excitement and simplicity of Twenty20 — which, some think, might even catch on in America or China — make it a more sellable form of the game than the subtleties of Test matches. (Wilby 2009)

The formation of the Indian Premier League (IPL), based on the English Premier League and the US National Basketball Association League, has constituted a watershed moment in the development of cricket. With the IPL's establishment in 2008 'fast cricket' had well and truly arrived. Twenty20 cricket — one day, twenty overs and one innings per team — had been introduced in England in 2003, but its full potential was only realised with the formation of the IPL, which was sanctioned by the International Cricket Council and involved eight franchises being sold by the Cricket Control Board of India to private owners (including Bollywood actors and actresses, businessmen, media moguls, and corporations) whose teams, representing cities or regions, were composed of the best players from around the world, irrespective of nationality, and for whom franchise owners had to bid at an open auction. Described as a 'heady cocktail of sports, entertainment and business' the IPL has generated revenue streams from the sale of television rights (Sony Max and World Sport Group reportedly paid US\$1.026 billion for the global media and production rights) and online video, mobile broadcasting and streaming rights (purchased by Global Cricket Ventures, Google, and Apalya Technologies), on ground sponsorships (Pepsi reportedly paid US\$12.5 million for official beverage partner status for a five-year period), for strategic time outs and umpires (Kingfisher Airlines paid US\$26.17 million for a five-year deal sponsoring the umpires), as well as from the screening of matches in bars. Add in the calculatingly choreographed elements designed to make IPL's version of Twenty20 spectacular — including scantily dressed cheerleaders dancing erotically to music, as well as machines pumping flames into the sky when a four is scored and fireworks when a six is hit — and it is clear that entertainment values have been fully embraced within 'fast cricket'. Virtually a metaphor for an emerging India, IPL Twenty20 cricket has achieved considerable international appeal and acquired significant economic value, in total the IPL industry 'events "eco-system"' has been estimated to be worth in the region of US\$4 billion (Indian Premier League 2010).

In the course of the twentieth century, increasingly it has been 'the empire of capital' (Woods 2003) and the growth of the communications industry, especially television and satellite broadcasting, which have transformed modern sports and accelerated their global diffusion. The unrivalled universal appeal of sport makes it an invaluable vehicle for capital's insatiable appetite for and relentless pursuit of global markets, as Rupert Murdoch categorically confirmed when he addressed the annual meeting of News Corporation in Adelaide in 1996,

[w]e have the long-term rights in most countries to major sporting events and we will be doing in Asia what we intend to do elsewhere in the world, that is, *use sports as a 'battering ram'* and a lead offering in all our pay television operations. (cited in Milliken 1996, emphasis added)

The increase in international tournaments and global sports events began in the late nineteenth century, most significantly with the establishment in 1896 of the IOC Summer Olympic Games held in Athens. It then gathered momentum from the early decades of the twentieth century, the next major development being the first International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) World Cup tournament held in Uruguay in 1930. Along with rapidly increasing appreciation on the part of global corporations of the unrivalled economic potential and market access modern sport represented — and coupled with later innovations in communications technology which made global satellite broadcasting possible — these events have radically transformed the culture and economy of modern sport. Markets for sports events and sports goods are now truly global. Teams, athletes, and players have acquired global fan-bases. High-profile international sports events routinely attract substantial numbers of spectators from around the world and real-time television transmission of them regularly draws huge global audiences. For example, the Athens Summer Olympic Games of 2004 reportedly 'established global viewing records' estimated at 3.9 billion people, and constituted 'the most watched television event of the year' (IOC 2004: 6, 8; Day 2004). In 2006 the FIFA World Cup held in Germany 'generated over 73,000 hours of dedicated [television] programming', was broadcast on 376 channels in 214 countries, and the coverage was judged to be 'the most extensive to date' (FIFA 2006).

The play-spirit and the business of global sport

From traditional roots in pre-modern ritual pastimes and related cultural practices the institution of modern professional sport has become an integral part of the late capitalist economy and now occupies a very prominent place in modern social life. However, the economic and cultural processes to which sports have been subjected have led analysts to lament what has been lost and to express particular concern about the ways in which sport has been transformed as it has been commercialised and turned into entertaining spectacle.

It has been argued that as modern sport developed from the late nineteenth century 'increasing systematisation and regimentation', along with a growth in professionalism and subsequently commercialism, meant the 'play-quality' associated with longstanding cultural pastimes and sport-like leisure activities was compromised, or as Huizinga (1949: 198) prefers, was 'inevitably lost', for the 'spirit of the professional' and a commercial sporting ethos are considered

not to be compatible with the 'play-spirit'. Huizinga argues that modern sport has become increasingly subject to rationalisation and is now overly preoccupied with discipline, training, and competitiveness, with success or 'winning at all costs', frequently to the detriment of the quality of performance, and often at the cost of freedom of expression and creativity in the way a game is played. From this standpoint sport is considered to have lost much of its sacred cultural quality, its 'spontaneity and carelessness'; its aura has been tarnished as it has become 'profane', and its play-spirit is considered to have 'undergone almost complete atrophy' (Huizinga 1949: 198). Professionalisation and commercialisation have dramatically transformed sport, as Huizinga argues, but his criticism of modern sports for their seriousness and competitiveness is misconceived for these qualities are common attributes of all sport-like activities, they were prominent in the games of classical antiquity, were very much a feature of the ancient Olympics, and might be argued to be intrinsic elements in all sporting activities (Spivey 2006). Indeed it might be countered that it is in fact competitiveness that provides sport with its necessary 'spirit'.

In 1977 Christopher Lasch offered a broadly comparable critique of what he described at the time as the increasing 'corruption of sport'. Lasch's essay, later revised and republished with the title *The Degradation of Sport* (1991), was written just before the dawn of a new era for modern sport, at a point at which sport was beginning to be radically transformed by innovations in communication technology that would mean it would never be quite the same again. In 1979 Bill Rasmussen, taking advantage of the potential made available by satellite technology and the television transmission and reception possibilities it opened up, established the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) and effectively initiated a process of profound cultural and economic change that has subsequently transformed virtually all professional sports (Halberstam 2001).

An international dimension had become an increasingly significant feature of modern sport from the late nineteenth century. At that point the internationalisation of modern sport was exemplified by the formation of international governing bodies and organisations, as well as the growth of international sporting exchanges and competitions. The development of increasingly more powerful and influential means of communication through the course of the twentieth century, especially radio, cinema newsreel, and then television, as well as the increasing availability from mid-century of jet air travel (which made a significant increase in the frequency of international sporting tournaments possible and thereby radically transformed the sporting calendar), contributed significantly to the growing global diffusion of modern sport (Smart 2005). In the early 1950s, before the development of jet airline travel, individual competitors and teams generally travelled to sports events by coach, train, or boat. Participation in international events, matches and tournaments often

involved travelling great distances and proved costly in terms of time. For example, when the first FIFA World Cup tournament was held in 1930 in Uruguay only a few European nations took part, a consequence of the distance and the time involved in travelling to and from the tournament. France, Belgium and Romania, three of the European teams taking part, travelled on the same boat, setting sail from Barcelona on 22 June and only arriving in Montevideo on 4 July (FIFA 2010). The Australian cricket team that toured England in 1948 left Fremantle on 19 March, and after a brief stop-over in Colombo, where they played one match, arrived at Tilbury on 16 April (Perry 2009). While the playing schedules of all professional sports — athletics, soccer, tennis, cricket, rugby and formula one — have become increasingly dependent on, indeed would be impossible without, jet travel (Courier 2004), it was the advent of live transmission of sports events, wherever and whenever they happened to be taking place, to viewing audiences around the world, courtesy of satellite television broadcasting, that made modern sport truly global in scale and scope and turned high-profile sporting figures into global celebrities.

The entry of ESPN and satellite television coverage transformed sports events initially in America and subsequently around the world. As Halberstam (2001: 128) notes, the technological innovations associated with the development of satellite television transmission introduced ‘a profound cultural change ... the future of sports had arrived’. With respect to the impact on the sporting world, the introduction and development of satellite television broadcasting (and later the internet and mobile streaming) does appear to have turned the planet into a virtual global sports village and to have created ‘conditions of extreme interdependence on a global scale’ as Marshall McLuhan (1967: 289; see also 1973: 12–13) speculated would be the case. Sporting competitions and tournaments, sports teams, and individual sport competitors can now be seen in action, live, in real time, around the world, by anyone with access to satellite television transmission or internet connection, a development that has significantly expanded global markets for sports events and merchandise as well as sport endorsement and sponsorship activity, and in consequence has radically transformed the cultural economy of late modern sport.

The processes identified by Lasch (1991: 108, 117–18) that were leading to the degeneration of sport into ‘spectacle’ — including the increasing ‘intrusion of the market’, escalation in the value of players’ contracts and financial rewards and the conferring of ‘instantaneous stardom’ and celebrity status — have increased exponentially in the intervening period as sport has become even more of a business and high-profile sportsmen and women have become increasingly indistinguishable from professional entertainers in the film and music industries. Other developments noted by Lasch to be features of professional sport in America at the time have also become increasingly evident elsewhere. In particular, rivalries between sports teams are no longer confined merely to

playing success on the pitch or court, but now extend to ‘a struggle for shares of the market’, and increasingly athletes and players seek to further their own interest, market their ability and sell their talent to the highest bidder, adopting a ‘business-like approach’, employing agents and public relations and media advisers. This is a development which has eroded any remaining vestiges of ‘local loyalty’ and fundamentally transformed the relationship between players and fans, and therefore between players and community (Lasch 1991: 118).

Leaving home and not alone: LeBron James takes the Heat

An appropriate contemporary example of the way in which local loyalty has been eroded is provided by LeBron James, formerly regarded as ‘the hometown hero’, the King of Akron, Ohio, and subsequently described as ‘a star member of a new breed of sportsmen and women who could be called “athlete corporations”’ (BBC News 2008). James’s move from his local hometown basketball team, the Cleveland Cavaliers, to the Miami Heat in 2010 prompted fans to accuse him of disloyalty, cowardly betrayal, and being heartless and callous, and led to them symbolically burning replica James jerseys in anger at his decision to leave.

James claimed to be leaving to achieve greater playing success, at the time he had not won the National Basketball Association (NBA) Championship, but unsubstantiated press reports of his lucrative new contract and the taxation benefits of living in Miami rather than Akron (estimated at between US\$6 million and US\$8 million) suggested that the cash nexus may also have played a part. As a ‘free agent’ and the NBA’s current two-time ‘Most Valuable Player’, James was in the driving seat and in true sporting celebrity fashion chose prime-time television to reveal where he would be playing the following season. On ESPN in a one-hour ‘Decision’ special, James revealed to his interviewer Jim Gray that he would be moving to the Miami Heat to join two other NBA superstars, Dwayne Wade and Chris Bosh, both of whom had signed matching contracts in 2006 to ensure they were ‘free agents at the same time’ as James (*Sydney Morning Herald* 2010).

The reaction of fans and critical observers to James’s decision to leave the Cavaliers for the Heat is revealing of the ways in which professional sport has changed as it has become more and more closely articulated with big business and entertainment, and exemplifies the rapidly increasing disparity between the life-worlds of high-profile professional sportsmen and women and the ordinary sports fans who purchase the tickets, television subscriptions and merchandise. Fans are now effectively constituted as ‘consumers’ of spectacularly staged sports productions and team or club merchandise, and in the case of television coverage of matches they are cast as virtual *extras* and, quite literally, are

charged to provide stadium atmosphere. As one critical observer commented on the erosion of traditional sporting values and the changing relationship between fans and players in the wake of James's decision to jump ship and forsake his hometown fans: 'Basketball is about more than winning — it is about honour. It is about respect. It is about loyalty to the game, to your teammates and to your city' (Willingham 2010).

Increasingly the reality for players and teams in all professional sport is that success, fame, money and market share is what matters above everything else and it is becoming increasingly rare for professional teams to field players from the local community or region (Willingham 2010). Indeed, in pursuit of sporting success and financial return sports teams are increasingly adopting a cosmopolitan approach to player recruitment, employing global scouting networks to source potentially appropriate additions to playing squads and hoping to discover individuals who possess not only the skills and abilities to be successful as players but also, as a bonus, the cultural credentials to further develop existing markets or open up new, or relatively underdeveloped, overseas markets. Yao Ming's move in 2002 from Shanghai to the NBA to join the Houston Rockets as 'overall first pick' provides an appropriate example (Wang 2004). It has been suggested that Yao Ming has had the greatest economic impact on the NBA of any new recruit since Michael Jordan and that his 'selling power breaks down national boundaries' (Smart 2012; Wang 2004: 264). Designated 'the child of globalization', Yao Ming has come to be regarded as the cultural icon of 'an ever-globalizing NBA' which in the course of the 2008/9 season included 77 overseas players drawn from more than 32 countries (NBA 2009; Wang 2004: 263). In respect of players what now matters is how good they are, what their contracts might cost, and also how much value they will add to the brand by increasing market exposure and share, rather than where they were raised and whether they have any particular affinity with the local community, region, or nation in which the team or club is located. The English Premier League provides an additional appropriate example of the continuing globalisation of player recruitment. In 2010 only 40 per cent of the playing staff at league clubs was of English nationality and since the formation of the Premier League (in 1992) it has not been unusual for teams selected for matches to contain no English players whatsoever (Jackson 2010).

LeBron James leaving the Cleveland Cavaliers for the Miami Heat constitutes a relatively local move — Ohio to Florida — when placed alongside the number of sporting competitors who have moved from one country to another and changed their nationality. For example, the current England cricket team has two players, Kevin Pietersen and Jonathan Trott, who switched allegiance from South Africa. In 1999 Qatar reportedly paid '[US]\$1 million to the Bulgarian weightlifting federation for eight athletes' and since 1992 US Olympic teams have included at least fifty athletes who have previously represented other countries. In addition,

Chinese table tennis players are now competing for various countries and Kenyan cross country runners are bearing the colours of a number of Middle-Eastern states in international athletic competitions. As Matthew Syed (2010) has summarised the current situation, 'national heroes are changing citizenship, passports are being swapped, and elite athletes are being traded like commodities', such is the cultural economy of sport in late modern capitalism.

Professionalised, hyper-competitive and global in scale and scope, modern sport is now organised — indeed relentlessly driven — by a commercial ethos that has transformed the institution as a whole into a lucrative business, an influential wealth-generating industry, and a spectacular and compelling form of live entertainment. It is highly valued on all counts by global communications media and commercial corporations eager to draw on sport's unrivalled cultural appeal and capacity to produce stars and celebrities and expand global markets, especially for pay-TV programming and the advertising and marketing revenue that is a corollary, and, not least, the sale of consumer goods and services (Smart 2005, 2007). Sport, as the deputy managing director of International Sport and Leisure remarked, has the capacity to cross borders, to transcend cultural differences and language barriers, and appeal to people irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, and increasingly, religious belief, and in consequence is rightly considered to be of unequalled commercial value (Smart 2007: 132). In sum, modern sport constitutes a rare commodity, a cultural universal with a growing global economic appeal and value.

Global sports business and industry forums

There are many signs of the growing significance of global sport within the cultural economy of late capitalism. In 2007 a Global Sport Summit was launched by The Economist Group. The 2008 report, 'Innovation v tradition: The quest for growth', published in association with the National Football League (NFL) and with ESPN as the lead sponsor, makes reference to how the sports industry has been experiencing substantial global growth as 'huge new audiences' have been generated for live and televised events (The Global Sport Summit 2008). Soccer and basketball are specifically identified as having a 'global fan-base' and, in consequence, to be an attractive proposition for sponsors and broadcasters, and other sports are noted to be aspiring to build a comparable international profile. The summit, taking place against the backdrop of a global financial crisis, had as its focus what further might be done to generate 'new overseas markets' and broaden and expand the audience and fan-base for the sport industry as a whole. Sport, like any other industry within a capitalist economy, has 'need of a constantly expanding market for its products ... it must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere' and it is proving to be remarkably successful in so doing (Marx and

Engels 1968: 83). The report makes reference to strategies employed by the NFL in the US to expand overseas, proposals being considered by the Premier League in England to further increase the game's global exposure, and notes that there are markets that have not yet been exploited: 'huge countries that have not yet been tapped in terms of their audience potential' (The Global Sport Summit 2008: 4).



Figure 17.1 Global sporting events: beautiful games or beautiful business?

The 2009 summit report identified a number of developments worthy of note and action. These include the opportunities overseas markets represent as home markets approach saturation, with the proviso that while developments in communications make reaching global audiences easier, it is important to respond appropriately to local conditions, to 'make the game relevant to local fans'. A further qualification contained in the report is that while the generation of new markets may be regarded as a corollary of the globalisation of sport, so is increasing competition as local or national sports find themselves pitched against global interlopers promoting their own tournaments, leagues, stars and merchandise, competing for fan-base, share of disposable income dedicated to leisure pursuits, and television audiences. The report also notes how difficult the battle for the 'entertainment dollar' is becoming 'as audiences become more fragmented' and how hard it is to 'monetize new media' and convince younger people to pay for online content (The Global Sport Summit 2009). A further sign of the increasing economic significance of the global sport industry was the inaugural meeting of a parallel forum, the Global Sports Industry Congress, also

held in London in October 2009. The sports industry was estimated at the time to be worth in the region of US\$500 billion with further growth anticipated, led by 'emerging sport nations', specifically countries in the Middle East, Central Asia, Eastern Europe, the Far East and Africa, whose economies were expected to have high growth rates, and who would anticipate being the beneficiaries of lucrative returns deriving from prestigious global sporting events they would have hosted or would be looking forward to hosting, including FIFA World Cups in South Africa (2010) and Brazil (2014), the Commonwealth Games (Delhi 2010), the Winter Olympics (Sochi 2014), and the Summer Olympics (Rio de Janeiro 2016) (Eventica Communications 2009).

Concluding remarks: sports marketing and the cultural economy of late capitalism

The Asia Pacific region has been identified as an important focus for sports marketing. In particular India — where cricket is far and away the most popular sport — has been described as a relatively underdeveloped sports market with a significant untapped potential. With a population estimated in 2010 to be in the region of 1.15 billion (the second largest after China) and projected to top 1.5 billion by 2030 (making it the largest in the world) it is not difficult to see why India is attracting the attention of various sporting interests, including leagues, clubs, and associated marketing organisations. A democratic polity with a rapidly developing economy (one which is estimated to have grown by 6.2 per cent over the period 1997–2005 and by 7.9 per cent in 2007), India has demonstrated that while cricket has secured more than 70 per cent of sports marketing revenues there is significant growth in interest in other sporting fields and events and considerable scope for additional commercial activity to support their development (United Nations 2007: 147). From the late 1990s golf has been growing in India and it gained considerable momentum from the establishment in 2006 of the Professional Golf Tour of India which now hosts four Asian Tour events and has sold exclusive broadcasting rights to Network 18, a media conglomerate. The Premier Hockey League and the All India Football Federation I-League have attracted similar media and sponsor interest and in 2007 the Force India Formula One team was established. In October 2010 the XIX Commonwealth Games were held in New Delhi and in addition the city was chosen to host the first India Grand Prix in 2011.

Further significant signs of sports marketing activity in India include Manchester United beginning to explore coaching and promotional possibilities, with the Kick Off programme in 2007 backed by the All India Football Federation, as well as the establishment in 2009 of 'upmarket bar restaurants' with video screens showing matches and booths selling club merchandise, and the NBA staging a 'Basketball without Borders' outreach programme in New Delhi in

2008 with the Basketball Federation of India (Ahmed 2009; NBA 2010; Page 2007). Other Premiership football clubs, including Liverpool, Chelsea and Arsenal, have also sought to secure a place in the Indian sports market by setting up football development, coaching, and scouting initiatives. The hope being, as a CEO at one of the clubs commented, that ‘India can experience the same sort of growth pattern in football terms that it has set itself in economic terms’ (Wilson 2009).

In 2009 India was described as a nascent market, ‘on the cusp of a major revolution in sports’, and basketball was identified as both a potential catalyst and beneficiary, as possessing an intrinsic appeal to the country, but one which had yet to be really exploited, and it was remarked that the NBA had decided to ‘come to India’ to make the game viable in ‘spectatorship and monetization’ (Memon 2009). However, after cricket it is actually association football rather than basketball that has made most headway in India, with television companies battling to secure telecast rights for prestigious international football events, to satisfy what in practice has been a longstanding grassroots passion for the game, and corporate sponsors, including Panasonic and Coca-Cola, recognising football’s increasing popularity and proceeding to offer financial and promotional support (Irani 2010).

Football’s growing profile in India demonstrates the increasingly close articulation between sport, business and the media within the cultural economy of late capitalism. The growing popularity of the game means that more young fans are wearing Messi or Ronaldo shirts, retailers are stocking up on Beckham merchandise, football players and events are being used to market all manner of goods to consumers, and matches are being shown at multiplexes or transmitted to television audiences, with around one hundred million Indian fans estimated to have watched the 2010 FIFA World Cup from South Africa. Although that represents only one-sixth of the Indian viewers that cricket might attract, football is considered to be an attractive commercial proposition to media organisations such as ESPN Star Sports, who were anticipating a 300 per cent increase in revenues compared to the 2006 World Cup, and sponsors such as Vodafone and Airtel DTH, Nokia, Samsung, and Honda, as well as advertising spot buyers, including Pernod Ricard, Micromax, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited and Coca-Cola, who associated themselves closely with the event. In the view of marketing agencies, football delivers good commercial returns and the responses of Adidas India, Coca-Cola India, McDonald’s, Sony India, and other comparable commercial corporations confirms that this is the case (Singh and Mukherjee 2010).

Institutionalised sport is a very popular — possibly the most popular — cultural form, one that occupies a prominent place in the lives of a majority of people around the world. From the late nineteenth century it became increasingly subject

to processes of professionalisation and commercialisation, and now its cultural being is inextricably bound up with the political economy of late capitalism. As the twentieth century developed, sport was increasingly 'drawn into capitalist production and circulation' and now displays more and more signs of 'the invasive influences of late capitalism' (Andrews 2004: 4; Mandel 1978: 393). Sport today is imbued with corporate values and subject to the logic of capital accumulation and profit maximisation; it has become a multi-faceted commodity for consumption in its own right and, in turn, its universal cultural popularity provides international corporations with the most effective means for global consumer marketing and brand promotion campaigns. In short, the cultural being of late modern sport is, in every sense, all-consuming.

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18 Technology, Popular Culture and Kraftwerk

Bruce Cohen

- Sociology challenges the determinist view that technology is neutral and naturally progressive. Instead, technology can only be fully understood with reference to the social, cultural and political processes of a given society.
- Technology can be seen to both *socially shape* society as well as being *socially shaped* by society.
- An important framing of technology in late capitalist society is through its relationship with popular culture. As people increasingly define themselves through practices of consumption, identifications are made with reference to mass-produced technological artefacts such as the automobile.
- The German electronic band Kraftwerk is a relevant example of a popular culture text which draws on a 'technological framework'.
- Inspired by the 'industrial sublime' and the consumption of technological artefacts, it is argued that Kraftwerk can only be fully understood with reference to the specific social, economic and political context of late 1960s and early 1970s Germany.
- It is concluded that, while there are points of resistance, the demands of capitalism and the culture industry remain dominant in the production and consumption of technology and other cultural texts.

Introduction

You could hear the drop of the stamp-forges, and I'd be laying in bed at night, just kinda tapping on the headboard, putting the extra rhythm into the stamp. (Bill Ward, Black Sabbath drummer, cited in Harrison 2010: 150)

Technology and the industrial aesthetic are deeply entwined with forms of popular culture. Black Sabbath, a 1970s heavy metal band from Birmingham, is just one example. Harrison (2010) sees their music as reflecting a working class rage at a life built around dead-end factory jobs (their singer, Ozzy Osbourne, worked on an assembly line testing car horns). Tony Iommi, Black Sabbath's guitarist, had been the victim of an industrial accident at the local Lucas car

plant which cut the end of his fingers off; this led to a different style of playing which was later credited as *the* defining heavy metal sound (Harrison 2010: 149–50). As we have seen in the above quote, the drum sound of the band was also heavily influenced by the sound of the stamp-forges at a nearby factory.

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how technology and popular cultural texts interact with one another. It will be demonstrated that, far from being neutral, technology is intrinsically tied to social and cultural relations, as well as issues of production, consumption and power in capitalist society. Likewise, through a discussion of the German electronic band Kraftwerk, it will be shown that the band are not an apolitical, neutral, avant garde text which can be considered as ‘above’ society, but rather a cultural text which is embedded within social and cultural relations, as well as adaptive to the interests of commercialism and commodification.

Defining technology

A common-sense definition of ‘technology’ suggests that it is ‘a specific class of objects’ (Kirkpatrick 2004: 4). This definition is tied to the assumption that technology in western society denotes things or products that allow us to live more efficient and fuller lives (such as the computer and the internet, the mobile phone and photocopier, the microwave and the television set). This determinist understanding conceptualises technology as neutral and inherently progressive. Thus, technology is autonomous, linear and free from cultural and ideological interference.

Drawing on Science, Technology and Society Studies, Critical Theory challenges the view that technology can only be conceptualised in this way. Additional to technology as object, it is argued that technology should also be considered as a *form of knowledge* and as a *process*. This suggests that technology is fully enmeshed in social, cultural and economic processes of society. Social criticism of technology has drawn attention to a number of issues which challenge the determinist approach. Feenberg (cited in Kirkpatrick 2004: 2), for instance, perceives three problems of technologies: firstly, they can be negative in and of themselves (for example, weapons of mass destruction), secondly, they can be used in negative ways, which disadvantage human beings (for example, the production line), and thirdly, they can be designed and produced for the systematic advantage of certain social groups, while excluding or disadvantaging other groups.

Fundamentally, sociologists of technology argue that technology is *socially shaped* by society (for example, by the needs of the marketplace and consumerism), as well as *socially shaping* (for example, the effects of the

seemingly useful and mundane plastic bag on our environment) (Matthewman 2007; see also Whelan, in this volume). Far from being neutral and naturally progressive, when technology is theorised as a process and a form of knowledge as well as an object it cannot be separated from social and cultural meaning-making. As Kirkpatrick (2004: 3) argues:

[i]n capitalist society non-technologists encounter technical objects only after they have been codified as such. This is how people know what they are and how to respond to them appropriately. We want to say that there is an essence of technology that precedes all such codifications, but such a thing is impossible: All human experiences of technology have been codified in ways that reflect parallel systems of social organisation and culture. The commonality we seek must be located here, at the level of patterns of organisation and human orientation.

Thus, in critically analysing the intersection between popular culture and technology we need to be aware that both are fundamentally shaped and made meaningful through social and cultural processes. Such relations are highly value-laden in capitalist society, with some discourses on technology being privileged while others are marginalised.

Using the example of the band Kraftwerk as a popular culture text can further our critical reading of technology by drawing on the idea of a 'technological frame', as outlined by Pinch and Trocco (2002: 309–10) in their discussion of the development of the Moog synthesizer. This term 'captures the way a whole series of practices, ideas, and values get built around a technology. It includes both the ways technologies are produced and the ways they are used and consumed'.

Technology and popular culture

An important framing of technology in late capitalist society is through its relationship with popular culture. As people increasingly come to define themselves through practices of consumption (see for example, Bauman 2000), identification of their perceived individuality and uniqueness is made with reference to mass-produced technological artefacts such as their mp3 player, iPad, or training shoes. Perhaps the primary example of the intersection between technology and popular culture is the example of the automobile. As Matthewman (2007: 338) remarks '[i]t is hard to think of a technology that has spread more rapidly or changed the world more fully than this'. Originally conceived as a machine to enable people to travel quicker from one location to another, the economic, social and cultural consequences on society have been highly significant: modern cities have been built around car use (rather than the

needs of pedestrians), and a plethora of support services have arisen to maintain and promote the car (for example, gas stations, car parks, motorways, garages, car showrooms, marketing agencies, lobby groups, and multinational oil companies). The twentieth-century environment is arguably one that was built by the car. Womack et al. (1990) note a number of negative side effects of this technology including rising oil prices, geopolitical rivalries (the occasional war or conflict to control such resources), environmental issues, congestion, the development of suburbia, increased geographical disparity in patterns of crime, and the increase in death and violence in society. As Matthewman (2007: 338) remarks, '[d]iscovery begets catastrophe' — without cars there would be no car accidents, no road rage, and so on.

Significant for our discussion here, however, is the mark such a technological artefact has had on culture. John Urry (2004) asserts that not only is the car a major item of individual consumption, it is the dominant symbol of the 'good life'; in essence, the car is the primary symbol of conspicuous consumption (for further discussion of this concept, see Veblen 1994). The car has also changed the food we eat (fast food, takeaways, and drive-throughs would not have been possible without the car), the music we listen to (and how we listen to it), the places we visit, and the movies we watch. The car symbolises individual freedom, it is a capitalist signifier with the 'freedom of the open road' being the freedom to consume automobiles, and this is reflected in countless popular culture texts. In terms of music, arguably the first rock 'n' roll record was a song about a car (*Rocket 88* by Ike Turner's Kings of Rhythm, released in 1951, an ode to the Oldsmobile 'Rocket 88'). The car/road motif has remained a strong focus in popular music from Bruce Springsteen to Kraftwerk. Yet as the car has transformed society, so society has transformed the meaning of the car. As Wollen (2002) notes, while the technology of the car has not radically changed since its invention, the design and appearance of the car has constantly changed. The car is no longer simply a functional item but has been transformed into a highly aesthetic product; the technology has been imbued with cultural significance, becoming an item of popular culture in its own right. Corporations like General Motors and Ford were quick to market cars back to the masses as symbols of success (Armi 2003). Thus we can see that the technological frame which informs such artefacts is of great importance in fully understanding the relationships between popular culture and technology. We will now explore these connections further through focusing on the electronic band Kraftwerk.

Kraftwerk: four lads that shook the (electronic) world

When investigating the 'artist' in media studies there is still a tendency to draw on notions of the 'genius'; that is, someone who transcends society and is able to produce work of a calibre that defies their historical, social and cultural location.

In the area of music, Beethoven or The Beatles might be cited as two such cases (maybe the work of Lady Gaga and Michael Jackson will also be considered as ‘genius’ in due course?). However, as David Inglis (in this volume) has noted, the terminology used and the mystique that surrounds such usage, emerged from specific economic instabilities of such cultural producers in eighteenth-century Europe. Similarly, the cultural elitism that informs notions of ‘high culture’ can be criticised for ignoring the social and cultural production of such texts, and the denial of power within language and the meaning-making associated with such claims. In analysing the aesthetic qualities of the text alone, such processes are ignored. We then rely on the value judgements of cultural ‘experts’ to inform us what is ‘art’ and worthy, what is ‘genius’, and, in contrast, what is popular culture and, consequently, worthless. A sociological investigation of art and culture must go further and analyse the political, social and cultural processes that inform production and consumption as well as definitions and reflections on the text. We will now move on to question the ‘artists’ known as Kraftwerk to demonstrate the impossibility of divorcing the aesthetic from the social, including the technological frame of electronic music production.

Kraftwerk are an electronic band from Germany who formed in the late 1960s, released 11 studio albums between 1970 and 2003, and continue to perform live today (albeit now reduced to one original member, Ralph Hütter). Their music has been both commercially and critically successful; the only German musical export that has commercially surpassed them is Rammstein, but arguably Kraftwerk have been much more influential. For example, they are often cited as a key influence on the British electronic bands of the early 1980s (such as The Human League, Depeche Mode, Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark, Duran Duran, Simple Minds, and New Order) as well as by artists as diverse as David Bowie (who dedicated a track on his *Heroes* album, ‘V-2 Schneider’, to founding member Florian Schneider), Iggy Pop, Moby, and Jay-Z and Foxy Brown (who sampled *The Man-Machine* on their single, ‘Sunshine’); Joy Division’s Ian Curtis reportedly played their album *Trans-Europe Express* before every gig, their songs have been covered by groups such as U2 (‘Neon Lights’) and Cold Play (‘Computer Love’), and — perhaps of most global significance — their influence on the development of early hip hop, drum ‘n’ bass, house, and electronic dance music is such that they are now often referred to as ‘the Godfathers of techno’ (Bussy 1993: 10). In any music critic’s top 100 albums of all time there is likely to be at least one or two Kraftwerk albums. In fact, in July 2006, *The Observer* stated that *Trans-Europe Express* (1977) was the third most influential album in the history of popular music (Pattie 2011: 1). As Pattie notes, Kraftwerk’s current position as ‘electronic pioneers’ is both ‘lofty’ and ‘secure’ (2011: 1).

The acclaim that Kraftwerk receive from commentators often draws not only on their music but on the mystique that has surrounded the band since their

beginnings. For example, the themes of most of their songs draw on technological artefacts and mundane aspects of modernism such as motorways ('Autobahn'), trains ('Trans-Europe Express'), the 'Pocket Calculator', 'Neon Lights', nuclear power and radio communication ('Radioactivity'), computers ('Computer World'), and 'Airwaves'. Not typical material for pop music. The band's name itself — Kraftwerk is the German word for 'power station' — also gives a key indication of this modernist aesthetic. The band's image can be seen as uncompromising and resistant to the demands of commercialism. This is most clearly identified by their classic song, 'The Robots'; live performances of the song see the band leave the stage and replaced by fully automated robotic versions of themselves. Most images of the band show four men, emotionless and stoic, behind their banks of electronic equipment. There is an idea of the band as present but non-present in live performances as well as in the images from their album covers. The art of Kraftwerk is closely controlled; interviews are rarely given (apart from before a live tour), they are secretive, and they present themselves as anonymous and mechanical (or robot-like). They have no identifiable celebrity status, they do not collaborate with other artists, they no longer regularly release new material (two new studio albums in the last 25 years), they sing in German, and have their own recording studio (as they have done since the early 1970s) in the undistinguished town of Düsseldorf in the industrial heart of Germany (the region known colloquially as the *Ruhrpott*). Through Hütter and Schneider, the two founding members of Kraftwerk, they exert immense control over their art and where it appears. Thus, Kraftwerk might be seen as the ultimate artists — their work is unaffected by the demands of commercial interest and the culture industry. In sum, the mystique of Kraftwerk as artists and as elite cultural producers suggests a group of geniuses who produce 'timeless music', which has been highly influential on other artists and forms of popular culture more generally. As uncompromising artists Kraftwerk have never 'sold out' to the cultural industry or the fashions of the day. They are essentially an avant garde project which has also had commercial success.

Thus, there is a familiar notion of Kraftwerk as the archetypal artists who had a vision that went beyond their own positioning in the world and that could foresee a future society of electronics, computers and digital information flows. They innovated with music and pioneered new forms of production which have remained influential to both high and popular cultural forms today. As a former member puts it, the band emerged in the middle of a 'cultural vacuum'; Kraftwerk 'suddenly appeared on the scene and did everything completely differently' (Wolfgang Flür, cited in Littlejohn 2009: 648). However, this idea of artistic serendipity will now be challenged by placing Kraftwerk within their specific political, social and cultural context. It will be demonstrated that not only is it impossible to conceive of the band existing outside of these social and

technological frameworks, but that the group's success has been a result of their adaptation to the needs of the cultural industry. That is, the band has been subject to the demands of commerce and commodification of capitalism as much as any other cultural text has.

Background: Kraftwerk and the avant garde

The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today. (Adorno, cited in Marcuse 2003)

As this often-cited quote from Adorno suggests, cultural production in post-war Germany suffered from the legacy of the Nazis and the Holocaust. Like all other institutions, art was tainted by its association with the Third Reich (1933–1945). German artists untouched by such associations had either fled the country or died in the gas chambers. Thus, for inspiration, German artists either looked to modern 'progressive' art, or romantically back to the Weimar Republic (1919–1933). Cultural texts produced by the new generation of German artists often overtly rejected the idea of a 'German culture' and a German aesthetic. For this reason German artists were particularly inspired by the avant garde artists of the 1920s and 1930s, and their questioning of the limits of art. In the area of music, conventional notions of melody and harmonic structure were largely abandoned due to their 'association with the cultural policies of the Nazi regime' (Pattie 2011: 7). Instead, the new avant garde musicians in Germany experimented with both traditional and new 'instruments' (such as vocoders) and new recording possibilities (such as the manipulation of tapes) to create new sounds.

Bored with the limitations of classical music and inspired by the work of avant garde composers and performers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Ralph Hütter and Florian Schneider were two classically trained musicians who similarly involved themselves in avant garde sound/noise experiments. This led to the production of four albums in the early 1970s (*Tone Float* — under the band name Organisation — *Kraftwerk*, *Kraftwerk 2*, and *Ralph and Florian*). The music on these albums are maybe best described as 'spacey'. The majority of tracks are psychedelic-tinged instrumentals, usually of extended duration, which oscillate between simple harmonies and radical divergences from obvious 'tonality' or 'musical tune', relying instead on repetition of specific instruments or created noise. Pattie (2011: 5) has noted the similarity in sound and performance of Kraftwerk to other German bands of this period (who collectively became associated with the unfortunate moniker of 'krautrock'); bands such as Neu! Tangerine Dream, Can, Faust and Harmonia also had a commitment to experimentation and working with emergent technologies,

producing ‘spacey’, jazz and soul-influenced progressive rock-like recordings and performances. The titles of Kraftwerk’s songs already suggested a close relationship to modern technologies and what Biddle (2004: 89) refers to as the ‘industrial sublime’ (for example *Megaheerz*, *Atom*, and *Strom* (electric power)).

The focus on industry and technological artefacts informing Kraftwerk’s musical themes can be situated within a broader social and political climate of West German society in the late 1960s and early 1970s. On the border of the iron curtain and effectively controlled by allied forces, West Germany often resembled a police state where democratic freedoms were often curtailed in the name of ‘security’ (Biddle 2004: 87). When, in the late 1960s, a new generation of young Germans began to question the involvement of their parents in the Third Reich it led to mass protests across the republic and violent clashes with state forces. The conservative governments of Chancellors Brandt and Schmidt, and the state crackdowns on political groups following the mass protests in 1968, led to the formation of left wing terrorist groups such as the Red Army Faction (RAF). The 1970s was a tense time to be young in West Germany, with regular ‘anti-terror’ raids, stop and searching of young people, and general police harassment. Together with industrial change and the coming of digital technologies, Biddle (2004: 87) notes that the ‘failings’ of 1968 led to a *Tendenzwende* (cultural change) in the country. The disillusionment with the possibilities of achieving social and political change brought about an *Innerlichkeit* (literally, an inwardness) amongst contemporary German artists. An emotional ‘flatness’ was evident in German popular culture of the 1970s, with resistance within cultural texts being reflected by an ironic displacement and a critical disengagement with politics (Biddle 2004: 82). Thus, ‘the deployment of “industrial” and automaton-like imagery’ by the new avant garde was utilised ‘in order to emphasize a “flatness” of expressive means’ (Biddle 2004: 82).

While there was a newness of approach to composition and the use of technologies by avant garde musicians in Germany, Kraftwerk had one which was markedly different from other groups. The few Kraftwerk songs that did have lyrics were ‘sung’ (or spoken) entirely in German. This was highly uncommon in the 1970s and might even have been seen as controversial at a time when overt connotations of ‘being German’ within the artistic community were to be avoided. When there were lyrics, most bands sang in English; it was considered the proper language of rock ‘n’ roll (Littlejohn 2009: 637). Such aspects of Kraftwerk have since been re-branded as part of a ‘teutonic’ and ‘German’ identity which marks the band out as unique artists. It will now be demonstrated that, through contact with the marketplace, the band left behind their avant garde roots and became a part of the culture industry.

Kraftwerk goes to market

By 1974 Kraftwerk were fully immersed in experimentation with electronic music, abandoning most traditional musical instruments on their latest album *Autobahn* (motorway), a five track album which included the title track taking up the whole of one side of the record and lasting over 20 minutes. The record was not a significant departure from the band's previous records — only the title track had lyrics, the text was sung in German, and the majority of tracks had a 'space music' and free-form style with song titles such as 'Kometenmelodie 1' (comet melody 1). As Littlejohn (2009) remarks, while the album was not 'pop' music, it turned out to be very popular. In America the title track was edited down to three and a half minutes and became a big international hit, the album made number 5 in the US charts (Littlejohn 2009: 643).

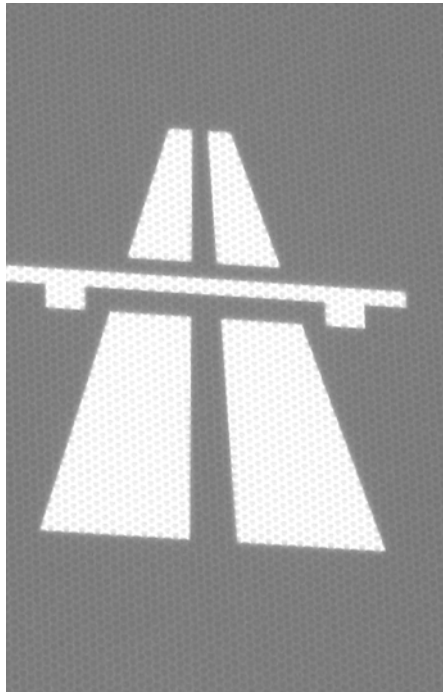


Figure 18.1 Sign for the *Autobahn*: used on the cover of the Kraftwerk album

'Autobahn' was seen as something of a novelty hit, perhaps because purely electronic records were a novelty for a mass audience at the time, and also that the band were singing in the un-rock 'n' roll language of German. The song's refrain 'wir fahr'n, fahr'n, fahr'n auf der Autobahn' (we drive, drive, drive on the motorway), makes a clear reference to one of Kraftwerk's chief American influences, the Beach Boys, and their pop hit 'Fun, Fun, Fun'. 'Autobahn' also draws on the well-worn car/road theme from American popular culture

(Littlejohn 2009: 643). Of most significance to our discussion here, the edited version of 'Autobahn' conformed to the standardised pop formula of verse-chorus-verse. As a result, Kraftwerk received considerably more radio play for this record than previous ones. As former Kraftwerk member Wolfgang Flür notes, '[o]nly when we began to structure our pieces according to the patterns of pop songs ... was Kraftwerk's music played on the radio, and as a result the group enjoyed international success and emerged from its experimental niche' (cited in Littlejohn 2009: 643). For their successful American *Autobahn* tour, Wolfgang Flür and Karl Bartos joined Ralph Hütter and Florian Schneider, completing the 'classic' Kraftwerk line-up which would last through their most successful period — in which they recorded and released the albums *Radioactivity* (1975), *Trans-Europe Express* (1977), *The Man-Machine* (1978), *Computer World* (1981) and *Electric Café* (1986) — until the early 1990s. Following the tour, the band signed with the international record label EMI.

It is here, at the juncture following the success of *Autobahn*, that Littlejohn (2009) makes his most controversial claim (and one I largely agree with): faced with the demands of the culture industry, Kraftwerk 'sell out'. The pressure to continue their commercial success and produce another 'hit' record meant that Kraftwerk had to abandon the uniqueness of their art in favour of standardised products which could be readily consumed by international audiences. To support this argument, Littlejohn (2009: 643–49) notes a number of changes which took place with *Radioactivity* (1975) and all subsequent albums, including:

- the length of the songs are reduced, with few tracks extending over five minutes;
- there are more songs on each album (*Radioactivity*, for example, contained 12 tracks);
- there is more repetition and less variation within songs;
- songs become more 'pop song'-orientated and formulaic (such as often having the verse-chorus-verse structure);
- there is an extension of the number of songs containing lyrics (from one song per album, to most songs having lyrics);
- the language of the lyrics change (English lyrics partly feature on *Radioactivity*, but from *The Man-Machine* onwards German text is used for German-speaking countries, and an English text version of the album is produced for the international market).

Although I would dispute Littlejohn's second point (in that subsequent albums following *Radioactivity* generally featured just six songs), his overall summation of Kraftwerk's loss of authentic and individual art in the face of the demand to reach bigger audiences and expand their commercial appeal is correct. The place

of oppositional art in capitalist society is always a marginal and fragile space, particularly for artists who wish to transcend national and cultural boundaries with their work. Kraftwerk eventually replicated and expanded on the success of *Autobahn*, through subsequent albums and hit records such as 'The Model', 'The Robots' and *Tour de France*. Littlejohn (2009) goes as far as to suggest that Kraftwerk's own ambivalence to this commercial success can occasionally be seen in their songs (for example, 'The Robots' or 'Showroom Dummies') — a last sign of resistance to the culture industry of which they had become an active part. In the last part of this chapter we will now examine the possibility for further signs of resistance within the cultural texts of Kraftwerk, focusing primarily on their references to the limits and unintended consequences of technology.

Texts of resistance: man against machine

In the foreword to Pascal Bussy's *Kraftwerk: Man, Machine and Music* (1993) biography he outlines a scenario at the beginning of the twenty-first century where Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider, while cycling in the Alps, launch simultaneous robot-led Kraftwerk concerts around the world via miniaturised computer devices. Although this is a continuation of the technological mythology that surrounds the band, it is a falsity. As has been demonstrated in this chapter, as a cultural text, Kraftwerk are very much a human enterprise which can be placed in a certain social and historical epoch. They were influenced by the German *Tendenzwende* of the 1970s, towards an *Innerlichkeit* expressed through avant garde musings and machinations on industrial modernism. Further, the band has also been subject to the forces of commercialisation and standardisation of product.

Rather than seeing the band as the ultimate expression of technological 'progress' leading to cyborgs and robots controlling human enterprise, Kraftwerk can instead be conceptualised as social critics of technology, who not only observe and comment on the transformative potential of technologies but also the problems of technological determinism. As Biddle (2004: 92) comments, songs like 'The Man-Machine' and 'Stimme der Energie' (the voice of energy) and albums such as *Computer World* 'seem to be pointing to a deeply contested set of concerns about agency'. The subject matter reflects a sense of loss; it is a sometimes dystopian view of advancing technologies which closely mirrors Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927). Take for example Kraftwerk's much misunderstood song 'Radioactivity' with lyrics such as 'radioactivity/is in the air for you and me'. Written at the time of burgeoning anti-nuclear and green party movements in Germany, this song was often misinterpreted as signalling Kraftwerk's support for nuclear power. Yet the composition has a sad and slow melody, with a text which can be read as both descriptive and ironic (another

line from the song states, ‘radioactivity/discovered by Madame Curie’; the nuclear scientist Marie Curie (1867–1934) eventually died of an illness contracted from her exposure to radiation) — a typical form of resistance for artists of this period. This reading was made obvious later in the band’s career when the remixed version (on *The Mix* (1991)) began with a name-check of the nuclear tragedies ‘Tschernobyl, Harrisburg, Sellafield, Hiroshima’ and added the word ‘stop!’ in front of the title. The live version (on *Minimum-Maximum* (2005)) began with a disembodied voice stating the potential for nuclear devastation due to the continued production of radioactive substances, and the original lyric ‘terminated ovulation’ was changed to ‘contaminated population’. The band has also taken part in some concerts for Greenpeace.

Kraftwerk themselves have also been quick to refute the idea that they were envisioning a utopian technologically informed future, instead the emphasis was on mass-produced and everyday items of the present. As Ralph Hütter stated in 1981, ‘we just find everything we do on the streets. The pocket calculator we find in the department stores. The autobahn we find in the first five years of our existence ... So everything is like a semi-documentary’ (cited in Cunningham 2011: 48). Typical of Kraftwerk’s cultural productions there remains both a nostalgia for the potential of industrial society as well as a deep ambivalence of its consequences. For example, the video backdrop accompanying the band’s recent live performances of *Autobahn* begins with a 1950s image of a family in a Volkswagen driving on one of the newly built German motorways through countryside with the sun shining in the background; this is transposed later in the song with gritty CCTV images of a now congested motorway system. As Pattie (2011: 9) has rightly stated of Kraftwerk, their relationship to technology has always been ‘bound up in their relation to their immediate environment; rather than using technology to map an escape route towards the further reaches of the cosmos, it is used to recreate the mechanized soundscapes of the modern, industrialized city’. It has been an approach that, while being distinctively modernist, has also been realist and sometimes resistant.

Further, the influence of the band on dance subcultures should not be ignored. Kraftwerk’s music was highly influential on the burgeoning black urban hip hop scene in the Bronx in the late 1970s and early 1980s, with Afrika Bambaataa & the Soulsonic Force sampling *Trans-Europe Express* on their classic rap record *Planet Rock* (1982). The electronic minimalism and repetitive drum rhythms of Kraftwerk’s songs often made them perfect for breakdancing and improvised rapping (for further discussion on this issue, see Toltz 2011). Thus, marginalised populations of black working class youth were appropriating commodified music and utilising it as a symbolic form of subcultural resistance to the culture industry (see Bennett, in this volume). A similar appropriation of Kraftwerk’s music took place later when the techno subculture emerged in Detroit in the mid 1980s. Developed in another city of heavy industry, this musical subculture used

the industrial and electronic aesthetic to create a deeply sampled, elongated and non-stop party music which initially drew heavily on Kraftwerk's music (see Toltz 2011: 226–28). Thus, Kraftwerk's music facilitated forms of subcultural resistance as well as, eventually, new forms of mainstream popular culture.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored some of the ways in which it is possible to theorise the interactions between technology and popular culture. Sociologists need to challenge the common-sense assumptions that technology is an inherently neutral and progressive process. Rather, technology needs to be conceptualised as being socially shaped by society, while also having the potential to shape social relations in turn. These processes are most often determined by production and consumption practices in capitalist society – some uses and some interactions with technological frames are privileged over others, just as some groups (such as the ruling classes, business elites, governments, and other institutions of social control) have more power to define the meanings and usage of technological artefacts in society. Using the example of Kraftwerk, it has been demonstrated that, while there are significant interactions with the 'industrial sublime' and technological artefacts in the production of texts, popular culture needs to be contextualised with reference to wider social and economic processes. Although there are points of resistance, these happen very much at the margins of cultural production. In late capitalism, the demands of the culture industry remain the dominant force through which we can further understand the production and consumption of cultural texts.

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19 Reality Television

Actuality, authenticity, artifice

Amy West

- The ‘reality’ in reality television is synonymous with the ordinary and the amateur, even as it self-consciously problematises this relationship.
- The reality genre resists categorisation on account of its formal diversity and ongoing evolution.
- It is argued in this chapter that reality television exemplifies trends in contemporary media towards audience interactivity, digital convergence and multi-platform delivery.
- Reality television facilitates international format adaptation and exchange in ways which both challenge and promote national identities.
- The rise of such an innovation in popular culture demonstrates a cultural fascination with ordinary experience, private lives and emotional exposure; this can be understood more broadly as part of a ‘turn’ in both media and society.

Introduction

One of a plethora of new reality programmes to appear recently is the BBC’s *Giles and Sue Live the Good Life* (2010). In this format, two well-known television presenters ‘go back in time’ to live the lives of Tom and Barbara Good, as performed by Richard Briers and Felicity Kendall in the classic 1970s sitcom *The Good Life* (1975–78). As a format which engages local celebrities, re-enacting fictional characters made famous by television actors, in the reproduction of a well-known sitcom as history, *Giles and Sue* may seem to contravene the proposition of television reality made by its programme category. However, partly because it destabilises conventional distinctions between television genres, this series epitomises the complex intersection between actuality and artifice which characterises contemporary reality programming. Despite ‘pretending to really fake the really fake’, as one acerbic reviewer (Gill 2010: 15) put it, *Giles and Sue* typifies the ease with which reality programming

blurs boundaries between fact and fiction, ordinary and celebrity, past and present, authentic experience and mannered performance.

As this example illustrates, the conjunction between reality and television is negotiated across tricky terrain. Detractors of the reality television trend have been quick to point out that so-called reality programming goes out of its way to problematise its relationship to the real (Clark 2002). Programmes have been criticised on the basis of their selection of non-normative participants (for example, the pathologically messy on *How Clean is your House?* (2003–09) and the overachievers on *The Apprentice* (2004–present)), extreme situations (for example, the contrived social encounters on *Big Brother* (2000–present) or the bizarre challenges on *Fear Factor* (2001–06)), improbable rewards (for example, a million dollars on *Survivor* (2000–present) and marriage on *The Bachelor/ette* (2002–present/2003–present)), extraordinary settings (for example, rented mansions on *America's Next Top Model* (2003–present) and privately owned mansions on *The Osbournes* (2002–05)) and manipulative production techniques (for example, editing for drama on *Wife Swap* (2003–09), and the painfully drawn-out eliminations on *Idol* (2002–present)), all of which factors are cited in contradistinction to the bold claim to being ‘reality’ made by the programmes’ generic label.

In this way, popular criticism of reality television reveals a great deal about collective assumptions as to the character and appearance of social reality. According to this logic, what is ‘real’ is what is considered to be normal, average, ordinary, everyday, familiar, relatable and commonplace. Since its inception, television has capitalised on the appeal of the ordinary to produce effects of realism and authenticity. Familiarity brings the behaviour and attitudes of people on screen close to the lived experience of the viewer and makes them credible, generating in John Ellis’s terms ‘a relationship of humanist sympathy’ (1992: 136). Domestic spaces, as represented in sitcoms and soap operas, are easily recognised and approximate the environment in which audiences are located at the time of television reception. This effect of social proximity is critical to the dynamic by which many television formats foster viewer engagement because it heightens authenticity — even when the world portrayed is fictional. Thus, ordinariness on television, however stylised, set-dressed or selective, works to certify the authenticity of the characters and events portrayed. Nowhere is this paradigm more in evidence than inside contemporary reality programming. Indeed, despite appearances to the contrary, frameworks of the ordinary, the familiar and the domestic are the very architecture of reality programming, and are common to all its various formations. The programmes cited above, as well as many others within the field, exhibit a persistent focus on intimate relationships, emotional exposure and domestic life. The ‘reality’ of reality television transpires, therefore, inside the co-ordinates of ordinary, personal experience.

This tendency in reality programming has been characterised by media theorist Graeme Turner (2010) as part of a wider media phenomenon which he terms the ‘demotic turn’, indicating a trend towards the representation of common or everyday concerns. Turner (2010: 4) argues that the twenty-first century might be defined by the ‘new visibility of ordinary people in the media as performers and producers’. Similarly, John Corner (2004: 291) has observed ‘a continuing “colloquial turn” in the culture and a shift towards greater engagement of the media with everyday terms of living and the varieties of ordinary “private” experience, both pleasant and traumatic’. Thus, a reality show about celebrities failing to accomplish mundane tasks associated with animal husbandry, vegetable gardening and jam-making, ticks the boxes in terms of intimacy, domesticity, and familiarity. Moreover, precisely because it reproduces the story of suburban self-sufficiency as a celebrity-challenge reality show rather than a sitcom, *Giles and Sue Live the Good Life* exemplifies twenty-first century media formations.

Genre formations

In many ways, reality television defies categorisation as a programme genre. Firstly, the domain of reality programming is characterised by the sheer diversity of its formations rather than its textual unity. As Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (2004: 5) note in the introduction to *Understanding Reality Television*, the designation ‘reality television’ covers a very broad range of formats in the current televisual landscape, manifesting ‘as many significant differences as commonalities, as well as different historical precedents, generic precursors, pleasures and modes of address’. Secondly, as the example of the reality re-make of *The Good Life* suggests, reality television is constantly mutating into different forms: hybridising traditional television genres with recent reality formations (as seen with *Dancing with the Stars* (2005–present)) (Hill 2008: 142), re-casting successful reality shows as celebrity specials (for example *Celebrity Apprentice* (2008–present)) and twisting existing formulae in ways which redefine the programme concept (as illustrated by the *Joe Millionaire* (2003) spin on *The Bachelor*). As television theorist Jane Feuer (1992: 141) has observed, these conditions typify the medium itself, as television is ‘in a constant state of flux and redefinition’, making genre categorisation a slippery task. However, the diversity of reality formations, its relative newness as a programme type, its rapid hybridisation and its proliferation across national borders, mean that, of all television’s formal genres, reality television is particularly prone to such ‘flux and redefinition’. Indeed, as Annette Hill (2005: 449) suggests, ‘reality TV is located in border territories, between information and entertainment, documentary and drama’. Thus, attempting to marshal reality television into a genre classification is like trying

to keep water in a leaky vessel, for reality programming is predicated on a certain porosity of form: it ‘blurs the boundaries’ (Nichols 1994), it breaks the rules. In this light, Daniel Biltereyst (2004: 117) has helpfully proposed that reality television might best be understood as ‘a tendency, a loose meta-genre or a container concept’.

Nevertheless, it is still possible and useful to identify a number of characteristics which remain consistent across reality television’s various formations. At the heart of the reality ‘turn’ is an attempt to represent real people, within a discursive framework which makes ‘real’ synonymous with ordinary and amateur. Thus, as Laura Brown (2005: 71) suggests, reality programming is ‘television that arises from the unscripted interactions of nonacting cast members’. This simple rubric remains consistent across formats as divergent as *Big Brother* and *Changing Rooms* (1996–2004), *Border Patrol* (2010) and *Next Top Model*. Even shows which deploy television personalities, actors and celebrities in the place of the ‘ordinary person’ (such as the Jessica Simpson docu-soap *Newlyweds* (2003–05), or *I’m a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* (2002–present)) retain a focus on natural, unscripted interactions and everyday concerns. Indeed, celebrity versions of reality formats propose an inversion of the ordinary and the extraordinary, promising a ‘behind the scenes’ glimpse of the ‘real’ person behind the mediated persona (Holmes 2004b).

While the label ‘reality television’ was first coined by the American television industry to designate a boom in ‘actuality footage’ programmes in the early 1990s (Corner 2004: 290), the phrase has endured over two decades of sometimes radical genre re-invention. These re-formations might be understood as sub-genres within reality television’s ‘container concept’, and have all attracted scholarly attention in their turn. In the 1990s, crime and emergency services (such as *Cops* (1989–present) and *Rescue 911* (1989–1996)) (Fishman and Cavendar 1998; Jermyn 2004; Nichols 1994) and amateur video clip formats (including the long-running *America’s Funniest Home Videos* (1989–present)) (Dovey 2000) held sway, while personal video diary shows (O’Shaughnessy 1997), and docu-soaps (*Sylvania Waters* (1992), *The Osbournes*) (Kilborn 2003; Stratton and Ang 1994) also made their mark. The late 1990s saw the rise of the personal makeover show (for example, *Changing Rooms* (1996–2004)) (Heller 2006; Lewis 2009; Moseley 2000), while the turn of the millennium spawned the reality history hybrid (starting with *1900 House* (1999)) (Arrow 2007; Diffrient 2007; West 2009). From 2000 onwards, the reality game show or ‘gamedoc’ dominated media debates, with certain programme phenomena (such as *Big Brother*, *Survivor* and *Pop Idol*) constituting subgenres in their own right, and generating numerous variant formations and dedicated academic discussion (Bignell 2005; Mathijs and Jones 2004; Smith and Wood 2003). Most recently, social intervention formats (for example, *Supernanny* (2004–present) and *The Biggest Loser* (2004–present))

(Ouellette and Hay 2008) and industry convergence or ‘reality talent’ shows (such as *Idol*, *Next Top Model*, and *Project Runway* (2004–present)) (Holmes 2004b) have mobilised debates peculiar to these new formations.

Thus, reality television might most usefully be understood as a media trend or ‘turn’, rather than a programme category or genre. Instead of framing reality television as a new, and increasingly prevalent, genre which is displacing traditional programme forms, ‘reality’ in this sense might be conceived as a contemporary televisual mode, one which easily co-opts existing programme forms into its ambit. As Tania Lewis (2009: 8) suggests, ‘rather than representing completely new genres ... reality formats ... can be seen to borrow from a range of older televisual genres that feature ordinary people and their everyday concerns’. Thus, the game show becomes *Fear Factor*, the sitcom becomes *The Osbournes* (Gillan 2004; Kompare 2004), the soap opera becomes *The Real World* (1992–present), the dating show becomes *The Bachelor/ette*, and so on. Reframing reality television as part of a broader cultural shift in which the ordinary, the popular and the amateur are brought to the fore, acknowledges the extent to which television itself is both a reflection of cultural practice and an agent in the production of socio-cultural meaning. To this end, television theorist Jason Mittell (2001: 7) has argued for a cultural studies approach to television analysis which ‘look[s] beyond the text as the locus for genre and instead locate genres within the complex interrelations among texts, industries, audiences, and historical contexts’. The significant diversity of reality television’s forms, and the slippages of its boundless evolutions, make it especially difficult to define reality programming as a set of textual properties. Rather, following Mittell’s cue, both the domain of reality programming and the reality it purports to demonstrate must be understood as a set of complex discursive formations arising out of and feeding back into socio-cultural and industrial practice. These formations will now be discussed.

Authenticity and performance

Central to popular and critical debates as to reality television’s claims on the real are the programme participants themselves. Annette Hill (2005: 449) has argued that ‘the performance of non-professional actors often frames discussion about the authenticity of visual evidence in popular factual television’, indicating that the perceived reality of a particular format hangs upon the credibility of show participants. As noted above, the status of people appearing in reality programming is problematised by a variety of production factors, including contrived social encounters, extreme physical and emotional challenges, selective editing, public exposure and associated celebrity or infamy. Nevertheless, what has been described as ‘the authentic articulation of the self’ (Holmes 2004b: 159) remains elemental to the reality television formula.

Like reality television itself, authentic performance implies a certain contradiction of terms. Various scholars have examined the extent to which reality programming sustains this particular paradox. For instance, in an article entitled *Performing the Real*, John Corner (2002: 257) argues that '*Big Brother* operates its claims to the real within a fully managed artificiality', suggesting that the representation of personal identities is necessarily tainted by the context of production. Corner uses the term 'selving' to indicate the active and self-conscious performance of selfhood which he sees as typifying participant behaviour on *Big Brother* and other reality formats. Conversely, in her discussion of ordinary people performing themselves on television, Karen Lury (1995/6) has borrowed the theatrical term 'corpsing', to indicate the accidental or spontaneous revelation of an authentic self. In Lury's terms 'corpsing engenders a moment where the television performer reveals his or herself as truly live, uncontrolled and expressive' (1995/6: 127). Thus, regardless of context and/or intentioned performance, people on television might unwittingly expose their most private identities through sudden emotional outbursts, spontaneous reactions or surprise revelations. Authentic or otherwise, it seems clear that emotional exposure is key to the reality television formula, producing vivid impressions of a mediated real.

At another level, reality programming engages in a complex dialectic between ordinary (associated with authenticity) and celebrity. In her work on *Big Brother*, Su Holmes (2004a: 124–30) has observed the inter-textuality of the media phenomenon generated by this format, in which a full range of media — tabloid newspapers, celebrity gossip magazines, subsidiary television productions such as 'behind-the-scenes' documentaries and the late-night 'uncut' versions of the show, as well as official and unofficial internet sites — extrapolate the personal narratives (past, present and future) of the housemates in ways which multiply and amplify their contradictory identities as both ordinary people and celebrities. These media texts offer stories about the individual's life and experiences prior to their exposure on television as evidence of their true (that is, unmediated) existence. As Holmes (2004a: 125) clarifies:

[t]his emphasis on the past self is paradoxically an attempt to offer the intimacy of the 'unmediated' identity. It is presented as 'authentic' precisely because it has not been subject to the manipulation of the televisual lens and the performative context this engenders.

While *Big Brother* makes people famous simply by causing them to be watched, talent show reality formats such as *Popstars* (2001–02) and *Idol*, as noted elsewhere by Holmes (2004b), produce celebrity as an effect of innate ability and hard work. By engaging with the mechanisms of the celebrity industries, reality pop formats actively authenticate the transformation of ordinary into

extraordinary as they anchor the fantasy narratives of a talent ‘discovered’ and ‘overnight success’ in the economic realities of a competitive marketplace. Talent formats of a different kind — including *America’s Next Top Model*, *Project Runway* and *The Apprentice* — likewise invoke a meritocratic logic in their processes of selection and reward. In this way, the production of the extraordinary — media celebrities, performers and business moguls — is contained within personal narratives which emphasise ordinary experience and endeavour.

Audiences and interactivity

From its earliest incarnation — as video clip formats which relied upon footage sent in by viewers, thus relocating televisual authority with the amateur producer — reality television has been credited with the reconfiguration of audiences (Dovey 2000; Glynn 2000). In the intervening years, advances in digital technologies and the proliferation of television’s delivery mechanisms have both enhanced and complicated the rise of the interactive audience.

In this regard, Henry Jenkins (2006: 2) has defined the contemporary mediascape as ‘convergence culture’, a ‘place where old and new media collide ... where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways’. In this context, traditional broadcast television is supplemented and reconfigured by interaction with viewers, sometimes invited and managed by programme makers (such as phone or text voting on *Idol* and *Big Brother*) and sometimes initiated by fan communities and potentially subversive (such as the *Survivor* ‘spoiler’ phenomenon) (Jenkins 2006: 25–58). In its energetic uptake of emerging technologies, marketing strategies and delivery mechanisms which extend beyond the reach of traditional broadcast television, reality programming exemplifies contemporary media formations.

The increasingly interactive dynamic between texts, audiences and industry is an area of critical concern. Laurie Ouellette and James Hay (2009: 32) are interested in the particular consequences proposed by this new relationship:

[a]s an early adopter of what scholars now call convergence culture, much reality television extends the experimentalism and participatory flair of its programming to viewers at home, so that the ‘programme’ in the old sense of broadcast media becomes the entry point into a broader menu of customizable entertainment and self-fashioning opportunities and requirements. Contrary to the stereotypical equation of television watching with passivity, the contemporary viewer — like the contemporary citizen — is increasingly expected to purposefully navigate the array of multimedia resources that television coordinates.

While scholars such as Jenkins (2006) and John Hartley (2008) interpret the participatory culture of reality programming optimistically, Ouellette and Hay (2008: 34) warn that:

TV's relationship to the 'public interest' has been severed from the ideal of preparing the masses for the formalized rituals (deliberation, voting) of democracy and linked to a 'can-do' model of citizenship that values private enterprise, personal responsibility, and self-empowerment.

Thus, voting strategies on *Idol* exert the will of consumer capitalism (as viewers' votes are equivalent to album pre-sales) while narratives of personal transformation, evident in so many reality formats, similarly emphasise a neoliberal ideology of individual responsibility and private consumption. Similarly, Graeme Turner cautions against the supposition that higher levels of audience participation correlate with higher levels of access, influence or control (2010: 1–11). Hence, he suggests that reality television is 'demotic' rather than 'democratic' in character, being simply 'of or for the common people' (2010: 1) rather than enabling equal participation by all. Despite these reservations, Daniel Biltereyst notes that a cultural studies position views widespread audience engagement as evidencing 'potential for new forms of public debate, broader representation, or a better access to wider information' (2004: 122). Thus, it is clear that the interactivity of contemporary reality television offers audiences and producers new opportunities for engagement: the potentialities of this encounter, however, are yet to be fully determined.

Global and local

Reality television has also been central to current debates regarding globalisation, cultural imperialism and media flows. The phenomenal success of reality programming has led to its rapid proliferation across geographic and cultural borderlines. Whether programmes are produced in one locality and sold abroad, or franchised around the world as formats and re-made within new national territories, reality television now dominates the international exchange of television programming. As with other television programmes which attain high levels of popularity outside their country of origin, the rise of reality television has consequences for national identities and cultural flow.

Albert Moran (2009: 20) suggests that the rise in the global exchange of television formats has occurred within a 'unique intersection of modern technologies of transmission and reception, innovative forms of financing, fresh ways of imagining the audience, novel forms of content, and new constructions of the television commodity'. As Moran notes, reality television is by no means the first television genre to be circulated in this way, but its phenomenal success

is predicated on its facility for format reproduction. Like chat shows, game shows or advice programmes, reality television depends on the new faces it introduces to each series or episode for its content. Thus, unlike drama or comedy, which rely upon ongoing character development and narrative plotting, reality shows are empty vessels, waiting to be filled and re-filled by the unscripted interactions of ordinary people. In this way, reality formats can be endlessly reproduced both within their country of origin and across national borders.

Although many high-profile programmes are exported to other territories where they are commercially successful, economic logic will ensure that their popularity will eventually generate local versions or variations of the original. This is in part because conceptual frameworks of ordinariness and authenticity are linked to that which is culturally familiar and thus locally produced. Indeed, a key reason for reality television's popularity and proliferation is its 'capacity to be customised or indigenised to help meet local tastes and expectation' (Moran 2009: 27). The potentialities of global format exchange remain, however, problematic. Citing Jamilah Maliki's research into the production and reception of *Akademi Fantasia* (2003–present), a Malaysian variant of *Idol*, Graeme Turner (2010: 60) has identified the extent to which a programme template produced in one national territory may bear with it certain cultural assumptions and commercial imperatives which are antagonistic to other cultures:

the focus on material goods, the trappings of celebrity, the importance of the individual rather than the community, and material consumption being offered as a key signifier of personal success — all of these run counter to the principles and philosophy of the Islamic state.

Alternately, Tania Lewis (2009: 9) has argued that international trade in reality formats may offer a 'challenge to US hegemony in global television traffic' as minor players sell successful formats to major media markets, thus reversing cultural flow.

Following Moran, Alexandra Beeden and Joost de Bruin (2010: 4) have noted that 'a key part of the success of a format adaptation appears to be the ability to adapt to and incorporate the context of the new country — to interpret rather than copy the original programme'. Analysing the successful format adaptation of British mockumentary *The Office* (2005–present) in America, Beeden and de Bruin (2010: 5) conclude that, 'while it may appear that the growth of international format adaptations reflects the increasingly globalized contemporary world, in fact, television format adaptations encourage articulations of national identity and cultural belonging'. Thus, reality formats may create opportunities for locally specific national imagining, regardless of

their country of origin, as programme concepts take on quite different meanings inside new cultural parameters (West 2008, 2009). Accordingly, reality format adaptation walks a fine line between cultural imperialism and the kinds of productive cultural refashioning discussed by media scholars as ‘glocalisation’ (Glynn 2007). As noted by Moran (2009: 27), ‘if this is television globalization, then it is globalization with a local look and sound’.

Cultural value

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the extent to which reality television has been subjected to cultural devaluation by critics and viewers alike. Routinely decried as ‘trash TV’ and as populist, sensational or tabloid in tone or content, the phrase ‘reality television’ has become a popular term of denigration (Dovey 2000: 83; Keller 1993; Wolcott 2009). Indeed, high-profile reality producer Mark Burnett (*Survivor*, *The Apprentice*) strenuously resists association with the reality television label, coining the terms ‘unscripted drama’ and ‘dramality’ for his work, and thereby signalling a formal attachment to a television genre with considerably higher cultural value. The disparagement of reality programming is, in part, a consequence of generic links with earlier, populist programming forms associated with the ordinary person, domestic life and emotional experience, such as talk shows, lifestyle and etiquette programmes and soap opera. In her analysis of *Big Brother*, Jane Roscoe (2001: 478) has observed that the format ‘provides a site in which the psychological and emotional are foregrounded, enjoyed and deliberated over’ in ways which align it with the history of women’s television viewing. Even formats which are ostensibly masculine in content — such as *The Amazing Race*, *Survivor*, and *Fear Factor* — set in outdoor or exotic locations and characterised by themes of competition, endurance, physical pain, and extreme stunts, are ultimately investigating the same range of human emotional experience (for example, humiliation, triumph, fear, hope, failure, and ambition) as other, more domestic or feminine formats.

This tendency is consistent with John Corner’s (2004: 291) observation that:

an expanded desire for ‘emotional knowledge’ about events — about what it is like to be ‘inside’ an event, ‘inside’ an experience — has appeared across a number of factual genres, including news, encouraging new modes of the subjective in visual style and speech.

Bill Nichols (1994: 55) mobilises similar discourses when he discusses reality television as being ‘bound up with everyday experience’. Citing Tania Modleski’s work on daytime soap operas, Nichols (1994: 55) suggests that, like soap opera, reality television bears out a

participatory quality (connection to versus separation from); a sense that characters or social actors are 'like me' — unlike stars who are of decidedly different status; an emphasis on knowledge of what others might do or think (troubled characters, potential dates, criminals at large) rather than strictly factual 'know how'; acceptance and acknowledgement that viewers are subject to 'interruption, distraction, and spasmodic toil'; multiple plot lines; and casts of characters who may not know each other.

Evident in Nichols' reading of Modleski's work are the critical constructs of participation, connection, familiarity, and 'emotional knowledge' (as discussed by Corner). Here, information is intimate (and intimately shared) rather than authoritative (and produced didactically). Moreover, 'multiple plot lines', which may be discontinuous, reflect a viewing environment characterised by distraction and menial, domestic labour. Thus, the structural and thematic overlap between reality programming and daytime soap opera elucidates the cultural devaluation of both. Regardless of dramatic or extraordinary content, reality television insists upon a mode of reality which rotates within a nexus of intimacy, emotion and domesticity.

This emphasis on emotional expression and intimate experience is key to the cultural devaluation of reality programming. Emotion itself is culturally suspect, associated with the feminine and private space, and opposed to masculinity, rationality and the public sphere. As Kristyn Gorton (2009: 93) has observed, emotional responses to film and television are 'disregarded as contrived and uncritical', as theorists assume that 'emotionalism in texts encourages passivity and uncritical distance'. Gorton (2009: 100) suggests that reality formats invite viewers to consider their own 'intimate feelings and relationships through an empathetic engagement with the participants'. While Gorton questions the validity of emotional responses to formats such as *Wife Swap*, suggesting that the key reaction is one of judgement and disdain, Misha Kavka (2008: 4) has argued, conversely, that emotional responses to reality programming both locate the real on screen and manifest authentic experience in themselves: '[f]eeling', Kavka suggests, 'operates like sonar for traces of the real within media (re)presentations'. Thus, reality television 'matters' in Kavka's terms because of its capacity to produce real feeling in viewers, including passionate attachment to characters or an investment in a programme's outcome. This ongoing preoccupation with the body as a site of authentic experience, both in terms of emotional expression and physical trauma (Wilson 2010), locates reality television within a tradition of screen 'body genres' (Williams 1990: 5) and thus confirms its low cultural status.

Conclusion

In conclusion, reality television deserves ongoing academic scrutiny not only for its intense, and indisputable, popularity (see Hill 2005: 450–51) but for its mobilisation of contemporary debates relating to genre formations and hybridity, performance and identity, ordinariness and celebrity, globalisation and format adaptation, cultural identity and local relevance, and cultural devaluation. Importantly, reality television should be understood as indicative of the current media landscape, and as part of television's ongoing state of flux and transformation.

Rather than blaming reality television for the debasement of contemporary media culture, as some media critics have been tempted to do (Wolcott 2009), it is useful to understand this programme genre as symptomatic of industrial, technological, and socio-economic shifts in the early twenty-first century. Where television was once defined by the principles of public service broadcasting, and transmitted free-to-air to a nationally specific audience, it is now increasingly privatised, globalised, delivered by satellite or cable, streamed over the internet and targeted at a multiplicity of niche markets (Turner 2004: 4–6). The sheer volume of television traffic — in terms of channels, delivery mechanisms and available programmes — now defines a period characterised by television theorist John Ellis as the 'era of plenty' (2000: 39–60). Because reality programming is relatively low-cost, has a fast production turnaround, deploys multi-platform delivery and is readily adapted to new markets or fine-tuned for specific audiences, this type of television is ideally suited to the demands of the new era.

However, the synchronicity between reality programming and the digital era raises broader questions as to the form and function of contemporary media and society. Despite the exponential and ongoing increase in the number of choices available to television viewers, Graeme Turner warns that the increasingly commercial character of global television networks is unlikely to generate 'a greater variety or diversity of content' (2010: 162). In this way, Turner invokes the work of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, who argued in the 1940s that the industrial production of media generated only 'standardized forms' (2002: 95) which were justified by the demands of business rather than art or culture. While it is prudent to approach the subject of reality television with an eye to the commercial imperatives which underpin its production and distribution, these are not the only factors which determine its meaning. As Daniel Biltereyst (2004: 121) concludes of reality programming, 'both defenders and critics agree that it openly constructs as well as explores significant issues which go to the heart of how people (can) live with each other in society'. More than simply a programme formula, therefore, reality television warrants

recognition and ongoing interrogation as a cultural phenomenon, one which is indicative of contemporary trends within both the media industry and society.

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20 Democratizing Television?

The politics of participation

Henry Jenkins

- Convergence represents a paradigm shift from medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels.
- With increased interdependence of communications systems and multiple ways of accessing and negotiating with media content, increasingly complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture are taking place.
- While convergence is enabling new forms of participation and collaboration between those traditionally considered only as ‘consumers’ of media, it is also recognised that mass media institutions are also embracing the process of convergence due to specific economic interests.
- It is argued that convergence encourages active participation and production of media, rather than simply the customising or user involvement in the choice of content.
- The active consumption and grassroots creativity of ‘knowledge communities’ forming through convergence is demonstrated in the chapter with reference to various sites of popular culture including Web zines and television programs.

Introduction

In August 2005, former Democratic vice president Albert Gore helped to launch a new cable news network, *Current*. The network’s stated goal was to encourage the active participation of young people as citizen journalists; viewers were intended not simply to consume *Current*’s programming but also to participate in its production, selection, and distribution. As Gore explained at a press conference in late 2004:

[w]e are about empowering this generation of young people in the 18-to-34 population to engage in a dialogue of democracy and to tell their stories of what’s going on in their lives, in the dominant medium of our time. The Internet opened a floodgate for young people, whose passions are finally being heard, but TV hasn’t

followed suit ... Our aim is to give young people a voice, to democratize television. (Berman 2005)

[...]

The idea of reader-moderated news content is not new. *Slashdot* was one of the first sites to experiment with user-moderation, gathering a wealth of information with a five-person paid staff, mostly part time, by empowering readers not only to submit their own stories but to work collectively to determine the relative value of each submission. *Slashdot*'s focus is explicitly on technology and culture, and so it became a focal point for information about Internet privacy issues, the debates over mandatory filters in public libraries, the open source movement, and so forth. *Slashdot* attracts an estimated 1.1 million unique users per month, and some 250,000 per day, constituting a user base as large as that of many of the nation's leading online general interest and technology-centered news sites (see Chan 2002; for more on participatory journalism, see Boczkowski 2005, Gilmor 2004). Yet, this would be the first time that something like the *Slashdot* model was being applied to television.

Even before the network reached the air, *Current*'s promise to 'democratize television' became a focal point for debates about the politics of participation. Cara Mertes, the executive producer for the PBS documentary program *POV*, itself an icon of the struggle to get alternative perspectives on television, asked:

What are you talking about when you say 'democratizing the media'? Is it using media to further democratic ends, to create an environment conducive to the democratic process through unity, empathy and civil discourse? Or does it mean handing over the means of production, which is the logic of public access? (Berman 2005; for more on the debates about *Current*, see Manjoo 2005, McCay 2005, Straus 2005)

Was *Current* going to be democratic in its content (focusing on the kinds of information that a democratic society needs to function), its effects (mobilizing young people to participate more fully in the democratic process), its values (fostering rationale discourse and a stronger sense of social contract), or its process (expanding access to the means of media production and distribution)?

Others pushed further, arguing that market pressures, the demand to satisfy advertisers and placate stock holders, would ensure that no commercial network could possibly be as democratic on any of these levels as the Gore operation was promising. Any truly democratic form of broadcasting would necessarily arise outside corporate media and would likely see corporate America as its primary target for reform. Even if the network remained true to its goals, they argued, those most drawn to the alternative media perspective would be skeptical of any media channel shaped by traditional corporate gatekeepers. A growing number

of Web services — such as participatoryculture.org and ourmedia.org — were making it easier for amateur media makers to gain visibility via the Web without having to turn over exclusive rights to their material to a network funded by some of the wealthiest men and women in the country. In a society where blogs — both text based and video enhanced — were thriving, why would anyone need to put their content on television?

Others expressed disappointment in the network's volunteeristic approach. Original plans to pay a large number of independent filmmakers to become roaming correspondents had given way to a plan to allow amateurs to submit material for consideration and then get paid upon acceptance. The first plan, critics argued, would have sustained an infrastructure to support alternative media production; the other would lead to little more than a glorified public access station.

The network defended itself as a work in progress — one that was doing what it could to democratize a medium while working under market conditions. A spokesman for the network observed, '[f]or some people, the perfect is always the enemy of the good' (Manjoo 2005). *Current* might not change everything about television, they pleaded, but it could make a difference. Gore held firm in his beliefs that enabling audience generated content had the potential to diversify civic discourse: 'I personally believe that when this medium is connected to the grassroots storytellers that are out there, it will have an impact on the kinds of things that are discussed and the way they are discussed' (Berman 2005).

At about the same time, the British Broadcasting Company was embracing an even more radical vision of how consumers might relate to its content. The first signs of this new policy had come through a speech made by Ashley Highfield, director of BBC New Media & Technology, in October 2003, explaining how the widespread adoption of broadband and digital technologies will impact the ways his network serves its public:

[f]uture TV may be unrecognizable from today, defined not just by linear TV channels, packaged and scheduled by television executives, but instead will resemble more of a kaleidoscope, thousands of streams of content, some indistinguishable as actual channels. These streams will mix together broadcasters' content and programs, and our viewer's contributions. At the simplest level — audiences will want to organize and reorganize content the way they want it. They'll add comments to our programs, vote on them, and generally mess about with them. But at another level, audiences will want to create these streams of video themselves from scratch, with or without our help. At this end of the spectrum,

the traditional 'monologue broadcaster' to 'grateful viewer' relationship will break down. (Highfield 2003)

By 2005, the BBC was digitizing large segments of its archive and making the streaming content available via the Web (BBC 2005). The BBC was also encouraging grassroots experimentation with ways to annotate and index these materials. *Current's* path led from the Web — where many could share what they created — into broadcast media, where many could consume what a few had created. The BBC efforts were moving in the other direction, opening up television content to the more participatory impulses shaping digital culture.

Convergence culture

Both [the BBC and *Current* network] were in the sense promoting what [I am] calling convergence culture. Convergence does not depend on any specific delivery mechanism. Rather, convergence represents a paradigm shift — a move from medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels, toward the increased interdependence of communications systems, toward multiple ways of accessing media content, and toward ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture. Despite the rhetoric about 'democratizing television', this shift is being driven by economic calculations and not by some broad mission to empower the public. Media industries are embracing convergence for a number of reasons: because convergence-based strategies exploit the advantages of media conglomeration; because convergence creates multiple ways of selling content to consumers; because convergence cements consumer loyalty at a time when the fragmentation of the marketplace and the rise of file sharing threaten old ways of doing business. In some cases, convergence is being pushed by corporations as a way of shaping consumer behavior. In other cases, convergence is being pushed by consumers who are demanding that media companies be more responsive to their tastes and interests. Yet, whatever its motivations, convergence is changing the ways in which media industries operate and the ways average people think about their relation to media. We are in a critical moment of transition during which the old rules are open to change and companies may be forced to renegotiate their relationship to consumers. The question is whether the public is ready to push for greater participation or willing to settle for the same old relations to mass media.

Writing in 1991, W. Russell Neuman sought to examine the ways that consumer 'habit' or what he called 'the psychology of the mass audience, the semi-attentive, entertainment-oriented mind-set of day-to-day media behaviour' would slow down the interactive potentials of emerging digital technologies

(Neuman 1991: 54). In his model, the technology was ready at hand but the culture was not ready to embrace it:

[t]he new developments in horizontal, user-controlled media that allow the user to amend, reformat, store, copy, forward to others, and comment on the flow of ideas do not rule out mass communications. Quite the contrary, they complement the traditional mass media. (Neuman 1991: 8–9)

The public will not rethink their relationship to media content overnight, and the media industries will not relinquish their stranglehold on culture without a fight.

Today, we are more apt to hear the opposite claim — that early adapters are racing ahead of technological developments. No sooner is a new technology — say, *Google Maps* — released to the public than diverse grassroots communities begin to tinker with it, expanding its functionality, hacking its code, and pushing it into a more participatory direction. Indeed, many industry leaders argue that the main reason that television cannot continue to operate in the same old ways is that the broadcasters are losing younger viewers, who expect greater influence over the media they consume. Speaking at MIT in April 2004, Betsy Frank, executive vice president for research and planning at MTV Networks, described these consumers as ‘media-actives’ whom she characterized as:

the group of people born since the mid-70s who’ve never known a world without cable television, the vcr, or the internet, who have never had to settle for forced choice or least objectionable program, who grew up with a what I want when I want it view attitude towards media, and as a result, take a much more active role in their media choices. (Frank 2004).

Noting that ‘their fingerprints are on the remote’, she said that the media industry was scrambling to make sense of and respond to sharp declines in television viewership among the highly valued 18–27 male demographic as they defected from television toward more interactive and participatory media channels.

[...] Betsy Frank and other industry thinkers still tend to emphasize changes that are occurring within individuals, whereas [my] argument is that the greatest changes are occurring within consumption communities. The biggest change may be the shift from individualized and personalized media consumption toward consumption as a networked practice.

Personalized media was one of the ideals of the digital revolution in the early 1990s: digital media was going to ‘liberate’ us from the ‘tyranny’ of mass media, allowing us to consume only content we found personally meaningful. Conservative ideologue turned digital theorist George Gilder argued that the intrinsic properties of the computer pushed toward ever more decentralization

and personalization. Compared to the one-size-fits-all diet of the broadcast networks, the coming media age would be a ‘feast of niches and specialties’ (Gilder 1994: 66). An era of customized and interactive content, he argues, would appeal to our highest ambitions and not our lowest, as we enter ‘a new age of individualism’ (Gilder 1994: 68). Consider Gilder’s ideal of ‘first choice media’ [as] yet another model for how we might democratize television.

By contrast, [I argue] that convergence encourages participation and collective intelligence, a view nicely summed up by the *New York Times*’s Marshall Sella (2002):

[w]ith the aid of the Internet, the loftiest dream for television is being realized: an odd brand of interactivity. Television began as a one-way street winding from producers to consumers, but that street is now becoming two-way. A man with one machine (a TV) is doomed to isolation, but a man with two machines (TV and a computer) can belong to a community.

[...] Rather than talking about personal media, perhaps we should be talking about communal media — media that become part of our lives as members of communities, whether experienced face-to-face at the most local level or over the Net.

[... Convergence] culture is enabling new forms of participation and collaboration. For Levy, the power to participate within knowledge communities exists alongside the power the nation-state exerts over its citizens, and corporations within commodity capitalism exert over its workers and consumers. For Levy, at his most utopian, this emerging power to participate serves as a strong corrective to those traditional sources of power, though they will also seek ways to turn it toward their own ends. We are just learning how to exercise that power — individually and collectively — and we are still fighting to define the terms under which we will be allowed to participate. Many fear this power; others embrace it. There are no guarantees that we will use our new power any more responsibly than nation-states or corporations have exercised theirs. We are trying to hammer out the ethical codes and social contracts that will determine how we will relate to one another just as we are trying to determine how this power will insert itself into the entertainment system or into the political process. Part of what we must do is figure out how — and why — groups with different backgrounds, agendas, perspectives, and knowledge can listen to one another and work together toward the common good. We have a lot to learn.

Right now, we are learning how to apply these new participatory skills through our relation to commercial entertainment — or, more precisely, right now some groups of early adopters are testing the waters and mapping out directions where

many more of us are apt to follow. These skills are being applied to popular culture first for two reasons: on the one hand, because the stakes are so low; and on the other, because playing with popular culture is a lot more fun than playing with more serious matters. Yet [...] what we learn through spoiling *Survivor* or remaking *Star Wars* may quickly get applied to political activism or education or the workplace.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, cultural scholars, myself included, depicted media fandom as an important test site for ideas about active consumption and grassroots creativity. We were drawn toward the idea of ‘fan culture’ as operating in the shadows of, in response to, as well as an alternative to commercial culture. Fan culture was defined through the appropriation and transformation of materials borrowed from mass culture; it was the application of folk culture practices to mass culture content (Jenkins 1991). Across the past decade, the Web has brought these consumers from the margins of the media industry into the spotlight; research into fandom has been embraced by important thinkers in the legal and business communities. What might once have been seen as ‘rogue readers’ are now Kevin Roberts’s ‘inspirational consumers.’ Participation is understood as part of the normal ways that media operate while the current debates center around the terms of our participation. Just as studying fan culture helped us to understand the innovations that occur on the fringes of the media industry, we may also want to look at the structures of fan communities as showing us new ways of thinking about citizenship and collaboration. The political effects of these fan communities come not simply through the production and circulation of new ideas (the critical reading of favorite texts) but also through access to new social structures (collective intelligence) and new models of cultural production (participatory culture).

Have I gone too far? Am I granting too much power here to these consumption communities? Perhaps. But keep in mind that I am not really trying to predict the future. I want to avoid the kind of grand claims about the withering away of mass media institutions that make the rhetoric of the digital revolution seem silly a decade later. Rather, I am trying to point toward the democratic potentials found in some contemporary cultural trends. There is nothing inevitable about the outcome. Everything is up for grabs. Pierre Levy described his ideal of collective intelligence as a ‘realizable utopia,’ and so it is. I think of myself as a critical utopian. As a utopian, I want to identify possibilities within our culture that might lead toward a better, more just society. My experiences as a fan have changed how I think about media politics, helping me to look for and promote unrealized potentials rather than reject out of hand anything that doesn’t rise to my standards. Fandom, after all, is born of a balance between fascination and frustration: if media content didn’t fascinate us, there would be no desire to engage with it; but if it didn’t frustrate us on some level, there would be no drive to rewrite or remake it. Today, I hear a great deal of frustration about the state of

our media culture, yet surprisingly few people talk about how we might rewrite it.

But pointing to those opportunities for change is not enough in and of itself. One must also identify the various barriers that block the realization of those possibilities and look for ways to route around them. Having a sense of what a more ideal society looks like gives one a yardstick for determining what we must do to achieve our goals. [...]

This approach differs dramatically from what I call critical pessimism. Critical pessimists, such as media critics Mark Crispin Miller, Noam Chomsky, and Robert McChesney, focus primarily on the obstacles to achieving a more democratic society [...] I don't disagree with their concern about media concentration, but the ways they frame the debate is self-defeating insofar as it disempowers consumers even as it seeks to mobilize them. Far too much media reform rhetoric rests on melodramatic discourse about victimization and vulnerability, seduction and manipulation, 'propaganda machines' and 'weapons of mass deception.' Again and again, this version of the media reform movement has ignored the complexity of the public's relationship to popular culture and sided with those opposed to a more diverse and participatory culture. The politics of critical utopianism is founded on a notion of empowerment; the politics of critical pessimism on a politics of victimization. One focuses on what we are doing with media, and the other on what media is doing to us. [However, for the author's more recent thoughts on the media reform movement see http://henryjenkins.org/2011/05/not_so_simple_an_open_letter_t.html#comments].

As with previous revolutions, the media reform movement is gaining momentum at a time when people are starting to feel more empowered, not when they are at their weakest.

Media concentration [...] is bad because it stifles competition and places media industries above the demands of their consumers. Concentration is bad because it lowers diversity — important in terms of popular culture, essential in terms of news. Concentration is bad because it lowers the incentives for companies to negotiate with their consumers and raises the barriers to their participation. Big concentrated media can ignore their audience (at least up to a point); smaller niche media must accommodate us.

That said, the fight over media concentration is only one struggle that should concern media reformers. The potentials of a more participatory media culture are also worth fighting for. Right now, convergence culture is throwing media into flux, expanding the opportunities for grassroots groups to speak back to the mass media. Put all of our efforts into battling the conglomerates and this window of opportunity will have passed. That is why it is so important to fight against the corporate copyright regime, to argue against censorship and moral

panic that would pathologize these emerging forms of participation, to publicize the best practices of these online communities, to expand access and participation to groups that are otherwise being left behind, and to promote forms of media literacy education that help all children to develop the skills needed to become full participants in their culture.

If early readers are any indication, the most controversial claim [I make] may be my operating assumption that increasing participation in popular culture is a good thing. Too many critical pessimists are still locked into the old politics of culture jamming. Resistance becomes an end in and of itself rather than a tool to ensure cultural diversity and corporate responsibility. The debate keeps getting framed as if the only true alternative were to opt out of media altogether [...] But what would it mean to tap media power for our own purposes? Is ideological and aesthetic purity really more valuable than transforming our culture?

The politics of participation

A politics of participation starts from the assumption that we may have greater collective bargaining power if we form consumption communities. Consider the example of the *Sequential Tarts*. Started in 1997, www.sequentialtart.com serves as an advocacy group for female consumers frustrated by their historic neglect or patronizing treatment by the comics industry. Marcia Allas, the current editor of *Sequential Tart*, explained:

[i]n the early days we wanted to change the apparent perception of the female reader of comics ... We wanted to show what we already knew — that the female audience for comics, while probably smaller than the male audience, is both diverse and has a collectively large disposable income. (e-mail interview with author, Fall, 2003)

In her study of *Sequential Tart*, scholar and sometime contributor Kimberly M. De Vries argues that the group self consciously rejects the negative stereotypes about female comics readers constructed by men in and around the comics industry but also the well-meaning but equally constraining stereotypes constructed by the first generation of feminist critics of comics (De Vries 2002). The *Sequential Tarts* defend the pleasures women take in comics even as they critique negative representations of women. The Web zine combines interviews with comics creators, retailers, and industry leaders, reviews of current publications, and critical essays about gender and comics. It showcases industry practices that attract or repel women, spotlights the work of smaller presses that often fell through the cracks, and promotes books that reflect their readers' tastes and interests. The *Sequential Tarts* are increasingly courted by publishers or individual artists who feel they have content that female readers might

embrace and have helped to make the mainstream publishers more attentive to this often underserved market.

The *Sequential Tarts* represent a new kind of consumer advocacy group — one that seeks to diversify content and make mass media more responsive to its consumers. This is not to say that commercial media will ever truly operate according to democratic principles. Media companies don't need to share our ideals in order to change their practices. What will motivate the media companies is their own economic interests. What will motivate consumer-based politics will be our shared cultural and political interests. But we can't change much of anything if we are not on speaking terms with people inside the media industry. A politics of confrontation must give way to one focused on tactical collaboration. The old model, which many wisely dismissed, was that consumers vote with their pocketbooks. The new model is that we are collectively changing the nature of the marketplace, and in so doing we are pressuring companies to change the products they are creating and the ways they relate to their consumers.

We still do not have any models for what a mature, fully realized knowledge culture would look like. But popular culture may provide us with prototypes. A case in point is Warren Ellis's comic book series, *Global Frequency*. Set in the near future, *Global Frequency* depicts a multiracial, multinational organization of ordinary people who contribute their services on an ad hoc basis. As Ellis (n.d.) explains:

[y]ou could be sitting there watching the news and suddenly hear an unusual cell phone tone, and within moments you might see your neighbor leaving the house in a hurry, wearing a jacket or a shirt with the distinctive *Global Frequency* symbol ... or, hell, your girlfriend might answer the phone ... and promise to explain later ... Anyone could be on the *Global Frequency*, and you'd never know until they got the call.

Ellis rejects the mighty demigods and elite groups of the superhero tradition and instead depicts the twenty-first-century equivalent of a volunteer fire department. Ellis conceived of the story in the wake of September 11 as an alternative to calls for increased state power and paternalistic constraints on communications: *Global Frequency* doesn't imagine the government saving its citizens from whatever Big Bad is out there. Rather, as Ellis explains, '*Global Frequency* is about us saving ourselves'. Each issue focuses on a different set of characters in a different location, examining what it means for *Global Frequency* members personally and professionally to contribute their labor to a cause larger than themselves. The only recurring characters are those at the communications hub who contact the volunteers. Once *Frequency* participants are called into action, most of the key decisions get made on site as the

volunteers are allowed to act on their localized knowledge. Most of the challenges come, appropriately enough, from the debris left behind by the collapse of the military-industrial complex and the end of the cold war — '[t]he bad mad things in the dark that the public never found out about'. In other words, the citizen soldiers use distributed knowledge to overcome the dangers of government secrecy.

Ellis's *Global Frequency Network* closely mirrors what journalist and digital activist Howard Rheingold (2003: xii) has to say about smart mobs:

[s]mart mobs consist of people who are able to act in concert even if they don't know each other. The people who make up smart mobs cooperate in ways never before possible because they carry devices that possess both communication and computing capabilities ... Groups of people using these tools will gain new forms of social power.

In Manila and in Madrid, activists, using cell phones, were able to rally massive numbers of supporters in opposition to governments who might otherwise have controlled discourse on the mass media; these efforts resulted in transformations of power. In Boston, we are seeing home schoolers use these same technologies to organize field trips on the fly that deliver dozens of kids and their parents to a museum or historic site in a matter of a few hours.

Other writers, such as science fiction writer Cory Doctorow, describe such groups as 'adhocracies'. The polar opposite of a bureaucracy, an adhocracy is an organization characterized by a lack of hierarchy. In it, each person contributes to confronting a particular problem as needed based on his or her knowledge and abilities, and leadership roles shift as tasks change. An adhocracy, thus, is a knowledge culture that turns information into action. Doctorow's science fiction novel *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* depicts a future when the fans run Disney World, public support becomes the most important kind of currency, and debates about popular culture become the focus of politics (Doctorow 2003).

Ellis's vision of the *Global Frequency Network* and Doctorow's vision of a grassroots Disney World are far out there — well beyond anything we've seen in the real world yet. But fans put some of what they learned from *Global Frequency* into action: tapping a range of communications channels to push the networks and production company to try to get a television series on the air (please note that all information and quotes in this paragraph are taken from Gebb 2005). Consider this to be another example of what it would mean to 'democratize television.' Mark Burnett, *Survivor*'s executive producer, had taken an option on adopting the comic books for television; Warner Bros. had already announced plans to air *Global Frequency* as a midseason replacement, which then got postponed and later cancelled. A copy of the series pilot was

leaked on the Internet, circulating as an illegal download on BitTorrent, where it became the focus of a grassroots effort to get the series back into production. John Rogers, the show's head writer and producer, said that the massive response to the never-aired series was giving the producers leverage to push for the pilot's distribution on DVD and potentially to sell the series to another network. Studio and network executives predictably cited concerns about what the consumers were doing:

[w]hether the pilot was picked up or not, it is still the property of Warner Bros. Entertainment and we take the protection of all of our intellectual property seriously ... While Warner Bros. Entertainment values feedback from consumers, copyright infringement is not a productive way to try to influence a corporate decision.

Rogers wrote about his encounters with the *Global Frequency* fans in his blog: '[i]t changes the way I'll do my next project ... I would put my pilot out on the internet in a heartbeat. Want five more? Come buy the boxed set'. Rogers's comments invite us to imagine a time when small niches of consumers who were willing to commit their money to a cause might ensure the production of a minority-interest program. From a producer's perspective, such a scheme would be attractive since television series are made at a loss for the first several seasons until the production company accumulates enough episodes to sell a syndication package. DVD lowers that risk by allowing producers to sell the series one season at a time and even to package and sell unaired episodes. Selling directly to the consumer would allow producers to recoup their costs even earlier in the production cycle.

[...]

While producers, analysts, and fans have used the fate of *Global Frequency* to explore how we might rethink the distribution of television content, the series premise also offers us some tools for thinking about the new kinds of knowledge communities [...]. If one wants to see a real world example of something like the *Global Frequency Network*, take a look at the Wikipedia — a grassroots, multinational effort to build a free encyclopedia on the Internet written collaboratively from an army of volunteers, working in roughly two hundred different languages.

[...]

We might think of fan fiction communities as the literary equivalent of the Wikipedia: around any given media property, writers are constructing a range of different interpretations that get expressed through stories. Sharing of these stories opens up new possibilities in the text. Here, individual contributions do not have to be neutral; participants simply have to agree to disagree, and, indeed,

many fans come to value the sheer diversity of versions of the same characters and situations.

On the other hand, mass media has tended to use its tight control over intellectual property to reign in competing interpretations, resulting in a world where there is one official version. Such tight controls increase the coherence of the franchise and protect the producers' economic interests, yet the culture is impoverished through such regulation. Fan fiction repairs the damage caused by an increasingly privatized culture. Consider, for example, this statement (cited in Green et al. 1998) made by a fan:

What I love about fandom is the freedom we have allowed ourselves to create and recreate our characters over and over again. Fanfic rarely sits still. It's like a living, evolving thing, taking on its own life, one story building on another, each writer's reality bouncing off another's and maybe even melding together to form a whole new creation.... I find that fandom can be extremely creative because we have the ability to keep changing our characters and giving them a new life over and over. We can kill and resurrect them as often as we like. We can change their personalities and how they react to situations. We can take a character and make him charming and sweet or cold-blooded and cruel. We can give them an infinite, always-changing life rather than the single life of their original creation.

Fans reject the idea of a definitive version produced, authorized, and regulated by some media conglomerate. Instead, fans envision a world where all of us can participate in the creation and circulation of central cultural myths. Here, the right to participate in the culture is assumed to be 'the freedom we have allowed ourselves', not a privilege granted by a benevolent company, not something they are prepared to barter away for better sound files or free Web hosting. Fans also reject the studio's assumption that intellectual property is a 'limited good', to be tightly controlled lest it dilute its value. Instead, they embrace an understanding of intellectual property as 'shareware', something that accrues value as it moves across different contexts, gets retold in various ways, attracts multiple audiences, and opens itself up to a proliferation of alternative meanings.

Nobody is anticipating a point where all bureaucracies will become adhocracies. Concentrated power is apt to remain concentrated. But we will see adhocracy principles applied to more and more different kinds of projects. Such experiments thrive within convergence culture, which creates a context where viewers — individually and collectively — can reshape and recontextualize mass-media content. Most of this activity will occur around the edges of commercial culture through grassroots or niche media industries such as comics or games. On that scale, small groups like the *Sequential Tarts* can make a material difference. On that scale, entrepreneurs have an incentive to give their

consumers greater opportunities to shape the content and participate in its distribution. As we move closer to the older and more mass market media industries, corporate resistance to grassroots participation increases: the stakes are too high to experiment, and the economic impact of any given consumption community lessens. Yet, within these media companies, there are still potential allies who for their own reasons may want to appeal to audience support to strengthen their hands in their negotiations around the boardroom table. A media industry struggling to hold on to its core audience in the face of competition from other media may be forced to take greater risks to accommodate consumer interests.

Conclusion

[... Convergence] culture is highly generative: some ideas spread top down, starting with commercial media and being adopted and appropriated by a range of different publics as they spread outward across the culture. Others emerge bottom up from various sites of participatory culture and getting pulled into the mainstream if the media industries see some way of profiting from it. The power of the grassroots media is that it diversifies; the power of broadcast media is that it amplifies. That's why we should be concerned with the flow between the two: expanding the potentials for participation represents the greatest opportunity for cultural diversity. Throw away the powers of broadcasting and one has only cultural fragmentation. The power of participation comes not from destroying commercial culture but from writing over it, modding it, amending it, expanding it, adding greater diversity of perspective, and then recirculating it, feeding it back into the mainstream media.

[...]

Welcome to convergence culture, where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways. Convergence culture is the future, but it is taking shape now. Consumers will be more powerful within convergence culture — but only if they recognize and use that power as both consumers and citizens, as full participants in our culture.

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21 Cinema and Cultural Studies

In the land of the cinephiles

Adrian Danks

- Despite being dismissed or disavowed by many commentators, cinephilia has been a central impulse in the study of cinema over the last 65 years.
- Cinephilia plays a central role in the legitimisation of the cinema and the popular application of specific critical and theoretical approaches (such as auteurism) to the movies. It also consistently parallels specific developments and trends within cultural studies.
- Although the end of cinephilia — and even cinema itself — has often been announced, longed for and lamented by a series of commentators ranging from Jean-Luc Godard and Susan Sontag to a slew of news media and online pundits, it is still an idea or practice that has a key historical place, is important to filmmakers themselves, and has an ongoing role in the serious and developing study of the cinema.
- While acting as an important staging ground for core debates in cinema studies — around affective responses to the movies, the relation of cinema to definitions of popular, middlebrow and high culture, and so on — cinephilia is also an idea or ideal that has returned to critical parlance with the rise of digital media and the internet and the more dispersive and incorporative practices they promote and entail.
- While still following particular trends and filmmakers, contemporary cinephilia is considerably more pluralistic and democratic in terms of both its objects of obsession and the contexts that they are then found and placed within (such as online, at film festivals, and on DVD).

Cinephilia, psychos, and cinema studies

Don DeLillo's (2010) recent novel *Point Omega* opens and closes with the description of recurring visits to a video installation by a solitary male figure. Much of this description is taken up by a discussion of both the other people who wander into the gallery space and the work that is being projected (Douglas Gordon's monumental *24 Hour Psycho* (1993)). Gordon's video work slows

down and elongates Hitchcock's original *Psycho* (1960) to an all-encompassing daylong duration. It makes visible and forensically palpable elements in the image and syntax of the original film that are not readily evident or conscious when watching it at normal speed. While positioning himself at the ideal angle to the screen, this male spectator fantasises about being engulfed by the work, allowed to experience it in its full, 'synchronous' duration. DeLillo dots his analysis of the transformative work done by Gordon with a speculative account of the response of the various, often distracted people who wander in and often quickly out of the radically oversized installation. In the process, he questions the value and purpose of Gordon's reframing of Hitchcock's overly familiar original, evoking both the initial shock of its first release and its endless recycling by popular culture and the movies. He also examines how Gordon's work reconfigures Hitchcock's film as both gallery and conceptual art, complicating its status as an exemplar of generic cinema and popular culture. In the process, he transforms a popular cinematic work of art into an instance of time-based media, provocatively reworking cinema's synchronous temporality. Gordon's work is seen as an act of homage and criticism, as both the cinema and most definitely something else.

This may seem like an odd place to begin a discussion of the discipline of cinema studies — particularly within a collection devoted to cultural studies — the specificity of film as an aesthetic and industrial form, and what is called 'cinophilia': a rapacious 'desire' or 'love' (Willemsen 1994: 225, 227) for the movies that has been both embraced and shunned at various moments across the history of the medium. Nevertheless, I think it can be argued that the pointedly gendered (male) response of DeLillo's character to Gordon's installation is reminiscent of the practice and peculiar conditions that constitute cinophilia, essentially 'an obsessive infatuation with film, to the point of letting it dominate your life' (Wollen 2002: 5). This obsession routinely takes the form of thinking, talking, writing and reading about the cinema, and responding to this experience in a variety of ways and guises (as fan, critic, buff, lover, and so on). DeLillo's obsessed character is as preoccupied with the physical and spatial conditions surrounding this installation as any true cinophile — the kind who cares precisely about 'his' positioning in the cinema — and the author's descriptions of the tactility of Gordon's work correspond closely with the affective and fetishistic response to the screen that defines 'classic cinophilia'. This character's preoccupation with moments in Hitchcock's film, such as the shower curtain rings shown in the famous murder sequence, points towards the creative reconstruction, restaging and memorialisation of cinematic fragments that mark the productive realm of cinephilic practice (in the form of writing, re-editing favourite moments on YouTube, and so on). Gordon's evocative description of this encounter between the cinema and modern art is also useful as a means of highlighting the fate of film within what might be called the post-cinema (or

post-celluloid, at least) era. A key aspect of what this character seeks to find in this gallery installation is the memory of what the cinema *used* to be like.

The rise and fall of cinephilia

Cinephilia is often most clearly associated with the rise of the French New Wave (*la nouvelle vague*) in the 1950s and the close relation it forges between film watching, film criticism and filmmaking. Its cause is most clearly taken up by such critics/filmmakers as Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette and François Truffaut. Of course such a love or obsession with the cinema has its roots and precedents elsewhere — particularly in 1920s Paris and the mix and match film-going activities of the surrealists — but a range of factors coalesce in the immediate post-World War Two era to make the full-scale appearance of something like cinephilia more probable. Thus the era sees the growth of what is called the ciné-club movement (the film society movement is the Australian and New Zealand equivalent), the rise of the American influence on French culture, key shifts in film aesthetics, and the arrival of large backlogs of Hollywood film titles prohibited during the German occupation. It is also significant that cinephilia finds its most full-blooded articulation during an era in which the cinema can claim a degree of ubiquity, a status as the pre-eminent medium before the full-rise of television in the early 1950s. So this classical flowering of cinephilia is geographically and temporally specific, an encounter with the peculiar circumstances and geographies of post-war Paris and other, subsequent Western metropolises like London and New York. In this earlier moment, cinephilia most keenly finds its expression in these traditional cultural centres, playing out its obsession with the cinema — as a serious *and* popular form — against and in relation to other developments in modern art, popular culture, intellectual fashion, and critical practice. These various movements and cultish configurations combine together to constitute what Philip Lopate calls ‘the heroic age of filmgoing’ (Porton 2002: 10).

But the key element here is the geographical specificity and relative isolation of particular places that give each expression of cinephilia its own peculiar flavour. For example, cinephilia makes its way to Australia and New Zealand in the early 1960s partly as a reiteration of French, British and American models but also as the expression of variations peculiar to each environment. In Australia, for example, this development is more clearly associated with the universities and responds actively to the lack of a viable local filmmaking culture at this point in time. While following the general trends in ‘author-identification’ (or what is called the ‘auteur theory’) that single out such Hollywood figures as Hitchcock, John Ford, Nicholas Ray and Howard Hawks, this localised cinephilia also champions other filmmakers and cinemas. Nevertheless, all of these ‘flowerings’ of cinephilia have a preoccupation with or prioritisation of what is

called ‘classical Hollywood’ cinema (the dominant form and model of American cinema, roughly between 1920 and 1960). This focus is a key element of the geographical dislocation associated with cinephilia, as well as its valorisation of popular cinema. This obsession with the Hollywood cinema of the 1930s, ’40s and ’50s focuses upon the possibilities for personal expression within one of the most regimented and streamlined systems for making movies in the medium’s history. It is also preoccupied with what is called *mise en scène*, the tactile and material elements such as lighting, set design and figure expression (as well as camerawork) that are arranged within the image or frame and over which directors might feasibly have asserted some control. This overriding interest in the insular and circumscribed world created by the Hollywood studios mirrors the often-solipsistic realm of cinephilia itself. It is this earlier moment of cinephilia that has an initial, profound influence on the formation of cinema studies as an academic discipline; an affinity the discipline often subsequently tries to distance itself from.

In its more negative form cinephilia is often associated with regressive and apolitical attitudes and ideas. One of the reasons it was rejected and pilloried during the structuralist and poststructuralist turn of the 1970s — a force profoundly felt within cinema studies under the sway of Lacanian psychoanalysis and apparatus theory — was its often romanticist preoccupation with authorship, personal expression and the revelatory experience of movie-going. As an approach to the cinema it could hold little traction — within academia and film theory, at least — in a field rife with identity politics and the profound disavowal of the conventional pleasures offered by mainstream narrative cinema. It is precisely this disavowal and rejection of cinephilia that fuelled Laura Mulvey’s (1975) groundbreaking work on the male gaze and the problematically gendered nature of classical cinema. In many cases, this shift in perspective occurred within the practice and position of figures who had once keenly identified themselves as cinephiles, both as filmmakers and critics. The initial return to a more circumspect and partial cinephilia occurs in the late 1970s after the retreat of grand or overarching theories of the cinema, approaches that had aimed to pin down and even find a ‘cure’ for our desire to watch movies (see Mulvey 1975). As Christian Metz (1982: 15) argues at this heightened, almost zealous moment:

[t]o be a theoretician of the cinema, one should ideally no longer love the cinema and yet still love it: have loved it a lot and only have detached oneself from it by taking it up again from the other end, taking it as the target for the very same scopic drive which has made one love it.

Metz’s conscious and schizophrenic decision to abandon his earlier love of cinema carries within it the seeds of its own unmaking.

In many respects the structuralist, poststructuralist and psychoanalytic approaches to cinema that dominated 1970s film theory — though other forms of criticism, such as auteurism, were still widely present elsewhere and even within this academic field — was a return to an earlier ‘sociological’ moment that helped legitimise the study of cinema (and other examples of popular culture) through a focus on audiences and effects. This approach to the cinema is closely linked to the more negative critique of mass culture offered by such key figures of the Frankfurt School as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Although several critics and theorists associated with this group — such as Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer — provided a more positive and productive view of the mass-produced, industrial basis of popular cinema, Adorno was withering in his assessment of its values and implications: ‘every visit to the cinema leaves me, against all my vigilance, stupider or worse’ (Adorno, cited in Stam 2000: 67). The primary basis of this critique was a view of popular cinema that emphasised its passive, narcotic, commodified and industrialised nature. It also regarded cinema as emblematic of a mass culture that had a regressive impact on morality, aesthetics, society and psychology. Like these earlier approaches, much of the film theory of the late 1960s and 1970s worked to question and disentangle the hold of the cinema on its audience. Nevertheless, the foundation of this disavowal of popular cinema in the cinephilia of the 1950s and 1960s would prove to be a key factor in this practice’s inevitable return, alongside a series of other, less monumental and more pluralistic approaches to the medium.

Although the end of cinephilia — and even cinema itself — has, depending on one’s perspective, consistently been announced, longed for and lamented by a series of commentators ranging from Jean-Luc Godard and Susan Sontag to a slew of news media and online pundits, it is still an idea or practice that has a key historical role, and even an ongoing place, in the serious and developing study of the cinema. As Jason Sperb and Scott Balcerzak (2009: 11) argue, ‘[t]he word “cinephilia” historically has most potently been linked to a diverse range of nearly ritualistic filmgoing habits of cinema connoisseurs throughout the middle part of the twentieth century’. Their definition rightly places cinephilia within a particular historical moment and in relation to specific, perhaps arcane, ‘ritualistic’ practices. It positions this ‘feverish’ (Sontag 2002: 120) and encompassing approach to the medium specifically within the geography and spatiality of the movie theatre, suggesting the eclipse and/or transformation of this practice within the era of the multiplex, DVD, online discussion forum and the download; an era that has seen the almost complete demise — outside of film festivals, cinémathèques and museums — of what was once called repertory cinema (the public contextualisation and screening of other than recent or new releases). But although the category of the cinephile has often been used as a term of derision, particularly within academia, ‘the revival of

‘cinophilia’ in the last fifteen years has seen the practice surprisingly become a ‘respectable, even desirable activity’ (Martin 2008: 41). As Adrian Martin argues, ‘[o]nce peopled by little groups on the margins of establishment culture — and often regarded suspiciously as instances of aberrant, excessive “movie love” — [cinophilia is] ... now fully in danger of being moved to that culture’s dead center’ (Martin 2008: 41). Such a shift from the margins to the mainstream is characteristic of the broadly co-optive strategies of commodification, consumer culture and late capitalism; factors and developments that have had a large impact on the fate and longevity of cinophilia.

The legitimisation and democratisation of cinema studies

Such a focus upon cinophilia and its core relation to various developments in cinema studies over the last 65 years allows me to foreground and discuss both the specificity and attraction of the cinema as a medium and its relation to key developments or turns in the study of popular culture. Although cinophilia has been historically preoccupied with the particularity of film or cinema as both a technology and an experience, as a site of both a critical practice and fan-based activity, it is often dismissed as a nostalgic or romantic approach by those who wish to further their claims for the cinema as a legitimate and quantifiable area of research and analysis. At this point in time such a defence of the cinema might seem unnecessary, but this composite, incorporative medium has long struggled to establish its credentials as a serious or equivalent art form to painting, literature, theatre and music. Cinophilia, in an historical sense, is worth revisiting because of the important foundational role it plays in the establishment of cinema studies as an academic discipline, the porous relation it suggests between fandom and academia, and for its initial, impassioned promotion of popular cinema over a more artistically respectable art cinema. As an approach it plays a significant role in upsetting key distinctions between high and low culture, with its earlier incarnations tending to favour a literary mode of analysis — focusing on authorship, theme, style and narrative form — that attempted to establish a shared connection between the cinema and the other arts. Its overwhelming focus upon the director (as author) and the establishment of both institutional and personal canons — dominant approaches to the cinema we live with to this day — are also legacies of this insistent campaign towards legitimisation.

Although often a key basis for an initial and overriding interest in the cinema, cinophilia sits uneasily beside more academically respectable contemporary approaches like neo-formalism (famously practised by Bordwell and Thompson 2010), reception studies, queer theory, transnationalism, narratology, film history and even auteurism. Often considered an immature or adolescent

approach to the movies, '[c]inephilia — a time of innocence — is the childhood/adolescence of film culture' (Martin 1988: 118), an idea or ideal that has returned to critical parlance with the rise of digital media and the internet and the more dispersive and arguably incorporative practices they promote and entail. During this period cinephilia has also become a much more respectable field of study, generating a number of special journal editions, monographs and edited collections. The global reach of the internet, the affinitive networks it has enabled, and the ways in which it traverses traditional centres of cultural power and influence has fuelled this post-classical cinephilia. It has also been preoccupied with the rise (and inevitable fall) of DVD and a download culture, and the profound impact these have had on the ways in which cinephiles interact with, watch and dissect movies. The once sacrosanct realm of the physical space of the cinema and of the celluloid artefact have been decentred by the arrival of a variety of different delivery platforms, a widening of the range of films readily available from a multiplicity of eras, genres and countries, the reconfiguring of what it means to be part of a film community, and the internationalisation accommodated by the fast pace of broadband networks. While for some commentators the loss of the traditional centres of cinephilia is a melancholy sign of the passing of this practice, and part-and-parcel of a broader disenchantment with the cinema (see Thomson 2002), for others it represents the full flowering of cinephilia's incorporative potential.



Figure 21.1 Art house cinema: a sacrosanct realm for the cinephile

This heightened discussion and contemporary practice often takes its lead from the key distinctions made between modern cinephilia and its earlier historical iterations. Some of this discussion is predicated upon generational differences between somewhat distinct eras of cinephilia and their attraction to particular technologies and modes of practice. In this regard, these shifts in the nature of cinephilia can be seen as a reflection of broader changes in the production, reception and distribution of the movies. Often a somewhat exclusive and even dandified mode of practice, it routinely finds its objects of obsession in surprising and difficult to access areas of the cinema. For example, the ‘classical’ cinephilia of the 1950s and 1960s largely practised in the large Western metropolises of America, Europe and smaller enclaves like Australia and New Zealand, has a number of preoccupations but is overwhelmingly concerned with the canonisation and categorisation of particular films, genres and filmmakers working within the Hollywood cinema of the previous three decades. It is also a response to and celebration of the decline of the old Hollywood studio system — which was on its last legs at this time — and reinforces and heightens the generally nostalgic and retrospective tendencies that mark cinephilia (and perhaps even the medium itself). Contemporary cinephilia, while still following particular trends and filmmakers, is considerably more pluralistic in terms of both its objects of obsession and the contexts they are then found and placed within: online, at film festivals, on DVD, in fragments on YouTube *and* in a range of cinemas (archive, multiplex, and so on). But the specific and urgent concern with mainstream cinema has been lost. The trail of discovery is now often led by the rise of film festival culture and a variety of far-flung international cinemas (in the last fifteen years, Iran, South Korea, Thailand, Argentina, and Romania amongst others) and filmmakers (for example, Wong Kar-wai, Hong Sang-soo, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Pedro Costa, Claire Denis, and Paul Thomas Anderson).

The end of cinema?

Susan Sontag (2002: 117), in her pessimistically entitled essay *The Decay of Cinema*, initially written to mark the century of the medium in 1995, argues not just for the demise or ‘decay’ of cinema at this symbolic moment in time, but of a particular kind of response to the medium, stating that ‘[c]inema’s hundred years appear to have the shape of a life cycle’. It is revealing that she pairs her analysis of cinema and film criticism’s loss of importance or cultural centrality — the ‘When Criticism Mattered (1968–1980)’ mantra reiterated in Gerald Peary’s recent documentary on the demise of American film criticism, *For the Love of Movies* (2009) — with the death of a cinephilia she closely associates with the profoundly communal activity of movie-going and the specific geography of particular American and European cities. As Sperb (2009: 99)

claims, '[i]f cinephilia has waned for spectators of Sontag's generation, it might be because they hold on so tightly to a historically specific mode of cinema'. Nevertheless, Sontag (2002: 122) also argues for the need to reconfigure cinephilia if the movies are to survive: '[i]f cinephilia is dead, then movies are dead ... no matter how many movies, even very good ones, go on being made. If cinema can be resurrected, it will only be through the birth of a new kind of cine-love'. For Sontag, cinephilia is an essential element of the cinema, inconceivable without it. Although Sontag may not have recognised or rated the more disparate communities and predilections of the contemporary cinephile, she might have embraced the profound shift from the analogue to the digital that lies at its heart. It is this tension between the public and the private, the physical communal space and its home theatre and online equivalents that most clearly demarcates the contested differences between these various generations and tribes. Whereas an earlier, more chauvinistic cinephilia prided itself on the almost sacred and ritualistic practice of movie-going — a fevered worship of large, incandescent images on the screen — regarding the seeking out of individual films across metropolises and between cities as a form of collecting, hunter-gathering or even *flaneurie*, contemporary cinephilia is considerably less concerned with questions of geographic specificity or the straightforwardly direct communal practice of movie-going.

As Elina Gorfinkel (2008: 37) argues, with the rise of home video in the early 1980s — and the various technologies that have followed — '[f]ilm became a collectible, something that could be owned, replayed, rewound, paused, and duped, entering a new sphere of privatization and domestication'. This shift to the privatisation of the cinematic experience is also accompanied by the miniaturisation and desacralisation of the filmic image. This shift in scale and relationship runs parallel to a key distinction that Godard saw between cinema and television: '[w]hen you go to the cinema you look up, when you watch television you look down' (Shambu 2011). Such a shift in how one regards the image is only accentuated by the perceptual overload of contemporary audiovisual culture. As Sontag (2002: 119) claims, it was the relative rarity and size of the cinematic image that exacted much of its power, but '[t]he sheer ubiquity of moving images has steadily undermined the standards people once had both for cinema as art at its most serious and for cinema as popular entertainment'. Part of what Sontag is also lamenting is a loss of cultural authority — partly her own, of course — a loss of clear distinction between voices and outlets with widely disparate levels of experience, expertise and institutional support. In contrast, I would argue that a fertile dialogue between academic discourse and more populist forms of analysis has always marked cinema studies. But it is the ubiquity of image and information — represented by the wide variety of film-related blogs, websites, fan and serious discussion forums available on the

internet — that contemporary cinephilia both revels within and is almost swamped by.

The politics of cinephilia

As I have stated, what I find most intriguing about DeLillo's description of the encounter between his solitary male figure and Gordon's installation at the beginning of *Point Omega* is its reliance upon words, terms and ideas that evoke the affective practice of cinephilia. DeLillo's character is a connoisseur who passes judgement on both the work he watches and the insufficient actions of the other spectators who encounter it. He expresses a desire to escape to and within this installation, to programme the rhythm of his body to its daily duration. Thus, his response to the work is akin to the exclusivity and temporality often associated with the compulsive repetition characteristic of cinephilia. DeLillo's character also sees the work of death in the studied apprehension enacted upon Hitchcock's smoothly unfolding images. It is therefore unsurprising that Paul Willemen, one of the key writers in this field, sees a pointed connection between cinephilia and necrophilia, as both complexes and neuroses that might require treatment, remedy and even attract disdain (or abject disgust in the case of the latter). I do not think that Willemen is suggesting a literal correlation between the two terms or practices, but he does see a pathological correlation founded in the cinema's origin in the animation of still images — projected at the rate of 24 or 25 frames-per-second to create the illusion of movement — a technological effect that might seem akin to the raising or reanimating of the dead. The recognition of this foundation is also at the core of the ghoulish work done by Gordon.

But Willemen's account of cinephilia and DeLillo's description of Gordon's work also highlight the fetishistic aspect of this approach to the cinema. Although some critics and theorists insist upon the totalistic elements of the cinema — as a world — when discussing cinephilia, it is more common to highlight the fragmentary or fetishistic elements of the filmic experience. This is particularly acute when responding to the vagaries of mainstream narrative cinema and the pleasures and idiosyncrasies to be mined from it. Even an author-based approach to such works — which runs counter to the industrial, technological and collective nature of the medium — tends to favour the isolated or 'privileged moment', those instances where the generic façade of the cinema lets down its guard. In this guise cinephilia can become a kind of archaeology and '[t]he experience of cinema becomes a matter of negotiating and combining pieces, ruins, sensorial memories of elements disconnected from the initial textual logic or system that contained them' (Martin 2009: 31). Such activities can take on the form of bricolage or for the surrealists and Dadaists of the 1920s, 'the capturing of fleeting, evanescent moments' (Willemen 1994: 232). As a

result, a particular definition of cinephilia has been preoccupied with the fragment, a transformative approach to the experience of the medium that highlights its piecemeal, composite nature.

In this regard, cinephilia is commonly figured as a critical, creative and even political act, a response to the cinema that needs to be transferred or transformed by the act of writing or even filmmaking. In a contemporary sense, the evidence of this lies in the endless array of websites and blog-posts that seek to express, document and describe the daily practice of film-going or watching. Such cinephilia is both a critical and devotional act, predicated upon an often-undying love for one filmmaker or film over another. Even such legitimising and systematising appropriations of cinephilia as Andrew Sarris' (1996) seminal, canonising account of American cinema rely upon a practice of passionate advocacy: 'Sarris's criticism, despite its cultism and often inchoate formalism, nevertheless possessed a certain anti-Establishment cache' (Porton 2002: 9). Therefore, cinephilia represents an active rather than passive response when considered as a critical or fan (hardly exclusive categories) practice. But evidence of this formative cinephilia can also be found in the legion of films and filmmakers — such as Martin Scorsese, Todd Haynes, Paul Thomas Anderson, Peter Jackson — who attempt to 'write' the practice and passions of their film-going into the movies they make. For example, the collected works of Anderson (including *Boogie Nights* (1997), *Magnolia* (1999), and *There Will Be Blood* (2007)) can be read as an attempt to rethink and restage many of the preoccupations and stylistic elements of 1970s and early 1980s American cinema, specifically the work of Scorsese and Robert Altman. As Noël Carroll (1998: 240–64) has argued, in the wake of the influence of the French New Wave, the American cinema from the late 1960s onwards has been profoundly marked by what he calls 'allusionism', a self-conscious intertextual practice that encompasses pastiche, parody, homage, and speaks to the seeming historical exhaustion and weight of contemporary cinema. Although the tastes and preoccupations of many of the filmmakers of the French New Wave shifted once they began to make movies, and gained a much more critical perspective on American popular culture in the light of events like the Vietnam War, their American counterparts more readily and slavishly 'stuck' to the memory of their classical predecessors. For example, although Scorsese dynamically explores the world of his Italian-American characters in *Mean Streets* (1973), they still watch such auteurist or cinephilic touchstones as John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) when they visit the cinema. In Peter Bogdanovich's melancholic *The Last Picture Show* (1971), the last film shown at the local cinema is a cinephilic object par excellence, Howard Hawks' western *Red River* (1948). In these and other moments, the films move beyond the articulation of a coherent and seamless screen world to signpost the tastes, passions and historical touchstones of their authors. And it is often in such moments that these filmmakers return to

their formative influences and re-stage their earlier preoccupations as film viewers.

As is probably self-evident, a key aspect of any discussion of cinephilia is an emphasis upon the personal, a recounting — whether one is a critic, blogger or filmmaker — of one's own often-formative encounter with the cinema. In this respect the practice of cinephilia becomes profoundly entwined with the memory of a movie or moment experienced in a specific place and time. But it is also this reflection upon the past that enables cinephilia's creative productivity in the form of writing (criticism, autobiography, and so on) and filmmaking. For example, Italo Calvino (1994: 37–73) recounts his early movie-going experiences in fascist Italy in the wonderfully evocative essay *A Cinema-Goer's Autobiography*. In this essay Calvino (1994: 38) explores the physical, historical and experiential dimensions of film-going and the specific contributions that each makes to the formation of his adult identity:

[t]he cinema as evasion, it's been said so many times, with the intention of writing the medium off — and certainly evasion was what I got out of the cinema in those years, it satisfied a need for disorientation, for the projection of my attention into a different space, a need which I believe corresponds to a primary function of our assuming our place in the world, an indispensable stage in any character formation.

Calvino's discussion of the cinema as an 'evasion', a retreat or escape into a 'complete' world, one segregated from that placed outside the cinema, is a common criticism of the apolitical and asocial dimensions of cinephilia. But Calvino's concerns in this essay are more productive, positive and full of longing, attempting to account for the ongoing importance of cinema in his life while documenting an encounter with the rarefied domain of the late 1930s Hollywood cinema that obsessed him during his teenage years. Calvino contrasts the fullness, richness and strangeness of this exotic world with the paltriness and mundanity of fascist Italy. It is this encounter with the foreign but also strangely familiar world of American movies that he feels compelled to recollect and re-imagine in his own writing — a valentine to a moment when the movies truly mattered.

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22 Digital Media

The cultural politics of information

Andrew Whelan

- While the distinction is somewhat vague, digital media are commonly positioned as ‘new’ media, as opposed to ‘old’ and analogue media.
- There is much debate regarding the cultural, political, and social impacts of digital media, particularly as regards access to cultural production and consumption, access to information, and access to digital media themselves.
- While access to the means of cultural production, and thus the emergence of ‘participatory culture’, is facilitated by digital media, there are still grounds for approaching claims that digital media are empowering and democratising with caution.

What are ‘digital media’?

The term ‘digital media’ is contrastive — specifically, it is contrasted with ‘analogue media’. This binary runs roughly in parallel with the distinction drawn between ‘new’ and ‘old media’, although, of course, new media are now not quite as ‘new’ as they once were. Technically speaking, where analogue technologies record signals as electric pulses (and usually to a fixed physical format, or intended for diffusion through such formats); digital technologies render those signals in binary form, as sequences of zeroes and ones. While the distinction is somewhat blurry, examples of analogue media include television, radio, vinyl records, video and audio cassettes, whereas examples of digital media include networked computers, mobile devices, and the huge array of ‘suffixed’ file formats (.mp3, .pdf, .jpg, .avi, .doc and so on). One way to distinguish analogue media is by their discreteness — you cannot play a tape or make a call on a television (it was not always so: early phonographs could be used for recording as well as playback, and early telephones were used to broadcast music). Digital media are metamedia, they *remediate* older media (Bolter and Grusin 1999), so you can email, read (write) the news, make a (video) call, read (and write, and publish) a book, listen to (and make, and distribute) music, download and watch (and produce) animation and so on, on a networked laptop. This is one of the meanings of ‘media convergence’. More

generally, digital media can be said to refer not just to the devices we use for producing, accessing, and distributing information, but to the cultural and social practices associated with their consumption, production and use, and indeed the political and economic ramifications of these.

Digital media have become a focus of attention for scholars across the humanities and social sciences, and there is a sizable literature in the area. The phrase ‘digital media’ is bound up with a range of concepts addressing the use of these technologies, such as the ideas around the emergence of a post-industrial information society and an information or knowledge economy (Bell 1981; Castells 1998; Fuchs 2008), the implications of virtual communities and virtual worlds (Boellstorff 2008; Rheingold 2000; Shields 2003), the preoccupation with ‘Web 2.0’ (Bassett 2008; Song 2010), convergence culture (Jenkins, in this volume), social media and social networking sites (Craigie, in this volume) and so on.



Figure 22.1 Mobile devices: participatory, empowering and democratising?

This is not the place to describe this literature, but it is worth commenting on in passing. There is a sense now that much of the early work on digital media manifested a kind of ‘techno-utopian’ rhetoric (Sterne 2005), not entirely dissimilar to that which circulated around previous niche media. Central here was the conviction that digital media are, in and of themselves, participatory, empowering and democratising. This rhetoric evidences a discourse sometimes referred to as the ‘technological sublime’ (Nye 1996) — a kind of fetishisation

of technology and 'the new'. The adoption of digital media and the apparent emergence of an information society were taken to imply a paradigm shift in the social and cultural order, a digital revolution.

The internet, for example, was going to reinvigorate community, free speech, and democracy (Barlow 1996; Klein 1999; Rheingold 2000), as it liberated the self from the material constraints of 'meatspace' (Turkle 1997). It was suggested that we were at the dawn of the 'posthuman' (Haraway 1991; Hayles 1999). The digital revolution was thought to be unprecedented in human history, and to either actually re-order society and culture, or at least be a (or *the*) major factor in such re-ordering. This was described as being the most significant development of media form since the invention of the movable type printing press in the fifteenth century.

However, there are good grounds for caution in thinking of digital media as revolutionary, as there are also with thinking the same of the introduction of the printing press. Cook points to two as regards the latter; namely, the limited availability of paper, and widespread illiteracy; in doing so, he problematises analogies which draw on what he calls the 'Gutenberg myth' (1997). Technologies do not in themselves bring about social change. Rather, they are embedded in social practices, and co-constitutive with them. Arguments which suggest otherwise are often castigated as technological determinism: the notion that technology not only has social effects, but that it can actively cause widespread social and cultural change, whether this change is conceptualised in utopian or dystopian terms. Moreover, the ways in which we conceptualise technologies impact upon not only their use, but also their development. It has been speculated that some of the early architects of the web were influenced by science fiction. The term 'cyberspace', for example, originates in the sci-fi of William Gibson (1984), where hackers 'jack in' to the matrix to interact directly with pure information. In thinking about digital media, either in customary or critical terms, we are also producing them as objects of inquiry of a certain kind.

Digital media as cultural form

Digital media and the debates around them thus generate insights into the complex interrelations between technology (as form or medium) and culture (understood both narrowly, as 'content', and broadly, as social practice). At the same time, the social practices associated with the production and consumption of cultural content are also altered (as when people 'timeshift' their favourite television by downloading it rather than being bound by the broadcasting schedule). Nor is the remediation of 'old' media forms the only or most significant aspect of digital media. Much scholarly work has focused on emergent social and cultural practices across a huge range of 'virtual

communities', attending especially to cultural forms which have developed wholly or significantly through their digital mediation.

Technology, however, is also perhaps best thought of as culture — technology, like 'science', is never neutral. People do not generally think of an atomic bomb, for instance, as being a 'neutral' tool; technologies are always implicated in social relations. It is perhaps better to think of technologies as having *affordances* (Hutchby 2001). Just as water coolers (Fayard and Weeks 2007) or automatic door-closers (Latour 1988) have social affordances 'inscribed' into them (respectively, allowing people to congregate informally at work, or to no longer bother closing doors after themselves), so digital media invite users to assume certain positions in their interactions with and through them (for example, in setting up profiles, it is rare to *not* be asked to specify a gender). Over time, the positions technologies offer us can become 'enculturated' — as, for instance, with the reconfiguration of public space around the car in Western cultures over the course of the last century (Urry 2004).

Nor are affordances restricted to the interactional positions they offer. The histories of the turntable and the sampler and their role in popular music serve as excellent examples of this (Katz 2010; Thornton 1995), as does the more recent incorporation of digital sound into popular music aesthetics — including the sound of digital error or 'glitch' (Young 2002), classic videogame sound (Driscoll and Diaz 2009), and the proliferation of the mp3 itself in mash-up and other musical subcultures (Sinnreich 2010; Whelan 2008). Technologies may lead or guide social action and interaction through their affordances, but they cannot ever entirely determine their own use. This will become more evident below when we consider some other unintended consequences of digital media.

In terms of access to the means of production and distribution of media — effectively, the ability to be publicly heard or to intervene in public debate — it is clear that digital media certainly possess some novel affordances. Consider independent or niche media practices prior to digital media: some good examples of DIY media include tape-trading (Manuel 1993, Marshall 2003) and zine (short for 'magazine') cultures (Duncombe 2008; Schilt 2003). Such 'micromedia' were and continue to be significant to numerous youth cultures (Harrison 2006; Kahn-Harris 2007). However, independent media is also often linked to dissidence and subversion, as with 'samizdat' culture in the Soviet Union (Feldbrugge 1975; Oushakine 2001). The humble cassette tape became associated with political ferment around the Iranian revolution of 1979. Prior to the revolution, recordings of the Ayatollah's speeches in exile in Paris were distributed widely within Iran, rather like analogue proto-podcasts, despite the best efforts of the Shah:

[i]n [the Ayatollah] Khomeini's rented house, two tape machines were kept permanently running, recording his speeches and

announcements and duplicating them for transmission or transportation to Iran. Khomeini refused to talk on the telephone directly so international lines were used for tape-to-tape recording. In Iran, followers in makeshift studios with numerous cassette recorders worked around the clock to duplicate these texts. (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi 1994: 120–21)

In a curious case of history repeating, Western news sources reported enthusiastically on the use of Twitter in Iran following the contested 2009 election (Morozov 2011).

Leaving aside for the time being the question as to whether enterprises such as Google, Telecom^{NZ}, or Microsoft are or are not similar to companies like 20th Century Fox around the middle of the last century, we can say that analogue media as technologies are generally associated with *mass media* as modes for the production and circulation of media messages. Mass media imply massive proprietary, and concentrated *one-to-many* broadcasting and content-producing conglomerates, such as syndicated TV and radio networks, print news sources like the *New York Times*, the ‘studio system’ of movie production and so on. Digital media, on the other hand, are generally understood to be, at least potentially, *any-to-many* — consider Twitter or MySpace profiles. Where analogue media content tends towards the mass and vertical (or top-down), digital media content includes the niche and horizontal, for instance a ‘friend-locked’ LiveJournal community.

Examples like LiveJournal or Twitter highlight the apparently agential affordances associated with digital media. In the analogue media environment content was capital-intensive, authoritative, and produced by professionals. Analogue media consumers were (in a rather exaggerated way) held to be a passive, atomised mass audience (Adorno 1991); digital niche media are associated with an altogether different figure, the producer-user or *produser* (Bruns 2010). The produser is a digital media user whose use is also productive in generating value. The example often provided of such user-generated or ‘crowdsourced’ content, being produced in ad-hoc networks of distributed creativity, is the success of Wikipedia, but seemingly innocuous behaviours, such as uploading photos to Facebook, also produce value (both for the uploader and their ‘friends’, and for Facebook and its advertisers).

Digital media also differ from analogue media in terms of their reproducibility. Imagine if somebody wanted to spread the word about music they liked in 1981. They might produce a zine using a typewriter, a photocopier, and scissors and glue (the technologies from which ‘cut and paste’ in contemporary software is derived — this kind of residual retention of older forms is sometimes called ‘skeuomorphism’). They could then sell or give away this zine — perhaps through a local independent record store. Over time, they might become familiar

with and participate in ‘snail mail’ networks involved in trading zines. Digitisation ‘dematerialises’ these sorts of practices by rendering the zine or the cassette (the movie, the newspaper and so forth) in binary code.

Our hypothetical zinester would today likely set up a blog, and this is significantly different from the 1981 situation in the following two ways: the blog (for good or ill) is potentially accessible to virtually anyone in a way that the zine was not. Also, one reader’s use of the blog does not preclude another reader’s use, whereas if there are only so many copies of a zine in circulation, one reader being in possession of a copy means by definition that some other reader does not have it. In economic terms, this point raises a fundamental feature of digital media: they are generally what are called ‘non-rivalrous goods’. One person’s consumption of, for instance, an mp3 hosted on another person’s computer, does not foreclose the possibility of another person also accessing that mp3. Unlike with, say, a hamburger, with digital media, consumption does *not* necessarily decrease value, and often may *increase* value (as with, for example, the adoption of open source code). Digital media can of course become rivalrous to the extent that proprietary claims can be made, enforced, and engineered. This issue is one of the central concerns around digital media.

Digital media and the politics of information

This concern is effectively around the ‘freedom’ or otherwise of digital media. The arguments advanced by ‘cyberlibertarian’ advocates for the freedom of digital media (sometimes disparagingly referred to as ‘freetards’ when their arguments address cultural goods) can be usefully framed in relation to a famous aphorism, attributed to Stewart Brand, suggesting that ‘information wants to be free’ (Anderson 2009). Of course, information cannot actually ‘want’ anything. Yet what is especially interesting about this slogan is the semantic ambiguity of the word ‘free’, where this may be understood as at no market cost (or no market value), and/or as unhindered in its movement, unrestricted, unpoliced. We are thus brought neatly to consideration of the market, and the state, and their respective relations with digital media. The aphorism implies, in keeping with a ‘cultural commons’ position, that it is in the public good for information to circulate widely, that artificial scarcity in the service of profit is not only inefficient, but detrimental to the wellbeing of society and culture at large. Arguments such as these are closely associated with the movements around ‘copyleft’ and Creative Commons licensing.

Over the last ten years, some of the most significant politico-legal interventions concerning digital media — including notably those which occurred in national courts of law and through supranational entities such as the European Union —

have sought to address and frequently to counter such arguments (this is the ‘paytard’ line). A common tactic, now enacted as law in France, Ireland, Malaysia, South Korea, and Taiwan, is to threaten ‘pirates’ with disconnection for sharing copyright material, as proposed also in New Zealand’s *Copyright (Infringing File Sharing Amendment) Bill* (New Zealand House of Representatives 2010). In many countries legislation has been put in place to restrict ‘fair use’ provisions (for example, rights of use for satirical or educational purposes) and bolster and enforce the intellectual property rights held by established media interests. In some instances, this legislation is being devised without public knowledge or disclosure, as with the international *Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement* (to which New Zealand is a signatory). In this regard, the recent history of digital media can be written as a history of legal judgements, as network technologies are subject to legal scrutiny, particularly the decisions made in *A&M Records Inc v. Napster* (2002), *MGM Studios Inc v. Grokster* (2005), and the Pirate Bay convictions (2009). These cases represent significant attempts to control novel and emergent socio-technical forms for managing, exchanging and producing cultural and social value. Among their implications, such rulings are likely to have chilling effects on technological innovation.

Over the longer run, one of the things we are witness to is an emergent culture of information which is sometimes at odds with traditionally powerful intermediaries. The idea that anybody with access could upload video to YouTube, or release an album on a netlabel, seems to indicate a shift in the terrain of the possible in media production and dissemination, as well as an increase in the range of media on offer. Moreover, the social affordances of such a shift are also profound, and the incredibly vast array of forums, fan communities, support groups, subcultures, and countless other ‘networked publics’ (Ito 2008) are evidence of this. Moreover, the existence of such cultural and social forms clearly redounds ‘offline’ (as, for instance, with the normalisation of online dating).

These developments relate to information access *in general*, although the established cultural industries have been particularly vocal in framing them as economically damaging. However, presenting ‘culture’ as (only) market goods and isolating the economic as ‘autonomous’ from the social and the political is itself problematic. Cultural forms like music, for instance, have not historically been the sole preserve of large-scale industrial concerns; rather, they are deeply embedded in social life. This is why dismissals of the ‘freetard’ position in favour of access often miss the mark.

At the time of writing, the debate around access to information has focused on WikiLeaks, a site which releases documentary evidence, usually as furnished by whistleblowers, which would otherwise not come to light. The outlook

expressed by WikiLeaks follows cyberlibertarianism in positioning open access to information as an absolute value, and information itself as an absolute good. Indeed, freedom of information, the right to free speech, and institutional openness, transparency and accountability are foundational values in democratic societies, albeit more honoured in the breach than the observance. Thus, Wikileaks — and cyberlibertarianism generally — radicalise rights enshrined elsewhere, including the *First Amendment to the US Constitution* and Articles 19 and 27 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which state that:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. (United Nations General Assembly 1948)

WikiLeaks also highlights the continued power of established intermediaries in deciding what counts as ‘news’. WikiLeaks acts as a kind of clearinghouse: while documents may be contextualised, and in some cases redacted, WikiLeaks does not really *interpret* (or more unkindly, *spin*) them. The business of *realpolitik* revealed by WikiLeaks was reported internationally in 2010, although more substantive aspects of ‘Cablegate’ — the release of hundreds of thousands of US diplomatic cables (confidential correspondence between the State Department and its overseas embassies) — did not receive as much coverage. This was contrary to WikiLeaks stated aspiration that established news media might use the documents they host to call governments to account (Khatchadourian 2010). In light of this, WikiLeaks’ *modus operandi* can be considered strategically ‘meta’: challenging ‘power by challenging the normal channels of challenging power and revealing the truth’ (Giri 2010).

The orientation to information articulated by WikiLeaks and others is sometimes referred to as ‘hacktivism’. The organisation known as Anonymous, for example, has conducted DDoS (‘distributed denial of service’) attacks on targets as varied as Gene Simmons of the band KISS, the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, the governments of Australia, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe, the Support Online Hip Hop site, and the Church of Scientology, crashing sites in all cases. In late 2010, Anonymous also targeted a range of financial companies which withdrew their services from WikiLeaks and supporters wishing to donate to it, including Paypal, Bank of America, MasterCard, Visa, Amazon, Moneybookers, and the Swiss bank PostFinance, with similar effects (Holwerda 2010).

Even taken solely as a symbolic expression of dissent, hacktivism takes us into territory where cultures of use, technology, economy, political ideology, and information itself become the grounds for social mobilisation. This is rather distinct from the forms of political action referred to as ‘new social movements’ from the 1960s onwards (Melucci 1994), let alone conventional left/right party politics. The sheer audacity of Anonymous, WikiLeaks, and the Pirate Bay in refusing the procedures of conventional opposition is striking in this regard, to the extent that questions have been raised about the possibility that the model of power operationalised in hacktivism is in some way impoverished. Perfect information is not going to provide us with salvation, although accelerated access to information is highlighted here as a cultural and political force. Like technology, information is not an independent ‘change agent’.

Economies of digital media

Freedom of information as a value needs to be placed in its broad context — a context of increasing ‘hyper-visibility’ (Nayar 2010) and ‘überveillance’ (Michael and Michael 2007), particularly as regards the diminishing privacy of the individual, rather than the institution. Free information cuts both ways, and goes in unpredictable directions. Sobering counterarguments to the idea that information wants to be free point to the ambiguity of ‘free’ also in other ways: organisations like the Recording Industry Association of America, for instance, have argued strenuously that ‘free culture’ actually frequently implies *displaced profits*: internet service providers, they suggest, unethically reap the rewards which previously accrued to the entertainment industry. Such an argument hinges on equating ‘free culture’ only with ‘piracy’; it would not apply, for instance, to the netlabels which simply give their music away (Whelan 2010). However, participatory culture also implies displaced profits to the extent that it is predicated on free labour or *playbour*. Kücklich uses this term to describe game modification or ‘modding’, where gamers engage in game development as an extension of leisure, and the economic value of this development is recuperated by the industry (2005). Proponents of free culture often advocate for an understanding of the unpaid work of mash-up artists, for instance, as a resistant engagement with copyright, rather than free publicity for powerful record labels. Notions of participatory culture and ‘we, the media’ (Gillmor 2006) are all well and good, but they are often belied by the large-scale concerns which host such productions and profit from them. The wonderfully ‘free’ participatory cultures of digital media can also be understood more cynically, as consumers joyously and freely generating content for corporations averse to the financial risks of innovation, but keen to profit from it nonetheless where their most loyal customers will do it for them.

This is why it is always interesting to follow the money: who might profit from the content hosted at LiveJournal, Blogger, Facebook, or YouTube — and who might pick up the tab? Such questions can also be extended to those who provide the hardware and infrastructure on which digital media depend — information may be virtual zeroes and ones, but it is still reliant on physical devices, and those devices are produced by real people in real places, and end up in real places when they rapidly become obsolete. In deciding that Dell laptops could be said to be made in the US, the Department of the Treasury (2002) found that,

[t]he components are sourced from various countries, which include: the chassis (Taiwan); hard disk drive (Thailand); BIOS chip (U.S.); floppy disk drive (China); AC adapter (China, but in the future, Thailand); CD ROM (Japan); fax modem cards (U.S.); docking station (Taiwan); and the memory board (Korea, Japan, or Singapore).

How well informed have digital media rendered Westerners about internet access and censorship, or even labour or environmental policies in any of these countries? This question points in a broader sense to the discourses which circulate around digital media as one-size-fits-all solutions to social problems. Nicholas Negroponte (1995), an early proponent of the techno-utopian views discussed above, went on to establish One Laptop Per Child, a non-profit project partially funded by, among others, eBay, Google, Intel, and News Corporation, which aims to provide children in developing countries with computers (made in Taiwan). Critics have queried the appropriateness of providing laptops in areas with often endemic poverty: is a laptop useful or a colonising ‘gift’ in an area where there may be poor access to potable water, let alone print materials in the local language? The goals of One Laptop Per Child are laudable, but might not expanded teacher training — or even the adequate provision of *pencils* (Felsenstein 2005) — be a better educational priority?

Such considerations interrogate the underlying assumptions of the techno-utopianism still associated with digital media, where an individual interacting alone with a laptop is the very model of civilisation and emancipation, while the social and cultural context is entirely evacuated. ‘New’ is not necessarily always better — in many educational contexts, ‘online learning’ is understood as a managerial strategy for reducing face-to-face teaching time and thereby increasing student turnover, rather than having any inherent pedagogical purpose (Clegg, Hudson and Steel 2003; Stirling, Hopkins and Riddick 2010). Any celebration of the emancipatory potentials of digital media is well served also by a critical and grounded engagement with these media as material cultures; this is because they are all too often thought of in such a way as to invite us to ask questions only of what we see when we look *through* the screen, rather than *at* the device.

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23 Facebook

Audiences, surveillance, friendship and identity

Adam Craigie

- Facebook users are ‘prosumers’ — they both produce and consume the content of the Facebook website.
- Privacy issues on Facebook include both ‘social privacy’ (information other people are able to view) and ‘institutional privacy’ (information other companies and organisations have access to).
- Facebook may contribute to building and maintaining certain forms of social capital, though these are generally ‘weak ties’.
- The concept of the ‘unitary self’ — where individuals present only one identity — is more useful for examining identity construction on Facebook than postmodern concepts in which individuals maintain multiple and fluid identities.

Introduction

If Facebook were a country it would be the third largest in the world. With membership of over 750 million users it is one of the largest contemporary global phenomena. Facebook is a social networking site that allows users to share information, post photographs, play games, and, most importantly, connect with friends, family and colleagues. Facebook users maintain a ‘Profile’ page that contains information such as their date of birth, email address, favourite movies, quotes, books, employment and education history, as well as a variety of other information from their thoughts on the latest television shows, politicians or social movements, to what they ate for breakfast. Users send ‘Friend Requests’ to others, which the invited user can then ‘Accept’, thus creating an institutionalised relationship between the two. The ‘Home’ page of users is called the ‘NewsFeed’, and this is constantly updated with the posts of all one’s ‘friends’ — if your ‘friend’ posts a photo, uploads a link to another web page, makes a comment on someone else’s profile or does virtually anything else on the site, this will be sent through to your ‘Home’ page. Facebook may be thought of as both an internet site (www.facebook.com) and as a corporation. The Facebook corporation is where decisions on strategies,

finances and features are made, but the Facebook site is where these decisions are played out and where users log on and interact.

Facebook was developed at Harvard in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg as a platform for users to maintain their offline connections in an online environment. Zuckerberg maintains absolute control over the company as he is both the CEO and also controls three of the five seats on its Board of Directors (Kirkpatrick 2010). The history of Facebook and Zuckerberg have been portrayed in a movie *The Social Network* (2010) and a book *The Facebook Effect* (Kirkpatrick 2010), and Mark Zuckerberg himself is now an internationally recognised figure — he was *Time* magazine's 'Person of the Year' for 2010 (Grossman 2010) and over three million Facebook users 'Like' his Facebook page.

After Facebook's initial development for Harvard students in 2004 it spread to other colleges in the US throughout the next year, and was then introduced to US high schools in 2005. However, the year when Facebook's growth really accelerated was in 2006 when Facebook opened up its membership and allowed anyone to join (Kirkpatrick 2010). By 2007, Facebook was worth US\$15 billion, up from US\$525 million in 2006 (Kirkpatrick 2010). Yet this pales in comparison to what the site is reportedly worth now. In January 2011 Facebook was trading on secondary exchange (SharesPost.Inc) at a valuation of US\$89.2 billion, up 40 per cent from December 2010 and making it one of the most profitable internet companies, second only to Google (Levy 2011). This valuation means that each of the sites' 750 million users is worth over US\$100 (CheckFacebook 2011).

This chapter will examine four aspects of Facebook: its audience and how they can be theorised, the privacy and surveillance aspects of the site, how Facebook is used in the process of identity construction, and the way Facebook has altered friendships. Facebook has had a significant impact on each of these: it represents another step in the breakdown of the producer-consumer divide in new media; it represents a mammoth change in the amount of publicly available information about an individual; it forces theorists to reconsider postmodern forms of identity construction; and it has been credited with both increasing the ability of users to maintain offline relationships and also with aiding in the collapse of meaningful friendships.

Facebook: blurring boundaries

Depending on whom you ask, Facebook is either a revolution in social networking and the future of e-capitalism, or a place where excitable youth post too much information about themselves,

risking exposure to stalkers or surveillance by employers, parents, and the C.I.A. (Cohen 2008: 5)

The question of what Facebook does and how it operates cannot be reduced to black and white definitions, as, in many ways, Facebook blurs boundaries. The site cannot be reduced to the utopian idea of the 'global village' espoused by Marshall McLuhan (1989) where the media begins to transcend nation-states, resulting in global democratisation and a full directory of the collective intelligence of the globe. Nor can it be reduced to the dystopian images of media imperialism resulting in cultural homogenisation, where the West colonises the rest through media content, as argued by Harindranath (2003).

Jenkins (2006: 156) uses the term 'pop cosmopolitan' to refer to the way 'transcultural flows of pop culture can inspire new forms of global consciousness'; Facebook may have the potential to do just this. The site aids in the de-territorialisation of knowledge, allowing it to flow more easily across space and culture. Examples of this can be seen in the civil unrest in Iran in 2009 when sites such as Facebook and Twitter were used by activists to get their messages out to the world (Sullivan 2009). Yet Facebook's aggressive growth strategy also aims to bring the entire world onto the site, which at its heart is imbued with Western conceptions of identity, transparency, communication and efficiency (Kirkpatrick 2010).

The site also contains elements of two distinct types of convergence: corporate convergence and grassroots convergence. Jenkins (2006: 155) describes 'corporate convergence' as the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few corporations. Facebook is becoming an increasingly central player in such a media oligopoly as illustrated by its huge numbers of users, massive monetary valuation, and increasing encroachment into all facets of the internet, with many sites encouraging users to 'Like' their webpage or product so that this information will be transmitted to the NewsFeed of all their Facebook friends. Conversely, 'grassroots convergence' relates to the increasingly central roles that digitally empowered consumers play in the production, distribution and reception of media content, with Facebook placing such ideals at the centre of its philosophy. Jenkins (2006) believes the future of media may be an 'uneasy truce' between commercial media organisations and grass-roots intermediaries. Facebook may be seen as an example of this where the corporation attempts to commodify interactions on the site, with site users accepting some of these while rejecting others.

The audience

A classic conceptualisation of the audience, postulated by the Frankfurt School, argued that people were passive recipients of mass-produced 'culture' — the

workers were ‘cultural dupes’, passively and joylessly consuming the products of the culture industry rather than producing their own oppositional and critical texts (Adorno and Horkheimer 1986). Stuart Hall (1980) later challenged this notion of an uncritical audience, developing his three typologies which suggested that, as well as the potential for the audience to remain in a passive state, they could also negotiate the meanings of a cultural text or even adopt oppositional positions, rejecting the dominant narrative of the text. However, Facebook users do not fit neatly into any of Hall’s typologies. Users are only capable of doing what the site allows — they may post photographs, play games and interact with their ‘friends’, but only within the confines of the Facebook system. Though active participation is meant to be a key feature of the site, this participation is actually quite limited — users cannot change what their homepage is, they may only add the types of information Facebook allows, and they cannot change the structure of their profile. This may be contrasted to other social networking sites such as MySpace which allows users to write their own code and dramatically alter the way they present themselves on the site (boyd 2007). Users *can* negotiate the meaning of Facebook as a cultural text, through changing their privacy settings and behaviour on the site, however, using Facebook requires one to accept its fundamental concept — that sharing information about oneself is both desirable and worthwhile. Therefore users can negotiate some aspects and meanings, but not the ethos of this cultural text; this also means that Facebook users cannot use the site and maintain an oppositional perspective. Nevertheless, most analyses of the Facebook audience have now moved beyond such conceptions to focus on the breakdown of the producer-consumer divide. Consumers of Facebook are also the producers of its content and the concept of the ‘prosumer’ has been used to analyse this phenomenon.

The concept of the ‘prosumer’ was initially developed by Alvin Toffler (1980) to describe how the boundary between the consumers and producers of cultural goods was disintegrating. Using examples ranging from consumers pumping their own petrol at service stations to women administering their own pregnancy tests, Toffler described an emerging form of ‘prosumer lifestyles’ and predicted that this boundary would become ever more blurred. Arguably, Facebook is an excellent example of the prosumer lifestyle: the site may be thought of as a newspaper or manuscript detailing the events and thoughts of over 750 million people. Facebook provides the infrastructure for this exchange of information to occur, but the site users themselves create the content and writing, and then distribute these cultural texts to their social networks of friends, family and colleagues. Thus Facebook may be seen as using the new corporate strategy of collaboration with the knowledge community, but doing so under the more traditional structures of for-profit commodity culture.

Web 2.0 — which refers to online applications that facilitate user interaction and user-centred design — altered consumers' role with the media, putting them at the forefront of the production of media content (Cohen 2008). Facebook represents the next step in this evolution of the prosumer. The activities users engage in on Facebook may be described as 'immaterial labour', which, in essence, is knowledge work. This concept has been used by Hardt and Negri, who describe this new form of work as the hegemonic form of labour in our society and the labour that creates 'relationships and ultimately life itself' (Hardt and Negri 2000: 108). Hardt and Negri (2000) then argue that this knowledge work of what they call 'the multitude' (that is, all people who produce under the rule of capital) is then appropriated by capitalism. They argue that capitalism is like a vampire, sucking out the life-blood of people's work and appropriating it for profit, and that this phenomenon can be understood as the continuation of capital's tendency to offload labour costs onto consumers (Cohen 2008). The melding of amusement and work, as reproduced through sites like Facebook, can be traced back to Adorno and Horkheimer (1986: 137) who argued that 'amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work'. It is not only the Facebook corporation itself that does this; Facebook users are now also involved directly in the marketing and distribution of the products of many media companies and commercial corporations such as *The New York Times* (over one million 'Likes', see <http://www.facebook.com/#!/nytimes>) or Coca-Cola (who has over 22 million 'Likes', see <http://www.facebook.com/#!/cocacola>). Users do this through posting links on their profile page, sending them to 'friends', becoming 'fans' of commercial entities, or commenting on the Facebook pages of products (which then distributes this information to all their friends' NewsFeed).

The prosumer logic inherent in Facebook is so pervasive that when Facebook launched a new feature allowing it to be translated into different languages the company left it to its users to do most of the translation (Kirkpatrick 2010). These users were making Facebook more easily usable for themselves, their friends and all those that spoke their language, but at the same time their immaterial labour enabled Facebook to grow and become the dominant player in the social networking market, thus adding millions of dollars in value to Facebook's net worth, while users do such immaterial labour for free. This demonstrates the essence of Hardt and Negri's (2000) argument of how capitalism appropriates the labour of the multitude. Users of Facebook create content, write applications and translate the site into various languages, but the fruits of their labour are then appropriated by the Facebook corporation so that money can be made through the selling of advertising and the mapping of the consumer behaviour of these same individuals (Cohen 2008).

Surveillance and privacy

Many discussions on Facebook privacy tend to revolve around first person social privacy (Millier 2008/9). First person social privacy relates to the availability of information posted by an individual. The problem centres on users being uninformed about the risks posed when one posts information on the site. There are a couple of examples which help problematise the social privacy issue with Facebook. Amy Polumbo was crowned Miss New Jersey in June 2007, then was subsequently blackmailed by someone who had found compromising photos of her on her Facebook account. Though the pageant board found the photos were in ‘poor taste’, she was not stripped of her crown (Millier 2008/9). This example illustrates the problem of first-person privacy on Facebook — Amy posted the photo herself for her friends to see, but this was then used against her, either by a friend or a third party. In a similar case, a 16-year-old girl named Kimberly Swann, was fired from her new job as an office administrator after only three weeks for posting comments on her Facebook page such as ‘first day at work. Omg [oh my God]!! So dull!!!’ and ‘all i do is shred hole punch n scan paper!!! omg!’ (Levy 2009).

The importance of this form of privacy cannot be understated and many commentators have suggested that Facebook will lead to an increasing number of ‘identity thefts’ (Millier 2008/9; Sophos 2008). Facebook’s recommended privacy settings include allowing everyone on the site to see your status (which is a section on one’s Facebook profile that allows members to share any information they wish with others), photos and bio[graphy] as well as your family and relationships. This means that, if Facebook users upload all the relevant information and do not change their privacy settings, any other Facebook user can log on to the site, perform a search by name, and will be able to view all of this information. Sophos (an internet security company) conducted empirical research which found that ‘41% of Facebook users will divulge personal information — such as email, date of birth and phone number — to complete strangers’ (Millier 2008/9: 542). The possible consequences of this may include increases in identity theft and blackmail as well as increased surveillance by employers and ex-partners. This suggests that Mark Zuckerberg’s vision of a ‘transparent society’ — where everybody shares everything with everyone — appears highly naïve. In contrast, courts in America are finding that, through posting information on the internet, individuals are losing their claim to a reasonable expectation of privacy (Millier 2008/9).

However, in addition to social privacy, there is also the issue of institutional privacy. Social privacy relates to what information other Facebook users are able to view, and it is this form of privacy that most users are concerned with.

So to give users a greater perception of control over their information Facebook allows these privacy settings to be adjusted in a 'Privacy Settings' menu. However, 'back-end' or institutional privacy refers to what information the Facebook corporation itself can see, what it owns, and what it can sell. The Facebook privacy policy states:

[f]or content that is covered by intellectual property rights, like photos and videos ('IP content'), you specifically give us the following permission, subject to your privacy and application settings: you grant us a non-exclusive, transferable, sub-licensable, royalty-free, worldwide license to use any IP content that you post on or in connection with Facebook. (Facebook 2010)

Facebook's terms and conditions are full of legal jargon which may be an attempt to conceal the fact that any information you post on Facebook (such as your demographic data, behaviour, usage and photographs) becomes the property of the Facebook corporation and may be reproduced by them for profit. This information is also used by Facebook to map consumer behaviour and sell advertising. Google introduced software in 2004 that scanned people's searches on the site as well as key words in their email service (Gmail), in order to sell advertising based on what people were searching for or writing about (Vise and Malseed 2005). After Google introduced these features, The Privacy Rights Clearinghouse and 30 other privacy rights groups wrote a letter to Google explaining their concerns and stated that the 'system sets potentially dangerous precedents and establishes reduced expectations of privacy in email communications' (cited in Vise and Malseed 2005: 158). However, eventually the controversy died down and the precedent was set. Facebook now uses this type of 'data mining' software but pairs it with the more traditional role of advertising — to create demand. Want to target your product at 'married women who live in northern Ohio' or maybe the more specific 'women who are parents, listen to Coldplay and live in cities' (Kirkpatrick 2010: 266)? Facebook allows you to do this. The corporation has the richest data set of any company in the world and uses this information to map consumer behaviour and sell targeted advertising (Cohen 2008; Kirkpatrick 2010).

Facebook may also be thought of as a form of 'panopticon' — an all-seeing eye used so that people self-regulate their behaviours. The panopticon was originally developed by Jeremy Bentham in the late eighteenth century as a prison design where one tower in the middle of a prison could watch over all of the prisoners. Subsequently, Foucault (1979: 173) developed this idea as a metaphorical as well as a physical construct of modernity, arguing that the panopticon was 'the perfect disciplinary apparatus [that] would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly'. The principles of panoptical surveillance have been infused into many aspects of society, from the architecture of schools and hospitals to swipe cards and CCTV in the modern work environment. Foucault

(1979: 196–97) describes the procedures put in place in a seventeenth-century European town when the black plague (an infectious disease spread by the lice on rats) first appeared. They include ‘a system of permanent registration’ where a ‘document bears “the name, age, sex of everyone, notwithstanding his condition”’ and ‘in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the centre and periphery’. It is easy to see how Facebook fulfils these functions, acting as a watch tower that constantly monitors and updates the events, actions and thoughts of over 750 million people.



Figure 23.1 Facebook surveillance: the latest form of ‘panopticon’?

The NewsFeed function — which is comprised of all the recent updates one’s ‘friends’ have made, such as the links they have posted, photos they have uploaded and comments they have made — created a huge amount of controversy within Facebook after it was first implemented in 2006. Facebook groups such as ‘Students Against Facebook news feed’ and ‘THIS NEW FACEBOOK SET-UP SUCKS’ quickly appeared. They objected to the new feature as they thought it was ‘too creepy, too stalker-esque’, and over 10 per cent of users actively protested these alterations through joining such groups to lobby against the changes (Kirkpatrick 2010: 189–90). However, the controversy subsided and people began to accept the new feature; membership of the protest groups has dwindled to 89 and 291 members, respectively.

NewsFeed is now an integral part of Facebook, the homepage of Facebook users and an accepted part of the site.

The NewsFeed did not make any information available to people who could not already see it, it just reorganised it so that any updates were automatically broadcast to one's networks. Thus, from a Foucauldian perspective, NewsFeed embodies the essence of the panopticon, a metaphorical tower from which one is able to keep constant surveillance over their 'friends'. Foucault (1979) argues that this threat of constant surveillance causes people to self-regulate to ensure they conform to social norms and expectations; therefore Facebook may be viewed as a site that promotes and reinforces cultural homogenisation.

Friendships/community

In contrast, Facebook has been theorised in a more positive way by Ellison et al. (2007) who argue that the use of Facebook is an effective way of building social capital. 'Social capital' refers to the sum of resources we accrue through possessing a network of institutionalised relationships. Bourdieu (1980) argued that social capital could be traded for other forms of capital, such as economic capital. For example, people may ask their friends, family or colleagues for employment opportunities, loans, or even for help around the house. Increased social capital is associated with a variety of positive social outcomes such as education, employment and health (Burt 1992; Coleman and Hoffer 1987; Lin 2001). Ellison et al. (2007) conducted a study on how university students used Facebook, investigating factors such as the amount of time they spent on the site, who had viewed their profile and whether they used the site to meet new people or maintain offline friendships. They found that there was a definitive relationship between certain kinds of Facebook use and increased social capital. For example, increased Facebook use was associated with a greater likelihood of being able to call on one's friends for small favours, and thus Facebook may be seen as a site which enables users to better maintain meaningful friendships.

However, Putnam (2000) has distinguished between two types of social capital — bridging and bonding. 'Bridging social capital' refers to weak ties — loose connections between individuals that can be used to gain information or new perspectives but do not involve emotional support. In contrast, 'bonding social capital', refers to strong ties between individuals in tightly knit, emotionally supportive relationships. In their research, Ellison et al. (2007) found that Facebook increases bridging social capital but *not* bonding social capital, providing evidence for other theorists who posit that internet use and computer-mediated relationships result in 'weak ties with low levels of commitment' (Lewis and West 2009: 1212) and 'aimless connectedness' with others (Jones 1997: 17). An example that supports such arguments is Hal Niedzviecki (2008),

a man from Toronto, who, in the summer of 2008, created an ‘Event’ on Facebook and threw a party. He invited all 700 of his Facebook ‘Friends’, and only one showed up.

Identity

Influenced by postmodernism, Gergen (1991: 150) argued that the self had become fragmented, and that people now exhibit a ‘pastiche personality’. Gergen argued this pastiche personality comprised one’s multiple and fluid identities: one identity for work, one for our old high school friends, one for our sports teams, one for our new university friends and so forth. He argued that our behaviours and identities shifted depending on the social context we were in. However, though Facebook might seem to offer this potential, there is limited evidence that this is actually happening. Though boyd (2007) found that some teenagers created two profiles on the social networking site MySpace (one ‘rude’ one for their friends, and a ‘clean’ one for their families), the majority of people maintain only one profile on Facebook (Joinson 2008). This has resulted in a convergence of identities, with Zuckerberg commenting that ‘[y]ou have one identity ... The days of you having a different image for your work friends or co-workers and for the other people you know are probably coming to an end’ (cited in Kirkpatrick 2010: 199). As most people maintain only one Facebook profile, use their real names on this profile, and then accept friends from different facets of their lives (work, school, university, sports teams and so forth), people can no longer present different identities to these different groups of friends. The increasing interconnection between our online and offline selves and the increasing influence and importance of social networking sites such as Facebook mean that we can no longer maintain multiple and often conflicting identities, and therefore the days of the ‘pastiche personality’ may be numbered. As such, returning to concepts of the unitary self — where an individual presented only one identity — may be more useful in examining identity construction on Facebook.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Charles Horton Cooley (1902: 184) described the concept of the ‘looking glass self’; this refers to how, when we are constructing our identity, we attempt to see ourselves through the eyes of others. He said that ‘in imagination we perceive in another’s mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it’. Thus, Cooley is arguing that we aim to create our identity based on how we think others will perceive us. George Herbert Mead took this further and argued that the self had two aspects — the ‘I’ and the ‘me’; ‘[t]he “I” is a spontaneous and creative element of the self, which responds to others’ actions towards the “me” self’ (Mead, cited in Sullivan and West-

Newman 2007: 237). Thus the 'me' is a social product, responding to others' perceptions and containing our learned social behaviours. These two theorists see identity as something that emerges in social interaction, a perspective that was utilised by Zhao et al. (2008) in their study of identity formation on Facebook.

Zhao et al. (2008) argued that identity construction is a public process where an individual makes an 'identity announcement' and then others engage in 'identity placement' by endorsing the claimed identity. Facebook facilitates this process through enabling 'identity announcements' to be made through several different medium. The implicit ways this can be done are through the posting of photographs of ourselves, our friends, or scenery we enjoy, and then commenting on these on the account's 'Wall' (this is the visual/text communication link which relays such announcements instantaneously to all the user's 'friends'). The authors argue that this projection of a visual self allows individuals to make identity claims through showing themselves in situations aimed at generating the desired response from their audience; such as posting photographs of yourself having fun to show you are a fun person, or photographs with your friends to show you are a popular and likeable person. This self is the 'self as a social actor', where Facebook users' identities can be forged through the ethos of 'watch me and know me by my friends' (Zhao et al. 2008: 1825). The researchers also found that more explicit identity claims could be made through the use of status updates and the 'bio' section of one's profile. These allowed users to provide a narration about themselves and make explicit 'identity announcements' about who they were. In the middle of this continuum of explicit versus implicit identity claims were identity claims about the 'cultural self' which Facebook enabled. These involved listing one's cultural preferences such as 'books', 'movies' and 'television programs', as well as 'personal interests', 'hobbies' and 'quotes' which allowed users to actively forge their 'cultural identity' (Zhao et al. 2008: 1825).

Zhao et al. (2008: 1827) found that these strategies for making 'identity announcements' were used by Facebook users to project a self that was socially desirable, and they identified three main qualities Facebook users attempted to portray. The first of these was 'popular among friends', which involved posting large numbers of photographs, often showing the individual having fun in a group setting, and having large numbers of friends and networks. A strategy that was often used to achieve this was having weak privacy settings. The second type of characteristic commonly portrayed on Facebook was 'well-roundedness'. This type of identity was usually forged implicitly through descriptions of one's interests and hobbies. Examples of this include:

[re]ading, swimming, listening to music, going out, and having fun

[f]ashion/shopping, traveling, NBA/NCAA b-ball [US basketball competitions], ... cooking/food, animals, booze, men, poetry/literature, movies, RED, anything highly sexual, being bronze and devilish, partying, dancing like a fool and not caring, ON DEMAND, my mom

[b]aseball, watching movies, dancing, partying and having a good time, meeting new people, exploring new things, and travelling.
(Zhao et al. 2008: 1827–28)

Travel, arts, sports and hanging out with friends were mentioned frequently by users in this category and participation in these activities were used to create a socially desirable image of a well-rounded, fun-loving and sociable individual. The third quality Facebook users attempted to portray was ‘thoughtfulness’ and this was commonly achieved through the use of quotes such as,

I do not intend to tiptoe through life only to arrive safely at death.

Life is easy if you wear a smile. Just be yourself, and don't ever change your style.

And when you dream, dream big/As big as the ocean, blue/'Cause when you dream, it might come true. (Zhao et al. 2008: 1828)

Through the use of these strategies, Zhao et al. (2008) found that Facebook users consistently attempted to portray these three characteristics. When this finding is coupled with the concepts of danah boyd (2007) — who argued that one's Facebook profile is their ‘digital body’, and that the creation and maintenance of such a body is akin to ‘writing yourself into being’ — the concept of ‘hyperreality’ can be explored. Baudrillard (1983) has argued that we are in a state of hyperreality — a state where the distinction between the imaginary and the real has become blurred (so much so, in fact, that we can no longer accurately tell one from the other). Facebook was originally developed as a way to communicate with people you already knew (Kirkpatrick 2010), however, now our digital bodies and our physical bodies have become interconnected, with one Facebook user commenting that if you did not have a Facebook profile ‘you don't exist — online at least’ and this meant that there were no traces of your existence in the community (Cassidy 2006: 59). The boundary between one's online and offline selves has evaporated, and Kirkpatrick (2010) envisions a time when Facebook may act as some sort of online identity registry. From this perspective Facebook may be seen as an online version of ourselves that is no less real or important than our offline selves.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have investigated the different ways in which Facebook can be conceptualised as a popular culture text. Facebook might be argued to represent a step in the evolution of the ‘prosumer’, combining collaboration with the knowledge community within its corporate, profit-making structures. It may be thought of as a digital ‘panopticon’ allowing both individuals and organisations to watch over the thoughts and interactions of others, yet it also allows its users to better maintain their offline connections and may aid in the building of social capital. Most users maintain only one profile on the site and, as such, the concept of the ‘unitary self’ is useful in examining how users ‘write into being’ their ‘digital body’ and create their online identities. Facebook blurs the boundaries and is engaged in a state of constant renewal. One could argue that the way Facebook attempts to do this and the response of its users may determine the parameters of the emerging ‘uneasy truce’ between commercial media organisations and grass-roots intermediaries. However, it could instead be argued that ‘extensive commodification’ is in fact already at the very heart of what Facebook is — Facebook’s aim is to make money out of the associations people have with their friends, family and colleagues, exploiting such connections to sell advertising. This process of commodification has perhaps been best explained by Marx (1888: 3) who stated that ‘capitalism must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish its connections everywhere’; even in the connections we have with our ‘friends’.

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24 The Sociology of Videogames

Eli Boulton and Colin Cremin

- This chapter offers a sociological account of videogames, a highly influential cultural form often overlooked by the discipline.
- First we cover the basic economic challenges facing the videogame industry and how it adapts to them.
- Videogames differ from other media forms such as film and literature. This is taken into account as we develop a theoretical map of the form.
- The relatively unique ways in which ideology and representation functions in videogames is explored through specific examples.
- We conclude with a discussion on the stigmatisation of videogame play and how the industry has responded to this.

Introduction

The history of videogames is a surprisingly long one. The first was created in 1958 at a US government nuclear research facility (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter 2009: 7–8). The technology at the time was far in advance of anything that could be marketed to ordinary consumers and the game was nothing more than a few odd blips on an oscilloscope to represent tennis rackets and a ball passing between them. It took another two decades before videogames became the lucrative mass-market phenomenon that we know today. We need to go back even further, though, to 1889 in fact, to discover the origins of the most dominant videogame company in the world today: the Kyoto-based company Nintendo, originally a playing card manufacturer (Wolf 2008: 113).

This chapter is about the videogame industry; it is about the form and content of videogames and the concerns people have about those who play them. We examine the industry and explore the videogame as a new media form. We conclude with an analysis of four of the most popular videogames of the current generation of consoles: *Call of Duty 4*, *Resident Evil 5*, *Grand Theft Auto 4* and *Wii Sports*. It will become clear in the course of this chapter why the culture of videogames is a suitable topic for sociological investigation.

Issues and themes in videogame sociology

It has been widely reported that in the United States the videogame industry is today worth more than Hollywood, in the region of US\$50 billion (Reuters 2007). When we consider that just three companies (namely, Microsoft, Sony, and Nintendo) virtually monopolise the console industry, then it is fair to say there is no other equivalent visual entertainment industry where ownership is so highly concentrated. This has far-reaching implications on the form and content of videogames, their production, distribution, exchange and consumption.



Figure 24.1 The videogames industry: more powerful than Hollywood?

The reason the industry is now so highly concentrated can be traced back to the medium's earlier volatile commercial roots and the prohibitive costs in developing and manufacturing consoles and videogames for mass consumption. The first commercially available computer game, *Computer Space* (Nutting Associates), was released in 1971, making the commercial videogame industry a mere 40 years old. Without tried and tested markets, videogame manufacturers took huge risks, often with disastrous results. Console manufacturers and the software developers came and went at an alarming rate. Even the largest videogame companies were prone to this. Atari, once the driving force of the videogame industry, now exists in name only. Sega pulled out of console

manufacturing business after their Dreamcast console flopped, due in part to fierce competition from the new kids on the block, Sony. Indeed, Sony only entered the videogame market after Nintendo backed out of a deal for Sony to manufacture a CD add-on to their Super Nintendo console. When this deal fell through, Nintendo stayed with a cartridge-based system for the N64 and Sony revamped the failed project to create their PlayStation console, taking the lead with the first successful disc-based console. Had their handheld devices not been such a success, Nintendo may well have gone the same way as Sega and become a software-only company producing *Mario* games for Sony and Microsoft (see Wolf 2008).

Today Nintendo is the only dedicated videogame company that manufactures consoles, develops videogames and distributes them. Third-party development studios (those that are independent from the console manufacturer) first emerged when game designers became dissatisfied with the management of the game companies they worked for. For example, while the company Activision is presently known for owning the rights to lucrative franchises such as *Spyro* (Insomniac Games et al. 1996–present), *Guitar Hero* (Harmonix et al. 2005–present) and *Call of Duty* (Infinity Ward et al. 2003–present) the company began its history producing unauthorised games for the Atari 2600 console (Dyer-Witthford and de Peuter, 2009: 13). Development studios are vital for the industry's stability as they effectively disperse the economic risk involved in producing videogames. Before their emergence such risk was concentrated into a single company such as Atari, producing both the consoles and the videogames to play on them.

One of the most famous examples of the hazards involved with such a business model can be demonstrated with the case of *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (Atari 1982). In order to capitalise on the popularity of the accompanying Spielberg film, Atari reduced the game's development period to a mere five weeks in order to release it in time for the 1982 Christmas shopping season (Montfort and Bogost 2009: 127). The poor quality of the game was compounded by the fact that Atari had produced more cartridges than there were consoles to play them on. The game was a massive commercial failure. Unsold units were buried in the Arizona desert. The debacle contributed to the 1983 North American videogame industry crash as it reduced consumer confidence in not only Atari, but the videogame medium in its entirety (Montfort and Bogost 2009: 76). It was Nintendo that helped revive the videogame industry with the release of their first home console 'the family computer' or Famicom (NES in the West) in 1983 (Wolf 2008: 115). Until Microsoft released the Xbox 27 years later, Japanese companies such as Nintendo, Sega and Sony dominated the console market in the West (Dyer-Witthford and de Peuter 2009: 15–18).

The economic risk involved in producing videogames lies mostly with the development studios. While console manufacturing companies do not have to worry too much about whether individual videogames of third party manufacturers sell or not, they do have to worry about maintaining a decent game library and keeping third party development studios happy with their lucrative franchises. It is common today for independent development studios to sign exclusivity rights with console manufacturers. This is what Microsoft did with Bungie Studios who produce the acclaimed *Halo* series (Bungie 2001–present). Bungie gets a guaranteed flow of income while Microsoft gets exclusive rights to the franchise and a cut of the profits on every game sold. Partly the reason that Nintendo is so successful is that they own the intellectual property rights to all their franchises including the *Mario* series, which has sold over 200 million games over the past 25 years (McLaughlin 2007), helping to consolidate their position in a volatile marketplace.

The possession of intellectual property rights to highly lucrative franchises is one of the biggest factors in Microsoft and Sony's successful entrance into the console market. While the general public tend only to remember historically successful consoles such as the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES), there have been countless failed game consoles released over the years that are now largely forgotten. Sony avoided the fate of earlier failed disc-based consoles such as the Panasonic 3DO and Philips CD-i by investing large sums of money in purchasing the rights to various acclaimed and hugely popular franchises such as Squaresoft's *Final Fantasy* (Square Enix 1987–present) series of games. Fans of the *Final Fantasy* series had no choice other than to buy a Sony PlayStation to get hold of the latest iteration. *Final Fantasy VII*, released for the PlayStation console, sold over 9.8 million copies, becoming what is termed a 'system seller' (Guinness World Records 2008). These are games that people buy consoles for — *Halo* on the Xbox and *Mario* on Nintendo being prominent examples. Exclusive franchises are the lifeblood of the console and the reason why we might purchase an Xbox over a Wii.

In the face of commercial volatility game distributors seek to minimise the economic risk by opting for titles with a proven track record. This becomes more imperative as the cost of videogame production increases. *Gran Turismo 5* on the PlayStation 3 took five years to produce, costing Polyphony Digital an estimated US\$60 million (Humphries 2009). Due to the success of the *Gran Turismo* franchise, the developers had more leeway with their extravagant development times and costs as investors knew it would sell well. While it is entirely possible for a third-party development studio to assert independence and focus on developing an innovative design concept, this idealism tends to maximise risk. This has led theorists such as Hassan (2008: 142–44) to assert that the videogame medium is inevitably corrupted by these commercial priorities, as they tend to diminish the possibility for original game concepts.

In the influential *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer wrote about the standardisation of culture. We are sold what is effectively familiar to us; for example, the trailers for Hollywood films promise action, spectacle and edge-of-the-seat thrills. They tell us in advance what to expect and how our emotions will be affected. The ‘real point will never be reached’, Adorno and Horkheimer (1997: 139) wrote, ‘the diner must always be satisfied with the menu’. This charge could equally be made about the videogame industry. *Call of Duty* sells because we already know what we are getting. There are minor variations contained in each iteration building on the same theme using the same game mechanic. By this reckoning videogames are crudely assembled mass-market products designed to maximise profit through whatever means seduces the consumer into buying them. The industry thrives on predictability and, in its mass market form, play becomes a commodity. On this basis, we must ask if videogames are simply disposable forms of entertainment or whether they deserve to be taken seriously not only for economic and social reasons but also for their cultural and artistic significance.

There are clearly differences in standards between videogames such as the critically acclaimed *Super Mario Galaxy* (Nintendo EAD 2007) and the family-friendly but commercially panned game *Carnival Funfair Games* (Cat Daddy 2007), both on the Wii console (see Cremin, 2011). But according to which criteria should we judge the quality of a videogame, and how do videogames differ from other forms of media such as film or literature? This is one of the more contentious issues in the field of game studies. The medium’s interactive nature complicates many of the standard arguments about narrative and representation. This distinctive interactive medium is to this day undertheorised, particularly in sociology. As Eskelinen (2001) notes, outside academia, people are usually excellent at making distinctions between stories and games, a distinction that is not so readily apparent to many academics who often view videogames as ‘interactive narratives, procedural stories or remediated cinema’. The intersection of play and narrative is a contested issue; a divide between the *narratologists*, who view the videogame as a new form of narrative, and the *ludologists*, who view the videogame first and foremost as a game. It could thus be said that the videogames’ relatively recent history has led to volatility not only on the marketplace, but also in the corridors of universities.

Both camps inherit their theoretical backbone from a time before videogames existed. The narratologists draw mostly from traditional literary and film theory, while the ludologists draw primarily from the specific theories of Huizinga (1955) and Caillois (1962) on play and games in human societies. According to Huizinga, play is a free activity, segregated in space and time from everyday life. Caillois, drawing from Huizinga’s findings but challenging many of his arguments, defines a relationship between play (*paidia*) and game (*ludus*). *Ludus* are the rules of the game and *paidia* the amount of space a player has to navigate

within those rules. While many theorists argue the two are separate, even the most paidia-dominant activity has some element of ludus. A child playing with a toy truck (paidia) is still playing by rules that dictate how a truck should operate (ludus), such as ‘vroom vroom’ sounds and so on. A videogame would not be a videogame without elements of both paidia and ludus. Without paidia it would cease to be playable and without ludus there would be no distinguishable content that would differentiate one videogame from another.

Whilst narratologists make useful observations, by overlooking the vital aspect of play their analyses are limited. As Eskelinen (2001) points out, while it is not enough for a reader to have only experienced ninety per cent of a work of literature, it is not necessary for a player to experience the ‘entirety’ of a videogame. Indeed, the amount of possibilities and narrative paths a game can take would make such an endeavour rather tedious. The player has a more active role in *generating* meaning from the videogame than in more traditional forms of media. The fatal flaw of narratologist approaches, according to Kerr (2006: 20, 26), is that it ‘[transposes] theories from static texts to more dynamic texts’, as the variability of videogames points ‘to a multiplicity of possible meanings and experiences’ that result from the player engaging with a videogame. Narrative is one possible ‘meaning’ that can be derived, but it can signify anything from committing a sequence of actions that decides whether, say, the protagonist’s brother in *Deus Ex* (Ion Storm 2000) lives or dies, to whether a player wins or loses in a game of *Tetris* (Alexei Pajitov 1984).

If the videogame genre thrives on interactivity, how does the sociologist address potential ideological issues that may arise from the medium? The term ideology is used in the social sciences to refer to a ‘set of ideas and discourses that serve to structure and interpret the world’ (Norgrove 2007: 357). There has been considerable debate in academia over how ideology is communicated to society at large, and the interactive nature of the videogame form complicates some more standard theoretical conclusions. While it could be argued that traditional ‘static’ mediums impose meaning, dictating plot developments and so on to the audience, videogames operate more on a generation of meaning through an active engagement with its audience, as videogame theorists such as Eskelinen (2001) and Wolf (2001) have observed. This calls into question what is generally known in cultural studies as the ‘hypodermic model’, in which ideological messages ‘have a direct effect on their audience’ (Morley 1992: 78), with no input from the audience themselves. There are numerous studies that have questioned this model and it would seem particularly inappropriate when applied to the videogame medium, as one of its biggest selling points is ostensibly the potential for this very ‘input’ that purely narrative-based mediums such as film and literature exclude.

A nuanced analysis of videogame form and content requires at least some consideration of the intersection of *paidia* and *ludus*. In traditional mediums it could be said that there is only one formal level where meaning can be extracted — such as what is being communicated directly to the audience in the page of a book or in the cinematic space of the screen. In contrast, Frasca (2003: 232) identifies three levels in the videogame form where meaning can be extracted through active engagement with the player. The first is the level of *narrative* and *representation*, superficial in the sense that ‘two games may have exactly the same gameplay’ but by the use of different signs ‘can convey different meanings of what is happening’ (Konzack 2002: 95). At the more substantial level of gameplay there are *manipulation rules* which allow for a ‘possibility’, such as the Karma system in the *Fable* series (Lionhead Studios 2004–2010) which allows the player to ‘choose’ to be good or evil while having no effect on the outcome of winning or losing the game. The rules of game completion lie purely within the realm of *goal rules*. All of these rules contain certain sets of ideological value-judgements. For example, the goal rules of *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (Infinity Ward 2007) communicate an imperative to carry out the aims of US militarism, and the manipulation rules in *Fable* (Lionhead Studios 2004) are conveying a value-judgement of what counts as a ‘good’ or ‘evil’ activity. Theorists such as Ang (2006: 306) are largely correct when they state that narrative/representation and gameplay are ‘complimentary’ rather than ‘antagonistic’, always informing how the other operates. It is this basic theoretical position that guides us through our analysis of four of this generation’s most popular console games.

***Call of Duty 4* and ideology**

Theorists such as Gelber (1999) have questioned Huizinga’s notion that games are entirely segregated from the values of wider society, instead they are argued to be informed by and reproduce societal values. *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (Infinity Ward 2007) is arguably an example of this, a videogame that uncritically reproduces the *ideology* of US imperialism. As we have noted, videogame interactivity precludes an ideological analysis which merely focuses on a top-down *imposition* of meaning, although given the problems with this approach we should preclude it from other media too. Using the term *interpellation*, the French structuralist theorist Louis Althusser (1970) developed an influential theory of how ideology operates on an individual level, examining how people respond to and interact with ideology. This makes his ideas useful to apply to a videogame context.

Althusser claimed that people identify themselves in the images they see and the words they hear. For instance, we all have our favourite celebrities, pop stars and so on, and even identify with them by wearing similar clothes and buying t-

shirts with their names brandished on them. These are examples of what Althusser called ‘interpellation’. An ideology ‘speaks to us’ every time we recognise ourselves in certain characters or identify with certain values represented in popular media or by the state, the family and other ‘institutions’ that he calls the generic *ideological state apparatus* (ISA). An authority — which can be anything from a policeman to an opinion in a newspaper — in a sense ‘hails’ or calls out to us. We could say that we are ‘interpellated’ by videogames when, for example, we identify with the protagonist or *avatar* we are controlling, the values they represent and the narrative we become a part of. By identifying with the protagonist in *Call of Duty 4* we ‘recognise’ ourselves in the world of *Call of Duty 4* as the character we play and the values he embodies. In this way we identify with the game world’s delineations of good and evil. We identify with the ideology and are thereby interpellated by the American military through the conduit of the videogame form.

Revisiting the theoretical framework of manipulation and goal rules that Frasca (2003) outlined, it becomes clear how the game interpellates the player into an ideology of American militarism. No ‘manipulation rule’ allows for the possibility of joining the side of the anti-US forces. In the realm of ‘goal rules’, if you shoot too much ‘friendly fire’ in the direction of in-game referents of US soldiers and their UK allies, the player loses the game. When the game developers of *Medal of Honour* (2010) enacted a feature that allowed the Taliban to be ‘playable’ in multiplayer mode, the content had to be subsequently removed as a consequence of the media controversy it stirred (Goodrich 2010). There were no such objections with *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010) which involved, among other things, enacting the assassination of the Cuban leader Fidel Castro and the slaughter of Vietnamese communists defending their country against the invading US forces.

The highly constrictive nature of videogames such as *Call of Duty* compels the player to identify with US military actions. For Rehak (2003), the spectator of a film ‘identifies’ with the actions and characters of the film, although there is no manipulable representation of the spectator on the screen. This is different in the gaming medium where the avatars or onscreen representations can be manipulated by the spectator/player. This has the effect of transforming the passive spectator into an active participant engaging with the action and story of the game. The implication is that someone can watch a film which supports US militarism but still disapprove of the violent actions occurring on-screen and choose to identify with the film’s representations of anti-US resistance. In *Call of Duty 4*; however, we are forced to side with Americans in their ‘war on terror’ whether we approve of it or not. If we shoot down a US Chinook helicopter it is game over.

***Resident Evil 5* and representation**

Narratologists can often overestimate the importance of narrative in videogame analysis, however this area can still be interesting to study. The videogame is still in a developmental phase that has not yet reached the potential of representational complexity that its interactive nature affords. While there have been a few games lauded by game critics for utilising this potential, such as the highly philosophical narrative of *Deus Ex* (Ion Storm 2000) or the heavily psychoanalytic *Xenogears* (Square Enix 1998), many games remain ‘simple kill-or-be-killed shooting scenarios’ (Wolf 2001: 93–94), relying on simplistic themes borrowed from other media such as film and literature. As an example, the design and narratives of horror games generally operate on a simplistic moral duality between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ (Kryzwinska 2002: 3). Usually this passes unnoticed, but when game developers use real-life representations to generate a story there are often unintended and sometimes unfortunate consequences. A case in point is Capcom’s *Resident Evil 5* (2009).

This game attracted controversy for featuring a white protagonist who kills throngs of black zombies in a poverty-stricken African village. This conjures images of colonial genocide. However, not all videogame critics think the imagery of the game is problematic. As zombie enthusiast Jonathan Maberry (cited in Kelley 2010) stated, ‘a zombie is a stand-in for anything we fear’. Zombies are the perfect blank canvas, the ‘Other’ on which societal anxieties can be projected — from anxieties of pandemic in the film *28 Days Later* (2002), to the fears of growing consumerist mediocrity in the film *Dawn of the Dead* (1978).

However, in the *Resident Evil* series there is a very particular way zombies are represented. As Krzywinska (2002: 3) notes, in the *Resident Evil* franchise the player’s avatar ‘has to restore balance to a world corrupted by evil forces that threaten humanity and rationality’, with zombies as the ‘manifestations of such forces’ the player must defeat. Videogames utilise various culturally embedded symbols to convey the idea that the zombie is an irrational and inhuman ‘Other’. For Edward Said, ‘one of [the West’s] deepest and most recurring images of the Other’ as its ‘contrasting idea or experience’ has been the non-Western world (1978: 1–2). Whereas the West is often portrayed as civilised and rational, the East is often portrayed as barbaric and irrational, an opposition Said famously termed ‘Orientalism’. These themes are especially apparent in many Western representations of Africa. As Achebe (1977: 788) puts it, Africa serves as the ‘setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human ... into which the wandering European enters at his peril’.

It could be argued that the *Resident Evil* franchise has been gradually accentuating the foreignness of their zombies to increase the player’s anxiety.

The first three instalments were set in the archetypical urban American location of Raccoon City. By the fourth instalment the location had shifted from this Anglo-Saxon industrialised city to a Romantic agricultural village in Spain. The problem of making Africa the site of the enigmatic 'horrific Other' is that it plays to the same racial stereotypes that provoke racism. The African zombie becomes a legitimate target for elimination by a white Western protagonist that we control. Introducing a black female avatar as another protagonist is a cynical ploy to deflect criticism, but even here she is portrayed as distinctly Western due to her origin story and European facial features. In *Resident Evil 5* we are, essentially, playing a North American or European running around 'primitive' villages killing representations of Africans. The narrative of *Resident Evil 5* has much in common with *Call of Duty 4*. In both cases we know who the hero is and who deserves to be shot.

Grand Theft Auto 4 and deviance

Criticisms of the content of *Call of Duty 4* and *Resident Evil 5* are mostly restricted to the videogame community. The *Grand Theft Auto* franchise (Rockstar 1997–present) on the other hand has become one of the central focuses of controversy surrounding the violent content of videogames. It could be argued that the reason for this is that the *Grand Theft Auto* series foregrounds an explicitly different kind of violence than that of *Call of Duty 4* and *Resident Evil 5*. While the latter games depict violent acts that would generally be considered legitimate by wider society (such as suppressing social disturbances and maintaining the political status quo), *Grand Theft Auto* is about committing deviant and criminal violent acts in the consumerist heartlands of America.

We can approach this double standard through Stan Cohen's (1980: 9) conception of the 'moral panic'. A 'moral panic' occurs when a 'condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests', which society appears periodically subjected to. The videogame medium could be said to be one of the latest targets of such moral panics. This was demonstrated by a survey of news reports on videogames from the 1990s onwards which increasingly focused on the risks of playing videogames and their possible displacement of 'healthier' activities (Williams 2003). It was implied in these reports that videogames had a negative effect on socialisation, values and behaviour.

This is not, however, unique to the videogame medium. In the 1950s, there were fears that television viewers would become 'addicted' and early critics of the cinema feared that films were 'perverting' society (Squire 2002). There have even been moral panics surrounding the birth of the modern novel and the emergence of mass literacy (Aliaga-Buchenau 2003). With its depiction of

deviant violence, *Grand Theft Auto* is an easy target for Cohen's 'moral entrepreneurs' (for example, politicians, journalists, and judges) to attribute any number of social ills to. However, the conditions that these moral entrepreneurs often panic about are 'presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media' (Cohen 1980: 9). One can see this manifestation in the controversy surrounding the *Grand Theft Auto* series.

One of the best examples of this is one of the franchise's most criticised features — the ability to have sex with a prostitute and then murder her to get your in-game money back. While various media outlets have stated that this game encourages such behaviour, there is no actual rule that demands that you kill prostitutes in order to complete a game mission: it is merely within the realm of possibility. Unlike in *Call of Duty 4* where one has *no choice* but to kill an Arab, in *Grand Theft Auto 4* choosing *not* to kill a prostitute has no consequence on the outcome of the game.

While *Call of Duty 4* can be praised for its 'realism', it is entirely sanitary in its depiction of militarist violence. The game does not allow for any possibility to commit some of the more controversial military actions that have occurred in the 'war on terror' despite the 'realism' of such actions. There are no side-quests or mini-games where the goal would be to burn civilian villages, rape Afghani women or bomb wedding parties. This contrasts to the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise where the player can choose to commit actions that are morally dubious from the point of view of a player in the West who may think bombing an impoverished people is justified on 'humanitarian' grounds. The game rids itself of the problematic moral dualities present in *Resident Evil 5* and *Call of Duty 4*, therefore making the game not only more realistic but also giving the player a much richer narrative experience.

Unlike many games where the avatar is simply 'good' or 'evil', in *Grand Theft Auto 4* (Rockstar 2008) the avatar, like characters in more sophisticated movies, is morally ambiguous. Tracing this through the narrative context of *Grand Theft Auto 4*, the avatar Niko Bellic immigrated to America to pursue the 'American Dream' and instead of this dream coming true he gets caught up in an impoverished urban environment and violent criminal underworld. Players not only decide the amount of antisocial activities to commit, they also decide how to judge Niko: a victim of circumstance or a degenerate criminal? *Grand Theft Auto*'s convergence of both free-flowing gameplay and ambiguous morality could thus be seen as a sign of the videogame medium's potential for narrative complexity that many videogame theorists have yearned for.

Wii Sports and stigma

The image of videogames being a site of deviance has often converged with the image of videogames being an exclusive masculine pastime. Videogames have widely been seen as a ‘boys-only’ phenomenon with the male characters predominantly occupying the role of playable protagonist. Typically, female characters have functioned as a damsel-in-distress or an object of sexual desire. By the late 1990s as many as eighty per cent of all videogame players were male (Cassell and Jenkins 2000: 14). Even when the industry began to release videogames with strong female protagonists, most notably Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider* (Core Design 1996), the designers had to balance the heroine’s appeal to both female and male players. This was done by portraying Lara Croft as both a ‘strong and independent’ woman for female gamers as well as making her sexually attractive for the game’s core male market by giving her extremely unrealistic body proportions (Cassell and Jenkins 2000: 35). However, the industry eventually began to produce games that could be marketed towards female consumers. Characterised by their highly gendered notions of what appeals to female players, these games often contain nurturing themes such as with *Nintendogs* (Nintendo EAD 2005) and *Animal Crossing* (Nintendo EAD 2001).

Buoyed by the success of these games, the industry began to resent the ‘boys-only’ perception that surrounded videogames, as it was seen as impacting negatively on their sales (see Juul 2009). The game industry began to identify games that fit the boys-only stereotype as being a part of the ‘hardcore’ market. This market has been defined by industry reports as being a commercially narrow one, composed of a niche demographic of 18–35-year-old males, comprising fewer than 15 per cent of the total population. The opposing ‘casual’ market is much broader, and seen as being evenly divided between female and male players, with the potential market supposedly comprising the entire population (Robbins and Wallace 2006: 9–11). In recognition of this, it is now increasingly difficult for game designers to acquire funding for games that are seen as only appealing to ‘hardcore’ players (Juul 2009: 204).

Nintendo are renowned for producing videogames with bright colours, ‘cute’ characters and family-friendly themes. However, it was with the advent of the Nintendo DS with its touch screen control and the motion-sensitive Wii console that Nintendo were really able to capitalise on their experience of making videogames for a broad demographic. With the Wii motion-sensitive controller — which can be used to mimic real world gestures such as swinging a racket or shooting a rifle — Nintendo were able to market a videogame console that many people could instinctively play. They went on to accomplish what had eluded the game industry for years: the destigmatisation of the videogamer. With the aid of a massive advertising campaign, Nintendo successfully marketed their

console as healthy, social and gender-neutral. This is illustrated in both the gameplay characteristics and the advertising campaign of the videogame *Wii Sports* (Nintendo EAD 2006), which comes pre-packaged with the console.

Wii Sports exemplifies Nintendo's emphasis on an entirely different type of videogame space to its competitors, what Juul (2009) refers to as 'player space', the physical space in which the player is situated. This spatial shift was achieved through the aforementioned motion controller. The effect of this was to make videogames 'socially embeddable', bringing them closer to the dynamics of card and board games where much of the meaning is derived not from the actions on the screen but rather on how the players interact with each other (Juul 2009: 117).

The visual focus of *Wii Sports* advertisements are not on the events happening on the screen but rather the people enjoying the game with each other (Juul 2009: 117). In analysing such advertisements as a system of signs, it could be argued that *Wii Sports* advertisements contain explicit examples of what Roland Barthes (1967) termed 'connotative sign-systems'. The full meaning of *Wii Sports* advertisements can only be derived with reference to signs that are *excluded* from the imagery. In these advertisements the players are portrayed as healthy, social and 'normal'. This imagery excludes any signs that would evoke ideas of the stereotypical 'hardcore gamer', such as being unhealthy, antisocial and poorly presented. The advertisements communicate that players of *Wii Sports* are able to enjoy videogames whilst still having an active and healthy social life, thus the deviant stigma that has become associated with more 'hardcore' playing habits is avoided.

Conclusion: videogames as a new media form

Whilst there has been a lot of interesting and innovative material generated from the field of game studies, there is still a vast array of issues to be examined. Videogames are a relatively new media form, only entering the mass consumer market a scant 40 years ago. As the medium evolves with new 3D technologies and downloadable content, so too does the field of game studies. With its emphasis on the social dimensions of media forms, sociology can make a significant contribution to ongoing debates about the social impact of videogames and the pleasures we derive in playing them. Sociologists can provide a critical voice, whether exposing the racial or gender stereotypes of a videogame or defending them against moral backlashes. Videogames are not simply children's entertainment; they are a serious media form, distinct from other media such as cinema, and potentially as rich, rewarding and socially valuable.

We have seen many changes in the industry during its relatively short history. We have seen many innovations, some of which have transformed the way we interact with videogames. And as long as companies keep producing videogames of the quality of *Super Mario* (Nintendo EAD 1981–present), *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo EAD 1986–present), *Half-Life* (Valve 1998–present) or *Grand Theft Auto* (Rockstar Games 1997–present), there is every reason to keep playing them. When it comes to videogames, sociologists are still largely in uncharted theoretical territory. The next generation of sociologists — many of whom will have been brought up with videogames — can make up for this deficiency and contribute their own thoughts on and analysis to this exciting and evolving medium.

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25 Space, Place and Identity

Fiona Allon

- All social relations, including cultural identities and practices, are spatially organised and distributed.
- The social and spatial are mutually constitutive and indivisible.
- Space and place are not fixed and static but dynamic *processes* constituted by constantly changing sets of social and spatial relations.
- Places do not have single, ‘authentic’ identities but are sites of multiple histories, identities and attachments.
- Place and space are contested terrains of power relations, political struggle, and competing definitions.

Introduction

It is impossible to fully understand cultural forms and practices without taking into consideration the spatial contexts in which they are located. Culture is always spatial and situated and its organisation at any particular point in time will always be inseparable from specific locations and geographies and the social relations that occur in these places. After all, our lives are conducted within and across a whole series of spaces at a number of different spatial scales, from the most intimate and domestic to the national and global. *All social relations are spatially organised.*

The vast spectrum of social spaces which we inhabit at different times reaches from spaces that are deemed to be ‘private’ such as the home and household, through the ‘public’ spaces within a workplace, a community or a city, to the much wider spaces of global finance, telecommunications and transportation networks. Importantly, however, this is not a simple hierarchy of geographical scales in which local space equates with what is concrete, specific and most immediate to us while the global stands for what is abstract, general and distant. Our day-to-day experiences are formed out of social interactions and interrelations that take place — frequently simultaneously — at all scales. This way of conceptualising the spatial, as the feminist geographer, Doreen Massey, explains, ‘inherently implies the existence in the lived world of a simultaneous multiplicity of spaces: cross-cutting, intersecting, aligning with one another, or existing in relations of paradox or antagonism’ (Massey 1994: 3).

The complexity of life in a highly mobile and globalised world also undoubtedly results in greater levels of spatial complexity. This requires us to regularly move through and across a range of new and different kinds of spaces — from the electronic spaces of new social media to the newly revitalised spaces of leisure and consumption in cities and de-industrialised urban centres. Through these interactions we also negotiate the social meanings that are attached to these spaces, including the ways in which such meanings become contested and change over time. Our engagement with such spaces also contributes to the production and reproduction of those spaces. Contemporary life is therefore indisputably spatial, constituted by dynamic and constantly changing sets of social and spatial relations.

To understand culture as spatially situated means taking space seriously. Spatial milieus matter because, quite simply, these are the contexts in which social relations are located and unfold. Yet space is not merely ‘just there’ as claimed by Enlightenment notions of space and Euclidean geometry, it is not simply an envelope or container into which things and objects are placed or a field in which events happen. It is neither ‘empty’ nor a passive surface or *tabula rasa* upon which actions take place, or across which history moves. Rather, space *is itself actively produced*; it is produced culturally by social relations and political practices. Yet again, this requires seeing space as more than just an afterthought to social relations, a material substance that is the simple outcome or result of specific social relations and practices. Space plays a fundamental role in the construction and manifestation of those very social relations. It is a constitutive force in the identities of human groups and subjects and the production of cultural phenomena. These relations, identities and activities gain their very conditions of possibility from spatial contexts, but also, in turn, contribute to forming and remoulding that space. The social and the spatial are therefore indivisibly intertwined, an idea that is implied in the term ‘socio-spatial relations’.

From this perspective, space is not an already-existing category or something that is external to social relations and material processes. But nor does space merely *follow* such processes; it is, in fact, a *requirement* for social and material production and possibilities. ‘The spatial organisation of society’, as Massey states, ‘is integral to the production of the social, and not merely its result. It is fully implicated in both history and politics’ (Massey 1994: 4). In this manner, social space is relationally constituted, formed and transformed by shifting, mutually constitutive social relations and spatial practices that are subject to ongoing contestation, political struggle and historical redefinition.

With this relational view of space, in which space is both multidimensional and multidirectional, we are far removed from any notion of space as absolute, immutable or fixed. Instead, this definition suggests that any analysis of space

must necessarily involve questions about how space is organised and demarcated, as well as how it is defined and used, at any particular point in time. In other words, we need to ask questions about how actual spaces are materially produced. This shifts our focus on to the continuous and ongoing *production of space*. This is a key concept in cultural theory that indicates that social space is not static or constant but is dynamic and constantly changing, constituted by social relations that are themselves in flux and regularly taking different forms and shapes. The concept of the production of space is most closely associated with the work of the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre, who was one of the key theorists pioneering this new way of thinking about space as an 'active moment' in the production of social reality. For Lefebvre, each historical era of social and economic organisation is accompanied by its own particular configuration of space. This means that 'the shift from one mode to another must entail the production of a new space' (Lefebvre 1991: 46). Space is therefore historically specific, and its material form will reflect the historical conditions in which it exists. So, if industrial modernity transformed feudal space, the late capitalist modernity of today will also be characterised by its own distinctive spatial forms and practices. In this historical period, just like any other, space will be made and remade for particular ends and interests, it will be colonised and commodified, bought and sold, and groups will struggle with other groups to stake their claim on its meaning.

When space is conceived as something that is inherently dynamic and generative, as actively created and produced and defined by movement, it becomes possible to understand it as inseparable from time. Space and time, after all, are not separate entities but always constitute each other. The spatial and the temporal are interwoven and occur simultaneously, in contingent and ever-shifting multiplicities of *space-time* (May and Thrift 2001). This way of thinking about space challenges some dominant, longstanding conceptualisations of space in which the spatial is simply opposed to the temporal and characterised as a flat surface or background, across which the important movements of time and history played out. This view produced a significant devaluation of space, whereby '[s]pace was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic' (Foucault 1980: 70).

This view of space as fixed and static has also influenced a conceptualisation of place as singular and bounded: a specific location with a fixed, settled and *timeless* identity. It is now recognised, however, that both space and place must be understood as open, multiple, and as sites of contestation. Both are social constructs and the products of social practices, and their identities and histories will also be the sites of contestation and dispute. While space and place may appear as concrete, material objects, it is important to realise that they engage lived, subjective experiences and are sites where power relations assume

physical existence. Because space and place are constituted in and through social relations of power, the way in which they are constructed and change over time will therefore always be political and ideological. Every spatial formation is suffused with power relations and spatial practices are always articulations of power and resistance.

Power relations establish rules and conventions about forms of knowledge, governing what can be said and thought at any particular moment, including the meanings, identities and representations associated with specific spaces. Power relations, however, also establish rules about how spaces should be actually lived in and used, and thus they exert a powerful influence on the kinds of behaviours that are seen as appropriate in particular spaces. For example, a homeless person sleeping on the streets challenges many dominant assumptions about the 'proper' and legitimate uses of public space. By conducting a 'private' activity in public, the homeless disrupt a much wider socio-spatial order that divides the world into public and private spheres and ascribes specific meanings and values to both.

Urban environments abound with rules about what constitutes socially 'acceptable' activities and the spaces in which they should be conducted. Spatial orders therefore organise an ensemble of possibilities within which people can conduct their lives and construct identities and communities, but they also constitute particular forms of organisation and particular forms of social power. A community garden, for example, is a space in which people come together to share and enjoy a natural environment. It is therefore a material setting for social relations, and it will be a social space of considerable meaning and attachment for those who have a particular connection to the garden. However, it will also be a space that requires rules, codes and conventions regarding its use. These may have to be discussed and continually negotiated, and may even involve considerable dispute and disagreement. This example shows that spaces do not just exist, but rather that they are always and continually being socially constructed, and that this process involves ordinary individuals as much as powerful institutional forces in society.

The social construction and regulation of space involves explicit and implicit norms about how space should be used and organised, and these are often exercised both directly and indirectly on and through the body and frequently in relation to ideas about gender. The constant debates in many cities over the staging of political protests, rallies and demonstrations, as well as practices such as urban graffiti, skateboarding, street theatre and busking, show how both spaces and modes of behaviour are policed, controlled and regulated. Similarly, the disputes that flare up about the presence of marginalised groups in certain parts of the city where they are deemed to be 'out of place' — for example, groups of young people, the homeless and the poor — not only demonstrates the

constant struggles over public space but the political and contested nature of space more generally. The spatial separation of home and workplace has also given rise to explicitly gendered meanings of public and private spaces. The traditional coding of the home and the domestic sphere as a 'feminine' space has produced anxieties about the presence of women in 'masculine' public spaces and often resulted in limitations on women's mobility. Space, and the gendered meanings it transmits, is therefore a powerful means of exclusion, subordination and control.



Figure 25.1 Urban graffiti: one example of the struggle over public space

This is what has been referred to as the *politics of space*. Yet such a view also relates to the *spatiality of power* itself. In contemporary life, for example, human bodies and activities are distributed across a vast array of social spaces that are ascribed culturally and historically specific meanings. These include the large number of social institutions in which modern life takes place and in which bodies are educated, disciplined, treated, trained, regulated, and put to work: homes, families, schools, hospitals, clinics, prisons, offices and factories. The spatial architectures of these institutions operate simultaneously as architectures of power.

Michel Foucault produced a large body of work that comprehensively analysed the spatial rationalities of such institutions, describing in the process the way in

which questions of space are inseparable from questions of power. Yet as he remarks:

a whole history [still] remains to be written of *spaces* — which would at the same time be the history of powers (both these terms in the plural) — from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat, institutional architecture from the classroom to the design of hospitals, passing via economic and political installations ... Anchorage in a space is an economico-political form which needs to be studied in detail. (Foucault 1980: 149)

From national identities to global spaces

Spaces are commonly understood in terms of the boundaries that demarcate one space from another. The modern system of nation-states, for example, divides the world into an order of separate, autonomous and discrete territorial units. Within this system, clearly recognisable borders serve to define a sovereign space over which the nation-state can exercise its territorial rights and control. But the boundaries of the nation-state also work simultaneously to construct a national space of identification and belonging and to define the limits of a national community. In this way, the nation-state system also gives rise to very specific separations between groups of people understood in terms of separate, coherent national cultures. The political form of the nation-state therefore assumes that national space will map neatly onto a distinctive culture that will be shared by everyone within that space. So, for example, each nation-state is expected to have a 'national language' that everyone speaks. A national identity, likewise, is expected to reflect a coherent, unified culture within the national space.

Yet the very idea of a world of spatially discrete, demarcatable places, each with its own unified culture, is not just a system of political organisation, it is also a system of cultural and spatial representation. Geographical classifications, for example, do not just describe the already existing form or shape of a region or a landscape; they actually help to bring it into being by constructing territorial categories and boundaries and by establishing places as objects of knowledge. Representations of space, through the use of maps, photographs, symbols, narratives, population statistics and so on, play a crucial role in this process by giving spaces meaning and definition. This highlights that 'each mode of thinking about space, each "field" of human spatiality — the physical, the mental, the social — be seen as simultaneously real and imagined, concrete and abstract, material and metaphorical' (Soja 1996: 64–65).

This process is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the form of the nation and the construction of national identity. The nation, after all, is not just a

political entity, it is also a site where particular cultural traditions, identities and identifications are created and narrated through symbols, myths, and discourses. For Benedict Anderson, this is how the nation produces itself as an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983). Central to this idea is a conception of the nation as a bounded space with a national consciousness formed out of a sense of shared experiences, histories, and feelings of national togetherness and common sentiment. Despite the considerable social and cultural differences and inequalities that may exist within a nation, the ongoing *imagining*, communication and perception of this shared, common bond sustains the idea of a homogeneous national identity. Media representations, rituals, sporting events and forms of popular culture that promote a shared and unified cultural experience are key mechanisms, therefore, for constructing both the nation and its identity as fixed, stable entities.

National identity is a powerful way of understanding cultural difference. Yet the idea of the nation as a separate and singular entity associated with a distinctive culture attached to a particular territory depends on a spatial model of an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’. It ascribes a sense of unity, coherence and wholeness to those within national space that is predicated on distinguishing (and also generally excluding), the differences of other people who reside outside the nation’s frontiers. Through these demarcations, the nation is given both a cultural unity and the idea of a common culture and is established as ‘a place that functions as the site of homogeneity, equilibrium and integration’ (Tölöyan 1996: 429). But these demarcations also function as symbolic boundaries between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’, ‘us’ and ‘them’.

This is the basis of nationalism, and it is tied to a cultural essentialism that posits a direct link between place, culture and identity. It leads to a scheme in which people are divided into fictively unified ethnic groups and defined by a specific ‘culture’ that corresponds to a particular place or location: ‘the French’, ‘the Chinese’, ‘Americans’, ‘Australians’ and so on. Within this scheme, individuals are assigned to one ethnic group and assumed to have one homogeneous cultural identity, an identity that is, in turn, seen to connect organically to a discrete, locally bounded place. In this conceptualisation, cultural identity is firmly located in particular places that are the sites of shared traditions and heritage — the ‘place’ of culture.

The idea that there are spatially discrete places that have a distinctive culture and identity not only gives rise to a model of separate cultures, but also to the conception of place itself as relatively fixed and static, as singular and a site of authenticity, and given in its identity. But against this desire to ‘fix’ the identity of place and tie it to a coherent set of meanings or images, Doreen Massey argues it is important to re-conceptualise the nature of place itself. For Massey, no place is reducible to one internalised history or narrative or to a stable,

unproblematic and unique identity. The identities of place are multiple and contested. In fact, all places are points of intersection for dynamic, social relations that extend way beyond them, including the mix of links and interactions that occur with what is presumed to be 'the outside'. As Massey puts it,

[i]nstead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings ... constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent. (Massey 1994: 154)

It is clear that the meanings and identities of place must have an irreducible complexity and density if what comes together to make up any particular place is always a 'conjunction of many histories and many spaces' (Massey 1995: 191). So, rather than a traditional notion of place as a bounded locality with its own essential character, for Massey, we need 'a global sense of the local, a global sense of place' (Massey 1994: 156). Such an 'extroverted' sense of place is above all necessary in a world where we can no longer confidently draw a distinction between inside and outside, here and there, the different and the same, between us and them.

Over the last few decades, developments in information, communications and transportation technologies have brought about important changes in spatial organisation. This period of globalisation has not only redefined the relations between nation-states, but it has also multiplied the connections between all kinds of places. One of the major effects of these changes has been the emergence of networks of mobility for the accelerated movement of media and information flows, ideas, cultural products and capital. However, the mobility of people (tourists, migrants, refugees, and transnational workers) along these networks has become equally intense and has created significant realignments of space, place and identity (Appadurai 1996; Bhabha 1994). Together, these changes have created a global framework of socio-cultural interaction that disrupts the idea of fixed, spatially bounded territorial units and exclusive place-based cultures.

Within this globalised world, people radically different from one another in background, world-view and power are increasingly being uprooted, juxtaposed and connected in diverse ways: through media communication, through face-to-face contact in particular localities, and through technologies such as the internet that transcend and redefine presence and distance (Ang 2001; Hannerz 1996). Through these transformations the presumed certainties of culture and identity (firmly located in particular places and reflecting shared traditions and heritage) are increasingly destabilised. As David Morley and Kevin Robins have argued,

within this global matrix, 'places are no longer the clear supports of our identity' (1993: 5). Globalisation also provides the conditions for more diverse forms of identity construction, especially identities that are not aligned with the nation-state. With the possibility of more and more spaces of identification, identity is not always able to be simply associated with one single place, whether that be an original homeland, a nation, or a community.

These new spatial dynamics have significantly transformed both experiences and understandings of both place and identity. Indeed, today it is unclear whether cultural identities can any longer be adequately understood in terms of place. For Clifford, for instance, it is now more appropriate to talk about 'travelling' rather than 'settled' cultures, where people have 'routes' rather than 'roots' (Clifford 1992, 1997). Hybrid identities, translocal and transnational communities, and diasporas, for example, have been shaped through movement and travel more so than by a fixed, stable location. This means that, increasingly, as Paul Gilroy (1990) argues, 'it ain't where you're from, it's where you're at' that becomes the most important part of identity formation within contemporary conditions of migration and displacement. The concept of *diasporic space* further complicates the relations between space, place and identity, encompassing groups that have been dispersed across global space, as well as those who live in the places associated with the community's 'origins' or homeland (Brah 1996). The spatiality of contemporary migration involves complicated connections between past, present and imagined places as well as between different social networks. The 'spatial stories' (de Certeau 1984) that migrants develop as they move between different places at different times demonstrate that experiences of home, belonging and identity are often played out over multiple spatial and temporal worlds.

Space and place are complex and ambiguous categories within current processes of socio-spatial restructuring. For many theorists, this represents a new phase of 'time-space compression' that collapses distance and ultimately threatens the integrity and identity of place. For Manuel Castells (1996) for example, the appearance of spatial networks and vectors indicates that we are now living not in a *space of places*, but in a *space of flows*. From this perspective, the hypermobility of flexible capital, communication and culture across globally interlinked networks creates an increasingly abstract, homogeneous and 'placeless' geography that weakens the authenticity and uniqueness conventionally found in particular localities. Certainly one of the most visible manifestations of increasing global interconnectedness has been the appearance of more and more spaces that are *moved through* rather than *lived in*. For Marc Augé (1995) such 'non-places' have become synonymous with an all-pervasive and highly mobile global consumer society and include sites such as airports, hotels, shopping centres and supermarkets. If place is conventionally defined as a site of permanence and collective identity, the non-place is one of transience

and solitary individuality, where anonymous strangers have fleeting, temporary and ephemeral encounters. In this account, global space leads to the erosion of place because all places end up looking alike. It also dilutes our sense of attachment to specific local cultures and environments.

Such theories highlight the need to radically rethink our traditional notions of space and place within the context of increased mobility. However, oppositional models that pit global space against local place are inadequate for understanding the complexity of contemporary spatial transformations and the new kinds of multiple and hybridised cultures, identities and identifications they produce. Arjun Appadurai, for instance, suggests that contemporary global conditions are better understood as constituted by a spectrum of disconnected *disjunctive flows* rather than in terms of deterministic linear models in which places are distinct bounded sites, vulnerable to the powerful forces of globalisation and cultural homogenisation. From this perspective, global flows are uneven and unpredictable, and give rise to complex, overlapping ‘scapes of interaction’ (ethnoscapes, technoscapes, mediascapes, and so on) rather than binary relations of global and local, or centre and periphery (Appadurai 1996).

So, while the circulation of global flows certainly forges new kinds of connections and relationships, there is a ‘power geometry’ associated with all forms of mobility and time-space compression (Massey 1994: 149). They are highly uneven processes that involve different social groups in very different ways: some people travel across space quite freely, some are forced to move while others are ‘stuck’ and do not move at all. In no way can such processes be seen as a simple ‘annihilation’ of space or ‘dissolution’ of place. Globalisation, after all, has ‘led not to the creation of an ordered global village, but to the multiplication of points of conflict, antagonism and contradiction’ (Ang 1996: 165). New forms of friction and encounter occur when people and things are brought into relation with one another through global connections (Tsing 2005). The contemporary city is one of the key sites in which these frictions and encounters take place.

Cities as contested spaces and places

Widespread spatial and technological changes have unravelled the bonds between people and territory, creating transnational cultures and diasporic identities. Yet at the same time we can also identify a yearning for groundedness, local identity, and stability. It is far too simple to claim that place has ceased to matter in a globalised world. David Harvey, for instance, suggests that ‘the elaboration of place-bound identities has become more rather than less important in a world of diminishing spatial barriers to exchange, movement and communication’ (1993: 4). In fact, in recent decades, there has been a renewed

concern with place in a range of widely divergent contexts. This includes, for example, the tourism and heritage industries, place management and community building programmes, lifestyle real estate and urban gentrification projects, disputes over the environment and land-use rights, and settings where social groups make claims to place in narrow, parochial and exclusionary terms.

Place is frequently invested with nostalgia, especially when it is imagined as an uncomplicated site of belonging or a symbol of traditional ways of life. But while some people are nostalgic for places that represent 'how things once were', the connection between physical place and cultural identity is no longer so straightforward as it once may have been, and is unlikely to ever be again. Yet the linking of place to identity is often a political process of self-definition and cultural affirmation for groups that are frequently marginalised, such as gays and lesbians, migrants and indigenous people. As Gupta and Ferguson (1992: 11) argue, 'connections to place, even if only imagined, are of central importance to migrants' lives'. For indigenous groups in particular, claims to place are often an important strategy for demonstrating the significance of indigenous heritage and culture and an ongoing attachment to land, as well as a form of resistance to continuing dispossession and colonisation. This is the politics of place construction and it reveals the complex connections between place, belonging and power. Above all, it demonstrates that the meanings and identities of place are never natural, obvious or fixed, but rather sites of social and cultural conflict and negotiation. It also shows that the social construction of places is inseparable from issues of race, class, gender and sexuality.

When place is defined simplistically as 'our place', however, or seen as a site that has a singular identity that is threatened by outside influences and therefore needing to be defended, it frequently produces a reactionary and xenophobic response that demands the exclusion of others. Such struggles inevitably involve an opposition between 'us' and 'them'. But in today's cities struggles over space and place have become infinitely complex, and they are frequently motivated by political and community responses to the vast array of cultural, gender, sexual, racial and ethnic differences that now make up places, but which often disturb traditional national narratives of sameness. As James Clifford has put it, when movement and travel are commonplace, 'difference is encountered in the adjoining neighbourhood, the familiar turns up at the ends of the earth' (1988: 14). Cities, then, are spaces where different groups negotiate the unavoidable challenges of this age of global mobility; namely, 'the problems of living together in one society for ethnic groups with diverse cultures and social conditions' (Castles and Miller 1993: 2).

The contemporary city is a key terrain for examining the political nature of space and the production of spatial identities. This is because the control and regulation of space plays a crucial role in how urban life is lived and

experienced in terms of inclusion and exclusion, access to public cultures, and to the kind of claims and ‘rights to the city’ (Harvey 2008; Lefebvre 1996) that groups are able to advance and expect. Struggles over place are increasingly struggles about the right to belong, and they involve questions such as ‘who belongs?’ and ‘where and when do they belong?’ Urban spaces are therefore contested sites where a politics of identity — Muslim/Christian, first/second generation migrants, European/non-European, local/cosmopolitan — is given a spatial and material form that involves constant negotiation.

Place is commonly understood as ‘space to which meaning has been ascribed’ (Carter, Donald and Squires 1993: xii). Over recent decades, however, place branding and marketing strategies have become increasingly important as very deliberate ways of creating particular myths of place. This is primarily because cities are now being more and more entrepreneurial in the way they construct places as objects of consumption (Harvey 1989). For example, in an era of international competition for foreign capital, tourists and investment, cities use representational and symbolic resources to construct themselves as vibrant and attractive places with a distinctive feel and identity. Similarly, urban regeneration programmes transform old buildings, warehouses, waterfronts and port areas into spaces of leisure and consumption. This is the *symbolic economy* of the city and it frequently rests on using culture and imagery to stimulate urban economic growth.

The urban renaissance and revitalisation schemes that have taken place in cities around the world have been designed to provide cities with a cosmopolitan image and culture that will attract investors, tourists and wealthy residents. But this process of creating exclusive — and therefore more expensive — urban centres also frequently leads to the displacement of low-income groups, the urban poor, the homeless, and other ‘undesirables’ who do not fit the visual and spatial representations of this new affluent and cosmopolitan consumption culture. Groups who cannot afford to participate are increasingly forced to the outer edges of the city. Once the crucible for the modernist dream of unassimilated difference and encounters with strangers, the city is now an increasingly privatised, purified and fortified space — and one frequently divided between ‘locals’ and ‘cosmopolitans’ (Hannerz 1990).

In many cities, the result of this process has been an increased social polarisation between wealthy residents in the urban centres and disenfranchised groups, including a migrant ‘underclass’, that are condemned to live in outer suburbs or in housing estates on the city’s edges. The urban unrest that periodically erupts in cities around the world can be seen as a direct consequence of such urban restructuring and the kinds of inequalities it produces. Yet while many urban riots have been associated with immigrant groups (for example, the series of riots in 2005 by mainly Muslim youth in Paris and other French cities), civil

unrest also increasingly involves white working class ‘locals’ who are equally as excluded from the cosmopolitanism of today’s global cities.

The so-called ‘Cronulla riots’ that took place in Sydney in 2005 can be seen in such terms, as a symptom of Sydney’s division into locals and cosmopolitans, into suburban and global space. The conflict between a group of self-declared Cronulla ‘locals’ and young Lebanese-Australian men arose because of an alleged attack on a surf lifesaver, but quickly developed into a symbolic struggle over place, belonging and the Australian way of life. Along with his postcode (2230), one young local wrote the slogan ‘we grew here, you flew here’ in ink on his bare chest. This image crystallised the whole confrontation: young locals at war with outsiders who come from somewhere else and do not belong. But it is an image that also represents the aggressive localism that arises when place is associated with an exclusive, singular and ‘authentic’ identity, and defined in terms of ownership — our place, our beach — and a sense of belonging to protect or defend (Allon 2008).

Both localism and nationalism have become features of public life in many countries in recent years. In Australia, the phenomenon of ‘suburban nationalism’ has given rise to the popular display of the Australian flag and other nationalist symbols across suburban landscapes. It has also intersected with the trend of celebrating ‘localism’ and ‘local pride’ as illustrated in the growing fashion of body tattoos using suburb names and postcodes (Gee 2006). This trend peaked after the Cronulla riots but it continues to have a presence in popular culture in many forms. The feature-length documentary film *Bra Boys: Blood is Thicker Than Water* (2007), for example, about a surfing/gang culture based at Maroubra beach in suburban Sydney, demonstrates the way in which a strong local identity and place-attachment can become entangled with the performance of national identity, mateship and masculinity. *Bra Boys* celebrates the male-dominated surfing culture of the Maroubra-based group and the place-identity they represent — most of the group’s members have tattoos of Maroubra’s postcode (2035), the suburb’s name, or phrases such as ‘My Brother’s Keeper’ or ‘Bra Boys’ on their bodies. The documentary also shows that despite the equality and egalitarianism that is traditionally associated with Australia’s beach culture, the activities of groups such as the *Bra Boys* actually reveal that the beach is a space that plays a central role in the construction of a very specific white, hyper-masculine form of national identity (Evers 2010). This is most obviously symbolised by the masculine figures of the surfer and the surf lifesaver, but it is also evident in the way the beach itself is defined as a site of Australian culture and mateship, which has to be defended from outside influences. As one member of the *Bra Boys* states, ‘Look at the way the coast is made — and the tribe over the hill is our enemy. That’s what it is all about, we stand our ground. It’s our little place.’

Conclusion

The localism of the *Bra Boys* is one instance where place identity and belonging takes an exclusionary and aggressive form. But it also clearly shows that a politics of place construction involves the interaction of different aspects of place simultaneously: place as a material setting, as a social practice, and a set of symbolic and imaginative representations. Cultural practices such as film, literature, music, and photography play a crucial part in the definition of place, and through an analysis of these forms we can see the politics of place construction and the ways in which the identity of place comes to be created. The discursive, symbolic and representational dimensions of place therefore require as much attention as its physical dimensions. As Sharon Zukin (1996: 43) argues, '[t]o ask "whose city?" suggests more than a politics of occupation; it also asks who has the right to inhabit the dominant image of the city'.

Places are never finished or settled but constantly in *process*. Ideas of permanence, rootedness, and a unique sense of place are always contingent and temporary claims on space rather than reflections of a static and stable history or identity. They are social practices that have to be continually repeated, reproduced and reiterated in the present, and which contribute to the lived experience of place as a 'contested terrain of competing definitions' (Harvey 1996: 309). This concept of everyday practice is important for understanding space, place and identity because it reminds us that such categories are never fixed, immutable or established. They only acquire meaning through lived materiality and subjective experience, and they only become operational through the unpredictable performances of social practice in space-time.

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