Martin Lüthe and Sascha Pöhlmann (eds)

Unpopular Culture

Unpopular Culture

Televisual Culture

The 'televisual' names a media culture generally in which television's multiple dimensions have shaped and continue to alter the coordinates through which we understand, theorize, intervene, and challenge contemporary media culture. Televisual culture is a culture which both encompasses and crosses all aspects of television from its experiential dimensions to its aesthetic strategies, from its technological developments to its crossmedial consequences. Concepts like liveness, media event, audiences, broadcasting need recasting as problematics around which the televisual will get interrogated within a dynamic media landscape. Rather than accept the narrative of television's obsolescence, the series aims at seriously analyzing both the contemporary specificity of the televisual and the challenges thrown up by new developments in technology and theory in an age where digitalization and convergence are redrawing the boundaries of media.

Series Editors:
Sudeep Dasgupta, Joke Hermes, Jaap Kooijman, Markus Stauff

Unpopular Culture

Martin Lüthe & Sascha Pöhlmann (eds)

Table of Contents

Introduction

What is Unpopular Culture?

Martin Lüthe & Sascha Pöhlmann

It all started with Anal Cunt. That is probably neither a sentence you thought you'd ever read in an academic text, nor is it one we thought we'd ever write in one. But it is true anyway, and so this introduction has to start with it, since what it is about started with it, too. One day, over the very unpopular food in the cafeteria at the Amerika-Institut of LMU Munich, we compared notes with some colleagues on what might be the most outrageous and offensive music. No such discussion worth its salt can occur without reference to Anal Cunt, a band who were very strong contenders for the disputed title of 'the most offensive band in the world' until main member Seth Putnam died in 2011. Abbreviating their own name to A.C. on album covers was about the only concession the band ever made to the rules of the music market or good taste. Their first EPs—such as the *88 Song EP* and the *5643 Song EP*—do not feature any song titles or even songs or lyrics that were written before the recording process, and the music fully deserves the 'noisecore' label (a genre that has its roots in what could be considered a classic of unpopular culture, Lou Reed's 1975 album *Metal Machine Music*). When Anal Cunt signed to the Earache record label, they discovered what would become their trademark: while their short songs, usually under a minute in length, never quite reached the musical excellence of grindcore greats such as early Napalm Death or Brutal Truth, their song titles ensured their place in the history of extreme music. Adolescent, nihilistic, ridiculous, and (self-)ironic, Anal Cunt perfected the art of the titular insult, trying to indiscriminately offend everyone, including their own fans, their record label, other bands, any social minority or majority, and even themselves. Their 1994 album *Everyone Should Be Killed* begins with 'Some Songs' and 'Some More Songs', but also already includes gems such as 'I'm Not Allowed to Like A.C. Any More Since They Signed to Earache', 'When I Think of True Punk Rock Bands, I Think of Nirvana and the Melvins' or 'Selling Out by Having Song Titles on This Album'. Their 1997 album *I Like It When You Die* presents their trademark use of the second-person address in song titles such as 'You Keep a Diary'; 'You Are a Food Critic'; 'You Have Goals'; 'You Play On a Softball Team'; 'You Go to Art School'; 'Your Best Friend Is You'; 'Your Favorite Band Is Supertramp'; 'You Live in a Houseboat'; 'You Are an

Interior Decorator'; 'You're Old (Fuck You)', 'You (Fill in the Blank)' and the classic 'Your Kid Is Deformed', which is even a pretty good song. The next album, *Picnic of Love* (1998), did yet another unpopular thing by offering lyrics so sweet they make your teeth hurt just by reading them, with song titles such as 'Saving Ourselves For Marriage'; 'Greed Is Something That We Don't Need'; 'I Couldn't Afford to Buy You a Present (So I Wrote You This Song)'; or, 'In My Heart There's a Star Named After You'. Yet, the album that followed, *It Just Gets Worse* (1999), turned out to have a prophetic title, and with this record the band pushed things too far, for critics and fans alike. Like many underground bands in extreme music scenes, their relative popularity was heavily dependent on their cultivation of unpopularity, with music that was too noisy and lyrics that were too offensive for most people, pleasing those in the know who wish to irritate, if not shock others with their taste in art (a phenomenon not limited to youth cultures, but also found in high culture, perhaps exemplified best by Dadaism).

Yet, Anal Cunt managed to offend even those who enjoyed offending others with their music, since the humor in their song titles became increasingly questionable, going for a wholesale insensitivity toward anyone and everyone by intensifying the homophobic, racist, and misogynist themes that had been present before, and which had been somewhat accepted as conforming to the rules of a transgressive genre by a heteronormative scene that was predominantly white, male, and lower- to middle class. With songs such as 'I Sent a Thank You Card to the Guy Who Raped You', 'I Sent Concentration Camp Footage to America's Funniest Home Videos', or 'Laughing When Leonard Peltier Gets Raped in Jail', the self-irony didn't seem to cut it anymore, and the limits of political correctness kicked in with those who had previously enjoyed their violation with adolescent rebellious glee. While the declaration that 'Everyone in Anal Cunt Is Dumb' might have added sufficient irony to make *I Like It When You Die* a joke many people could laugh at, a similar move of stating that 'Being Ignorant Is Awesome' was no longer enough to sustain the precarious balance, and it was all downhill from there. Media such as the German *Rock Hard* magazine stopped covering the band after main member Seth Putnam made some particularly anti-Semitic statements, and the grindcore scene—which is traditionally rooted in anarchism and still espouses (extreme) left-wing values to a significant extent today—partly turned its back on Anal Cunt, especially as Putnam collaborated with extreme right-wing bands. While the band had always sought to be controversial, it was now controversial in the very scene that has always espoused an aesthetics and politics of provocation and controversy, and it thus uncovered some of the rules of

transgression in a transgressive discourse.[1] True to form, Anal Cunt refused to rescind their provocations and return to the limits of the acceptable on later albums, declaring 'I'm Glad Jazz Faggots Don't Like Us Anymore' while throwing out songs such as 'Ha Ha Holocaust' or 'Even Though Your Culture Oppresses Women, You Still Suck You Fucking Towelhead'. At the same time, the band did not hesitate to offend its potential new audience by informing them that 'The South Won't Rise Again' or that, quite simply, 'All Our Fans Are Gay'. This hard-earned unpopularity with everyone even entered Seth Putnam's obituaries when he died of a drug-related heart attack in 2011, which often declared in one way or another that 'he may not be universally mourned' (MyDeathSpace), though not necessarily in such euphemistic terms.

   Anal Cunt were a thorn in the side of a grindcore scene that considers itself a thorn in the side of the mainstream. Indeed, grindcore thrives on provocation and explores extremes to counter what is perceived as a shallow and lukewarm field of mainstream music, and Anal Cunt managed to alienate even a scene that usually has no trouble at all with being highly ironic and dead serious at the same time. Yet, the band also poses a challenge to something larger and more abstract, namely to our conceptions of popular culture and of the 'unpopular/popular divide'. This, then, is how we finally arrive at the larger project introduced by this essay. As we discussed bands such as Anal Cunt among colleagues who all work in one way or another on popular culture, it became increasingly (if only at first intuitively) clear that one would not even label their musical genre of grindcore or noisecore popular culture, not to mention the band itself, which has managed to marginalize itself even further from a marginalized sphere of cultural production. If this is not popular culture, and if we can just as instinctively rule out that other half of the traditional binary opposition, high culture, then the simplest and most obvious answer seems to be that it must be *un*popular culture. This resonated with those of us who consider themselves affiliated with subcultures that embrace and value unpopularity in one way or another, or even make unpopularity one of their defining traits. Yet of course, this simple answer is not simple at all, since it begs the question we would like to begin to address in this introduction, and which the contributors to this volume will tackle in many different ways in their respective essays: what is unpopular culture?

   This is the guiding theme of the present essay collection, which is the result of a four-day conference on unpopular culture held at Amerika Haus Munich in fall 2013. In this volume, the authors will explore the possible meanings and uses of the term and concept in various ways, sometimes

more theoretically, sometimes with regard to particular artifacts that can be classified as unpopular culture rather than pop or high culture. The variety of approaches is intentional, as we did not provide a fixed framework of analysis when asking for contributions via our call for papers. While we had our own ideas about the potential of the concept—which we will elaborate below—we simply invited people to take the term and run with it in whatever direction it might take them, to see what results a communal effort of definition and discussion would bring. This openness produced the variety within the present volume, but it did not produce a single dictionary-style definition of unpopular culture. Instead, we were guided by questions such as the following: How does unpopularity come about? How is it constructed and defined, how are such constructions maintained, and by whom? How do the mechanisms of the unpopular change over time? What histories of the unpopular could we tell? How does unpopularity relate to popular and high culture? Can there even be such a thing as unpopular culture, or is the unpopular at odds with culture itself? What are the politics of the unpopular? What is its importance as a category of inclusion and exclusion, for the self-proclaimed 'subcultural underground' and 'the mainstream'? How do particular cultural artifacts represent unpopularity, and to what end? Can we describe an aesthetics of the unpopular? What particular fields of popular and high culture distance themselves from or embrace the unpopular? How do particular cultural artifacts become unpopular, and why? How is the unpopular related to value judgments such as 'offensive', 'controversial', 'cool', 'ugly', '(un)fashionable', or 'bad'?

Evidently, these questions are of the kind that cannot be answered definitively or completely but need to be addressed nonetheless. Like popular culture and high culture, unpopular culture remains—and surely will remain—a concept that is fluid and fuzzy, prone to change and criticism, characterized by family resemblances rather than a fixed set of characteristics that allows for easy characterization and labeling. Like so many concepts in cultural studies, it might be more appropriate to always think of unpopular culture*s* in the plural, in order to avoid giving the impression of a monolithic, coherent, and homogenous theoretical construct. Therefore, as the following essays show, it is the sum of answers to that definitional question given here that matters, and it is rather the proliferation than the reduction of meanings that testifies to the productivity and usefulness of the concept, and the desirability and even necessity of exploring it beyond what this collection and this introduction can offer.

What we do offer is this. The volume opens with Martin Butler's essay 'Why We Talk the Talk We Talk: On the Emptiness of Terms, the Processual

Un/Popular, and Benefits of Distinction—Some Auto-Ethnographical Re-marks', in which he theoretically explores the way in which conceptions of popular and unpopular culture are used as categories of self-positioning and identitarian capital, rather than as analytical categories.

Dominika Ferens then takes the consideration of unpopular culture to the field of literature in 'Big Fish: On the Relative Popularity of Zane Grey and Ernest Hemingway', comparing two authors whose works, careers, and commercial and critical reception raise questions about the criterion of 'popularity' used to classify writers. Ferens argues that Grey and Hem-ingway consistently traded in the not-yet-popular, used similar strategies of controlling their public image to boost book sales, and were both read by millions, though perhaps not the same millions. She addresses how Hemingway the Modernist was torn between a desire and fear of popular recognition and draws on biographical sources for Grey to show how he dealt with his own waxing and waning popularity.

James Dorson takes this writerly concern with (un)popularity a step further in 'How (Not) to Make People Like You: The Anti-Popular Art of David Foster Wallace', reading his story 'A Radically Condensed History of Postindustrial Life' as well as *The Pale King* as exemplary of a more general desire in Wallace's fiction to oppose what Dorson calls 'popularity culture', or art that primarily seeks approval, not money or distinction, as well as a sociability in which approval is the overriding end. Historicizing and contextualizing Wallace's texts by connecting them to David Ries-man's sociology of 'other-direction', Dorson reads Wallace's concern with sincerity and recursivity, as well as his critique of postmodernist literary aesthetics, as part of an engagement with work and life in post-industrial society.

Elizabeth Kovach closes this section with her essay 'Dissenting Com-modities: Negotiations of (Un)popularity in Publications Critical of Post-9/11 U.S.-America', in which she discusses three generically diverse pieces of writing that are critical of U.S.-American foreign policy and society since 9/11: Jane Mayer's *The Dark Side*, Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom*, and Juliana Spahr's *thisconnectionofeveryonewithlungs*. She argues that these texts have been mostly read as dissenting, critical, and counter-hegemonic depictions of the direction that the US has taken since 9/11, but little attention has been paid to the commodified nature of such writerly dissent. In her own analysis—drawing particularly on the work of Jacques Rancière—she explores the tensions and ambivalences regarding issues of unpopularity and popularity that affect writers who strive for political impact while they participate in a market logic that inevitably dampens the blow.

The volume moves from literary to televisual culture with Dan Udy's essay 'Secrets, Lies and *The Real Housewives*: The Death of an (Un)Popular Genre'. Conceiving of the un/popular as that which splits viewers into two opposing factions, where ardent fans clash with critics and wider audiences, Udy presents the reality TV or docusoap show *The Real Housewives* and the wider media network it is part of as an example of how audiences that embrace such productions simultaneously reject them, based on a normative notion that they *should* reject them by certain cultural standards. Thus, Udy identifies the unpopular as both closely related to camp and as the productive force behind the complex cultural notion of the guilty pleasure.

Jeroen de Kloet and Jaap Kooijman consider a similarly un/popular media phenomenon in 'Karaoke Americanism Gangnam Style: K-pop, Wonder Girls, and the Asian Unpopular', highlighting particularly how unpopular culture helps describe issues of cultural transfer, translatability, and, indeed, marketability in a globalized world. They analyze why K-pop remains globally unpopular and propose the notion of 'karaoke Americanism' to understand global cultural flows and disjunctures. They examine the pop act Wonder Girls as an example of this, describing not only their (un)popularity in different cultures, but also their appropriation in different contexts that attest to the political potential of karaoke Americanism. While they acknowledge that this speaks of the continuous power of the United States when it comes to the production of popular culture, they also describe recent developments in terms of geopolitics, fragmentation, and the digitization of culture that may help challenge this hegemony.

Florian Zappe continues this intermedial approach in a different way in his essay '"When order is lost, time spits": The Abject Unpopular Art of Genesis (Breyer) P-Orridge'. Zappe draws on the work of Julia Kristeva to theorize an abject unpopular culture at the radical fringes of popular culture, which rejects its empty gestures of rebellion by dwelling on the threshold of the unsettling and intangible qualities of the abject. He does so by analyzing the work of performance artist Genesis (Breyer) P-Orridge, whose use of abjection as an aesthetic principle on all levels of his life and work—particularly in the context of projects such as COUM Transmissions and Throbbing Gristle—locates him not only in the excluded middle between the two poles of bourgeois 'high' and popular 'low', but in the intangible center of a triangle consisting of 'high', 'low', and 'pop' culture.

Christian Schmidt then shifts the focus of the collection more firmly towards music in his essay '"Famous in a Small Town": The Authenticity of Unpopularity in Contemporary Country Music'. He explores the ways in which popularity and unpopularity are part and parcel of contemporary

country music, a genre that is both commercially successful and, at the same time, aspires to self-consciously distance itself from the perceived artificiality of popular culture and thereby become regarded as the true music of the common American folk. Schmidt shows how country music simultaneously taps into a discourse of American popular culture and styles itself as this popular culture's unpopular other by staging a notion of authentic Southern and Dixie identity in and through the music and its visual representation in music videos. Drawing on Judith Halberstam's notion of metronormativity, he argues that country music *is* popular culture, yet at the same time pinpoints the particular strategies used by the country music industry, its artists, and its audiences to mark their distance to it and construct an image of country music as the more authentic counterpart to supposedly artificial *popular* culture.

Bärbel Harju addresses similar issues from a very different perspective in 'Making Christianity Cool: Christian Pop Music's Quest for Popularity', as she analyzes Christian pop music's shifting engagement with 'secular' society and mainstream pop culture since the late 1960s. She examines the genre's unique situation between religion, commerce, and music, along with its (self-)perception as unpopular and its continuous struggle with the mechanisms, values, and demands of pop culture, arguing that this also sheds light on American evangelicalism as well as American culture at large. Harju reads the genre's attempts to join the mainstream as part of the broader evangelical movement and its strategic embrace of popular culture.

C. Richard King then scrutinizes an even more unpopular field of musical production in 'Listening to Bad Music: White Power and (Un)Popular Culture', finding in white power music a form of expressive culture that breaks with social convention as its overt racism, advocacy of violence, and palpable rage transgress accepted limits of speech and sentiment. Yet, King offers a more complex interpretation that complicates prevailing accounts of white power, musical expression, and popular culture. He argues that white power music may be unpopular but is not isolated or idiosyncratic, since it actively engages with and appropriates musical styles to communicate its message, build audiences, create community, recruit members, and to crossover to more mainstream spaces. He also shows how, in the course of the twentieth century, white supremacist music has moved from pervading popular culture and public life to its margins, as it draws upon and deploys popular stylings but has little claim beyond a bounded social field on audience, desire, or fashion.

Paola Ferrero focuses on the importance of a perceived unpopularity for a genre's self-conception in her essay 'Hipster Black Metal?

Deafheaven's *Sunbather* and the Evolution of an (Un)popular Genre'. Ferrero examines how the genre of Black Metal has shifted from the realm of the unpopular to that of the 'cool', effectively making a transition into indie music as its style evolved from its early Norwegian roots. To this end, she analyzes the receptive strategies of indie webzines reviewers of Black Metal records by using Deafheaven's album *Sunbather* as a case study, arguing that the growing popularity of the genre in indie webzine is a result of the reification of this particular album as a paradigmatic shift in the history of genre, a reading counteracted by the fans' own ideas concerning the nature of the genre as a historically unpopular one. The tension arising from this controversy reveals the way a music subculture as carefully protected as Black Metal polices its own boundaries and how processes of cultural appropriation threaten the very identity of the genre.

Barry Shank's essay 'Unpopular Culture and the American Reception of Tinariwen' ends the section on music in this volume by arguing that the spread of popular music across significant geographic and political boundaries implicates new populations in enhanced and enlarged conceptions of the polis, the political form of the people. Shank asks whether it is possible for a shared aesthetic to change to the shape of the political in a meaningful way. He does so by discussing the case of Tinariwen, a band of Tuareg musicians who have been among the leading groups developing a particular style of what the West has come to call 'desert blues'. As the Western popularity of Tinariwen's music has increased, political chaos has descended upon Mali, the nation state that claims sovereignty over the territories from which Tinariwen and Tuareg music emerged. This forms the backdrop for Shank's inquiry into the potential political force of music in the face of war's destruction.

Dietmar Meinel then explores the dichotomy of the un/popular in reference to film in his essay 'Cultural Studies and the Un/Popular. How the Ass-Kicking Work of Steven Seagal May Wrist-Break Our Paradigms of Culture'. Tracing the Seagal oeuvre as he moved from acclaimed martial arts action star to bizarre media figure, while remaining both consistently unpopular and consistently popular, Meinel challenges a particular representational logic in cultural studies by drawing attention to unpopular texts that function only poorly as representations of their period and their social formations. He argues that the artifacts of unpopular culture, such as the later Seagal productions, question the representationalist paradigm in literary and cultural studies and necessitate novel approaches to conceptualizing culture.

Karsten Senkbeil utilizes the prism of the unpopular to examine sports in his essay 'Unpopular Sport Teams and the Social Psychology of "Anti-Fans"'. Considering the apparent paradox that major sports teams across the world are simultaneously highly popular and unpopular, Senkbeil asks why fans unite in their overt contempt for a specific team, what the psychological setup and the sociocultural rationale of the 'hater fan' may be, and particularly why people so fervently and outspokenly assign to themselves the role of a *non*-member of a certain fan group. Engaging critically with the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, John Fiske, and Michel Maffesoli, Senkbeil argues that many typical characteristics of fans of any type of pop culture can indeed be applied to anti-fans as well, and that economic reasons (symbolic class struggle, traditionalism, and jealousy toward the *nouveau riche*) combine with the dynamics of gender identities in bringing these characteristics about.

Catherine Bouko combines the perspectives of media and museum studies in her essay 'Popular, Unpopular: When First World War Museums Meet Facebook' to explore how the differences between popular and unpopular media practices have shifted in the digital age. She considers the historical museum as the traditionally 'sacred space' of high culture and its attempts to integrate the codes of popular culture to make the younger generations sensitive to themes they are likely to consider unattractive. In doing so, she analyzes the story of the fictional WWI infantryman Léon Vivien that was disseminated on Facebook in 2013 on behalf of the Meaux Museum of the Great War, creating a media object that seeks to fuse History as presented in museums with a popular contemporary media culture as two paradigms of intimacy and connectivity intersect.

Susanne Leikam addresses a different kind of memorial culture with an American focus in 'Unpopular American Natural Calamities and the Selectivity of Disaster Memory', in which she presents selected 'forgotten' natural disasters and the (failed) processes of their memorialization that, at the time, prevented them from becoming productive parts of public discourses and to be visible in 'high' and 'low' cultural spheres. In reference to two case studies, Leikam argues that the unpopularity of natural calamities is not an inherent condition or arises arbitrarily, but rather is the result of economic, cultural, and political endeavors struggling for hegemony in American cultures and, as such, is also often directly related to the popularity of other historical moments.

Sebastian M. Herrmann closes the volume with an essay that takes the notion of unpopular culture to yet another abstract level by applying it to the field that comprises all the contributions collected here, the humanities.

In 'The Unpopular Profession? Graduate Studies in the Humanities and the Genre of the "Thesis Hatement"', Herrmann analyzes a polemic and conflicted genre that originates from within the humanities and warns against pursuing a career in its disciplines. This is indicative of the role the humanities and the academy play in contemporary U.S., if not Western society. Herrmann describes these texts' precarious form of (mis)communication as being marked by irony, hyperbole, and a particular set of tropes and metaphors. He also carves out their contradictory politics of labor, class, income, and academia. Finally, Herrmann discusses how these texts undermine their own presumed project.

While these considerations of unpopular culture are certainly original in their respective explorations of the concept's potential, they are not without precedent in cultural studies, although explicit mention of the unpopular is scarce. For example, Andrew Ross makes an important gesture toward the unpopular within the study of popular and high culture in his 1989 monograph *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture*, when he emphasizes that,

> [w]hile it speaks enthusiastically to the feelings, desires, aspirations, and pleasures of ordinary people, popular culture is far from being a straightforward or unified expression of popular interests. It contains elements of disrespect, and even opposition to structures of authority, but it also contains 'explanations' [...] for the maintenance of respect for those structures of authority. (3)

One could say that this dialectic of popular culture is driven by the unpopular; that is, the counternarrative within popular culture itself that prevents it from becoming what Ross dismisses as the 'conspiratorial view of 'mass culture' as imposed upon a passive populace like so much standardized fodder, doled out to quell unrest and to fuel massive profits' (4). Ross argues not only that the histories of high and popular cultures must be told together to make sense, but also that they need a history of intellectuals, or those

> experts in culture whose traditional business is to define what is popular and what is legitimate, who patrol the ever shifting borders of popular and legitimate taste, who supervise the passports, the temporary visas, the cultural identities, the threatening 'alien' elements, and the deportation orders, and who occasionally make their own adventurist forays across the border. (5)

Unpopular culture, then, can be imagined as the disputed territory between high and popular culture, a place that both lay claim to, but that none can ever own completely; it is a perpetual no man's-land that presents a challenge to the very notion of permanent territorial inscription itself. Without using the term, Ross identifies unpopular culture as a residue within two internally heterogeneous systems of culture that prevents and resists their respective attempts at homogenization and stabilization; not an outside force to disturb their internal coherence but always already an internal element of incoherence and disruption that must be continually managed, supervised, and controlled.

In the now canonized field of cultural studies, (popular) culture famously 'is the struggle over meaning, a struggle that takes place over and within the sign' (Grossberg 157). This struggle over meaning and articulation, which critics like Stuart Hall, Lawrence Grossberg, and Dick Hebdidge have tackled, could be complicated through a serious analysis of practices of unpopular cultural articulation and appropriation and the way they might open up a space of socio-cultural criticism beyond and/or within the ironic. Accordingly, the politics of unpopularity and their relationship with hegemonic cultural articulation are what is at stake when we take cultural studies as a point of departure for assessing the unpopular. Unpopular culture invites us to question the rules of popular culture and high culture as a whole, and it offers us other options and not just a third, as for example validating high-quality segments of popular culture as *popular arts* does and has done, to evaluate and interpret cultural artifacts in their aesthetic and political significance. One cannot overestimate the fact that today popularity is most often measured in commercial terms, that this has been the case for a long time, and that, furthermore, our understanding of high culture relies heavily on commercial *un*popularity.

These are a number of approaches to unpopular culture *avant la lettre*, but the term itself has also been used in different contexts by different people. That said, it has been employed in such specific ways that a more general inquiry into its meanings is in order, and its prior uses can already be considered part of this inquiry. For example, Bart Beaty used the term in the title of his monograph *Unpopular Culture: Transforming the European Comic Book in the 1990s*, to describe an area of cultural production that was often used as an epitome of popular culture while at the same time being unpopular—both part of mass culture and not part of it. In 2008, the artist Grayson Perry published his selection of works from the British Arts Council Collection under the title of *Unpopular Culture*, in which he seeks to provide an 'alternative view' of postwar British art that 'moves away from facts,

dates and movements and towards a more subtle investigation of the mood, pace and preoccupations that underline British art of this period.' This anti-mainstream attitude characterizes many considerations of unpopular culture. Moreover, it already points toward one of the most useful understandings of the term as a third concept that breaks open the dichotomy of high and pop culture, denoting that which is not part of a (perceived) mainstream mass culture but not part of a bourgeois high culture either. This was the mission of *SCRAM* magazine, 'a journal of unpopular culture', which chronicled 'the neglected, the odd, the nifty and the nuts' (*SCRAM*), or the now-defunct *Tangents* magazine. Similarly, the annual Festival of Unpopular Culture in Adelaide or the Institute for Unpopular Culture in San Francisco (IFUC) celebrate and support non-mainstream art. In its mission statement, the latter declares its determination to help 'alleviate artists' needs to cater to public taste and opinion in order to survive' (IFUC).

The normativity behind such contrasts and distinctions is obvious: here, art is supposed to be absolutely autonomous, independent of commercial considerations and critical or public reception. Popularity is understood as something that should not even have to cross the artist's mind in the process of creation since it is a potential source of corruption of the art itself, a view of art and artist that is rooted in Western Romanticism and especially Modernism. Unpopularity is therefore desirable for the 'true' artist, and maybe even a measure of the cultural value of his work. At the same time, the statement draws attention to the standards by which cultural popularity is most often measured today, and it defines *ex negativo* standards of unpopularity. The following aspects of un/popularity seem the most crucial to us:

1) Popularity is commercial popularity, i.e. measured according to sales. A cultural product is popular if it sells well, and it is unpopular if it is a commercial failure.
2) Popularity is critical popularity, i.e. measured according to a discourse between experts who declare a cultural product valuable. A cultural product is popular if a sufficient number of critics consume and value it, and it is unpopular if critics ignore it or do not value it.
3) Popularity is mass popularity, i.e. measured according to the number of consumers (though not necessarily in terms of sales). A cultural product is popular if a sufficient number of people consume it, and it is unpopular if the number is insufficient.
4) Popularity is aesthetic popularity, i.e. a means of describing and quantifying pleasure in consuming a cultural product. A cultural

product is popular if a sufficient number of people *like* it, and it is unpopular if the number is insufficient. (This is obviously related to but not identical with the previous point.)

5) Popularity is original popularity, i.e. something that originates from the people, i.e. measured according to its producers and its context of production. A cultural product is popular if it comes from the people, and it is unpopular if it is imposed on the many by the few. This is especially relevant in constructions of popularity with regard to imagined communities such as nations, where, for example, a 'popular' culture of traditions, folk songs, or fairytales was invented in Romanticism to *construct* a people in the first place and an invention of an unpopular culture might have always already functioned as said *construction's* inherent Other.

Other categories of popularity and unpopularity can, of course, be found, and the essays in this collection certainly provide a few; yet, these strike us as the most relevant for the purpose at hand of conceptualizing unpopular culture as a third term that complicates and enriches the opposition between high and pop culture and that offers an entirely different perspective. We will return to these aspects later; for the moment, it is sufficient to note that the study of unpopular culture is interested in exploring, analyzing, and challenging the mechanisms and ideologies of (un)popularity mentioned above.

Stephen Redhead has done this from a combined perspective of law, sociology, and cultural studies in his 1995 *Unpopular Cultures: The Birth of Law and Popular Culture*, which provides a useful framework for thinking about unpopular culture at large, even though he does not really pursue the implications of the unpopular as far as possible. Redhead emphasizes from the start that his is not simply 'a study of outlawed cultures,' and that to 'decide what, and who, is 'deviant' these days [...] is not an easy, or straightforward task' (3). In doing so, he draws attention to the problematic dichotomies of the normal, the mainstream, and the popular and the abnormal, the marginalized, and the unpopular. This differentiation is highly important to unpopular culture, but its rules and regulations are far from straightforward or unitary, and they are certainly subject to change over time and in different contexts. In this understanding of the term, unpopular culture distinguishes itself from popular culture rather than high culture, since it opposes a certain mainstream, and it assumes its meanings in opposition to popular culture as *mass* culture. Yet, unpopular culture is not simply a synonym for high culture that maintains the old dichotomy

of high and low, since it is often located in very different contexts and is opposed to, if not even hostile to, the bourgeois environment that defines high culture. At the same time, works of unpopular culture do not buy into a simple dichotomy of class that would oppose a bourgeois elite (defined by capital, education, etc.) to the masses of a homogeneous working class and their respective separate cultural spheres. Unpopular culture can be so elitist that even T.S. Eliot might want to tell its devotees to loosen up and live a little; try discussing the sufficient criteria of what makes for true Black Metal or Underground Rap, or the rules of selling out in any field of cultural production that opposes the mainstream, and you will find out soon enough that only very little is popular about these alleged fields of popular culture. A conceptualization of unpopular culture may show that such strict conventions of inclusion and exclusion are similar but obviously not identical to those of high culture, which also demarcates its territory by carving out a particular sphere of the unpopular from mass culture; but, while it also justifies its unpopularity aesthetically, it does so in reference to a very different notion of cultural value. Unpopular culture thus can be considered the disruptive element that resists and complicates the simplifications of binary oppositions such as elite versus masses or highbrow versus lowbrow. Both high and pop culture can be unpopular culture, but neither defines the term, nor do both concepts taken together do so.

What unpopular culture does is draw attention to the aesthetic and political value judgments that are at the heart of the high/pop culture divide, and it shows that, while Postmodernist theory has taught us to shy away from such judgments, we still make them every time we consider, appreciate, consume, and reflect upon a cultural artifact, as cultural critics and as fans. It highlights the fact that both high and pop culture are always loaded terms that can never be used neutrally, innocently, or merely descriptively; if cultural studies has shown anything, then it is that such a thing as 'mere description' is impossible. Unpopular culture thus intervenes in the alleged neutrality of this discourse, drawing attention to considerations of aesthetics—'good' music, a 'really bad' novel, a video game that 'sucks' but 'is fun', a 'camp' performance, a 'B' movie, a 'cult' classic, 'offensive' lyrics, and so on—that have supposedly vanished from critical considerations of culture as they opened up toward the popular, but which, in fact, have only become implicit where one may as well make them explicit. Therefore, unpopular culture simultaneously highlights the normativity of high and pop culture and embraces its own normative position instead of pretending not to have one. Rather, it inquires into the rules of that very normativity

by considering what is deviant, abject, offensive, and marginalized, but also set aside as special, underground, visible or accessible only to a certain elite, a niche cultivated by its own caste of priests and devotees who are very particular about inclusion and exclusion (and this means Joyceans deciphering *Finnegans Wake* as much as avid readers of fan fiction speaking in their own code).

For this reason, as well as for its recognition of the intrinsic connection between the aesthetic and the political, the study of unpopular culture must necessarily follow Fredric Jameson's famous slogan to 'Always historicize!' (ix). Just like any artifact might transition from high to pop culture or vice versa over time, it might also become part of unpopular culture, or stop being part of it, a process that may be connected to a categorization as high or pop, but does not necessarily have to be. This means that not only can something be high culture and unpopular culture but also popular culture *and* unpopular culture at the same time, even though the latter seems to be a contradiction in terms. However, it is only oxymoronic if one buys into the high/pop culture dichotomy in the first place and understands mass culture in an all too homogeneous way. Unpopular culture instead draws attention to the heterogeneities that characterize both high and pop culture, and to those spheres of cultural production and reception that are not adequately described in reference either to a certain cultural elite or a certain large group of people who are all too often cast as passive recipients rather than active critics of the works they consume. Evidently, this arcs back to the complex of cultural encoding and decoding that holds a prominent place in post-cultural studies inquiries of cultural forms and practices. Unpopularity and intentionality enter a meaningful relationship in this context, insofar as the 'intentionally unpopular' and the 'accidentally unpopular' illuminate the complexities inherent in meaning-making and cultural agency. After all, being purposefully 'unpopular', as in avant-garde or underground cultural production, is different from becoming or being made unpopular in the process of audience reception, re-articulation, and appropriation—especially in our times of digital media communication and its instantaneous, and instantaneously serial, aesthetics of unpopularity.

It was probably the elitist strands of Modernism that first cultivated the aesthetics of the unpopular and unpopularity as aesthetics, valuing art only if it was *not* for the people but rather for a selected few initiates. However, it is also true that quite a few Modernists were not at all averse to financial and, indeed, popular success, and so were cultivating aesthetic unpopularity while at the same time seeking commercial popularity. It is worth remembering that the first publication of *Ulysses* as a single book

was printed in different editions to suit different tastes and wallets,[2] while Joyce sought just the right kind of unpopularity, and by 'resisting the critical appropriation of his writing into Culture, Joyce refused both the affable handshake of the *biens culturels* and remained aloof from ordinary readers' (Nash 98). These complex rules of unpopularity as a measure of aesthetic quality that have been set in and by Modernism are still with us today, having, for example, seeped into musical subcultures in which 'selling out' is the worst an artist can do, thus winning and losing an audience at the same time. Postmodernism—in academia as well as in the larger cultural sphere—ultimately did not succeed in exorcising the specters of this high-cultural prejudice, nor did it manage to really 'cross the border, close the gap' (in Leslie Fiedler's famous words) between high and popular culture, partial and significant successes notwithstanding. A conceptualization of unpopular culture can be considered part of this ongoing attempt to do so, using different tactics in an already established strategy of assaulting one of the most entrenched fortifications of Western cultural tradition.

Questions of popularity have been haunting artists for more than a century since Modernism became, somewhat paradoxically, both the epitome of high culture and at the same time a paradigm for what culture is in general, a standard of the exceptional that was met with resistance from Postmodernists as soon as it had completed its transition from subversion to establishment. One fine pre-Modernist example is Henry David Thoreau, who reported in his diary on 28 October 1853 that he had received the brutally material proof of his commercial failure as a writer:

> For a year or two past, my *publisher*, falsely so called, has been writing from time to time to ask what disposition should be made of the copies of 'A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers' still on hand, and at last suggesting that he had use for the room they occupied in his cellar. So I had them all sent to me here, and they have arrived to-day by express, filling the man's wagon,—706 copies out of an edition of 1000 which I bought of Munroe four years ago and have ever since been paying for, and have not quite paid for yet. The wares are sent to me at last, and I have an opportunity to examine my purchase. They are something more substantial than fame, as my back knows, which has borne them up two flights of stairs to a place similar to that to which they trace their origin. Of the remaining two hundred and ninety and odd, seventy-five were given away, the rest sold. I have now a library of nearly nine hundred volumes, over seven hundred of which I wrote myself. (*Journal* 459)

As Thoreau was reminded of his unpopularity as a writer, he reinscribes commercial failure as artistic and, indeed, personal liberation, declaring that it is precisely his lack of popularity that makes him a better writer, as he is now free from any intended or imagined audience in his writing process:

> Nevertheless, in spite of this result, sitting beside the inert mass of my works, I take up my pen to-night to record what thought or experience I may have had, with as much satisfaction as ever. Indeed, I believe that this result is more inspiring and better for me than if a thousand had bought my wares. It affects my privacy less and leaves me freer. (*Journal* 460)

Thoreau's example indicates that unpopular culture is always related to failure in one way or another—failure to sell, failure to please the critics, failure to meet one's own artistic standards, failure to save the world or at least change humanity, and so on—and therefore both exposes and challenges the very criteria that define success. As such, the queer art of unpopular culture can be considered part of Judith Halberstam's 'queer art of failure' that can show potential among an oppressive actuality:

> Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may […] offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world. […] The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being. (2–3)

The study of unpopular culture, then, is a critical inquiry into these 'certain circumstances' as well as these 'other goals', and Halberstam's work shows that it should not take itself too seriously if it wants to challenge what is all too serious, and that it must retain a questioning perspective on its own ideologies, as the case of Thoreau shows. After all, for him, as for the contemporary indie band, it is always easier to celebrate and romanticize one's own commercial failure as true artistic integrity if one simply cannot get the damn public to buy one's stuff. Many critics agree that it was this unpopularity that made Thoreau rewrite *Walden* so that it might be more popular and marketable: as Robert F. Sayre has it, the book 'was advertised in *A Week* as soon to be published. But the commercial failure of his first book discouraged the publisher from undertaking a second, and throughout the early 1850s Thoreau reworked *Walden* into the form in which we know it' (Thoreau, *Walden* 1052).

As a contemporary countermodel to the Thoreau that professed to embrace unpopularity while seeking popularity, Walt Whitman tried very hard to become popular and sell his self-published book *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, not only reviewing it himself—very favorably as well as anonymously—but also famously using a letter from Emerson as a blurb for the second edition without seeking permission. Furthermore, he also 'created a book that he hoped would "go into any reasonable pocket", something the first edition clearly would not do' (Folsom), so that it could truly be the people's poetry he envisioned as his '*Great Construction* of the *New Bible*' (Whitman, *Notebooks* 353, emphasis in original). Yet, Whitman was clearly never as popular as he wanted to be, and his declaration that ends the preface of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* that the 'proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it' (25) remained wishful thinking, at least while he was alive. The number of artists who suffered similar fates of unpopularity that were then transformed into popularity—as high culture and pop culture, respectively or simultaneously—is legion; just think of Melville[3] or Dickinson in the nineteenth century or David Markson, who ironically chronicled the unpopularity of artists in the vignettes of his later novels, in the twentieth. Some writers were too popular in their time to be considered high culture later on, with highbrow critics for a long time operating under the a priori assumption that popularity must equal aesthetic impoverishment. Edgar Allan Poe and William Shakespeare are probably the most striking examples of this high-cultural prejudice against popularity. Yet, their cases are obviously no warning to proponents of high culture that today's pop culture might be tomorrow's high culture (and vice versa), and that critics should not be deterred by the popularity of a work of art. Thus, Harold Bloom hoped in a *Wall Street Journal* article in 2000 that 'my discontent is not merely a highbrow snobbery' but nevertheless went on to answer his own rhetorical question in such a way as to indicate as much: 'Can more than 35 million book buyers, and their offspring, be wrong? Yes, they have been, and will continue to be for as long as they persevere with Potter.' And as if just to make sure that we make no mistake about his highbrow snobbery, he wrote in 2003 that the 'decision to give the National Book Foundation's annual award for "distinguished contribution" to Stephen King is extraordinary, another low in the shocking process of dumbing down our cultural life' ('Dumbing Down'). Bloom is not just an obvious straw man here, an old conservative critic who rants in a jeremiad against the youth of today and their ridiculous reading habits that will one day surely ruin us all (although he is, and he does), but he is a powerful figure in the discourse of literature and culture, and he is not in any way

exceptional when it comes to prejudice against the popular. (Just think of Adorno on jazz, a genre that probably has moved from pop to high culture like no other in music, but certainly not because of him.)

Instead, Bloom's example draws attention to the aspect of power that marks the discourse of unpopular culture as much as any other discourse. Popularity and unpopularity do not just occur, they are *produced*, not (or only rarely) by a single person, but rather by complex cultural mechanisms. For example, one might frame the canon wars that started as early as the 1960s and reached their culmination in the 80s and 90s in terms of unpopular culture, and as a consequence see that popularity and unpopularity are discursive tools and, indeed, weapons to construct and control meaning, significance, and ultimately ideology. For the canon, it is not important if a text is popular or unpopular; it has to be popular and unpopular *with the right people* to make it into 'literature'. The standards of unpopularity are closely connected to the standards of literature and of the bourgeois conception of art itself. At the same time, unpopularity can be precisely what subverts these standards. Unpopular culture is not a unified field; the answers to the question 'unpopular with *who*, and *why*?' will always indicate as much, and they are therefore central to the study of unpopular culture, and central to its political and aesthetic outlook.

There is a similar popular bias against so-called high culture, which is notoriously unpopular, and often simply because it is *framed* as unpopular (difficult, inaccessible, elitist, boring, intellectual, irrelevant, and so on). Unpopularity is thus connected to a certain set of expectations rather than aesthetic qualities. We are surprised when these expectations are not met and, for example, a text labeled as highbrow turns out to be entertaining and funny instead of boring and outdated, and it turns out to fulfill our criteria of popularity but remains within the unpopular sphere of high culture because of its designation as such. Every reader will have their own examples of such revelations, just like we might be unable to explain the popularity of a cultural artifact even if our lives depended on it, or why it has become popular or unpopular as its historical context changed. This applies to critical honors as much as to bestseller lists: why is *Peyton Place* no longer read by just about everyone, as it used to be in the 1950s; how did Philip K. Dick's stories move from pulp magazines to the Library of America; and why on earth did Rudyard Kipling ever get the Nobel Prize? And why has [insert name of your favorite author] not been given one?

Quite a few of the texts students of literature have thrust upon them in introductory classes are unpopular with them; perhaps they are unpopular with them precisely because they are thrust upon them. You might hate

having to read Franklin's *Autobiography* when you have to, but enjoy it when you do it because you want to; or you might hate reading *Pride and Prejudice* no matter how free you were in choosing to do so, as Mark Twain kept saying, for example, when insisting in *Following the Equator* that '[j]ust that one omission [of Jane Austen's books] alone would make a fairly good library out of a library that hadn't a book in it' (312). Unpopularity always has a context, and by definition there is no unpopularity *without* context; the concept itself presumes a certain audience (even if it does not contain a single member), and it does not describe a property intrinsic to the cultural artifact itself, but one that is always somehow inscribed upon it. Twain does such inscribing on Austen's texts in the quotation above, questioning her popularity by demanding her radical unpopularity; more often than not, however, such power lies not with individuals but with groups of people who exert sufficient influence over the discourse to attest or deny (un)popularity. The study of unpopular culture, then, is also the study of audiences, and it tends to be concerned more with the reception of cultural artifacts than with their production, since unpopularity presupposes an audience. At the same time, considerations and aspects of unpopularity are certainly part of production of the work as well as the work itself, and it would be reductive and misguided to consider the study of unpopular culture as a kind of reader-response criticism in which all popularity is produced solely in the recipient.

There are many different aesthetics of the unpopular, never fixed but ever-changing in different times and cultural contexts, but present nonetheless, and they can be described in relation to their historical moment of production and reception. Unpopularity can be sought, produced, and used for different purposes; it can be a source of aesthetic liberation from the constraints of popular taste or from those of critical esteem. Yet, at the same time, popularity and unpopularity are always somewhat beyond control, even though manufacturing consent has been part of the capitalist cultural industry for a long time. This may be one of the strongest subversive potentials of the unpopular in a society that defines popularity in terms of commerce, and this is where the aesthetics and the politics of unpopular culture become indistinguishable: its irreducible ability to surprise the cultural market, to deny popularity where it should be granted, to create something that cannot be used, to find the niches and loopholes and blind spots in a system of commerce that should not have any. At the same time, the unpopular is always in danger of being made popular, of being bought and sold, and any subversive potential can always be integrated within the very system it seeks to undermine. If 'any System which cannot tolerate

heresy [is] a system which, by its nature, must sooner or later fall' (Pynchon 747), then capitalism has avoided its downfall by being exceptionally good at tolerating (i.e. incorporating) heresy against it. You can always offer the underground anarchist punk band a million-dollar record contract and ask them to become Blink 182; in fact, the Sex Pistols have always been a product of the very industry they allegedly attacked. (Then again, we can only imagine what would have happened if someone had offered Anal Cunt a similar contract.)

Nevertheless, unpopular culture can potentially subvert the very foundation of the popular and offers ways of rethinking even the most dominant of ideologies. If popular culture—just as much as high culture—is being used to create the people in the first place, not as a culture for the people but a culture constructing the people as a people by giving them a history and an identity, then unpopular culture is the disruptive element in this construction, resisting its homogenizations and omissions, opposing the complete smoothing of a striated cultural space. In *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri first pose the crucial question 'what is a people and how is it made?' and then go on to argue that this construct is the result, and not the foundation, of the national and its Modern homogenizations: 'Although "the people" is posed as the originary basis of the nation, *the modern conception of the people is in fact a product of the nation-state*, and survives only within its specific ideological context" (102, emphasis in original). Both high culture and popular culture have participated in this homogenizing process of identity formation, and one will find sites of resistance to this power of the national with the global unpopular cultures that offer a multitudinous Other to the Empire of high and low, pop, or mass cultures, although they also pervade and partake of them, and they both support and resist their mechanisms. Within this national and global cultural industry, it may well be unpopular culture that is still able to tell the stories and histories nobody wants to hear, sing the songs nobody else wants to sing, show the world what it does not want to see, and ultimately give the people what they *don't* want because what they want was never what they really needed.

Notes

1.   For a solid overview and brief history of grindcore and its political outlooks, see Salmhofer.
2.   For an excellent study of Modernism and commercialism, see Catherine Turner's *Marketing Modernism between the Two World Wars*, in which she

argues that, 'without embracing consumer culture wholeheartedly, the modernists saw that they had much to gain by reaching a détente with commerce. Their art remained sacred products of their own inspiration, but they also saw that if they really wanted to 'make it new'—in the broad sense of changing human perception and experience in the world—they would have to reach an audience' (4), or in other words: become popular.

3. For an excellent discussion of Melville's (un)popularity and his relevance for popular culture, see Richard Hardack's essay '"Or, the Whale": Unpopular Melville in the Popular Imagination, or a Theory of Unusability', in which he answers his question of 'why most of Melville's works remain unknown or unpopular, not just resistant to interpretation, but almost invisible and 'unreadable' in popular media' (8) by usefully exploring the unpopular as the unutilizable.

Works Cited

'The 2013 Festival of Unpopular Culture.' Format Collective. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Beaty, Bart. *Unpopular Culture: Transforming the European Comic Book in the 1990s*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1997. Print.

Bloom, Harold. 'Can 35 Million Book Buyers Be Wrong? Yes.' *Wall Street Journal*. 11 July 2000. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

—. 'Dumbing Down American Readers.' *The Boston Globe*. 24 Sep. 2003. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Fiedler, Leslie. 'Cross the Border—Close the Gap.' *Playboy* (December 1969): 151, 230, 252, 254, 256, 258. Print.

Folsom, Ed. 'Whitman Making Books/Books Making Whitman: A Catalog and Commentary.' *The Walt Whitman Archive*. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Grossberg, Lawrence. 'History, Politics, and Postmodernism: Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies.' *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. Ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen. London: Routledge, 1996. 151–73. Print.

Halberstam, Judith. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke UP, 2011. Print.

Hardack, Richard. "Or, the Whale': Unpopular Melville in the Popular Imagination, or a Theory of Unusability.' *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies* 11.3 (2009): 7–26. Print.

Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000. Print.

Institute for Unpopular Culture (IFUC). Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. London: Routledge, 1981. Print.

Nash, John. *James Joyce and the Act of Reception: Reading, Ireland, Modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. Print.

Perry, Grayson. *Unpopular Culture: Grayson Perry Selects from the Arts Council Collection*. London: Hayward, 2008. Print.

Pynchon, Thomas. *Gravity's Rainbow*. 1973. London: Vintage, 1995. Print.

Redhead, Steve. *Unpopular Cultures: The Birth of Law and Popular Culture*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995. Print.

Ross, Andrew. *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1989. Print.

Salmhofer, Andreas. 'Grindcore—eine extreme Mutation des Metals? Zur Diskursivierung des Grindcore.' *Metal Matters: Heavy Metal als Kultur und Welt.* Ed. Rolf F. Nohr and Herbert Schwaab. Münster: LIT, 2011. 207–24. Print.

SCRAM Magazine: A Journal of Unpopular Culture. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Tangents: The Home of Unpopular Culture. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Thoreau, Henry David. The Journal of Henry David Thoreau. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906. 459–60. Print.

—. *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*: *A Week, Walden, The Maine Woods, Cape Cod*. New York: Library of America, 1985. Print.

Turner, Catherine. *Marketing Modernism between the Two World Wars.* Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2003. Print.

Twain, Mark (Samuel L. Clemens). *Following the Equator: A Journey around the World.* 1897. Vol. 2. New York: Harper, 1916. Print.

'Unpopular Culture: Grayson Perry Selects from the Arts Council Collection.' Southbank Centre. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass.* 1855. *Poetry and Prose.* Ed. Justin Kaplan. New York: Library of America, 1996. 5–145. Print.

—. *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts.* Ed. Edward F. Grier. 6 vols. New York: New York UP, 1984. Print.

Why We Talk the Talk We Talk

On the Emptiness of Terms, the Processual Un/Popular, and Benefits of Distinction—Some Auto-Ethnographical Remarks

Martin Butler

Granted, the term 'unpopular culture' adds some spice to the soup of terms we[1] usually stir when we talk the talk we are used to (supposed to?) talk in the study of popular culture. 'Unpopular culture', to be precise, sounds somewhat more 'exotic', even subversive, compared to the more established repertoire of concepts that usually come in dichotomies—'mass culture', 'low culture', 'the mainstream', as opposed to 'elite culture', 'high culture', 'avant-garde', to mention perhaps the most prominent examples. But what's in it, one might well ask, despite its challenging prefix 'un-', which, indeed, somewhat surprisingly, irritates our set of taken-for-granted terms and concepts? My contribution takes this question as a starting point to explore if, and, if yes, in how far thinking and talking about 'unpopular' culture might be a fruitful exercise, not so much with regard to the examination of specific popular cultural practices and forms of expression, but rather with an eye on the ways we talk a talk in which the above-mentioned terms, including the 'unpopular', are used as categories of self-positioning, rather than as analytical categories.

The inspiration for this essay sprang from the long-winded discussions with my 18-year-old daughter on what is popular and what is not—discussions that I get involved in quite regularly to learn why it is that I (and the things I am doing) are *particularly unpopular.* This is perhaps no coincidence, as it is exactly these discussions that made me sensitive toward the contingency of the terms and concepts I regularly employ in scholarly discourse. To be more precise, the very fact that the conversations with my daughter happen in a non-academic context made me realize that the dynamics of the debate about what is popular and what is unpopular are highly dependent on the social environment in which the debate takes place. In other words: the debate as well as the actors' positioning within that debate are processes that are distinctly context-specific. Consequently, claims of what is popular and what is not are, first, relational acts of creating difference, and second, charged with normative implications *both* in everyday and in scholarly discourse.

Moreover, after some closer inspection of the situations I had in mind, I also came to the conclusion that in the conversations I have with my daughter we rarely use the term 'popular', and I think we hardly, if ever, use the term 'unpopular'. Instead, we refer to a range of synonyms and alternatives, using a more nuanced vocabulary to navigate within this process of positioning ourselves, which, in fact, added to my curiosity about these situations. To be precise, when my daughter says 'uncool', she probably means 'unpopular', at least this is what I assume. Based on this assumption, then, I observe myself deliberately contradicting her, using 'uncool' as a synonym for what I think she would consider 'popular' in the first place, i.e. everything that is hit-listed, everything that is a must-have, everything that you have to acquire to be included and, at the same time, to be able to exclude those who cannot afford it. This is also everything I dislike—at least that's what I keep on proclaiming in these very conversations.

So—I have been asking myself again and again—am I lured into believing in the somewhat too orthodox voice of Adorno telling me, as a parent, to be skeptical of whatever is termed 'popular' by my daughter? Me, who considers himself quite familiar with the Birmingham narrative of subversive appropriation and the emancipatory potential of popular culture? Quite intuitively, and somewhat at odds with my academic socialization, it seems that I try to position myself in a debate that, though at least I should be aware that nobody will prevail, is still fought with passion and stamina. Perhaps this is what I do. And so does my daughter, and as the debate continues, I have the feeling that, somehow, both of us lose: my daughter, who is victimized by the culture industry (at least this is the position I observe myself taking), and me too, since I turn out to be worried after each and every conversation, exactly because I realize that I don't really think that there is something intrinsically bad in popular culture (yet I keep on arguing along these lines).

In the following, I would like to take these highly anecdotal, auto-ethnographic observations as a starting point for some reflections on what we do when we talk about popular culture, and what this talk does both to us and to popular culture. I would like to begin my exploration by questioning the benefits of the category of the 'unpopular' in the first place. In other words: what is gained once we add to the range of dichotomies that scholars in the field of popular cultural studies have been keen to deconstruct, another term that, once related to these dichotomies, might run the risk of perpetuating rather than questioning them? Sure, a term such as 'unpopular' might contribute to irritating established concepts and

might thus complicate matters in a productive way, if we ask, as Lüthe and Pöhlmann do in the introduction to this volume: 'How does unpopularity relate to popular and high culture? Can there even be such a thing as unpopular culture, or is the unpopular at odds with culture itself? [...] What particular fields of popular and high culture distance themselves from or embrace the unpopular?' (10) However, as irritating as these questions might be, one might as well argue that they indeed frame the unpopular by sketching (and thus perpetuating) a set of established notions and ideas, of popular culture, of high culture, and of certain 'fields' that are said to exist in each domain.

But then again, how else should we approach the unpopular, if not through the creation of difference, through the search and identification of the 'absent' other, as has been the case with the established definitions of popular culture that all work on the basis of a logic of distinction? Yet, once we accept that 'popular' is a relational category and arrive at John Storey's conclusion that 'popular culture is in effect an empty conceptual category, one which can be filled in a wide variety of often conflicting ways depending on the context of use' (1), I think we need to acknowledge that the 'unpopular' might be equally empty. If this is the case, then how do we determine the 'absent other' of a conceptual category that itself is but an 'empty category'?

What adds to this epistemological dilemma that results from the double contingency of two 'empty conceptual categor[ies]' is the highly normative history of the term 'popular', which comes with a lot of ideological underpinnings and is charged with a range of connotations, depending, of course, on the specific 'context of use', as Storey would argue. Consequently, a concept such as the 'unpopular', through its built-in reference to the 'popular' as its point of departure, is not only difficult to grasp, but also highly contaminated.

Where, then, do we go from here, if we do not want to abandon the term and still believe that—despite its inherent problems as an analytical category—it might be worth exploring? One way of turning its contingency and its normative dimension from a bug into a feature might be to conceive (in the sense of Storey) of the 'unpopular' (e.g. as in 'unpopular culture') not as an ontological category, but as a discursive ascription. That is, not as an 'organic' or essential characteristic of specific cultural practices or artifacts, but as a highly precarious, momentous, and discursively assigned quality, which is constituted (and vanishes?) within processes of reception, appropriation, and commodification, framed by specific discursive settings which, in turn, operate according to a set of context-dependent

rules and regulations. Acknowledging this processual quality (i.e. the discursive constitution and the 'situatedness' of both categories) may help conceive of 'popular' and 'unpopular' not as a terminological or conceptual dichotomy, but as different moments in the 'appropriation trajectories' of cultural practices and artifacts.

Such a notion of the processual un/popular, then, may indeed unfold analytical potential, as it allows us to describe and understand the politics of positioning in a debate I regularly have with my daughter—a debate that could thus be conceived of as a process of drafting specific subject positions for both of us, subject positions that we accept or not, that we may conform to, but also struggle with or work against. Against this backdrop, the discourse on the popular and the unpopular, in which both terms are continuously redefined, turns into a site for identity formation and transformation, in which different actors, non-academic as well as academic, continuously set out to situate and re-situate themselves, more or less successfully.

What might be helpful for a more precise conceptualization of what is at stake in these situational formations and arrangements is the notion of 'identitarian capital' introduced by Sebastian Thies and Olaf Kaltmeier. Though they specifically look at transcultural processes of identity formation in their theoretical outline of identitarian capital, the concept might serve well to add precision to the description of what is going in the discourse on the 'unpopular'. With reference to Bourdieu, Thies and Kaltmeier argue that identitarian capital is negotiated on what they call 'the field of identity politics' (25 et passim), in which 'all positions are informed by situational components and the interrelation with other actors in the field and can thus be seen as part of complex constellations' (37).

Their notion of identitarian capital, then, is based on the idea that one can 'use' his or her cultural identity as capital in processes of strategic positioning in that field, while these acts of positioning, in turn, may increase or diminish one's 'amount' of identitarian capital, so to speak. For instance, in academic contexts, the identitarian capital accumulated through talks, publications, acquired funding, etc., is a resource scholars may rely upon to strategically position themselves and to draw attention to what they write. The same capital would perhaps affect things negatively in a different context, for instance, in a family argument about what is popular and what is not, where the subject position 'scholar' would not be acknowledged in the same way (if at all). In more abstract terms, 'a person's individual constellation of subject positions may in certain constellations facilitate

intervention [...] or hinder it, while in other constellations the roles might be inversed' (Thies and Kaltmeier 30).[2]

Accordingly, Thies and Kaltmeier describe identitarian capital as

> a form of capital that merges together aspects of Bourdieu's concepts of cultural, social and symbolic capital. Cultural identities comprise habitualized manners, language, education, and emotional belonging, all related to cultural capital as an incorporated form of knowledge about social distinction. Social capital bears on social networks, institutional belonging and political organization. (29–30)

'Contrary to economic capital,' they eventually conclude, 'identitarian capital does not obey a *logic of scarcity*, but serves as a sort of credit by means of which a certain actor receives recognition and power from his social environment. In this way, it resembles the characteristics of symbolic capital' (30). As already hinted at above, this credit is, of course, not so easily transferable from one social or discursive environment to another, nor do social or discursive environments automatically acknowledge the capital I bring—to be sure, this is exactly where the trouble starts, as when we talk the talk we talk, the credits associated with this talk is highly dependent on the specific context in which we talk this talk (cf. also Maase).

What's in it, now, that would further our understanding of the tricky business of talking about the popular and the unpopular? I think the answer could be at least twofold: first, to label something or somebody as 'popular' or 'unpopular' becomes part of a 'narration of identitarian positionings and positions' (Thies and Kaltmeier 39), i.e. whenever I call something 'popular' or 'unpopular', it may actually tell you more about who I am than about what I have been trying to describe. Moreover, it definitely matters when and where I call something or somebody 'popular' or 'unpopular', as my authority to say so heavily depends on my identitarian capital, which, in turn, is determined and eventually affected—i.e. diminished, increased, transformed—by the very situational parameters that frame my discursive intervention.

And, to be sure, such narrations of identitarian positionings and positions that draw upon the 'popular' and the 'unpopular' are manifold and can be found in different contexts: there is, for instance, an Institute for Unpopular Culture, the IFUC, which is—and I quote from the website— 'a San Francisco-based organization that supports emerging artists and promotes artistic attempts to challenge the status quo. By sponsoring subversive or 'unpopular' artistic visions, IFUC helps to alleviate artists'

needs to cater to public taste and opinion in order to survive' (IFUC). Thus, clearly aligning the unpopular with the subversive, ascribing a distinctly political momentum to it, the Institute presents and positions itself as a supporter of cultural 'dissenters' and marginalized voices. And, as a more historical part of this narrative of positioning suggests, the Institute seems to have been quite successful in this regard:

> The founder of the IFUC, David Ferguson, produced, managed, and directed the careers of musicians like Johnny Rotten (Public Image, Ltd.), Billy Bragg, The Avengers, Lydia Lunch, and Henry Rollins. David also operated a lecture agency in the 1970s which represented the Black Panther Party, Paul Krassner (founder of the Yippie Party), Stewart Brand (founder of the Whole Earth catalogue), and poet Michael McClure. (IFUC)

The Festival of Unpopular Culture, which took place in October 2013, set out to 'blur the lines between high-art and pop culture,' thus implying quite a different notion of the 'unpopular' ('Festival'). SCRAM magazine, which calls itself 'a journal of unpopular cultures,' has been chronicling 'the neglected, the odd, the nifty and the nuts' (SCRAM), whereas a past exhibition at the Southbank Centre in London called 'Unpopular Culture' featured a selection from the Arts Council Collection consisting of 'modern British paintings, sculpture and photographs', thereby associating with the unpopular a notion of avant-garde, or vice versa ('Unpopular Culture: Grayson Perry').

In all of these examples, the 'unpopular' implies something slightly different. What these narratives have in common, though, is that all of them use the term 'unpopular' not only as a descriptive category, but also, and more significantly so, as a normative category that serves the purpose of symbolic distinction. The term and concept of the 'unpopular', then, indeed becomes a signifier that is used to draw lines of demarcation and to position oneself. The discourse that draws on these terms and concepts is therefore 'primarily a political discourse' (Tragaki 8). 'The politics of who says what is 'popular' [or 'unpopular', M.B.],' writes Dafni Tragaki, 'what it means, and against what it is defined, and of course, when, where, and for whom, reproduce 'the popular' [as well as the 'unpopular', M.B.] as an ideologically pregnant category' (8). And though we all know, we sometimes forget that this discourse not only 'happens' in the field of cultural production, but also among those who observe this very field, i.e. us.

In other words, 'observers are considered actors in the field which, just as all other actors, necessarily take the role of observers', employing a

'hermeneutics of the other' (high culture, popular culture) to continuously position and re-position themselves and, as Thies and Kaltmeier explain further, 'in relation to identity politics the field cannot be observed from a neutral perspective without the observer's transforming the field by his power of vision and division' (44). Starting from here, then, one may ask what or in how far this present volume contributes to the discourse on the popular and the unpopular respectively; or, to put it into a more Bourdieusian diction, to: 'transforming the field by [...] vision and division' (Thies and Kaltmeyer 44)? What narrations of identitarian positions and positionings does it foster, and who or what is positioned where through these very narrations?

Perhaps I am writing about processes that we are all aware of anyway. And perhaps this sounds all too didactic. Still, I consider these issues worth remembering, because, I must admit, I sometimes forget about them; for instance, when I'm arguing with my daughter, i.e. when I am subjected to another discourse in a familiar and at the same time unfamiliar environment, in which my capital as a scholar does not facilitate, but, somewhat paradoxically, hinders discursive intervention in a debate that I think I am familiar with.

So what I would like to emphasize is the necessity of acknowledging that the descriptive and normative dimensions (and usages) of the terms 'popular' and 'unpopular', as both categories of analytical differentiation and categories of social distinction are intertwined, at times even conflated, both in public and scholarly debates. In other words, the discussion on the difference between popular and unpopular is, more often than not, a discussion on the difference between you and me, or us and them, or X and Y, discussing the difference between popular and unpopular. And it is here, one might argue, where the double contingency mentioned above, i.e. the difficulties in defining the unpopular because of the difficulties in defining its other, turns out to be highly fruitful and productive, as it allows for a great diversity of narratives that serve the purpose of strategic positioning.

I believe that a critical awareness of both conflation and contingency is all the more important, as (most of the) scholars in the field of popular culture studies, I assume, take part in public and scholarly as well as private debates on the popular and the unpopular. At least I do. Consequently, the set of ideas and stories I produce about what is popular and what is not, in order to act according to the various subject positions ascribed to me—which, by the way, constitutes what Thies and Kaltmeier call the 'microphyics of identity politics' (31)—is always, and necessarily, framed by 'multi-sited contextuality' (38). This contextuality, then, should make us conceive of actors in the

field, such as me and my daughter, as 'networks of dispositions' rather than 'homogenous, coherent, and entirely self-determined subjects' (Thies and Kaltmeier 38). No wonder, then, that in our everyday life—negotiation of the identitarian capital we invest for strategic purposes—my daughter and I are not really talking to each other about what is unpopular and what is not. We are, in fact talking, *about* each other (and our relationship) without talking about each other (and our relationship) explicitly. If I told her that, she would not believe me. No way. Considering the aforesaid, however, this does not come as a surprise. It turns out to be part of the game.

Notes

1. Whenever I use 'we' in this essay, I refer to an implied readership that I assume works in the field of popular cultural studies and, thus, has become aware of the problems attached to the term 'popular'. The 'we' is not at all meant to suggest any generally agreed upon consensus on terms, concepts, or normative implications, but—in accordance with the auto-ethnographical approach that this essay pursues—is supposed to denote a particularly self-reflexive dimension of the practice of talking about un/popular culture, which is central to my argument. Of course, this is not to imply either that 'we' share the same or similar experiences with this practice and the ways of reflecting on it. In addition, the use of the first person pronoun both in the singular and plural form is also a deliberate attempt at self-positioning in a debate—why else should I write such a piece?

2. As already hinted at, Thies and Kaltmeier conceptualize identitarian capital in and for a different context, thus its applicability to what I describe here might be limited. Nevertheless, I allow myself to refer to their term and concept as it nicely captures the processes of negotiating and positioning that become visible in the debates on the 'un/popular'.

Works Cited

"Festival of Unpopular Culture." Institute for Unpopular Culture. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Institute for Unpopular Culture (IFUC). Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Lüthe, Martin, and Sascha Pöhlmann. 'Introduction: What is Unpopular Culture?' *Unpopular Culture*. Ed. Martin Lüthe and Sascha Pöhlmann. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2016. 7-29. Print.

Maase, Kaspar. 'Divergente Codierungen: Schwierigkeiten der Wissenstransfers zwischen Populärkultur, Wissenschaft und Gesellschaft.' *Pop / Wissen / Transfers: Zur Kommunikation und Explikation populärkulturellen Wissens*. Ed. Susanne Binas-Preisendörfer, Jochen Bonz, and Martin Butler. Münster: LIT Verlag, 2014. Print. 113–24.

SCRAM Magazine: A Journal of Unpopular Culture. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Storey, John. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction.* 4th ed. Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006. Print.

Thies, Sebastian, and Olaf Kaltmeier. 'From the Flap of a Butterfly's Wing in Brazil to a Tornado in Texas? Approaching the Field of Identity Politics and Its Fractal Topography.' *E Pluribus Unum? National and Transnational Identities in the Americas / Identidades Nacionales y Transnacionales en Las Americas.* Ed. Sebastian Thies and Josef Raab. Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009. Print. 25–46.

Tragaki, Dafni. 'Introduction.' *Empire of Song: Europe and Nation in the Eurovision Song Contest.* Ed. Dafni Tragaki. Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2013. Print. 1–34.

'Unpopular Culture: Grayson Perry Selects from the Arts Council Collection.' Southbank Centre. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Big Fish

On the Relative Popularity of Zane Grey and Ernest Hemingway[1]

Dominika Ferens

> Why does a man with such great talent continually deny his sensitivity and overprotest his masculinity? He is so virile and so vast—why does he waste his time roughhousing with playboys, trying to catch the biggest fish, to bring that fish in the fastest [...]?
> —Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings on Ernest Hemingway (qtd. in Eby 94)

> The rivalries between boatmen are keen and important, and they are fostered by unsportsman-like fishermen. And fishermen live among past associations; they grow to believe their performances unbeatable and they hate to see a new king crowned. This may be human, since we are creatures who want always to excel, but it is irritating to the young fishermen. As for myself, what did I care how much the swordfish weighed? He was huge, magnificent, and game to the end of that four-hour battle.
> —Zane Grey, *Tales of Fishes* (42)

This paper was born of a fascination with the overlapping lives of two American writers who made it their business to popularize the unpopular or the not-yet-popular. When they were not writing about not-yet-popular pursuits and places, they traveled, fished, and hunted compulsively, leaving behind them long trails of publicity photographs. With the rise of the internet, hundreds of photographs of Grey and Hemingway with their trophies—big fish, rhinos, lions, bulls, bullfighters, and natural wonders—were uploaded onto fanpages and archive websites.[2] Zane Grey (1872–1939) and Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) frequented some of the same fishing resorts, including Key West and Bimini, and while they never met, biographical sources on Gray make references to Hemingway, who is said to have so admired Grey's non-fiction book *Tales of Fishes* that he bought several copies to give to friends. On hearing this, Grey wrote to Hemingway, inviting him on a round-the-world fishing trip. Hemingway declined—perhaps fearing that prolonged association with the aging pulp fiction writer might damage his reputation (cf. May 149).

While Hemingway requires no biographical introductions, few contemporary readers of American literature know that Grey was once the most revered writer of late-Romantic Westerns.[3] At the height of his career, in the 1910s and '20s, he took millions of Americans on vicarious trips to the Southwest, and many of his novels are still in print. One might assume that his choice of the Western genre guaranteed popularity. Yet, there was nothing inevitable about Grey's rise to fame. Trained as a dentist, he should have spent his life filling teeth. To relieve the boredom of dentistry, he began writing fiction based on his family's pioneering days in eighteenth-century Ohio, and then moved on to stories of adventure set in the Southwest. But initially his choice of setting did not guarantee a wide audience. As cultural studies scholar Lee Clark Mitchell observes (and it is an electrifying observation), in the nineteenth century, when Grey was growing up, most Americans had little interest in what was going on in the West and no intention of ever going there (cf. 5). The cowboy was not yet a national icon. It was President Theodore Roosevelt and Owen Wister who valorized the West by writing about their ranching life for select audiences; it was Grey who fictionalized it for millions.[4]

Meanwhile, Ernest Hemingway, a Modernist who expressed deep contempt for popularity, gradually won both critical and popular acclaim, to eventually become a 'classic' in the American canon. On the surface, then, it would seem that Grey and Hemingway are a perfect illustration of the two-tier system described by Pierre Bourdieu: the literary field sustains two economic structures, one that produces 'bestsellers', the other 'classics'. Large publishing houses with a rapid turnover and large print runs tend to invest in 'bestsellers'; smaller houses use 'talent-spotters' who are able to 'sense the laws of a market yet to come'. In a cultural climate in which 'success is suspect', such small publishers invest in little-known authors and groom them, with the help of reviewers and literary critics, to become 'classics', thus earning a long-term profit on their (ostensibly) throwaway investment (cf. Bourdieu 101). Thus, the very features that potentially make a book popular in one period (such as the right proportion of the familiar to the unfamiliar in an easily recognizable genre) may make it unpopular in another, or else popular with a different group (for instance, novels originally written for adults sometimes slide into the category of juvenile fiction). Conversely, books that usher in new genres, elude generic categorization, or challenge the broad reading public's sense of decorum, sometimes manage to interpellate a new reading public, which builds its distinction around a preference for the unpopular. Eventually, with the right institutional backing, some originally unpopular books

enter national canons and are read by generations of high-school and university students.

But the case of Grey and Hemingway is not as clear-cut as Pierre Bourdieu's theory of 'bestsellers' and 'classics' would suggest.[5] It is worth discussing these two writers together because their works and careers raise questions about the criterion of 'popularity' used to sort writers into boxes, and about the cachet attached to 'unpopularity'. In addition to thinking about (un)popularity in terms of the book marketplace, this paper will explore the thematic continuities in the work of Grey and Hemingway to question some of the distinctions made between popular and highbrow subjects and forms. What I see is an economy of the popular/unpopular, a continuous flow between these elusive categories. It is not that I want to reclaim Grey as an unrecognized 'classic'; the formulaic character of most of his fiction does not permit such a repositioning. What I would like to show is that, writing in more or less the same period, Grey and Hemingway consistently traded in the not-yet-popular, which was often synonymous with the exotic; that they used similar strategies of controlling their public image to boost book sales; and that they were both read by millions, though perhaps not the same millions. These two Americans of respectable small-town middle-class background (Grey, the son of an Ohio dentist; Hemingway, the son of an Illinois doctor) both managed to write themselves out of the middle class by being popular with the middle class. Drawing on Robert W. Trogdon's 2007 study of Hemingway's lifelong relations with Scribners, I will try to show how Hemingway negotiated the problem of 'popularity', endlessly vacillating between desire and fear of popular recognition. As there is no comparable archival study of Zane Grey's relations with his publisher, Harper and Brothers, I will draw on biographical sources to show how he dealt with the waxing and waning of his own popularity.

The Book Marketplace and Changing Readerships

Stuart Hall and Elizabeth Traube single out the early decades of the twentieth century, when Grey and Hemingway made their careers, as a period of technological and social transformations that reorganized popular culture. 'Local entrepreneurs who catered to class-specific urban markets gave way to oligopolistic corporations producing for national markets' (Stansell and Peiss qtd. in Traube 140). In the nineteenth century, print runs had been relatively small in comparison with those in the 1910s and '20s. Grey's books

were among the first to sell in hundreds of thousands. Even Hemingway's avant-garde Modernist novels sold in tens of thousands.

Grey and Hemingway were both read by crossover audiences: Grey by middle- and low-brow audiences, Hemingway by middle- and high-brow audiences. Within their lifetime, a rift began to form within the middle-brow readership: some continued to embrace the traditional 'producer ethic based on work and self-denial', while others were attracted to the 'emergent ethic of consumption' and 'a new promise of sensory excitement, sexual expressiveness, and emotional release' (Traube 140–41). Grey and Hemingway clearly espoused the ethic of consumption. Posing for publicity photographs, they modeled a lifestyle for their fans,[6] as did their literary characters. If those characters chose to live modestly—even ascetically—they did so in exciting, faraway places. The large print runs made possible by the new publishing industry meant generous royalties that gave both men the freedom to travel and write about places inaccessible to most of their contemporaries. Grey was one of the earliest tourists in the American Southwest; by writing about this region, he was able to tap into urban Americans' longing for wide-open spaces. Rather than cash in on a pre-existing fad, he created the fad himself, and when masses of tourists following in his footsteps trampled his beloved natural wonders, he sought new pastures. Likewise, Hemingway drew his readers toward exotic places, from the Left Bank in Paris, through rural Spain and East Africa, to Cuba and the Florida Keys.

Both writers offered sensory excitement but learned to temper their imagination so as to maintain the middlebrow readership. For Grey this meant completely suppressing his interest in sex. As critic Jane Tompkins pointed out, Grey powerfully projected the erotic onto the Western landscapes—a skill that elevates him above the average pulp writer.[7] Writing in the more sexually liberated post-First World War times, Hemingway frequently explored heterosexual relations but had to avoid overt depictions of the erotic and to suppress his interest in the non-heterosexual.

Like cultural change anywhere, the developments in the US of the early twentieth-century meant that 'some cultural forms [were] driven out of the center of popular life [...] so that something else [could] take their place' (Hall 443). Grey's romances, styled on Nathaniel Hawthorne's and Robert Louis Stevenson's, were increasingly pushed out of the center to be read mainly by immigrants and young adults. Meanwhile, middle-brow readers acquired a taste for Hemingway's ascetic style and innuendos, embracing him as the voice of a generation. But this cultural process did not happen spontaneously. By examining Hemingway's writings we can observe how

Hemingway actively pushed older, less modern writers out of the center to make room for 'the new'.

The Western Legacy

Both Grey and Hemingway can be viewed as heirs to the rancher-turned-president, Theodore Roosevelt[8] and to Owen Wister[9] who elevated the Western from pulp to classic in *The Virginian*. Aligning themselves with Roosevelt and Wister, Grey and Hemingway built their careers on an ethos Jane Tompkins identified (with reference to Grey) as 'being, acting, and writing [which] formed a perfect continuum' (163). Grey met his frontier hero Charles Jesse 'Buffalo' Jones at a lecture in New York and followed him out to Arizona. It was to Jones and the Mormon rancher Jim Emmett that he owed his first heady experience of pioneering in the desert, fictionalized in *The Last of the Plainsmen* (cf. May 48-52). Henceforth, Grey would spend part of each year in the Southwest, hunting, trekking, and keeping notes that would later be transformed into fiction or articles for men's magazines.

Hemingway, in turn, was a belated cowboy who spent long periods on 'dude ranches' in Wyoming and Idaho. Few of his aficionados, however, are aware of these episodes because he wrote so little about them. Why he chose not to do so can be explained by the fact that by the 1930s pulp writers and Hollywood studios had thoroughly exploited the old frontier states. The logic of tourist and literary consumption drove Hemingway to seek other frontiers in Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean, even though he sometimes retreated to the West to write (for instance during the Great Depression).[10]

The Masculine Code

Arguably, one of the sources of Grey's and Hemingway's popularity, particularly with male readers, was the fact that they were heirs to the 'Code of the West' popularized by Wister's *The Virginian*. The eponymous narrator travels from the East Coast to a Wyoming Ranch, where he gradually learns the code by observing the modest, laconic, stoical Virginian. He sketches scenes that illustrate the Virginian's protective attitude toward women and all weaker beings (including the narrator and an eccentric old hen) and the Virginian's sense of responsibility for the local community. At times, being responsible means taking the law into his own hands. Like the Virginian, Wetzel in *Betty Zane,* Hare in *Heritage of the Desert*, and Lassiter in *Riders*

of the Purple Sage do not shirk from lynching cattle thieves, kidnappers, despots, and bad Indians. Grey took over the masculine code wholesale, creating a series of male characters who risk their lives to protect women's honor, expecting nothing in return, not even love.

In line with Roosevelt and Wister, Grey believed the Frontier to be crucial for hardening white men in body and spirit. According to eugenicists, as a result of 'overcivilization', the white race could lose its dominant position in the United States and in the world.[11] Whites were the only race capable of bringing progress and making full use of the continent's natural resources. As critics Richard Slotkin and Lee Clark Mitchell have argued, the wide-spread anxiety over the condition of white masculinity was associated with economic and cultural change. The industrial revolution had pressed the small farmers and entrepreneurs into factories and offices, where obedience and productivity was valued higher than individualism and resourcefulness. The Civil War and the First World War had stripped many men of the faith in righteous, heroic struggle. Rightly assuming that American male factory and office workers longed to identify with heroes who were their own antithesis, Grey created many hypermasculine protagonists who had the freedom to ride, track and shoot game, herd cattle across wide open spaces, and dispense justice. Yet, Grey was just as interested in disoriented, indecisive men weakened by illness. For instance, the Easterner Hare in *Heritage of the Desert* learns ranching and survival skills in the uplands of Utah, but he often hesitates to use arms, and spends days in hiding, outnumbered by thugs, and unable to make a heroic gesture. Critic Alf F. Wallee goes so far as to say that the gradual domination of society over the individualistic hero is what distinguishes Grey's heroes from Wister's Virginian.

Hemingway's indebtedness to nineteenth-century models of masculinity is less apparent,[12] but the fact that he jeered at heroic codes in his fiction should not blind us to the centrality of heroism in his fiction and to his insistence on developing codes of conduct better suited to life in the shadow of modern warfare. Equipped with a personal code of conduct, Hemingway's heroes maintain dignity in a world where all authorities, human and divine, have failed. In the face of chaos and suffering they adopt a stoical stance. While they have few opportunities to mete out justice, they care about it profoundly. To allow the reader to observe how the personal code works, Hemingway juxtaposes his heroes with antiheroes who lack the inner compass and rely on second-hand codes. As a self-conscious modernist, Hemingway rejected idealism, but he continued to valorize some of the key themes of Romantic literature, including masculinity, death, and nature. Like the frontier mythmakers, he insisted on nature's regenerative powers.[13]

It may well have been the presence of these themes that led Owen Wister to take an interest in Hemingway's career and to put in a good word for him at Scribners (cf. Trogdon 74–75).

The Trouble with Femininity

Inflating the value of masculinity inevitably leads to the devaluation of femininity. Grey and Hemingway were both traditionalists, in the sense that they assumed only men are bound by hero code. Female characters (for instance, Grey's Jane Withersteen or Hemingway's Brett Ashley) may develop a code of their own, but they are usually too weak and emotional to stick to its rules.

Within Grey's and Hemingway's lifetime, the social position of white American women changed drastically. Large numbers of women began earning a living, first as factory and office workers, then, with greater access to education, in the better-paid professions. They began to show their ankles, practice sports, sue for divorce and, after 1920, to vote. With the increased migrations of rural populations to cities at the end of the nineteenth century, and the rise of rooming-house districts where men and women lived in rented apartments, far from the inquisitive gaze of families and neighbors, sexual norms grew less restrictive (cf. Meyerowitz 92–115). The female characters in Grey's and Hemingway's fiction—fiancées, shepherdesses, ranchers, nurses, and guerilla fighters—shared many features with the New Woman who no longer needed to be the 'angel in the house' to be admired. Though Grey liked to dress his New Woman in period costumes, she was arguably far more liberated and powerful than Hemingway's New Woman who revealed her ankles, drank, and smoked. In fact, Grey devoted an entire novel, *The Light of the Western Stars* (1913), to a New Woman. Madeline Hammond, who comes to New Mexico from the East to recover and rebuild her life, becomes a successful businesswoman, and it is she who plays the role of rescuer in the novel: she crosses the Mexican border on horseback to save an American kidnapped by revolutionaries.

But healthy, active, and often financially independent though such fictional characters might be, most of them depend on male protection. Grey's androgynous Bess in *Riders of the Purple Sage* belongs to a band of horse rustlers and is known in town as the Masked Rider who can outride anyone. But when wounded in a scuffle, she becomes passive, completely dependent on the male protagonist, puts on weight, and starts looking like a woman. Hemingway's Brett Ashley undergoes a similar, though less

obvious, transformation. Whereas initially she goes wherever she wants and is sexually adventurous, at the end of *The Sun Also Rises* she calls on the narrator to come to her rescue, acting the part of the traditional damsel in distress. In this respect, Hemingway's paradigmatic Modernist novel is as traditional as most of Grey's romances—a fact that may have contributed to its readability.

Nature as Asylum

Yet another popular theme that runs through the work of Grey and Hemingway is the turn away from middle-class urban America toward the bosom of nature. Grey sought adventure in the Southwest, sublime landscapes, big game, and big fish. For Hemingway it was adventure at war, at Spanish village fiestas, in Kenyan savannahs, and on deep-sea fishing trips. In fact, he immersed himself in premodern worlds so obsessively that Saul Bellows made him the object of a burlesque, *Henderson the Rain King* (1959).

Since the turn of the nineteenth century, immersion in nature and the cultivation of primitive savagery in young boys had been advocated by American physicians as remedies for 'overcivilization', 'effeminacy', and 'neurasthenia' to which white middle-class men were supposedly succumbing (cf. Bederman 77–120). Such views gave rise to the scouting movement, of which Grey was a lifelong member and propagator. In his fiction, nature has regenerative power: it heals the sick and disheartened, gives shelter, disciplines the body, builds up the spirit, and, no less importantly, delights the eye. Grey's protagonists immerse themselves in nature time and again. Perhaps the most idyllic natural asylum in Grey's prose is Surprise Valley in *Riders of the Purple Sage*, which is only accessible through Deception Pass, overhung by the Balancing Rock. One of the protagonists comes across Surprise Valley by accident, and when he first takes a look around,

> Rabbits scampered before him, and the beautiful Valley quail, as purple in color as the sage on the uplands, ran fleetly along the ground into the forest. It was pleasant under the trees, in the gold-flecked shade, with the whistle of quail and twittering of birds everywhere. (89)

There is a rambling brook, a spacious cave, and plenty of food. The cave is conveniently equipped with clay utensils—relics of an extinct Indian tribe. Surprise Valley gives shelter to two pairs of lovers in succession. It heals their wounds and erases painful memories. For the first couple it is a

temporary asylum, but for the second it is the final destination: Balancing Rock collapses and 'the outlet to Deception Pass closed forever' (238).[14]

Likewise, Hemingway as a boy was an amateur scout. He wrote memoirs of trips to the Illinois woods and Indian villages with his father, and in childhood photographs he is the splitting image of Huckleberry Finn, complete with dungarees, a straw hat, and a fish dangling from his hand. We know that his romantic view of nature was severely shaken by the Second World War experience as well as naturalist philosophy, for nature in his fiction is usually indifferent to human dramas. Yet, Hemingway continued to treasure rituals associated with nature, and the longing for its regenerative power kept surfacing in his work—perhaps most forcefully in *The Sun Also Rises.* There, two American men experience the soothing power of a Spanish forest and a stream teeming with fish. The shade of the trees protects the anglers from the midday sun; the stream cools their bodies and their wine bottles; overhanging the stream are ferns ideal for wrapping the fish they catch. 'We stayed five days at Burguete and had good fishing. The nights were cold and the days were hot, and there was always a breeze even in the heat of the day. It was hot enough so that it felt good to wade in a cold stream, and the sun dried you when you came out and sat on the bank' (125). The men cannot stay in this idyllic spot forever—they must return to their work and irresolvable conflicts—but they can always return to the stream in Burguete: the narrator has been there before, and no falling rock will bar access to it. Nature as asylum, nature as a regenerative force—such themes had been present in American literature since their introduction by the Transcendentalists. Tapping into these time-tried themes, both Grey and Hemingway appealed to a broad American readership.

Books as Commodities

Nothing could be further from the marketplace and base financial concerns than the ideal of living the 'strenuous' rather than the 'good life'[15] and retreating from time to time into premodern worlds. Yet, the books that convey these themes are commodities which transform aesthetic pleasure into capital. Hemingway's posthumously published novel *Islands in the Stream* (1970) includes a humorous conversation about art that takes place in the Bahamas between a white painter and a black barman. What the black man has trouble understanding is how the white man manages to make a comfortable living by painting scenes from the everyday life of poor people like himself.

> 'You sell those pictures you paint all the time?' [asks the barman]
> 'They sell pretty good now'. [the painter replies]
> 'People paying money for pictures of Uncle Edward. Pictures of Negroes
> in the water. Negroes on land. Negroes in boats. Sponge boats. Squalls
> making up. Water spouts. Schooners that got wrecked. Schooners build-
> ing. Everything they could see for free. They really buy them?'
> 'Sure they buy them. Once a year you have a show in New York and they
> sell them'. (16–17)

Note that the painter in this passage feigns lack of agency in the process of
marketing his own work. He suggests that it becomes popular spontane-
ously. The barman asks, '*You* sell those pictures you paint all the time? […]
They really buy them?' obviously suggesting that such paintings would
not sell in the Bahamas. To this the painter responds: '*you* have a show'
(instead of I have a show) and '*they* sell them' instead of '*I* sell them'. I find
this pronoun substitution telling, because it divorces art from the business
of selling art. It also absolves the artist of any suspicion that he might be
knowingly exploiting the exotic potential of the Bahamas. Yet, the fictional
artist's choice of subjects *is* guided by the awareness of what is popular
among some segments of New York society, as were Hemingway's choices.

Hemingway's literary settings are clearly the result of his search for not-
yet-popular literary terrains whose symbolic value was as yet undetermined.
Spain was one such terrain. Encouraged by Gertrude Stein and Alice B.
Toklas to attend a bullfight, Hemingway traveled there. He subsequently
spent years collecting insider knowledge about this spectator sport and
writing a non-fiction book expressly designed to popularize something that
for most Americans was an unfamiliar (and repulsive) subject.

To say that books about bullfighting in Spain or deep-sea fishing in the
Caribbean were popular during Hemingway's lifetime is, of, course, an over-
statement, since Scribner's sold a total of just 20,780 copies of Hemingway's
non-fiction book about bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon*, and 133,650
copies of *The Old Man and the Sea*. Nonetheless people in the United States
did pay a great deal of money for 'pictures of Uncle Edward' (or someone
very much like him—old Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea*).

Unlike the artist in *Islands in the Stream*, though, Hemingway took an
active interest in the marketing of all his work, badgering his publisher to
spend more money on advertising, making sure his novels were serialized
in prestigious magazines, and collecting far more review clippings from
the syndicated press than Scribners did in their archive. For instance, in a
letter to his editor, Hemingway wrote: 'What about running a few chapters

from Death in the Afternoon [in *Scribner's Magazine*] just before it comes out—Do you think that would be good for it. The book I mean?' (qtd. in Trogdon 106). Such requests pepper his correspondence with Scribners, as do complaints that not enough money was being spent on publicity,[16] even though the publisher's advertising budget for some novels approximated his earnings (and, in the case of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, exceeded $40,000 [cf. Trogdon 260]).

The Unbearable Lightness of Popularity

Grey's attitude to popularity can be described as ambivalent. There is no question that he sought it, writing the kinds of books that would appeal to the broadest possible readership. The following figures reported by biographer Stephen J. May reflect the measure of Grey's popular success: 27 million copies of his books were sold in his lifetime; after his death, as late as 1991, his novels were still selling at the rate of 500,000 per year; at the height of his career Grey earned between $50,000 and $80,000 per serialized novel (in times when the dollar was worth more than ten times what it is today); nine of his novels made the bestseller list—the highest score of any writer before 1950 (May 149–51). Yet, his *un*popularity with reviewers and critics caused him anguish, for he never abandoned the hope of becoming a great American author, remaining oblivious to the shifting distinction between middlebrow and highbrow literature, which followed aesthetic and philosophical rifts. Book reviews—which became increasingly disparaging as Grey's fiction grew more formulaic—plunged him into depressions. But his career was brilliantly managed by his wife Lina Grey, who financed the publication of his first novels and, after 1910, negotiated lucrative contracts with book and magazine publishers. This left Grey free to do what he enjoyed most: traveling, hunting, fishing, and writing.

    Hemingway had to work much longer to become a household name in the United States, and while he scoffed at those more popular than himself, there is ample evidence that he longed for recognition. Early on, Hemingway's talent was acknowledged and fostered by fellow writers such as Sherwood Anderson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Owen Wister, and Harold Loeb. It was Fitzgerald who helped Hemingway secure his first contract with Scribners. For over two decades, Hemingway had his personal liaison and editor at Scribners, Maxwell Perkins, who cosseted and cajoled him into producing work that broke novelistic conventions yet was accessible to a

broad readership. But until the public got used to Hemingway's style, he remained a promising minor author.

The fact that he came to be known as a novelist rather than a short-story or non-fiction writer can be seen as a by-product of trying to secure popularity. Short fiction was his forte, but his first publisher, Liveright, and then Scribners pressured him to write novels in order to make his name, and then to remain popular (cf. Trogdon 19, 157). Scribners used his short stories strategically, placing them in *Scribner's Magazine* and elsewhere, as a way to keep his name in the reading public's mind during the long periods when he was unable to produce a novel. He found writing long fiction grueling and often asked for extended deadlines. When writing long fiction, his aesthetic judgment—unerring in the case of short stories—often failed him.

In correspondence with Perkins, Hemingway explained his understanding of popularity: 'you can't be popular all the time unless you make a career of it like Mr. Galsworthy, etc. I will survive this unpopularity and with one more good book of stories (only these are going to be with plenty of action so they can understand them) and one good novel you are in a place where they will have to come around and eat shit again' (qtd. in Trogdon 160). This passage suggests Hemingway was aware that some readers were baffled by his more experimental stories, so when sequencing short stories he alternated the more straightforward writing with the more opaque stories in which meaning is compressed between the lines. In correspondence with Perkins he explained: 'If you want to make a living out of it, in addition every so often, without faking, cheating […] you have to give them something they understand and that has a story—not a plot—just a story they can follow instead of simply feel, the way most of the stories are'; 'I know the book needs one more simple story of action to balance some of the difficult stories it contains' (qtd. in Trogdon 6). What we see here is Hemingway knowingly balancing popular and unpopular.

More ideas about popularity were occasioned by the planned release of *The Green Hills of Africa*. About this novel Hemingway write to Perkins:

> It may be what people want to read. […] I believe it should sell better than 20,000 [it actually sold 12,532]—Winner Take Nothing had not one element of popularity and everything to make it unpopular. This book has so many elements that should make people like it—it has a long and good story […] plenty of story interest, suspense, and conversation, and it takes people bodily into a place where they have never been and most of them can never go. (qtd. in Trogdon 155)

Courting popularity, Hemingway nonetheless professed contempt for the market reader, whom he sometimes imagined as a female member of the Book-of-the-Month Club. To please such clubwomen, he argued, publishers try to censor his prose: '[I] will not have any pressure brought to bear to make me emasculate a book to make anyone seven thousand dollars' (qtd. in Trogdon 109). Elsewhere he wrote: 'I'm the guy who's been the worse emasculated of any in publishing' (qtd. in Trogdon 116). As evidence, he collected cases when his competitors got away with the use of swearwords.[17] But he also made part-conciliatory part-provocative gestures toward the obnoxious clubwoman, even putting her into one of his books. *Death in the Afternoon*, a whimsical guidebook to bullfighting in Spain, is repeatedly interrupted by the author's dialogues with an imaginary lady-reader who is curious about bullfighting but somewhat resistant to its appeal, easily bored, and inclined to stereotypes. For instance, during her third appearance in the book they have the following exchange:

> Now, what puzzles you, madame? What would you like explained?
> *Old lady*: I noticed that when one of the horses was hit by the bull, sawdust came out. What explanation do you have for that, young man?
> Madame, that sawdust was placed in the horse by a kindly veterinarian to fill a void created by the loss of other organs.
> *Old lady:* Thank you, sir. You made me understand it all. But surely the horse could not permanently replace those organs with sawdust?
> Madame, it is only a temporary measure, and one that no-one can approve of. (79)

Although the most obvious function of these dialogues is to distinguish this book from standard guidebooks and provide comic relief, they are a poignant record of his anxiety about his work's reception.

Even more obsessive than his imaginary bouts with the market reader are Hemingway's efforts to avoid the aura of popularity. For instance, to control the cultural meaning of *Death in the Afternoon*, he refused *Cosmopolitan*'s offer to serialize several chapters (cf. Trogdon 107). He also balked at the proposition that it be offered to the Book-of-the-Month club to boost sales in a stagnating Depression Era market. 'If anyone so acts as to put themselves out as a book of the month they cannot insist in ramming the good word shit or the sound old word xxxx down the throats of a lot of clubwomen' (qtd. in Trogdon 109). (Significantly, in 1940 Hemingway did sign a contract with the Book-of-the-Month Club to publish *For Whom the Bell Tolls* [cf. Trogdon 208–11]). Much of his correspondence with Perkins concerned the need to

eliminate/retain obscene language, particularly the words 'fuck' and 'shit'. Perkins repeatedly warned that the inclusion of such words would lead to courts banning the books; Hemingway fought valiantly for each 'fuck' claiming that this word made his dialogues truly masculine and authentic.

Exposing himself to potential libel suits was yet another strategy for making himself unpopular. His first long piece of prose, *Torrents of Spring*, was an extended parody of Sherwood Anderson's style. Such an exercise in self-positioning against a highly respected American author was bound to offend many. Throughout his career, Hemingway continued to shoot poisoned arrows (overtly and covertly) at his competitors. For instance, Scribners fought a veritable battle to prevent him from calling Gertrude Stein a 'bitch' in *The Green Hills of Africa* (cf. Trogdon 159–61). (Arguably, though, the very strategy which made Hemingway unpopular with some endeared him to others who enjoyed such irreverence.)

One of the most interesting attempts to position his art against popular literature is in the two opening chapters of *The Sun Also Rises*. Why the narrator Jake Barnes would spend two chapters gossiping about Robert Cohn, the most pathetic expatriate in Paris, only becomes clear when we interpret the novel's opening as an exercise in self-positioning in the field of American literature and, simultaneously, in the field of morality. By devaluing Robert Cohn as a writer and a man, Jake introduces us to his own standards. He sniggers:

> That winter Robert Cohn went to America with his novel and it was accepted by a fairly good publisher. [...] The publishers praised his novel pretty highly and it rather went to his head. [...] He had been reading W.H. Hudson. That sounds like an innocent occupation, but Cohn had read and reread The Purple Land. The Purple Land is a very sinister book if read too late in life. It recounts splendid imaginary amorous adventures of a perfect English gentleman in an intensely romantic land, the scenery of which is very well described. (8–9)

Hemingway could have easily substituted the late-Romantic novel *The Purple Land* with Zane Grey's *The Riders of the Purple Sage*, which also abounds in 'splendid amorous adventures' and purple prose about 'scenery'. Purple or popular prose serves Hemingway as the antithesis of the laconic fact-filled cables Jake sends to an American newspaper. Since Hemingway tended to link literary style with moral conduct (calling his own 'straight' and 'true'),[18] he made the fictional hack writer Robert Cohn a henpecked bore with dated chivalric notions. Thus, from the beginning of the novel

the reader is expected to trust Jake, a hard-boiled reporter with no romantic illusions.

Most people familiar with the Paris expatriate community instantly recognized in Robert Cohn a caricature of Harold Loeb, an American writer who had been supportive of Hemingway. Several years later, in *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway attacked another writer with romantic notions, Waldo Frank, whose travel narrative *Virgin Spain* had allegedly become popular through fakery and 'bedside mysticism' (46–47). But this was a head-on attack, unmitigated by a fictional name. It is important to understand that Hemingway was not merely being petty when he maligned fellow-writers Harold Loeb and Waldo Frank; he refused to cut the potentially libelous material because he clearly had a stake in driving out an old literary practice from 'the center of popular life [...] so that something else [could] take [its] place' (Hall 443). That 'something else' was a literature distinguished by formal innovation and a quality that would come to be known as the hipster ethos.[19]

Conclusions

The literature Hemingway attempted to drive out on his way to popular success had not always been popular. It was Zane Grey, among others, who had made it popular. Hard as is it is to imagine, Harper and Brothers rejected Grey's first three novels before he convinced them to publish his fourth, set in Utah, *Heritage of the Desert* (1910). It was billed as 'a rushing story [...] full of action, in which men are swayed by primitive motives, facing death carelessly' (May 64). Having made a profit once, Harper and Brothers never let Grey go. Though the sales of his books eventually dropped off, some remain in print in Dover Thrift Editions. As the audience for the romance genre shifted from the middlebrow to the lowbrow, Grey's chances of becoming a 'classic' dwindled while Hemingway's increased. Unable to reconcile his aspirations with his actual status of a popular genre writer, ridiculed by reviewers for his 'purple prose', the 51-year-old Grey wrote but never published 'My Answer to the Critics'. In it, he restates his creed that a writer should 'use his gifts toward the betterment of the world' and 'write of the struggle of men and women toward the light'. Rejecting the critics' assessment of his prose he asked them to refer to the real authorities—'your janitor, your plumber, the fireman and engineer' (qtd. in May 134). The audience for some of Hemingway's fiction also grew younger and less aesthetically sophisticated. A headline in the *New York Times* on 8 December 1968

read: 'Ernest Hemingway and the pursuit of heroism: Hemingway makes an ideal hero for youth'. This headline also draws attention to the thematic continuity between Grey's and Hemingway's fiction; masculinity, courage, honor, and genuine risk-taking are central to both, even if Hemingway's prose tends to emphasize 'struggle' over 'light'. Thus, the overlapping careers of Grey and Hemingway show us the workings of 'the cultural escalator' imagined by Stuart Hall to explain how certain popular forms gradually appreciate in cultural value while others 'cease to have cultural value and are appropriated into the popular' (448).

Notes

1. Short fragments of this paper were previously published in an article introducing Zane Grey to Polish audiences, 'Zane Grey', *Amerykański western literacki w XX wieku. Między historią, fantazją a ideologią,* eds. Agata Preis-Smith and Marek Paryż (Warszawa: Czuły Barbarzyńca, 2013), 36–57.
2. There are 10,000 photos of Hemingway at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston and 2,000 more in Havana, Cuba.
3. Together with Grey's record book sales, his world fishing records have fallen into oblivion. 'The work of pioneers was jettisoned', wrote a belated fan in 1992. 'There is no recollection of Zane Grey's 582-pound broadbill swordfish, his 63-pound dolphin, his 758-pound tuna, or his 1,036-pound tiger shark. But the cruelest blow of all came when the larger Pacific sailfish, whose scientific name honored Zane Grey, was lumped with the smaller Atlantic subspecies' (Reiger 236).
4. Eventually the millions turned to Western movies which Grey was, in fact, instrumental in popularizing. He sold movie rights to Hollywood studios, and when they insisted on shooting papier-mâché landscapes, Grey moved his family to Los Angeles and set up his own film company which shot on location (May 104–10).
5. Another author who has slipped in and out of the categories of the 'popular' and the 'unpopular' is Owen Wister, whose *The Virginian* (1903) started out as a 'highbrow' version of the 'lowbrow' Western. Highly praised by Henry James, it gradually entered the American literary canon. As the general public grew more sophisticated, *The Virginian* lost its cachet. The 1987 Polish translation is stacked in the children's section of public libraries.
6. Grey's lifestyle often made national news, as evidenced by the following *New York Times* headlines: 'Zane Grey Buys Schooner' (21 August 1924), 'Zane Grey Goes Fishing in Faraway Seas: Tells of Battles with Gigantic Swordfish, Tuna, and Sharks in the Blue Waters of the Pacific' (12 July 1925); 'Zane Grey Gets Big Fish: Lands 582-Pound Swordfish after Five-Hour Fight off California' (1 July 1926). The press also lionized Hemingway—so much

so that Gabriel Garcia Lorca, who had never met Hemingway but caught a glimpse of him once, recalled: 'I recognized him immediately, passing with his wife Mary Welsh on the Boulevard St. Michel in Paris on a rainy spring day in 1957' (*New York Times* 26 July 1981).

7.   What Jane Tompkins intuited but did not know was that Grey had been immensely interested in sex and that he did, in fact, write about his sexual exploits, though not in print. As a public figure, Grey strictly adhered to the Victorian moral code. That he had led a sexually liberated life only became apparent in 2005, when his encrypted sex diaries came to light. See Thomas H. Pauly, *Zane Grey: His Adventures, His Women* (2005).

8.   Hemingway once disparagingly wrote to his editor, 'I am working on a long plan instead of trying to be popular every day like Mr. Roosevelt' (qtd. in Trogdon 160). Yet, we know from biographers that Hemingway lionized Roosevelt as a huntsman and national hero. For an account of Hemingway's safari in Kenya, where he hired the very same guide who had worked for Roosevelt 20 years earlier, see Reynolds (155-67). Hemingway's grandson corroborates this story, giving the guide's name, Philip Percival. He also explains that in the 1930s Hemingway ordered a 'military version of the .30-06 bolton-action rifle […] essentially the weapon that Teddy Roosevelt took with him to hunt in Africa' (Patrick Hemingway xvi–xvii).

9.   Owen Wister actually supported Hemingway in the publishing business, advising Scribner's to serialize *A Farewell to Arms* (cf. Trogdon 74).

10.   Hemingway's annual retreats to the L-T ranch in Wyoming are discussed, among others, by Vaill (62–65) and Hawkins (141–42).

11.   Gail Bederman in *Manliness and Civilization* (1995) and Richard Slotkin in *Gunfighter Nation* (1992) examine white masculinity at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century.

12.   Masculinity in Hemingway's prose is discussed in depth by Thomas Strychacz in *Hemigway's Theatres of Masculinity* (2003) In *Ernest Hemingway: Machismo and Masochism* (2005), Richard Fantina confronted the feminist accusations that Hemingway enacted the worst kind of masculinism. Most biographers and literary scholars who have written on Hemingway since the rise of gender studies make some reference to his fraught relation with masculinity.

13.   Hemingway's belief in the regenerative power of nature is less apparent than Grey's because it is tempered by his fatalism. Yet, as Susan B. Fegel points out, Hemingway 'grew up in the midst of an environmentalist awakening […]—the so-called back to nature movement'—a response to rapid industrialization and the hunting frenzy that eliminated countless animal species (239). Taught to appreciate the wilderness by his father, he sought contact with unspoiled nature in the Spanish highlands around Burguete (depicted in *The Sun Also Rises*), on the plains of the Serengeti (depicted in *The Green Hills of Africa*), and, throughout his life, out at sea which 'once you are out of sight of land, […] is the same as it has ever been since before

men ever went out on it in boats' (Hemingway qtd. in Fegel 241). Even if one can only enjoy brief moments of respite from modernity in natural retreats, the compulsion to do so is evident in Hemingway's fiction and in his life.

14.   Attesting to the lasting inspiration of Grey's romantic vision of nature is the following blog http://desertspiritpress.net/2013/06/05/zane-grey-solitude-and-the-western-hero/ posted by Brad Karelius on 5 June 2013. Karelius is the pen name of an academic and Episcopalian pastor, author of *The Spirit in the Desert: Pilgrimages to Sacred Sites in the Owens Valley* (2009).

15.   'The Strenuous Life' is the title of an influential 1899 speech by Theodore Roosevelt about ideal American manhood. It was subsequently expanded into *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (1900).

16.   Trogdon gives the figures for Scribner's advertising expenditures in Appendix 2 (260). They range from in 1926–27 $6,557.93 for *The Sun Also Rises* to $43,567.09 in 1940–41 for *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

17.   Accusations of nihilism, the use of obscene words, as well as representations of sex, debauchery, and senseless death resulted in many of Hemingway's books being banned in Europe and the United States.

18.   For example, Hemingway wrote to his editor about *The Green Hills of Africa* that 'it is straight and absolutely true autobiography with no pulling of punches or lack of frankness' (qtd. in Trogdon 155). He defended *Death in the Afternoon* as 'a straight book on bullfighting' (qtd. in Trogdon 120). More interestingly, he used similar adjectives in a description of Pedro Romero's style of bullfighting, which can be read as an exposition on Hemingway's aesthetic values. Romero's style 'was straight and pure and natural in line' and 'gave real emotion, because he kept the absolute purity of line in his movements', while his competitors 'twisted themselves like corkscrews' and elicited 'fake' emotions (*The Sun Also Rises* 167–68).

19.   According to Aleksandra Litorowicz, writers such as Ernest Hemingway, D.H. Lawrence, and Henry Miller were the direct intellectual forerunners of such hipsters as Norman Mailer (28).

Works Cited

Bederman, Gail. *Manliness and Civilization.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995. Print.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature.* Ed. Randal Johnson. New York: Columbia UP, 1993. Print.

Eby, Carl P. *Hemingway's Fetishism: Psychoanalysis and the Mirror of Manhood.* Albany: State University of New York, 1999. Print.

Fantina, Richard. *Ernest Hemingway: Machismo and Masochism.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.

Fegel, Susan B. 'The Environment.' *Ernest Hemingway in Context.* Ed. Debra A. Moddelmog and Suzanne del Gizzo. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013. Print.

Grey, Zane. *Heritage of the Desert.* 1909. New York: TOR, 2009. Print.

—. *The Light of the Western Stars.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1914. Print.

—. *Riders of the Purple Sage.* 1912. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002. Print.

—. *Tales of Fishes.* 1919. Lanham, MD: Derrydale Press, 2001. Print.

Hall, Stuart. 'Notes on Deconstructing the Popular.' *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture.* Ed. John Storey. New York: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 1998. 442–453. Print.

Hawkins, Ruth A. *Unbelievable Happiness and Final Sorrow: The Hemingway-Pfeiffer Marriage.* Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 2012. Print.

Hemingway, Ernest. *Death in the Afternoon.* 1939. New York: Arrow Books, 2004. Print.

—. *Islands in the Stream.* New York: Scribner's, 1970. Print.

—. *The Sun Also Rises.* 1926. New York: Scribner's, 1954. Print.

Hemingway, Patrick. Preface. *Hemingway on Hunting.* Ed. Seán Hemingway. New York: Scribners. xiii–xviii. Print.

Litrowicz, Aleksandra. *Subkultura hipsterów. Od nowoczesnej etyki do ponowoczesnej estetyki.* Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Katedra, 2012. Print.

May, Stephen J. *Zane Grey: Romancing the West.* Ohio UP, 1997. Print.

Meyerowitz, Joanne. *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880–1930.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988. Print.

Miles, Jonathan. 'Rider of the Purple Prose: Review of "Zane Grey: His Life, His Adventures, His Women", by Thomas H. Pauly.' *New York Times* (1/I/ 2006): n.pag. Print.

Mitchell, Lee Clark. *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996. Print.

Pauly, Thomas H. *Zane Grey: His Adventures, His Women*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2005. Print.

Reiger, George. Introduction to 'The First Thousand-Pounder.' *The Best of Zane Grey, Outdoorsman: Hunting and Fishing Tales.* Zane Grey. Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1992. Print.

Reynolds, Michael. *Hemingway: The 1930s.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998. Print.

Slotkin, Richard. *Gunfighter Nation*: The *Myth* of the *Frontier* in *Twentieth-Century America*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1992. Print.

Strychacz, Thomas. *Hemingway's Theatres of Masculinity*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2003. Print.

Tompkins, Jane. *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992. Print.

Traube, Elizabeth G. '"The Popular" in American Culture'. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25 (1996): 127–51. Print.

Trogdon, Robert W. *The Lousy Racket: Hemingway, Scribner's and the Business of Literature.* Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 2007. Print.

Vaill, Amanda. *Hotel Florida: Truth, Love, and Death in the Spanish Civil War.* New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2014. Print.

Wister, Owen. *The Virginian.* 1902. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. Print.

How (Not) to Make People Like You

The Anti-Popular Art of David Foster Wallace

James Dorson

> 'Forget so-called peer-pressure. It's more like peer-*hunger*.'
> — *Infinite Jest* 694

Few writers have catered to unpopular tastes with such great success as David Foster Wallace. Not only has his work consistently resisted easy consumption through its experimental style or sheer volume—as in the 1079 densely annotated pages of *Infinite Jest* (1996)—it has often sought out the most unappealing topics, from the arcane, the cruel, the geeky, the awkward, and the repulsive to the infuriatingly complex and the insanely boring. He frequently imitates other styles, not just literary ones, but such trying forms as academic prose, statistical representation, dictionary entries, legal jargon, and bureaucratese. His novels and stories are not only difficult to read, but often unpleasant as well, in their detailed accounts of bodily excretions and psychological neediness. Zadie Smith, in an essay on Wallace's 1999 short story collection *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*, sums it up well when she writes: 'There are times when reading Wallace feels unbearable, and the weight of things stacked against the reader insurmountable: missing context, rhetorical complication, awful people, grotesque or absurd subject matter, language that is—at the same time!—childishly scatological and annoyingly obscure' (275–76). This is from someone who has called Wallace her 'favorite living writer' (261), and whose laudatory blurbs appear on the front cover of several of his books.

But trying the patience of readers in this way serves an explicit purpose in Wallace's work. It is not obstructionist but programmatic, not meant to provoke outrage but to shake up the institutions of writing and reading. While Smith reads his challenge to readers in the grain of high culture that makes them work hard for their aesthetic reward, the notorious difficulty of his work is not only motivated by a resistance to popular culture, but even more fundamentally by a deep skepticism toward *popularity* as such. The idea of death by entertainment that *Infinite Jest* explores may have been a mordant satire of commercial culture, but Wallace's problem with popularity cuts across the high/low culture divide. From his essay 'E Unibus Pluram:

Television and U.S. Fiction' and interview with Larry McCaffery—both first published in 1993 and frequently cited as expressions of Wallace's aesthetic program—to his widely circulated 2005 Kenyon College speech, he has made it clear that *automatism* and *awareness* are the two poles that make up his aesthetic map, with commercial art pushing toward the former, and what he called 'real art-fiction' (McCaffery 32) pushing toward the latter. Wallace embraced the view that the role of fiction should be 'to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable' (McCaffery 21). To disturb the reader meant, in Smith's words, 'to break the rhythm that excludes thinking' (268), which is an idea that harks back to the Russian Formalist view of art as de-automatized perception, and which was central to modernist aesthetics. Such art makes use of what George Saunders, in reference to Wallace, described as a 'shock methodology', 'a kind of stripping away of the habitual' (53). But if 'art-fiction' could shock us into greater awareness, television for Wallace had the opposite effect. Television was what he called 'the epitome of Low Art', because 'it engages without demanding. One can rest while undergoing stimulation. Receive without giving' ('E Unibus Pluram' 37). If 'art-fiction' wakes us up, television fixes viewers 'in an attitude of relaxed and total reception, rapt' ('E Unibus Pluram' 26).

Crossing this automatism/awareness axis, which spans from television and advertising to 'real art-fiction', however, is another polarity in Wallace's work that ranges from *deceit* to *sincerity*, and which cannot be divided into commercial versus non-commercial art. Whereas television made up the negative pole on the automatism/awareness axis, then metafiction for Wallace had come to make up the negative pole of the deceit/sincerity axis. Metafiction—and by extension the postmodern institutionalization of irony—did not represent popular culture, but rather what could be called *popularity culture*. In contrast to popular culture, popularity culture may be defined not in commercial terms, although economic gain is often a byproduct of popularity, or in terms of symbolic capital or distinction, which is the currency of high culture, but rather in terms of approval. Popularity culture is art that primarily seeks approval, not money or distinction. The definition may be expanded to include not only art but a form of sociability in which approval is the overriding end. As I hope to show in the following, it is the reaction against popularity culture more than anything else that defines Wallace's fiction. It is what impelled him to explore avenues of unpopularity, but also what ultimately won him such popular approval. While many critics have engaged with Wallace's relation to postmodernism, focusing especially on the relationship between irony and sincerity in his work, few have tried to uncover the historical reasons for his occupation

with sincerity.[1] By reading Wallace through the lens of popularity culture, the following sections argue that Wallace's beef with postmodernism should be understood in the context of his beef with another 'post', namely that of post-industrial society. By bringing some of the most important texts in Wallace's oeuvre into dialogue with David Riesman's classical sociology of 'other-direction', the aim here is thus to historicize the significance that the key issues of sincerity and recursivity play in Wallace's fiction with respect to work and life in post-industrial society, and ending with an account of unpopularity in his last novel, *The Pale King* (2011).

Popularity Culture and 'Other-Direction'

Although Wallace is not known for brevity—even his essays had to be radically pruned in order to meet magazine standards—the short story with which *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men* begins shows that he was capable of compression as well as inflation. The story is called 'A Radically Condensed History of Postindustrial Life', and is quoted here in full:

> When they were introduced, he made a witticism, hoping to be liked. She laughed extremely hard, hoping to be liked. Then each drove home alone, looking straight ahead, with the very same twist to their faces. The man who'd introduced them didn't much like either of them, though he acted as if he did, anxious as he was to preserve good relations at all times. One never knows, after all, now did one now did one now did one.

The first thing to note about the story is that it is located on page zero of the story collection, which suggests that Wallace thought of it as a sort of ground zero for contemporary life. The situation that it describes so tersely is meant to be representative of the human condition in its present shape, and it presents itself as a diagnosis of this condition. What the three characters—or rather caricatures—in the story have in common is a shared desire to be liked. They behave in a way meant to maximize their likeability; that is to say, their behavior is calculated and instrumental. This requires that each character has in mind an ideal model of likeable behavior to which they seek to adjust their own behavior. If they were seeking admiration or distinction, or in some other way to impress the others, the model they would seek to conform to would have to be based on what they imagine is somehow superior to those they seek to impress. But since their goal is only 'to be liked', the ideal model has to be as much like those they seek to be liked

by as possible. In short, their conformity is not vertical but horizontal: what they seek to adjust to is one another, not some elevated model of behavior instilled in them prior to having met each other.

This is, of course, the form of peer adjustment that David Riesman so famously calls 'other-direction' in his 1950 landmark study of social character, *The Lonely Crowd*. In contrast to 'inner-direction', where parental authority has been internalized at such an early age as to become second nature, the 'other-directed' character was not guided by an inner moral compass, but by the changing pressures of his or her social environment—in Riesman's terms, not by a 'gyroscope' (16) but a 'radar' (25). On the upside, this means that the 'other-directed' character is far more receptive to signals from others than the rather single-minded 'inner-directed' character. On the downside, it means that the 'other-directed' person has 'no clear core of self' (157). Those who are 'other-directed' are *too* receptive, lacking any autonomous sense of self that could protect them from the caprices of their environment. Although Riesman cautions against dismissing the qualities of 'other-direction' out of hand, by identifying the need for approval as the overriding desire of the social type he analyzes, his study inevitably creates the grounds for its disapproval. This is the paradox of popularity culture: the more evidently one seeks approval, the less likely it is that one receives it. As Riesman notes, 'because it is approval for which one is competing one must repress one's overt competitiveness' (81). The recursivity in popularity culture requires that one dissimulates one's feelings and behavior in order to manipulate those of others. But precisely because the relationship is recursive, and manipulation is most effective when it does not appear as such, it also requires that one dissimulates one's dissimulation, and so on *ad infinitum*. The paradox is illustrated in 'A Radically Condensed History'. The narrator's explanatory comments on the ulterior motives for the behavior of the characters—'hoping to be liked', 'anxious as he was to preserve good relations at all times'—effectively undermine their attempts to be liked in the eyes of the reader. Their desire to be liked, which is emphasized in the story to the extent that it becomes a parody of popularity culture, is what makes them unlikable. Instead of likable, it is more probable that they are perceived as fake, behaving not as they are or how they feel, but as they think they should behave in order to be liked.

This perception of being 'fake' was, in effect, how Riesman's study contributed to make a whole generation feel. But the strength of his account and its continued relevance today was the historical and social processes that underlay the transformation of character. The 'inner-directed' type for Riesman was a product of the industrial era, where 'technical competence'

(129) had been the key to advancement. In his own era of bureaucracy and mass consumption, the key to success had become 'social competence' (129), as work increasingly required the manipulation of people instead of things. This shift from an economy based on production to one largely based on consumption implied a fundamental change in social relations. To a far greater extent than before, the degree to which people were able to get along—with coworkers or customers—determined how successful they were at their work. Social skills had become a prerequisite for upward mobility; it had become necessary 'to preserve good relations at all times', as 'A Radically Condensed History' has it. But social competence involves a level of complexity far greater than that of any technical competence. While natural resources can be manipulated independently of the relationship between manipulator and manipulated, this is not the case in the manipulation of people. The successful manipulation of rocks or trees does not depend on our behavior toward them, but the successful manipulation of people does. Post-industrial work relationships are inherently more recursive than industrial ones. The engineer with technical expertise does not need to be popular in order to succeed, but the office worker among office workers competing for the favor of the manager does. From the emergence of personnel departments and the Human Relations Movement in the early decades of the twentieth century to the training of emotional intelligence and the recruitment of 'Happiness Engineers' in the workplace today, corporate self-help books and managerial practices in the past century may be characterized as the search for ever better methods for manipulating what used to be called 'the human element'.[2]

Popularity culture is the direct outgrowth of this development: the increasing correlation between personal and professional success. Post-industrial work relations demand to an ever greater degree that the emotional and personal qualities of people are counted as assets. For Eva Illouz, in her account of what she calls 'emotional capitalism', the intertwining of work and affect has made 'the economic self emotional and emotions more closely harnessed to instrumental action' (23). When personal life enters the workplace, work also enters personal life. The result is that the risk of manipulation seeps into every aspect of social interaction. If not being liked jeopardizes not only one's personal relationships but also one's work relationships, then it is never clear whether one seeks approval for reasons of pure sociability or for instrumental ends. As the line between work and personal life becomes blurred, every act may or may not be a calculated one, because every act may or may not serve instrumental purposes. 'One never knows, after all, now did one now did one now did one', as the trailing

voice of Wallace's story says. But not only does it become difficult to know the motives of others, it becomes difficult to know one's own motives. If other people may seem like frauds, one may also feel like a fraud oneself.

This dilemma is played out in Wallace's story 'Good Old Neon' from *Oblivion* (2004). The story is narrated by a character who has already killed himself and is now explaining why. It begins with the character describing his problem:

> My whole life I've been a fraud. I'm not exaggerating. Pretty much all I've ever done all the time is try to create a certain impression of me in other people. Mostly to be liked or admired. It's a little more complicated than that, maybe. But when you come right down to it it's to be liked, loved. Admired, approved of, applauded, whatever. (141)

As an account of how the character could not quiet his 'mind's ceaseless conniving about how to impress people' (160), it is a stark confession of 'other-direction' and its discontents. In characterizing his trouble, he identifies what he calls the 'fraudulence paradox':

> The fraudulence paradox was that the more time and effort you put into trying to appear impressive or attractive to other people, the less impressive or attractive you felt inside—you were a fraud. And the more of a fraud you felt like, the harder you tried to convey an impressive or likable image of yourself so that other people wouldn't find out what a hollow, fraudulent person you really were. (147)

The recursive trap is typical of Wallace's work. Here, the recursion inherent in popularity culture—where seeking approval is a cause for disapproval which causes one to seek approval—has been internalized. The recursive game that one plays with others, one also plays with oneself. The effect is not only that a wedge is driven between people who may feel that others are fraudulent, but that one feels fraudulent oneself. As the character in the story says: 'I actually seemed to have no true inner self, and that the more I tried to be genuine the more empty and fraudulent I ended up feeling inside' (160). Seeking approval empties out the self because it introduces a level of calculation to our sense of self, which we believe should be free of calculation in order to be genuine. The trap is that the more empty inside one feels, the more one needs approval, which in turn makes one feel all the more empty. As such, if the 'other-direction' prompted by twentieth-century transformations of work results in us having 'no clear core of self', as Riesman

said, then having no clear core of self makes us more 'other-directed'. The effect is that we are caught in a loop of calculation that appears to isolate us from each other and alienate us from ourselves—which would explain the feeling of despair beneath the parody of 'A Radically Condensed History', when 'each drove home alone, looking straight ahead, with the very same twist to their faces'.

But while the characters in 'A Radically Condensed History' clearly fall toward the deceit end on the deceit/sincerity axis that structures Wallace's fiction, the story itself is also deceptive. It is not the history that the title promises. By inflating the 'other-directed' insecurity of the characters into a caricature, they become the butt of a joke shared by narrator and readers. In recognizing the insecurity of the characters we automatically become superior to them. In other words, the story flatters us. We may like it for sharing a joke with us over the heads of its characters, yet we may also dislike it for this very reason, for its smug appeal to our sense of superiority. Its radical condensation makes it look like the witticism made by the first character, as if it itself were 'hoping to be liked'. In this sense, it resembles the metafiction that Wallace sought to distance himself from. While the ironic mode of metafiction—always self-consciously undercutting its own narrative—at first served to deflate the conceits of realism and the conformity of the early postwar era, by the late 1980s Wallace felt that it had outlived its purpose. Irony, now as 'the dominant mode of hip expression' ('E Unibus Pluram' 67), had itself become oppressive. For Wallace, the formal stunts of metafiction often served no other purpose than to exhibit the skills and astuteness of the writer, as if to say, as he phrased it in his interview with McCaffery, 'Hey! Look at me! Have a look at what a good writer I am! Like me!' (25). Revealing the deceits of art had devolved into its own deceit. And if the anticipatory logic of calculation in popularity culture was lethal to personal relationships, it was also lethal to fiction. The fiction writer seeking approval from an audience was just another manifestation of 'other-direction'. As the narrator of the story 'Octet' from *Brief Interviews* warns the reader: 'there is no quicker way to tie yourself in knots and kill any human urgency in the thing you're working on than to try to calculate ahead of time whether that thing will be "*liked*"' (129).

Of course, being open about this problem inevitably raises the reader's suspicion about whether by confessing this 'Octet' is itself only trying to be liked. The reflexivity about self-reflexivity so characteristic of Wallace's work has been described by critics as a form of metafictional self-implosion that reverts into its opposite.[3] But perhaps a more accurate description of what goes on here is that the reader becomes implicated in the calculated

exchanges that his stories parody. Whether it is the anxious platitudes in 'A Radically Condensed History' or the account of the corrosive writer/reader relationship in 'Octet', neither narrator nor reader are ever above suspicion. If the joke at first appears to be on the 'other-directed' characters of the stories, the joke ends up being on us, the readers, because we are not able to extract ourselves from the recursive processes that the story demonstrates. The reader will also have to reflect that, in a culture where everything may always be tainted by instrumentality, 'one never knows'. The cynical knowingness that he found so discomfiting about metafictional irony is undermined by the uncertainty of popularity culture that he imposes on the reader. Characteristically, Wallace's stories not only depict the recursive process of popularity culture but actually perform it, drawing readers ever further into its exasperating loops, in effect making us complicit with it.

The Problem of Sincerity

While N. Katherine Hayles in an article on *Infinite Jest* has convincingly shown how the novel performs 'the fact of recursivity', it should be clear that Wallace was not only interested in trapping readers, but also in discovering ways out of the trap. The sense of isolation and loneliness that runs through his work is thus not only a result of the popularity trap, but also a potential remedy for it. In his biography of Wallace, D.T. Max suggests that he had a penchant for 'universalizing his neurosis' (94). This may sound like solipsism, but it was in the act of universalizing what he felt that Wallace sought a way to counter the sense of isolation he found in post-industrial life. By linking the sense of isolation and loneliness that he felt defined the human condition to the postmodern and post-industrial condition, we might also say that he historicized his neurosis. In a crucial passage in *Infinite Jest*, where the narrator reflects on what ails the troubled main character Hal Incandenza, we are told that 'inside Hal there's pretty much nothing at all' (694). The narrator then goes on to generalize Hal's condition: 'We enter a spiritual puberty where we snap to the fact that the great transcendent horror is loneliness, excluded encagement in the self. Once we've hit this age, we will now give or take anything, wear any mask, to fit, be part-of, not be Alone, we young' (694). Again we have the 'fraudulence paradox': in order to escape loneliness we seek to conform, which in turn alienates us from what we truly feel—loneliness. The key theme of addiction in *Infinite Jest* is presented in the same way as something characters are drawn into because it blunts their feeling of inner destitution, but which

only aggravates the condition they seek to escape. Earlier in the novel, Hal says about playing tennis that '[w]e're each deeply alone here. It's what we all have in common, this aloneness', to which another character responds: '*E Unibus Pluram*' (112). Wallace's fiction is full of lonely crowds—is that not essentially what 'out of one, many' means?[4] At the same time, however, as 'aloneness' is a common feeling at this particular moment in history, it is also one that may be shared, and thus possibly revoke the isolating recursions of popularity culture. Still, if Wallace looked to the sharing of feelings for an alternative to popularity culture, like everything in his work, this was easier said than done.

‘Octet’ dramatizes the problem of sharing succinctly. Presented as advice on how to write good fiction, the narrator of the story underlines the importance of making readers empathize with characters by feeling ‘some sort of weird ambient *sameness* in different kinds of human relationships’ (131-32). This suggests another form of ‘other-direction’ at work in Wallace’s fiction. ‘Octet’ even uses the term ‘other-directedness’ (117), not in Riesman’s sense, but as synonymous with empathy. In spite of its radar-like sensitivity, Riesman’s ‘other-direction’ is rather what Smith described as the ‘other blindness’ (291) of the hideous men in *Brief Interviews*, as their concerns for how they are perceived by others effectively blocks their perception of them. Against Riesman’s ‘other-direction’, Wallace’s *other* ‘other-direction’ aims not at winning the approval of others but at sharing a sense of ‘urgent interhuman sameness’ (‘Octet’ 133). The problem, then, is how to know when another person is feeling as you do. The story offers the following solution:

> The trick to this solution is that you'd have to be 100% honest. Meaning not just sincere but almost naked. Worse than naked—more like unarmed. Defenseless. ‘This thing I feel, I can't name it straight out but it seems important, ‘do you feel it too?’—this sort of direct question is not for the squeamish. For one thing, it's perilously close to ‘*Do you like me? Please like me,*’ which you know quite well that 99% of all the interhuman manipulation and bullshit gamesmanship that goes on goes on precisely because the idea of saying this sort of thing straight out is regarded as somehow obscene. (131)

If sharing a sense of the human predicament in post-industrial life was, for Wallace, a way in which to remedy it, then sincerity becomes imperative as the precondition for this sharing. But there is a fine line between emotional sharing and emotional manipulation. Being open about one's feelings requires that others are equally open about theirs. It is

an all-or-nothing proposal: if all parties are sincere, the cycle of deception may be broken; if they are not, it is intensified, as lowering one's defenses makes one prey to greater manipulation. As 'Octet' makes clear, there can be no compromise: 'Anything less than completely naked helpless pathetic sincerity and you're right back in the pernicious conundrum' (131).

Wallace's proposed solution to the problem of recursivity in popularity culture only presented him with a new problem, namely that of knowing when one is '100% honest'. This is, of course, a problem that dates back at least to St. Augustine's *Confessions*, and which with Rousseau's secularization of the confessional mode in the late eighteenth century became a hallmark of modern culture. The aim of confession is to flush out hidden deceits that may be lurking in the inmost recesses of the self. Self-examination through self-revelation purifies as it proceeds, as every impurity discovered and revealed is an impurity cleansed by the fact that it is no longer hidden. As confessions are cathartic, a form of self-erasure that wipes the slate clean, it follows that the greater the depravity exposed the greater the relief from it and the cleaner the slate. This is the logic of the AA meetings in *Infinite Jest*, described as a form of 'deprogramming' (369). The litanies of personal horror and humiliation that its members reveal at the fervent incitement of their fellow ex-abusers seem almost like a contest in self-deprecation. However, the confession must be received as sincere by its audience. This was the key to a successful AA confession, as the former addict Don Gately reflects: 'Speakers who are accustomed to figuring out what an audience wants to hear and then supplying it find out quickly that this particular audience does not want to be supplied with what someone else thinks it wants' (367-68). Premeditation is as unwelcome here as in the writer/reader relationship in 'Octet': 'It can't be a calculated crowd-pleaser, and it has to be the truth, unslanted, unfortified. And maximally unironic' (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 369).

Wallace made use of this confessional mode frequently as a narrative ploy both in his fiction and non-fiction. His infamous footnotes often function as correctives 'in the spirit of 100% candor', as one note in 'Octet' proclaims (125), and metafiction on the whole is aimed at revealing narrative deceits. Yet, the confessional mode in Wallace cuts deeper than this because it pervades his style. Like J.D. Salinger's ingenuous narrative voice, Wallace's voice often employs a highly informal tone that brings about a degree of intimacy with the reader that a more formal prose style could not do. Wallace's style draws the reader into confidence, and this was wholly intentional. As he told one interviewer, he thought of his relationship with the reader as being

like 'a late-night conversation with really good friends, when the bullshit stops and the masks come off' (qtd. in Max 221).

At the same time, Wallace knew that the colloquial tone he used to give readers a feeling of intimacy was not only subject to manipulation, but was the quintessential trick of the confidence man. His essay on John McCain's bid for the 2000 Republican presidential nomination is a case in point. The essay, published in *Consider the Lobster* (2005) as 'Up, Simba', begins with a disclaimer to the reader—addressed as 'Dear Person Reading This' (156)—that the essay is 'just meant to be the truth as one person saw it' (157).[5] But even as the style of the essay begins by drawing the reader into confidence, confidence is precisely what it goes on to problematize. Describing his road trip as a journalist with McCain on his campaign bus the 'Straight Talk Express' (171), Wallace seeks to resolve the contradiction between McCain's candid appearance—his 'straight talk', suggesting that he is not merely catering to public opinion—and his need as a presidential candidate for popular approval. McCain may have been sincere, 'all conspicuously honest and open and informal and idealistic and no-bullshit' (228), but at the same time his sincerity was highly effective self-promotion. The essay concludes that it was impossible 'to tell whether John McCain is a real leader or merely a very talented political salesman' (228), and ends with an appeal to the reader: 'whether he's truly "for real" now depends less on what is in his heart than on what might be in yours' (234).

In his essay on 'David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction', Adam Kelly writes that sincerity 'can always be taken for manipulation, and this risk is fundamental—it cannot be reduced by appeal to intention, or morality, or context—because true sincerity, if there is ever such a thing, must take place in the aporia between the conditional and the unconditional' (140). This non-identity of sincerity means that its only identity is relational, that 'the possibility of sincerity depends upon its becoming dialogic in character, always requiring a response from the other to bring it into play' (Kelly 141). Wallace's appeal to the reader—and specifically the reader's heart—in 'Up, Simba' is thus symptomatic of how he deals with the problem of sincerity. Rousseau in *The Confessions* (1782) may have thought that he 'unveiled [his] inmost self' (3), but for Wallace the medium of language through which the self must be unveiled is itself suspect. The 'whole' self that sincerity implies cannot possibly be unveiled through language. 'Good Old Neon' is told in the confessional mode with the first person narrator seeking to account for his fraudulence, but at the same time he admits to the impossibility of self-revelation through confession.

He points out the vast discrepancy between what we are and how little of ourselves we are able to represent to others:

> As though inside you is this enormous room full of what seems like everything in the whole universe at one time or another and yet the only parts that get out have to somehow squeeze out through one of those tiny keyholes you see under the knob in older doors. As if we are all trying to see each other through these tiny keyholes. (178)

The keyhole is language, which for Wallace presents a barrier to sharing as great as that posed by manipulation. Language is by definition misleading as it only represents a fraction of our experiences. But if the problem of language is postmodern and that of manipulation post-industrial, the solution for Wallace appears to be the same. It may be impossible to squeeze one's whole self through the keyhole of language, but as 'Good Old Neon' informs us, 'the door can open' (178). Opening the door to the self for the other to enter only requires that the mask of language be removed, which is why 'it feels so good to break down and cry in front of others, or to laugh, or speak in tongues, or chant in Bengali—it's not English anymore, it's not getting squeezed through any hole' ('Good Old Neon' 179). If the sincerity of the whole self cannot be revealed through the language of confession, perhaps it is disclosed in the breakdown of language. Disgusted by the barrier that language poses to sincerity, the narrator of 'Good Old Neon' ends on a decisive note: 'Not another word' (181).

'Not another word' may not seem like the right coda for a writer famous for his verbose style, but the compulsion to confess is as much a part of the problem for Wallace as it is of the solution. This is especially the case when his fiction addresses the modern variant of confession: therapy. In 'The Depressed Person' from *Brief Interviews*, Wallace demonstrates how the sharing of feeling can lead to a destructive spiral of narcissistic reflexivity that obstructs any possibility of genuine sharing. The story begins grimly: 'The depressed person was in terrible and unceasing emotional pain, and the impossibility of sharing or articulating this pain was itself a component of the pain and a contributing factor in its essential horror' (31). But after almost thirty pages of trying to articulate and share her emotional pain with her therapist and 'Support System' (32)—her name for those friends to whom she obsessively confesses her feelings—the story ends with no communicative progress whatsoever having been made: 'How was she to decide and describe—even to herself, looking inward and facing herself—what all she'd so painfully learned said about herself?' (58) The question is itself the

problem that keeps her trapped. On the one hand, we are as much trapped within her looping therapeutic logic as she is because the story compels us to participate in her self-analysis. On the other hand, by representing her allegorically as 'the depressed person', the story makes her representative of a cultural condition: it universalizes her neurosis. The real question of the story is not what it says about her but what it says about us. The more she tries to share her feelings the less she is able to. Her sharing impedes rather than facilitates communication since it is not reciprocal but one-sided, as in her relationship with her therapist or 'Support System'. The only way out of her recursive trap would be not to ask what she had learned said about herself, but to ask what it said about being a human being. In other words, she would have had to ask, 'do you feel it too?'[6]

Accounting for Unpopularity

'The Depressed Person' is Wallace's cruelest rendering of what Christopher Lasch called *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979). Lasch provides the same general historical account of the transformation of character as Riesman. With the bureaucratization of society, he argues, 'ambitious young men now had to compete with their peers for the attention and approval of their superiors', with the result that '[t]he management of interpersonal relations came to be seen as the essence of self-advancement' (114). But while Riesman's study inspired a countercultural response to such behavior, Lasch wrote after the counterculture had run its course. The counterculture for Lasch may have been radical, but what it had radicalized was the structure of dependence that the process of bureaucratization first gave rise to. The rejection of cultural restraints for personal gratification had not led to autonomy but turned the screw of conformity another notch: 'Strategies of narcissistic survival now present themselves as emancipation from the repressive conditions of the past, thus giving rise to a "cultural revolution" that reproduces the worst features of the collapsing civilization it claims to criticize' (21). The search for authenticity against calculated behavior had only deepened a 'therapeutic sensibility' (33), because, like the bureaucratic erosion of tradition and community, it served to further detach the self from the continuity of the past. As 'The Depressed Person' suggests, the examination of the self turns into self-excoriation once it rejects the social ties that constitute the self. Like the hollowing out of self effected by the internalization of calculated behavior, the self-fulfillment that therapy promises is self-defeating to the extent that it treats the self as an intellectual

problem apart from its social context. The rejection of dependence that the search for personal authenticity implies erodes the very self that is sought, thus making the self more and not less dependent on others for its affirmation. Instead of autonomy, the rejection of calculated behavior in favor of personal authenticity only meant its narcissistic transformation, which Lasch described as a kind of intensified 'other-direction':

> Notwithstanding his occasional illusions of omnipotence, the narcissist depends on others to validate his self-esteem. He cannot live without an admiring audience. His apparent freedom from family ties and institutional constraints does not free him to stand alone or to glory in his individuality. On the contrary, it contributes to his insecurity, which he can overcome only by seeing his 'grandiose self' reflected in the attentions of others, or by attaching himself to those who radiate celebrity, power, and charisma. (38)

Lasch's account of the intensification of dependence as a result of its rejection in favor of personal authenticity is indicative of the cultural trap that Wallace was trying to write himself out of.[7] His investment in sincerity was his attempt to counter the desire for approval that accompanied the attenuation of self. But at the same time, as he shows by repeatedly performing the failure to pin down sincerity, he was aware that this investment was susceptible to misuse. Sincerity involves a leap of faith, but there is no way of telling whether one's trust will be betrayed. What passes for openness, as *Infinite Jest* warns, may well turn out to be 'a purposive social falsehood [...] a pose of poselessness' (1048). Wallace's unfinished novel *The Pale King*, published posthumously in 2011, is his final jab at the problem of sincerity as a way out of the cycle of post-industrial manipulation. *The Pale King* in many ways unfolds against a backdrop of an 'other-directed' or narcissistic culture, but it departs from the accounts of both Lasch and Riesman in one crucial way. While the bureaucratization of society was responsible for the social changes that Riesman and Lasch each documented, *The Pale King* suggests that bureaucracy itself may be a key to the reversal of these changes. Riesman and Lasch's accounts were written against the backdrop of the bureaucratic welfare state. In the 1980s, when Wallace came of age, however, anti-bureaucratic sentiment had not only gone mainstream but had itself become institutionalized with the Reagan administration and, specifically, in the shape of neoliberal reform. In the intervening years between the publication of Lasch's indictment of dependence and Wallace's work on *The Pale King*, nothing had become more unpopular than bureaucracy itself.

The choice of a bureaucracy for the setting of *The Pale King*—a regional IRS center in Peoria, Illinois—provides Wallace with both an arena for the further exploration of sincerity and for the direct engagement with something as unhip as one could possibly imagine. In 'E Unibus Pluram', Wallace famously called for a new rebellion against the hegemony of hip:

> The next literary 'rebels' in this country might well emerge as some weird bunch of *anti*-rebels, born oglers who dare somehow to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse and instantiate single-entendre principles. Who treat of plain old untrendy human troubles and emotions in U.S. life with reverence and conviction. Who eschew self-conscious and hip fatigue. These anti-rebels would be outdated, of course, before they even started. Dead on the page. Too sincere. Clearly repressed. Backward, quaint, naïve, anachronistic. Maybe that'll be the point. Maybe that's why they'll be the next rebels. Real rebels, as far as I can see, risk disapproval. (81)

If this was Wallace's manifesto for unpopularity, *The Pale King* imagines the 'anti-rebel' as a bureaucrat. IRS examiners are trained to detect fraudulence in tax returns, just as Wallace's own prose is geared toward detecting fraudulence in readers by drawing us into the recursions of popularity culture. While irony is about undercutting the equivalence between what is stated and what is meant, accounting is about determining it. And what could be more unpopular than holding people to account for what they state in their tax returns? The Latin motto ascribed to the IRS in the novel—translated by one character as '*He is the one doing a difficult, unpopular job*' (244)—leaves no doubt about how unpopular the bureaucrat is. The IRS employee is not one who seeks approval, but one who risks disapproval. *The Pale King* even goes as far as to recast this as a form of heroism. In an epiphanic moment, one character recounts a lecture by his Jesuit accountancy teacher:

> 'True heroism is *a priori* incompatible with audience or applause or even the bare notice of the common run of man. In fact,' he said, 'the less conventionally heroic or exciting or adverting or even interesting or engaging a labor appears to be, the greater its potential as an arena for actual heroism, and therefore as a denomination of joy unequaled by any you men can yet imagine'. (230)

With his bow tie and business fedora, the Jesuit teacher himself seems 'a hundred percent indifferent about being liked or seen as cool or likeable

by the students' (226-27). He appears to be the embodiment of the heroic 'anti-rebel' in an era defined by what another character in the novel calls 'tyranny of conformist nonconformity' (149).

While many critics have taken Wallace's comments about 'anti-rebels' as a trumpet call for a New Sincerity, others have more wisely suggested that his own work seeks rather to combine cynicism and naïveté.[8] As such, it should be clear that a champion of unpopularity such as the Jesuit in *The Pale King* is not meant as a positive model. He is a caricature of 'inner-direction' in the same way that needy characters elsewhere in Wallace's fiction are caricatures of 'other-direction'. He is indeed 'dead on the page', and only comes to life as a counterpoint to his approval-starved contemporaries. Wallace's method was far too dialectic to actually live up to the 'post-postmodern' rebellion against irony that he has been revered as the progenitor of. But his search for a counterpoint to popularity culture in a character such as the Jesuit is also indicative of the problem he faced. The Jesuit's indifference to approval is the result of his commitment to such 'single-entendre principles' that Wallace suggested defined the 'anti-rebel'. Yet, those principles in *The Pale King* are beside the point. The point of the novel is not taxation or accounting as such, but what the commitment to such principles entails.[9] Tax accounting in *The Pale King* is not important for its civic value, as it is for the Jesuit, but for how it may serve as a counterpoint to popularity culture. Accounting is interesting to Wallace only insofar as it inoculates the Jesuit against popularity. He is drawn to bureaucracy not because of what it stands for but because it is unpopular.

The unpopular is the equivalent of the authentic to the extent that it claims to be indifferent to approval. But just as the search for personal authenticity for Lasch only made the individual further dependent, the search for unpopularity only broadens the scope of popularity culture by consigning all value that is claimed as unpopular to the absolute value of approval or disapproval. Thus, even as the Jesuit's social commitment places him beyond the loop of popularity culture, the novel's representation of his commitment in terms of unpopularity draws him back into that very loop. As a revolt against popularity culture, the search for unpopularity is inherently a part of what it rejects. Just as popularity culture turns every value into a vehicle for the attainment of approval, the revolt against popularity relegates all value to the attainment of disapproval. It trades in the same currency as popularity culture only with the valences reversed, which means that every other possible incentive—from money to morals—is devalued. This was the risk that Wallace ran when he made sincerity the only value that counted. By committing himself so exclusively to the dissection of

popularity culture, his work in effect became complicit in its devaluation of any actual commitment that might transcend it. As the poles of deceit and sincerity along which he strung his fiction were ultimately a product of popularity culture itself, the harder he pushed toward the sincerity end of the spectrum the more entangled he became in the popularity trap.

One character in *The Pale King* refers to a fictional self-help guide with the title '*How to Make People Like You: An Instant Recipe for Career Success*' (302). This is a lightly-masked reference to Dale Carnegie's classic *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936), which was one of the first self-help books to equate popularity with professional success, and which thus contributed to the post-industrial conundrum that Wallace found himself in. But as Wallace's own soaring popularity in the past decade shows, the criteria for how to make people like you greatly varies. While the goal of peer-approval in a society that depends on it has not changed, the means for reaching it has. Ironically, in large part because Carnegie made the link between our social popularity and professional achievements so disagreeably evident, the rejection of popularity has long been a fixed staple in the search for approval, and thus success. Under such circumstances, nothing that is valued mainly for its unpopularity could ever offer an alternative to popularity, only a new means for attaining it. Wallace's significance is not that he showed us a way out of popularity culture, but that his inspired attempts to extract himself from it made its consequences so painfully clear.

Notes

1. One important exception is chapter two of Mary K. Holland's *Succeeding Postmodernism: Language and Humanism in Contemporary American Literature* (2013), which reads Wallace in terms of Christopher Lasch's critique of 'the culture of narcissism'. For an overview over what has already come to be called 'David Foster Wallace Studies', see Adam Kelly's 'David Foster Wallace: the Death of the Author and the Birth of a Discipline'.
2. For the most comprehensive account to date of this new managerial revolution, see Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999). For the concept of 'Happiness Engineers' at work, see Burkeman.
3. For instance, A.O. Scott describes Wallace's fiction as 'meta-ironic,' turning 'irony back on itself.' Marshall Boswell similarly suggests that 'Wallace uses irony to disclose what irony has been hiding [...] to recover a learned form of heartfelt naïveté' (17).
4. Although not as conceptually productive as Riesman's study, Robert D. Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2000) provides a more recent sociological context

for Wallace's millennial loneliness. Echoing Wallace's 'E Unibus Pluram', he partly blames the erosion of social capital on the individualizing effects of the 'massive telecommunications and entertainment industries' (216).

5. Telling 'the truth as one person saw it' has, of course, been the very hallmark of the essay form since it was pioneered by Montaigne in the sixteenth century, and as such goes a long way to explain Wallace's affinity for the genre.

6. For a good account of the importance of the interpersonal in Wallace's work, see Nicole Timmer's study of post-postmodernism, which borrows its title from this quote, *Do You Feel It Too? The Post-Postmodern Syndrome in American Fiction at the Turn of the Millennium* (2010).

7. For a more extensive reading of the relationship between Wallace and Lasch's critique of narcissism than I am able to provide here, see Holland.

8. See especially the first chapter of Boswell.

9. This is most evident in the novel's allegory of the boy who tries to press his lips to every part of his body. The boy is described as 'self-contained' (401) due to his 'daily discipline and progress toward a long-term goal' (396). The point of the passage is clearly not the value of contortionism, but what the adherence to a goal—any goal—implies.

Works Cited

Boswell, Marshall. *Understanding David Foster Wallace.* Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2003. Print.

Burkeman, Oliver. 'Who Goes to Work to Have Fun?' *The New York Times.* 11 Dec. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Hayles, N. Katherine. 'The Illusion of Autonomy and the Fact of Recursivity: Virtual Ecologies, Entertainment, and *Infinite Jest.*' *New Literary History* 30.3 (1999): 675–97. Print.

Holland, Mary K. *Succeeding Postmodernism: Language and Humanism in Contemporary American Literature.* New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013. Print.

Illouz, Eva. *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007. Print.

Kelly, Adam. 'David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction.' *Consider David Foster Wallace: Critical Essay.* Ed. David Hering. Austin, TX: Sideshow Media Group Press, 2010. 131–46. Print.

—. 'David Foster Wallace: The Death of the Author and the Birth of a Discipline.' *Irish Journal of American Studies* 2 (2010). Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Lasch, Christopher. *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations.* New York: Warner Books, 1979. Print.

Max, D.T. *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story: A Life of David Foster Wallace.* London: Granta, 2012. Print.

Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000. Print.

Riesman, David. *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character.* 1950. New Haven: Yale UP, 2001. Print.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Confessions*. 1782–89. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1996. Print.

Saunders, George. 'Informal Remarks from the David Foster Wallace Memorial Service in New York on October 23, 2008.' *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace*. Eds. Samuel Cohen and Lee Konstantinou. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2012. 53–55. Print.

Scott, A.O. 'The Panic of Influence.' *The New York Review of Books*. 10 Feb. 2000. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Smith, Zadie. 'Brief Interviews with Hideous Men: The Difficult Gifts of David Foster Wallace.' *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays*. London: Penguin Books, 2009. 257–300. Print.

Wallace, David Foster. *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1999. Print.

—. *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays*. 2005. London: Abacus, 2012. Print.

—. 'E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction.' 1993. *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments*. 1997. London: Abacus, 2012. 21–82. Print.

—. *Infinite Jest*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1996. Print.

—. Interview with Larry McCaffery. 1993. *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*. Ed. Stephen Burn. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2012. 21–52. Print.

—. *Oblivion: Stories*. 2004. London: Abacus, 2008. Print.

—. *The Pale King*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2011. Print.

Dissenting Commodities

Negotiations of (Un)popularity in Publications Critical of Post-9/11 U.S.-America

Elizabeth Kovach

I.   (Un)popularity and Marketability

This essay discusses three generically diverse pieces of writing that are critical of U.S.-American foreign policy and society since 9/11: Jane Mayer's *The Dark Side* (2008), Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom* (2010), and Juliana Spahr's *thisconnectionofeveryonewithlungs* (2005). These texts—journalistic, novelistic, and poetic—are dissenting, critical, and counter-hegemonic depictions of the direction that the USA has taken since 9/11. They have been written, marketed, and successfully sold to well-established sectors of the reading public. While there is a significant body of scholarly work that focuses on how such examples of post-9/11 writing offer discourses counter to those perpetuated by top policymakers and mainstream media outlets, little attention has been paid to the commodified nature of such writerly dissent. In my analyses of these texts, I explore the tensions and ambivalences regarding issues of unpopularity and popularity that affect writers who strive for political impact while they participate in a market logic that inevitably dampens the blow.

I thus conceive of popularity and unpopularity in terms of marketability. Raymond Williams writes in *Keywords* that the word 'popular' began as 'a legal and political term', referring to what was generated by the people, but finds that '[t]he transition to the predominant modern meaning of 'widely favoured' or 'well-liked' is interesting in that it contains a strong element of setting out to gain favour' (236-37). That which sets out to be popular is strategically designed to fall within the parameters of what is known to be favorable. Popular cultural artifacts, news outlets, and political messages generally enter the realm of the familiar and acceptable, abide by established tastes and sensibilities, and match desires and expectations prevalent within the public sphere. They are, simply put, produced with their markets in mind.

The unpopular is that which does not set out to gain favor. It does not purposefully appeal to a market, even though it will likely find one, however small. Within a neoliberal age that accommodates virtually any form of

cultural expression (even the extreme levels of offense pursued by the band Anal Cunt mentioned in this volume's introduction), the unpopular is more of an aspiration—a fantasy of unadulterated and autonomous expression that does not pander to anyone or anything—than a fully realizable phenomenon. Pursuits of the unpopular are nonetheless attempts to break out of established paradigms, and, even if in failure, they perform politics. Jacques Rancière's concept of the 'distribution of the sensible' is helpful in this context (cf. *Aesthetics* 12–19). Changes made to this distribution of what can be known, sensed, and imagined at any given place and time are, for Rancière, the essence of politics. I posit that pursuits of the unpopular have more potential to disrupt this distribution than the purposefully popular, as the latter is tailored to fall largely within its bounds.

Rancière's theoretical framework offers a productive perspective for thinking about issues pertaining to unpopularity and popularity as they find expression within, and amongst discourses surrounding, politically and socially critical writing about U.S.-America's post-9/11 era. My contention is that such writing engages in politics in the manner that Rancière conceptualizes, by adding to the ways we sense and perceive the post-9/11 political and social horizon. Naturally, this happens in ways that are in accordance with the segmentation of the literary market and the media landscape at large. The impulse to engage in political and social critique is thus channeled through specific market structures that position the meaning and reception of these texts, determine who their audiences will be, etc. This process is one that generates complex negotiations regarding issues of popularity and unpopularity—what I have respectively framed as the pursuit of market-friendliness and the refusal to make such a blatant appeal.

After elaborating upon Rancière's concept and relating it to notions of the unpopular and popular (section II), I proceed with the three case studies (section III). While I discuss the content of these three texts, I also consider paratextual information (III.1), authorial comments (III.2), and the selection of genre (III.3), respectively, to understand the positioning of these texts as products. These dissenting commodities engage in the politics of aesthetics while they are also framed within the limitations that the logic of the market places on this endeavor.

II.   Political Dissent and the Distribution of the Sensible

The premise that sensory perception is contingent upon social, political, and historical regimes offers a powerful framework with which to consider

(un)popularity. Rancière establishes the phrase 'distribution of the sensible' to refer to a system of boundaries that define what is generally sensed within a community. For Rancière, politics 'consists in interrupting the distribution of the sensible by supplementing it with those who have no part in the perceptual coordinates of the community, thereby modifying the very aesthetico-political field of possibility' (Rockhill 3). Politics is the integration of that which has previously been excluded from view, the subjectivization of those not formerly acknowledged as speaking, acting subjects.

According to such a framework, something can become popular if it falls within the realm of what is recognizable to the senses. The unpopular, on the other hand, confounds the senses; it arises from outside the frame of what is knowable, visible, or audible—from an uncanny, non-normative place excluded from dominant frames. The unpopular thus performs politics by first disrupting and consequently reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible. According to this extension of Rancière's framework onto notions of (un)popularity, politics is the introduction of the unpopular into the field of the sensible. It involves bestowing something or someone with the chance to be sensed—with legitimate and ontological presence—as well as with the ability to influence the distribution to which it/he/she belongs. The unpopular is both political and aesthetic because it alters the purview of perception; it rearranges the coordinates of what is knowable, visible, and imaginable.

As any form of cultural expression, non-fictional and fictional literature can exert pressure on the distribution of the sensible. Rancière often stresses the difference between speech and noise in discussions of the literary: speech is voiced by those participating in the distribution of the sensible, while the latter is the din of the excluded. Political activity 'makes audible as speaking beings those who were previously heard only as noisy animals' (*Aesthetics* 4). For Rancière, most literature as we know it today has emerged from an aesthetic revolution epitomized by the realism of Balzac and Flaubert. In producing works that paid indiscriminate, impartial, democratic attention to the minute details, objects, and artifacts of banal, everyday life, these writers tore down hierarchies that 'governed [...] the appropriateness of expression' (*Literature* 10). They shifted to the 'social and political promotion of ordinary human beings' (*Literature* 11). Instead of portraying the actions of heroes, Rancière states that:

> The sentences of Balzac and Flaubert may well have been mute stones.
> [...] They don't have voices like princes, generals or orators. But they only

> speak all the better as a result. They bear on their bodies the testimony of their history. And this testimony is more reliable than any speech offered by human mouth. It is the truth of things as opposed to the chatter and lies of orators. (*Literature* 14)

Sentences like mute stones, I suggest, are sentences that communicate without appealing to an audience. They are not crafted with the same kind of rhetorical and political intentions as the sentences of 'princes, generals or orators' and thus embrace the tenets of the unpopular as I have defined it. This literary aesthetic was revolutionary, according to Rancière, because it pulled the 'testimony' and 'the truth of things' from the realm of 'noisy animals' into the field of speech.

I would add here that what were once revolutionary narrative tactics during the time of Balzac and Flaubert have lost their singularity within the logic of postmodernism. In an essay on philosophical honesty in post-modern literature, Timothy Bewes stresses how sentences can no longer appear like mute stones—autonomous and true—because '(1) a sphere outside the administered realm of the market seems unimaginable at the moment' and '(2) because of the theoretical and philosophical objections to the concept of aesthetic autonomy which arise in postmodernism' (428). Within a neoliberal market designed to absorb all human action (cf. Harvey 3), and with intertextuality and pastiche overriding the notion of 'aesthetic autonomy', attempts at literary 'testimony' and 'truth' are inevitably compromised by a cultural and economic sphere from which an escape 'seems unimaginable'. The unpopular is always already swallowed up by the market's highly obliging distribution of the sensible.

The distribution of the sensible could perhaps also be construed as the distribution of the marketable. It seems that the more expandable and accommodating this market distribution becomes, the less it can be perturbed or produce significant counterweights to the speech of official policymakers—the 'princes, generals [and] orators'. As Jodi Dean writes, the USA witnesses a significant discrepancy between 'the circulation of content and official policy. Both are politics, just politics of different sorts, at different levels' (20). Referring specifically to the post-9/11 era, she notes how the Bush administration, for example, acknowledged what was a significant deluge of dissent within various media channels and in the form of mass protests on the streets as preemptive war on Iraq drew near. Yet, this was acknowledgement of a right to express disagreement—of the fact that people are entitled to their opinions, just as the administration had a right to its own. The communication of dissent did not exert pressure on the

powers that were. A democratic openness of expression that continuously revises the limits of the sensible proves to be compatible with a disjoint in the mechanisms of democracy: 'dense, intensive global communications networks actually relieve top-level actors (corporate, institutional, and governmental) from the obligation to answer [...]' (Dean 20).

These dynamics, I would venture, generate a desire amongst those unsatisfied with the status quo for unvarnished, true communication and a form of politics different from the actual 'normative political sphere' that 'appears as a shrunken, broken, or distant place of activity among elites' (Berlant 227). Ironic as it may be, in October 2003, Bush himself expressed the wish to 'go over the heads of the filter and speak directly to the people' (qtd. in Berlant 223). Lauren Berlant discusses this comment in her book *Cruel Optimism*, suggesting that the filter, which sorts out noise to make communication possible, creates clear speech and strategic messaging, as opposed to affective noise. Bush's comment reveals a desire for 'true soul-to-soul continuity between politicians and their public' (Berlant 226). Such continuity would be democracy in an ideal state and communication in its purest form.

This political fantasy of getting to the side of noise is what unpopular artistic and aesthetic endeavors entertain. Pursuits of the unpopular, while they cannot presuppose radical rupture within the postmodern paradigm, nevertheless strive to bring untapped ideas and affects to light and make them available for reflection. The texts presented in the next section perform this kind of politics. They portray certain facts, stories, and sentiments, drawing them into the purview of the sensible. I would suggest that they stem from a desire for unfiltered politically and socially critical expression. This desire, however, takes a transformational journey: it is translated into words on paper, picked up by the appropriate publishing houses, and packaged and publicized to meet the demands of the market in which it ultimately circulates.

III.   Commodified Critique: Three Case Studies

III.1   The Dark Side

In his description of writers like Balzac and Flaubert, Rancière emphasizes how fiction, when democratically chronicling the minutiae of unremark-able objects and lives, enters the same realm as testimony. It reports and lays bare material to the reader's eyes. The testimony that results from

investigative journalism, I would argue, attempts a similar type of politics. With what became a bestseller within the American market, Jane Mayer chronicles the way black sites such as Abu Graib, Guantanamo, and the case for invading Iraq, among other things, were made possible. *The Dark Side* suggests that Bush, Cheney, and close advisors obtained what many found to be dubious legal opinions to sanction, for example, forced confessions, extrajudicial detention, and the expansion of executive power. White House insiders—not even political opponents but in-house lawyers, top military and intelligence officials, allies and the British Intelligence Service—were, as Mayer's research attests, marginalized and penalized for challenging decisions and expressing dissent. Much of this dissent remained hidden, as these matters were protected by claims of national security. The administration essentially controlled and protected a specific 'distribution of the sensible' and resisted attempts to rearrange its coordinates.

While it is interesting to consider the 'distribution of the sensible' and the controlling of what could become popular inside the post-9/11 White House, this is not my main intention in discussing this text. Rather, I mean to highlight the politics of Mayer's journalism itself, which gives voice to many politicians, aides, intelligence workers, lawyers, military personnel and military psychologists—not to mention detained terror suspects and victims of torture—who had been silenced. Her collection of details, interviews, and researched facts about the course of events are laid out chronologically. The book's politics is about giving things presence, offering them, making them available for recognition and acknowledgement. It pulls information into the purview of the sensible—or, in Ranciere's words on literature, it 'intervenes [...] in the carving up of space and time, the visible and invisible, speech and noise' (*Literature* 4).

With a title like *The Dark Side*, the book also loudly announces itself as a work that reveals concealed truths, the Other of the government's official narrative. Its purposefully flaunted appeal is the access it gives the reader to unvarnished reality. As the review blurbs covering my edition claim, this account, which became a finalist for the National Book Award, is 'deeply troubling', 'shocking', 'unsettling'; it is lauded as an *'essential'* book 'that should be read by every concerned American' (this is the Anchor Books edition, 2009 [2008]). *The Washington Post* writes that '[t]o dismiss these [findings] as wild, anti-American ravings will not do. They are facts, which Mayer substantiates in persuasive detail'; Bloomberg News says that the narrative takes the reader through 'the processes by which practices and methods we associate with tyrannies become official U.S. policy'. What these reviewers consistently claim is that Mayer's work

brings new facts to light, and that it is vital that they reach the public. The book did, indeed, reach many readers, as its bestseller status proves. It surely informed a significant number of U.S.-Americans about post-9/11 political realities largely excluded from the mainstream media's coverage. When reviewers write that such a journalistic account is important and essential, the question is to what ends does such importance and essentiality aim?

One blurb is particularly striking in a different way than the others, and it moves me toward a tentative answer. A reviewer for *Slate* is quoted as stating: 'Stunning…. If you're a fan of *24*, you'll enjoy *The Dark Side*'. In other words, viewers of the fictional television series *24* about Counter Terrorism Unit agent Jack Bauer will also enjoy the heart-racing tale of American tyranny Mayer reports. What the selection of this blurb for the front matter (i.e. the pages proceeding the actual text) of this edition indicates is that *The Dark Side* is marketed as a consumer experience and form of entertainment. While I do not wish to insinuate that a TV series like *24* is not critical in its own right, its critique operates metaphorically while Mayer's work of investigative journalism speaks directly of the facts and gives voice to flesh-and-blood witnesses. The paratextual reference to *24* implicitly relegates *The Dark Side* to the same market segment occupied by viewers of fictional television.

The selection of this blurb is symptomatic of an effort to gain favor—a positioning of the book within a large and established consumer market. In his work on the forms and functions of paratexts, Gérard Genette writes that every paratext is

> a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that—whether well or poorly understood and achieved—is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies). (2)

The paratextual strategy of this blurb's selection is to mobilize a consumer segment. It sets the stage for a page-turning experience rather than for collective outrage to which policymakers would have to answer. The importance and essentiality of the narrative that Mayer presents is thus packaged as a politically dissenting, shockingly true document that is destined for likeability amongst a certain milieu, rather than the grounds for the policy changes Mayer implicitly begs for throughout the account she provides. There is a push for popularity written all over this book's packaging, while

its message is meant to function in an unpopular manner in the sense of perturbing the status quo.

This packaging and presentation of disturbing information as 'likeable' is strange, though it is easy to overlook the strangeness of such a scenario at first glance, because it has arguably become a naturalized phenomenon within the current cultural logic. The 'like' function on Facebook comes to mind as an analogy: awkward moments arise when users post troubling information that friends, wishing to acknowledge the importance of such content, end up 'liking' for lack of an alternative response mechanism. In a similar sense, *The Dark Side* circulates as a product within the book market and, as such, participates in a logic in which favorability-as-marketability is its driving force. Its outrage-inducing content stands in tension with its commodification.

III.2 Freedom

Jonathan Franzen's novel *Freedom* supplements perception about American politics, culture, and society with the breadth of politically charged themes and plotlines pertaining to the post-9/11 era that it covers. It is a family saga that begins just after 9/11 and traces the interrelated fates of various protagonists. One of them is the family son, Joey Berglund, who has just begun his college career when the 9/11 terrorist attacks occur. Imbued with a sense of entitlement, Joey resents the attacks for their interference in his college experience:

> Joey Berglund had received numberless assurances that his life was destined to be a lucky one. [...] The world had given unto him, and he was fine with the taking. [...] [C]ollege looked like it would be an extension of the world as he had always known it, only better. He was so convinced of this—took it so much for granted—that on the morning of September 11 he actually left his roommate, Jonathan, to monitor the burning World Trade Center and Pentagon while he hurried off to his Econ 201 lecture. Not until he reached the big auditorium and found it all but empty did he understand that a really serious glitch had occurred. [...] [T]he deep chagrin he'd then experienced [...] became the seed of his intensely *personal* resentment of the terrorist attacks. [...].
> In the days after 9/11, everything suddenly seemed extremely stupid to Joey: It was stupid that a 'Vigil of Concern' was held for no conceivable practical reason, it was stupid that people kept watching the same disaster footage over and over, it was stupid that the Chi Phi boys hung a banner

of 'support' from their house, it was stupid that the football game against Penn State was canceled, it was stupid that so many kids left Grounds to be with their families [...]. (232–33)

The novel performs politics in the way Rancière describes it not simply because Joey's perspective obviously counters post-9/11 discourses of trauma, redemption, and heroism that bolstered the hegemony's tightly controlled distribution of the sensible. Rather, in portraying a character like Joey, the novel performs politics in the detailed, democratic attention it pays to the psyche of a young adult who is unremarkable, unadmirable, and has absorbed neoliberal individualism to such a degree that he '*personally*' resents national, collective tragedy. This is not a story of actors or heroes but that of mundane living and, according to Rancière, 'what literature pits against the [...] privileging of action over life, is writing seen as a machine for making life talk' (*Literature* 14). Franzen's novel is a reporting on life that integrates the unpopular into its fabric, thereby presenting it as an artifact available to perception.

As Franzen states in an essay on novel-writing entitled *Why Bother?*, his aims as a writer are not explicitly political nor does he expect the aesthetics of his work to have much societal impact:

> I can't pretend the mainstream will listen to the news I have to bring. I can't pretend I'm subverting anything. [...] I can't stomach any notion that serious [literature] is *good for us*. It's hard to consider literature a medicine, in any case, when reading it serves mainly to deepen your depressing estrangement from the mainstream. [...] Expecting [literature] to bear the weight of our whole disturbed society—to help solve our contemporary problems—seems to me a peculiarly American delusion. To write sentences of such authenticity that refuge can be taken in them: Isn't it enough? Isn't it a lot? (73–74)

Here, Franzen expresses a conviction in small, sentence-sized forms of poetic truth, along with a professed disdain for the mainstream. As a writer, he aims to offer refuge as opposed to calls for action. Novel writing is, for him, not about political agendas and there is nothing particularly heroic about the effort. The 'bother' is about refuge, retreat, reflection, and a sense of connection between readers and sentences on the page.

When Oprah Winfrey, the highest-rated talk show host in U.S.-American television history, announced that Franzen's novel *The Corrections*, which was published before *Freedom*, had been chosen for her book club, Franzen

publically expressed concern about what his instant popularity would mean. He worried that his association with Winfrey's pop-iconic status would alienate his writer friends and the types of readers he most wanted to reach. His reaction, not surprisingly, caused a wave of controversy and motivated Winfrey to rescind the selection (cf. Kachka). The controversy was nonetheless effective in putting Franzen on the map.

Franzen, especially by the time he wrote and published *Freedom*, had become a brand name with a marketing machinery behind him poised and ready to push his products and more or less ensure their commercial success. His post-9/11 realism reaches a widespread public, because it is presented as a high-demand commodity. The 'Oprah incident' suggests that Franzen is not fully comfortable with the phenomenon he has become. He wishes to satisfy the desires of those who value the unpopular and feel a 'depressing estrangement from the mainstream'. This, not hype and attention, is the source of his pride as a writer. There is certainly something snobbish and judgmental about this desire to be unpopular. It presupposes that mainstream audiences lack the subtlety or acumen to take refuge in sentences according to Franzen's design, that the realm of the popular glosses over and fails to grasp the text's poetic truth.

Yet, perhaps Franzen's discomfort is more accurately about the politics of aesthetics. When a book is hyped in the way *Freedom* is, it becomes difficult if not impossible to discern if its success, in terms of sales, truly depends on its content or marketing and publicity. Its popularity is anything but spontaneous or surprising and its circulation among readers is by no means autonomous. What is more, the reading process becomes prefigured, or pre-mediated, by the hype. This is a potential conflict of interest for the politics of Franzen's novelistic aesthetics. When they are lauded as coming from the greatest American novelist of our time, Franzen's sentences are loaded with platitudes and an imposed weightiness that they are not meant to possess. In depicting Joey's reaction to 9/11, for instance, Franzen is arguably not voicing political opinion through his character, but rather attempting to transcribe the noise of life into discernable speech. The novel's politics, as in this particular scene, lies in its embrace of an unremarkable, unlikable, selfish college student. Joey's personal resentment towards the 9/11 attacks as well as the outpouring of emotion and campus activity they unleash is a depiction of an unpopular, post-9/11 structure of feeling.

Like the un-heroic and un-admirable Joey, Franzen's own aesthetic is meant to be un-heroic in itself, not met by an applauding Oprah-show studio audience or interpreted as *the* definitive social portrait of our times. Its aim is to expand the distribution of the sensible into the flat, banal,

embarrassingly human stuff of U.S.-American experience since 9/11. This is the politics and the aesthetic that the novel's popularity might overshadow and the potential source of Franzen's controversial reaction to the mainstream favorability that the phenomenon of Winfrey's book club selection guarantees.

III.3   thisconnectionofeveryonewithlungs

The degrees of (un)popularity of a published text depend on its genre. Mayer's non-fictional 'current events' book and Franzen's literary novel represent two of the most readily bought and sold genres on the market. By choosing to write poetry, a writer also inherently accepts the limited extent of her own (un)popularity. Even the most renowned poets would not garner the kind of media hype or sales figures that a popular novelist would. Juliana Spahr published a series of personal and political poems written from her home in Hawaii between 2001 and 2003, which she entitled *thisconnectionofeveryonewithlungs*; it begins with a poem about 9/11, followed by others concerned with its political aftermath. The spirit and structure of Spahr's lyrics are in the tradition of Walt Whitman. Formally and thematically, they cultivate notions of connectedness. The ethos of these poems is clearly to expand the distribution of the sensible into an all-encompassing whole.

Spahr's words aim to refigure notions of selfhood that banish individuality and selfishness to create an ethical mode of being that fosters awareness of the contingency between the cells, the body, personal space, the state, nation and international spheres, through to the limitless expanses of outer-space. In the 11 March 2003 entry she writes:

> Bush keeps saying he will go it alone if he has to.
> Huge protests continue, protests without alone and against alone.
> It is the word alone, beloveds, the word alone.
> When I speak of alone I speak of how there is no alone as Pakistan
> claims it is moving in on bin Laden, as Iran's nuclear plant is
> nearing completion, as Oscar organizers announce that the show
> will go on in the event of war.
> ....
> It is an uneventful day as we sit here waiting for news.
> The television promises updates on the situation with Iraq on the
> half hour.
> Our apartment is small and is buried between two other apartments,

one above and one below.
Beloveds, my desire is to hunker down and lie low, lie with yous
in beds and bowers, lie with yous in resistance to the alone, lie
with yous night after night.
But the military industrial complex enters our bed at night.
We sleep with levels of complicity so intense and various that our
dreams are of smothering and of drowning and of the military outside
our door and we find it hard to get up in the morning. (61–63)

In *Frames of War*, Judith Butler responds to U.S. foreign policy since 9/11 by
asking that we reconsider subjectivity in a way that 'implies living socially,
that is, the fact that one's life is always in some sense in the hands of the other.
It implies exposure both to those we know and to those we do not know'
(14). Spahr engages in a similar reframing by resisting 'the alone'—resisting
a sense of enclosure to accept complicity, resisting a narrow distribution of
the sensible to cultivate a globally scaled form of awareness. She advocates
a sensibility through which the discrete boundaries of bodies and things
dissolve and frames collapse.

   This wish for an all-inclusive distribution of the sensible is a wish for
the end of politics in the way Rancière defines it: with no noise waiting to
be turned into discernible speech, with nothing excluded awaiting entry
into the purview of perception, the post-political, democratic vision Spahr
cultivates is utopian. She figures a space in which everything is awarded
ontological presence, legitimacy, and equal footing—in which terrorism,
weapons of mass destruction, and preemptive war would be rendered use-
less. But, as Spahr acknowledges, the 'military industrial complex' persists
and waits 'outside our door'.

   Ultimately, Spahr's poetry cultivates a vision that self-consciously admits
to its own limitations. Rancière describes writing that tries to prefigure the
future and write new life into being as inherently thwarted by the fact that
it can only draw from the world available at the time of its composition.
Instead of envisioning new forms of life out of nothing, writing is 'a powerful
machine for self-interpretation and for the re-poetization of life, capable
of converting all the rubbish of ordinary life into poetic bodies and signs
of history' (*Literature* 29). The notion of a 'new body that sings the hymn
of the new world is destined to remain a utopia, at once necessary and
unrealizable, by means of which the regime of literary writing projects itself
beyond itself' (*Literature* 29). Instead of forging the new, the writer can only
really convert what is unpopular and excluded into the distribution of the
sensible. Boundaries are not collapsed but shifted.

Spahr pursues what is 'necessary but unrealizable', not merely in terms of what her poetry can achieve but also, I would argue, by choosing to be a poet herself. Successful and recognized as she is, she devotes her energies to a relatively unpopular mode of cultural production. Her efforts go into words that will shift thought and experience within an intimate circle. As she writes of her apartment, framed by others on all sides, social experience is ultimately one of compartmentalization, not fusion. The military industrial complex waiting outside her door blocks the extension of social engagement that she is able to cultivate domestically and creatively. She engages in a small form of politics in the sense that the message of her poetry is limited by the market of readers for which contemporary poetry is packaged and marketed. The impetus for writing is thus not revolutionary but a modest contribution to latent and untapped realms of perception, to honing and preparing the senses for new configurations of reality not yet fully imaginable. Spahr produces an inherently unpopular type of text yet still bothers to bring it into existence, and thus she upholds the conviction that even the smallest contributions to the distribution of the sensible are worth our while.

IV.   Conclusion: Framing Counter-discourse

I have covered a range of different genres of text. Yet, from Mayer's laying out of facts to Franzen's depiction of mundane subjects to Spahr's verses about complicity and connectedness, all these texts perform politics, or at least attempt to add to the way we sense and perceive the social and political contexts they address. This kind of politics is about illuminating parts that have no part (to paraphrase Rancière). It is about giving the unpopular the option to become popular and to 'introduce lines of fracture' (Rancière, *Aesthetics* 39) into arrangements of perception. A discourse counter to those disseminated by top policymakers and the mainstream media takes shape, is circulated and documented, via such publications.

Instead of simply focusing on how the case studies presented here function in counter-discursive manners, however, my aim has been to understand the fate of counter-discursive publications within the logic of the publishing market. Mayer's investigative journalism is packaged as a thrilling experience as much as it comprises a document of potentially serious political consequence. Franzen's literary fiction seeks to honestly portray American society and tap into a truthfulness of experience that pandering to a market arguably taints; yet, his novels are hyped more than those of almost any other contemporary U.S.-American novelist today. Spahr's

poetry funnels dissenting expression into an intimate sphere, making her global vision knowingly utopian and inevitably limited. All of these cases have exposed a tension between the degrees of popularity (the purposeful setting out to gain favor and market viability) and unpopularity (expression free of targeted appeal) that such texts symbolize. I have thus explored how these publications embody tensions surrounding (un)popularity. This essay is meant as an impulse for further inquiries in such a direction—into reading critical texts not simply for their messages but also for how such messages are framed for the market, and what this does to the channeling and fate of dissent.

Works Cited

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke UP, 2011. Print.

Bewes, Timothy. 'What is 'Philosophical Honesty' in Postmodern Literature?' *New Literary History* 31.3 (2000): 421–35. Print.

Dean, Jodi. *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*. Durham: Duke UP, 2009. Print.

Franzen, Jonathan. *Freedom*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010. Print.

—. 'Why Bother?' *How To Be Alone*. London: Harper Collins, 2002. Print.

—. *The Corrections*. New York: Picador, 2001. Print.

Kachka, Boris. 'Corrections: The Short and Difficult Marriage of Jonathan Franzen and Oprah Winfrey.' *The Slate Book Review*. The Slate Group, 5 August 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Mayer, Jane. *The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned into a War on American Ideals*. 2nd ed. New York: Anchor Books, 2009. Print.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Literature*. Trans. Julie Rose. Cambridge: Polity, 2011. Print.

—. *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Trans. Gabriel Rockhill. London: Continuum, 2004. Print.

Rockhill, Gabriel. 'Translator's Introduction: Jacques Rancière's Politics of Perception.' Rancière, *Aesthetics* 12–19. Print.

Sherman, Gabriel. *The Loudest Voice in the Room: How the Brilliant, Bombastic Roger Ailes Built Fox News—and Divided a Country*. New York: Random House, 2014. Print.

Spahr, Julianna. *thisconnectionofeveryonewithlungs*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2005. Print.

24. Prod. Joel Surnow and Robert Cochram. Perf. Kiefer Sutherland. 20th Century Fox Television, 6 Nov. 2001–24 May 2010. Television.

Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983. Print.

Secrets, Lies and *The Real Housewives*

The Death of an (Un)Popular Genre

Dan Udy

'I'm from this town, I know what's real and what's fake.'
—Kyle Richards, *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*, season 4 opening credits

Through the course of this compendium, my fellow contributors and I aim to work through what it is that makes up 'unpopular culture'. This is no easy task, and if any conclusion is to be drawn it is that there is, quite simply, no single definition. Where does one draw the limit on 'culture'? Are we speaking of productions, people, or practices? And what do we mean by 'popular'? To identify these ambiguities hardly breaks new critical ground, yet to consider them in light of the *un*popular is to venture into relatively uncharted territory. Our rubric brings together two terms that are multivalent and broad in scope, and this essay does not intend to sketch out all its possible manifestations or provide a unifying answer to the questions raised above. What this collection instead aims to do is break down unpopular culture into its constituent parts. When viewed as a whole, maybe our examples will provide a more coherent image of the myriad directions these cultural forms can spread. Before moving forward, though, some refinements are needed, and by re-distributing 'unpopular' into a set of sub-categories the theoretical grounding for what is to follow may become clearer. These adjustments are made by way of punctuation, an academic technique that, according to an old professor of mine, 'was fashionable about ten years ago'. Amusingly fitting, then, for use here.

Underground music, the Westboro Baptist Church (WBC) and Justin Bieber could all be described as 'unpopular', but the disparities between them show that with each use of the term we mean subtly different things. For example, fans of bands with a strong presence on Pitchfork, but not the Billboard Hot 100, position themselves outside the general public. Audiences are small in size, but are united in a shared appreciation for a genre. They are, to use the Latin root, not of the 'populus'. Denunciation of the WBC is shared by politicians and ordinary individuals across the globe, and although these two examples may seem radically different, they do, in fact, share a common trait. They incite homogenous audience behaviors, both

taking different interpretations of 'popular' (audience size and positive appreciation) and inverting them completely. An essay could be devoted to unpacking distinctions and relations between the two, but I merely claim that 'unpopular' is in these cases appropriate. Other cultural figures and productions, though, require a reconstruction of the term to reflect the complex behavior of those who interact with them.

The un/popular, here exemplified by Justin Bieber, splits its audiences into two opposing factions where ardent fans clash with critics and wider audiences. A slash literalizes this process through its double meaning, signifying not only a punctuation mark but also an act of violent division. Tensions between fans and critics are often played out across online social networks and blogs, and it is through such confrontations that the dialectic of un/popularity is maintained. In negotiating this virtual space fans also sometimes inhabit both sides of the binary division: self-fashioned tribal groups (Lady Gaga's 'Little Monsters', Justin Bieber's 'Beliebers', One Direction's 'Directioners', etc.) engage in hostile exchanges, defending their chosen idols while viciously attacking others.

A second reconstruction of 'unpopular' further muddles the coherence of a viewing demographic. The (un)popular's audience is not homogenous, but nor is it singularly defined by internal conflict. While the un/popular fosters a semantic antagonism between its composite parts, the (un)popular's inverted popularity is subjugated through a bracketing. It is what audiences 'hate to love' instead of 'love to hate', and although the boundaries between these separate permutations of unpopularity are by no means rigid, objects of (un)popularity are often subject to a more light-hearted approach. Audiences that embrace these productions simultaneously reject them, or are aware that they *should* reject them, and this process establishes the (un)popular as a close cousin of camp (it is no coincidence that there is significant overlap between examples of the two). Such behavior is, of course, by no means unanimous across all individuals who engage with these cultural forms; for every media text declared 'trashy' or 'tasteless' there will be those who genuinely invest in it, lacking the cultural capital that tells them they should, apparently, know better. However, when a substantial proportion of an audience decry the music they repeatedly listen to or the television show they can't bear to miss, an (un)popular category of forms—the guilty pleasure—is born.

When preparing to deliver an early form of this essay, mention of its topic was often met with a laugh or smirk. There was an amusing incongruence to a conference paper on a lowbrow Reality TV show. Potentially subversive and definitely comic, discussing *The Real Housewives* would be

an unpopular gesture in most academic circles, and even when presented at a conference titled *Unpopular Culture* it did not fail to elicit the occasional giggle. To conduct scholarly work on a brazenly vapid television series was funny because, quite simply, it felt like breaking the rules. Despite the decades that have passed since cultural studies formed a discipline in its own right, the notion that scholarship must be 'serious' if one wants to get an academic job has somehow managed to persist. All of us in that room were—not for the first time that weekend—deviating from this apparent norm, and (un)popular, in this particular context, came to signify more than 'guilty pleasure': it is the not-serious, the playful, the improper and the out-of-place.

The Real Housewives of Orange County was developed by Scott Dunlop in 2004, and, after being bought by the American network Bravo, premiered on 21 March 2006. It was the third in a sequence of television programs focusing upon the affluent residents of Orange County, California, beginning with teen drama series *The O.C.* (Fox, 2003-2007) followed by *Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County* (MTV, 2004–2006), replacing the former's fictional characters with real-life group of adolescents. The figure of the Orange County housewife—surgically enhanced, permanently medicated and devoted to a full-time schedule of social engagements—featured as a peripheral element to both, and was mythologized as a distinctly local phenomenon. Further influenced by the recent success of *Desperate Housewives* (ABC, 2004–2012), the show capitalized upon the popularity of affluent female subjects by following a group of women living behind the gates of Coto de Caza, a private residential community. In the years since its premiere the franchise has reached unprecedented levels of success, with a rumored value in excess of half a billion dollars and a peak rating of 3.1 million viewers over *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* season five. At the time of writing, six more U.S. editions have aired (set in New York City, Atlanta, New Jersey, Washington D.C., Beverly Hills and Miami) alongside seven spin-offs, and it is the first docusoap to franchise overseas with international editions in Greece, France, Canada and Australia. Its (un)popularity is evidenced through an all-pervasive cultural reach: a 2012 *Hollywood Reporter* cover story declared the franchise to be 'the guiltiest pleasure on television' (Bruce), and it even earned a humorous acknowledgment in a speech by President Obama the same year. In a recent interview, Dunlop declared that '[y]ou can love the show, you can hate the show but you really can't ignore it' (qtd. in Day 16).

After undergoing refinements through its early seasons, each edition of *The Real Housewives* now follows a relatively standardized format. Cast

members are documented as they navigate the trials and tribulations of female friendship, formed in part by pre-existing bonds but also through the show's artificial augmentation of social groups. Narratives unfold amongst patterns of relentless consumption: exotic holidays, plastic surgery, extravagant parties and luxury shopping trips form the rotating background against which the drama of each season takes place. Fly-on-the-wall documentary footage forms the bulk of each episode, interspersed with video confessionals that, although filmed retrospectively, deny their temporality through a present-tense narration of each woman's thoughts and feelings. Polished aesthetics characterize these segments: a green-screen is replaced with images of opulent domestic interiors, coupled with soft lighting, expensive dresses and heavy make-up. At the closing credits for each episode a cast member's voice-over directs viewers to Bravo's website, where official blogs by each of the housewives are posted to offer further thoughts on the footage and enable additional interaction with their fans. At the end of each season the cast are brought together by Bravo vice president Andy Cohen for a reunion episode (or episodes, sometimes split into multiple parts), in which protagonists are shown footage from the past season and asked for their thoughts on the events that transpired.

Similar to unpopular culture, the category of 'docusoap' is marked by ontological incoherence. Its trajectory is difficult to precisely chart, given the gradual process of hybridization through which it occurred and the historical analysis that grouped programs into new generic clusters. PBS's *An American Family* (1973) is often identified as the genre's earliest and most prominent example, in which a documentary used the narrative structure of soap opera to chronicle the lives of the Loud family from Santa Barbara, California. Cameras captured the unexpected dissolution of the domestic unit when Pat Loud asked her husband Bill for a divorce, and also followed their eldest son Lance move to New York City and immerse himself in the downtown queer arts scene. This identification as a docusoap, though, is a retrospective one, and the use of the term in relation to contemporary media did not occur until two decades later. Although the focus of this essay is restricted to American visual culture, the simultaneous emergence of the docusoap on both sides of the Atlantic can yield some useful context; Janet Jones's survey of British journalism shows the term entering our lexicon most prominently in 1998 (cf. 76), so it would be accurate to assume the genre emerged a few years prior.

Experiments in format between the realms of factual and fictional programming produced a range of new generic types, in which dramas such as *E.R.* and *NYPD Blue* adopted the visual grammar of the documentary,

while MTV's *The Real World* used documentary footage and confessional interviews to narrativize the lives of a group of strangers picked to live together. This particular mode of production quickly proved unpopular with critics, who bemoaned the undermining of documentary's founding principles in favor of mass entertainment, and expressed frustration with the quick proliferation of cheaply-produced programming and its cast of interchangeable, everyday people. The visual format employed by *The Real World* has since developed into the most culturally prolific form of docusoap today, to the extent that it has become synonymous with Reality television—in fact, a sprawling array of diverse media—in the public imagination. Now continuing into its third decade on the air, the show's structure has remained largely unchanged and is reflected in a huge number of popular programs across a global array of broadcasting networks. *The Real Housewives* displays many hallmarks of internationally successful docusoaps such as *Jersey Shore* and *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*: it combines fly-on-the-wall footage with direct-to-camera interviews, narrativizing its content through soap opera-esque edits and dramatic music.

A continuity of cast members between seasons charts their development from 'normal' women to public figures, and in doing so the show produces a self-reflexive documentation of the perks and pitfalls of Reality TV fame. As their public profile increases, the women adapt their behavior and appearance accordingly—original Orange County Housewife Lauri Peterson describes the cast of season one as 'virgin housewives' who quickly substituted 'no make-up and sweatpants' for more glamorous fare once they witnessed themselves on screen ('100th Episode Special'). Alongside the manifest pressures of the film crew's presence, the cameras of the paparazzi eventually come to exert their influence. After encountering their mediated representations the women react to their appearance on screen and in print, and as viewers we witness the trajectory of this peculiar phenomenon. By allowing the process of celebrification to feature within its tightly-edited narratives *The Real Housewives* maintains a precarious link between Reality and reality that carves its own space within a crowded genre whilst simultaneously undermining its numerous, and necessary, fictions.[1]

Within the franchise, degrees of authenticity are modelled according to the multiple footage types used, forming a Chinese box structure. Each segment purports itself to be the location of authentic thoughts and feelings, yet as these move outwards cast members reflexively analyze themselves and others to reveal to their audience their 'real' opinions. Confessionals reflect upon the core documentary footage, official blogs analyze episodes as a whole and final reunions examine the contents of all three, during

which editing techniques, on-screen personas and off-camera events are all discussed. As seasons progress and the housewives' celebrity status develops, digital tabloid media emerge as a powerful force which reformulates this structure from both its epicenter and periphery. Interactions between storylines and the internet and tabloid press begin to occur, disrupting its episodic narrative by the immediacy of gossip blog and social media posts that reveal to Bravo's audience the chasm between transmission dates and the actual time of production. Stories relating to the cast, particularly 'behind-the-scenes' gossip, are delivered with up-to-the-minute speed by outlets such as *TMZ* and *Radar Online*, providing information on 'real-life' drama beyond the confines of the show and the extent to which scenes are contrived by Bravo. When these become embroiled within the show's storylines, a new hybrid R/reality is produced; as an active and temporal construct, it is maintained by and dependent upon the tensions between real life and its augmentation.

This symbiosis produces a genre in perpetual flux. Tied as it is to the immediacy and frenetic turnover of the tabloid media, docusoap programming presents difficulties for scholarly work. The categorical 'presentness' of the viewing experience makes retrospective viewing surreal and incomplete, and this takes an admittedly comic turn with the unrelenting pace of surgical upkeep (watching old seasons appears to make breasts deflate and noses grow). Translating such temporalities into the permanence of the written word, then, risks fast becoming irrelevant, if not incorrect. In the short period between this essay's original presentation and the time of writing, new seasons of the franchise have come and gone, and more will inevitably follow. A strategy for the most accurate representation of such media texts is to engage with very recent and current programming, yet the original examples used are now, of course, already comparatively dated. For now, though, this essay's main proposals continue to be demonstrated, and I will use my original examples alongside some more recent case studies. My focus will be restricted to two particular instalments of the franchise which have exemplified the tumultuous relationship between Reality and reality, and its mediation through tabloid gossip. The intermedial nature of *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* (2009–present) and *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* (2010–present) is demonstrated through cast members' engagement with stories online and in print, where articles published by *TMZ*, *Radar Online*, *People* magazine and *US Weekly* become anchor points between which plot lines are drawn and from which dramatic confrontations are frequently provoked. This phenomenon is hardly limited to these two instalments, but for the sake of coherence within this survey it is necessary to refine my scope.

With its setting in the affluent Los Angeles suburb, *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* is situated in the epicenter of the tabloid and entertainment industries, an area housing major TV and film studios as well as the headquarters of numerous print and digital media outlets. Its cast are embedded within a social circle that features many high-profile celebrities—current housewives Kim and Kyle Richards are aunts to Paris Hilton—and interactions between its cast and tabloid journalists or paparazzi occur with a higher frequency than other installments of the franchise. Street photographers are evident as a peripheral element of everyday life for the city's wealthy residents, concentrated within particular areas where the Housewives live and socialize. The relative normalization of tabloid encounters amongst the residents of Beverly Hills eases their transition into public figures, initiating conflicts and developing narratives with which audiences are able to directly engage. One particular confrontation exemplifies the feedback loop between online gossip and events within the show, and is constructed through a web of dialogic exchange between cast members and journalists. Although it is by no means the only instance of such conflict, it succinctly demonstrates the complexities of this process.

In the reunion episode for season two, cast members Lisa Vanderpump and Adrienne Maloof trade accusations regarding the selling of stories. When Vanderpump alleges that Maloof's chef leaked information to the tabloids, the latter responds by claiming that Vanderpump had sold articles to *Radar Online* for the amount of $25,000. For viewers wanting to decipher the truth to these contradictory claims, the website itself posted articles covering its inclusion in the episode:

> The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills all have one thing in common—they love RadarOnline.com! In the reunion episode that aired Monday night, Radar was the center of attention, because we apparently really get under their skin. [...]

> So was Adrienne right? Did RadarOnline.com pay Lisa $25,000? Find the answer on twitter at @IMPerel.
> ('Real Housewives Fight At Reunion—Over Radar!')

Through directing readers to the page of Twitter user IMPerel—a.k.a. David Perel, the company's Executive Vice President—the normally mediated exchange between journalists and the cast is transformed into direct communication. Indeed, the use of Twitter by the Housewives serves a key role in

the expansion of the show's narrative to a real-time space, equalizing three forms of subject (cast, journalists and viewers) within the same interactive virtual domain, and allowing the possibility for viewers to enter into conversation. In a follow-up story on the website, quotes are taken from Perel's Twitter conversations with Vanderpump and Maloof and it transpires the argument was apparently a misunderstanding.

> After talking to both ladies, Perel figured out who had communicated the false information to Adrienne and the air was cleared.

> '@IMPerel Thank you for your support, I know what @TheRealCamilleG and I were told. Moving fwd in a positive direction! xoA' Adrienne tweeted on Tuesday to Perel.

> 'Thank u!! following you @IMPerel glad we can move on to more important things! Have a great day!! XoxoA'

> Lisa also tweeted in support: '@radar_online thank you for supporting me and not that bullsh*t…means a lot'.
> ('Lisa Vanderpump & Adrienne Maloof Feud Over Radar: All A Big Misunderstanding!')

Negotiations of authenticity and attempts to establish 'the truth' feature heavily throughout *The Real Housewives*, and are often the primary catalyst for its narratives. Considering the relative stability of their affluent lifestyles, the show's dramatic events must be constructed predominantly from the fabric of inter-personal relationships.[2] As public figures with lucrative personal brands, the cast are aware that reputation is tightly linked to financial gain; Bravo's viewers are, in essence, consumers, targets of subtle (and frequently unsubtle) product placement of the books, clothing and beauty products the Housewives endorse. Indeed, the inclusion of business ventures and products, alongside pay increases, has even been factored into contract deals for popular returning characters ('Exposed!'). Rose and Wood explicitly address this model of viewership in their article 'Paradox and the Consumption of Authenticity through Reality Television', and conclude that audiences 'increasingly value authenticity in a world where the mass production of artifacts causes them to question the plausibility of the value' (286). In a competitive effort to self-market along these lines, proclamations of 'realness' and authenticity abound as the women collectively try to determine who is, or is not, 'fake'. In this case, the context of Beverly Hills

provides a backdrop of normalized 'fakeness' against which the Housewives position themselves: alongside surgical enhancement, superficial personas are touted as a well-known stereotype of wealthy Angelenos, leading Yolanda Foster to ask Lisa Vanderpump in season 4 episode 17, 'Are you a Hollywood friend or a real friend?' ('Lines in the Sand').

These conflicts are magnified within reunion shows, in which a legalistic mise-en-scène evokes the theatrical arrangement of the courtroom. Host and Bravo executive Andy Cohen is flanked by the cast on opposing sofas and mediates in sometimes violent altercations. Damaging rumors are traced back to their source, and cast members exchange accusations of lying in an attempt to maintain and accumulate authenticity as a valuable form of social capital. Objects of 'proof' are used as evidence in their pre-meditated confrontations, in which photos, text messages and print-outs of e-mails are brought by the Housewives to make their case for truthfulness before the jury of their fellow cast and viewers at home. The literal value of authenticity in this case, as a determining factor in viewer popularity, could be perhaps conceived as an economic drive behind such conflicts, in which social capital stands in for its financial equivalent. Postmodern philosophical scholarship, however, cannot be entirely ignored in favor of a purely Marxist approach: this search for authenticity can be, and often is, formulated as a response to the postmodern condition itself. Instead, the clear financial motives behind establishing 'authenticity' could be seen to merely exacerbate the epistemological uncertainties felt by subjects of postmodern culture. That the differentiation between fact and fiction occurs both within and beyond the bounds of the camera's frame is testament to the prevalence of this cultural anxiety, and is demonstrated by efforts of fans to peel back façades of production. The timed, dated interactions between cast members and viewers through social media are used to re-chronologize the show, matching dates of tweets and sightings of the cast with events portrayed on screen. Through exposing the re-arrangement of events to form satisfying narratives, independent bloggers collude with tabloid media in their galvanization of cynical, suspicious viewers. If chronological adjustments can easily be de-coded, then what other elements of reality have been manipulated? Whilst edits can, with in-depth detective work, be unveiled, what about producer interventions, or performative elements that influence the raw footage?

The disorientating generic hybrid of the docusoap induces unsettling effects upon its audience, captured in Annette Hill's observation that 'viewers describe themselves as watching a bad dream, trying to work out what is real or not in the topsy-turvy world of reality entertainment' (89). Reality

television—as manifested in the docusoap—is, then, characteristically postmodern in its in-betweenness, and the viewing experience is theorized as such. Rose and Wood point to a 'postmodern paradox' (286) at the heart of this search for authenticity, whilst Janet Jones describes the process in a 2000 article title as 'The Postmodern Guessing Game'. Jones's essay is telling in its particular phrasing: the docusoap is not *a* postmodern guessing game, it is *the* guessing game. This is not to say that uncertainty is only inherent in encounters with the docusoap—far from it, in fact, as one could argue a similar response through the spectrum of postmodern cultural productions—but rather that the multiple anxieties brought to bear upon the viewing experience typify the concerns of our contemporary epoch.

Here, I follow the view that postmodernity is ongoing, and while this perspective is certainly open to debate (countless variations of 'post-postmodernism' have been proposed, but few–if any–have gained traction), general consensus points to its beginnings in the late 1970s. From this moment onwards, postmodernism's most transformative effects can be seen the field of subject-image relations. Coupled with a broader suspicion of grand narratives and a burgeoning discourse on the politics of representation, the photographic image was deconstructed along lines of race, class, and gender by both visual artists and critics. Documentary photography's claim to neutrality formed an easy target for this cultural interrogation, and the digital turn only heightened such suspicion when its claim to verisimilitude—indexicality—was removed. As a consequence, the drive to challenge documentary's 'truthfulness' is exacerbated when its already contestable forms are merged with the inherent fictions of entertainment. Audiences are prompted to work through its mesh of realities to distinguish its constituent parts, and the unique quality of *The Real Housewives* is the bleeding of this process through the screen. When this crisis is addressed within episodes of the show it reveals a unique degree of self-reflexivity, but also slowly begins to expose and unravel its inner workings.

Not only are anxiety-driven responses to *The Real Housewives* characteristic of docusoap programming, but the specific discourse of differentiation also forms the genre itself. Building upon the discourse model of cultural genre theory in which genres are maintained through locating a text in identifiable clusters, the interactive commentary on tabloid websites and social media can be seen to create, and perpetuate, the docusoap genre through the very nature of its investigations. In 'A Cultural Approach to Television Genre Theory', Jason Mittell proposes that 'a more satisfying macro-account of a genre's history' can be built 'from the bottom up, by collecting micro-instances of generic discourses in historically specific

moments and examining the resulting large-scale patterns and trajectories'
(10). Specific events within the Beverly Hills and New Jersey instalments
document confrontations between fact and fiction that hallmark *The Real
Housewives*' contributions to the docusoap genre. They pinpoint new R/
realities created by the show, yet also indicate a compulsive drive to self-
revelation threatening to wreak havoc upon the genre it inhabits. In such
instances, legal threats have prompted Bravo to remove large proportions
of footage, transforming the symbolic presence of the law (the reunion as
trial; the use of evidence or proof) into a literal one, and shifting its agency
from an internal negotiation to an external force. This shift occurs via
a complex middle ground in which cast members themselves invoke its
authoritative presence.

Efforts to maintain a distinction between Reality and reality are
frequently demonstrated by the Housewives, such as in Kyle Richards's
book *Life Is Not a Reality Show: Keeping it Real with the Housewife Who
Does It All*. When this occurs alongside a simultaneous drive towards
authenticity, though, the two come into a destructive collision, and this
is most acutely shown in a plot line starting from season 3 episode 6 of
The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills. When in a group conversation with
other cast members, Brandi Glanville expressed frustration with the 'lies' of
fellow Housewife Adrienne Maloof, and in her efforts to expose 'the truth'
revealed an apparently shocking piece of information. That this gesture
was controversial was only deducible from reaction shots, after lawyers
acting at Maloof's behest forced producers to cut the content from the
show. The ongoing conflict initiated by this revelation, however, provided
the central storyline for the season, and the audio of Glanville's allegation
was simply removed, leaving collateral information behind. The gaps in
audio prompted an online discourse of docu-/soap differentiation, which
attempted to re-insert Glanville's words into the *Housewives* narrative. Her
continual utterance of this void in the media commentary accompanying
the furor (when asked, she replied that she was banned from discussing it)
urged viewers to complete her forbidden declaration by searching, through
the usual online channels, for what exactly was removed. Tabloid gossip
outlets quickly revealed that the information Maloof had been so intent on
silencing was that she had used a surrogate for her youngest two children,
despite claiming that she had given birth naturally. After forcing Bravo
into extensive and costly re-edits she confirmed the rumor in an *US Weekly*
cover story, and subsequently refused to appear for the reunion show taping.
Maloof's handling of the allegation eventually resulted in her firing from
the show, with host Andy Cohen explaining in his opening monologue that

This season was hard on Adrienne, as you all know. A secret about her
family was revealed by Brandi. And from that moment on, Adrienne
refused to speak directly about it. We know that frustrated you in the
audience, and that frustrated all of us too. If you read the tabloids you
might have theories on what the secret is, but Adrienne won't be here to
tell her side of the story. Not only is she absent tonight, but she won't be
on the show next season. ('Reunion: Part One')

Her decision to abstain from the reunion was not followed by Paul Nassif,
Maloof's then ex-husband from whom she announced her separation in
the season finale. Choosing to appear through a pre-recorded interview,
he dismissed the accusation propagated by his ex-wife that Glanville was
responsible for the breakdown of their marriage, instead blaming the moment
when 'Reality became reality' as a catalyst for his divorce ('Reunion: Part Two').

Here, the show's construction of the Real forms a pattern of simultaneous
in-/exteriority. This transformation emerges again within case studies—Mit-
tel's 'historically specific moments'—that chart a broader unravelling of the
genre, where lawsuits from external individuals have been brought against
cast members, production companies and Bravo itself, causing fissures
within the precariously maintained docu-soap structure. These points of
rupture take the form of narrative voids which similarly led viewers to tabloid
websites in order to uncover the secrets of absent footage. Two examples from
seasons 4 and 5 of *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* differ in post-production
editing technique, ranging from a complete and seamless removal of foot-
age to explicit omissions that frame invisible content through remaining
shots. They both, however, share a degree of significance with regards to
the docusoap's disintegration: they expose the means through which drama
is orchestrated, and the contractual agreements used to maintain control
over the cast, their mediated representations and, by extension, reality itself.

Whilst filming during a holiday in the Dominican Republic for season 4,
internet rumors began to spread of a large-scale brawl at the bar of the Hard
Rock Resort in Punta Cana, which culminated in the detainment of cast
members by local police ('EXCLUSIVE'). In a 42-page complaint filed after
their return to the U.S., a vacationing family alleged that upon confronting
the cast when one of their party was sprayed with champagne

members of the cast and crew [...], without provocation, brutally and
savagely beat, kicked, punched, scratched, jumped on and smashed glass
on the heads of [the claimants] causing them to sustain severe pain and
suffering and bodily injuries. ('EXCLUSIVE')

The filing against Bravo and production company Sirens Media also alleged that they

> encourage, promote and demand that the cast […] engage in verbal and physical conflict with one another and members of the public, creating a culture, climate and/or atmosphere of confrontation, hostility and violence in order to attract viewers. ('EXCLUSIVE')

Claimants' passports were apparently withheld until they signed a release of claims drafted by lawyers especially flown in by Sirens Media and Bravo to the Dominican Republic. They allege that they were under 'great duress, coercion and physical and emotional stress' and signed the release in order that they might return home quickly and receive appropriate medical care ('Manzo's take Punta Cana by Storm'). The case was subsequently settled out of court for an undisclosed amount, and footage of the Punta Cana altercation was removed in its entirety from the show before broadcast. Tabloid gossip here not only attempts to fill narrative voids and piece together reality, broken by the docu-soap into pieces of an incomplete puzzle; it exposes the presence of such voids altogether. Season 5's finale, by contrast, depicted a confrontation through momentary snippets of footage, in which a fight at the opening of a hair salon is represented through reaction shots of bystanders interspersed with fades to black ('Salon, Farewell'). The lawsuit that occurred as a result of the violence consisted of criminal charges filed by a peripheral cast member, John Karagiorgis, against cast members Jacqueline Laurita, Chris Laurita and Joe Gorga for assault, harassment and/or terroristic threats. In exchange for the dismissal of the criminal case in September 2013, Karagiorgis was granted a waiver of the show's contract clause, which hitherto prevented him from filing against the network itself.

At the time of writing, it is understood that he plans to press civil charges against all three cast members, Sirens Media, Bravo, NBC and security teams for planning the altercation, manipulating individuals with a known propensity for violence and not intervening after the fight had occurred. A copy of the contract signed by the claimants in both lawsuits was leaked to *Radar Online* in the same month, exposing through dense legal prose the degree to which docu-soap narratives may be fictionalized. In signing, subjects agree that:

> I understand that […] my actions and the actions of others participating in the Program may be embarrassing or of an otherwise unfavorable nature that may be factual or fictional. […] I further understand that

my appearance, depiction, and portrayal in and in connection with the
Program [...] may portray me in a false light. ('We Can Fictionalize The
Footage!')

Digital copies can, of course, be immaterially and endlessly circulated,
reproduced and quoted as above. The ontology of the contract, however, is
material in its essence: it is a paper document validated through signature(s),
and digital copies are merely inadequate signifiers, unable to translate
the physicality of their real-life referent. This signified, then, is a symbolic
object, an icon for the *Real* of the Housewives that balances, or attempts to
balance, the conflicting realities of 'docu' and 'soap'. As well as outlining
the control producers have over cast and their representations, it details
the manner in which individuals may become the subject of tabloid gossip
('defamatory' or 'embarrassing' information may emerge 'in connection
with the Program'). The waiving of its terms in a court of law demonstrates
the undoing of the docu-soap within a system predicated upon discern-
ing absolute truth, and whilst the Karagiorgis case presents implications
specifically for *The Real Housewives*, its resonation can be found in legal
troubles concerning other high-profile programs.

Concurrent lawsuits have led to similar self-exposures whilst under oath,
most notably in the case of *Keeping Up With The Kardashians*. In the March
2013 divorce trial between Kris Humphries and Kim Kardashian, the former
sought an annulment on the alleged grounds that he was duped into a mar-
riage conducted purely for television ratings, and after being subpoenaed to
appear in court, a producer on the show testified that specific scenes had
been 'scripted, re-shot or edited' to alter the appearance of their marital
breakdown ('Producer Testifies Under Oath'). Court documents leaked in
March 2014 detail a subsequent lawsuit brought by Kardashian and her
then fiancé Kanye West against Chad Hurley, an uninvited guest at West's
lavish proposal who released amateur footage of the event online before
its airing on the show. In her written statement, Kardashian's mother and
manager Kris Jenner declared that she 'played a major role in organizing
and running the event', despite its portrayal on the show as solely arranged
by West ('Monster-In-Law!').

The case studies used in this essay form, I hope, a trajectory of the
docu-soap as shown through *The Real Housewives*, from the genre-defining
negotiation of truth to the ultimate conclusion of this process through
the legal system. One current case marks the most significant unravel-
ling of the franchise yet, not only implying a resolution of truth by virtue
of its legal nature, but involving charges that are themselves concerned

with the fraudulence of cast members' affluent lifestyles. When *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* stars Teresa and Joe Guidice were charged in July 2013 on a 39-count indictment of financial fraud, their legitimacy as cast members—predicated upon displays of wealth and extravagance—was quickly undermined. The pair were charged with conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud, bank fraud, lying on loan applications, bankruptcy fraud and failure to file tax returns. After initially pleading not guilty, the couple brokered a plea bargain in March 2014 admitting to a handful of charges in exchange for reduced jail time, and at the time of writing are currently awaiting sentencing.[3] In an early stage of the proceedings, Bravo were subpoenaed to submit hundreds of hours of unedited footage, and it is through using the show itself as evidence in determining authenticity—or a lack thereof—that the metaphysical negotiation embarked upon by cast and audience is now transferred into the courts. The catastrophic impact of the Guidice case upon *The Real Housewives* is manifest in subtle but significant changes, and that such transformations work along and through the limitations of genre is evidence of the docu-soap's gradual disintegration. In the final episode of *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* season 5, the cut to a montage of news coverage of the Giudice trial—covering events between the end of shooting and the upcoming reunion—indicates a process of breakdown, in which generic integrity is broken though appropriation of alien media forms.[4] Subsequently, a disruption of layered temporalities occurred in *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* season 4, itself a season revolving primarily around the drama caused by tabloid 'lies'. At the end of the final episode, a brief preview of the reunion show revealed the artifice of this most 'authentic' element of the franchise, where backstage and behind-the-scenes footage documented the women arriving at a studio lot, sitting in hair and make-up and preparing for the upcoming conflicts during taping ('Reunion: Part One'). This breaking open of the *Housewives* structure moves another degree closer to the documentary real, but in doing so continues to lay bare its meticulous construction. It reveals the uneasy co-existence of documentary and soap, in which the fashioning of entertainment from the 'authentic' proves to be an endless cycle of self-sabotage. Where, then, does the trajectory of this phenomenon point? Such outcomes can only be hypothesized, and we must look towards our TV screens to watch the answers unfold. What is apparent, though, is that we may just be witnessing the death of an (un)popular genre.

Notes

1.   Some clarification might be necessary to avoid confusion: when referencing 'Reality' or the 'Real', I do not intend to invoke any Lacanian terms. I use a capitalization to distinguish between mediated reality and actual lived experience.
2.   With the exception of occasional developments such as alcoholism, death and divorce, which are evidently not influenced by producers.
3.   As of 2 October 2014 Teresa and Joe Giudice received prison sentences of 15 months and 41 months respectively.
4.   This process of breakdown later accelerated through the course of season 6, in which the Giudice's legal troubles formed a substantial element of the core documentary footage. Cast members are shown watching television coverage of the couple's court appearances, and interspersed sections of news footage were accompanied with dates.

Works Cited

'100th Episode Special.' *The Real Housewives of Orange County*. Bravo. Season 8 Episode 13. 24 June 2013. Television.

'Are You My Friend?' *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*. Bravo. Season 4 Episode 19. 10 Mar. 2013.

Bruce, Leslie. '„Real Housewives": The Guiltiest Pleasure on Television.' *The Hollywood Reporter* 1 April 2012. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Day, Elizabeth. 'Scott Dunlop: "You can hate The Real Housewives but you can't ignore it."' *The Observer* 16 Feb. 2014: 16. Print.

'EXCLUSIVE: Joe Giudice and NJ Housewives Cast Members Detained By Police Overseas After Bar Fight.' *Radar Online*. American Media. 16 Mar. 2011. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Hill, Annette. *Restyling Factual TV: Audiences and News, Documentary and Reality Genres*. London & New York: Routledge. 2007. Print.

Jones, Janet. 'The Postmodern Guessing Game.' *Journal of Media Practice* 1.2 (2000): 75–84. Print.

'Lines in the Sand.' *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*. Season 4 Episode 17. Bravo. 24 Feb. 2014. Television.

'Lisa Vanderpump & Adrienne Maloof Feud Over Radar: All A Big Misunderstanding!' *Radar Online*. American Media. 1 Feb. 2012. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

'Manzo's take Punta Cana by Storm: Legal Documents Reveal.' *Faux Reality Entertainment*. 8 Oct. 2012. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Mittell, Jason. 'A Cultural Approach to Television Genre Theory.' *Cinema Journal* 40.3 (2001): 3–24. Print.

'Monster-In-Law! Kris Jenner Confesses SHE Planned Kanye West's Proposal To Kim Kardashian in Shocking New Court Documents.' *Radar Online*. 11 Mar. 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

'Producer Testifies Under Oath: Kim Kardashian Faked Scenes to Make Kris Humphries Look Bad!' *Radar Online*. 13 Mar. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

'Real Housewives Fight At Reunion—Over Radar!' *Radar Online*. American Media. 31 Jan. 2012. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

'Reunion: Part One.' *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*. Season 3 Episode 20. Bravo. 25 Mar. 2013. Television.

'Reunion: Part One.' *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*. Season 4 Episode 20. Bravo. 17 Mar. 2014. Television.

'Reunion: Part Two.' *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*. Season 3 Episode 21. Bravo. 1 Apr. 2013. Television.

Richards, Kyle. *Life Is Not a Reality Show: Keeping It Real with the Housewife Who Does it All*. San Francisco: HarperOne. 2011. Print.

Rose, Randall I., and Stacy I. Wood. 'Paradox and the Consumption of Authenticity through Reality Television.' *The Journal of Consumer Research* 32.2 (2005): 284–96. Print.

'Salon, Farewell.' *The Real Housewives of New Jersey*. Season 5 Episode 18. Bravo. 29 Sep. 2013. Television.

'She's Gone Too Far.' *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*. Season 3 Episode 6. Bravo. 10 Dec. 2012. Television.

'"We Can Fictionalize The Footage!": Secret Contract Exposes How "Reality" TV Shows Are REALLY Made.' *Radar Online*. 23 Sep. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Karaoke Americanism Gangnam Style

K-pop, Wonder Girls, and the Asian Unpopular

Jeroen de Kloet and Jaap Kooijman

The year: Unknown. The project W.G. is deemed a success as human genetics are combined with robotic enhancements. Yubin. Yennie. Sohee. Lim. Sum. Bionic women given the title of Wonder Girls. They are perfectly designed for complete domination. The future is now.
— Wonder Girls featuring Akon, 'Like Money' (2012)

Motown meets K-pop. A promotional photograph of the 2012 TNT *Christmas in Washington* television special features the show's two headliners Diana Ross and PSY, both dressed in campy sequined outfits and smiling broadly into the camera. The two stars performed in front of America's First Family, Barack and Michelle Obama with their two daughters, the latter two visibly most enjoying PSY's performance of 'Christmas Gangnam Style'. As lead singer of the Supremes in the 1960s and solo superstar in the 1970s and early 1980s, Diana Ross signifies the traditional dominance of America in global pop culture, currently most explicitly embodied by her 'successor' Beyoncé (cf. Cashmore); PSY, in contrast, articulates the appropriation of American pop culture, simultaneously reinforcing and challenging America's hegemonic presence, albeit for a short moment. That PSY is a one-hit wonder novelty act is significant, as it highlights the difficulty for non-Western pop acts to get accepted as 'real' pop music in the Western world.

In global commercial pop culture, Anglo-American pop continues to be perceived as 'the original' to be emulated, a perspective that is reinforced by popular global television formats such as *Idol*, *X-Factor*, and *The Voice*. Even though these formats originated outside of the US, they tend to present Anglo-American pop music as the standard to which non-Anglo-American pop music is compared (cf. Bochanty-Aguero; Kooijman). When non-Western pop acts aim to achieve worldwide stardom, they face the challenge of overcoming the comparison to their Anglo-American counterparts, particularly from a Western perspective. For example, in their discussions of the attempt of South Korean pop star Rain (*Bi*) and his producer Jin-Young Park (*Pak Chin-Jŏng*, also known as JYP) to become popular in the United States, both Hyunjoon Shin and Eun-Young Jung cite

the negative review of Rain's sold-out Madison Square Garden concerts in *The New York Times* of 4 February 2006. In the review, Jon Pareles dismisses Rain as 'sound[ing] like a nostalgia act' by emphasizing his 'unoriginality' in comparison to Anglo-American stars such as Michael Jackson, Justin Timberlake, George Michael, and Usher. Watching Rain perform is 'like watching old MTV videos dubbed into Korean', Pareles argues, concluding that 'by the time [Rain's producer] Mr. Park has figured out how to imitate the latest English-speaking hit, American pop will have jumped ahead of him'. What stands out in this (rather condescending) review is the notion that K-pop not only deliberately imitates the Anglo-American original but also is lagging behind. Tellingly, the review's title—'Korean Superstar Who Smiles and Says, "I'm Lonely"'—does not even identify Rain by name. In *The New Yorker*, John Seabrook uses the same argument of K-pop as imitative and lagging behind, arguing that K-pop acts like SHINee, f(x), TVXQ!, and Girls' Generation remind him of the 1980s music videos by Madonna, the 1980s New Jack Swing sound of Janet Jackson, and the girl group sound of the 1960s.

While these two white male American music critics explain the un-popularity of K-pop by arguing that K-pop is imitative and lagging behind, Youna Kim explains K-pop's (cult) popularity among European audiences by suggesting that Western fans perceive K-pop as 'a futuristic pastiche that sounds like a utopian blending of all contemporary musical genres' (17). Whether considered unpopular or popular, 'lagging behind' or 'futuristic', K-pop does not differ from Anglo-American pop in its continual referencing and recycling of earlier pop styles, a practice that Simon Reynolds has called 'retromania'. The only difference thus seems to be that Western music critics consider such a practice as 'lagging behind' when the referencing is done by a non-Anglo-American or non-Western pop act. Although K-pop is an exceptionally popular phenomenon, arguably the most popular part of the Korean Wave (cf. Choi and Maliangkay), the limited appeal of specific K-pop acts for Western audiences, and what we expect to be the one-hit global appeal of PSY, point at the unpopularity of pop-cultural forms from outside the West. Particularly those forms—sounds and im-ages—that cannot be categorized as 'exotic' or 'world music' tend to be dismissed by Western critics as imitative and lagging behind to explain their unpopularity.

In this chapter, we will first analyze why K-pop remains globally unpopu-lar and explain why we consider the notion of karaoke Americanism produc-tive to help understand global cultural flows and disjunctures. We will then examine Wonder Girls—a pop act that is, like Rain, 'manufactured' by

producer Jin-Young Park—as a form of karaoke Americanism, which helps to explain their local and regional popularity. While Wonder Girls, like many K-pop acts, have been very popular in South-Korea, China, and Japan, the group, similar to Rain, had only little success in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. The regional appropriation of Wonder Girls, for example by Wonder Gay in Thailand, attests to the political potential of karaoke Americanism. Yet, our final example of the song 'Like Money' by Wonder Girls—with which we opened this chapter—illustrates the continuous power of the United States when it comes to the production of popular culture, rendering forms that are produced outside the West as perpetually unpopular. In the final part, we pan away from such a gloomy conclusion by hinting at recent developments in terms of geopolitics, fragmentation, and the digitization of culture that may help to change this global geo-cultural predicament.

K-pop as Karaoke Americanism

Since the late 1990s, the South Korean state has strongly supported its creative industries, resulting in what has been termed 'the Korean Wave' (*Hallyu*). Initially propelled by popular television drama, the Korean Wave soon included pop music, so-called K-pop (cf. Chua and Iwabuchi; Kim). The Korean Wave challenged the hegemony of Japanese pop culture in the region and constituted an important cultural force, termed soft power by Nye that lasts till today (cf. Nye and Kim). In this way, popular culture rather than neo-Confucianism connects cultures in East and South-East Asia (cf, Chua), of which the Korean Wave serves as a prime example. The dialectics between cultural proximity (a shared sense of 'Asianness') and cultural difference—as reflected, for example, in the different seasons (which, for example, do not exist in Singapore) or the Korean language— help to explain the regional appeal of Korean pop culture. Yet, apart from cultural factors, governmental and corporate support remains crucial to the success of the Korean Wave. As Doobo Shim has pointed out, the state's creative policies were initially developed to protect the cultural industries against 'threats of foreign cultural domination' (30). In terms of political economy, a localist and protective rationale underpinned the Korean Wave. That this would lead to regional success beyond national borders was unintended and took the Korean government by surprise. As Shim argues, 'the vitality of East Asian popular culture is growing', with Japan, Thailand, and South Korea inspiring each other instead

of 'refer[ing] to the West for melodramatic imagination as well as for modernization' (31).

For many K-pop acts, however, Anglo-American pop culture continues to function as one of its main inspirations. Moreover, although Asia remains the prime market for K-pop, becoming popular among Western audiences and conquering the Western market is an aim—and more and more a possibility—for many K-pop acts (cf. Glynn and Kim 2). As Eun-Young Jung has pointed out, 'this drive for "commercial success" in the West, and particularly in the US, is driven not purely by financial aspirations, but by the postcolonial desire for recognition and acceptance by the nation at the absolute peak among world entertainment economies' (109). In other words, as Anglo-American pop culture continues to be perceived as 'the original', being popular in the West not only facilitates economic success but additionally signifies the validation that K-pop is 'real' pop music.

The global success of PSY clearly outperformed all previous Korean pop acts, including Rain, G-Dragon, and Wonder Girls. His celebrity status owes a great deal to the 'riding an invisible horse' dance style that was performed in the humorous video for the song. One may wonder whether the humor of PSY is inclusive (laughing *with* him) or exclusive (laughing *at* him), although many scholars have argued for the latter, observing in the music video and his image a gesturing towards orientalist stereotypes of Asian men as being funny, unattractive, and nerdy (cf. Glynn and Kim 3). Such critique underlines our point that cultural counterflows remain enmeshed in global cultural hierarchies. In their conclusion, Glynn and Kim observe that, within Britain, PSY 'failed as an entrée to Korean culture because it was quarantined as a meme and/or a novelty record' (13). Furthermore, the song's initial criticism of the Gangnam lifestyle (Gangnam is a posh neighborhood in Seoul) got completely lost in translation, and instead was repackaged as a mere profitable celebration of the Gangnam lifestyle.

Hyunjoon Shih's analysis of the globalizing aspiration of K-pop, in his analysis of Rain, helps to further question the global appeal of K-pop. In his article, Shih wonders: 'What happens, and what will happen, when popular culture from the non-center (periphery) tries to intrude into the "center"?' (508) He analyzes the Korean in-house system in which production, management, and all other functions for the making of a star are being integrated. Shih explains how, after the crisis of the record industry, Rain is typical of a new star persona, one that is not only a teenage idol and marketing artifact, 'the new type of star had to be seen as more "real" or

"authentic" in his or her own way' (511-12). One important site for Rain to construct his authenticity was his muscular body, reflective also of hard work, an important value in Asian pop culture (cf. Chow and de Kloet), in combination with his angelic face, a combination that has been hailed as a new Asian masculinity (cf. Sun).

This development of an Asian masculinity, one that is far more sexy than that of PSY, underlines the importance of sex and gender in the making of a star. Given a generally more prudent attitude towards sexuality in Asia, this makes Shih observe that for K-pop stars, 'their images were more "American (Western)" and less "Asian (Korean)"', to such an extent that 'the border-crossing appeal of Rain at the regional level came from his "Asian" element, which is at best secondary' (Shih 514). When going global, however, the importance of Asianness returned with a vengeance. In the West, Rain will be perceived an artist with an Asian background, to be measured against the hegemonic standards of global (read Western) pop: 'Asianness will only work if the artist does not care that his or her music is to be pigeonholed as only "world music" searching for a niche market. But that is another story, which is different from the world of pop music' (Shih 516). Here, we would like to add that, indeed, Rain will be measured against the standards of global pop, but this measurement is bound to be filled with prejudice as artists from the non-West are de facto perceived to lag behind. As Jeroen de Kloet explains elsewhere: 'Creativities that emerge outside the "West", constantly carry the burden of geopolitical representation as authenticating proof. Whereas "the West" can claim to make universal rock music, in China, this has to be *Chinese* rock music. Idem ditto for contemporary art, literature or cinema' (7). The same argument can be made about K-pop.

The erasure of Koreanness in K-pop acts like Rain and Wonder Girls can be seen as clear examples of 'odorless culture', using the concept by Koichi Iwabuchi. Their alleged lack of cultural characteristics aims to facilitate a smooth travel across national and cultural boundaries. In a similar vein, Kim argues that K-pop travels well globally, 'precisely because there is not very much Korean in K-pop that it can become such an easy sell to consumers abroad' (17). However, the lack of Koreanness in K-pop may also feed the Western perspective of K-pop as a blank imitation, lagging behind and lacking any local, exotic flavor. K-pop will, especially at a global level, continue to be haunted by Koreanness, a haunting that is inevitable given the bodily appearance of the performers. The odorless products Iwabuchi referred to are all products that do not involve 'real' people: they are consumer technologies, computer/video games, and comics and

cartoons—all animate objects that are more easily to be stripped off their Japaneseness than more 'organic' forms of popular culture. In the case of K-pop, the emphasis on the way K-pop stars are manufactured, thus artificial constructions, helps to perceive them as 'odorless' and 'inauthentic', while at the same time rendering the Anglo-American 'original' as 'authentic'.

As Shih explains in his analysis of the regional and (mostly failed) global stardom of Rain, K-pop is just one new component of an already existing Inter-Asia crisscross flow of pop culture. Chua Beng Huat analyzed this emerging East and South East Asian cultural sphere and the related distribution of labor that turns some sites (e.g. Japan, South Korea and Taiwan) into cultural producer and others (e.g. China and Singapore) into cultural consumers. 'The group of Korean cultural industries as its agencies, is just a new player in this complex and multi-directional traffic' (Shih 507). Can the perpetually unpopular—Asian pop music is notoriously absent at a global level, with only a few exceptions that are often instrumental (such as ELO) or merely comical (such as PSY)—enter the domain of the popular? As we have argued above, the chances are small, as the denial of coevalness continues to haunt possible counterflows of cultural globalization. Non-popular, non-Western pop products are generally perceived as mere copies, based on originals that are already outdated. Only the sounds, images, and styles that are geographically marked, and thus come to represent the specific sound of a region, may cross the heavily policed boundaries of Anglo-American pop culture.

To avoid perceiving K-pop—and Wonder Girls in particular—as merely imitations of an Anglo-American original, we will use the concept of karaoke Americanism—a term we borrow from film scholar Thomas Elsaesser, who defines it as 'that doubly coded space of identity as overlap and deferral, as compliment and camouflage' (317). Karaoke, not as actual practice but as theoretical concept, is quite productive for two reasons: first, karaoke is an active form of cultural appropriation, which enables to move beyond the question whether or not the imitation is a successful imitation of the original (as white male American music critics Jon Pareles and John Seabrook assessed K-pop), as the focus shifts to how the copy transforms the original in the new context; second, karaoke openly and consciously uses the generic character of the original, thereby recognizing rather than mystifying its construction. It is important to note that our aim is not to 'prove' whether or not a pop-cultural object is a form of karaoke Americanism, but rather to make the cultural appropriation visible by perceiving the object as such (cf. Kooijman).

MTV Wonder Girls

The girl group Wonder Girls was launched in 2007 with the South Korean reality television show *MTV Wonder Girls*, broadcast by MTV Korea, part of the international yet US-based media conglomerate Viacom. Throughout its four seasons, the show provided viewers with a backstage glimpse of how pop stars are created, thereby not only following the group members on their journey to stardom, but also functioning as a tool to promote the group to its local and regional audience. In this way, the show both reveals and is part of the construction of stardom. From the start, Wonder Girls have been explicitly shaped by American pop culture. *MTV Wonder Girls* is a Korean adaptation of the American MTV show *Making The Band*, and, throughout the show, Wonder Girls perform songs by American artists, such as Janet Jackson and the American girl groups Destiny's Child and the Pussycat Dolls. In the show's third season, Wonder Girls travel to New York City to film the music video to their song 'Wishing On A Star', thereby literally occupying the space of 'real' Anglo-American pop stardom. Also the group name is an explicit reference to American pop culture, referring to *Dreamgirls*, the 2006 movie starring Beyoncé, which in turn is based on the 1981 Broadway that presented a fictional account of the 1960s girl group Diana Ross and the Supremes. The connection is made explicit by the Wonder Girls, as the song 'We Are The Dreamgirls' from the musical is often included in their live performances. Moreover, the music video of their biggest hit single 'Nobody' also refers to *Dreamgirls*.

'Nobody' is a 'typical idol K-pop, bubblegum pop song' (Jung 110), which was released first in Korea in 2008 and became a major hit in South-East Asia. In addition to the version sung in South Korean, 'Nobody' was also released in American English (2009), Chinese (2010), and Japanese (2012). In each version, the choruses are sung in English, with the verses in the respective language. The *Dreamgirls*-inspired music video was used for the first three versions (resulting in some lip-synching inconsistencies), while a new music video was shot for the Japanese version. In *Dancing in the Distraction Factory*, Andrew Goodwin makes a distinction between the visual narrative—the fictional short story told by the music video—and the metanarrative of stardom of its performer. He uses Madonna's 'Material Girl' as an example of a music video in which the performer's star text is most significant, as the main narrative function of the music video was 'shifting Madonna's image from that of disco-bimbo to "authentic" star' (100). The music video of 'Nobody' has a similar function, as the fictional story of their discovery is used to present Wonder Girls as global 'authentic' pop stars to

both Asian and Western audiences. The 'Nobody' music video was used as a main promotional tool to introduce the group in the America in 2009, when Wonder Girls were the opening act on the US tour of the popular American boy band the Jonas Brothers. Not surprisingly then, 'Nobody' became their biggest hit single in the US.

After the non-diegetic text 'JYP Entertainment: Leader in entertainment', the music video opens with a performance of 'Honey' by JYP (the artist name of producer Jin-Young Park, who had a minor hit with the song in 1998) with the five Wonder Girls in white dresses performing the backing vocals. The setting is the 1960s and clearly inspired by *Dreamgirls*, with JYP in the role of soul singer Jimmy Early (played by Eddie Murphy in the movie) and the Wonder Girls as the Dreamettes. The performance by 'Honey' is followed by a flash forward to rehearsal time, during which two producers approach JYP with the sheet music of a 'hot new song' named 'Nobody', which JYP tries to sing in a high-pitched voice, with Wonder Girls dancing in the background. This backstory establishes JYP as the song's lead vocalist, and Wonder Girls as the backing vocals, while also illustrating the production of pop culture: producers in black suits bring the music score to the vocalist, who becomes more like a laborer, the one performing the song, without any involvement in its creation. Moreover, the backstage rehearsal of the song implicates the audience in the production of pop culture and helps to authenticate the song. The leading role of the producers in the creation of the song is rendered even more self-reflexive given that JYP is the 'real' manager of Wonder Girls. The subsequent flash forward shows Wonder Girls on stage, dressed in gold, ready to perform, intercut with images of JYP stuck in the toilet, as there is no toilet paper left. While JYP fails to come to the stage, Wonder Girls pick up their microphones and move them front stage to perform the song instead. They become instant stars. Here the music video's visual narrative closely resembles the story of *Dreamgirls*, as similar to the Dreamettes who become the Dreams when they move from the background to the front of the stage, Wonder Girls become the main stars of the show.

In reinterpreting the discovery of the 'Dreamgirls', the music video evokes the success myth of stardom, which, as Richard Dyer has argued, mystifies the construction of the star image by emphasizing the accidental discovery of the talented star—stars are born, not made (cf. Dyer 42). The conventional narrative of the soda-fountain girl becoming the hottest Hollywood film star, or, in this case, the background singers becoming stars because the main act is stuck in the toilet, adds to the myth of stardom. The backstory takes up the first two minutes of the music video, followed by another two minutes of the 1960s Wonder Girls performing 'Nobody' on stage. The

performance is interrupted by a standing ovation of the diegetic audience, leading into a montage sequence portraying the group's rise to success, still set in the fictional 1960s. Flashbulbs of paparazzi, black-and-white television performances, and several magazine covers featuring Wonder Girls, including the 'Lilloard starlist' (an obvious reference to *Billboard* magazine and its Hot 100 chart) on which they rank number 1 emphasize the fame of the group. However, the montage sequence also functions to move Wonder Girls from the fictional 1960s to the actual present. As Wonder Girls become more and more successful, 'they wear skimpier and flashier dresses' (Jung 111), which not only makes them more 'sexy' but also more contemporary. The final performance shown in the music video is set in the present, emphasized by Wonder Girls rapping the lyrics.

Instead of just imitating Anglo-American pop culture, with the 'Nobody' music video, Wonder Girls mimic the story of *Dreamgirls*, and in extension the traditional narrative of the success myth of a pop music meritocracy that is rooted in the American Dream (cf. Dyer 42). In this way, the imitation becomes explicit and deliberate, with a 'light comical tone [that] fits well with Wonder Girls' bubblegum pop style and their playful girlish image' (Jung 111). More importantly, the overt appropriation of conventional Anglo-American stardom not only shows how stardom is a construction, but also places the Anglo-American 'original' in the past, the fictional 1960s, enabling Wonder Girls to emerge as a contemporary pop act, rather than an imitation that is lagging behind. The 2012 Japanese version of the 'Nobody' music video takes the Wonder Girls metanarrative further by presenting them as established superstars, no longer an imitation but a full-fledged and contemporary—thus 'real'—pop act.

Thai Wonder Gay

The processes of cultural appropriation, as we have discussed with Wonder Girls, do not stop there but instead inspire subsequent rhizomic flows towards other parts of Asia. In other words, what started as an example of karaoke Americanism in South Korea is multiplying itself towards other localities in east and South-East Asia. Rather than referring to this as cases of karaoke Koreanism, a term we consider not appropriate given the continuous strong presence of Americanness as well as the 'odorlessness' of the generic conventions appropriated in these products, it may make more sense to see karaoke Americanism as a process that bleeds on, that does not involve two localities, but instead many more, and in this

bleeding, new appropriations occur, producing new and different meanings. These further appropriations instigate, as usual, debates over copyright, for example, entertainers in China, Thailand and Cambodia are accused by the management JYP Entertainment of 'recklessly copying' the Wonder Girls' songs, dances, and even costumes. Still, more interesting than such debates over rights are the actual cultural appropriations taking place. Here we like to zoom in on one particular case, Wonder Gay in Thailand, for which we draw from an analysis by Dredge Byung'chu Käng.

In a video that became an instant hit on YouTube, five boys mimic the Wonder Girls' 'Nobody' music video. Naming themselves Wonder Gay (a name in itself already charged with sexual politics), they perform in green school uniforms with black shorts, making gayish movements around a flagpole. Both the school uniform and the flagpole are signifiers for the Thai nation state, charging the music video with a strong political meaning. The music video consequently caused heated debates in Thailand, questioning whether or not Wonder Gay was 'inappropriately representing Thai-ness' as well as causing concern about the group's popularity 'encourage[ing] other boys to become effeminate/homosexual like them'—a topic which is particularly sensitive in Thailand considering the country's global image of being 'too gay'. As Käng concludes, the debate about Wonder Gay 'exemplifies the limited acceptability of male effeminacy in popular Thai discourse and how Thai national identity is articulated through discourses of gender and sexuality' (178–79).

Even though the YouTube music video receives a good rating (and Wonder Gay quickly gained popularity, even being contracted by a record label), Käng shows how, in the end, the negative framing predominates. Wonder Gay 'become a source of national shame' as they are perceived as reaffirming global stereotypes about Thailand as a gay country and lacking in true masculinity, and as such 'come to represent a nation that is already overly queered, and one that can only mimic others without producing anything original (Käng 181). The 'Nobody' music video thus not only became another site for the policing of Thai masculinity but also triggered anxiety over losing Thainess due to uncritical copying, echoing wider debates on the loss of authenticity because of intensified cultural globalization.

Here, then, we see the politics of karaoke Americanism at work. In their appropriation of the Wonder Girls' 'Nobody' song and music video, Wonder Gay present a slippage of meaning. The song remains the same, *but not quite*, to paraphrase Homi Bhabha. In this slippage of meaning we can locate the politics of the song: it queers a country, stirs up public debate, and challenges both the heteronormative framing of the nation and its related claims on

Thainess. Karaoke is doing just that: it is copying with a twist, it allows for slippages of meaning that hold the potential for a renewed politics, a politics that was not that much at play in the original reception of the song. But, as Käng observes, these politics in the end resulted in a growing critique on the music video, suggesting that the securing of heteronormativity in the end prevailed, as did the critique on imitation and copying. Yet, Wonder Gay also speaks back to the 'original', re-infecting it with a sense of queerness as well. After all, after seeing Wonder Gay, Wonder Girls are also queered. As such, cultural karaoke inspires us to focus our attention not only on cultural appropriations and slippages of meaning that take place in processes of cultural globalization, but also vice versa, it may help us to rethink the original itself.

Translate to English

In 2012, Wonder Girls released the music video 'Like Money', featuring the African-American R&B singer Akon. The song was part of the television movie *The Wonder Girls*, made for the US American TeenNick channel, like MTV owned by Viacom. The movie, which also starred producer JYP as 'himself', tells the story of how the 'international pop sensation [Wonder Girls] are coming to America to make it big'. The opening of the video is telling for their global aspirations. A screen flickers, and in Korean 전송시작 (*jeonsongsijag*) appears, after which a robotic voice commands 'Translate. Translate to English'. Then, the translation appears on the screen: 'Transmission Begin'. What this opening suggests is that in order to make it globally, a translation into the lingua franca of global pop, English, is pivotal. As such, the opening reads as a surrender to the hegemony of Anglo-American pop. The robot as well as the technologized visuals gesture towards a techno-orientalism, a conventional trope in which East Asia is constructed as the technological other of the West (cf. Morley and Robins). The robot voice continues by speaking the words with which we opened this chapter, ending with: '[Wonder Girls] are perfectly designed. Perfectly designed for complete domination. The future is now'.

Meanwhile, the music video shows x-rays of the spines of each of the Wonder Girls, overseen by a Frankenstein doctor (played by producer Jin-Young Park). When they are introduced one by one, they appear as robot-like Korean girls, and are turned around as if they are transported from or towards another dimension. Here, the laboratory that produces pop stars is not even taken as a metaphor but presented as the real thing.

The manufacturing of the pop star aims at complete domination, the future is now, and the future comes from Korea. Only not quite, as the texts are spoken and sung in English, and the African-American singer Akon is inserted as if to further Americanize the song. Who dominates who in this music video, or better, in this manufactured commodity? The song's title is ambivalent: are Wonder Girls a purely commercial product, and thus like money, or do they like money themselves? Again, like 'Nobody' the music video is highly self-reflexive, literarily showing the production of stardom, this time not by accidental discovery conform to the star myth, but by the forces of genetic and robotic technology.

Wonder Girls may be designed for complete domination, but in the end, they fail to dominate, again raising the question of who dominates who. As Eun-Young Jung argues, 'Wonder Girls' "Like Money" is mostly an American team production—reflecting the American racial and sexual views on Asian women and the Korean (at least JYP's) desire to be accepted by the mainstream US pop market even if they have to greatly compromise themselves to be racially, sexually, and musically acceptable' (112). Moreover, as we have argued in this chapter, despite their attempts to become 'American', to produce an odorless image and sound, Wonder Girls continue to be haunted by Koreanness. The politics of karaoke Americanism may play out more interestingly both nationally, in South Korea, and regionally, in East and South-East Asia, as the case of Wonder Gay has illustrated, but when it comes to the desire to enter the US-based center of global pop the cards are quite differently played out. Then and there, Wonder Girls are bound to be framed as lagging behind, as being pop, *but not quite*, as becomes clear in some comments about 'Like Money' on YouTube:

> Seriously, why?! take K-pop, add an American rapper and take away all the Korean and there's no way to differentiate it from all that Mainstream shit that comes out nowadays. I don't want this to he considered part of the K-pop scene... I think it's embarrassing...
> I'm glad for their American debut though... at least they made it this far... (AliceWWND)
>
> Honestly, whoever chose the concept for this debut was insane; who in their right mind would use robots and technology as a concept for a music video in America, lol. Let alone the fact that the girls look so weird with those hairstyles, outfits and make-up, Be My Baby would've been a better debut to be honest. Besides, Akon sings/raps like 50% of the song, so... (Jessicasadlibs)[1]

The first quote puts the group back in their Korean cage, claiming that Wonder Girls have lost it as they betray their cultural background, whereas the second quote is illustrative of the assertion that they in any case lag behind and need the input of an American star to make it work. And it did not really work, in the end. Karaoke Americanism may thus help us to understand and indeed appreciate the multiple cultural translations and appropriations that are happening between Anglo-American pop culture and its countless cultural 'others' around the globe. It sets in motion subsequent cultural translations that hold the potential to ignite political debate and controversy. But when it comes to speak back to that imagined origin, the United States, we are confronted with mere silence, in the end, global hegemonic fault lines in the production of culture remain in place, positioning time and again the West as the best, only to be followed by the rest.

Final Notes on the Asian Unpopular

At this moment, K-pop acts such as Wonder Girls find themselves positioned in between the two poles embodied by Diana Ross and PSY, as presented at the beginning of this chapter, as they are deemed to be either an outdated copy of an American original (the girl group image represented by Ross and Beyoncé) or an exotic, Korean novelty act. However, at the end of the day, the new sounds of K-pop, these original copies, these absolute fabrications, are not likely to become popular beyond their cultural comfort zone. While Wonder Girls sing 'I want nobody nobody but you', we can imagine their American counterparts singing back, 'We want nobody nobody but us'. After all, despite decades of intense globalization and significant geopolitical shifts, we are bound to conclude that Anglo-American pop culture remains hegemonic on the global scale. When taking the US as the yardstick of success, the rest, and especially the non-West, remains unpopular, with the exception of a few one hit wonders like PSY that make us dance Gangnam Style.

But this might well be too gloomy a conclusion. We would like to close this chapter with three brief observations that may open up avenues for future research. First, as Jeroen de Kloet's research into Chinese popular culture suggests, a significant change has taken place over the past two decades. Whereas Chinese rock bands during the 1990s were still very much engaged with making rock with Chinese characteristics, involving articulations of ancient as well as communist China, today it seems they

care much less. They sing in English, adopt a clearly cosmopolitan style, and parody the predicament that they will always be seen as copycats. The 'rise of Asia' comes with an increased dose of cultural self-confidence. Today, Asian artists seem to care less about what others think of them, nor are they so much concerned with making it in the West, or more precisely, in the United States. Their primary market is the local and the regional market. To reach that market, creative practices of karaoke Americanism, as we have analyzed in this chapter, continue to be a productive aesthetics tactic.

Second, in a context of an increased fragmentation of cultural production and consumption, numerous niche cultures proliferate globally, including, for example, around Japanese anime culture, around the Japanese musical genre of Visual Kei, around Chinese art house movies, and around K-pop. These subcultures may not be massively popular, but they do result in vibrant cultural practices, Facebook pages have emerged globally where K-pop fans gather, just as German Visual Kei bands attract substantial attention. Such subcultural, rather than mainstream popular, counterflows may indicate a slow and gradual redrawing of cultural hegemonies, in which the popular and the West do not conflate as strong anymore as they do now.

Third, Japanese hologram star Hatsune Miku has performed in Los Angeles as well as Amsterdam, aside from her fan base in East Asia. The star does not exist; she is just a visual illusion projected on stage, together with a live band. Through specific software applications, audiences have co-written her songs that she now plays. The star as a personal being is not needed any more; what matters is the audience that co-produces the star, together with cloud technologies developed by the cultural industries. While we do want to steer away from either a technological utopianism or determinism here, what Hatsune Miku does tell us is how new technologies may open up possibilities for a global participation in the making and branding of a star and a star product. This alludes to the democratic potential Walter Benjamin already traced in the mechanical reproduction of culture, a potential that may well be globalized in the case of digital reproduction. Hatsune Miku illustrates that audiences may in the near future play a more decisive role in what constitutes the popular, and in this process, the location of the audience, or that of the star, may become less important, thus also allowing for a redrawing of global geocultural boundaries.

Note

1.   All taken from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quE6Cq4Q2bs

Works Cited

Bochanty-Aguero, Erica Jean. 'We Are the World: *American Idol*'s Global Self-Posturing.' *Global Television Formats: Understanding Television Across Borders*. Ed. Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf. London: Routledge, 2012. 260–81. Print.

Cashmore, Ellis. 'Buying Beyoncé.' *Celebrity Studies* 1.2 (2010): 135–50. Print.

Choi, JungBong, and Roald Maliangkay, eds. *K-pop: The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*. London: Routledge, 2014. Print.

Chow, Yiu Fai, and Jeroen de Kloet. *Sonic Multiplicities: Hong Kong Pop and the Global Circulation of Sound and Image*. Bristol: Intellect, 2013. Print.

Chua, Beng Huat. 'Conceptualizing an East Asian Popular Culture.' *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 5.2 (2004): 200–21. Print.

Chua, Beng Huat, and Koichi Iwabuchi. 'Introduction: East Asian TV Dramas: Identifications, Sentiments and Effects.' *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*. Ed. Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi. Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2008. 1–12. Print.

De Kloet, Jeroen *Looking for a Gown: Creative Production in a Mimetic World*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2014. Print. Available online at http://oratiereeks.nl/upload/pdf/PDF-2229weboratie_JdK.pdf

Dyer, Richard. *Stars*. 2nd ed. London: BFI, 1998. Print.

Elsaesser, Thomas. *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2005. Print.

Goodwin, Andrew. *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992. Print.

Iwabuchi, Koichi. *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*. Durham: Duke UP, 2002. Print.

—. 'Korean Wave and Inter-Asian Referencing.' Kim 43–57. Print.

Jung, Eun-Young. 'Playing the Race and Sexuality Cards in the Transnational Pop Game: Korean Music Videos for the US Market.' *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 22.2 (2010): 219–36. Print.

—. 'K-pop Female Idols in the West: Racial Imaginations and Erotic Fantasies.' Kim 106–19. Print.

Käng, Dredge Byung'chu. 'Queer Media Loci in Bangkok: Paradise Lost and Found in Translation.' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17.1 (2010): 169–91. Print.

Kim, Jeongmee, and Basil Glynn. 'Opp-tunity Knocks: PSY, 'Gangnam Style' and the Press Reception of K-pop in Britain.' *Situations: Cultural Studies in the Asian Context* 7.1 (2013): 1–20. Print.

Kim, Youna. 'Introduction.' Kim 1–27. Print.

—. ed. *The Korean Wave: Korean Media Go Global*. London: Routledge, 2013. Print.

Kooijman, Jaap. *Fabricating the Absolute Fake: America in Contemporary Pop Culture*. 2nd ed. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2013. Print.

Laurie, Timothy. 'Come Get These Memories: Gender, History, and Racial Uplift in Bill Condon's *Dreamgirls*.' *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation, and Culture* 18.5 (2012): 537–53. Print.

Morley, David, and Kevin Robins. *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries*. London: Routledge, 1995. Print.

Nye, Joseph. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2004. Print.

Nye, Joseph, and Youna Kim. 'Soft Power and the Korean Wave.' Kim 31–42. Print.

Pareles, Jon. 'Korean Superstar Who Smiles and Says, "I'm Lonely."' *The New York Times* 4 Feb. 2006. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Seabrook, John. 'Factory Girls: Cultural Technology and the Making of K-pop.' *The New Yorker*
     8 Oct. 2012. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Reynolds, Simon. *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past*. New York: Faber & Faber,
     2011. Print.

Shih, Hyunjoon. 'Have You Ever Seen the Rain? And Who'll Stop the Rain?: The Globalizing
     Project of Korean Pop (K-pop).' *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 10.4 (2009): 507–23. Print.

Shim, Doobo. 'The Growth of Korean Cultural Industries and the Korean Wave.' *East Asian Pop
     Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*. Ed. Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi. Hong Kong:
     Hong Kong UP, 2008. 15–32. Print.

Sun, Jung. *Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption: Yonsama, Rain, Oldboy, K-pop
     Idols*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2011. Print.

'When order is lost, time spits'

The Abject Unpopular Art of Genesis (Breyer) P-Orridge

Florian Zappe

'THIS VILE MAN CORRUPTS KIDS –
DEMI-GOD FEEDS POP FANS ON SEX, SADISM, AND DEVIL RITES'.
— Headline of *The Sunday People*, 24 July 1988[1]

I

I want to start my exploration of the topography of one of many possible territories of the 'unpopular' by looking at the identity politics of that particular segment of popular culture we like to call 'pop'. Of course, when engaging in the discussion of 'pop culture', one has to be prepared to enter highly contested territory. Like any significant concept in cultural theory, this term also frames a discursive battlefield fraught with numerous aesthetic and political implications, ambiguities, contradictions and a long history of transformations and theoretical reflection.[2]

When I speak of pop in this essay, I am referring to that specific vanguard offshoot of mass culture that emerged in the light of the generation conflicts from the 1950s onward, which were, as we know, not merely an adolescent insurgency but the beginning of a veritable cultural revolution. Pop reconciled the young postwar generation's emerging impetus towards emancipation, liberation, and social change with production apparatuses, distribution channels, and representational modes that are usually associated with the culture industry. According to Andreas Huyssen's by now classic definition, this understanding of pop

> stood for beat and rock music, poster art, the flower child cult and the drug scene—indeed for any manifestation of 'subculture' and 'underground'. In short, pop became the synonym for the new life style of the younger generation, a life style which rebelled against authority and sought liberation from the norms of existing society. (141)

Especially in its first, idealistic phase[3] pop culture held the utopian promise of constituting a counter-space to mainstream bourgeois culture. As the

analytical tradition of the Birmingham School (and its followers) has shown, it could serve as a door-opener for alternative models of recognition, community, self-expression, meaning-production and, after all, identity. The blueprint narrative of that identity discourse was (and to a large extent still is) that of the rebel who resists institutionalized and structural authority and frees himself from the constraints imposed on him by a society he feels deeply alienated from. The archetypical subject of pop strives, as Patti Smith programmatically shouted in her iconic 1978 song 'Rock 'N' Roll Nigger', for an existence 'outside of society'.

Since the mid-twentieth century, pop culture has provided an enduring and ever-adjustable myth of liberation around this rebellious outsider and sold it (in any sense of the word) to its audiences in various guises: the attractive juvenile delinquent, the sophisticated beatnik, the hyper-masculine biker, the hedonistic hippie drop-out, the cool mod, the libertine rock star, the desirable pop starlet, the tough-minded gangster rapper—just to name a few stereotypes.

Yet, this myth is problematic for a variety of reasons. As poststructuralism's analysis of the power structures in Western societies has shown, its reigning logic based on an 'inside vs outside' binarism cannot serve as a successful strategy of resistance against what Gilles Deleuze described as the all-embracing web of micro-power regimes that govern our late capitalist 'societies of control'.[4] From this perspective, any notion of an authentic, uncorrupted 'outside of society'—pop culture being, of course, just one of many discourses claiming to be a manifestation of such a cultural realm—appears to be just another normative discourse in disguise. All the archetypical rebellious identity models mentioned above are themselves ruled by their respective micro-regimes of normative control in regard to behavior, body politics, and codes of signification. And even the grand narrative of an essential counter-identity itself carries—in its negative fixation to the (petty-)bourgeois mainstream it claims to reject—the inherent risk of morphing into an oppressive ideological dualism.

In the light of this insight, one of the few remaining possibilities for cultural opposition appears to be the striving for alternative concepts of subjectivity and identity that have the potential to elude the incorporation into the binary logic that equally governs our hegemonial culture as well as our countercultures. These alternatives must avoid the pitfall of an all too simple apotheosis of the clear-cut difference of 'the Other' but embrace the complexity of hybridity, ambivalence and contradiction.

A variety of viable attempts have been made—both in cultural theory and practice—to frame such a cultural territory. One is the category of the

'abject' that was defined by Julia Kristeva in her seminal essay *Powers of Horror* as that which 'disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (4).

As this volume seeks to explore the 'unpopular' as the excluded middle between the cultural realms of 'high' and 'popular' I will propose a definition of this middle as the *abject space* of popular culture. Its inhabitants employ the classic mechanisms and media channels of popular culture: they write books, produce films, form bands, release records or play live concerts. However, with regard to their identity politics and aesthetics they actively try to elude the traditional forms of incorporation (such as canonization, commodification, etc.) by employing abjection as a strategy to provide their audiences with aesthetic experiences that cause a radical and enduring disturbance of established cultural—also subcultural—concepts of meaning and identity.

According to Kristeva's initial psychoanalytical definition, the term 'abjection' refers to a feeling of repulsion or nausea that emerges in the face of decay, filth, body excretions, torn tissue, sickness, effects of violence, the grotesque, the monstrous, the ugly, etc.—without a doubt highly unpopular themes that are usually kept outside of everyday experience, concealed under the blanket of societal norms, confined to the realm of the unspeakable. But if this blanket is lifted and the individual is confronted with these taboo aspects of life, the experience of the abject, of that what is 'neither subject nor object' (Kristeva 1), has the power to disarrange the clear structures that define the cultural framework of meaning that we live in.

Megan Becker-Leckrone notes that '[a]bjection is, for Kristeva, an experience of unmatched primordial horror, putting the subject in the most devastating kind of crisis imaginable; but ultimately, certain modes of discourse have found a way of speaking that horror instead of repressing it' (20). 'Abject unpopular culture', as I define it, can be understood as that particular 'mode of discourse' that uses the expressive forms of pop(ular) culture to articulate this staggering abhorrence of unpopular things and the existential shock experience provoked by them. By undermining binarisms such as self/other, inside/outside or the fundamental distinction of subject and object that forms the basis of every process of subject formation, the abject has the capability to cause a mind altering experience that upsets the notions of subjectivity and individual identity that are constructed within established bourgeois as well as popular culture.

Pop culture's Promethean rebellious archetypes embody the utopia of an authentic counter-subjectivity in a space of freedom that is often defined as the antithesis of one of mainstream culture's most powerful ideological

tools to police deviance—morality. Yet, as Kristeva argues, the simple negation of the hegemonial moral order does not inevitably entail the subversive potential associated with the category of abjection:

> He who denies morality is not abject; there can be grandeur in amorality and even in crime that flaunts its disrespect for the law—rebellious, liberating and suicidal crime. Abjection, on the other hand, is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you. (Kristeva 4)

'Abject unpopular culture' therefore operates in the shadow cast by the amoral grandeur of pop cultural rebellion and does not advocate the all too simple transgression towards 'the other side' but a dwelling on the threshold of the unsettling and intangible qualities of the 'abject'. It is decidedly not to be understood as a rigid generic concept, but it might be a useful term to describe a variety of certain artistic expressions on the radical fringes of popular culture, reaching from the writings of Kathy Acker or Dennis Cooper to the films of John Waters (at least up to *Polyester*), Jörg Buttgereit or Bruce LaBruce.

II

One of the most instructive and idiosyncratic examples to reflect on this peculiar notion of 'unpopular culture' is provided by the English-born and New York-based musician, writer and performance artist Genesis (Breyer) P-Orridge.[5] He is particular interesting because his use of abjection as an aesthetic principle on all levels of his work and life—the symbolic, the performative, the musical and the corporeal—locates him, as I will argue in the pages to follow, not only in the excluded middle between the two poles of bourgeois 'high' and popular 'low' but in the intangible center of a triangle consisting of 'high', 'low', and what I have sketched above as 'pop' culture.

   Born in 1950, (Breyer) P-Orridge is himself a child of the pop age. He played drums in several amateur psychedelic rock bands as a teenager (cf. Reed 74) and even recorded (but not distributed) one album with a band called 'Worm' (cf. Ford 1.6) before—at least for some time—choosing a different path of artistic practice. Inspired by an eclectic conglomerate of intellectual influences, ranging from the theories of John Cage, the occult spirituality of Aleister Crowley to William S. Burroughs's ideas of deconditioning through

cut-up and tape experiments, he immersed himself in the avant-garde art scenes of Hull (where he had a short career as a university student) and London and explored a wide variety of artistic strategies.

The roots of his engagement with the abject can be traced back to his involvement in the Fluxus-inspired mail art movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In what P-Orridge retrospectively (and quite self-explanatory) called his 'maggots-and-meat-through-the-mail phase', he used the disruptive powers of the abject to confront this specific artistic scene with its pseudo-radical self-image: 'I wanted to have something in there that everyone would go, "Yecchh!" Because for all their so-called radicalism, they were incredibly conservative and very moral' (qtd. in Vale and Juno 14).

This was, however, just the moderate beginning of P-Orridge's career as an extremist of abject aesthetics. He put hegemonial boundaries of good taste to even more uncompromising tests after he became involved in the radical performance art scene that started to burgeon internationally in the late 1960s. In 1969, he joined with fellow artist, occasional stripper and porn model Cosey Fanni Tutti (Christine Newby) and a number of changing collaborators to found the performance art collective COUM Transmissions, whose performances quickly became notorious for their taboo-breaking extremism. After the group had quickly achieved an infamous reputation within the art circle, it was an exhibition called 'Prostitution', held at the *Institute for Contemporary Arts* (*ICA*) in London in 1976, that gained them wider public notoriety. The show 'caused a scandal chiefly because it featured used tampons and contained pages from pornographic magazines featuring Tutti in her role as a photographic model', and in the end it 'provided evidence of the lack of understanding between contemporary artists and the general public, or at least the self-selected representatives of that public—the newspapers' (Ford 6.19). Indeed, the British tabloid press scandalized the event and triggered a fierce debate about the public funding system for art in the United Kingdom. As a side effect, the 'Prostitution' exhibition revealed a dialectical link between the abject and the unpopular in the cultural phenomenon we like to call 'scandal': although its content had no realistic possibility of finding consensus and recognition within the mainstream (or, to put it in other words, to become popular), it gained the group an unprecedented amount of *un*popularity, culminating in parliamentarian Nicholas Fairbairn's much-quoted statement that the members of COUM Transmissions were the 'wreckers of civilisation' (qtd. in Ford 6.22).

While the general public's rejection of the collective's aesthetics was as expectable as calculated, it is a highly staggering phenomenon that

COUM Transmissions also managed to disturb the segment of the art world that—by self-definition—considered itself as the most radical rim of the avant-garde of that time. The group's efficacy in this regard can be traced back to the extreme modalities in which their performances emphasized the materiality of the body. The concept of the abject is undeniably and by nature always closely tied to the corporeal. In the context of the discussion of the collective's politics of abjection, however, Hanjo Berressem's distinction between the terms '*a*bjection'[6] to describe 'the production of disgust from "abjection", the cultural marking of events|objects as disgusting' and '*a*bjects' as a term 'to highlight the materiality of what is normally called "the abject"' (19) can provide valuable insights.

Whereas many so-called 'abject' artists evoke the feeling of abjection on the symbolic or metaphorical level, COUM Transmissions played on both fields by dealing with 'abject' themes on the level of representation (e.g. by employing sexually explicit imagery with the capability to evoke abjection) but also by staging '*a*bjects', which are, according to Berressem, always 'extremely, one might even say *excessively,* material' (21) and defined by certain characteristic attributes:

> *A*bjects tend to centre around bodily openings through which exchanges with the environment are materially regulated and channelled. *A*bjects are created when these exchanges get out of bounds: for instance, when they become uneconomic|excessive, as when one confronts unstoppable flows and fluxes such as diarrhea or haemorrhaging, or when they are reversed—for example in the case of vomiting or refuelling 'waste' into the system through an opening that is normally used to fuel the system with nourishment[.] (42–43)

The following description of a COUM Transmissions performance in Los Angeles in 1976, given by P-Orridge himself, illustrates how the group's performative aesthetics centered around that particular moment of creating *a*bjects. In order to fully comprehend the radicalness and relentlessness of their approach as well as the utter repulsion the collective was able to evoke even in audiences that were familiar with what at that time was considered as 'transgressive art', it is necessary to quote at some length:

> I used to do things like stick severed chickens' heads over my penis, and then try and masturbate them, whilst pouring maggots all over it. [...] I drank a bottle of whisky and stood on a lot of tacks. And then I gave myself enemas with blood, milk and urine, and then broke wind so a jet

of blood, milk and urine combined shot across the floor in front of Chris Burden and assorted visual artists. I then licked it off the floor, which was a not-clean concrete floor. Then I got a 10-inch nail and tried to swallow it, which made me vomit. Then I licked the vomit off the floor and Cosey helped me lick the vomit off the floor. And she was naked and trying to sever her vagina to her navel with a razor blade, and she injected blood into her vagina which then trickled out, and we then sucked the blood from her vagina into a syringe and injected it into eggs painted black, which we then tried to eat. [...] Chris Burden, who's known for being outrageous, walked out with his girlfriend, saying, 'This is not art, this is the most disgusting thing I've ever seen, and these people are sick'. (qtd. in Vale and Juno 17)

What Burden (who, as a key figure of the Body Art movement, was himself no stranger to *a*bject performances) and the other audience members experienced in this performance is what Berressem called 'a moment of *a*bject *verité*' that is defined by the fact that it 'pushes *a*bjection beyond the level of the representational logic' and refers it 'back to the level of pure physics' where it cannot be read as 'either fictional or as a special elaffect' (20).

In the light of the Foucauldian insight that identity is a power effect inscribed in and on the body, this radical exploration of physical boundaries in its auratic materiality inevitably raises the general question of the permeability of identity constructs. The complete collapse of the inside/outside logic of the culturally coded system of normalized corporeality retroacts with the subjectivity of both the performer and the viewer, because, as Berressem aptly puts it, '*a*bjects are related to material operations that threaten the material *as well as the* psychic organisation of a human system' (42).

III

In 1975, P-Orridge and Tutti started to expand their aesthetic vocabulary by 'improvising informally with traditional rock instruments, electronic gear, and tape, recording long jams of mostly beatless sounds and wordless textures' (Reed 72). This experimentation with sound and music fragments ultimately led to the formation of the band project Throbbing Gristle,[7] which was to become the formative group of the Industrial genre that started to develop from the mid-1970s onwards—a genre that, according to P-Orridge, aimed at the disruption of pop culture's rebel mythology of the 'romance

of "paying your dues, man"; of being "on the road"—rock 'n' roll as a career being worthwhile in itself, and all that shit' (qtd. in Vale and Juno 10).

As P-Orridge himself has pointed out, founding a band was intended to be a deliberate move away from the self-centered art world into the sphere of the popular:

> When we shifted from *Coum Transmissions* to *TG*, we were also stating that we wanted to go into *popular* culture, away from the art gallery context, and show that the same techniques that had been made to operate in that system could work. We wanted to test it out in the real world, or nearer to the real world, at a more street level—with young kids who had no education in art reception, who came along and either empathized or didn't; either liked the noise or didn't. (qtd. in Vale and Juno 15–16)

This digression from an elitist 'high-brow' cultural scene that had been growingly infested by the hype about radical performance art such as Fluxus, the Viennese actionists or the Body Art movement was an intended democratization, an attempt to overcome bigger audiences' inhibitions in terms of intellectual accessibility and reception context.

It is no coincidence that new phenomena like Industrial or Punk emerged at a time when the vanguard momentum of pop culture showed signs of serious exhaustion: 'As a mass-marketed form of rebellious individualism, rock and roll culture has always peddled the "won't be fooled again" consolation prize to its consumers, but by the late seventies, the self-reflexive folds within its inner logic traded the oppositional ambitions (the "counter" in "counterculture") for a comfy brand of elitist quietism' (Daniel 87).

Throbbing Gristle's injection of those abject themes and aesthetics— which have proved to work in the art context—into the system of pop aimed at revitalizing its worn-out vanguard impulse by willfully shocking its audiences out of their comfort zones. Simultaneously, their persistent implementation of abject strategies and the fact that 'they always remained a far more conceptual entity than the overwhelming majority of popular music acts' (Kromhout 26) rendered Throbbing Gristle a more 'unpopular' than 'popular' pop band, as the group's biographer Simon Ford noted:

> TG thus reversed an established avant-gardist paradigm. Rather than translate popular cultural forms into high art, as Warhol and the pop artists had done, TG transformed high art into popular culture. Rather than tone down and aestheticise the more intense and ugly aspects of avant-garde art, TG chose the most debased subject matter and abstract

forms to present to a mass public. This lack of a concession to mass taste
ensured that TG's music was never appreciated by a mass audience. TG
operated necessarily on the fringes of the music industry and this meant
never achieving, or seeking, mass appeal and mainstream popular suc-
cess on the scale of, say, the Human League or OMD. (Ford 5.18)

Indeed, Throbbing Gristle's musical aesthetics and performance styles
represented the greatest imaginable revocation of the time-honored 'social
contract' defining the artist-audience relationship in conventional popular
culture. As Diederichsen tellingly notes, especially the first two albums—
The Second Annual Report (1977) and *D. o. A.: The Third and Final Report of
Throbbing Gristle* (1978)—'dealt with issues of control, submission, extreme
pain, and even torture in a manner that was fascinating and definitely broke
the taboos of the time but that no one would ever have thought to describe
as "entertainment" (Diederichsen, 'Entertainment' 26). And even the slightly
more accessible *20 Jazz Funk Greats* (1979), which is 'widely misunderstood
as their "pop album", [is] too perverted, willful and crude to effortlessly pass
as "real music"' (Daniel 3).

The band's 'unpopularity' resulted from the eclectic crossover of classic
avant-garde techniques (shock politics, the disruption of the organic work
of art, etc.), sound and noise experiments, post-Situationist détournements
of pop iconography, controversial subject matter (violence, pornography,
occultism, 'the ugly', etc.) and the confusion of gender stereotypes. Again,
abjection was the underlying aesthetic paradigm of the project, but Throb-
bing Gristle slightly shifted away from the corporeal extremism of the
COUM Transmissions era, focusing more on the (a)rhythmical, performative
and representational (in terms of lyrics and imagery) aspects of the abject
instead of the *ab*ject materiality of bodily orifices.

After entering the stage of popular culture, the element of language
gained more importance for the group's politics. Examples of abject content
are manifold in their lyrics: they deal with serial killers and necrophilia
('Very Friendly', 'Urge to Kill'), blood and brains spilled over a breakfast
table ('Hit by a Rock'), cutting an unborn child out of a pregnant woman's
stomach in order to cannibalize it ('Slug Bait'), or severely burned bod-
ies ('Hamburger Lady'). Reynolds and Press noted that even the band's
name—a slang expression for an erect penis—'managed to combine
phallic innuendo with a sense of the abject nature of fleshly existence, a
reminder that being alive means being subject to involuntary processes
(excretion, reproduction, decay, death) and the everpresent possibility of
violence' (91).

Even history's utmost excess of abject violence is echoed in what S. Alexander Reed calls Throbbing Gristle's 'heartstopping pseudo-fascist vocabulary' (75). Especially in their early years, the group frequently wore camouflage and uniform-style stage outfits and used band logos that evoke associations of Nazi symbols. It would be too simple to read this flirtation with totalitarian aesthetics (a model that other Industrial acts, most notoriously the Slovenian band Laibach, would follow) as a radicalized version of punk-style 'bricolage' or as a mere gesture of distinction from the tastes of mainstream as well as established pop culture alike. Throbbing Gristle employed the horrific repertoire of fascist imagery at a more profound level. In her essay on abjection Kristeva notes:

> In the dark halls of the museum that is now what remains of Auschwitz, I see a heap of children's shoes, or something like that, something I have already seen elsewhere, under a Christmas tree, for instance, dolls I believe. The abjection of Nazi crime reaches its apex when death, which, in any case, kills me, interferes with what, in my living universe, is supposed to save me from death: childhood, science, among other things. (4)

It is exactly this kind of abjection related to the Holocaust that Throbbing Gristle evoke by using the image of a heap of skulls for the cover art of their single 'Subhuman', or by choosing a photograph as the logo of their record label 'Industrial Records' that at first sight shows a factory but actually depicts the crematorium at Auschwitz, which is, according to P-Orridge, 'one of the ultimate symbols of human stupidity' (qtd. in Ford 7.18).

When it comes to lyrics, Throbbing Gristle reached the 'apex' of abjection in the song 'Zyklon B Zombie' on their debut album *The Second Annual Report.* Here, the traditional coordinates of humanist morality are disarranged by narrating—in 'almost incomprehensible, but highly controversial' (Kromhout 26) lyrics—a disturbing dialogue between a young Jewish girl and a warden in a concentration camp: 'I'm just a little Jewish girl/Ain't no clothes on/And if I had a steel hammer/I'd smash your teeth in/And as I walked her to the gas chamber/I'm out there laughing/Zyklon Zyklon Zyklon B Zombie Zombie […]'.

One cannot avoid sensing an unfathomable uneasiness among critics and scholars writing about these references. Kromhout, for example, tries to overcome this by explicitly stressing that 'Throbbing Gristle *were* violent as much as *about* violence. But, one could argue, they were also *against* forms of authoritarian violence. Their work aimed at uncovering and countering hierarchical government- and industry-controlled power' (27). Reed, on the other hand, tries to express his ambiguity in regard to Industrial music's

pastiche of fascist symbolism, noting that '[d]espite the genre's purported antihegemony, its unchecked battle wounds weaken its already shaky stance on some key social and political grounds' (204).[8]

IV

If we shift our focus from the content level towards the sonic and performative aesthetics of Throbbing Gristle, we will recognize a subversion of a traditional cathartic function of rhythm and music in regard to the abject that Kristeva traces back to Aristotle:

> Rhythm and song hence arouse the impure, the other of mind, the passionate-corporeal-sexual-virile, but they harmonize it [...]. They thus soothe frenzied outbursts [...] by contributing an *external* rule, a poetic one, which fills the gap [...] between body and soul. (Kristeva 28)

Although Kristeva's statement is universal, it applies particularly well to rock music, in which '[t]he abject began looming [...] when the insurrectionary energy of the late '60s started to flag, and rock turned heavy' (Reynolds and Press 87). Undeniably, one can argue that the aesthetic experience of a traditional rock concert is coded by a logic that corresponds to what Kristeva has called 'poetic purification—in itself an impure process that protects from the abject only by dint of being immersed in it' (28). However, the aforementioned arousal of the 'passionate-corporeal-sexual-virile' through the performance of the rock star is merely *claiming* subversion, drawing on stereotypical phallocentric tropes of rebellion. Reynolds and Press highlight the conservative gender politics ingrained in 'rock rebellion':

> In the rebel imagination, women figure as both victims and agents of castrating conformity. Women represent everything the rebel is not (passivity, inhibition) and everything that threatens to shackle him (domesticity, social norms). This ambivalence towards the feminine domain is the defining mark of all the classic instances of rock rebellion, from the Stones through the Doors, Led Zeppelin, the Stooges, to the Sex Pistols, Guns N'Roses and Nirvana. (3)[9]

Throbbing Gristle—in their intention to be, as P-Orridge once claimed, 'a rock band which was actually not a rock band' (qtd. in Ford 5.17)—were not interested in this cathartic ritual and tried to escape it by disrupting the

harmonizing, external 'poetic' rule of the concert situation. Their shows confronted their audiences with a challenging tonal amalgam of experimentally sampled rock elements, amplified noise collages and distorted electronically modified 'singing' voices up to the point of abjection where 'sound became noise and where noise became music and entertainment became pain and where pain became entertainment' (P-Orridge qtd. in Ford 6.10). The result of this—as Diederichsen calls it—'entertainment-through-pain-programme' is not the external, 'poetic' and identity-affirming rule of the pop/rock concert, but a 'materialist counterprogramme to all cultures of submission, however one wishes to construe them, whether as spectacle, sedation, or conditioning' (Diederichsen, 'Entertainment' 32–33).

This sonic anti-catharsis is accompanied by P-Orridge's equally anarchic as erratic mockery of traditional rock star poses à la Mick Jagger. A video of a live performance of the band's probably best known song 'Discipline'—which Reed deemed an 'overwhelming attack on the audience' (76)—, recorded at SO36, the center of West Berlin's subcultural music and art scene in the early 1980s, may serve as an example here. We see P-Orridge, dressed in a camouflage outfit and army boots—undoubtedly alluding to the style of skinhead culture—convulsing frantically, throwing himself on the stage floor, violently banging his head against the amplifiers while maniacally shouting lyrics to the audience: 'Discipline! We need some discipline in here! [...] Are you ready boys? Are you ready girls? Discipline!' The performance exemplifies Throbbing Gristle's

> hyperbole of popular music and culture, using, imitating, and exaggerating its workings, presenting a mirror image of everyday pop music and culture. As they did with the conventions of modern art in their previous work, Throbbing Gristle became one of those significant acts in the history of popular music that turned it inside out, and its audience with it. (Kromhout 26)

Their performative and sonic disruption of the external rule of music over the body again serves the group's overall attack on identity constructs in general. Reed notes correctly that '[t]he normativity they seek to dismantle is not to be replaced with a new standard, for that would just be as tyrannical' (83). Instead, they advocate an 'ever shifting absence' (Reed 83), a domain of constant becoming—not in a nihilistic void, however, but along the lines of appropriated and rearranged cultural signifiers. P-Orridge himself poetically envisioned such a realm in a text published in the German underground magazine *Gasolin 23*:

In a universe of flux there are no fixed answers. No fixed moments. Rapidity, fusion, flexibility are thee hard edges, thee frame of this alchemy of survival. Place is in thee truest sense, merely a landscape we pass through. It has no density. Remembrance should be more exact. There are lines, boundaries, in all of these places. There common language is one of symbols. When order is lost, time spits. (P-Orridge 26)

V

This employment of the disruptive *power of the abject* for the total confusion of the codes of the socio-cultural imaginary established by orthodox pop narratives and the deconstruction of the rock star archetype have to be understood in the larger context of the overriding identity politics P-Orridge followed in all his artistic endeavors, from COUM Transmissions to Throbbing Gristle and also his later, more occult/esoteric band Psychic TV, which, according to Reed, 'was conceived as a fully multimedia project, integrating music [...], video [...], and a philosophical propaganda wing, Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth (TOPY)' (142).

For P-Orridge—as for Throbbing Gristle—the notion of a subject, regardless if positioned inside or outside the mainstream, cannot entail true liberation as it remains caught up in the binary system of either/or or subject/object. So for them, the idea of an essential fixed subjectivity itself has to be attacked. In a fragment of what presumably is a television interview with Psychic TV from the early 1980s, P-Orridge elaborates on this philosophy:

Well the *I* is what we call the flat people who assume that the person that they've been donated by social conditioning is a one dimensional actual person. The *We* is how we see the world which is that everybody is made up of lots and lots of different personalities, fantasies, [and] attitudes, and that a multi-personality is in fact the reality, not the *I* personality... ('PTV Interview')

Staging the 'abject' in the domain of the popular is one promising strategy to evoke this multifaceted notion of the 'multi-personality' as

[t]he abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes

me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is abject, on the
contrary, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where
meaning collapses. (Kristeva 1–2)

Abjection can therefore have the productive function as a 'door-opener'
towards a liminal realm that offers those possibilities for a continuous
renegotiation of symbolic orders that Homi K. Bhabha attributed to his
concept of the 'Third Space [...] which constitutes the discursive conditions
of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have
no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated,
translated, rehistoricized and read anew' (37).

    In 2003, Breyer P-Orridge started to transform his own body into such a
space of identitarian renegotiation by literally opening it up—not only on
the symbolic or performative level but also on that of the materiality of the
corporeal. In a collaborative project with his second wife Lady Jaye Breyer
he worked on the construction of what the couple called a 'pandrogynous'
identity. The endeavor is in accordance with Reed's observation that 'abjec-
tion strives for an Artaudian rebirth into a new flesh uninterrupted by the
real world and untouched by that most fundamental logic, the subject-
object division' (177–78). The artist couple implemented this idea almost
literally by cutting through their skin, which is that 'fragile container' that
guarantees 'the integrity of "one's own and clean self"' (Kristeva 53). The
programmatic statement for this practice of physical disinterpellation
by rearranging the biological signifiers of gender identity on P-Orridge's
website reads as follows:

> Inspired by the language of true love and frustrated by what they felt to
> be imposed limits on personal and expressive identity, Genesis and Lady
> Jaye applied the 'cut-up' to their own bodies in an effort to merge their
> two identities, through plastic surgery, hormone therapy, cross-dressing
> and altered behavior, into a single, 'pandrogynous' character, 'BREYER P-
> ORRIDGE'. This project focused on one central concern—deconstructing
> the fiction of self. (genesisbreyerporridge.com)

The Pandrogeny project is the literal embodiment of the in-betweenness
of the abject and its capacity to escape cultural containment that was
only performed and lyrically addressed before. It presents, to frame it in
Deleuzean terms, a 'line of flight' from the aforementioned cultural fiction
of the '*I* personality' that leads the self on 'a path of mutation precipitated
through the actualisation of connections among bodies that were previously

only implicit (or "virtual") that releases new powers in the capacities of those bodies to act and respond' (Lorraine 145).

Art and music to h/er (as s/he prefers to be referred to since the beginning of the Pandrogyny project) are therefore not primarily modes of expression—that would presuppose the idea of the 'I' of a speaking subject—but means of communication of this escape route from what s/he perceives as the prison-house of a fixed and unified identity, a narrative that also governs traditional pop culture.

Certainly, the growing recognition of Throbbing Gristle as an important cultural influence on a variety of rock music subgenres and especially Breyer P-Orridge's ever increasing canonization in the art world raise the question of whether h/er strategies can effectively work as a form of cultural resistance. To answer that problem, we might again draw on Berressem, who stresses that abjection as a counter-cultural strategy can escape incorporation if it leaves the level of the symbolic and turns to the materiality of the body:

> Even if countercultures celebrate *a*bjects, they can never be [...] experienced as simply positive, a fact that makes for a deeply disturbing underside to these celebrations. Although *a*bjects may be included into a logic of cultural subversion, they remain disturbing on their own ground; the ground of matter and its organizations|disorganizations. (46)

So even if Breyer P-Orridge may have become increasingly canonized (yet hardly commodified) the radical commitment to h/er life-long project of de-essentializing the concept of identity itself, ultimately resulting in the return to the materiality of the body and the disturbing re- or disorganization of its biological signifiers in the 'Pandrogyny' project, might prevent h/er from becoming what Berressem calls a 'faux-*a*bject' that 'remain[s] caught within the economies of the cultural|linguistic matrix' (44). True *a*bjects however 'are so dreadful for both culture and the subject precisely because they are not merely its cultural others—it is in this realm that *faux-a*bjection operates, as when it juxtaposes puritan cleanliness to "dirty things"—but disruptive material forces that are operative in the subject and in culture' (Berressem 44).

One can without any doubt claim that the '*a*bject *verité*' is the predominant leitmotif that runs through any aspect of Breyer P-Orridge's *un*pop stardom. The radical materiality of h/er body modification renders h/er an *a*bject work of art in its own right that sabotages the phallocentric identity machine of traditional pop culture. Through h/er ongoing activity of

performing and recording music[10] s/he will—by sheer physical presence as well as h/er dissonant and violent opposition against the inherited rhetoric of pop—remain an agent in the service of abject unpopular culture's resistance to closure: h/er art eludes location, it is neither 'high', nor 'low' nor 'pop', and yet all of these at once—or to say it with Kristeva's words, it operates in the territory of 'the excluded, the outside-of-meaning, the abject. Atopia' (22).

Notes

1. Qtd. in https://realitysandwich.com/22347/process_product/ and also—fragmentarily—in Ford 1.6.
2. For a comprehensive overview see Hecken.
3. Diederich Diederichsen differentiates between two major eras in pop history: *Pop I* (lasting roughly from the early 1960s to the 1980s) in which the discourse could credibly claim the potential for revolution and subversion and the phase of *Pop II* (beginning in the early 1990s) in which pop's transgressive promises have drowned in the sea of a postmodern plurality in which everything can be labeled as 'pop'. He aptly notes: 'Pop I has always been entangled with transgressive movements, whereas it seems, at a first glance, to be the tragedy of Pop II that there is no territory left that resists being invaded by it. [Pop I war immer in grenzüberschreitende Bewegungen verwickelt, das Drama von Pop II besteht auf den ersten Blick darin, dass kein Terrain sich gegen seine Invasion mehr sperrt]' (Diederichsen, *Der lange Weg nach Mitte* 275, my translation).
4. Deleuze argues that, after the Second World War (in an interesting parallel development to the rise and decline of *Pop I*), the *disciplinary societies*, whose mechanisms of governance relied on the various institutions of enclosure Foucault has described (the family, the school, the army, the factory, etc.), have continually been replaced by the new *societies of control*, characterized by an inescapable ubiquity of 'ultrarapid forms of free-floating control that replaced the old disciplines operating in the time frame of a closed system' (4).
5. Born as Neil Megson, the artist adopted the pseudonym 'Genesis P-Orridge' in the 1960s and changed it to 'Genesis Breyer P-Orridge' in 2003 after starting a body modification art project called 'Pandrogyny' in collaboration with his second wife Lady Jaye Breyer P-Orrdige. For the sake of accuracy I will refer to the artist as 'P-Orridge' when talking about his work before 2003 and as 'Breyer P-Orridge' for work since then.
6. Berressem uses the italicized '*a*' in order to distinguish his interpretation of these terms from the common use within the discourse of the abject.
7. Besides P-Orridge and Tutti, the musicians and sound artists Chris Carter and Peter 'Sleazy' Christopherson, who had occasionally collaborated on various COUM Transmissions projects, completed the group.

8. Especially the fact that the genre was and is up to this day predominantly white and masculine—the two central attributes of every fascist identity narrative—in many ways obstructs the use of its aesthetics for other forms of identity politics.

9. Of course, this characterization would also apply to other phallocentric forms of pop(ular) cultural rebellion such as Hip Hop.

10. Throbbing Gristle existed from 1975 to 1981 and reunited in 2004 until Christopherson's death in 2010 put a definitive end to this project. After a first phase of existence from 1982 to 1999, Breyer P-Orridge revived h/er Psychic TV project in 2003. It is active to this day.

Works Cited

Becker-Leckrone, Megan. *Julia Kristeva and Literary Theory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.

Berressem, Hanjo. 'On the Matter of Abjection.' *The Abject of Desire. The Aestheticization of the Unaesthetic in Contemporary Literature and Culture*. Ed. Konstanze Kutzbach and Monika Mueller. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 19–48. Print.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Deleuze, Gilles. 'Postscript on the Societies of Control.' *October* 59 (Winter 1992): 3–7. Print.

Diederichsen, Diederich. *Der lange Weg nach Mitte: Der Sound und die Stadt*. Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1999. Print.

—. 'Entertainment through Pain.' *Cosey Complex*. Ed. Maria Fusco and Richard Birkett. Cologne: Koenig Books, 2012. 25–34. Print.

'Discipline.' Throbbing Gristle. *YouTube*. 2006. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Ford, Simon. *Wreckers of Civilisation. The Story of Coum Transmissions & Throbbing Gristle*. London: Black Dog Publishing, 1999. Print.

Hecken, Thomas. *Pop. Geschichte eines Konzepts 1955–2009*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009. Print.

Huyssen, Andreas. *After the Great Divide. Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988. Print.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982. Print.

Kromhout, Melle Jan. '"Over the Ruined Factory There's a Funny Noise": Throbbing Gristle and the Mediatized Roots of Noise in/as Music.' *Popular Music and Society* 34.1 (2011). 23–34. Print.

Lorraine, Tasmin. 'Lines of Flight.' *The Deleuze Dictionary*. Ed. Adrian Parr. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005. 144–46. Print.

P-Orridge, Genesis. 'German Order.' *Gasolin 23* 9 (1986): 24–26. Print.

'PTV Interview (Genesis P-Orridge & Peter Christopherson).' *YouTube*. 2007. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Reed, S. Alexander. *Assimilate—A Critical History of Industrial Music*. New York: Oxford UP, 2013. Print.

Reynolds, Simon and Joy Press. *The Sex Revolts—Gender, Rebellion and Rock 'N' Roll*. London: Serpent's Tail, 1995. Print.

Vale, V. and Andrea Juno. *Industrial Culture Handbook*. San Francisco: RE/Search, 1983. Print.

'Famous in a Small Town'

The Authenticity of Unpopularity in Contemporary Country Music[1]

Christian Schmidt

In this essay, I aim to analyze the intricate ways in which popularity and unpopularity are—perhaps oxymoronically—part and parcel of contemporary country music. Importantly, I focus on *commercially successful* forms of country music and thus deal with a musical genre that is truly popular in one sense of the term at the same time as it thrives on its self-conscious distance from the perceived artificiality of popular culture and aims to establish itself as the true music of the common American folk—truly popular music in a slightly different understanding of the term. In this context, any study of contemporary commercial country music—thus my claim—needs to come to grips not only with the ways in which the music taps into a discourse of American popular culture, but also with its self-styling as this popular culture's unpopular other. Even though country music truly is popular music, it relishes an image of *un*-popularity that stands in marked contrast to common ideas about popular music. At least in part, it does so by staging a notion of authentic Southern and Dixie identity that is constructed in and through the music and its visual representation in music videos. If we add to this claim Frith's by-now classical observation that 'popular music is popular not because it reflects something, or authentically articulates some sort of popular taste or experience, but because it creates our understanding of what popularity is' ('Towards' 137), the interesting question remains: what identity does country music create and construct? And how does this idea relate to the notion of unpopularity rather than popularity as well? In an attempt to provide partial answers to these questions, this paper analyzes how country music constructs the idea of a truth, a real thing behind the music, in the first place, and how this produced notion of the real takes the form of proudly unpopular forms of cultural expression. Country music, I argue, constructs a notion of authentic identity that is both widely unpopular and that plays with the image of country as popularity's metronormative other, in Judith Halberstam's terminology. In order to do justice to country's simultaneous popularity and unpopularity, my reading will argue that country music *is* popular culture, yet at the same time pinpoint the particular strategies used by the country music industry,

its artists, and its audiences to mark their distance to it and construct an image of country music as the more authentic counterpart to supposedly artificial *popular* culture.[2]

Country and/as Popular Culture

Looking at all available indicators of popularity, country music may well be *the* most popular genre of music in the United States: there are more radio stations exclusively dedicated to playing country music than any other musical genre, just as the sales figures of physical records continue to exceed most other genres. A cursory look at Billboard's so-called 'Rich List' of the forty top-selling musical acts of 2013 underlines this, as it not only includes more than 10 country artists but is spearheaded by two of them, namely Taylor Swift and Kenny Chesney (cf. 'Music's Top 40'). Moreover, even among a presumably younger audience country music is alive and kicking: From its first season in 2011, the American television casting show *The Voice* has included country star Blake Shelton among its superstar jurors. Already in 2005, country singer Carrie Underwood won the fourth season of *American Idol* by a huge margin of audience support and since then has gone on to sell more albums than any other winner of that show (roughly 15 million copies) in addition to receiving numerous Grammy, CMA, and ACM awards. Today's biggest country stars, such as Underwood, Shelton, Miranda Lambert, or Brad Paisley not only sell millions of records, but also reach large audiences through social media such as Twitter or Facebook. Recent years have seen further in-roads of the supposedly old and outdated country music into more mainstream pop-cultural terrain.[3] In a related development, television shows such as *Nashville*, the Southern-themed *Hart of Dixie*, and reality shows like *Duck Dynasty* have taken up explicitly Southern settings, which, at least in part, entail a cultural atmosphere permeated with, if not dominated by, country music. The South and with it country music have become thriving markets and increasingly have crossed over from being products of regional culture to becoming icons of popular culture in a broader sense.[4]

Yet, at the same time, country music presents an exquisite paradox in that it refuses to stylize itself as popular. Even though its self-understanding is that of music made by and aimed at the common man—thus, popular in a very elementary sense of the term—it explicitly rejects an association with popular culture, understood as artificial 'pop' culture. Of course, one can read this simply in terms of a cultural niche tailoring its products at a particular market, creating an offer for a closely circumscribed clientele

of rural, small-town people, the common folk; yet, such an analysis falls short when we consider country music's often implicit claim to being *the* American music, of its being the soundtrack of American life more widely understood. As George Bush, Sr. phrased this when he declared October 1991 'Country Music Month' during the height of the first Gulf War: 'Of course, while country music speaks from the heart of the American people, it has—like liberty itself—a great and universal appeal' (qtd. in Mann 74). Yet, while country music speaks to and for all American people, it also restricts itself to being the music of the 'Little Man', as Alan Jackson sang in his 1999 hit single of that title. Thus, country music epitomizes a form of self-consciously unpopular culture: it is a highly commercialized genre with immense sales figures and wide outreach and, as such, part and parcel of contemporary American popular culture. At the same time, however, everybody involved in it views this very popularity highly skeptically, since country music quickly runs the risk of selling out the interests of the small folk for whom it has to speak and sing. Despite its wide-ranging popularity and in spite of its own self-fashioning as *the* music of the people, country music is seldom mentioned, and even more rarely actually analyzed, when it comes to discussions of American popular music and culture. As literary critic Barbara Ching observes in her analysis of hard country and contemporary culture, country music is 'one of the most popular forms of music in the United States' yet at the same time has not 'figured in any of the now canonical discussions of postmodernity' (*Wrong's* 3). And she goes on to argue that this observation is indicative of 'just how remote country music is from intellectual discourse, and thus how overlooked it is in contemporary cultural politics' (3). Why is one of the most popular genres of music so decidedly unpopular both with academics and 'the people' in a broader sense? And why are there still strong prejudices in place against country music as hopelessly outdated, decidedly un-hip, something from which it is better to distance oneself? Furthermore, why is country music proud of this very unpopularity? In this paper, I want to shed some light on the ways in which country music is a form of such unpopular culture and in doing so answer the question implied in my title: Why is country music so dang proud of only being famous in a small town?

Famous in a Small Town? – Country's Unpopularity

Researching unpopular cultures produces a surprising dearth of studies of the unpopular.[5] This is surprising because the unpopular is not only the

dark underside of the popular but, as popular is a *relational* term, studying its others and its opposites is necessary in order to circumscribe what popularity actually entails. As a wide variety of critics—in fact, more or less everybody writing about country music—has argued, the creation of authenticity is at the heart of what defines country music (cf. my own 'Nashville' for a critical discussion of the role of authenticity in definitions of country music). True country music, so the reasoning goes, is the unpopular realm of small-town folks and precisely not the glitter of Hollywood or Broadway and thus almost necessitates a negation of commercialism and popular success. It is not a part of the pop culture industry, but rather an honest encounter between fans and performers, who meet as equals in the shared space of the home of country music, which is usually located in an idealized, Southern small town. Thus, '[c]ountry music still ha[s] something popular music [does] not—it [is] "*real*"' (Jensen 128, my italics). This also means, as Jocelyn Neal has shown, that the music 'both is part of mainstream pop culture and stands in stark opposition to it' (474). Yet, if cultural studies scholar John Storey is also correct in arguing that '[p]art of the difficulty [in defining *popular* culture] stems from the implied *otherness* which is always absent/present when we use the term "popular culture"' (1), where does this leave country music? If we agree that popular culture is, indeed, 'an *empty* conceptual category' (1), one that is always defined in contradistinction to other categories, such as high culture, folk culture, mass culture, or the unpopular, how does country music figure in this equation? It *is* popular culture and thus stands in marked contrast to forms of high culture, yet at the same time it also is unpopular culture *par excellence*, self-consciously refusing to be popular. Since country music partakes of both popular and unpopular culture, it becomes clear that these two categories are working with different scales that lie orthogonal to one another: one is quantitative (successful vs unsuccessful), the other qualitative (what truly represents the people vs what represents only an elite, for example). Thus, contemporary country music can be commercially successful—hence popular—*and* unpopular at the same time, and these are the complex cases of unpopular popular music in which this paper stakes its claim. Even though popular for the sake of its wide appeal, country music consciously distances itself from other forms of popular culture that it views as inauthentic, fake, or artificial. Proudly inhabiting this subaltern space of unpopularity, country music then simply *has* to be proud of only being famous in a small town.

Of course, setting itself up as the *other* of popular music leads to the oxymoronic notion of an unpopular popular culture, a form of culture

that at the same time claims to speak for the average, common American as it refuses to be popular. This entails a self-positioning in explicit contradistinction to all other forms of popular culture in that it rejects the rules of pop stardom, the musical market, and the like. At the same time, however, the music also sets itself in explicit contrast to so-called high-culture and any form of elitist presumptions. The prime example for this can be gleaned from one of the oldest institutions of country music: the Grand Ole Opry, whose very name marks an explicit distinction from opera as the prototypical example of high culture. In 1925, WSM's barn dance got its moniker to differentiate between the rich people's opera and the folks' grand ole opry, while also creating a rural, Southern identity in opposition to urban forms of popular culture. From its inception, then, country music has operated in opposition to both high culture and mass culture and thus in the space of unpopularity. As Lüthe and Pöhlmann state in their introduction, unpopular cultures are productive rather than expressive of identities, and they argue: 'If popular culture—just as much as high culture—is being used to create the people in the first place, not as a culture for the people but a culture constructing the people as a people by giving them a history and an identity, the unpopular culture is the disruptive element in this construction, resisting its homogenizations and omissions, opposing the complete smoothing of a striated cultural space' (27). In the context of my discussion of country music, I take this to mean that constructing the country folk as unpopular establishes the music as a 'thorn in the side of the mainstream' (Lüthe and Pöhlmann 9) as it sonically creates a rural Southern identity to oppose a homogenized national culture that I will describe in Halberstam's terminology as metronormative. This, of course, complicates constructions of American (popular) identities, if we bear in mind that country music establishes itself as simultaneously popular and unpopular. Contrary to what the editors observe in their introduction, however, country music, as the popular unpopular, does *not* 'sing the songs nobody else wants to sing, [nor does it] show the world what it does not want to see' (27). Rather, it creates a particular notion of the people as pop culture's other, but does so not from a subaltern position but from the space of the (silent) majority—and this population *does* want to hear and sing these very songs, in fact needs to hear these songs in order to make sense of themselves in today's world. In order to do that, the music clings to a nostalgic version of a past that never was in order to give the people *exactly* what they want and need.

Aaron Fox has convincingly shown that country music defines itself as music of, by, and for the common folk, the people, and thus is popular music

in its most basic definition. In addition, however, country music, more than any other genre of commercial music, sets itself up as *the other* of popular music. In Fox's words, it stylizes itself as a form of 'abject' culture, which relishes its own status as self-avowedly 'bad' and unpopular music by speaking from the much disabused subject position of what Wray and Newitz call 'white trash'.[6] More generally speaking, country music is widely perceived as a genre that is decidedly unpopular, antiquated, uncool, something to be ashamed—rather than proud—of. In her study of country's perceived otherness, Hubbs argues that a 'taste for country music is the failure of taste that flags a lack of moral value' (41) since a declaration of distaste for the music, in this context, 'appears first and foremost as a gesture of *social* exclusion. Musical exclusion is secondary, a vehicle and symptom' (24). In short, country music is unpopular *not* because of any inherent musical flaws, but rather due to what it is perceived to stand for.[7] To urban, Northern, non-country ears, the music appears as 'dumb, reactionary, sentimental, maudlin, primitive, and so forth' as they 'hear a commodification and cheapening of the same supposed folksy authenticity that so disgusts [them]' (Ching, 'Acting Naturally' 231). Ching calls this the 'double bind of rustic authenticity' (232); that is to say, the music either crudely represents the rustic life of rural America (and is thus nothing but folklore) or represents failed attempts at creating the impression of such an authenticity (and is therefore, perhaps, even worse). In this context, Hubbs's conclusion that 'country *music* function[s] as proxy for the *people* of the white working class, figured as ignorant and bigoted' is spot on and—drawing on Bryson—she 'suggest[s] that *shared distaste* may be as culturally significant as shared taste, the usual object of inquiry in studies by Bourdieu and many other researchers' (45, my italics).

In this shared distaste for the ways of small-town Southern folks, which finds its way into distaste for 'their' country music, lies the kernel that explains both the unpopularity of country music and its pride in this very unpopularity. As Aaron Fox has elaborated, country music's 'working class fans *embrace* what is 'bad' about the music's—and their own—cultural identity and meaning, as a way of discovering and asserting what is valuable and good about their lives and their communities' (52). In his argument about the music's badness—which is quite similar to my own reading of the music as self-consciously unpopular, even if I focus more on the producers' than on the receivers' end of the equation—, Fox argues that the working-class fans embrace country music precisely *because* it is bad for them and thus turn it into an 'abject sublime'. This ambivalent gesture can productively be read in terms of what Judith Halberstam has called

'metronormativity' (36; cf. 36-38). In metronormativity, so she claims, the urban is established as the unmarked norm by the adjudicators of good taste and culture against which the rural always already is marked as the deviant other. The lack of critical attention to country music can be explained in terms of such metronormativity in that country always already is viewed as the (marked) exception and therefore cannot tell us anything about the people as a whole. Interestingly, country music cedes this metronormative point and embraces its own non-normativity as abject bad music or, in my terms, self-consciously unpopular music, the 'unpopular' other to the unmarked norm of popularity. That is to say, country fans embrace the music's 'bad' identity in a defiant gesture that both acknowledges the metronormative gaze as it refuses to be stymied by it. The music's 'sublime quality', then, is to be found in this very badness, or rather, in this re-valuation of something bad into something good. In Fox's words: 'It's all good *because* it's all bad' (59). Thus, it's all popular *because* it's all unpopular—or, put differently, they are famous *because* they create the credible impression of only wanting to be famous in a small town.

Miranda Lambert, 'Famous in a Small Town'

Miranda Lambert's 2007 single 'Famous in a Small Town' not only provides the title for this paper but also points to the central contradiction at the heart of much of country music: how is it possible to enjoy popular success without sacrificing one's own authenticity on the altar of artificiality? In its lyrics as well as in its musical and visual presentation, Lambert's music video addresses the trappings of fame and directly engages the economics of popularity by singing about the advantages of unpopularity. The lyrics of the song waste no time getting to the heart of the matter, as the first verse immediately establishes the contradiction between popularity and small town anonymity. The first line describes an outsider's (metronormative) point of view, cryptically indicting an unreferenced 'They' who think that 'life is so much sweeter through the telephoto lens of fame', whereas 'around here you get just as much attention / cheerin' at the high school football game'. The deictic 'here' thus juxtaposes the beauty of small-town life where everybody is a star and, given the upbeat driving rhythm of an acoustic guitar strumming in a major key, the song already implies that this is neither a dirge nor an indictment of this small town but a resonant celebration of it.

The song's video stages this conflict quite effectively by showing us two parallel narrative strands: on the one hand, we see a small-town girl in boots

and dress walking through the eponymous 'small town', shot in black and white. On the other hand, the clip also showcases a musician and her band, playing on a bright red carpet, closely cordoned off against the backdrop of a marquee banner with the singer's name. This contrast is most effectively introduced in the second verse of the song: after the drums and electric guitars have set in, the lyrics move to the possible fame of Nashville as the video switches from monochrome black and white to colorful shots of pop stardom. Here, the video juxtaposes glamour shots on the red carpet—on which Lambert, in shiny clothes and full make-up, and her band perform the song—, including flashing cameras and all the other colorful accoutrements of pop stardom to the black-and-white popularity in a small town. Through the harsh juxtaposition of these two storylines, the video shows that being famous in a small town may be desirable but cannot easily be reconciled with commercial and popular success. It is an either/or-choice, it seems, since the worlds are simply too far apart. In fact, the lyrics explicitly question the need for pop-star fame and popularity, seeing that in small-town America everybody dies famous because everybody already is popular, whether it is for shooting 'the first buck of the season' or for 'cheerin' at the high school football game'. To visualize this, the video cuts various faces of small-town people against the artist singing on the red carpet, juxtaposing the two versions of popularity: real popularity vs small town popularity, a.k.a. unpopularity. Hitting home its point, the song's bridge spells out the advantages of this latter unpopular popularity: 'Well, baby who needs their faces in a magazine? Me and you, we've been stars in this town since we were seventeen'. Importantly, the black-and-white scenes do not appear bleak at all but come across as more grounded—more 'real', if you will—than the artificial colorfulness of popular stardom.

Given that Miranda Lambert stars in both storylines, however, the video also implies that it *is* possible to be both successful and to remain the simple girl next door, popular *and* unpopular at the same time. And this is the important point: in order for the song to work *as country music*, Lambert needs to be able to negotiate the gap between pop star and unpopular local hero, as country music audiences do not allow for distantly aloof superstars. No, they want even 'their' biggest stars to remain normal people—'just folks'—rather than artificial industrial products. They need to be both, the black-and-white regular girl next door *and* the glamorous superstar. In a certain sense, then, Lambert's song relishes the authenticity of unpopularity in country music even as it performs the very tension at the heart of country music: Miranda Lambert, of course, never would have become the country superstar she now is if she were literally 'only famous in a small town'.

Similarly, her single would not have sold in excess of 500,000 copies and been certified gold record status had it remained within the confines of her home town of Lindale, Texas, or within Lebanon, Tennessee, where the video was shot. Rather, country music sings about and for a metaphorical small-town America in order to distance itself from mainstream popularity. Presumably, it can do so without succumbing to the allures of pop stardom, and the country artist can, allegedly, stay true to the expectation of authenticity, which requires her to remain just a small town girl. As a country musician, Lambert can, and has to be, both: famous *and* famous in a small town.

Brad Paisley, 'Southern Comfort Zone'

Another song that plumbs these same depths is Brad Paisley's 2012 single 'Southern Comfort Zone'. It also quite self-consciously blends the dimensions of country's simultaneous popularity and unpopularity and describes the need to leave behind the singer's titular Southern comfort zone and venture out into a world in which 'Not everybody owns a gun [or] wears ball-cap, boots, and jeans'. Just as in Lambert's song, Paisley's lyrics make no mention that its lyrical I is a musician—yet, both songs more or less imply that their singers are not narrating a fictional story but are singing autobiographically about their own personal lives. Doing so, both Lambert and Paisley fold their artistic personae and their 'real' identities into one, in an attempt to create an authentic country persona who is the 'real deal', rather than an artificial pop star. 'Southern Comfort Zone' tells the story of a Southerner who leaves home, only to be surprised that 'not everybody drives a truck, not everybody drinks sweet tea'. The song opens with an acoustic guitar intro that is supported by the warm sound of a violin and the soft resonance of a mandolin, sampled into which are an excerpt from Jeff Foxworthy's 'You Might Be A Redneck' routine and a snippet from *The Andy Griffith Show*, thus setting the story in an imaginary Southern soundscape. Even more outrageously, the song explicitly refers to the Southern Comfort Zone as 'Dixie land', thus taking on a historically loaded term, complete with associations of the old South, slavery, rural backwardness, and all the historical baggage that makes 'Dixie' a contentious and thoroughly unpopular topic. As if this were not enough, the song is framed by choral renditions of the song 'Dixie', and Paisley's powerful electric guitar, drum, and banjo-driven chorus inscribes itself into the Southern tradition by directly addressing 'Dixie land, I hope you understand'. Yet, in its overemphasis

of some of the worst stereotypes of the Southern folk as gun-carrying, Nascar-loving, Billy Graham-following, Dixie-singing backward yokels, the song embraces these very stereotypes and claims the abject otherness of Southern identity as country music's legacy. Paisley's southern comfort zone, thus, is the realm of the unpopular—unpopular, that is, in the sense that Southern pride is frowned upon (in educated circles) as backward, reactionary, and highly politically incorrect; *and* unpopular in the sense that the comfort zone is understood not as the wide realm of the pop world but refers to a more or less closely demarcated idea of home that explicitly does *not* speak for all American people. In the words of the song's pre-chorus, country music sings about and for a frowned-upon 'minority'—an experience the singer has made on his cosmopolitan travels outside his Southern comfort zone—rather than for the people as a whole. In this, country music embraces its own outsider status, its own unpopular image, and revalues it from a stain into a rallying cry.

The supreme irony of the 'Southern Comfort Zone' becomes even clearer in its music video: its opening shot shows Paisley starting his tractor, dressed in Jeans, T-Shirt and wearing the inevitable cowboy hat.[8] Different from the album version, the video opens with a sample from the First World War-song 'How ya gonna keep'em down on the Farm? After they've seen Paree' (by Joe Young & Sam M. Lewis), which ironically highlights the central oppositions at play within country music's unpopularity: the safety of the small-town home versus the world, the unpopular tackiness of the small town boy, who phonetically misspells the name of the French capital versus the draw of cosmopolitan popularity. Once Paisley starts singing and strumming his acoustic guitar, the song slowly merges the rumbling of the tractor and the rhythm section of the band until, eventually, the scene cuts from the tractor to the singer running through a variety of European cities set against a fairly rocky musical accompaniment. As the song ends, the video cuts back to the still stuttering tractor, thus framing the popular, worldly music within a bracket of authentic Southern Dixieness. In many ways, then, the video self-consciously plays with the distinction between being down-home and worldly: it does so through its lyrics but also in its mixing of musical elements from traditional country and more cross-over/rock-oriented bits, such as the driving rhythm of the song or the extended electric guitar solo. Juxtaposing the country yokel and his tractor to the worldly cosmopolitan hectically rushing through European metropolises, the video portrays him as ultimately being equally at home in both. Moreover, the video cleverly plays with the supposedly large discrepancy between these roles and thereby signals not a 'lack of sophistication' but openly and self-reflexively 'functions

as a sly, even campy, announcement of the fact that it is a *performance* rather than a spontaneous expression of some pure emotion or state of being', as Ching has argued ('Acting Naturally' 233). In other words, Paisley's song self-consciously performs its 'authentic' countryness by presenting the music precisely through the lens of a metronormative point of view that pigeonholes country music accordingly. In this respect, Paisley's tractor and cowboy hat are simultaneously serious and deeply ironic gestures meant to underline both the authenticity of the music *and* the awareness that this is, after all, a performance. Rather than being a dismissal of the stereotype of the backward Southern redneck, 'Southern Comfort Zone' echoes and thus updates the infamous 'Dixie' as it loudly bangs a drum for the small-town, Southern heritage of the music. Yet, as a self-conscious performance the song also indicates that this Southern authenticity is no longer—if ever it was—to be had without the cosmopolitan dimension. In its sonic and visual blending of these two elements, the video showcases the enmeshment of the modern and the traditional, the popular and the unpopular and thereby complicates this very distinction. Yet, like so many country songs, old and new, it needs to reiterate the authentic heart of country, the Southern comfort zone without which no *country* popularity could ever come about: In short, without the tractor, Paisley would be just another pop star.

Darius Rucker, the South, and Unpopularity

As should have become clear, one of the defining criteria of country music is a self-conscious questioning of what it actually means to *be* country in the first place. As I have claimed, part of what makes country popular to its practitioners, fans, and critics is its embrace of a certain authentic image of 'being country' that celebrates its own unpopularity. In order to continuously underline this otherness from the merely popular, country music employs a wide variety of what Joli Jensen calls 'authenticity markers' that '*certify* [...] *country music as real to fans* [*yet which*] *are the same markers that seem corny and hillbilly to everyone else'* (13, emphasis in original). These markers range from the 'ball-cap, boots, and jeans' mentioned in 'Southern Comfort Zone' to the seemingly ever-present cowboy hat, and also include tractors, honky tonks, sweet tea, but also conservative values and religious beliefs, and a large variety of things that make country music appear unpopular and unappealing to certain audiences. In many country lyrics, you will find such proud celebrations of authentic country identity, all of which revolve around a counter-modern, anti-popular form of Southern pride.

Telling examples of such nostalgic Southern pride can be found in the music of Darius Rucker, who, after a successful career as lead singer for the indie rock band Hootie & the Blowfish in the 1990s, has established himself as a mainstream country artist. Throughout his country oeuvre, Rucker flaunts his Southern identity, exemplified by his third country album, *Charleston, SC 1966* (2010), whose title references the singer's own year of birth and his hometown, thus blending the singer's private life with his public country star persona. The song 'Southern State of Mind' describes a Southerner's experiences in Eastern and Western locations, where his way of life renders him an unpopular minority much as in Paisley's song.[9] Coincidentally, Rucker's song about being the Other of metronormativity invokes some of the same authenticity markers as does Paisley's song, singing that 'You can see it in the clothes I wear, you can hear it when I talk / Ball-cap, boots, and jeans, and a little Southern drawl'.[10] Establishing the South not only as a real geographic space but as a metaphorical home, the song juxtaposes the quirkiness of a 'Southern State of Mind' with the modernity of urban life, in relation to which country music self-avowedly has fallen out of both time and space. Similarly, Rucker's 2013 Grammy award-winning hit-single 'Wagon Wheel'[11] captures an image of the South as both sentimental home and as unpopular other to the 'cold up in New England', as the lyrics stipulate. Selling nearly three million copies of the single in two years (cf. 'Wagon Wheel'), the song clearly was a popular smash hit that celebrates a Southerner's running away from a Northern, urban, and metropolitan life. The song's up-beat chorus with its catchy repetition of Dylan's original phrase 'Rock me, momma, like a wagon wheel' is addressed not to the singer's real mother but metaphorically establishes the South as nurturing mother figure to which the lyrical I of the song desperately yearns to return. Just as the musician of Lambert's song flees the lure of Nashville, Rucker's singer returns to the Southern small-town life that is his home as he was 'born to be a fiddler in an old-time string band'. Within the song, the South serves as the metaphorical bosom nurturing the singer and even takes on an existential dimension as the third verse builds momentum toward the final chorus: 'And if I die in Raleigh, at least I will die free'. Here, reaching the South means freedom—even if this entails death.[12] The music video of this song further underlines this impression as it shows the singer's hitchhiking quest through a cold world eventually to find bodily warmth and human touch in a live music setting. On this journey, the neighborliness of the kind people driving him—all portrayed by members of the Robertson family[13]—stands in striking contrast to his chilly surroundings. Once the song reaches its final chorus, the singer has found the place in which he can

be both warm and free: a small bar where he performs 'Wagon Wheel' in front of an appreciative audience that joins him in a communal sing-along of the lyrics.[14] Catching the musically 'southbound train' of the oft-repeated chorus, Rucker's lyrical I yearns for—and ultimately reaches—the small-town Southern home of authentic country life as the song celebrates the authenticity of unpopularity in contemporary country music.

This is Country Music—and They Do

The interaction between artists and fans, as staged in the live performance in the video to Rucker's 'Wagon Wheel', is an important part of country music but also of unpopular culture more broadly understood. As the editors of this volume state in their introduction: 'The study of unpopular culture, then, is also the study of audiences, and it tends to be concerned more with the reception of cultural artifacts than with their production, since unpopularity presupposes an audience' (26). What is important about this definition is that production and reception need to be considered together when talking about unpopular culture, as unpopularity is neither detectable in the music per se—just as music's 'badness' as defined by Fox is not an objectively measurable quality, or lack thereof, in the music—nor is it something that resides solely with the recipients of the music and thus the audience (or the people refusing to listen to it). Country music consciously encodes unpopularity into its music, i.e. produces deliberately unpopular music, and its audience willingly embraces this unpopularity. That is to say, performers and fans of country music conspire to create unpopular identities that find expression in the music. In the words of the second verse of Paisley's 'This Is Country Music' (2010): 'It ain't hip to sing about tractors, trucks, little towns, and mama'. Here, the song pretends to take on the metronormative point of view that these, indeed, are topics unfit for popular culture, only to respond by proudly rejecting its validity; in a word (or three): 'This is country music—*and we do*!' In this song, the 'we' of country music defiantly celebrates its own 'abject badness' (Fox) and the proud unpopularity that the metronormative gaze ascribes to it.

Drawing on Frith's work on the function of popular music, Hubbs argues: 'Country music thus performs a type of cultural work that is performed by popular music generally. It models subjectivity in forms relevant to its listeners' (103). Yet, country music also *differs* from other popular music, Hubbs claims, in that it 'treats real-life themes of hard times, including facing serious illness and facing death' (103). And, indeed, Paisley's 'This

Is Country Music' is an excellent example of the ways in which country music proudly claims unpopular topics and establishes itself as a collaborative project of both producers and recipients. In the lyrics of the song we encounter country music's insistence on doing things differently, as the second verse explicitly states: 'It ain't hip to sing about tractors, trucks / Little towns and mama, / Yeah that might be true / But this is country music and we do'. The lyrics defy popular ('hip') tastes as does the song's instrumentation, in which the plucking of a banjo carries the melody. As the banjo sonically represents a rural, pre-modern, old-fashioned identity, it underlines country's otherness and thereby instruments country music's resistance to modern popularity. While a fiddle provides the harmonies over a whining pedal steel guitar in the background in the first verse, a fairly modern electric guitar picks up the song in the second verse, in a seamless juxtaposition of modern and traditional, popular and unpopular musical elements to exemplify the ways in which country music is both similar to and different from popular music. Country music's proud 'We do' serves as a rallying cry for the country community shouted into the face of popular music as a self-conscious form of othering, in which the 'we' sets itself in direct opposition to the implied popularity of 'them'. Insisting on its difference from popular culture, Paisley's country music celebrates its own tackiness and stoutly defends its usage of decidedly unpopular themes. Moreover, the chorus consciously refutes any distinction between the real world outside and the potentially artificial diegetic world of the song as it folds its listeners and its singer into one shared authentic country universe. Directly addressing the audience with 'you' throughout the song, the chorus explicitly states that 'This is real, this is your life in a song / Yeah, this is country music'. In short, not only does the song embrace country music's unpopularity by singing about unpopular themes such as 'cancer', 'Jesus', and the 'little towns' in which Lambert is so famous; no, it also claims that the deictic 'this' of country music is the authentic life-world of both performers and fans as they inhabit the unpopular realm of authentic country life *together*—as a 'we'.[5]

Clearly, this unpopularity is celebrated as a badge that needs to be earned and that is to be found in the nexus between production and reception, residing in neither sphere exclusively. Given country music's insistence on authenticity, it is not surprising to see how closely both artists and fans patrol the borders of what—and who—may count as authentic country music. This is why it is so important for any artist to establish their bona fide country credentials, and it also explains why Paisley's 'This Is Country Music' ends by namechecking a list of legendary country songs into whose

footsteps the song quite ambitiously steps. In its extended play-out, the song reiterates the authentic strength of country music by juxtaposing its titular phrase 'This is Country Music' with song titles such as 'Hello, Darling', 'He Stopped Loving Her Today', or 'Stand By Your Man'. The song never bothers to mention the names of the artists as the fans will know who they are—Conway Twitty, George Jones, and Tammy Wynette, respectively—and why their simple reference is enough to tap into the lineage of authentic country music. As Aaron Fox has convincingly argued, 'the standard of authenticity to which country is consequently held is [...] the historicized essence of 'real' country music—an originary badness, always receding into the nostalgic mists of a preceding generation of stars and consumers' (44). The 'real' thing into which contemporary country music thus taps is not a real to be found in the world outside, an existing way of life, as Fox importantly reminds us. Rather, it is an artistic discourse that creates the impression of realness by invoking the proud history of the music and the South, relishing a nostalgic version of the past that never was as unproblematic as these reminiscences imply. Country music is real and authentic because it sounds like the music that has come to be accepted as an authentic expression of the real, and the country community is proud of this unpopularity even if—or perhaps because—it is deemed deviant from a metronormative perspective.

Conclusion

The 'wheelhouse' of much of country music is the very tackiness of its 'Southern Comfort Zone', the 'Wagon Wheel' of Rucker's 'Southern State of Mind', or Lambert's small-town popularity. More precisely, country music is not only located in this liminal space but it has built a comfortable nesting spot in this position as a more 'real' alternative to the bland pop mainstream. Unfortunately, there is more to this unpopularity than just a stubborn refusal to be streamlined. As many critics, such as Pamela Fox or Geoff Mann have pointed out, country is a thoroughly white musical genre. This is not because of a lack of 'black' or non-white influences but, on the contrary, because it constructs and re-inscribes a certain notion of implicit whiteness that is not only unpopular but, at times, deeply racist. Therefore, the unpopularity of country music is more than a simple unwillingness to leave one's Southern comfort zone. It also entails a refusal to take on the admittedly complicated task of honestly dealing with its own (historical) constructions of whiteness. Part of country's unpopularity, as I have argued, lies in the music's Southern pride and the concomitant politics of

whiteness, despite the presence of African American fans and performers, such as Darius Rucker. Viewed from a different angle, this self-image of country music as an unpopular minority entirely silences these much more uncomfortable racial politics of country music, which more or less whitewash country music and disregard the problematic aspect of proudly embracing a redneck identity with all of history's baggage.[16] That is to say, the music embraces a notion of authenticity that is not only unpopular but, in fact, highly politically incorrect and, at times, blatantly racist.

   'Accidental Racist', Brad Paisley's hotly debated yet rightfully unpopular collaboration with hip-hop artist LL Cool J, is one of the few cases in which country music explicitly deals with racial issues. Its good intentions notwithstanding, the song is an awkward attempt to come to terms with the 'accidental racism' that is part and parcel of so much of American life and country music; or, as the first verse of the song phrases it: 'The red [Confederate] flag on my chest somehow is like the elephant in the corner of the south'. By 'walk[ing the elephant] right in the room', the song attempts to free Southern culture and country music from its historical baggage and to return to a nostalgic past back when it was okay proudly to embrace Southern identity and the unpopularity it entails. The song's lyrical I is a proud Southerner who insists on the necessity to start talking to one another about the uncomfortable effects of the intricate racial histories of the South, even though 'you and me can['t] re-write history'. In the song's final verse and chorus, Paisley and LL Cool J have a sincere dialogue, in which the former's country singing and the latter's rapping manage to overcome the past and, despite their statement to the contrary, attempt to 'rewrite history'.[17] Lyrically, the song is a horrible failure in that it compares black people's 'do-rags' to the white man's 'red flag' (the Confederate Flag) and, even more outrageously, compares hip-hop's 'gold chains' to slavery's 'iron chains'. Adding insult to injury, the song ends by proudly embracing the 'Southern pride' free of the so-called 'Southern blame' that accompanied it in the first iterations of the chorus and thus quite self-consciously inhabits a highly unpopular, abject, Southern point of view 'where all that's left is southern pride'.[18] At long last, country music can stake a claim in the unpopular realm of 'Dixie', the sounds of which permeate Paisley's entire album *Wheelhouse*—both Dixie as country music's metaphorical 'wheelhouse' and the song 'Dixie'. Here, it becomes clear why country is at the same time the music of the common people (and thus of quite a lot of folks) *and* so unpopular, out of time, and embarrassing to many other people (yours truly, at least sometimes, included): as it embraces the identity of supposedly authentic Southern, redneck identity, country music creates an

image that is well-nigh impossible to be proud of for quite a large number of people. Possibly, a country song by definition cannot achieve what Paisley presumably wanted it to: that is, to go beyond the tightly drawn racial scripts of country music because it is so deeply enmeshed in its own unpopular re-production of whiteness as its default condition (cf. Mann; Fox).

In the end, country music has to be a bit corny, a tad folksy, and above all authentic. Paisley's Southern comfort zone and Lambert's small town are the spaces in which this unpopular culture unfolds. And there is nothing wrong with only being famous in such a small town as long as this proud embrace of the genre's unpopularity does not entail clinging to a simplistic historical account of how its own whiteness was made. In that case it might be better if the music remained, indeed, truly unpopular and thus known only in a very, very small town.

Notes

1. Many thanks to Martin Lüthe und Sascha Pöhlmann for their insightful suggestions on an earlier draft of this essay.
2. Simply by using their real names, most country stars mark their difference from the artificiality of pop stars such as Madonna or Lady Gaga. The German term *Künstlername* perhaps best expresses the ambiguity of taking on a persona: the term literally means 'artist name', thus naturalizing the artificiality of choosing a pseudonym rather than one's real name for the purpose of performing an artistic identity. For an important analysis of the ways in which 'the folk' and folklore are often read as authentic products rather than constructions themselves, cf. Bendix.
3. A long list of indicators could be used to document the increasing cross-over success of country artists, such as ABC's screening of a three-hour prime-time broadcast of the CMA Music Festival on 5 August 2014 (cf. Hudak) or the recent hype about so-called 'bro-country' on the general pop charts (cf. Dauphin and my critical discussion of the latter in 'All Kinds of (Queer) Rednecks').
4. This recent (re-)popularization of Southern culture is, of course, nothing really new given that Southern music has shaped American (popular) music throughout its history; as its preeminent historian Bill Malone has argued, the South 'was the land that gave rise to virtually every form of American popular music' (*Southern Music* 4).
5. To give just two examples out of a very small number of studies available: Covach's essay on 'unpopular musicology' only uses the term in its catchy title and never discusses the term's wider implications, whereas the editors of *The Popular Music Studies Reader* limit discussion of *un*popularity in

their introduction to a short aside on 'live opera' as a 'defiantly unpopular' form of entertainment, 'in both economic and cultural terms' (3).

6. To give just two examples for the general dislike of and hate toward country music: Aaron Fox has pointed out that country music is the only musical genre that is often negatively referenced in personal ads in newspapers (cf. Fox 44). In 'Anything But Country', the first chapter of her *Rednecks, Queers & Country Music* (23–50), Hubbs discusses the phenomenon that so many people feel the need to distance themselves from country music— or, rather, not from the music *per se* but from country music 'as a cultural category and brand' (23).

7. In Frith's much better formulation: 'Authenticity […] is a quality not of the music as such […], but of the story it's heard to tell' ('Music' 124).

8. Thus Paisley continues the long tradition of country music's 'singing cowboys': dressed in 'ersatz cowboy costume' this figure 'had won the day in country music' by the time Hank Williams and Hank Snow appeared in the 1950s (Malone, *Singing Cowboys* 99).

9. Given that Rucker, as of 2014, is the only major African American country artist with any semblance of mainstream success, this notion of being a minority takes on another layer of meaning—to which I will return in my conclusion.

10. Perhaps not surprisingly, both songs were co-written by Chris DuBois, which may explain the repeated use of the exact same phrase in different songs.

11. The song is a cover version of the 2004 underground smash hit by the string band Old Crow Medicine Show, who, in turn, had written this song based on snippets of a song written by Bob Dylan in 1973. While the Old Crow version already had become something of a Southern popular phenomenon—their song never hit the charts until Rucker's version was released but could be heard around campfires, tailgates, and college parties all over the American South—, Rucker exploded the popularity of this song, taking it not only to the top of the country charts but also reaching the top 20 on the *Billboard Hot 100* (cf. 'Darius Rucker').

12. There is a certain irony in this line, considering that Rucker, sole successful *black* country artist, sings about running to—rather than fleeing from—the South to gain his freedom.

13. Like almost no other on-screen personalities, the Robertsons of *Duck Dynasty*-fame stand for a Southern unpopular way of life that resists the pace of modernity and of artificial popular culture against which their staged authentic lifestyle is set. Not only have they been met with TV success; they have also made strong in-roads into the country music industry in recent years. They have recorded a CD of country Christmas songs, on which they collaborate with country superstars such as George Strait, Alison Krauss, and Luke Bryan, appeared at the 2013 CMA awards, and have starred in Tyler Farr's video to 'Redneck Crazy' (2013). In all of these, the Robertsons

epitomize the figure of the redneck, a central—truly unpopular—trope in much recent country music (cf. my 'All Kinds').

14. This ending creates the impression of authentic live music. In a discussion of the history of country music videos, Fenster has analyzed this device under the heading of the 'performance/concept combination' (Fenster 116). Cf. also Auslander's argument that the music video 'has usurped live performance's authenticating function' (105). In 'All Kinds of Kinds' I briefly address the community-constructing function of such intradiegetic live performances as a form of country music's political unconscious.

15. In this respect, it is a clever choice that Paisley did not produce a music video for this single but simply used a live performance from the 2010 CMA awards, at the beginning of which he thanks the fans for his Entertainer of the Year Award.

16. As Berndt Ostendorf so helpfully pointed out in his response to this paper: there seems to be a 'masochistic celebration of a wound' (Munich, 30 October 2013) at play in many nostalgic distortions of the past in American culture, an example of which can be found in country music's embrace of the Southern past.

17. As many commentators have pointed out there are two main objections to this set-up: first, Paisley is using one black popular artist as a straw-man to absolve the South and country music of their historical mistakes and problematic silences. Second, the particular artist that he chooses has never been known for his political outspokenness (as opposed to, say, Mos Def or Public Enemy); moreover, LL Cool J, by now, is not even perceived as a musician anymore but much more widely known as an actor in the popular police procedural *NCIS: Los Angeles*. Paisley's choice of him as *the* spokesperson for black people, thus, is viewed as misleading at best and dishonest at worst (cf. Coates).

18. I am not alone among critical audiences of the song to be irritated by Paisley's choice of the words 'Southern *blame*' in the chorus, thus singing about an assignation of blame from outside rather than about an honest confession of guilt (*shame*). Thanks to Heike Paul for pointing this out to me.

Works Cited

Auslander, Philip. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. Second Edition. London: Routledge, 2011. Print.

Bennett, Andy, Barry Shank, and Jason Toynbee, eds. *The Popular Music Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Ching, Barbara. 'Acting Naturally: Cultural Distinction and Critiques of Pure Country.' *White Trash: Race and Class in America*. Ed. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz. New York: Routledge, 1997. 231–48. Print.

—. *Wrong's What I Do Best: Hard Country Music and Contemporary Culture*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. Print.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. 'Why 'Accidental Racist' is Actually Just Racist.' *The Atlantic*. 9 Apr. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Covach, John. 'Popular Music, Unpopular Musicology.' *Rethinking Music*. Ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. 452–70. Print.

'Darius Rucker.' *Billboard.com*. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Dauphin, Chuck. 'America's Music: How Country Popped its Way into the Mainstream.' *Billboard. com*. 2 June 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Fenster, Mark. 'Genre and Form: The Development of the Country Music Video.' *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader*. Ed. Simon Frith, Andrew Goodwin, and Lawrence Grossberg. London: Routledge, 1993. 109–28. Print.

Fox, Aaron A. 'White Trash Alchemies of the Abject Sublime: Country as 'Bad' Music.' *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*. Ed. Christopher J. Washburne and Maiken Derno. New York: Routledge, 2004. 39–61. Print.

Fox, Pamela. *Natural Acts: Gender, Race, and Rusticity in Country Music*. Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 2009.

Frith, Simon. 'Music and Identity.' *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay. London: Sage, 1996. 108–27. Print.

—. 'Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music.' *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance, and Reception*. Ed. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987. 133–49. Print.

—. 'What is Bad Music?' *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*. Ed. Christopher J. Washburne and Maiken Derno. New York: Routledge, 2004. 15–36. Print.

Halberstam, Judith. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York UP, 2005. Print.

Hubbs, Nadine. *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music*. Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 2014. Print.

Hudak, Joseph. 'ABC's Music Fest Special: Jake Owen and Justin Moore's Exclusive Preview.' *Rolling Stone Country*. 4 Aug. 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Jensen, Joli. *The Nashville Sound: Authenticity, Commercialization, and Country Music*. Nashville: The Country Music Foundation Press & Vanderbilt UP, 1998. Print.

Lüthe, Martin, and Sascha Pöhlmann. 'Introduction: What is Unpopular Culture?' *Unpopular Culture*. Ed. Martin Lüthe and Sascha Pöhlmann. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2016. 7-29. Print.

Malone, Bill C. *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers: Southern Culture and the Roots of Country Music*. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1993. Print.

—. and David Stricklin. *Southern Music/American Music*. 1979. Revised Edition. Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 2003. Print.

Mann, Geoff. 'Why Does Country Music Sound White? Race and the Voice of Nostalgia.' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31.1 (2008): 73–100. Print.

'Music's Top 40 Money Makers 2014: The Rich List.' *Billboard.com*. 10 Mar. 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Neal, Jocelyn R. *Country Music: A Cultural and Stylistic History*. New York: Oxford UP, 2013. Print.

Newitz, Annalee, and Matt Wray. 'Introduction.' *White Trash: Race and Class in America*. Ed. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz. New York: Routledge, 1997. 1–12. Print.

Ostendorf, Bernd. 'Introduction: Wounds as Collective Memory.' *Negotiations of America's National Identity*. Vol. II. Ed. Roland Hagenbüchle and Josef Raab. With Marietta Messmer. Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2000. 275–82. Print.

Schmidt, Christian. 'Nashville—The Authentic Heart and Soul of Country Music?' *Rural America*. Ed. Antje Kley and Heike Paul. Heidelberg: Winter, 2015. 327-45. Print.

—. 'All Kinds of (Queer) Rednecks: The Sexual Politics of Contemporary Country Music.' *America and the Musical Unconscious*. Ed. Julius Greve and Sascha Pöhlmann. New York: Atropos Press, 2016. 65–92. Print.

Storey, John. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. 3rd Edition. Harlow: Prentice Hall; Pearson Education, 2001. Print.

'Wagon Wheel.' *RIAA.com*. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Music and Music Videos

Lambert, Miranda. 'Famous in a Small Town.' *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. Columbia Nashville, 2007. CD.

—. 'Famous in a Small Town.' Music Video. Dir. Trey Fanjoy. 2007. Web. Vevo.com.

Paisley, Brad. 'Accidental Racist.' *Wheelhouse*. Arista Nashville, 2013. CD.

—. 'Southern Comfort Zone.' *Wheelhouse*. Arista Nashville, 2013. CD.

—. 'Southern Comfort Zone.' Music Video. Dir. Jim Shea. 2012. Web. Vevo.com.

—. 'This Is Country Music.' 2010. *This Is Country Music*. Arista Nashville, 2011. CD.

—. 'This Is Country Music.' Music Video. Recorded at CMA awards 2010. Nashville. Vevo.com.

Rucker, Darius. 'Southern State of Mind.' *Charleston, SC 1966*. Capitol Nashville, 2010. CD.

—. 'Wagon Wheel.' *True Believers*. Capitol Nashville, 2013. CD.

—. 'Wagon Wheel.' Music Video. Dir. Jim Wright. 2013. Web. CMT.com.

Making Christianity Cool

Christian Pop Music's Quest for Popularity

Bärbel Harju

'Can't you see? You're not making Christianity better, you're making rock and roll worse!' Hank Hill's assessment of Christian rock music in the episode 'Reborn to Be Wild' of the animated sitcom *King of the Hill* corresponds with much of the mainstream media's perception of this phenomenon.[1] A *Seinfeld* episode, 'The Burning', also illustrates the poor reputation of Christian pop. Upon learning that her boyfriend listens to Christian rock music, Elaine voices concern about his taste in music, but her friend George disagrees: 'I like Christian rock. It's very positive. It's not like those real musicians who think they're so cool and hip'. George's endorsement backfires, of course, as he clearly makes a distinction between 'real', 'cool', 'hip' artists and Christian rock musicians.

Christian pop's reputation as 'the least fashionable music on earth' (Beaujon 6) is not limited to mainstream media and pop culture. When I began researching Christian pop music, I soon found out that this musical genre is quite unpopular as an academic topic. The amount of scholarly work on the subject pales next to the books and articles on more popular musical genres such as hip-hop and punk, gospel and folk music, and in fact most histories of popular music almost ignore the phenomenon altogether.[2] The reactions of most colleagues when I disclosed my area of research to them ranged from amusement and skepticism to utter incomprehension as to what the motives for studying Christian rock might be. Claire Fisher's comment on the TV show *Six Feet Under* when she finds out that her boyfriend listens to Christian rock captures how most people feel about this topic: 'Oh my god, you may just be the most deeply unhip person I have ever met' (qtd. in Beaujon 6). Its negative connotations notwithstanding, Christian pop music, its cultural ramifications and contradictions, had captivated my attention: anything this unpopular, I supposed, was certainly worth exploring.

Making Christianity cool is a challenge. The term 'Christian pop music', to many, has an almost oxymoronic ring to it.[3] Often ridiculed, marginalized or dismissed as unauthentic, uncool, irrelevant, and unhip, the concept of evangelical pop and rock music appears to be too far removed from the infamous triumvirate of drugs, and rock and roll. Since its inception in the late 1960s, Christian pop music has been a contested genre, generating

criticism from all sides. The development and transformations of the genre correspond with the changing attitudes of its critics. This essay analyzes Christian pop music's shifting engagement with 'secular' society and mainstream pop culture since the late 1960s. An examination of its (self-) perception as unpopular and its continuous struggle with the mechanisms, values, and demands of pop culture also sheds light on American culture at large. Christian pop music's search for popularity derives from complex and often conflicting agendas. Situated between religion, commerce, and music, this quintessentially American phenomenon is not a fringe phenomenon, but it provides insight into America evangelicalism as well as the larger culture. Its attempts to join the mainstream can be seen as part of the broader evangelical movement and its strategic embrace of popular culture.

Christian pop should be understood as part and parcel within the framework of American evangelicalism that has always operated successfully in the marketplace of culture.[4] As historian Robert Laurence Moore convincingly argues, its employment of marketing techniques and the quick adaptation of media innovations and popular trends helped evangelicalism to stay 'lively and relevant to national life by reflecting popular taste and commanding media coverage' (275).[5]Assertive self-commodification has allowed evangelicals to spread their message in the most contemporary way while reaching out to non-believers and remaining culturally relevant. The emulation of mainstream cultural practices attests to its flexibility in terms of cultural adaption, it is important to note, however, that there has been a 'tradition of dissent', a 'sense of dispossession from, and antagonism toward, dominant culture' (Luhr 107). Taking into account the conflicted relationship between American evangelicalism and the larger culture, I will show how Christian pop has struggled with all three: notions of popularity, mainstream culture, and its critics.

Contrary to the widespread dismissal of Christian pop as uncool and unpopular, the genre is firmly rooted in American popular culture. Christian pop has found its niche in the marketplace of culture as part of a huge Christian, largely evangelical, billion-dollar-a-year-entertainment industry (Ali). With several big music festivals, a large number of record labels, award shows, radio stations and magazines, Christian pop music has been one of the fastest growing genres of music in the U.S. during the past 20 years. Its records outsell those of jazz and classical music combined with a 7% share of overall music sales in the U.S. in 2001 (Ali).[6] Despite its commercial success, however, Christian pop often fails to register with the mainstream music culture, which is either completely apathetic towards it or considers it a rather marginal phenomenon with only limited cultural impact.

Its popularity, measured in terms of commercial success and number of consumers, comes along with an astounding critical unpopularity.

This critical unpopularity of the genre has not been coherent or monolithic. In fact, Christian pop music has been criticized for many reasons from both within and outside of the evangelical community. Some of the charges leveled against the genre from mainstream critics include, but are not limited to, the following: the alleged poor quality of the music both artistically and production-wise; 'bad', agenda-driven songwriting oscillating between happy-clappy Christianity and turn-or-burn rhetoric; the perceived lack of authenticity due to a disconnect between musical style and lyrical content (a favorite target here is Christian black metal music); a certain uneasiness relating to the financial exploitation of faith; the 'sneaky' employment of pop music as a tool for either evangelization or the promotion of (sometimes equally unpopular) right-wing politics.[7]

The criticism of Christian pop music by evangelicals is equally diverse: the allegation that rock music itself is inherently bad or 'of the devil'—a concern frequently expressed by televangelists during the culture wars of the 1970s and 1980s; commercialization and 'selling Jesus' as an ungodly practice—spreading the gospel should be a ministry, not a business; the 'sell-out' accusation: Christian pop music emulates the secular world and therefore falls prey to its values, succumbing to commercialism and star cult; bands employing subtle lyrics are accused of watering down their message; and finally, others argue for the dismissal of Christian pop as a genre altogether, claiming they are 'Christian by faith, not by genre' (Kirk Miller 36) and refusing to be pigeonholed by their association with evangelicalism and the stigma that is attached to it.

In his essay 'What is Bad Music?' popular music scholar Simon Frith stresses the shape-shifting and constructed nature of 'bad music' as a concept and its necessity for musical aesthetics (cf. 19).[8] Judgments of music, Frith points out, are sociological rather than musical, criticizing the 'social institutions or social behavior for which the music simply acts as a sign' (20). While a lack of authenticity is the most common allegation, explanations often focus on production-related charges, the supposedly formulaic nature of a musical product, the prioritizing of marketing as opposed to artistic decisions, or the derivative (as opposed to original), standardized (as opposed to individual) production of music (cf. Frith 22–28). The multi-faceted criticisms of Christian pop illustrate that the identity of the listener is key to aesthetic and ethical judgments of music. Depending on who is listening to it, a song could be considered too preachy or not preachy enough. Negative stereotypes invoked in the mainstream media may thus say more about pop

culture at large than about Christian pop music. Audiences respond to the genre based on musical and cultural knowledge and expectation. The value judgments listed above are equally ethical, musical and heavily dependent on the identity of the listener (cf. Frith 33). The evolution of Christian pop music and its critics not only sheds light on the interfaces of music, commercialism, and evangelical Christianity, but also on the complex cultural mechanisms that produce and construct this genre's (un)popularity.

A Parallel Universe? Cultural Warriors and the Commercialization of Christian Pop

The counterculture of the Sixties is widely recognized as the birthplace of Christian pop music. Members of the Jesus People Movement—hippie-inspired born-again Christians—committed an act of rebellion when they adapted contemporary rock, pop, and folk music to spread the gospel.[9] Refuting the sacred hymns and gospel songs found in churches, young Jesus Freaks took to the streets and claimed rock music 'to make a joyful noise for the Lord' (Diamond 48). As a 'counterculture within a counterculture' (Romanowski 61), this mass youth movement opposed not only the hedonistic culture of their day but also rejected established churches. They founded their own parachurch organizations and groups catering to hippie sensibilities and countercultural appearances and practices.[10] Their rallying cry was coined by Larry Norman, one of the pioneering Jesus Rock musicians, who famously asked in his 1972 hit song: 'Why should the devil have all the good music?' The Jesus Freaks' primary goal was to reach their generation's lost souls through rock music with straightforward, simplistic Christian lyrics. Although it gained momentum among the spiritually seeking youth, conservative evangelical leaders questioned the viability of rock music as a tool for evangelization, suspecting a depreciation of the message (cf. Plowman 32).[11]

The initial popularity of Jesus Rock at the time of the Hippie movement, however, quickly vanished. Harsh criticism was sparked during the 1970s and 1980s, when the movement and its music became increasingly commercialized—co-opted and exploited by more conservative forces and mainstream evangelical organizations.[12] Christian pop grew into a full-fledged industry that emulated the musical styles and business models of the mainstream: record labels, magazines, award shows, and radio stations were founded, but the newly created parallel universe lagged behind the mainstream's standards of production, distribution, and marketing. The

relative mediocrity of evangelical cultural production was not only noted by mainstream critics, evangelicals too criticized the retreat into a closed-off subculture with 'inbred artists [...] rewarded by those who populate this little ghetto' (Schaeffer 46), unaware of broader cultural currents and movements. Though evangelization remained part of the rhetoric, Christian pop music was almost exclusively sold in Christian bookstores, played on Christian radio stations and performed in Christian venues: 'Designed to reach the lost, the music was being heard by the found' (Howard and Streck 71).

Christian pop artists did not create new sounds; innovation and creativity were largely surrendered to mainstream artists. Christian singers and bands simply added distinctly Christian lyrics to existing popular musical styles from new wave and metal to punk, rock, and pop. Disregarding its cultural roots and social implications, they considered music a neutral vehicle to convey the evangelistic message. Aside from the obviously derivative nature of the music, the result was often a certain disconnect between the music and the lyrics, 'a curiously rootless sort of music' (Flake 182). Authenticity, allegedly an important ingredient of art, was glaringly missing from this sanitized version of pop music.

Meanwhile, Christian pop music culture indulged in self-flagellation and tore itself up about questions concerning the nature of their enterprise, as Christian radio DJ Paul Baker remembers: 'Is the music a ministry, or is it entertainment? Can it be both? Should there be such a thing as Christian entertainment? How far was too far in becoming like the pop-music industry?' (133) Artists questioned their roles in the conflicting spheres of business and ministry, but no one matched the commitment of singer Keith Green. Convinced that 'ministry of any kind should be free' (Green 233), Green announced to withdraw from the commercial side of Christian pop and began to give his albums away for free. Since none of his peers followed suit, Green's attempt to 'un-commercialize' the gospel (Green 230) could not resolve the conflict between ministry and economics. This long-lasting identity crisis was only gradually overcome in the 1990s.[13]

Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), as the genre was called by the mid-1970s, was undeniably far removed from rock'n'roll rebellion. The rigid codes of moral conduct of evangelical Christianity contributed to an atmosphere that stifled creativity and smothered artistic experimentation. Songs and singers were scrutinized by unforgiving audiences and record companies, who routinely included morality clauses in their record contracts with artists to ensure Christian behavior (cf. Dawidoff 43). Gatekeepers—especially Christian bookstores, where most of the music was sold—and radio

stations only promoted morally acceptable music that explicitly represented evangelical values, sometimes counting the 'jpm' (Jesuses per minute), as opposed to the bpm (beats per minute). The consumption of alcohol, the use of swearwords or the sporting of even a mildly sexy outfit could legitimately end or stifle careers in the Christian market. 'Safe for the whole family', the governing principle for Christian entertainment, created a bad image that looms large in the popular imagination of Christian pop until today.

The *South Park* episode 'Christian Rock Hard' that first aired in 2003 perfectly illustrates this negative image. Cartman bets Kyle that he can make a platinum record before him, and he identifies Christian rock as the quickest way to fame and fortune: 'Think about it! It's the easiest crappiest music in the world, right? If we just play songs about how much we love Jesus, all the Christians will buy our crap'. This alludes to the common—and quite plausible—impression that 'the Christian audience had a higher toleration for crap music', as Christian rock singer Steve Taylor explained in a personal interview. As long as it came 'coupled with a good message' (Taylor), believers seemed to embrace it. Author and industry insider John J. Thompson notes that 'by the mid-1980s, the Christian pop scene had become a machine that could sell a certain amount of everything, regardless of quality. [...] The result was waves of awful Christian pop records' (89). *South Park's* satirizing of the songwriting process for a Christian pop song also refers to the lack of authenticity due to the music's derivative, un-artistic production. As Cartman explains: 'All we have to do to make Christian songs is take regular old songs and add Jesus stuff to them. See? All we have to do is cross out words like 'baby' and 'darling' and replace them with "Jesus"'. The aforementioned disconnect between lyrics and music becomes obvious, when Cartman replaces certain lyrics to boost the jpm-factor, thereby implying a romantic relationship with Jesus:

> Don't ever leave me, Jesus, I couldn't stand to see you go.
> My heart would simply snap, my Lord, if you walked on out that door.
> I promise I'll be good to you and keep you warm at night.
> Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, why don't you just shut off the lights.

South Park mocks the way Christian record companies try to exert moral control over their artists. When the CEO of the fictional *Faith Records* comments on some of the lyrics before signing the band, he quips: 'It appears you are actually in love with Christ'. The conflict between ministry and business is poignantly captured as the record company executive assures that they would 'just like to make sure the bands we sign are in it for God,

and not for the money'. He then prods them to just 'sign here and we'll get your album sold'. *South Park*'s portrayal of Christian pop music is predicated on the genre's negative image that goes back to the 1980s: a commercialized, both musically and lyrically unsophisticated, one-dimensional emulation of secular pop songs, sometimes dubbed as 'Christian cotton candy' (Menconi 20).

This depiction of tame, happy-clappy Christian music is one version of evangelical popular music during the 1980s. Artists like Amy Grant became huge commercial hits—and even had some crossover success in the mainstream—with sweet melodies and simplistic lyrics that did not dig very deep theologically. At the same time, though, there existed another, more aggressive type of Christian rock that was deeply entangled with and influenced by the culture wars raging during the 1980s. Conservative evangelicals had been heavily politicized and rallied around organizations of the New Religious Right like Jerry Falwell's 'Moral Majority'. The rhetoric of political debates and televangelist broadcasts was boasting, replete with militaristic and triumphalist imagery. The framing of conflicts as war, the emphasis of clearly opposing categories like 'right' and 'wrong', 'good' and 'evil', 'us' versus 'them' are staples in Christian pop music culture during the 1980s.[14] Christian pop music increasingly became associated with the Christian Right and evoked images of self-righteous, greedy, fire-and-brimstone televangelists and politicians with aggressive political stances towards abortion, pre-marital sex, and same-sex marriage.

Petra is a case in point. One of the most successful Christian rock bands of the 1980s, they sold out huge secular venues with their arena rock. Songs like 'The Battle Belongs to the Lord' and 'Armed and Dangerous' identified the secular world as the enemy and positioned Petra as relentless Christian warriors. Their stage outfits resembled combat gear, and they opened their shows with the hymn 'Onward Christian Soldier' (Powell, 'Petra'). 'This Means War!' illustrates how the band unabashedly interspersed triumphalist rhetoric with military imagery:

> This means war! And the battle's still raging.
> War—and though both sides are waging
> The victor is sure and the victory secure,
> But till judgment day we all must endure.

Their display of triumphalism and spiritual warfare appealed to the evangelical audience but never succeeded in the mainstream market, nor was it intended to do so. The 'world' is clearly the opponent, as singer Bob Hartman

explained: 'We know our music is aimed at the church. [...] [The album *This Means War!*] deals with all three areas of our spiritual warfare. As Christians, our enemies are the world, the flesh, and the devil. The songs on *This Means War!* deal with one of those three issues and talk about spiritual warfare' (Newcomb 99).[15] The closing of ranks with the New Religious Right manifested itself not only in imagery and rhetoric, but also in Petra's support of conservative politics, for example their promotion of a constitutional amendment allowing prayers in public schools (cf. Powell, 'Petra').

If mainstream critics took any notice of it at all, they dismissed the music as 'mediocre stuff, diluted by hesitation and dogmatic formula, inferior to the mainstream popular music it emulates' (Dawidoff).[16] The rejection by mainstream audiences and critics allowed—and continues to allow— Christian pop bands to tap into a traditional trope among U.S. evangelicals, namely narratives surrounding its 'persecution complex' (Joseph 181). The perceived dispossession and rejection by the mainstream enables artists to position themselves as 'rock's real rebels' (Kevin Miller 90) and articulate their unpopularity in positive terms based on Jesus' persecution due to his countercultural stance. Mark Stuart, singer of Audio Adrenaline, elaborates on the idea of Christian rebellion in the face of adverse circumstances: 'I think rebellion and Christianity go together [...]. Singing about sex and drugs is the easiest thing to do. It's old by now. So pretty much the most rebellious rock-and-roll person you can be is a Christian-rock frontman because you get people from every side trying to shut you down' (Ali 43). The framing of mainstream culture in terms of conformity to a godless value system emphasizes Christian pop's claim to its potential as a subversive force that questions or undermines dominant ideology.[17]

The extent to which this potential was achieved during the 1980s remains disputable. Christian teenagers embraced 'cool' Christian bands like Petra, but conservative evangelists like Jimmy Swaggart publicly denounced the music while the mainstream was largely unresponsive. Internal struggles with notions of commercialized ministry and religious entertainment continued to plague the evangelical music industry. Overall, Christian pop became a deeply conflicted, self-contained subculture, predicated on its opposition to an allegedly corrupt 'secular' mainstream culture. By adapting and 'Christianizing' secular musical styles, Christian pop provided music for the converted, a safe and healthy alternative for the Christian youth, not a vehicle to 'save lost souls'. Christian pop culture turned into 'a cultural ghetto, frequently ridiculed and easily avoided' (Powell, 'Jesus') that had little—if any—traction beyond its boundaries. This era shaped the image of Christian pop as second-rate, a 'pale imitation of the real thing' (Howard and Streck 35).

Christian by Faith, not by Genre: Embracing the Mainstream

Since the early 1990s, however, Christian pop music has been on a quest for popularity, 'hipping itself for the approaching millennium' (Ali). The professionalization of the genre was spurred by secular media conglomerates' acquisition of Christian record labels. Companies like BMG and EMI identified American evangelicals as a profitable segment for the entertainment industry and noticed the monetary gain to be made with Christian pop music. Backed by these corporations, the production, distribution and marketing mechanisms for Christian pop improved drastically and could now match the mainstream market's standards. No longer dependent on conservative, volatile Christian book stores, the music is now available at secular outlets and garners considerable crossover success with many artists generating sales in both the Christian and the mainstream market.[18] This transformation and reframing of Christian pop music came along with hip appearances, subtle lyrics and a new openness towards non-believers. The rhetoric of the culture war gave way to subtle, more marketable terminology. In a *Newsweek* article in 2001, Lorraine Ali described Christian pop music as the 'hottest genre in the entire music industry', quoting recent sales figures that added up to '747 million Dollars in records sales last year—7 percent of the overall sales in the American music industry'. Similar to country music, Christian pop has carved out a lucrative niche for itself in the highly competitive cultural marketplace. The music allows evangelicals to participate in a wholesome version of popular culture without feeling that they have to make sacrifices in terms of quality and coolness.

Not satisfied with the niche status as part of the evangelical subculture, however, a growing number of Christian artists have been reaching out to a broader audience by attempting to abandon the label 'Christian'—and the stigma that is attached to it—altogether. Bands like P.O.D., SixPenceNonetheRicher, The Fray, Creed and many others have left the parallel universe of Christian pop music behind to explore other ways of articulating the gospel. Presenting a 'modern version of evangelism that uses a new language, a new discursive style' (Hendershot 54), their musical message is more subtle and toned down. Decoding and interpreting the meaning of their songs requires an active role on the part of the listener. The lyrics avoid 'bible-thumping' and 'turn-or-burn' rhetoric and are characterized by ambiguity, offering a vaguely Christian perspective based on love, forgiveness, responsibility, and social equality. The names of Jesus or God are never explicitly mentioned, and often substituted with the more embracing 'you'. The implication that the song might be addressing a loved-one earned them

the name 'God-as-a-girlfriend-song'—a reverse strategy from the 1980s jpm count alluded to in the above-mentioned *South Park* episode. These artists succeeded within the framework of the mainstream music culture without completely abandoning religious undertones—by quietly sharing their worldview without reverting to preaching.

Christian pop artists' embrace of the mainstream coincided with changes in evangelical culture overall: while many evangelicals were still 'suspicious of mainstream culture and the cultural elite', those in positions of cultural and social leadership actively 'distance[d] themselves from the movement's subculture' that they describe as '"gross", "cheesy", and "anemic"' (Lindsay 121, 123). The unpopularity of evangelicalism, their image as ruthless cultural warriors and greedy, hypocritical televangelists required the adoption of new strategies. Efforts to embrace the mainstream are manifest in the upsurge of so-called seeker churches since the 1990s that catered to non-Christian 'spiritual seekers' and their consumerist sensibilities (cf. Sargeant 146).[19] While seeker sensitivity is predicated on clever marketing techniques and a contemporary presentation of the gospel, the so-called emerging church, another trend among American evangelicals that began in the 1990s, aims to reconcile postmodern culture and Christian sensibilities by discarding absolute truth claims and embracing doubt, insecurity and flaws while focusing more on social equality and justice.[20] Evangelical cultural production reflected these trends. Instead of preaching to 'unsaved' people with straightforward Christian messages, this new generation of artists relied on 'seed-planting' and pre-evangelism tactics: 'The new evangelical quietly "shared" with "searchers" rather than preaching hellfire and damnation from a pulpit' (Hendershot 61). The focus has shifted from overemphasizing the artists' lyrics and lifestyle to focusing more on artistic integrity and excellence—which many evangelicals cultural leaders now understood to be a prerequisite for cutting edge cultural products and mainstream acclaim.

The new brand of Christian pop music succeeded with mainstream audiences, and their quest for popularity is now making progress. Key to mainstream acceptance is the avoidance of any overt association with the evangelical subculture. Jason Wade, lead singer of the band Lifehouse, tried to steer clear of the stigma that is attached to Christian pop: 'My music is spiritually based, but we don't want to be labeled as a Christian band, because people's walls come up and they won't listen to your music and what you have to say' (Wild 45). The rock band Creed has successfully appealed to the music industry by shunning the Christian music subculture, as one observer notes:

> Whenever anyone asks Creed if they're Christian, they say: 'No, but we're searching'. It's obvious that they've either done their homework very well or they have some sort of a Christian foundation in their background. [...] It's great that they're careful, with the way the world is today, the way popular culture and the people they're trying to sell records to are. Creed's not ostracizing themselves by communicating that they've found all the answers. (Jonathan Richter qtd. in Hendershot 59)

Switchfoot, another example of the new approach in Christian rock, rejects the categorization as a Christian band in an often-quoted statement by bassist Tim Foreman. When asked by *Rolling Stone Magazine* whether Switchfoot is a Christian band, Foreman replied: 'We're Christian by faith, not by genre' (Kirk Miller 36). Foreman challenged the label 'Christian music' by insisting that a genre should be characterized by musical style, not lyrical content. Carefully crafted interviews and conscientious statements obscure the band's agenda in order to win over the mainstream without deterring Christian fans. Many of these artists quote U2—the enormously successful band with several Christian members—as role models, since they have been on 'a long, arduous and well-planned trek, astutely avoiding the cultural ghetto of Christian music' (Di Sabatino, 'Why') since the 1980s while weaving subtle Christian messages into their lyrics.[21] Christian audiences know how to interpret these bands' obscured messages and claim them for themselves, even if the artists do not identify themselves as Christian.

Ambiguity, double-coding, and subtle references also helped nu-metal band P.O.D. succeed in the mainstream. Early in their career, the band's lyrics were seasoned with fire and brimstone—and it didn't shy away from hot-button issues of the culture wars, as their 1993 song 'Abortion is Murder' vividly proves.[22] On later albums, the band toned down their message to reach a broader audience. Lead singer Sonny Sandoval explains their reevaluation: 'We don't do that stuff anymore, 'cause that's not where we're at. You know, we're not about stepping on people's toes [...]. We just wanna make music that'll continue to affect people' (Beaujon 4). The band signed with Atlantic Records in 1999 and achieved a global breakthrough success with their hit single 'Alive' in 2001. The song embodies P.O.D.'s new style and language:

> Everyday is a new day.
> I'm thankful for every breath I take [...].
> So I trust in love,
> You have given me peace of mind.

I feel so alive
For the very first time.
I can't deny you […].

Sunshine upon my face,
A new song for me to sing.
Tell the world how I feel inside,
even though it might cost me everything […].

Now that I've seen you
I can never look away […].
I believe no matter what they say.

At first glance, the song presents itself as a very positive, high-energy rock anthem. The unspecified 'you' addressed in the lyrics might refer to a romantic relationship. The video supports this reading with its narrative surrounding a couple and no overt allusions to Christianity. Jesus or God are never explicitly mentioned. A closer look at the band's Christian background, however, allows for a different reading. The singer thanks God in the opening lines before joining the chorus—'I feel so alive for the very first time'—in an allusion to an experience crucial in the lives of evangelicals. In this moment of spiritual rebirth, evangelicals believe to be born-again after accepting Jesus as their personal savior. The conversion experience lets the lyrical I feel alive for the first time and strengthens their faith—'now that I've seen you, […] I believe no matter what they say'. The phrase 'I can't deny you' signals the speaker's Christian allegiance by alluding to the biblical motif of confessing to one's faith even in the face of prosecution and discrimination, as mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew: 'But whoever shall deny me before men, him I will also deny before my Father which is in heaven' (Matthew 10:33). The next lines pertain to the aforementioned 'persecution complex' of many evangelicals and deal with the stigma that is attached to this confession and to being openly Christian: 'Tell the world how I feel inside, even though it might cost me everything'. The video underlines this reading with the singer wearing a T-shirt that blazes a white hand with a hole in it—a symbol for Jesus's crucifixion. Signaling proves effective in conveying a subtle message—to believers and non-believers alike—because it requires decoding. Toned-down lyrics and cautious statements, according to the tactics of pre-evangelism, could plant a seed in a person's heart that may someday grow, while being ambiguous and open enough to accommodate the mainstream audience.

Have born-again Christians finally managed then to trade the image of bible-thumping culture warriors for the more palatable one of culturally savvy hipsters? The struggle for 'legitimacy and the desire to escape the "subliterate" stigma' continues to be an issue for evangelicals who navigate a 'secular marketplace that they realize is wary of both evangelical faith and politics' (Hendershot 54). Ultimately, making evangelical Christianity cool remains a challenge. It cannot be denied, however, that Christian music's quest for popularity has succeeded to an astonishing degree—whether it manages to bind evangelical kids to their faith by presenting a hip version of Christian culture or by way of 'infiltrating' the mainstream without immediately self-identifying as evangelical Christians. Either way, Christian pop's pursuit of 'cool' caters to the demands of evangelical Christianity. Its embrace of popular culture and the deliberate self-commodification allow evangelicals to present their 'product' in the best possible way. The music is still scrutinized and met with criticism, but its sweeping commercial success speaks for itself. Christian pop continues to be popular and unpopular at the same time—but it is far from irrelevant. Much like American evangelicalism, it remains both 'embattled and thriving' (Smith). Making accommodations to the marketplace of culture may not have led to universal acceptance and unanimous critical popularity. Soft-sell evangelism, however, helped blur the fault lines between the sacred and the secular, between 'uncool' and 'cool'—and allowed Christian pop to effectively navigate the complex cultural mechanisms of the unpopular.

Notes

1. In this episode—'Reborn to Be Wild' is a pun alluding to the famous Steppenwolf song 'Born to Be Wild' and the born-again experience of evangelical Christians—Hank is dismayed upon learning that his son Bobby's new bible group consists of hard-rocking, skateboarding, tattooed punks, led by a youth pastor who doubles as a Christian rock band leader. While Hank may have an appreciation for both rock music and Christian faith, he certainly does not approve of the—in his eyes—oxymoronic and blasphemous amalgam of rebellious youth culture and religion, as epitomized in his son Bobby's desire to get a Jesus tattoo and his T-shirt that says 'Satan sucks'.

2. *The Rolling Stones Illustrated History of Rock and Roll*, for example, notes the fact that U2 is a spiritual band, but does not mention Christian pop music. Christian pop is also omitted or neglected in scholarly publications. See for example Garofalo; Bennett, Shank, and Toynbee.

3.   In fact, the term Christian pop music, although widely used, is contro-
      versial, not only because of the vagueness of the term—what counts as
      Christian pop?—but also because the Christian music industry is largely
      evangelical. The usage of the adjective 'Christian' also serves to draw an
      imaginary line between the spheres of 'Christian' music and 'secular' music,
      which in fact is hardly visible in US culture—and music especially—be-
      cause of the pervasiveness of religion. In general, the affiliation with a cer-
      tain denomination has been losing significance, non-denominationalism is
      trending. For a more detailed discussion of terminology see Harju (14–21)
      and Hochgeschwender (15–31).

4.   Robert Laurence Moore uses the term synonymously with 'commercial
      culture' and notes that 'America's boom market in religion operated most
      effectively at the popular end of the market in cultural commodities' (6).

5.   Moore's analysis of religious commercialization since the early nineteenth
      century refutes theories of secularization and stresses the continuing
      impact of commercialized forms of religion in American culture, observing
      that 'a sizable portion of the Protestant evangelical community has made
      its peace with commercial culture' (255).

6.   The difficulty to obtain accurate sales figures derives from the fact that the
      term itself and the boundaries of the genre are hard to define. Sometimes
      labeled Christian Rock, Contemporary Christian Music, Faith-Based Music
      or Contemporary Praise and Worship, a clear categorization is difficult; in
      addition, some Christian artists try to avoid the stigma attached to Christian
      music by not using any of these labels, while at the same time spiritually-
      inclined country or mainstream songs sometimes are included in Christian
      sales records, which makes accurate numbers difficult to track.

7.   See Harju; Howard and Streck.

8.   Frith points out that '"bad music" […] is only interesting as part of an argu-
      ment,' positioned in a 'context in which someone else thinks it's good' (17).
      The object of labeling records as 'bad music,' he continues, is 'a critique of
      public taste' (18), with contempt leveled at 'the people who like them, who
      take them seriously' (19). The effects of music, too, elicit value judgments
      based on the belief in the 'power of music to shape society' (24).

9.   While Christian rock music appeared revolutionary at the time, the adapta-
      tion of popular music for the purpose of evangelization has actually been a
      successful strategy for centuries and can especially be found during eras of
      spiritual renewal (Harju 44–57). See also Marini.

10.   David Di Sabatino notes that contrary to popular opinion—the view that
      Jesus Freaks were saved drug addicts and hippies—'the breadth of the
      movement […] consisted of teenagers with mainline and evangelical church
      backgrounds who adopted the spiritual hippie chic as a middle ground
      between the radical counterculture and the overly cautious and often in-
      flexible traditions of their home denominations' (*Jesus People* 4).

11. Radio and television evangelist Bob Larson, for example, repeatedly claimed that 'the devil's music' and Christian lyrics were incompatible (Howard and Streck 32). In an essay titled 'Taking Stock of Jesus Rock' that appeared in *Christianity Today* in 1971, Edward Plowman notes that owners of radios stations 'claimed that the music was suggestive, desecrating, of the devil, and that it dwelled too much on personal experience rather than on doctrine' (32).

12. The religious music festival Explo 72 held in Dallas in 1972 marks a turning point: Known as 'Godstock', the event organized by *Campus Crusade for Christ* drew 180,000 fans and 'symbolized a conservative evangelical appropriation of the Jesus Movement: carefully planned, toned down, and commercialized' (Turner 121).

13. Singer Steve Taylor, whose career in Christian music spans over three decades, has been one of the more forward-thinking and progressive voices in this debate, as this statement made in 1986 demonstrates: 'I'm tired and bored with trying to figure out what's right and what's wrong in music. You know, the whole secular and sacred debate. How did we get off on that tangent? [...] I'm convinced that there are different ways to go about this business of using music to change the world. Why do we insist on reducing it to a formula? [...] When we limit ourselves, we cut off that access, that avenue of communication. People complain about U2 and say that they aren't explicit enough about Jesus in their music. But U2 may be opening the door for other groups that do take a more literal approach [...]. We've got to allow for diversity within our ranks or we'll end up talking to ourselves' (Seay 28).

14. Notions of an ongoing struggle with the secular world, however, were not new, as sociologist Christian Smith notes: 'Distinction, engagement, and conflict vis-à-vis outsiders constitutes a crucial element of what we might call the 'cultural DNA' of American evangelicalism. The evangelical tradition's entire history, theology, and self-identity presupposes and reflects strong cultural boundaries with non-evangelicals; a zealous burden to convert and transform the world outside of itself; and a keen perception of external threats and crises seen as menacing what it means to be true, good, and valuable' (121).

15. This strategy was not pursued by all Christian pop bands of the 1980s, as Eileen Luhr points out in her analysis of Christian crossover metal bands between 1984 and 1994. The glam metal outfit Stryper, for example, employed stealth tactics to get signed to a secular label but then began to use the rhetoric and imagery of cultural warriors. They generated some mainstream interest (including MTV airplay) due to their novelty value as a longhaired, literally Bible-throwing Christian metal act in black and yellow unitards. Glam metal bands like Stryper with their long hair, tight outfits and heavy make up raised some interesting questions concerning evangelicalism and gender roles that were not approved of by conservative evangelicals (cf. Luhr 121–22).

16.   While there certainly is some ridicule and criticism towards evangelical
       cultural products, Lindsay points out that, in general, 'cultural leaders are
       not antagonistic towards Christianity. They're apathetic toward Christianity'
       (145).
17.   See also Luhr 125.
18.   Many artists resort to double-distribution-deals, where two separate mar-
       keting teams cater to the needs and particularities of both markets.
19.   Often mega churches, these congregations avoid denominational affiliation,
       overtly Christian symbols and rhetoric while offering a number of services
       (child care, matchmaking, etc.) and activities (sports, cooking classes,
       drama groups) in a casual atmosphere. Sargeant points out that 'seeker
       churches present a more plausible model of Christianity—a model that
       fits with pervasive cultural understandings about choice, individualism,
       autonomy, the importance of the self, therapeutic sensibilities, and an anti-
       institutional inclination common today' (31).
20.   In his book *A New Kind of Christian*, evangelical pastor Brian McLaren
       stresses the movement's rejection of dogmatic faith.
21.   Di Sabatino elaborates: 'Bono is probably as close to an international
       spokesman as the evangelical movement could ever dream of having, a
       poster child for the successful marriage of social justice and biblical faith
       […]. Who better than the U2 singer to look to for hints on how to be cultur-
       ally relevant, socially concerned and biblically faithful?' ('Why')
22.   The song was published through their own independent record label
       Rescue on the album *Snuff the Punk*. Lyrics like this would mean a swift
       end of mainstream success: 'Abortion is murder! There's nothing you can
       do to justify the fact that there's a living, breathing baby inside of you […].
       Murder! Murder! Murder!'

Works Cited

Ali, Lorraine. 'The Glorious Rise of Christian Pop.' *Newsweek*, 16 July 2001: 38–48. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.
Baker, Paul. *Contemporary Christian Music. Where It Came From, What It Was, Where It's Going.*
       Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1979. Print.
Beaujon, Andrew. *Body Piercing Saved My Life. Inside the Phenomenon of Christian Rock.* Cam-
       bridge, MA: Da Capo, 2006. Print.
Bennett, Andy, Barry Shank, and Jason Toynbee, eds. *The Popular Music Studies Reader.* London:
       Routledge, 2005. Print.
Dawidoff, Nicholas. 'No Sex, No Drugs, but Rock and Roll (Kind of).' *New York Times Magazine*
       26 Feb. 1995: 42–43. Print.
Di Sabatino, David. *The Jesus People Movement: An Annotated Bibliography and General Resources.*
       Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999. Print.
—. 'Why I Would Follow Bono into Hell.' *PRISM Magazine* 14 Sept. 2002. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.
Diamond, Sara. *Not by Politics Alone. The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right.* New York:
       Guilford, 1998. Print.

Flake, Carol. *Redemptorama. Culture, Politics, and the New Evangelicalism*. Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1984. Print.

Garofalo, Rebee *Rockin' Out: Popular Music in the USA*. 5th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2011. Print.

Green, Melody. *No Compromise: The Life Story of Keith Green*. Chatsworth, CA: Sparrow, 1989. Print.

Harju, Bärbel. *Rock & Religion. Eine Kulturgeschichte der christlichen Popmusik in den USA*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2012. Print.

Hendershot, Heather. *Shaking the World for Jesus: Media and Conservative Evangelical Culture*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004. Print.

Hochgeschwender, Michael. *Amerikanische Religion. Evangelikalismus, Pfingstlertum und Fundamentalismus*. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2007. Print.

Howard, Jay R., and John M. Streck. *Apostles of Rock. The Splintered World of Contemporary Christian Music*. Lexington, KY: U of Kentucky P, 1999. Print.

Joseph, Mark. *The Rock and Roll Rebellion. Why People of Faith Abandoned Rock Music and Why They're Coming Back*. Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1999. Print.

Lindsay, Michael D. *Faith in the Halls of Power. How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite*. Oxford UP, 2007. Print.

Luhr, Eileen. 'Metal Missionaries to the Nation: Christian Heavy Metal Music, Family Values, and Youth Culture, 1984–1994.' *American Quarterly* 57.1 (2005): 103–128. Print.

Marini, Stephen A. *Sacred Song in America. Religion, Music, and Public Culture*. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2003. Print.

McLaren, Brian D. *A New Kind of Christian. A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*. New York: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

Menconi, Al. 'What's Wrong with Christian Music? An Open Letter to Contemporary Christian Musicians.' *Contemporary Christian Music Magazine* June 1987: 19–20. Print.

Miller, Kevin A. 'Rock's Real Rebels. Christians (and the God-Haunted) Make Inroads into New Territory.' *Christianity Today* 8 Jan. 2001: 90. Print.

Miller, Kirk. 'Switchfoot.' *Rolling Stone Magazine* 16 Oct. 2003: 36. Print.

Moore, Robert Laurence. *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994. Print.

Newcomb, Brian Quincy. 'Petra's Battle.' *The Heart of the Matter: The Best of CCM Interviews Vol. 1*. Ed. John Styll. Nashville, TN: Star Song, 1991. 95–104. Print.

Petra, 'This Means War!' *This Means War*. Star Song Records, 1987.

Plowman, Edward E. 'Taking Stock of Jesus Rock.' *Christianity Today* 26 Feb. 1971: 32. Print.

P.O.D. 'Abortion Is Murder.' *Snuff the Punk*. Rescue, 1993. CD.

—. 'Alive.' *Satellite*. Atlantic, 2001. CD.

Powell, Mark Allan. 'Jesus Climbs the Charts. The Business of Contemporary Christian Music.' *Christian Century* 2 Dec. 2002. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

—. 'Petra.' *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002. Print.

'Reborn to Be Wild.' *King of the Hill: Season 8*. Fox, 2003. DVD.

Rolling Stone Magazine. *The Rolling Stone History of Rock and Roll: The Definitive History of the Most Important Artists and their Music*. New York: Random House, 1992. Print.

Romanowski, William D. 'Rock 'n' Religion: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of the Contemporary Christian Music Industry.' Ph.D. diss, Bowling Green State University, 1990.

Sargeant, Kimon Howland. *Seeker Churches: Promoting Traditional Religion in a Nontraditional Way*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2000. Print.

Schaeffer, Franky. *Addicted to Mediocrity: 20th Century Christians and the Arts*. Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1981. Print.

Seay, David. 'Steve Taylor: Rebel with a Cause.' *Contemporary Christian Music Magazine* Feb. 1986: 26–29. Print.

Smith, Christian. *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998. Print.

South Park. 'Christian Rock Hard.' Season 7, episode 9 (originally aired 29 October 2003).

Taylor, Steve. Personal interview. 27 March 2009.

'The Burning', *Seinfeld: Season 9*, Sony, 2012. DVD.

Thompson, John J. *Raised by Wolves. The Story of Christian Rock & Roll*. Toronto: ECW, 2000. Print.

Turner, John G. *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ. The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America.* Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2008. Print.

Wild, David. 'The Rock & Roll Gospel According to Lifehouse.' *Rolling Stone* 7 June 2001: 45. Print.

Listening to Bad Music

White Power and (Un)Popular Culture

C. Richard King

On 4 August 2012, Wade Michael Page went on a rampage at a Sikh temple outside of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, killing six people and wounding four others before taking his own life. Although his precise motivation remains unclear, his racist beliefs clearly played a leading role. For more than a decade, Page had embraced core elements of white supremacy. He was also an active, even visible, member of the white power music scene. In 2005, he founded the group End Apathy. Fed up with what he saw as social pathologies, he hoped the band would encourage whites to better see the world around them and act to make it a better place. Importantly, Page put race at the center of his vision, using the divisive discourse of white power to identify both problems and solutions. As his description of the band highlights:

> End Apathy began in 2005 [...] to figure out what it would take to actually accomplish positive results in society and what is holding us back. A lot of what I realized at the time was that if we could figure out how to end peoples apathetic ways it would be the start towards moving forward.[...] But I didn't want to just point the finger at what other people should do, but also I was willing to point out some of my faults on how I was holding myself back. And that is how I wrote the song 'Self Destruct'. (Blood)

On the group's MySpace page, moreover, Page contrasted its music with pop: 'The music is a sad commentary on our sick society and the problems that prevent true progress'. He concludes that whites are blind and asleep, an assessment that reflects a deeper white nationalist belief that whites are 'zombies' who need to wake up to their perilous situation. Clearly, Page hoped his music would be a catalyst for this racist revolution.

Few would classify End Apathy as popular music. The band had a limited audience, meager sales, and no name recognition. Moreover, the group openly expressed sentiments many would deem racist, hateful, and dehumanizing. Indeed, were it not for his act of violence, few would have ever heard of the band, which was destined to be bad music—offensive, transgressive, and of questionable quality.

White power music remains wildly unpopular. In fact, it is hard to imagine a more maligned and marginalized form of expressive culture, whether measured by market share, public outrage and condemnation, or reaction from other musicians, as evidenced by songs like 'Nazi Punks Fuck Off' by the Dead Kennedys. It would be tempting to dismiss white power music as simply bad music: in poor taste and of questionable quality, it breaks with social convention as its overt racism, advocacy of violence, and palpable rage transgress accepted limits of speech and sentiment. Yet, if this is all we hear in white power music, we are not listening closely enough to it. This paper seeks to offer a more complex interpretation that complicates prevailing accounts of white power, musical expression, and popular culture. To this end, drawing on examples primarily from the U.S., this paper advances three arguments.

First, white power music is unpopular, but it is not isolated or idiosyncratic. Rather, it actively engages with and appropriates musical styles to communicate its message, build audience, create community, recruit members, and to crossover to more mainstream spaces. Second, the unpopularity of white power music has crystallized across the past century. Where white supremacist music, like white racism generally, pervaded popular culture and public life, it now largely dwells on the margins, emergent in oppositional subcultures. Finally, for all of its engagements with the popular, white power music remains unpopular. It is perhaps best described as unpopular culture; that is, a set of cultural practices and cultural productions that draw upon and deploy popular stylings but have little claim beyond a bounded social field on audience, desire, or fashion.

Despite its unpopularity, the power of white power rock is evident not just in its resonance with the movement but the ways that its aesthetics and styles mesh with a white supremacist narrative. I build my argument upon the idea that 'racist music' becomes a space for community, for disseminating the grammar, tropes, and narratives of white supremacy, and for cultivating a white nationalist worldview. Hate music is not innocuous but part and parcel of the development of the white nationalist movement. The Southern Poverty Law Center highlights this power:

> Since the early 1990s, various forms of 'white power' music have grown from a cottage industry serving a few racist skinheads to a multimillion-dollar, worldwide industry that is a primary conduit of money and young recruits to the radical right. Although the music originated in Britain in the early 1980s, it is now popular among hard-core racists throughout Europe and the United States.

With this in mind, I begin my discussion with a survey of white power music. Against this background, I endeavor to complicate white power music, contrasting songs from the first decades of the twentieth century with more recent works. This comparative analysis allows a rereading of popular music as 'race music' that lays seeds for more radical harvests. Next, I shift my focus to the use of the sounds and stylings of popular music to reach new audiences, first in the recruitment of new members to the movement and second in an unorthodox effort to create a crossover band, a group that would remain faithful to white power ideals and ideologies and appeal to a wider audience. In closing, I reflect on the scope and significance of unpopular culture.

'Race Music'

In 1955, Asa Carter lost his job at WILD radio station in Birmingham, Alabama, bringing to an end his regionally syndicated program, which was sponsored by the American States Rights Association. His firing would also mark the end of his radio career. Rather than rethink his racist and anti-Semitic views, Carter redoubled his commitments to segregation and white supremacy. He publicly broke with longtime ally the Alabama Citizens' Council, organizing the North Alabama Citizens' Council as a visible alternative. The leadership role arguably gave Carter an advantaged position to defend Jim Crow and commandeer media attention. Almost immediately, he directed attention at the evils of popular culture. Of particular concern for Carter and his followers was the rising popularity of rock 'n' roll, which many at the time dubbed 'race music'. The former radio personality advocated a ban of the musical style, believing its content encouraged moral degradation and race mixing. The music itself and the behaviors said to be promoted by it were perceived to be a grave threat to white culture (cf. Martin and Segrave). Indeed, Carter saw in rock 'n' roll a conspiracy by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 'a plot to mongrelize America'. As such, 'the obscenity and vulgarity', he and others found in the increasing popular genre led them to assert that 'rock n roll music is obviously a means by which the white man and his children can be driven to the level of the negro' (qtd. in Garofalo 145). To combat the animalism evoked by the banality of rock music, he laid out a plan to work with the owners of juke boxes to remove 'race music' records.

As outrageous as his reading of pop music seems today, Carter was not an isolated voice. His protest escalated locally and echoed nationally. Perhaps

dissatisfied with the theatrics of public relations, Carter formed a second group in 1956, the Ku Klux Klan of the Confederacy (KKKC), which turned to direct action and violence. They disrupted a Nat King Cole concert, attacking the singer on stage, and 'picketed a concert featuring the Platters, LaVern Baker, Bo Diddley, and Bill Haley, with signs reading, "NAACP says integration, rock & roll, rock & roll", "Jungle Music promotes integration", and "Jungle music aids delinquency"' (Delmont 138). Later, members of the KKKC would abduct, castrate, torture, and leave for dead an African American painter.

Racist opposition to rock music manifested itself throughout the country. City councils in Alabama, Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Texas, and Virginia prohibited interracial dances and concerts. Meanwhile, radios from Pittsburgh and Cincinnati to Chicago and Denver 'refused to play rock and roll' (cf. Delmont). And, perhaps mirroring efforts organized by Carter, protestors in Inglewood, California circulated fliers that depicted the perceived evils of rock music. They featured 'pictures of young black men and white women dancing, with captions reading, "Boy meets girl... be-bop style", and "Total Mongrelization"' (Delmont 138).

Carter eventually turned away from the KKKC, apparently after a falling out over finances in which he shot two associates, and his crusade against pop music, but remained active in (racial) politics. He worked as a speech writer for Governor George Wallace, helping to pen the iconic phrase, 'Segregation Today, Segregation Tomorrow, Segregation Forever'. Later, he reinvented himself and became wildly popular, authoring the novel that served as the basis for *The Outlaw Josey Wales* and under an assumed name an equally fictional tale that purported to be the autobiography of Cherokee Indian, *The Education of Little Tree*, which for a time was selected as an official choice of Oprah's Book Club.

Carter did not stop rock music any more than local ordinances extending Jim Crow did throughout the body politic. Ironically, much of today's music that comprises the white power scene derives from early forms of rock 'n' roll. While this might horrify the former Klansman, demagogue, and crusader, one imagines that he would applaud the creative energies and racist ideologies central to it. Much like his early career in radio, in which he used a popular medium for increasingly unpopular ends, today musicians, producers, and leaders use popular musical forms to recruit new members, generate revenue, stabilize white nationalist identities and ideologies, and create community. And like Carter, this music scene is vocal and theatrical, wildly unpopular, and primed for volatility and violence.

Recentering White Power

In a recent interview, sociologist Peter Simi, co-author of *American Swastika*, identified music as the cornerstone of contemporary white power:

> Music is central to the movement in a lot of ways. It played a vital role in terms of offering opportunities for potential recruitment, offering opportunities for the generation of revenue and then probably most importantly, you know, music pulls people together. It gives them opportunities to get together for music shows, music festivals; small shows, large ones, coming together on the Internet and talking about music shows.
> All of these are opportunities for them to share in these kinds of occasions where they're talking, you know, spending time with, communicating with like-minded others who share the same view of the world as they do and talking about, you know, the future and what needs to be done.

As Simi suggests, the white power music scene matters in ways often unrecognized and unexpected from scholars and non-scholars alike. Like all subcultures rooted in expression, style, and performance, it has always been about more than entertainment, parties, fun, and 'distractions'. For a movement pushed to the margins, it advances the movement organizationally, facilitates the circulation of ideological positions, anchors interactive spaces (both in person and online), and establishes a forum for the elaboration of meaningful identities.[1]

White power music covers a diverse range of musical styles. In addition to folk and country, it includes musicians producing hard rock, punk, Oi, hardcore, and metal, notably National Socialist black metal. Its global audience produces and consumes it within local and regional subcultures. Although most visible in North America and Western Europe, it plays an increasingly important role in cultural politics within Eastern Europe, South America, and Australia. Producers of white power music have adopted emerging media with swiftness and relative ease, first embracing CDs over albums and cassette tapes and more recently moving onto the Internet both to facilitate distribution and seize upon the marketing possibilities of new media, tapping the potential of social media to connect with audiences and increase access to music through streaming audio and internet radio. Not infrequently, labels have ties to established or emerging white nationalist organizations.

Resistance Records offers a great illustration of the scene and its organizational structures and ideological elements. Indeed, as an emblematic label, it has proven to be a vital institution not only within white power music but also for the movement as a whole. Established in Windsor, Ontario in 1993, according the Anti-Defamation League, it operated as a 'one-man hate-music distribution operation with a handful of album titles', but rather rapidly expanded to become the leading hate rock distributor in the US. Legal problems crippled the label, leading to its eventual sale to Willis A. Carto, founder of the Liberty Lobby, and Todd Blodgett, who relocated it to the US and worked to resuscitate it. A year later, the pair sold it to William Pierce, author of *The Turner Diaries* and founder of the National Alliance. Like Carto and Blodgett, Pierce believed Resistance Records had the potential to recruit young people to the movement and more easily and broadly communicate its message. As such, the new ownership expanded the label beyond its historic distribution hub, adding a monthly magazine and establishing a web presence notable for its scope. While the label has suffered as lawsuits, Pierce's death, and factionalism devastated the National Alliance, it remains a major example of the promise of and problems posed by white power music. Labels like Resistance Records are not the only space of dissemination for hate music cultivation. Concerts and music festivals play a pivotal role in the scene, creating what Simi and Futrell dub 'free spaces' that allow participants to express themselves without reservation, validating identities and ideologies. Music matters to white power because of the ways in which it advances the movement, communicates its ideological messages, and opens spaces for the creation of social networks and identities.

Race, Resentment, and Rage

White power music has no singular origin. It has multiple roots and takes seemingly endless routes in and out of popular culture. It appears in blackface on the minstrelsy stage, later in the patriotic songs of the Ku Klux Klan (cf. Crews), and then in the guise of country and rockabilly (cf. Messner et al.; Wade). Most famously, it has favored the oppositional worlds of alternative rock—oi, punk, hardcore, and metal (cf. Duncombe and Tremblay; Dyck; Hochhauser). It exemplifies the transnational dialogues stitching together white power worldwide and the increasingly translocal articulation of whiteness that anchors white nationalism. Perhaps ironically, it takes shape in subcultures marked by resistance and known for anti-establishment, progressive, and even anti-racist sentiments (cf. Duncombe and Tremblay; Home; Sabin).

Contemporary histories of hate rock almost invariably center their accounts around the British band Skrewdriver and its charismatic lead singer Ian Stuart, highlighting the ways in which the band blended class politics, white victimization, British nationalism, and strident racism into a volatile cocktail that drew on the resentment and rage of punk music and the utopian underground of the skinhead subculture. In a very real way, Skrewdriver racialized Oi music and punk more generally, offering a template of how to repurpose pop stylings and the sentiments of youth subculture. It opened a dialogue first within the UK and then across the Atlantic and into Europe around how music as a cultural technology might be deployed to direct political energies (cf. Brown; Ridgeway), establishing close ties with the National Front and encouraging violence sonically, and also secure niche markets through ideology, founding the record label Blood and Honour. These precedents of invention of genre, exploitation of medium, and ideological opportunism reappear in successive subcultures across national borders: hardcore in the United States, black metal in Europe, and folk in the UK (cf. Spracklen).

Less important than the actual chronology of white power music are the conditions that make it possible for hate rock to take shape and persistently shift in novel contexts. I have in mind what Dunscombe and Tremblay refer to as the 'tipping point', which transforms 'inchoate, oppositional rage' into a potent, mobilizable force that targets abject others: where punks had once 'allowed their rage against the status quo to slip between those in power and those without it, the White Power punk tips primarily into a hatred of the powerless' (114). White power music becomes a vector for white resentments associated with globalization, decolonization, deindustrialization, and post-Fordism; a small, marginal, expression of a larger backlash against immigration, multiculturalism, and civil rights. Importantly, according to Dunscombe and Tremblay,

> White Power punk's sense of victimization, its valorization of opposi-
> tional solidarity, its creation and mobilization of DIY cultural networks,
> its understanding of the desire of the forbidden and the shocking, and the
> simple raw emotionality and anger of its expression are characteristics
> that *all* punk shares. (115)

These elements were the building blocks for more expansive and penetrating dialogues, enabling hate rock to crystallize, gain traction, and eventually become the cornerstone of the movement and the key ideological conduit for it.

Listening to Hate Rock

Hate rock addresses the preoccupations and expresses the presumptions of advocates of white power. As such, band names and song lyrics clearly illustrate the findings of scholars concerned with the movement more generally. Grounded in concrete notions of naturalized racial and gender differences, they represent a world of constant struggle, especially an ongoing or impending race war; they celebrate pride, honor, and loyalty; they give voice to a hypermasculine and heteronormative worldview; they picture whites (as a people, race, nation, and/or culture) as imperiled; they present dehumanizing portraits of racial others, especially Jews and African Americans; and they offer critiques of the state of society and the relationship to the nation state. The most extreme lyrical themes cluster around racism, anti-Semitism, and homophobia. For instance, songs like 'Splatterday, Nigger Day' by Grinded Nig, which depicts an attack on an African American, and 'Repatriation' by Final War, which launches an invective against immigrants, clearly illustrate the extremes of white power music (cf. Dyck). And Midtown Bootboys call for anti-gay violence:

> Stop the threat of AIDS today
> Cripple, maim or kill a gay
> We've got to take a stand today
> We've got to wage a war on gays
> (qtd. in Burghart 1)

Advocacy of violence has led some critics to describe white power music as terrorism, a point substantiated by Aaronson who asserts that between 1987 and 2003, 'members of the white power music scene have been linked to 56 murders as well as thousands of acts of vandalism, assault', and other crimes (cf. Aaronson).

Less extreme, though not innocuous, tropes include songs that wax nostalgic about Nazi Germany and Viking society, linking past to present, while laying claims to a virile and romantic versions of a supreme white masculinity. An overlapping theme hails specific heroic figures, often celebrating their sacrifices to the movement and/or race. Other songs extol the virtues of contemporary white nationalism, especially embodied by skinheads, as a way of life. In such music, '[t]here is also a clear emphasis on upholding Aryan values through movement participation, fraternity, kinship ties, and racial loyalty. These lyrics speak of fostering "global brotherhood", "volk", "white pride", and "Aryan heritage"' (Futrell et al. 281). In sum, what

is important to note here is that white power music creates an abject, even monstrous, other and an empowered and enlightened self, reiterating some of the most vile and violent imagery directed at people of color, Jews, and gays and lesbians, and some of the most romanticized assessments of white (supremacist) agents.

The White Power Music Scene

The social structures and cultural meanings associated with white power music have spawned subcultures around the globe and facilitated the construction of identities. It not only creates an interactive context for the presentation and articulation of self, but it also provides a set of frames and codes through which individuals can fashion themselves. Music matters to white nationalists not simply for its rhythm or sound, not only because it gives voice to visions and values, but importantly because it provides a material expression to white power. It anchors a scene, opens up space, encourages interaction, fosters the articulation of identity, and creates community. While critics have rightly highlighted the lyrics of hate rock and often linked them to violence, such assessments threaten to offer merely a caricature of the scene, its attractions, and its significance. For clearly, what white power music means for its producers and audiences is multifaceted: part ideological, part, interactional, part identification. While white supremacist music now might be best described as marginal, if not deviant, manifesting many of the features of other oppositional musical subcultures, often interfacing, if not overlapping with them, its present formation differs markedly from its antecedents in tone, content, and reception.

Songs for Mary Phagan

Music extolling white supremacy, advocating hatred towards blacks, Jews, and immigrants, and promoting the defense of the white race (often from a perceived existential threat) is nothing new. In fact, this might describe much of American popular music up into the twentieth century. On the one hand, the minstrelsy tradition, in which actors staged performances in blackface, borrowed and denigrated expressive elements of the African diaspora, used caricature blackness to make commentaries on racial and class politics, and delighted audiences of white men with their song stylings, arguably constitutes a core strand of American popular culture. On the

other hand, as urbanization, industrialization, and immigration changed the face of America, scholars set about collecting endangered musical traditions, seeking pure, uncorrupted, and authentic expressions that required disentangling white from black stylings (cf. Taylor and Baker 2007). This racialized and essentialized splitting would have profound implications for the development of popular music as well as understandings of racial difference that echo down through Asa Carter and hate rock.

A measure of the centrality of white supremacy to popular music in the early twentieth century can be found in Ku Klux Klan (KKK) sheet music. While the KKK has the rightful reputation of being a violent vigilante group that used terror to police racial boundaries and put African Americans in their ascribed social place, the group remade itself in 1915 as a fraternal organization that was at least to the outside committed entirely to 100% Americanism. In the following decade, the KKK skyrocketed to prominence across the US, promoting family values, patriotism, and tradition, while campaigning against modernity, immigration, and progressivism. Public pageantry, from parades to socials, and ritualized secrecy were fundamental to the success of the reborn KKK, particularly its political influence in local and regional elections and the passage of immigration reform at the national level. Not surprisingly music played a key role, communicating values and principles, creating community, and crafting identities of white Americans. In the songs collected by Crews one sees a celebration of America, Christianity (or rather Protestantism), whiteness and, to a lesser extent, denigration of Jews, immigrants, Catholics, and African Americans (cf. Crews). As the reformed KKK collapsed under the weight of corruption and disillusionment, most Americans forgot its 100% Americanism and the music that accompanied it—so much so that a recent episode of *History Detectives* on PBS featured a segment sleuthing the origins of a KKK recording discovered by a surprised and disgusted antique collector at a yard sale.

After the Second World War, two fundamental shifts reinforced one another: first, American society began a slow and incomplete journey toward racial equality, which contrary to public opinion was neither as successful nor as complete as notions of a post-racial America would imply (cf. Dowd-Hall), and second, consumerism and media culture began to reshape selves and society. Asa Carter's campaign discussed at the outset of this chapter represented a backlash against these twin forces. In keeping with these deeper shifts in racial thinking and cultural production, the terrain of the popular shifted as well, destabilizing the acceptability and in many cases the utterability of overtly racist music. In essence, white power music has become unpopular and yet has remained a vital means through

which advocates have sought to become popular, to expand the base of the movement and the purchase of their ideological claims.

Two songs clarify these broader shifts in white power and popular culture, offering keen insight into the scene and its strategies. Both songs about Mary Phagan, a young factory worker killed under mysterious circumstances in the Atlanta area in 1913. The subsequent investigation led to Jewish factory manager Leo Frank being charged with the murder. Labeled the American Dreyfus, an obvious reference to the fraudulent, anti-Semitic trial of a French officer at the end of the nineteenth century, Frank was convicted and initially sentenced to death, which was later commuted by Governor John M. Slaton. Outraged, a group of local citizens, including many community leaders, formed the Knights of Mary Phagan (KMP) to avenge the girl and defend the race. As one speaker said to assembled members of the group:

> This sainted girl [...] who, true to her inherent high breeding and the teachings of her devoted mother, gave up her own life rather than surrender that Christian attribute—the crown, glory, and honor of true womanhood into the threshold of which she was just entering. (qtd. in Dinnerstein 136)

Shortly thereafter, members of the KMP kidnapped Frank from prison and lynched him. None of the participants were ever convicted for their roles in the ritual killing. Frank was pardoned posthumously in 1986. Importantly, the Knights of Mary Phagan would be central to the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan, comprising its core membership at its public unveiling in 1915 (cf. Dinnerstein).

A folk ballad, 'Little Mary Phagan', began circulating after the trial. It was played at rallies calling for the execution of Frank. Largely a narrative of key events, it paints the young woman as an innocent and virtuous victim, while casting the accused killer as cold, calculating, and alien, an individual who defiled both a young woman and the traditions of region since he took advantage of her vulnerability and did so on Confederate Memorial Day.

> Leo Frank he met her
> With a brutish heart, we know;
> He smiled, and said, 'Little Mary,
> You won't go home no more'.

Sneaked along behind her
Till she reached the metal-room;
He laughed, and said, 'Little Mary,
You have met your fatal doom'.
(Snyder)

While the ballad paints a morality tale, pivoting on familiar themes of good and evil amplified by references to the inhumanity and marginality of the perpetrator, it does not invoke overt anti-Semitic slurs or celebrate the impending violence of retribution. It does not have to. The audience knows that the ballad is as much a racial drama as it is a morality play because media coverage and popular sentiment have already framed it as a young, virginal and honorable woman mercilessly murder by a racial other and outsider—a Jew, an industrialist, a transplanted Yankee (though born in San Antonio, Texas). It was one more text in a broader dialogue about racial justice and social order in which the execution of the former would ensure a return to the latter.

Seventy-five years later, the white power band Achtung Juden would release *Reich Songs, Volume Two*, which featured a photo of the lynching as its cover. The CD, featuring 14 tracks, opens with 'The Knights of Mary Phagan', and also includes original songs like 'Keep on Fighting', 'Burn the Books', and 'Our Pride is our Loyalty' and covers of 'classic' songs by Skrewdriver, 'Hail the New Dawn', and No Remorse's 'Son of Odin'.[2] The song is a simple, fast-paced, and hard-driving rock anthem marked by forceful guitars and drums and guttural vocals. Key passages follow.

Fetch the Rope
String up the Jew
Punish the Abraham
Leo Frank at the End of a Noose
....
We are the Knights of Mary Phagan
We are the Knights of Mary Phagan
....
Kill the pedophile
Reclaim our nation
....
Destroy ZOG, before they destroy you
....
We are the Knights of Mary Phagan
We are the Knights of Mary Phagan

Where the ballad reported a current event, here, the author and listener becomes one of the Knights, empathizing with, endorsing, and enacting the lynching. Violent in imagery and sound, the song celebrates the killing, legitimating the deed through anti-Semitic language and assumptions, which were absent from the ballad. This should not be too surprising given that the name of the band itself translates from German as Attention Jews and makes a fairly explicit reference to Nazism, a reference reinforced by the CD title (*Reich Songs, Volume Two*). To make Frank and the impropriety of his actions stark to contemporary listeners, the band foregrounds the killing and the pathological character of the killer. And more, it reminds listeners that this is not an isolated or historical act, but rather an ongoing campaign by the Zionist Occupational Government (ZOG, or more generally, the Jews). Finally, where the KMP and the ballad itself called for defense of the race and the honor of its women, the track calls for the reclamation of the nation, suggesting that necessary action goes beyond defense to recuperation and renewal.

These two songs highlight a number of important shifts in white supremacy and popular culture. First, where racially charged songs were once accepted and applauded (regionally, if not universally by 1915), today, they are unpopular, marginal, and taboo. Indeed, white supremacy, formerly a shared value and perceived natural fact, has become contested, a persistent structure held under erasure by colorblindness, new racism, and multiculturalism. Second, in contrast with the common sense narrative or recitation of the ballad, 'The Knights of Mary Phagan' offers an argument, rather explicitly advancing racialized rhetoric to make claims about the current condition. Third, the language, tone, and style of the songs expose profound changes. Not only does hard rock (somewhere between punk and metal) replace the fiddle and folks stylings of yore, but the imperiled state of whiteness is more urgent, the action depicted more vulgar and violent, and the references to difference more denigrating and starkly anti-Semitic. Fourth, the regional and racial references in 'Little Mary Phagan' give way to a new imagining of race and nation, in which whiteness has more global and trans historical referents, can be seen as the foundation for a nation distinct from and opposed to the USA, and in an existential struggle with ZOG (Jews). Importantly, in spite of changes in technology and the visibility of white nationalism, music sits at the core of the movement into the present moment. Moreover, the changing place and presence of mainstream popular culture and the dialectics between cultural integration and white nationalist formation compelled a continued emphasis on counter cultural production from white supremacist spaces.

Isn't It Ironic

Asa Carter, whose career and critique opened this essay, seized upon what he understood to be a fundamental contradiction that many think should make hate rock unthinkable. Rock music emerges from a hybrid space, mixing sonic traditions, cultural behaviors, and racialized bodies (cf. Lipsitz). For Carter and many others in the late 1950s and early 1960s, these polycultural patterns of integration challenged the rule of Jim Crow and threatened their understanding of race relations, the boundaries of whiteness, and the social order. By and large, producers and consumers of popular music do not consider this origin story when writing, recording, performing or listening to a recent release or personally meaningful song. And much the same is true for participants in the white power music scene.

On the one hand, the commercial music industry, beginning at roughly the moment of Carter's campaign, whitened popular music, reworking its polycultural beginnings for increasingly discrete, if not segregated, niche markets defined by race, class, and gender. As a consequence, rock music does not so much conjure a multiracial social scene or musical style, as refer to white artists—the Beatles and Rolling Stones, AC/DC and Rush, Led Zepplin and Areosmith—while soul, R'n'B, urban contemporary, Latin and so forth mark music by and for people of color.

On the other hand, the racial politics of popular music shifted after rock 'n' roll allegedly became white. Over the past two decades, the normalcy of rock has been contrasted with the deviancy, hypersexuality, and violence of hip-hop and the oppositional waves of (white) alternative music. In common with many pundits and parents, hate rock holds the former in contempt, viewing it as a degenerate genre and social ill. At the same time, it engages with the latter, drawing on punk, metal, hardcore, and even neofolk to communicate its ideology and hail prospective adherents to it.

Without setting aside the irony of white separatist and white supremacist music policing racial boundaries and reiterating racial hierarchies, two other elements crucial to the white power music scene merit emphasis. First, commercial music came to make and market the same racial categories that Carter sought to defend in his campaign. Second, where whiteness came to displace the polycultural foundations of rock music, blackness remained a social problem and source of moral panics over the past half century.

Remapping the Musical Landscape

One map of the contemporary American musical landscape might suggest a rather deep, if not complete, separation between various popular styles, whether rock, jazz, alternative, roots, or hip-hop, and white power rock. After all, the latter centers on hate, a coming race war, and imperiled whiteness—themes rarely found in the pop charts, not to mention polite conversation. Such a rendering would, however, misconstrue the contours of mainstream music and its entanglements with race and racism. I offer three fragments to render an impressionistic portrait.

Writing in the late 1970s, musician and critic Lester Bangs offered a scathing assessment of the place of race in the underground music scene (cf. also Kennedy). Lifting the veil off hipster life and its extremities, he probes an emerging contradiction in the wake of the civil rights movement; most hipsters, like most white Americans 'don't have to try at all to be a racist'. He recounts a series of incidents and observations that should trouble the avant-garde, but do not. For instance, he notes, in the shadow of the Vietnam War, a long-forgotten band called Shrapnel regularly played a song 'Hey, Little Gook!', and he describes Iggy Pop introducing a song, 'Our next selection tonight for all you Hebrew ladies in the audience is entitled "Rich Bitch!"' His concern goes beyond shock value and pushing limits, recounting an appearance of Miriam Linna of the Cramps 'posing proudly' in 'leathers and shades and pistol in front of the headquarters of the United White People's Party, under a sign bearing three flags "GOD" (cross), "COUNTRY" (stars and stripes), "RACE" (swastika)' (Bangs 1979).

This linkage of America and whiteness slides with disturbing ease into an embrace of white power imagery, which Bangs insists is about more than getting a rise through performance art. Like the use of Nazi imagery in British punk in the same era, these limit projects do more to show the limitlessness of white privilege and the limited capacity of hipsters to revalue white racist imagery. But then, as others in the underground scene suggest, perhaps ascribing sincerity to much of their culture work is giving them too much credit. As Bangs observes, Nico, member of the acclaimed Velvet Underground, who performed 'Deutschland über Alles' at CBGB, lamented the loss of a record contract in a later interview: 'I made a mistake. I said in *Melody Maker* [...] that I didn't like negroes. That's all. They took it so *personally* [...] I don't like the features. They're so much like animals [...] its cannibals, no?' (Bangs, emphasis original)

At the close of his short catalog of opinion, utterances, and encounters, Bangs has resigned himself to a rather troubling conclusion: 'When I started

writing this, I was worried I might trigger incidents of punk-bashing by black gangs. Now I realize that nobody cares. Most white people think the whole subject of racism is boring'. Of course, for the artists he discusses and many other hipsters at the time racism was fun, racism was powerful (both as it reinforced and held the promise of upsetting the system). This power, of course, is an unrecognized bridge between the hip, fashionable, and proper experiments of the avant-garde on one side and the vulgar, uncouth, and unacceptable stylings of white power on the other.

Speaking in 1997, Glenn Danzig (*né* Glenn Allen Anzalone), founding member of The Misfits and Samhain and later successful solo artist, sat for an interview with Steven Blush of *Seconds* magazine. While much of the discussion centers on his musical endeavors and business ventures, near the end, the conversation swerves to race. Danzig proceeds to reaffirm his past statements that he did not think that there was anything 'wrong with being proud of being white', adding comments on a possible race war and the oppressive nature of what he read as double standards. He closes with a flourish:

> I'm going to say something very controversial: if you are African-American and you don't want to live by White people, that should be your choice. [...] The flipside of that is why shouldn't there be areas a Black person can't go? If a White person doesn't want to live with Black people, that's their decision. This is America; do what you want to do.

In his comments, he has completely reframed racism, advocating racial segregation and separation (Jim Crow style) in the rubric of colorblindness and abstract liberalism (everyone can make an individual choice). This blend is at once in keeping with much of what neoconservatives say about race and racism amid a neoliberal backlash against the civil rights movement and an endorsement of white nationalists' embrace of heritage, love of one's people, and defense of one's race. Not surprisingly, discussants on Stormfront love this interview and hold Danzig in high regard ('Danzig on White Pride and Racism').

Although not as effusive, in a 2010 *Playboy* interview, popular singer/songwriter John Mayer also invoked themes more familiar from white nationalist discussion forums.

> PLAYBOY: If you didn't know you, would you think you're a douche bag?
> MAYER: It depends on what I picked up. My two biggest hits are 'Your Body Is a Wonderland' and 'Daughters'. If you think those songs are

pandering, then you'll think I'm a douche bag. It's like I come on very strong. I am a very...I'm just very. V-E-R-Y. And if you can't handle very, then I'm a douche bag. But I think the world needs a little very. That's why black people love me.

[...]

PLAYBOY: Do black women throw themselves at you?

MAYER: I don't think I open myself to it. My dick is sort of like a white supremacist. I've got a Benetton heart and a fuckin' David Duke cock. I'm going to start dating separately from my dick.

His hasty apologies following publication suggest he thought the broader public would not like the man behind the media persona, when they read of his multicultural heart and 'David Duke cock'. It is quite telling that one can have a schizophrenic relationship with race, embracing, but not desiring, diversity, accepting difference as a fashion statement or marketing campaign, but rejecting it as a pathway to intimacy and carnality. What's worse, it is not simply that Mayer so easily compartmentalizes race, desire, and aspects of himself, but that he so comfortably refers to the central marker of his masculinity in this conversation as an infamous white supremacist: what does it mean to internalize such an identification and declare it so openly to the world?

The point of this remapping is not to argue that John Mayer inspires hate rock, or to locate its origins within the hipster scene of the late 1970s. Rather, in these passing comments and deeply held sentiments deeper, ongoing dialogues about racial difference, dialogues that call into question progressive narratives of being beyond race and comfortable dissociations around taste and style. Indeed, it may be the case that these anecdotes reveal how shifting racial mores have dictated a renegotiation of stage and backstage performances, of public and private codes of conduct, and how these in turn dictate racial etiquette and self-presentation in a society committed to colorblindness. In turn, they likely suggest how and why producers and performers of white power rock continue to find in pop music the promise of conversion of and crossing over to the mainstream.

Unpopular Culture

If Asa Carter had had his way, parents and politicians would have prohibited rock music, putting a decisive end to what he saw as a corrupt musical fashion and arguably more importantly saving the white race from certain

moral degradation and cultural decline. Despite his best efforts, rock 'n' roll did not die, a fact many who make white power music today likely greet with great joy, because it constitutes a core of the social scene and political ideology anchoring the movement today. For all of this, while white power engages with and appropriates pop music for its own ends, it remains wildly unpopular, as evidenced by market share, public outrage and condemnation, and the reaction to it within other music subcultures, perhaps notably in punk songs like 'Nazi Punks Fuck Off' by the Dead Kennedys and 'Fuck the K.K.K'. by the Unseen (cf. Spracklen).

This unpopularity has crystallized across the past century. Where white supremacist music (like white racism generally) once enjoyed a warm welcome in public life, especially in areas ruled by Jim Crow and that nurtured the reinvention of the Ku Klux Klan as a mainstream fraternal order, it now largely dwells on the margins, emergent in transgressive and oppositional subcultures. My discussion of songs about Mary Phagan underscores the decline and marginalization of white power, especially in popular culture. Nevertheless, music has proven to be especially fecund, enabling adaption and elaboration of style and sound. For all of its engagements with popular music, hate rock remains unpopular. It is perhaps best described as unpopular culture, that is, a set of cultural practices and cultural productions that draw upon and deploy popular stylings but have little claim beyond a bounded social field on audience, desire, or fashion.

The unpopularity of white power music certainly derives from the tastes of audiences and artists in Europe and the USA. For its part, the music industry has never embraced it, seeing it neither as an acceptable market nor its producers or consumers as viable. And where new media has created alternative platforms that increase the appeal and audience of white power music, scholars of popular culture have largely neglected the subject, underscoring its unpopularity and reinforcing the idea that it can be disentangled from more popular musical forms. Even the special issue of *Popular Music and Society* on hate rock in 2007 stands as an exception to the overriding tendency to ignore, demonize, and/or marginalize. In large measure, this likely derives from the shared values of those who create, commercialize, and consume music and those who study it and study them. It may arise, moreover, from the blurring of the boundaries formerly separating fans from scholars, and since few scholars openly embrace white power, and those who have done have become pariahs, there is little chance it will become a more popular subject in the field. Finally, the subcultures, sentiments, and stylings of white power make it difficult to place it in some of the dominant narrative frames of pop culture studies. The very

deviance and hate that attract disaffected whites to it complicate efforts to speak favorably of identity or resistance, for example. Whatever its cause, this pattern of neglect, as I have endeavored to demonstrate in this study, diminishes our understanding of white power and mainstream society, impairing our capacity to understand the entanglements, shared histories, and overlapping ideologies as well as the antagonism and alienation that foster outburst common to the white power scene and increasingly common in acts like the attack on Sikh Temple in Wisconsin in 2012.

Notes

1.   Cf. Burghart; Corte and Edwards; Dyck; Futrell et al; Kim; Mann 2008; Messner et al.
2.   http://www.micetrap.net/shop/catalog/achtung-juden-reich-songs-volume-p-2564.html

Works Cited

Aaronson, Ben. 'Campaign Targets "White Power Music" and Provokes Store Owners.' *Chicago Reporter* 1 Mar. 2003. Print.

Anti-Defamation League. 'Deafening Hate The Revival of Resistance Records.' 2000. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Bangs, Lester. 'The White Noise Supremacists.' *Village Voice* 30 Apr. 1979. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Blood, Jack. 'Band (End Apathy) interview with Alleged Wisc. Shooter Wade Page.' *Deadline Live*. 6 Aug. 2012. Radio Transcript. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Brown, Timothy S. 'Subcultures, Pop Music, and Politics: Skinheads and "Nazi Rock" in England and Germany.' *Journal of Social History* 38.1 (2004): 157–78. Print.

Burghart, Devin. *Soundtrack to the White Revolution: White Supremacist Assaults on Youth Musical Subcultures*. Chicago: Center for New Community, 1999. Print.

Corte, Ugo, and Bob Edwards. 'White Power Music and the Mobilization of Racist Social Movements.' *Music and Arts in Action* 1.1 (2008). Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Cotter, John M. 'Sounds of Hate: White Power Rock and Roll and the Neo-Nazi Skinhead Subculture.' *Terrorism and Political Violence* 11.2 (1999): 111–40. Print.

Crew, Danny O. *Ku Klux Klan Sheet Music: An Illustrated Catalogue of Published Music, 1867–2002*. Jefferson: Macfarland, 2003. Print.

'Danzig on White Pride and Racism.' Discussion Forum. Stormfront. 7 May 2004. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Delmont, Matthew F. *The Nicest Kids in Town: American Bandstand, Rock 'n' Roll, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in 1950s Philadelphia*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2012. Print.

Dinnerstein, Leonard. *The Leo Frank Case*. New York: Columbia UP, 1968. Print.

Dowd Hall, Jacquelyn. 'The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past.' *The Journal of American History* 91.4 (2005): 1233–63. Print.

Duncombe, Stephen, and Maxwell Tremblay, eds. *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race*. London: Verso, 2011. Print.

Dyck, Kirsten A. *Race and Nation in White-Power Music*. Washington State University, 2012.

Futrell, Robert, Pete Simi, and Simon Gottschalk. 'Understanding Music in Movements: The White Power Music Scene.' *Sociological Quarterly* 47 (2006): 275–304. Print.

Garofalo, Reebee. *Rockin' Out: Popular Music in the USA*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1997. Print.

Hamm, Mark. 'From Hip Hop to Hate Rock: A Criminology of the Good, the Bad, and the Truly Awful.' *Journal of the Institute of Justice and International Studies* 9 (2009): 11–18. Print.

Hochhauser, Sharon. 'The Marketing of Anglo-Identity in the North American Hatecore Metal Industry.' *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the Globe*. Ed. Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Greene. Durham: Duke UP, 2011. 161–79. Print.

Home, Stewart. *Cranked Up Really High: Genre Theory and Punk Rock*. 1995. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Kahn Harris, Keith. *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*. New York: Berg, 2007. Print.

Kennedy, Channing. 'Understanding Hipster Racism: Lester Bangs' 1979 "White Noise Suprema-cists."' *Colorlines* 27 Apr. 2012. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Kim, T.K. 'A Look at White Power Music Today.' *Intelligence Report* 121 (Spring 2006). Print.

Klein, Adam G. *A Space for Hate: The White Power Movement's Adapation into Cyberspace*. Duluth: Litwin Books, 2010. Print.

Lipsitz, George. *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007. Print.

Mann, Geoff. 'Why Does Country Music Sound White? Race and the Voice of Nostalgia.' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31.1 (2008): 73–100. Print.

Martin, Linda, and Kerry Seagrave. *Anti-Rock: The Opposition to Rock 'n' Roll*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1993. Print.

Messner, Beth A., Art Jipson, Paul J., Becker, and Bryan Byers. 'The Hardest Hate: A Sociological Analysis of Country Hate Music.' *Popular Music and Society* 30.4 (2007): 513–31. Print.

Ridgeway, James. *Blood in the Face: The Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations, Nazi Skinheads, ad the Rise of a New White Culture*. New York: Thunder's Mouth, 1990. Print.

Sabin, Roger. '"I won't let that dago by": Rethinking Punk and Racism.' *Punk Rock: So What? The Cultural Legacy of Punk*. Ed. Roger Sabin. New York: Routledge, 1999. 199–218. Print.

Simi, Pete. Interview by Melissa Block. *NPR: The Two Way*. 8 Aug. 2012. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Snyder, Franklyn Bliss. 'Leo Frank and Mary Phagan.' *Journal of American Folklore* 31.120 (1918): 264–66. Print.

Southern Poverty Law Center. 'Racist Music.' Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Spracklen, Karl. 'Nazi Punks Folk Off: Leisure, Nationalism, Cultural Identity and the Consump-tion of Metal and Folk Music.' *Leisure Studies* 32.4 (2013): 415–28. Print.

Taylor, Yuval, and Hugh Baker. *Faking It: The Quest for Authenticity in Popular Music*. New York: Norton, 2007. Print.

Wade. Michael. 'Johnny Rebel and the Cajun Roots of Right-Wing Rock.' *Popular Music and Society* 30. 4 (2007): 493–512. Print.

Hipster Black Metal?

Deafheaven's *Sunbather* and the Evolution of an (Un)
popular Genre

Paola Ferrero

A couple of months ago a guy walks into a bar in Brooklyn and strikes up a conversation with the bartenders about heavy metal. The guy happens to mention that Deafheaven, an up-and-coming American black metal (BM) band, is going to perform at Saint Vitus, the local metal concert venue, in a couple of weeks. The bartenders immediately become confrontational, denying Deafheaven the BM 'label of authenticity': the band, according to them, plays 'hipster metal' and their singer, George Clarke, clearly sports a hipster hairstyle. Good thing they probably did not know who they were talking to: the 'guy' in our story is, in fact, Jonah Bayer, a contributor to *Noisey*, the music magazine of *Vice*, considered to be one of the bastions of hipster online culture. The product of that conversation, a piece entitled 'Why are black metal fans such elitist assholes?' was almost certainly intended as a humorous nod to the ongoing debate, generated mainly by music webzines and their readers, over Deafheaven's inclusion in the BM canon. The article features a promo picture of the band, two young, clean-shaven guys, wearing indistinct clothing, with short haircuts and mild, neutral facial expressions, their faces made to look like they were ironically wearing black and white make up, the typical 'corpse-paint' of traditional, early BM. It certainly did not help that Bayer also included a picture of Inquisition, a historical BM band from Colombia formed in the early 1990s, and ridiculed their corpse-paint and black cloaks attire with the following caption: '*Here's what you're defending, black metal purists. THIS*' (Bayer). The use of Inquisition as a negative example meant to mock BM purists and their theatrics was probably unfortunate and a little misinformed: Inquisition had, in fact, just recently issued *Obscure Verses for the Multiverse* (2013), a critically acclaimed album much lauded on indie webzines for its intricate guitar work and powerful melodies.[1]

The question framing the article was indeed humorous but also very provocative, as it pitted 'traditional' BM of the 1990s, here represented by Inquisition, against a new wave of experimental BM bands founded around the mid-2000s of which Deafheaven are the most popular example. As a result, a long-winding debate ensued in the comment section of the

article over the nature of 'authentic' BM. While comment sections on online
music webzines are notoriously a haven for 'trolls' and people generally
insulting each other's opinions, the discussion arising from Bayer's piece
was surprisingly articulate and rational.[2] Opinions ranged from the mellow
live-and-let-live argument to outspoken attacks on the perceived closed-
mindedness of BM fans' and also to more articulate and certainly debatable
notions of what constitutes 'real' BM. Several identitarian positions arose:
the uncompromising BM fan defending the genre from mass co-optation,
the open-minded BM fan allowing for the genre's hybridization, and the BM
'neophyte', a fan extraneous to the genre's history that happens however to
like Deafheaven. What emerged from the comment section debate was a
host of different ideas concerning BM's place in the contemporary musical
market. While the article was purposefully vague on Deafheaven's actual
musical production and proceeded to bash BM's elitism (or at least the
author's version of it), commenters pointed to a much more interesting issue
concerning Deafheaven's polarizing music: the relationship between the
band's overwhelming popularity on indie music webzines and the historical,
entrenched, even sought for 'unpopularity' of BM.

Deafheaven's first album, *Roads to Judah* (2011), was well received on
musical webzines and earned them some honorable spots in end-of-the-year
lists on Pitchfork and NPR, though strictly in metal lists. However, nothing
could prepare them, and BM fans, for the sudden and mind-blowing success
of their next excellent album *Sunbather* (2013). The album received stellar
reviews and topped Best Album lists in many indie music webzines and
mainstream music publications like *NME* and *Rolling Stone*, and the band
was unexpectedly catapulted into indie music stardom. Sounding like the
lovechild of Darkthrone and My Bloody Valentine, Deafheaven are not
your traditional BM band, and they stand at the forefront of a movement
that sees young BM bands, especially from the U.S. and France, playing
with the traditional boundaries of the genre in both its musical and formal
aesthetics. The band's overall appearance, the unusual composition of their
audiences or the choice of a pink cover instead of the mandatory black of
most BM releases are the elements that have drawn the most criticism
and skepticism from BM fans. While *Sunbather* was indeed the spark that
ignited the controversy concerning 'traditional' vs 'hipster' BM, and while
it still remains the most popular object of contention, the critical interest
in the album is not an isolated phenomenon. Deafheaven are only the most
visible product of an undeniable trend that sees BM albums and tracks
being reviewed with increased frequency in general interest publications
like *The New Yorker* or the *San Francisco Weekly* or in indie music webzines

like *Pitchfork* and *Stereogum*.[3] These two online zines are considered the strongholds of musical 'hipsterdom', and for good reason. They have quickly become important cultural powerhouses, musical trendsetters with the ability of directing musical tastes and pushing unknown artists into the spotlight.[4]

Readers of these webzines in the last couple of years could notice a steady increase in the number of heavy metal releases reviewed, particularly extreme metal records. Once obscure bands like the veterans Agalloch, Alcest, Blut aus Nord, Krallice, Locrian, Wolves in the Throne Room, Horseback or Panopticon and newcomers like Ash Borer, Castevet, Deafheaven, Cara Neir, Vattnet Viskar, Raspberry Bulbs and many others often feature as 'Albums of the Week' or as 'Top Track' selections in indie music webzines, a fact that has significantly increased their visibility. How can we therefore explain this shift of BM from the realm of the unpopular to that of the 'cool'? How has the genre become part of indie music discourse despite the fact that it usually poses serious challenges to an uninitiated listener, revels in obscurity and insularity, and is usually perceived as static and impermeable to outside influences? And how is the reception of BM in indie webzines related to the stylistic evolution of the genre from its early Norwegian roots to the present day? I will answer these questions by illustrating the receptive strategies put into practice by reviewers in indie webzines when dealing with new BM records by using Deafheaven's latest controversial album *Sunbather* as a case study. In doing so, I will rely on the methodological tools of popular musicology, and particularly on the analysis of musical events through the study of 'musical collectivities' and their 'musical competences'. My analysis, a sort of online ethnography of BM, will be based on reviews and articles dedicated to Deafheaven and BM in indie webzines like Pitchfork, Stereogum and Noisey and on the reactions of fans in the comment sections to those articles.[5] BM fans intervene in the definition of BM's identity by displaying their own 'subcultural capital' against newcomers to the genre and uphold an idea of BM as transgressive and alien to the mainstream. I will argue that the growing popularity of BM in indie webzine is a result of the reification of Deafheaven's *Sunbather* as a paradigmatic shift in the history of genre by indie music critics, a reading counteracted by the fan's own ideas concerning the nature of BM as a historically unpopular genre. The tension arising from this controversy reveals the way a music subculture as carefully protected as BM polices its own boundaries and how processes of cultural appropriation threaten the very identity of the genre.

1.   'Nobody burns churches anymore'. A Brief Introduction to Black Metal

The reasons for BM's historical unpopularity can be attributed to several complementary factors relating to its origins, style and musical affiliation. Indeed, musicians and fans of heavy metal, the 'mother' genre, have always characterized themselves as 'proud pariahs' (Weinstein 93). Since its inception, heavy metal has always been occupying a place at the margins of music history, being either ignored or vehemently attacked by mainstream music critics (cf. Walser 21). During the 1970s, Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath were criticized for their harsh sound and their provocative lyrics, while in the 1980s trash metal bands (Metallica, Megadeth and Anthrax, among others) were attacked by both rock journalists and subculture theorists for their lack of political commitment and musical unsophistication (cf. Weinstein 240). Heavy metal has been routinely accused of instigating suicide among teenagers and to be symptomatic of a dangerous alienation among young people (cf. Kahn-Harris 598).

As an extreme subgenre of Heavy Metal, BM was bound to become even more controversial. Early representatives of the genre like UK's Venom, Switzerland's Hellhammer (and its later iteration, Celtic Frost) and Sweden's Bathory, the so-called 'First Wave' of the late 1980s, used Satanic imagery and mixed heavy metal and crust punk in often chaotic-sounding productions (cf. Patterson 6–16, 25–35, 36–57). However, BM's musical codification came to fruition in the genre's 'Second Wave' in Norway: between 1990–1994 a number of Norwegian bands from Oslo expanded and radicalized the musical and ideological codes of the genre's first wave. Bands like Burzum, Darkthrone, Mayhem, Emperor, Enslaved and Ulver (only to cite a few) created a whole new musical subculture. BM's musical style was characterized by high-pitched screaming vocals, full chord progressions and a droning, buzzing sound resulting from the guitar technique of buzz-picking[6] (which created a denser and less clearly resonant timbre) coupled with the drumming technique of the 'blast beat'[7] (cf. Hagen 2273–2293). The imagery was harsh and obscure: everything, from the convoluted and almost unintelligible band logos to the menacing stage names and the use of corpse-paint, had to suggest an image of inaccessibility and mystery. The majority of the bands wrote lyrics relating to Satanism and Viking or Norse mythology and advocated a return to pre-Christian Paganism as a form of rebellion against the establishment. The scene was plagued by a series of violent incidents, namely the suicide of Mayhem's singer Per Yngve Ohlin, aka 'Dead', the murder of Mayhem's

guitarist Euronymous by Burzum's main man Varg Vikernes and a series of church burnings that created a moral panic in Norway and helped to crystallize an all encompassing and misleading image of the entire scene as violent, Satanic and leaning towards National Socialist ideologies (cf. Patterson 209–214). While the story of the Norwegian scene is too complex to be dealt in full here, it is true that the sensationalistic events surrounding it helped to make Norwegian BM an export product, but most importantly, it crystallized the genre's stylistic and aesthetic elements as integral to 'authentic' BM.[8]

US Black Metal (USBM) as we know it today was born partly out of the influence of the Norwegian scene, but also as a result of the early USBM of the 1980s and 1990s by American bands like Von, Absu, Profanatica, Krieg, and Weakling. The latter band in particular was instrumental in codifying the more recent wave of experimental USBM with their only album *Dead as Dreams* (2000), which was in its turn heavily influenced by Burzum's *Filosofem* (1996), a seminal record characterized by a wall of repetitive BM riffs accompanied by an eerie synth line and mantra-like lyrics (cf. Patterson 212). Weakling's *Dead as Dream*s blended Burzum's penchant for expansive and repetitive compositions with the emotionally surging riffs of post-rock, combining emotive resonance and personal lyrics about solitude and paranoia, with the typical BM wash of sound and the wailing, wraith-like vocals, through towering, twenty-minute long compositions (cf. Nunziata). Deafheaven, probably the most famous contemporary USBM band, have conflated the most important strands of the genre's evolutionary pattern while subverting some its most identifiable trademarks. Their penchant for post-rock-infused BM is matched by the use of an unusually colorful artwork and the simple, unassuming appearance of the band members. The publication of their sophomore record, the highly anticipated *Sunbather* (2013), had a twofold effect on the BM scene: it spawned a debate surrounding the current state of BM, with some commenters declaring the death of the genre in its traditional form, and retroactively created an increased interest towards a genre that has usually been the subject of specialized metal magazines and webzines and the exclusive territory of BM fans. So, why is BM suddenly a popular topic of discussion on indie webzines? What are the processes and the actors involved in the sudden popularity of such an unpopular genre? And most importantly, what really is at stake in the debate over BM's identity and its co-optation (or fears thereof) by what is disparagingly defined as 'hipsterdom'?

2.   Subcultural Capital and Transgressive Power in the Black Metal Musical Collectivity.

One way to explain the shift of BM from the realm of the unpopular to that of the cool is to understand the way BM as a musical event has been received by the indie music audience and the meaning of this co-optation. Popular musicologist Richard Middleton in his *Studying Popular Music* tries to interpret musical meanings and analyze the reception of musical events by relying on the dynamics pertaining to 'musical codes' and 'musical competences' of a 'musical collectivity'. BM can be defined as a musical event characterized by a set of 'musical codes', i.e. characteristics that relate musical sounds to extra-musical factors (cf. Middleton 246). These categories allow us to describe a particular musical work according to its generic norms, its musical and historical context as well as its musical content. The term 'musical collectivity' has been devised by Italian musicologist Franco Fabbri to describe all the social actors involved in the creation and fruition of music and the definition of musical genres (cf. 85). According to his definition, a musical collectivity includes musicians, composers, promoters, label executives, fans, journalists, music critics and scholars.

   Said music collectivity is endowed by what another Italian musicologist, Gino Stefani, has termed 'musical competence' (*Il Segno della Musica* 21), i.e. the way a musical message is received and interpreted by a musical community. Stefani has devised a general scheme of musical competences according to the analytical 'tools' used by the music 'receiver'. All these codes are grouped into two specific competence types, 'high competence' and 'popular competence' (Brackett 13).[9] The most common example is the difference between a receiver approaching a piece of music with a knowledge of music theory and one that approaches it at what Stefani calls an 'anthropological' level, as a daily practice (cf. *La Parola all'Ascolto* 12–13). Stefani's model complements Middleton's in that it introduces the concept of 'context' of the musical event by 'telling us about the larger social and cultural context, about the individual backgrounds of the senders and the receivers of the message, and about the background of the message itself' (Brackett 14). In other words, musical works may be received and codified by a musical collectivity according to different levels of musical competence, a process that in turn influences the way in which musical works are perceived and evaluated. In the case of BM's reception by both the indie and the BM musical collectivity, musical competence does not relate specifically to a knowledge of the inner workings of a BM song in terms of, say, chord progressions, melody, or harmonic structure: BM has rarely if ever

been analyzed from a music theory perspective, and certainly not in music webzines.[10] On the other hand, the musical competences of BM's fans relate to a knowledge of the history of the genre, of its musical and ideological evolution both temporally and spatially, and of the musical characteristics linking the 'old guard' with this new host of young BM bands. This may be true for most fans of very specialized genres, but in the case of BM, a very unpopular genre now experiencing a sudden increase in popularity, this aspect becomes crucial and arguably unique.

The process through which members of the BM 'musical collectivity' define themselves through their level of 'high competence' of the genre produces two complementary effects. Firstly, it endows them with 'subcultural capital', a concept that Sarah Thornton, adapting it from Bourdieu's own theory of cultural capital, has used to study dance-music subcultures in the United Kingdom. Translating the concept to the extreme metal subculture, Keith Kahn-Harris has observed how the display of musical knowledge within the scene produces an accumulation of subcultural capital. Extreme metal fans are eager to show that they know all the intricacies of the scene and the evolutionary paths of influence from one band to another. Secondly, it creates 'hierarchies of status' and 'hierarchies of power' (Kahn-Harris 2367) within but, most importantly, as a reaction to outsiders trying to get in. As Frith argues, if 'social relations are constituted in cultural practice, then our sense of identity and difference is established in the process of discrimination' (*Performing Rites* 18). Part of the pleasure of belonging to the extreme metal scene is in fact derived from the profound knowledge of the genre's history, a kind of subcultural capital that allows scene members to exclude or discriminate newcomers. BM fans and practitioners have always proudly been conscious of the unpopularity of the genre and have therefore reveled in the idea of being a part of a 'secret society' of like-minded individuals exclusively conscious of the inner workings of the genre.

BM fans have also been proudly conscious of the genre's 'extreme' or 'transgressive' nature. Generally speaking, the fact that BM's lyrics and imagery usually deal with death, violence and the occult is part of the reason of its unpopularity. More specifically, the pleasure of transgression from the norm of acceptable musical practice that extreme forms of metal afford their listeners is crucially linked to questions of subcultural identity formation. Keith-Kahn Harris has individuated three types of transgressions in extreme metal: 'sonic', 'discursive' and 'bodily' (Kahn-Harris 660). Without going into the detail of musical analysis, extreme metal transgresses the 'norm' of mainstream music and even classic heavy metal by emphasizing elements such as heavy guitar distortion, down-tuning and volume. Other

characterizing sonic elements of BM, such as the screaming vocals or the furious technicality of the drum signature, make the genre even more inaccessible. At the level of discourse, extreme metal has made themes like death and violence even more explicit than in classic heavy metal. As Kahn-Harris notes, seminal extreme metal bands like Carcass, Cannibal Corpse, Death, Dismember and Obituary routinely resorted to revolting images of torture and suffering in their lyrics and artwork (cf. 787). BM bands, particularly from the genre-defining Norwegian scene, have instead embraced Satanism (or anti-Christianity) as an extreme form of individualism. Kahn-Harris writes: 'Satanism is generally more concerned with liberation from the perceived constraints of humanity than with worshipping the devil' (856). As such, Satanism in BM transforms into a form of rebellion against the establishment that enhances the fans' perception of the elitist and unpopular nature of the genre. Bodily transgression like heavy consumption of alcohol and drugs are less central to the scene and certainly not unique, and they do not constitute a defining factor of the genre's unpopularity. The streak of violence associated with the Norwegian scene of the 1990s has instead assumed a 'mythic significance' (Kahn-Harris 999), and the genre has certainly capitalized, if unwittingly, on the allure of this violent origin story. As such, the transgressive elements associated with BM, coupled with the fans' deep knowledge of the genre's musical codes and accumulation of subcultural capital constitute the building blocks of its unpopular identity. These elements intervene significantly in the way BM fans negotiate their own sense of identity and how they respond to co-optation by the popular mainstream.

The critical space generated by *Sunbather* through reviews, op-eds and their respective comment sections illuminates the dynamics of appropriation of subcultural musical genres by mainstream culture and the way fans negotiate questions of authenticity and belonging. Fans and critic-fans alike are part of one or several overlapping musical collectivities, in this case the BM and the indie one. In fact, the blurring of boundaries caused by the sudden entry of BM into the world of indie webzines is one of the main forces behind the debate over BM's identity. In the next section of this essay, I will use *Sunbather* as a case study in order to flesh out the different voices of the BM musical collectivity: the fans, the indie webzine's journalists as critic-fans, and the musicians themselves. The participants in the debate display their own specialized knowledge of BM musical codes and their accumulated subcultural capital to either reinstate or redefine what they believe can be considered BM and what can be excluded from it. The discussion of Deafheaven's explosion of BM musical codes reveals how inclusionary and exclusionary processes taking place at the limits of

subcultural spaces amplify the fans' concerns over cultural appropriation. Now that BM is up for the taking, so to speak, now that it has burst through its prescribed boundaries into indie cultural consciousness, its very identity as an unpopular genre is put into question.

3.   'Death to Black Metal': Deafheaven's *Sunbather* and Black Metal in a 'Post-Pitchfork' World

The increased coverage of BM in indie webzines following the publication of Deafheaven's *Sunbather* has led to an exponential rise in reviews and op-eds debating the current status of the genre and to the consequent extension of the debate among fans in the comment sections. As Sexton argues, the proliferation of critical discussions about music in online zines has significantly blurred the boundary between the professional rock critic and the critic-fan (cf. 6). Publications like *Pitchfork* and *Stereogum* can be described as 'semi-fanzines', a term developed by Frith to describe those music publications where the critic's 'knowledge and authority proceed not from formal, educational or professional training but primarily from autodidactic, amateur enthusiasm' (Atton 9). Consequently, music criticism of BM in these websites does not subscribe to the classic narrative that pits established rock critics upholding some 'universal critical values' (Atton 5) against expert fans of a subgenre. The debate surrounding BM's sudden popularity in articles on indie webzines involves a musical collectivity where most actors involved possess high musical competence and a good quantity of subcultural capital.

The articles devoted to *Sunbather* argue for the death of traditional forms of BM in favor of multiple new forms of BM that take a decisive step away, stylistically and most importantly ideologically, from the 'mother' genre. Furthermore, they argue that the musical codes of BM have changed dramatically for the better and Deafheaven's *Sunbather* has been instrumental in igniting the change. An example of this kind of argumentation is Michael Nelson's op-ed 'Deconstructing: Alcest's *Shelter* and metal in a post-Deafheaven world' on *Stereogum*. Nelson, it must be noted, is *Stereogum*'s metal columnist and author of the monthly 'Black Market' column, so his musical competence on BM is beyond doubt, yet I take issue with his interpretation of Deafheaven's *Sunbather* as a watershed moment in the history of BM, producing a sort of paradigmatic shift in the genre and a 'post-Deafheaven' world. In the article, Nelson introduces Alcest, a French BM band mixing BM with the shoegaze of Slowdive and

My Bloody Valentine, as another similar example of the way the genre is breaking away from tradition. With their latest release, 2014's *Shelter*, Alcest have abandoned BM altogether and essentially put out a shoegaze record. According to Nelson, Deafheaven are direct descendants of Alcest's 'blackgaze', who provided Deafheaven's 'blueprint', and he triumphantly proclaims *Sunbather* to be 'the most important moment for American metal since the release of Nirvana's *Nevermind*'. The publication of *Shelter*, Nelson points out, comes at a 'fortuitous' time, since just when Deafheaven release a watershed, genre-defining record, Alcest decide to 'joyously' abandon BM altogether. What Nelson seems to suggest here is that *Sunbather*'s unexpected success (according to Metacritic, *Sunbather* was 'the best reviewed album of 2013') has created a decisive break in the evolutionary trajectory of BM, and that Alcest's *Shelter* marks the next logical step. In other words, *Sunbather*'s critical popularity is integral to the break with the tradition of BM, a tradition that will remain unpopular because it cannot survive in a post-Deafheaven world.

To back up his argument, Nelson cites another controversial op-ed, *Decibel*'s Michael Bergrand preface to his 'Best Metal Albums of 2013' article. In his introduction to the list, Bergrand essentially declares the death of metal, or at least its current status of creative 'atrophy'. Any innovation in metal, according to Bergrand, comes from bands actually overstepping the received boundaries of the genre and embracing forms as diverse as shoegaze, kraut-rock, progressive, jazz, etc. Begrand states that this process of 'border-crossing' has been happening for at least the last ten years, and Deafheaven's latest record is a crucial part of this process:

> Deafheaven's 2013 album *Sunbather* just might be the first major splintering that will eventually see 'extreme music' separating completely from actual heavy metal. [...] It remains the most critically acclaimed album of 2013, of any genre, marking the first time an album that has occupied that grey area between 'metal' and 'extreme music' has captured the attention of so many mainstream critics and audiences. Some critics still call Sunbather 'metal', but to do so is to forget what makes heavy metal heavy metal in the first place, merely clutching to the few metallic threads in an otherwise richly varied musical fabric. In reality, *Sunbather* is a tremendous example of extremity transcending the metal ethos entirely.

Bergrand expresses a very stylistically conservative view of metal with regard to style, but he makes an interesting though ultimately debatable

statement: that metal and extreme music are two different things. More importantly, he claims that *Sunbather*'s success with mainstream audiences is a result of an excision of the musical elements of metal in favor of the gray area of extreme music. As he goes on to conclude, while metal lingers in a state of crystallized motionlessness, extreme music is 'the true limitless form of music'. Using Bergrand's argument about *Sunbather*, Nelson goes even further and questions the nature of metal itself: if *Sunbather* is extreme music and thus not bounded by BM's 'rigid confines' (Nelson), then Alcest's *Shelter* is also extreme music, and so are Burzum's with his 'washed-out, lulling and gentle' records. In a post-Deafheaven world, metal is indefinite.

While I may spend paragraphs arguing why I find very little 'gentleness' in any Burzum record, my interest lies more in the way BM has been shoehorned into indie cultural consciousness by positing this 'post-Deafheaven' world in which BM itself is eliminated from the equation in favor of the all-encompassing 'extreme' label. Initially, Nelson seems to disagree with Bergrand's uncompromising view of metal, but he then utilizes his definition of extreme music to equate extremity with musical innovation and BM with musical rigidity. Ironically, Burzum need also to become undefinedly extreme because identifying them strictly with BM would automatically make their disciples, Deafheaven and Alcest, still BM. BM musical codes, the ones Burzum allegedly helped to create, are therefore made irrelevant because they did not exist in the first place. The way BM, and particularly *Sunbather*, is received by the indie music collectivity, in this case reviewers and fans or commenters, dramatizes exactly how the unpopularity of the genre has been metabolized through a narrative that downplays its BM elements and at the same time posits the evolution of BM in the 'post-Deafheaven' world as a decisive break rather than an evolutionary narrative.

Brandon Stosuy's enthusiastic review of *Sunbather* on Pitchfork also favors this narrative of rupture in the BM continuum. First he lists all the influences present in the record, an impressive roster of bands that, quite ironically, makes you wonder where Deafheaven's groundbreaking originality truly lies: we have the massive, cinematic post-rock of Mogway, Goospeed You! Black Emperor, and Sigur Rós, but also the 1980's art rock of The Cure and The Smiths, and of course the shoegaze of My Bloody Valentine. He then concludes his review by also positing a 'post-Deafheaven' world where 'black metal won't be the same now that [*Sunbather* has] been released'. Nelson's review of *Sunbather* runs along the same line of thought and tends to stress Deafheaven's non-BM elements:

> If you were to remove all Clarke's vocals from Deafheaven's new LP, *Sunbather*, and replace them with anodyne, ethereal cooing courtesy of, say, Bilinda Butcher or Rachel Goswell, you would be unlikely to hear *Sunbather* as anything except a shoegazer album. Or you could axe the vocals entirely and just call it a post-rock record and you wouldn't be wrong. Clarke doesn't even look like what a guy in a black metal band is supposed to look like: He's dapper, smartly dressed, cleanly cropped. You'd be more likely to mistake him for a member of Morrissey's backing band than a member of Inquisition or Immortal. But as soon as he opens his mouth… ('Premature Evaluation')

He later ascribes to Deafheaven an almost single-minded need to create controversy by going against everything a BM record is supposed to be:

> In a studio diary published earlier this year on Invisible Oranges, Clarke wrote: 'I named the record *Sunbather* because that's the feeling it gives me. It is the sadness and the frustration and the anger that comes with striving for perfection. Dreaming of warmth and love despite the pain of idealism'. I don't (entirely) mean to question Clarke's sincerity, but that seems like an *enormous* stretch to me. He couldn't find a better metaphor to capture Sisyphean angst than *Sunbather*? Nah, I'm not buying it—as I said in my review of *Sunbather*'s lead single, 'Dream House', I think he's trolling the trolls: Black metal bands don't have pink album covers, and they don't have album titles that refer to vapid summertime outdoor leisure. That is the *exact fucking opposite* of what black metal bands do. I think it's deliberately intended to inflame. (Nelson, 'Premature Evaluation')

As a phoenix reborn out of the flames, Deafheaven have, according to this reviewer, metaphorically 'killed' their elders and done away with BM's traditionalist and insular approach, making it finally acceptable to a wider audience. Rather than accepting the fact that BM musical codes have evolved for the better, he needs to create a reassuring narrative in which pink covers and 'vapid summertime outdoor leisure' may never become part of the BM imaginary. This kind of rhetorical strategy is present in many articles and reviews of these new BM bands on indie webzines: the gist is that these bands become acceptable once their style points more to something other than BM. The reviews on Pitchfork and Stereogum are all eager to point out, for example, how the sound of new USBM bands like Locrian, Castevet or Vattnet Viskar owes more to the kraut-rock of Popol

Vuh or the post-rock of Mogwai and Godspeed You Black Emperor! than to Mayhem or Darkthrone. Yet, while these bands hybridize their sound with other genres and do away with the more spectacular elements of early BM (the corpse-paint, the Satanic or occult imagery), stylistically they do not, or at least not completely. Stereogum's Chris DeVille pointedly states in an article on Deafheaven's crossing over to the 'dark side' of hipsterdom ('Deconstructing: Deafheaven, Disclosure and Crossing Over'), that indie music critics are usually eager to present themselves as open-minded omnivores. Reviews of *Sunbather* in both indie webzines and mainstream publications will therefore embrace the album as a break with traditional BM and disparage BM's purists supposed backlash.

However, as I have already pointed out at the beginning of this essay, such a purist backlash is actually rare and discussions on comment sections to articles about Deafheaven are usually cogent and well-informed dissections of BM's myriad influences and subcurrents. Of course, exceptions apply: some commenters are openly hostile to metal, feeding off the usual stereotypes about metal fans' musical immaturity, herd mentality, and elitism. Other listeners approaching BM for the first time with what we could term 'low' musical competence of the genre, tend to find fault with some of its most inaccessible musical elements, but they nevertheless show a certain degree of open-mindedness, certainly fuelled by the hype created by their favorite indie webzines. A commenter on *Sunbather*'s reviews on *Stereogum* named 'KiDCHAIR' states that he would definitely listen to Deafheaven, he loves the melodies, the emotional surge of the blast beat coupled with the frantic chord progressions, but he really cannot swallow a singing that to him is just a series of 'YAI, YAI, YAAAHAHAH' that does not communicate any emotion to him. 'Why can't he sing?' he asks (Nelson, 'Premature Evaluation'). Some commenters on the articles by Baher, Nelson and DeVille define themselves as 'metal outsiders' and are usually confused by metal's endless breakdown into currents and subgenres, but still express interest in giving BM a try. A commenter on the DeVille article named 'spo' for instance states how his enjoyment of the Deafheaven album has encouraged him to listen to other bands, like Wolves in the Throne Room.

The most interesting insights on the debate come, however, from BM fans, people with medium to high musical competence about the genre. The concern of these fans revolves around the crossover of the genre from the unpopular underground to the popularity of indie music culture, a fact signaled by the success of Deafheaven. Fans tend to respond to the hostility of mainstream culture by further asserting and promoting heavy metal as an exclusive subculture. Heavy metal fans, as Weinstein has noted, take

pride in the fact that they listen to good music that outsiders tend to either misinterpret or denigrate (cf. 143). While metal's subcultural status has historically relied on several 'external' signifiers such as the long hair, the leather jackets and tattoos as well as communal gathering places like the metal festival or the local record store, the music has always been its most defining factor. Metal is a 'music based subculture' (Weinstein 143) in that it is grounded in the fans' assumption of its innate greatness. This, in turn, generates a heightened sense of commitment and social belonging: heavy metal fans are loyal to their favorite bands and assume a defensive attitude towards criticism coming from the outside. In other words, heavy metal is a quintessentially unpopular genre, a fact that fans take as a point of pride rather than as a defeat.

Some BM fans commenting on Bayer's article actually indicate elitism as the force behind BM's musical quality. They argue that BM's co-optation from indie culture will inevitably result in a decline in the quality of the music as well as a 'softening' of the distinctive features of the genres. The 'selling out' paradigm is indeed integral to indie music culture. Kembrew McLeod's study on the mid-1990s American hip-hop scene has revealed the dynamics through which a subculture tries to preserve its identity from mainstream assimilation. He argues that when members of a musical community

> disparage inauthentic symbols of identity and valorise authentic symbols of identity, they implicate themselves in a larger cultural logic shared by other cultures and subcultures which face the contradiction of being inside a mainstream culture that they define themselves against. (51)

BM fans' fears of co-optation by mainstream culture induce some of them to assume a defensive posture and single out those features of BM that they deem authentic (obscure imagery and themes, traditional sound) from those they feel are inauthentic (mainstream music influences, imagery and style). Therefore, these fears are exasperated by fans' own perception, as user 'Dave Emerson' puts it, of the genre's 'strictly defined boundaries' (Bayer). Another user named 'hi arc tow' reinforces this idea of BM's uniqueness by upholding elitism as a distinctive feature of metal in general. Counteracting accusations of BM's lack of musical openness, 'hi arc tow' positions the genre as a force against what he perceives as a mediocre musical panorama. He asks his fellow commenters: 'Not open to what?—having a distinct and difficult musical genre we care about absorbed by the morass of mediocritis-ing, lowest common-denominator indie/pop/rock that western culture is

saturated in?' (Bayer) As this last comment renders evident, some fans share a romanticized view of BM as uncorrupted by the forces of the global music industry. But as Spracklen points out, BM 'is part of the Westernised, commercial pop and rock music industry that has imposed itself on the rest of the world, and as such BM reproduces the instrumental actions that govern that industry' (9). In other words, whatever subcultural capital BM may afford its fans, the genre produces actual capital for its practitioners and promoters and is part of the same processes of supply and demand that characterize mainstream musical cultures. The co-optation of BM by other musical subcultures becomes therefore a battle for the genre's identity, one that is still conceived by many fans as the only alternative to mass-produced pop or the latest indie fad.

Still other BM fans take a completely opposite view and see BM as naturally suited to hybridization with other genres. Commenting on Bayer's article, user 'Arif Aksit' interestingly questions *Sunbather*'s sudden success, but most poignantly, he points to BM's past history of musical innovation, discarding the reading of *Sunbather* by indie music critics as a groundbreaking, genre-altering record. A good number of fans also take issue with the definition of *Sunbather* as a non-BM record or a generally extreme record that transcends BM altogether. This is most evident in the Nelson article on a 'post-Deafheaven' world, where fans competently point to the preponderance of BM musical elements like tremolo picking, the blast beat, and the high-pitched screaming vocals in *Sunbather*. A user named 'themetalpigeon' counteracts Nelson's argument and voices an opinion shared by most commenters to the article: BM, and metal in general, is not a static genre and Deafheaven are not revolutionary. As he argues: 'Metal's malleability is its core strength after all—long before there were Alcests and Deafheavens metal was already branched out in a myriad of different directions with unique styles'. User 'A. Darryl Moton' re-asserts the same concept: 'I like the new Alcest album, much like I enjoyed the Deafheaven album, but I don't think anything truly revolutionary is going down here–to me, it's pretty much the same thing that metal's been doing since Black Sabbath made blues slower and louder'. These comments show that musically competent BM fans counter the construction of *Sunbather* as a break with the tradition and reject the fable of its threatening nature to the status quo on two accounts: it is not a genre-altering recording and it *is* a BM record. The fans' reading of Deafheaven's phenomenal success clashes with a dubious narrative, constructed mainly by the indie webzines, that sees new BM bands breaking decisively with a monolithic earlier tradition that is still staunchly defended by a supposed backlash of close-minded purists.

Even the bands themselves, as evinced for example in Brandon Stosuy's interview with Deafheaven and Liturgy on Pitchfork, never repudiate their BM roots and are quick to acknowledge their debt to traditional bands. In several interviews after the release of *Sunbather*, Clarke and McCoy refuse to be pinned down as 'controversial' or of having 'an outlook or an agenda' and just point to BM's 'underlying beauty' (Stosuy, 'Show No Mercy') from the very beginning. In an interview with metal webzine *Invisible Oranges* McCoy answers a question about his BM 'touchstones' by acknowledging his major influences and unwittingly confirming BM's evolutionary trajectory:

> *McCoy:* Pretty much all the stuff we're influenced by is the Ukrainian stuff like Drudkh or Hate Forest. Or the German bands like Lantlos or Cold World. More of the atmospheric, post-rock kind of thing. Other than that the French bands, especially. And I hate that I'm about to say this but Wolves in the Throne Room and Panopticon are great. [Laughs] Then early Darkthrone, early Burzum, Ulver.

Deafheaven's music, as the musicians themselves also seem to imply, is neither modeled after a 'blueprint' of Alcest, nor is it an undefined form of extreme music that completely transcends BM, but it is rather a further proof of the evolutionary potential of BM's musical codes. The linear trajectory became a network after early Norwegian bands ignited BM's global expansion. However, this evolutionary narrative of BM clashes with the fact that the genre's musical codes are usually perceived as static, monolithic and thus inaccessible by listeners unfamiliar with the genre. It also clashes with readings in indie webzines that see *Sunbather* as a paradigmatic shift in the genre, and which have an even more controversial subtext: that Deafheaven's popularity is a *result* of this paradigmatic shift, a final abandonment of the (problematic) BM heritage. But is this really the case? Have Deafheaven actually rewritten BM's musical codes and finally transcended them, thus rescuing the genre from its undeserved unpopularity? Or is *Sunbather*, an excellent album by all accounts, just a further realization of BM's incredible evolutionary potential?

Deafheaven's 'Dreamhouse', the opening track from *Sunbather*, opens with a somewhat typical buzz-picked chord progression, soon followed by the blast beat and Clarke's screaming vocals. What makes Deafheaven an heir to Burzum's and Drudkh's tradition is the centrality of melody. The layers of guitar, heavily delayed, buzzing and lyrical and the fuzzy blast beat blend seamlessly with the vocals to create an emotional surge that relies heavily on melodic crescendos. The song swings from darkness

and ferocity to light and sweet melancholy, an effect both Burzum and Drudkh achieved through repetition of heavy guitar riffs accompanied by uplifting, melancholic tremolo-picked melodic lines or sequences of arpeggios. With Deafheaven, melody becomes a key element of the composition and the tremolo picked guitar crescendos are as much a product of post-rock experimentations of bands like Sigur Ros , Explosions in the Sky and God Speed You! Black Emperor as of the melodic overtures of Burzum and Drudkh. Deafheaven's music is not a break or a watershed, but rather a continuum in BM's ongoing evolutionary narrative of constant rewriting of its *own* musical codes. BM is 'extreme' insofar as it has always been the metal subgenre that has been playing the most with the outer hedges of metal, its 'extremities', so to speak.

Conclusion

The reason for the indie webzine's increasing coverage of BM resides in the fundamentally experimental attitude of the genre since its very beginnings. If we set aside the corpse-paint and the Satanic or Pagan imagery and listen to it, we will find that precisely because BM is the most extreme of metal subgenres, always skirting at the edges and playing with other genres, especially electronic music, dark ambient, drone music, and punk, it is also the most malleable and experimental, the one most prone to a hybridization of its core elements. The Norwegian bands of the second wave of BM, far from remaining monolithic protectors of the traditional 'true' sound, have also continued to deconstruct the genre from within, a fact that has had a direct consequence on the experimentations of the new BM bands. This evolutionary reading of BM as it travels from Europe to the US and back re-inscribes a narrative of continuity that counters some of the indie webzines' narratives of appropriation, discontinuity and disavowal. One just needs to listen to the latest record by Norwegian BM veterans Darkthrone, *The Underground Resistance* (2012), alongside the music of newcomers Rasperry Bulbs; or the 'black' prog-rock of another BM institution, Enslaved, alongside the psychedelic experimentations of younger bands like Vattnet Viskar or Oranssi Pazuzu. Musically speaking the core elements of BM are still present, but they are mixing with other genres, crossing and disrespecting boundaries to create new brands of BM. Lyrics express anguish, pain and frustration with the modern world, with society and with relationships in a different, maybe more personal language, but the feelings typical of BM are all there. This is a testament to the fact that BM is today the most vital

subgenre of heavy metal, a genre that contrary to charges of conservative-ness and insularity is able to reach out of its received boundaries to new audiences while still retaining a relation with its past.

The progressive cross-over of BM from unpopularity to indie culture popularity, as epitomized by Deafheaven's *Sunbather*, dramatizes the battle over BM's contentious identity among old and new fans and between fans and indie music journalists. The analysis of a selected number of articles on Deafheaven by critic-fans and the response from fans in the comment sections has revealed that while both camps share a view of BM as a genre in constant stylistic evolution, they do not always agree on the actual direction it is taking. These particular BM fans value important factors such as respect for the history of the genre and belonging to a musical subculture and resist readings of BM that reject that history and compromise its identity. In other words, they use their subcultural capital to assert a kind of 'righteous' unpopularity of BM, one that is connected to the history of heavy metal as a misunderstood niche genre and the fans' conviction of its innate musical quality. At the same time, this identification of BM as unpopular allows them to protect it from co-optation from the mainstream, which they see as creatively stultified. Conversely, the critic-fans of BM mentioned here use their own deep knowledge of BM musical codes to create a narrative of rupture that sees old forms of traditional BM as obsolete and advocates a new course for the genre paradoxically without or beyond BM. This nar-rative, as my analysis of *Sunbather* suggests, is open to contestation and debate, considering the band's musical lineage. However, if we go beyond mere judgment of taste we can see how it is precisely this narrative that has propelled the band from the BM underground to instant popularity. Deafheaven's global reach through such an unpopular genre as BM is in fact crucially related to the overwhelming power of indie music webzines and the gatekeeping function of indie music journalists. Older bands, like for instance Burzum or Darkthrone, were born in an era where web-based music journalism and internet-based music distribution did not exist. They created and cultivated a cult following fuelled by fanzines, trade-taping and specialized printed magazines that enhanced the scene's circumscribed (un)popularity and its sense of community. Today, as Deafheaven and other young BM bands grow in popularity, the ripple effect produced by heightened media coverage puts BM and its embattled identity under the (uncomfortable) spotlight.

And now to come full circle. Inquisition's guitarist Dagon, our infamous BM 'purist', recently pondered over a question about Metal's broader accept-ance and coverage outside of the underground:

> There is absolutely a wider acceptance of heavy music now. [...] Musician-
> ship has evolved. Skills are sky high in every sense and anyone with a
> brain knows skill when they see it and hear it. What made metalheads
> different from the masses years ago is that we could hear talent through
> the muddy productions and looser performances. Today I feel that Metal
> is almost the new jazz or classical music. There is tremendous skill and
> pushing the envelope is the building block of this music much like clas-
> sical music was or jazz. (*Steel for Brains* interview)

I may be pushing this a little too far, but there seems to be a forbidden
pleasure in redeeming BM from its unpopularity, freezing it in perpetual
elitism and immutability, and positing a 'post-Deafheaven' reality, an
almost post-apocalyptic renewal of BM into popular indie culture that
erases its roots and history. But as Dagon reminds us, pushing the envelope
constitutes 'the building blocks' of this genre, and its staunch, sought for, and
well-guarded historical unpopularity is linked to this intrinsic experimental
drive and to the 'cultural awareness' of it by BM fans. The crossing-over of
BM into the popular realm of indie webzines is just the realization of this
cultural awareness.

Notes

1.   Inquisition's *Obscure Verses for the Multiverse* received stellar reviews from
     most specialized metal webzines (*Cvlt Nation* and *Invisible Oranges*, among
     others) as well as an 8.1 score from *Pitchfork Magazine.* See Kim Kelly 'Al-
     bum Reviews: Inquisition: *Obscure Verses From the Multiverse*'.
2.   The act of 'trolling', described by the Urban Dictionary as the act of 'being
     a prick on the internet because you can,' consists of insulting or offending
     other people's opinions and tastes in the comment sections of various spe-
     cialized and non-specialized websites in order to spike controversy. Most
     webzines, for example *Stereogum*, apply a certain degree of censorship and
     hide particularly offensive comments, while others, like the overwhelm-
     ingly popular *Pitchfork*, have done away with comment sections altogether.
     Wired Mat Honan has declared the death of the comment section in favor
     of social network services like Facebook and Twitter. I would however coun-
     teract that, at least in the case here at hand of music webzines, a carefully
     moderated comment section creates very fruitful and focused conversations
     among musically literate individuals as opposed to social network's disper-
     sal through information overflow. See, Mat Honan, 'Comment Sections are
     Wastelands Ruled by Trolls. Here are Alternatives'.

3.   The term 'indie' has quickly come to be used, starting from the 1990s, to de-
      scribe the music produced by labels independent of the major record label
      system. R.E.M. are often cited as the primary example of an indie band, to-
      gether with the meteoric explosion of the Seattle grunge scene, with bands
      like Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Soundgarden, Alice in Chains and others. Nowadays
      the term 'indie' is used in a much looser sense and indicates those artists
      walking a fine line between the underground and the mainstream. For more
      on the history of the indie genre see Azzerad and Kruse. For a tentative
      definition of indie music see Hibbet.

4.   Simon Frith defines rock critics as the 'opinion leaders' and 'ideological
      gate-keepers' (*Sound Effects* 117) of the musical communities they write for.
      They become veritable 'consumer guides for adults' and are able to stir the
      listeners' tastes concerning the palatability of certain artists and their place
      in the pantheon of music history. The process of 'legitimization' of BM by
      mainstream rock and indie critics constitutes a crucial aspect of the genre's
      problematic relationship with popularity. On the ideological function of
      rock music criticism see also Frith, *Performing Rites*, and McLeod.

5.   'Online ethnography' or 'Netnography' is a fairly recent anthropological
      field, originally developed for marketing and consumer research, dealing
      with online communities and online social interactions. For an introduc-
      tion to the methodological tools of Netnography see Robert V. Kozinetz,
      Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online.

6.   Tremolo picking: double picking of the strings at a fast tempo. It favors
      chord progressions around arpeggios.

7.   Rapid alternating or coincident strokes, primarily on the bass and snare
      drums.

8.   The growing interest in the history of Norwegian BM, certainly fuelled in
      part by the mythologization surrounding Euronymous's death, has since
      spawned a series of publications on BM of which Michael Moyhinian's
      Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground (1998) is
      the earliest example. However, Moyhinian's book focuses more on the his-
      tory of the Satanic 'inner circle' surrounding the scene rather than on the
      music itself. A recent, interesting oral history of BM, dedicated but not lim-
      ited to the Norwegian scene, is *Metalion: The Slayer Mag Diaries,* a volume
      collecting the *Slayer Magazine*, a seminal DIY metal magazine published in
      Norway between 1985 and 2010 by Norwegian BM 'insider' Jon Kristiansen,
      aka Metalion. Other recent publications specifically dedicated to BM offer a
      more global history of the genre's musical output, particularly an essay col-
      lection edited by Tom Howells, *Black Metal: Beyond the Darkness* (2012) and
      an encyclopedic volume by Dayal Patterson, *Black Metal: Evolution of the
      Cult* (2014). Of specific interest to Norwegian BM is the recent documentary
      by Aaron Aites and Audrey Ewells, *Until the Light Takes Us* (2009), which
      features an extensive interview with Burzum's Varg Vikernes.

9.   Gino Stefani's musical competences are part of a much more complex categorization of musical codes that takes into account other intra-musical levels, namely 'Tecniche Musicali' (Musical Techniques), 'Stili' (Styles), 'Opere' (Works), 'Pratiche Sociali' (Social Practices) and 'Codici Generali' (General Codes). 'High' and 'popular' competence levels work along these categories, with high competences being related with the first three categories and popular competences being related with the last two. See Middleton and Stefani, *Il Segno della Musica*.

10. To my knowledge, the only essay attempting an analysis of BM's musical characteristics (Norwegian BM to be exact) is Ross Hagen's 'Musical Style, Ideology and Mythology in Norwegian Black Metal.' Hagen rightly laments the lack of rigorous music theory analysis in most studies on BM in favor of historical, cultural, literary, or critical theory approaches. It has to be noted, however, that BM is just part of a larger trend that has seen a progressive disappearance of music theory from popular music studies and more evidently in music criticism on music magazines and webzines, a fact noted by jazz historian Ted Gioia in his controversial and much-discussed article on *The Daily Beast*, 'Music Criticism Has Degenerated into Lifestyle Reporting.' BM fits right into this polemic, since extra-musical elements relating to the genre's ideology and presentation have always been an integral part of the its reception by mainstream audiences.

Works Cited

Atton, Chris. 'Writing about Listening: Alternative Discourses in Rock Journalism.' *Popular Music*. 28.1 (January 2009): 53–67. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Bayer, Jonah. 'Why are Black Metal Fans such Elitist Assholes?' *Noisey – Music By Vice* 21 Jan. 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Azerrad, Michael. *Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes from the American Indie Underground 1981–1991*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2001. Kindle E-Book.

Bergrand, Adrien. 'The Best Metal Albums of 2013: Introduction.' *Basement Galaxy* 30 Dec. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Birk, Nathan T. 'South of Helvete (And East of Eden).' Howells 8–29. Print.

Brackett, David. *Interpreting Popular Music*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge UP, 1995. Print.

Deafheaven. *Sunbather*. Deathwish, 2013. LP.

DeVille, Chris. 'Deconstructing: Deafheaven, Disclosure and Crossing Over.' *Stereogum* 11 July 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Eddy, Chuck. 'Deafheaven: *Sunbather*.' *Rolling Stone* 12 Aug. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Fabbri, Franco. *Il Suono in cui Viviamo. Saggi sulla Popular Music*. Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2008. Print.

Frere-Jones, Sasha. 'The Dark Arts. How to Approach Black Metal.' *The New Yorker* 10 Oct. 2011. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Frith, Simon. *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure and the Politics of Rock'n' Roll*. New York: Pantheon Book, 1981. Print.

—. *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996. Print.

Gioia, Ted. 'Music Criticism has Degenerated into Lifestyle Reporting.' *The Daily Beast* 18 March 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Hagen, Ross. 'Musical Style, Ideology, and Mythology in Norwegian Black Metal.' Wallach, Berger, and Greene 2229–2485. Kindle E-book.

Hibbett, Ryan. 'What is Indie Rock?' *Popular Music and Society.* 28.1 (Feb. 2005): 55–77. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Howells, Tom, ed. *Black Metal: Beyond The Darkness.* London: Black Dog Publishing, 2012. Print.

'Interview: Deafheaven's George Clark and Kerry McCoy.' *Invisible Oranges* 12 June 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Kahn-Harris, Keith. *Extreme Metal. Music and Culture on the Edge.* Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007. Kindle E-Book.

Karim, Alee. 'Deafheaven: How an S.F. Duo Made the Breakthrough Metal Album of the Year.' 11 Sept. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Kelly, Kim. 'Album Reviews. Inquisition: *Obscure Verses for the Multiverse.*' 9 Dec. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Kozinetz, Robert V. *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online.* London: Sage Publications, 2010. Print.

Kruse, Holly. *Site and Sound. Understanding Independent Music Scenes.* New York: Peter Lang: 2003. Print.

McLeod, Kembrew. 'One and a Half Star': A Critique of Rock Criticism in North America.' *Popular Music.* 20.1 (2001): 47–60. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Middleton, Richard. *Studying Popular Music.* Buckingham: Open UP, 1990. Print.

Moynihan, Michael, and Didrik Søderlind. *Lords of Chaos: The Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground.* Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 1998. Print.

Nelson, Michael. 'Premature Evaluation: Deafheaven's *Sunbather.*' *Stereogum* 29 May 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

—. 'Deconstructing: Alcest's *Shelter* and Metal in a Post-Deafheaven World.' *Stereogum* 3 Jan. 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Nunziata, Francesco. 'Weakling: Osceni Disastri Black Metal.' *OndaRock* 17 April 2011. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Patterson, Dayal. *Black Metal. Evolution of the Cult.* Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2013. Print.

Spracklen, Karl. 'True Aryan Black Metal: The Meaning of Leisure, Belonging and the Construction of Whiteness in Black Metal Music.' *Inter-Disciplinary.Net* 2006. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Stefani, Gino. *Il Segno della Musica.* Palermo: Sellerio, 1987. Print.

—. *La Parola all'Ascolto.* Bologna: CLUEB, 2000. Print.

Steel for Brains. 'Incense of Rest—A Conversation with Inquisition.' *Steel for Brains.* Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Stosuy, Brandon. 'Show No Mercy: Death to Black Metal.' *Pitchfork* 30 Jan. 2012. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

—. 'A Blaze Across the North American Sky.' Howells 36–59. Print.

—. 'Album Reviews. Deafheaven: *Sunbather.*' *Pitchfork* 11 June 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Wallach, Jeremy, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Greene, eds. *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the World.* Durham: Duke UP, 2011. Kindle E-Book.

Walser, Robert. *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music.* Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1993. Print.

Weinstein, Deena. *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture.* 1991. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2000. Print.

Unpopular Culture and the American Reception of Tinariwen

Barry Shank

> 'Compassion [...] is the disturbance of violent relatedness.'
> —Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (xiii)

> 'I'm a fuckin' walkin' paradox. No I'm not.'
> —Tyler, the Creator, 'Yonkers'

I have been provoked by the topic of this volume, Unpopular Culture, to address some of the assumptions that traditionally underlie popular culture studies. Important among those assumptions is the belief that the spread of popular cultural forms across significant geographic and political boundaries can be a positive development. Clearly, this is not necessarily or universally true. Popular culture scholars have not mindlessly celebrated White appreciation for Black music or the Western appropriation of non-Western musical styles. I certainly do not assume that the global spread of American popular culture has produced consistently progressive consequences. Nor am I asserting the naïve belief that shared tastes equate to shared political stances. But using a slightly more sophisticated version of the same belief, in my case based on a theoretical framework that draws from Chantal Mouffe, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Jacques Rancière, I have claimed that the spread of popular music implicates new populations in enhanced and enlarged conceptions of the polis, the political form of the people.[1] Voices newly heard as musical are the voices of political persons, humans demanding to be heard as legitimate participants in political discourse. In an increasingly integrated global sphere of politics, the sharing of truly aesthetic pleasure, when geographically and culturally dispersed groups share the sense that a particular set of sounds are beautiful, can change the boundaries of the popular. This is not an unchallenged assertion. But it strikes an important counterpoint to the pernicious yet dominant assumption that cultures are objects that belong to groups as property, as the source of coherent and incommensurable identities that function as boundary markers separating us all from each other.[2]

Raymond Williams was among the first to argue that popular culture was the culture of the people and should be analyzed from a perspective alert to their particular characteristics and needs. Following standard Marxist thinking, the category of the people was defined by class, and the culture of the people could be known by observing what the people listened to, read, and watched (cf. 306–12). But we know now that cultures do not have boundaries; they have threads that interweave across communities and geographies, defying any effort to keep them in their place. Our historical moment is one of intense and rapid change, where traditional organizations of sounds and traditional organizations of life are being engulfed by global waves of violence. This is not a time when political or musical boundaries stand still. Popular music in itself cannot stop war, but newly arranged timbres, scales and beats can create new musical aesthetics that ratify a world of sound and meaning shared across borders. When a new sense of musical beauty spreads across new listeners, a different sense of the political world is produced. This aesthetic process of changing the boundaries of the political is not a popular one in the traditional sense. Indeed, it could be understood as one of the key gestures of truly unpopular culture as it challenges common sense conceptions of the people.

It is not obvious what happens when people from opposite sides of the planet share a sense of musical pleasure. Is it possible for that shared aesthetic to change the shape of the political in a meaningful way? This essay examines the case of Tinariwen, a band of Tuareg or kel Tamashek musicians who have been among the leading groups developing a particular style of what the West has come to call 'desert blues'. Over the past decade, as the Western popularity of Tinariwen's music has increased, political chaos has descended upon Mali, the nation state that stands upon the ground from which Tinariwen and Tuareg music emerged. Over the past several years, this turmoil has intensified, with multiple armies swarming across the northern portion of Mali. In this example, it might be worth asking what political force can music have in the face of war's destruction.

During this recent period of turmoil, Tinariwen has been continually on the road, performing across Europe and North America. Their Anglo-American following is drawn by the sounds of their guitars and assumptions about the cultural histories those sounds carry with them. Curious listeners to their earlier recordings were hailed by comments in Pitchfork reviews like this one where Joe Tangari described their 2007 album, *Aman Iman*:

> The music of Tinariwen is at once exotic and familiar—the scales and arrangements are as strange to our ears as the language they sing in,

but there's a force operating on a more subliminal level that unites it to something rattling around inside anyone who was brought up on blues or rock & roll. It's music of longing and rebellion, weary wisdom and restless energy, and it sounds so, so good. ('Aman Iman')

When reviewing Tinariwen's 2009 album *Imidiwan*, the same writer evoked the social context for its production, describing the 'intermittent violence and displacement' the Tuareg people experience 'as they've fought to maintain their culture and lifestyle in a world that isn't built to accommodate it' ('Imidiwan'). Listening to these recordings, the disproportionately young white male readers of these *Pitchfork* reviews could imagine a soundscape that integrated sounds both familiar and exotic, guitar drones amid North African scales, non-English lyrics—mostly Tamashek, but some French—repeated with strophic phrasing, within a contemporary geopolitical struggle, conjuring the associations of global black music with the drive for human emancipation. 'The blues is present', says Tangari, 'as a sense of intense longing and defiance in the face of despair that hums in sympathetic vibration with its trans-Atlantic cousin' ('Aman Iman'). In these reviews, Tinariwen is misrecognized as a modern inheritor of the blues impulse. On first hearing, their music sounds like the blues created by Black Americans, and therefore we are to assume that the struggles experienced by the Tuareg are akin to Black Americans' struggles for freedom.

The power of this set of assumptions can be understood through a concept developed by Roshy Kheshti called the 'aural imaginary', which has significant implications for all forms of listening, perhaps especially the initial listening that might be the first step towards the emergence of new political communities. The first encounter of new sounds, that moment when we begin to sort those sounds into musical categories, is fraught. Inevitably, a kind of misrecognition occurs that results not only from the extreme differences between the social contexts of the music's origin and the contexts of the music's hearing, but also from deeply held and nearly unconscious assumptions about the social meanings of particular sounds (cf. Kheshti 711–31).[3] In this case, Tinariwen's droning guitars and deep masculine voices reverberate off ear canals trained by decades of rock's romanticization of the blues impulse and stimulate the longing for political music that haunts the aural imaginary of many American listeners. At least one commentator from 2007 had a more accurate understanding of Tinariwen's context. Robert Christgau wrote in a review of that same album *Aman Iman*: 'What's sought isn't your affection, but your respect.' He went on to quote a translation of one line from the song 'Tamatart Tilay', 'We

kill the enemies and become like eagles. We'll liberate all those who live in the places'. Christgau reminded his readers: 'This is not a metaphor. They are talking about killing'. But he stood out from the crowd. Most American reviews were shaped by romantic associations of blues music with civil resistance and political progressivism.

The effects of the audible imaginary were not limited to US-based listeners. When Tinariwen toured the UK a few years ago, Thomas Jones wrote in *Crack* magazine: 'As dedicated to their music as they are to their struggle for independence, Tinariwen are the ultimate rebel rockers'. Yet in the same article, Jones quotes Ibrahim Ag Alhabib, one of the band's founding members, saying, 'Our message is about who we are as people. We are doing music that comes from our ancestors, *with electric guitars*, but with the lyrics, the rhythms and the ambience from our heritage. So we are musicians first, but the voice of our people at the same time'. Articulating a classic understanding of the popular, Ag Alhabib insists that Tinariwen's music is traditional, rooted in a local heritage of musical performance.

The melodies and rhythms that sound both exotic and familiar to the carefully nurtured Anglo-American audience emerge from a tradition of guitar-accompanied warrior praise songs called *ichumar* or *alguitara*. (*Ichumar* is the local word for the unemployed. *Alguitara* refers, of course, to the instrument.) It is an adaptation of a slightly (but only slightly) older traditional style called *teherdent*. As the ethnomusicologist Nadia Belalimat outlines it, the *teherdent* style features both male and female singers, the women alternating ululations with the men's chants. The instrumentation is sparse, featuring rhythms beat out on a *tinde* drum reinforced by handclaps, while the melodies are echoed on the three-sting lute from which the style takes its name. Originally a style that was performed only by local musicians, predominantly women, for an audience of extended family and friends, its orientation shifted outward during the 1960s. Belalimat notes: 'Many musician-artisans started performing outside their own lineage affiliations in order to provide for themselves, since their former employers could no longer support them' (160). The *teherdent* style adapted to the guitar when that instrument spread across the region. The guitar could be both louder and more percussive than the *teherdent*, and it was just as easy to carry. When the Tuareg resistance began again in the late 1980s, the instrument quickly became metonymically linked to weapons of rebellion. Another of the founding members of Tinariwen, Keddou Ag Ossad, was praised for riding into battle with a rifle in one hand, a traditional saber in the other, and his guitar on his back (cf. Rasmussen 643). As Rasmussen explains, 'in the early ichumar music, the composers, performers, and audience all were combatants' (635). Rasmussen

goes on to say, 'Early ichumar songs were composed by one rebel to praise another and were performed by the composer or the subject of praise in a tightly knit 'circle' of mutual support' (639). As the alguitara or ichumar style developed, recordings of this music were banned by the Malian government and circulated only via underground cassette copies.

Just as the musical style itself emerged from local conditions, the musicians of Tinariwen did not inherit the legacy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, although apparently they have their own history of slave-trading. The Tuareg are an ethnic group often included among the Berbers, but distinguished by their language, Tamashek. When France's North African colonies achieved independence in the 1960s, they found their traditional territory divided among the nations of Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Algeria. At the time of decolonization, the Tuareg were a mostly nomadic people, who herded cattle along the Niger River. Their way of life was increasingly threatened by the modernizing projects transforming the region's economy. Post-colonial national boundaries made little sense to people who drove their cattle anywhere water and grass could be found. In addition a long drought period greatly reduced the landscape's ability to support nomadic groups and their animal herds (cf. Zoumenou).

One of the results of these environmental and economic pressures was the Tuareg rebellion. The Tuareg had spent decades resisting French colonial domination. In 1960, when the new state of Mali was created, it forced different people with no independent history of political cooperation into one national formation. The Tuareg saw no reason they should cooperate with the Malian government centered in Bamako, in the southwestern region. Vastly different ways of life combined with elements of racial tension (Government officials were largely Black Africans, while Berbers like the Tuareg are more light-skinned) to provoke a decades-long conflict that has gone through periods of greater and lesser violence. Under environmental and developmental pressures, the Tuareg social world has been fundamentally transformed. The traditional self-sufficient way of life is now nearly completely eradicated. From its early days, the government of Mali had inherited a crippling debt, which was enforced by the World Bank, depriving the government of resources that could have eased some of the tensions. Almost no money was available for further development in the North (cf. Prashad). Many Tuareg moved south into the cities, where the formerly incomprehensible idea of unemployment, something that makes no sense to a nomadic people, became a lived reality (cf. Lecocq).

Some of the former Tuareg warriors moved to Libya where they joined with Gaddafi's forces, gaining modern training and weapons. Several of the

musicians in Tinariwen, including Ibrahim Ag Alhabib, the most senior member of the band, and fellow founder Abdullah Ag Alhousseini, met during the 1980s in camps in Libya while undergoing military training conducted by Gaddafi's army. This camp encounter is a central node in the narrative that links the sounds of Tinariwen to the romantic image of the camel-riding rebel (cf. Eyre).

After the fall of Lybia in 2011, armed struggle broke out again in northern Mali. The National Liberation Movement of Azawad (MNLA), the political group that Tinariwen identifies with, was reinvigorated when its leader made an alliance with a more religiously motivated group called Ansar Dine (Defenders of the Path) in an effort to separate Azawad from the rest of Mali. The rebellion received a military boost when highly disciplined fighters identified with Islamic fundamentalist groups joined the rebellion. These forces quickly drove the relatively lackluster Malian army from the region and declared independence for Azawad (cf. Smith).

> During an early 2012 tour of the UK, Ag Alhabib described the struggle this way:
> 'This year is a special year. Although the first rebellion started in 1963, we have never been as strong as the rebellion has this year. The MNLA is controlling 2/3 of Mali in the North, and we need to stay strong and fight for our autonomy, we want to find a deal with the international community and with the Malian government'. (Jones, 'Tinariwen')

On the ground in Mali, however, military leaders associated with the Tuareg had slaughtered dozens of the remaining Malian soldiers. The violence involved in the loss of the region was enough to prompt a change of national government in Bamako. In the ensuing governmental gap, the foreign fighters began setting up Islamic governments. By July 2012, these governments controlled most of the region. The worst punishments of Shari'a law were enacted against the remaining dark-skinned inhabitants. As Andy Morgan, former manager of Tinariwen, describes it: 'Almost all the condemned were 'black' Songhoi or Bozo men. Almost all those who judged them were 'white' or lighter skinned Arabs, Touareg or foreigners' (19).

As amputations and stonings stoked the racialized divisions in the country, a general proclamation went out over Azawad:

> 'We, the mujahedeen of Gao, of Timbuktu and Kidal, henceforward forbid the broadcasting of any Western music on all radios in this Islamic territory. This ban takes effect from today, Wednesday. [22 August 2012]

We do not want Satan's music. In its place, there will be Quranic verses. Shari'a demands this. What God commands must be done'. On that day, Tuareg music was banned in their own homeland. When a large group of Malian musicians drawn from a wide range of different styles recorded a special song of unity, 'Voices United for Mali', no one from Tinariwen, or Terakaft, or Tartit, the leading Tuareg bands, participated. (Morgan 21)[4]

Consequently, Tinariwen's new album, *Emmaar*, was recorded in the Mojave desert in California. My copy of the album came with a sticker attached to it quoting Bob Boilen, the host of NPR's 'All Songs Considered' and their leading popular music critic. It says 'Let's get one thing straight: Tinariwen is just about the best guitar-based rock band of the 21st Century'. That sentence became a key marketing tool in the promotion of the band's most recent tour of the US as well as the new album. Fully in line with the history of the band's marketing strategy and ignoring the messy details of the ongoing conflict, this quote situates Tinariwen in a language of rock and guitars, foregrounding the commonality between their music and the music listened to by the baby boom generation and generation X, which form the largest age demographic of NPR listeners. Having grown up with experience in or at least some awareness of the US Civil Rights movement, this group of listeners is primed to hear the musical similarities between Tinariwen and the blues musicians of the late 1950s and 60s. Through the associations channeled by the aural imaginary, Tinariwen's status as romantic rebels fighting for justice is reaffirmed.

Initial reviews of the album were quite positive and, in general, better informed than reviews of the earlier albums. Many reviewers commented on the power of Tinariwen's 'backstory', however, without trying to comprehend its complexity. *Pitchfork*'s Tangari begins his review with his standard reference to the Sahara and insists that the 'music still moves like a sandstorm' before going on to discuss specifics of the new album's sound. NPR's Anastasia Tsioulcas writes: 'Despite the pain and politics that surround *Emmaar*'s birth, it's a pleasure to hear how Tinariwen keeps finding new ways to translate the soul of the Sahara for fans around the world'. Writing for the online source *The 405*, Lyle Bignon is slightly more self-aware as he comments on 'how difficult it often is for us, the Western listener, to understand the cultural and social values of Touareg musicians'. He continues: 'Maybe, even in this uber-connected and super globalized era, Western audiences are still—generally speaking—far removed from the less-documented struggles of life [...] in the West African country of Mali'. In his piece for *The Quietus*, Richie Troughton essays a more detailed discussion

of Ibrahim Ag Alhabib's biography and the cassette-only era of the band. Enough context is provided that the lyrics quoted at the end of the review from 'Agregh Medin (I Call on Man)' carry significant affective power: 'I no longer believe in unity / I will only believe in it again if those opinions serve a common ideal: That of the people from which they emanate'.

The best of the recent review pieces appeared in the *Noisey* blog sponsored by *Vice* magazine. There, Zachary Lipez gives the most detailed account of the current situation that Tinariwen face in Mali. The account is presented as a series of difficult and questionably translated interview exchanges with guitarist and bassist Eyadou Ag Leche. By foregrounding the translation problems, Lipez lets his readers know that there is more to Tinariwen's story than he can tell them and that multiple barriers lie between his readers and these musicians' lives. There is nothing reductive about this move. Instead, it is an effort to get beyond what Lipez terms 'dervishes on the sands of time, grad school othering hokum', which is how he more or less accurately characterizes so much of the journalism about Tinariwen. After stating a number of caveats about uncertain linguistic equivalencies, Lipez asks Ag Leche detailed questions focusing on the band's songwriting practices and how they feel about the intervention of the French military. In his questioning, Lipez treats Eyadou as a fully political subject with his own complex opinions, not as a representative of an otherwise faceless mass. Working through the translator, the musician says:

> 'France decided to make these borders 50 years ago. France came into this conflict when it was a bad issue so I'm glad they came…but hopefully they will leave. Hopefully they won't take everything. But the French know EXACTLY what the situation is. We don't know what the French will give to us. Maybe they will help or maybe they will just make more borders and work with the bad politicians. So, actually, we don't know. It's a long bad history with the French. We don't know what they're bringing now'. (Lipez)

In Lipez's version of the translator's version of Eyadou's words, the political situation of being an outside observer of the military imposition of a cease-fire creates a precise context for the opening lyrics of 'Toumast Tincha', the first track on *Emmaar*. Here also translated: 'The ideals of the people have been sold off cheap, my friends. Any peace imposed by force is bound to fail and give way to hatred'. Set in a musical frame more fully polished and produced than any recording previously released by the band, this sentiment reinforces the determination and insistence that lies behind Tinariwen's

lengthy career. The guitars on this track are layered with echo, and the drones that anchor the band's sound are played on a pedal steel guitar. The song begins with spoken words in English intoned by Saul Williams. From production style to instrument choice to the first appearance of English words on one of their tracks, this recording addresses its Anglo-American audience more directly and clearly than Tinariwen ever has before. The touring in support of the album has been incessant. In 2014, they played over 130 shows solely in Europe, the UK and the US.

The video for the song, however, presents a visual narrative of isolation and alienation. Ibrahim Ag Alhabib rides in the back of a car across the Mojave. No other humans are shown. During most of the video, the camera shoots out the window of the moving car, showing only the desert racing by. Railroad tracks, electrical lines and poles, and the occasional speed limit sign break up the flow of unpopulated dust, scrub trees and hills. As the song comes to its end, the car pulls up to a fire, suggesting the presence of others, but not showing them. Finally, the camera pans up, revealing a few old amplifiers waiting alone. The video makes clear the absence of a public for whom the band performs, the disappearance of the deep connection with an audience that grounds the pleasures of popular music, despite the fact that their popularity in the West continues.

In this way, these Tuareg musicians exemplify the category of unpopular culture. With their homeland devastated, Tuareg musicians have become migrant workers moving from field to field, concert house to concert house, laboring where the opportunity arises, touring the West, performing music that draws rapturous crowds, negotiating marketing images and promotional narratives that misrecognize the political significance of their music. Tinariwen and their fellow Tuareg musicians continue to extend their musical offerings to crowds that do not understand their lyrics and that often subsume their struggles into a monolithic category of rebel rockers derived from an earlier moment in musical and political history. Yet, this misrecognition makes possible their financial survival. Ironically, in this way they have become more like the great blues performers of the mid-twentieth century who found white college students listening to them after their black audiences had moved on to soul and hard-bop. Perhaps this is the true link between desert blues and the older form. Both musical styles became globally popular with White Western audiences at the moment when their sounds no longer connected organically with their original conditions of production. Both musical styles look backwards even as they sing the future possibility of a larger political community, one not divided by violence but connected through the shared experience of musical beauty.

Returning their music to the complexities of its context does not situate Tinariwen as political innocents nor as heroic rebel rockers. While many of their Western fans retain a blurred picture of that context and a romantic framework for their listening, the advance in journalistic response evidenced in Lipez's analysis suggests that the experience of musical beauty is generating a drive towards a more full understanding of the complexities demanded of a more expansive political community capable of truly recognizing the range of combatants in North Africa. This suggests that the inevitable misrecognition that frames all listening to truly new music can be and indeed often must be the first step towards the interrogative listening that invites the transformation of political community. Thus, the unpopular sows the seeds of a popular to come.

Notes

1. Portions of this chapter were first published in the 'Coda' to my book *The Political Force of Musical Beauty*. Thank you to Duke University Press for permission to reprint.
2. For a sample critique of the concept of culture as a bounded whole, see Crehan 36–66.
3. Bob White makes a similar point in 'The Promise of World Music: Strategies for Non-Essentialist Listening' when he asserts that consuming world music often leads to essentialist assumptions about the culture that produced the music. His analysis of the problem is less subtle than Kheshti's, however, relying as it does on an unnecessary one-to-one link between musical style and cultural identity for his own position as well as the listening practices he critiques. But his list of strategies for avoiding essentialist listening is useful.
4. See also Whitehouse 17–18.

Works Cited

Belalimat, Nadia. 'The *Ishumar* Guitar: Emergence, Circulation & Evolution from Diasporic Performances to the World Scene.' *Tuareg Society within a Globalized World*. Ed. Anja Fischer and Ines Kohl. London: I.B. Tauris, 2010. 155–70. Print.

Bignon, Lyle. 'Tinariwen—Emmaar'. *The 405*. 25 Feb. 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Christgau, Robert. 'Consumer Guides: Tinariwen'. Robertchristgau.com. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Crehan, Kate. *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2002. Print.

Eyre, Banning. 'Tinariwen's Abdullah Ag Alhoussein Talks About Mali'. *Afropop Worldwide*. 3 July 2012. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Hirsch, Afua. 'Islamic Extremists Face Citizen Uprising in Mali'. *The Guardian* 17 July 2012. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Jones, Thomas. 'Tinariwen'. *Crack*. 12 Sep. 2012. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Kheshti, Roshanak. 'Touching Listening: The Aural Imaginary in the World Music Culture'. *American Quarterly* 63.3 (October 2011): 711–31. Print.

Lecocq, Baz. 'Unemployed Intellectuals in the Sahara: The Teshumara Nationalist Movement and the Revolutions in Tuareg Society'. *IRSH* 49 (2004): 87–109. Print.

Lipez, Zachary. 'Tinariwen Talks "Emmaar", Politics, and Working with Matt Sweeney'. *Noisey*. 20 Feb. 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Morgan, Andy. *Music, Culture and Conflict in Mali*. Barrington: Freemuse, 2013. Print.

Mouffe, Chantal. *The Return of the Political*. London: Verso, 1993. Print.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Being Singular Plural*. Trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Brien, Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000. Print.

Prashad, Vijay. 'What's Happening in Mali?' *Counterpunch*. 28 Oct. 2009. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetic: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Trans. Gabriel Rockhill. New York: Continuum, 2004. Print.

Rasmussen, Susan. 'Moving Beyond Protest in Tuareg Ichumar Performance'. *Ethnohistory* 53.4 (Fall 2006): 633–55. Print.

Shank, Barry. *The Political Force of Musical Beauty*. Durham: Duke UP, 2014. Print.

Smith, Stephen W. 'In Search of Monsters, On the French Intervention in Mali'. *London Review of Books* 35.3. 7 Feb. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Tangari, Joe. 'Aman Iman: Water is Life'. *Pitchfork*. 4 Apr. 2007. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

—. 'Imidiwan: Companions'. *Pitchfork*. 13 Oct. 2009. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

—. 'Tinariwen, Emmaar'. *Pitchfork*. 10 Feb. 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Troughton, Richie. 'Tinariwen—Emmaar'. *The Quietus*. 11 Mar. 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Tsioulcas, Anastasia. 'First Listen: Tinariwen, "Emmaar."' *Music.com*. 2 Feb. 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

White, Bob. 'The Promise of World Music: Strategies for Non-Essentialist Listening'. *Music and Globalization: Critical Encounters*. Ed. Bob White. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2012. 189–217. Print.

Whitehouse, Bruce. 'What Went Wrong in Mali?' *London Review of Books* 34.16. 30 Aug. 2012. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Williams, Raymond. *Culture & Society: 1780–1950*. 1958. New York: Columbia UP, 1983. Print.

Zoumenou, David. 'West Africa: The Sahel—Is There a Solution to the Tuareg Insurgency?' *AllAfrica*. 20 Mar. 2012. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Cultural Studies and the Un/Popular

How the Ass-Kicking Work of Steven Seagal May Wrist-Break Our Paradigms of Culture

Dietmar Meinel

<div align="right">

'*Steven Seagal*. Action Film. USA 2008.'
—German TV Guide

</div>

The first foreigner to run an aikido dojo in Japan, declared the reincarnation of a Buddhist lama, blackmailed by the mob, environmental activist, small-town sheriff, owner of a brand of energy drinks, film producer, writer, musician, and lead in his first film (cf. Vern vii), 1980s martial arts action film star Steven Segal is a fascinating but often contradictory figure. Yet, Seagal is strikingly absent from the contemporary revival of seasoned action-film heroes such as Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Bruce Willis, Jean-Claude Van Damme, Dolph Lundgren, and Chuck Norris in *The Expendables* (2010), *The Expendables 2* (2012), and *The Expendables 3* (2014). In contrast, 'starring' in up to four direct-to-video releases each year over the last decade, Seagal has become a successful entrepreneur of B movies. The (very) low production values of these films, however, highlight rather than conceal his physical demise as incongruent, confusing, and Godard-style editing replaces the fast-paced martial arts action of earlier movies. While his bulky body has become a disheartening memento of his glorious past, his uncompromising commitment to spiritual enlightenment and environmental protection arguably elevates him above the mere ridiculousness of his films.

In this essay, I will explore Seagal and his oeuvre as he moved from acclaimed martial arts action star to bizarre media figure in order to devise a framework for un/popular culture. By reading the thirty-year long career of Seagal as consistently unpopular and consistently popular, I appropriate and utilize what James Storey describes as the 'absent other' (1). In *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (2010), Storey draws attention to the dualistic dimension of any attempt to define the popular. Since most conceptualizations juxtapose the popular with an 'absent other'—whether folk, high, or working-class culture—any analysis will be 'powerfully affect[ed by] the connotations brought into play when we use the term "popular culture"' (Storey 1).

Indeed, definitions of popular culture and its absent others utilize quantitative and qualitative categories. In his *Keywords* (1983), for example, Raymond Williams describes popular culture as a phenomenon 'well-liked by many people' to which 'well-liked by few people' functions as its unpopular other. While to be 'disliked by many people' constitutes a second other in the example, this notion of a detested, yet widely known phenomenon suggests an additional dimension of the un/popular. Rather than a quantitative assessment, the popular can, as Williams maintains, also designate 'inferior kinds of work (cf. popular literature, popular press as distinguished from *quality press*); and work deliberately setting out to win favour (popular journalism as distinguished from *democratic journalism*, or popular entertainment)' (237, emphases in original). Although different qualities define the value of a text (independent of its quantitative distribution), often high art serves as this absent other of popular literature or entertainment. In Williams's example, the notion of a 'democratic journalism' also foreshadows a third category of the popular in addition to its quantitative (known vs unknown) and qualitative dimension (inferior culture vs high art). As Williams also deems popular culture to represent 'the culture actually made by people for themselves' (237), in this Marxist understanding of popular culture, an authentic culture of the working class or 'the people' exists that functions as a space of resistance against capitalist appropriation and commodification.

Similarly, among the six definitions of popular culture James Storey offers, the notion of popular culture as a quantitative measure, an anti-thesis to high art, and as a (authentic) culture of the people figure prominently. Even when Storey lists definitions describing the popular as 'mass culture', as part of the ideological apparatuses, or as an essential feature of hegemony (cf. 5–12), these latter notions all delineate a political function as well. In this sense, Storey's definitions equally underscore the quantitative, the qualitative, and the ideological or conceptual dimension of popular culture that Williams alludes to. Linked to each other even in their absence, thus, the notion of the popular, the unpopular, and high art necessitate a shared conceptual framework I label the un/popular.

Having appeared (and often starred) in over forty films, Steven Seagal experienced the height of Hollywood blockbuster popularity and the lows of direct-to-video unpopularity as he evolved from promising action film performer to blockbuster star to direct-to-video celebrity in the course of his career. This eventful trajectory from box office draw to low-budget entrepreneur serves to designate the intimate connections between the popular and the unpopular—and allows me to assess the quantitative dimension of

the un/popular by looking at the commercial success and failure of his films. Given that the actor developed and maintained a particular Seagal formula inseparable from his public persona in his films, his music, and TV shows, Seagal also mirrors auteur practices and postmodern authorial strategies. Since the martial artist further advocates an environmentalist position in his otherwise sensationalist action films, Seagal also echoes those post-postmodern theories that link postmodern metafictional play with a 'sincere' desire for political consciousness (cf. Saldivar, 'Historical Fantasy' 593–96). In appropriating auteur theory, postmodern performativity, and notions of the post-postmodern, I analyze the cultural text 'Steven Seagal' within the context of high art and investigate the qualitative dimension of the un/popular in order to question the dichotomous construction of inferior popular art versus superior (and unpopular) high art. So instead of attempting to understand the popular, the unpopular, and high art as autonomous, individual phenomena, I explore their numerous links to provide a first understanding of Steven Seagal's un/popularity.

Yet, when Martin Lüthe and Sascha Pöhlmann characterize the unpopular as 'that which is not part of a (perceived) mainstream mass culture but not part of a bourgeois high culture either' (18) in their introduction to this volume, both situate the phenomenon in-between high and popular culture and call attention to the individual quality of the unpopular. Looking at unpopular texts may broaden our prevailing paradigm of culture, particularly because the abscence of popularity (as a quantative measure) and high cultural ascriptions often justify a disregard for these texts. Since scholars refer to either the artistic quality of a text or its widespread reception to legitimize the study of a particular phenomenon, in this logic, texts only possess validity if they are representational—of a particular social formation, period, or idea (cf. Hatt and Klonk 22–25). Due to its (absence of) particular qualities, unpopular culture disrupts this Hegelian notion predominant in literary studies and cultural studies. Indeed, unpopular texts function poorly as representations of their period and their social formations, because hardly anyone reads, watches, or appraises these productions. Unpopular culture such as the later Seagal productions eventually question this representationalist paradigm and necessitate novel approaches to conceptualizing culture.

From Box Office Draw to Home Entertainment Entrepreneur

In his first four films, *Above the Law* (1988), *Hard to Kill* (1990), *Marked for Death* (1990), and *Out for Justice* (1991), Steven Seagal established himself as a promising action film performer. Because all of the films grossed a multiplicity of their production costs at the box office,[1] Seagal's first four releases must be considered successful genre productions.[2] His films did not rival the commercial success of the most popular action films of the late 1980s—*Top Gun* (1986) or *Die Hard* (1988)[3]—but Seagal could compete with the established stars of the genre. Although Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger had paved the way for the action film hype of the 1980s, their films often did not perform better at the box office or match the revenues of the Seagal films.[4] Judging by the people willing to see his films, Steven Seagal has to be considered popular in the period from 1988 to 1991—particularly within the context of the action film genre. The commercial success of his early films propelled Seagal to star in the high value productions *Under Siege* (1992), *On Deadly Ground* (1994), *Under Siege 2* (1995), and *Executive Decision* (1996). In these films, Seagal was supported by well-established actors such as Michael Caine or Tommy Lee Jones or starred alongside Kurt Russell and Halle Berry. But when the last three of these high-value productions failed at the box office, the commercial fiascos initiated his descent into direct-to-video obscurity.[5] As his follow-up productions *Glimmer Man* (1996) and *Fire Down Below* (1997) led to even greater box office losses,[6] his next film, although initially planned for cinematic release, was eventually exclusively distributed in video stores: *The Patriot* (1998) thus ushered in a period of direct-to-video productions. Although Seagal reappeared on the silver screen two additional times with mixed success—in *Exit Wounds* (2001) and *Half Past Dead* (2002)[7]—his box office career ended in 1998 and was supplanted by a long-lasting one in direct-to-video projects. Starring in films exclusively released for the (rental) video, DVD, and Blu-ray market, Seagal maintained a vocation in film with almost no significant commercial success to merit high-value productions again.[8] Although his following 23 releases in nine years (2001–2010) generated enough revenue to continuously finance his next video endeavor, the martial arts actor Steven Seagal has virtually disappeared from public notice since the late 1990s. While his name may still ring a bell even among people uninitiated to his films, Seagal has become a faint memory of some cult 1980s action films or a synonym for cheap and obscure B movies.[9]

This transformation from blockbuster draw to obscure media figure represents a decisive quality of the Seagal phenomenon. In contrast to

similarly cult and obscure 1980s action stars such as Jean-Claude van Damme or Chuck Norris, Seagal actually became popular starring in high-profile action films.[10] But in contrast to Stallone, Schwarzenegger, or Willis, Seagal eventually disappeared from (big budget) silver screen productions to submerge in the (quantitative) meaninglessness of direct-to-video releases. While other actors build a more popular or a more unpopular career, Steven Seagal functions to exemplify the quantitative aspects of the un/popular. As Seagal also appropriates a variety of high-art strategies throughout the popular and unpopular phases of his career, his oeuvre allows us to similarly explore the ways in which his auteur performance and post-postmodern practices further shape the un/popular. Much as Seagal's commercial un/popularity, the artistic continuity in his work contests the traditional high art (unpopular) and low culture (popular) divide.

Performing the Post-Postmodern Auteur

French auteur theory considers directors to be authors who express their aesthetic and political visions through film. With its inception in the *Cahier du Cinema* in the 1950s, auteur theory—or *la politique des auteurs*, as Francois Truffaut first named the approach in his article 'A Certain Tendency in the French Cinema' (1954)—attempted to alter the status of films and directors. '[A] director must exhibit certain recurrent characteristics of style, which serve as his signature' (132), asserts Andrew Sarris when introducing auteur theory to the Anglophone world in 'Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962'. In connecting the feel, the look, and the meaning of a film to the thoughts and ideas of its author-director, auteur theory ascribes a 'distinguishable personality' to directors and defines these men and women to be the 'criterion of value' (Sarris 132). Since motion pictures had not been considered a valid form of art well into the 1950s and cinematic texts were consigned to the realm of 'mass culture […] commonly dismissed with terms such as "entertainment" and "escapism"' (Wexman 3), the rationale behind appropriating literary theory for film analysis thus attempted to elevate the works of a small number of directors to the status of high art. In acknowledging the limits set by the demands of the commercial Hollywood production system, auteur theory furthermore locates the artistic quality of a director in privileged moments of a film, which urges critics 'to master the entire body of a director's output (or *oeuvre*) so that a pattern of these privileged moments of personal vision could be discerned' (Wexman 3). Because of its emphasis on the entire corpus of an auteur-director, its appreciation of the

necessities of commercial production modes, and its desire to define film as high art, auteur theory offers a valuable frame within which to situate the work of Steven Seagal.

But since no one considers Seagal a particularly artistic director and he has only directed one film in his entire career, auteur theory may appear impracticable and inadequate for his work. By starring in most of his 42 films, however, Steven Seagal is an apt example of what pop critic Vern labels the 'Badass Auteur Theory' in his *Seagology: A Study of the Ass-Kicking Films of Steven Seagal* (2012). In this theory, the 'badass (or star) [...] carries through themes from one picture to the next [...] it is the star that connects the body of work more than the director' (Vern v). This augmented version of auteur theory acknowledges and privileges the coherence stars create over the course of their films.

In many respects, the characters played by Seagal encourage such a comparative approach. From his early performances in the 1980s on, Seagal established a narrow set of character traits his later roles continuously rehearse:

> enlightened men with shadowy CIA pasts, westerners with expertise in Asian ways (aikido, swords, herbology, Buddhism), various types of mafia (Italian-American, European, Asian), music (blues, bluegrass, reggae, much of it performed by or written by Seagal himself), the protection of animals or the environment. (Vern vi)

As Seagal films 'always end up featuring some of his obsessions' (Vern vi), the identity of the film artist spills into the films just as character traits transcend the cultural text. Already the very first shots of his first film, *Above the Law* (1988), exhibit this entanglement of artist persona and film character. Opening with childhood memories of protagonist Nico Toscani, his voice-over tells the story of a teenage adolescent fascinated by martial arts who eventually journeys to Japan to become a highly respected aikido master. While the film score softly plays classical music to further embellish this narrative of individual success, the cinematography shows childhood pictures and newspaper clippings of Steven Seagal during his time in Japan when the actor-to-be trained to become an aikido master. By using the childhood photos of the artist Steven Seagal and his biographical experiences to introduce its protagonist, *Above the Law* questions their clear-cut distinction.[11] As virtually all Seagal characters share these traits, his films establish a pattern in which the biography of the actor is almost synonymous with his roles and vice versa. Intimately involved in writing

and producing many of his films, Seagal can bring, as Vern summarizes, 'a certain personality, formula and set of motifs to pretty much every picture he ever does' (vi). Even when not immediately part of the creative process, this Seagal formula functioned as an artistic and commercial strategy, as the actor explains: "'I haven't always been dealt scripts that were palatable and movies that I thought were even makeable, and I think one of the secrets of my success is that I *changed* them into something that was almost watchable"' (Vern vi, emphasis in original).

This interrelation of artist persona and film character is a common phenomenon in the Hollywood film industry; producers, film-makers, and actors have always employed biographical information to enlarge and embroider a star persona in order to promote a film (cf. Harris 42–43).[12] Most famously, Marilyn Monroe has (been) exploited (by) the assumed similarities between her roles, her personal experiences, and her private persona as her symbolic meanings 'far outrun what actually happens in her films' (Dyer 3)—the star system as such 'is based on the premise that a star is accepted by the public in terms of a certain set of personality traits which permeate all of his or her film roles' (Harris 41). As a consequence, Christine Gledhill encourages intertextual readings and interdisciplinary analysis of stars *and* their roles as one coherent phenomenon (cf. xii).

Instead of an individual film, then, star studies define the actor or performer as the principal analytical category and encourage to explore the entire body of his or her work—which includes a broad variety of material beyond the cinematic text. This concentration on individual artists, the concentration on the entire work of a performer, and the notion of a coherent personal vision resemble the analytical approach of auteur theory. Since the celebrity status of film auteurs also helps 'produce and promote texts that invariably exceed the movie itself, both before and after its release' (Corrigan 101), star studies and auteur theory allow us to understand the Seagal phenomenon as part of mass culture (the star) and high art (the auteur).

By the time of Seagal's first blockbuster production *Under Siege* (1992), his character Casey Ryback did not need an intimate introduction anymore as audiences already knew in advance about the superior close-combat abilities of Ryback/Seagal. Neither an average street cop nor a lowly cook, Nico Toscani and Casey Ryback—and Mason Storm and John Hatcher and Gino Felino and Forest Taft—are all highly decorated elite experts in martial arts, weaponry, and military tactics of some sort. These characters also share a clandestine past as well-trained combat men who work some uneventful job after their dishonorable discharge from the army—usually due to their

insubordination to a corrupt or immoral superior. And while no similar military records of Seagal exist, his ambition to raise, in his words, "'political conscientiousness'" (Vern vi) echoes the motivation of his characters to act by a general moral code and 'do what's right' (*On Deadly Ground*)—even if this includes the disobedience of the chain of command and leads to a dishonorable discharge. These shared political ambitions are particularly highlighted in films addressing ecological devastation. Condemning the commercial exploitation of nature, Forest Taft, Jack Taggart, or Dr. Wesley McClaren express an "'environmental conscientiousness'" (Vern vi) in *On Deadly Ground* (1994), *Fire Down Below* (1997), or *The Patriot* (1998) that is also dear to Seagal.

In addition to the martial arts expertise, a potpourri of imagined Asian cultures, political and environmental concerns, and an affinity for Buddhism, Seagal characters also often possess talents the actor indulges in. As a musician, guitar player, and lead of his blues band *Thunderbox*, Steven Seagal is not only credited with composing and co-composing soundtracks; in *Fire Down Below* (1997), protagonist Jack Taggart also picks up a guitar.

Finally, the reality TV show *Steven Seagal: Lawman* (2009-2010) further blurs easy distinctions between artist persona and film character. The show follows police reserve deputy 'Steven Seagal' of Jefferson Parish, Louisiana—something the artist Steven Seagal has been supposedly doing for the past twenty years. Although the reality TV format asserts to portray 'Steven Seagal [...] as a real-life cop in Louisiana' and maintains to be 'No Act' (as the tagline for *Lawman* asserts), the scripted, filmed, and edited nature of the reality TV format undermines any claim to authenticity. Throughout the show, people on the streets also recognize protagonist 'Steven Seagal' as a film star rather than as an officer of the law. Being asked for autographs, people assure Deputy Sheriff 'Seagal' that he could beat Jean-Claude van Damme but would lose to Chuck Norris in a fight, or apologetically state that "'this is my first time going to jail, Mr. Stallone'" (Vern 382). *Steven Seagal: Lawman* further underscores the performativity of identity, since the artist Steven Seagal stars as Reserve Deputy Sheriff 'Steven Seagal', a 'martial artist, movie star, blues musician, herbalist, acupuncturist, dog owner, philanthropist and swordsman turned Deputy Sheriff' (Vern 371) who became a film star by playing police officers with martial art skills, Buddhist beliefs, blues music affinities, and philanthropic world views. Because the show eventually reveals the clandestine past of star-auteur Steven Seagal working for a law enforcement agency, *Lawman* further authenticates his film characters and fictionalizes his biography.[13]

Although this interplay of public persona and film role(s) is a common phenomenon for Hollywood's star system, in contrast to his action film colleagues Stallone, Schwarzenegger, or van Damme, Seagal never ventured beyond the action film genre to shoot romances, comedies, or science fiction—no out-of-character performance challenged the linkage between artist persona and film figure. While in the work of Stallone, Schwarzenegger or van Damme biographical information also spills into their films, starring as a police officer of the twenty-second century, as a cyborg sent from the future to wipe out humanity, or as a video-game character distinguished these performers from their roles.[14] Not surprisingly, the very first works in Seagal's career already announce the amalgamation of artist persona and character when film posters and video covers declare that 'Steven Seagal is Hard to Kill' (*Hard To Kill*), 'Steven Seagal is Marked for Death' (*Marked for Death*), and 'Steven Seagal is Out for Justice' (*Out for Justice*).

In spite of this continuous play of references, Steven Seagal does not merely exhibit (or appropriate) postmodern authorial strategies, since the performer also consistently articulates political or ethical positions. Indeed, his work can be considered what Ramon Saldivar has labeled 'post-postmodern', since the Seagal oeuvre attempts to give 'a sincere explanation for murder, cruelty, and evil, without resorting to postmodern irony or metafictional play' ('Imagining Cultures' 12). Condemning corporate power, denouncing the primacy of profit, decrying a propagandistic media culture, demanding increased environmental fines, and advocating people's rights,[15] the earnest, sincere, and passionate ending of an otherwise ludicrous and over the top action film such as *On Deadly Ground* (1994) fashions 'links between the *fantasy of the imaginary* and the *real of history*' (Saldivar, 'Imagining Cultures' 13, emphasis in original). These intersections of postmodern play and 'political and environmental conscientiousness' is a defining quality of Seagal's work and the post-postmodern.

Unpopular Popularity

The different quantitative (known vs unknown) and qualitative (inferior mass culture vs high art) frames of reading Seagal provide a preliminary summary of what may constitute the un/popular. First, I deemed Seagal highly popular during the first decade of his career as his films succeeded at the box office; and although his big-budget productions mostly failed, the willingness of the studios to spend large budgets on a Seagal film further signals his initial popularity. Additionally, I appropriated auteur theory,

explored the conjunction of artist persona and film character, and hinted at the post-postmodern qualities of the Seagal oeuvre to explore its links to different high art discourses. Since Seagal's commercially successful films exemplify these practices and strategies, the early phase of his career combines the quantitative feature of the popular and the qualitative elements of high art.

Second, after his commercial peak in the mid-1990s, Seagal descended into the realm of direct-to-video productions and, thus, became quantitatively unpopular. The B movie obscurity of his productions, however, does not conceal their postmodern and post-postmodern quality as numerous aesthetic features of his early work define Seagal's later releases—particularly his career as a musician and his TV show further encourage to situate the complete 'Steven Seagal archive' within high art authorial strategies. The direct-to-video films additionally exhibit a cinematic quality fundamentally different from the commercially popular Seagal films. Due to the poor acting, the cheap mise-en-scene, the incoherent fight choreographies, and the chaotic editing, the former often mirror the discontinuous filming pioneered by Jean-Luc Godard, while the inconsistencies in the plot further deconstruct the immersion aimed for by Hollywood cinema. In this sense, Seagal's direct-to-video releases (and maybe B movies in general) share numerous cinematic elements with the French New Wave, whose directors utilized these strategies to challenge the established codes and boundaries of Hollywood cinema. As an artist engaged with questions of authorship, the direct-to-video-Seagal continues to epitomize contemporary high art practices, but the marginal audience interest in his DVD premiere releases speaks to his increasing quantitative unpopularity.

Third, despite the numerous high art practices in his oeuvre, Seagal achieved his commercial success in a highly conventional genre by starring in predominantly generic productions. Although I have not analyzed their politics of representation, films such as *Marked for Death* (1990) or *Under Siege* (1992) exhibit highly normative narratives and imagery in the decidedly Hollywood fashion of mainstream film. As his highest grossing film *Under Siege* (1992) also apes the prominent *Die Hard* (1988) formula, critics deemed the film an inferior copy of the Bruce Willis vehicle upon release. Due to this absence of narrative originality, cinematic innovation, or ideological transgression, Seagal's commercially successful theatrical releases represent the popular in its derogatory sense of inferior 'mass' culture.

Finally, thanks to the dearth of any artistic, aesthetic, or narrative sophistication viewers often resent the action film genre in general and the Seagal films in particular as low forms of art or entertainment. Actually, this is not

an inaccurate assessment with regard to direct-to-video productions and Seagal. Neither watched by a noteworthy audience, nor attributable with considerable cultural relevance, *The Foreigner* (2003), *Submerged* (2005), *Today You Die* (2005), or *Pistol Whipped* (2008) could very well be considered completely unpopular. Since these video releases do not appear to follow any artistic aspirations but merely the necessities of low budget productions, one may find my assertion of auteur theory, postmodern performativity, and the post-postmodern stretching the boundaries of these concepts. As Seagal never indicated any kind of ambition or desire to utilize these theories in his films, a fourth conclusion may simply deem his later work (quantitative) unpopular and (qualitative) irrelevant.

These different readings of Steven Seagal, as I have suggested in the beginning, should function to expose the interdependence of the popular, high art, and the unpopular—and complicate a coherent definition of the un/popular. These categories, characterized whichever way, cannot be thought separately. And while the career of Steven Seagal has enabled me to explore the intricate conjunctions of the quantitative and qualitative features of the un/popular, the commercial insignificance (unpopular culture) and cultural irrelevance (popular culture) of his direct-to-video releases—his unpopular popularity—fosters questions about the necessity to study this and similar phenomena. What are, in other words, worthwhile avenues of thought opened up by the un/popular?

One inquiry could, for example, explore the normative and subversive functions of the direct-to-video sphere. In analogy to the early star system, which emphasized the morality of its protagonists to portray the cinema as 'a healthy phenomenon' (De Cordova 29), questions about the (re)production of social norms through the un/popular become prominent. Richard de Cordova, for example, situates the attempts of the film industry to convey a proper, wholesome image of its protagonists within cinema's (commercial) competition with a theater scene that the public often perceived as scandalous and frivolous in the 1910s. Following highly aesthetic and narrative conventions, the Seagal films exemplify a set of social norms and can similarly help to analyze hegemonic ideological formations in the present. Due to its commercial irrelevance, however, the un/popular can also function as a marginal space where subversive, aesthetically daring, and unruly practices find a realm for expression and open up novel perspectives about the direct-to-video market, its stars, and their roles within the broader cultural industry.

Yet, in assessing the subversive and normative potentials of the un/popular, the financial limitations of these projects particularly (and

involuntarily) impact the 'healthiness' or unruliness of un/popular texts: as the poor cinematic quality of B movies often challenges or undermines the seamless immersion pursued by Hollywood films, novel conceptualizations of the film apparatus and its interpellatory possibilities become necessary. This (unwilling) instability of the un/popular may thus help to expand our understanding of the subversive and normative features of cultural texts in general.

A different approach to the un/popular could investigate the limitations posed by the star persona. By developing a household name or brand identity, stars and auteurs successfully compete in a highly volatile commercial market, but they are simultaneously tied to their public persona and, consequentially, to audience expectations. These may become inhibiting when stars aim to (or have to) alter their persona, yet hope to maintain their popularity (cf. Harris 45). While successful child actors encounter this challenge most prominently, the un/popularity of Steven Seagal encourages us to explore whether his public persona and his roles are particularly suited for a B movie career. In what ways, for example, is the Seagal formula bound to fail in large box office productions but especially prone to success in the direct-to-video context? In this sense, un/popularity offers a frame of analysis for different authorial strategies.

Finally, in his seminal *Heavenly Bodies* (1987), Richard Dyer describes stars as texts through which contemporary society negotiates 'what it is to be a human being […] [or] the particular notion we hold of the person, of the "individual"' (8). Seen from this perspective, the un/popularity of Seagal may offer insights, for example, into popular forms of male individuality in the early 1990s (cf. Malin 31-37) and its altered notions in the present. The revived popularity of aging action stars such as Stallone, Schwarzenegger, Willis, van Damme, and Norris[16] as well as the continued unpopularity of Seagal could help to chart contemporary conceptions of male individuality through the un/popularity of particular star personalities.

These eclectic suggestions indicate the possibilities of the un/popular within studies of culture. To explore the normative and subversive potential the un/popular holds, to investigate the limitations of an un/popular star persona, or to read the un/popular within the context of individuality, however, confines the un/popular and the unpopular to the representational paradigm of cultural studies. Quantitatively negligible and artistically irrelevant, however, the unpopular challenges our conceptualizations of culture as these texts seemingly fail to offer any insight into a broader understanding of the world.

Wrist-Breaking Hegelian Paradigms of Culture

In analyzing the transnational dimensions of American exceptionalism, Winfried Fluck identifies a shared premise in national as well as transnational approaches to American studies. The defining hypothesis in the study of culture, he asserts in his essay 'Men In Boats and Flaming Skies', is the assumption that 'art can reveal deeper truths about an age or a society, because it is the result of a drive towards self-consciousness of the universal spirit' (142). Although the Hegelian presupposition of a universal or 'metaphysical' spirit, as Fluck is quick to add, does not represent the principles of cultural studies today, 'the assumption that the study of art is important because it provides something like a privileged form of self-recognition of a culture, nation, or group is alive and well, even in such seemingly far removed approaches like race and gender studies or postcolonial studies' (142). Whether referring to its cultural significance or its wide distribution, scholars often invoke one of the two to justify the analysis of a particular archive (cf. Fluck 143)—actually, literary studies and cultural studies would not be imaginable without this presupposition.

Seen from this perspective, the un/popular sustains this concept of culture. By exploring unpopularity in the context of the popular, the approach maintains the primacy of the latter and the supposition about art and culture as privileged sites of knowledge. Instead of using the unpopular merely as another puzzle piece within our established frame of culture, however, to position the unpopular at the heart of our conceptualization of culture would shared fundamentally transform our understanding of culture. In exposing the shared Hegelian premises of national and transnational approaches to American studies, Fluck asks whether we can imagine any alternatives to our established approaches to culture. After all, in order to question nationalist assumptions about culture, transnationalism cannot merely be satisfied with envisioning borderlands and contact zone or exposing intricate Atlantic and Pacific networks while continuing to employ a Hegelian understanding of culture. If we do not conceptualize cultural texts as representing nations, societies, or groups, however, the question arises 'on what grounds cultural and aesthetic objects can still carry cultural and political meanings' (Fluck 158).

Although I have highlighted the intersections of the unpopular, the popular, and high art throughout my essay, the particular features of unpopular culture—the absence of any artistic quality and the highly limited distribution of the text—offer yet untraversed paths in developing a novel paradigm of cultural studies. After all, the increasing democratization

of the technological means to produce cultural texts (literature, music, film) and publish them on the internet demands to engage with questions concerning the quantity, the politics, and the aesthetics of unpopular material. Beneath these novel archives of unpopular texts lurk deeper issues about the legitimation of cultural studies. So far, any study of culture has rationalized and validated its significance by asserting to offer 'a privileged form of self-recognition' (Fluck 142) not available to the natural sciences— particularly in, although not limited to, the continuous competition for financial funding and social legitimation. While the engagement with unpopular culture may further foster stereotypes about the arbitrariness and irrelevance of the humanities, thinking about these texts may also expand the democratizing potential the study of culture possesses. Neither of particular artistic value nor widely distributed, the utterly insignificant films, music, and performances of Steven Seagal in the past fifteen years eventually present us with an opportunity to question the Hegelian premise of literary and cultural studies.

Notes

1.   *Above the Law* (1988) cost 7.5 million dollars in production and grossed 19 million dollars at U.S. box offices, *Hard to Kill* (1990) 10 million and 47 million, *Marked for Death* (1990) 12 million and 46 million, and *Out for Justice* (1991) 14 million and 40 million dollars respectively (cf. boxofficemojo.com).

2.   It is worth mentioning that Steven Seagal began his career by starring in his first film (with Sharon Stone and Pam Grier in supporting roles).

3.   *Top Gun* (1986) cost 15 million dollars in production and made some 180 million dollars at U.S. box offices; *Die Hard* (1988) made some 83 million dollars at the national box office while costing some 28 million dollars (cf. boxofficemojo.com).

4.   Sylvester Stallone's cult film *Cobra* (1986) made some 49 million dollars at U.S. box offices (production budget not available) and his *Tango & Cash* (1989) co-starring Kurt Russell some 64 million dollars (with a budget of 55 million dollars). Arnold Schwarzenegger was able to bring in some 60 million dollars (at a budget of 15 million dollars) with his *Predator* (1987), 38 million dollars on a 27 million dollar budget with *Running Man* (1987), and 35 million dollars (production budget not available) with *Red Heat* (1988) (cf. www.boxofficemojo.com).

5.   At U.S. box offices *Under Siege* (1992) earned 83 million dollars (production budget: 35 millions), *On Deadly Ground* (1994) 39 million dollars (production budget: 50 millions), *Under Siege 2* (1995) 50 million dollars (production budget: 60 millions), *Executive Decision* (1996) 56 million dollars (produc-

tion budget: 55 millions). Although all these films roughly earned the same amount of money at international box offices (not to mention the rental and video market), these films were considered flops by the studios.

6. At U.S. box offices *Glimmer Man* (1996) earned 20 million dollars (production budget. 45 millions) and *Fire Down Below* (1997) 16 million dollars (production budget: 60 millions).

7. At U.S. box offices *Exit Wounds* (2001) earned 80 million dollars (production budget: 33 millions) and *Half Past Dead* (2002) 19 million dollars (13 millions).

8. Since information about direct-to-video releases (or rental revenues) for individual films is hard to acquire or often not available, a direct comparison between the DVD premiere movies and theatrical releases remains challenging. In general, home entertainment revenues of all VHS, DVDs, Blue-Rays, and online distributions (sales and rentals) reached some 18 billion dollars in 2013 (cf. Fritz http://www.wsj.com), while studio investments in direct-to-video productions reached some three billion dollars in 2005 (cf. Hettrick and Lerman). These numbers indicate the value of the video entertainment market in general and the value of DVD premiere movies in particular. Yet, blockbuster Hollywood production, successful box office releases, and popular TV shows dominate the home entertainment market nonetheless—the annual list of the 100 top selling DVDs in the United States (since 2006), for example, contains no single Seagal film (cf. www. the-numbers.com). As direct-to-video productions do not necessarily aim for a wider audience and often struggle to compete with the high-value theatrical releases repackaged for home entertainment, this absence of Seagal films does not come as a surprise.

At the same time, the home entertainment and the direct-to-video market present the entrepreneur Seagal with profitable business opportunities. The martial arts performer earns up to four million dollars 'for his work in a DVD premiere movie' (Hettrick and Lerman). Indeed, many of his productions are shot on a ten-million-dollar budget and '[t]he top titles in the DVD premiere movie segment, including Seagal's *Belly of the Beast* released last year [2004] and *The Foreigner* in 2003, each covered their budgets with the $14.3 million and $16.7 million generated from home video in the U.S. alone' (Hettrick and Lerman). While these direct-to-video budgets correspond to the production costs of the early Seagal films in the 1980s (without factoring in inflation and changed production costs), the present-day direct-to-video releases compete in a highly enlarged and diversified market and profit from a dedicated base of supporters as 'Seagal's audience [...] remains the same whether it is a movie in theaters or a DVD premiere' (Hettrick and Lerman). For Steven Seagal, then, his films continue to provide a source of income and considerable wealth, but since the home entertainment and the direct-to-video market profoundly expanded and diversified in the last thirty years, his profits are not necessarily a sign of wide-spread popularity. In addition,

       when 'live-action DVD premiere actors, particularly in the action genre,
       still suffer professional snubs for being a "direct-to-video star"' (Lerman and
       Hettrick) in 2005 and when '[t]he biggest taboo in American cinema may
       be the direct-to-video (DTV) market' (Erickson) even in 2013, these attitudes
       capture the unpopularity of this segment of the film industry.

9.   Seagal maintained a degree of renown and visibility not just through his
       direct-to-video releases. Rather, his extra-diegetic endeavors allowed the
       martial arts experts to continue his career as a celebrity. Beyond his films,
       TV shows and music Seagal also remained visible through tabloids and yel-
       low press stories (particularly surrounding his divorce). With time, his early
       films earned Seagal a cult following making the martial arts expert known
       to people who may have never seen his films. In this paper, however, I will
       not focus on these and similar strategies of forming a public (or celebrity)
       persona.

10.   Norris and van Damme had their breakthrough as leading stars at U.S. box
       offices with *Missing In Action* (1984) which earned 23 million dollars (pro-
       duction budget: 2,5 millions) and *Bloodsport* (1988) which 12 million dollars
       (production budget: 1.1 million) respectively. Until their appearance in *The
       Expendables II* (2012) both did not appear in any high value production, and
       in the 2012 film both play supporting roles with Stallone, Schwarzenegger,
       Willis, and (Jason) Statham playing key characters in the film.

11.   In his *Seagalogy*, Vern writes that Seagal 'really did go to Japan as a young
       man, he may have really hung around in the general vicinity of the founder
       of aikido, and later he definitely did run an aikido school, unheard of for
       a white man in Japan [...] However, Seagal's claims and innuendo about
       working for the CIA are at best unverifiable' (5).

12.   Hollywood developed, systemized, and subsequently exploited this star
       phenomenon from its inception in the 1910s. Whether during the tightly
       managed studio system period until the 1950s or in the less regulated Hol-
       lywood era afterwards, stars were often considered to transcend their films
       and, thus, manufactured a coherence among a set of otherwise diverse films
       (cf. Barker 1–22).

13.   At Seagal concerts, audiences similarly conflate the different personas when
       people chant 'Ryback, Ryback' (cf. Vern 482).

14.   Stallone in *Demolition Man* (1993), Schwarzenegger in *The Terminator*
       (1984), and van Damme in *Street Fighter* (1994).

15.   The following quote is an excerpt (!) from a longer speech Forrest Taft, the
       protagonist of *On Deadly Ground* (1994), gives at the very end of the film:
       'The concept of the internal combustion engine has been obsolete for over
       fifty years. But because of the Oil Cartels and corrupt government regula-
       tion, we and the rest of the world have been forced to use gasoline for over
       a hundred years. Big Business is primarily responsible for destroying the
       water we drink, the air we breathe and the food we eat. They have no care
       for the world they destroy, only for the money they make in the process [...]

these people broker toxic waste all over the world. They basically control the legislation, and, in fact, they control the Law. The Law says, 'no company can be fined over $25,000 a day'. For companies making $10,000,000 dollars a day by dumping lethal toxic wastes into the ocean, it's only good business to continue doing this. They influence the media so that they can control our minds. They have made it a crime to speak out for ourselves, and if we do so we're called 'conspiracy nuts' and we're laughed at. We're angry because we're all being chemically and genetically damaged, and we don't even realize it [...] Our most common and God-given rights have been taken away from us. Unfortunately, the reality of our lives is so grim that nobody wants to hear it. Now, I've been asked what we can do? I think we need a responsible body of people that can actually represent us rather than Big Business. This body of people must not allow the introduction of anything into our environment that is not absolutely biodegradable or able to be chemically neutralized upon production. And finally, as long as there is profit to be made from polluting the Earth, companies and individuals will continue to do what they want. We have to force these companies to operate safely and responsibly, and with all our best interests in mind. So that when they don't, we can take back our resources and our hearts and our minds and do what's right' (*On Deadly Ground*).

16. *The Expendables* (2010), *RED* (2010), *The Expendables 2* (2012), *Looper* (2012), *RED 2* (2012), *Escape Plan* (2013), and *A Good Day to Die Hard* (2013) are some of their most prominent recent releases.

Works Cited

Barker, Chris. *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. 2000. 3rd ed. Los Angeles: Sage, 2008. Print.

Barker, Martin. 'Introduction.' *Contemporary Hollywood Stardom*. Ed. Thomas Austin and Martin Barker. New York: Oxford UP, 2003. 1–22. Print.

boxofficemojo.com. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Corrigan, Thomas. 'The Commerce of Auteurism.' *Film and Authorship*. Ed. Virginia Wright Wexman. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2003. 96–111. Print.

De Cordova, Richard. 'The Emergence of the Star System in America.' Gledhill, *Stardom* 17–29. Print.

Dyer, Richard. *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*. London: MacMillan Education Ltd., 1987. Print.

Erickson, Steve. 'Fresh Blood: Three Great Directors of Direct-to-Video Action.' *Roger Ebert.com*. Ebert Digital LLC, 6 Aug. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Fluck, Winfried. 'Men in Boats and Flaming Skies: American Painting and National Self-Recognition.' *Re-Framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies*. Ed. Winfried Fluck, Donald E. Pease, and John Carlos Rowe. Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2011. 141–64. Print.

Fritz, Ben. 'Sales of Digital Movies Surge Delaying Availability of DVDs, Rentals Nudged Consumers.' *The Wall Street Journal*, 7 Jan. 2014. Web 7 Apr. 2016.

Gledhill, Christine. 'Introduction.' Gledhill, *Stardom* xi–xix. Print.

—. *Stardom: Industry of Desire*. New York: Routledge, 1991. Print.

Harris, Thomas. 'The Building of Popular Images: Grace Kelly and Marilyn Monroe.' Gledhill, *Stardom* 41–45. Print.

Hatt, Michael, and Charlotte Klonk. *Art History: A Critical Introduction to Its Methods*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2006. Print.

Hettrick, Scott, and Laurence Lerman. 'Stars, Money Migrate to DVDP.' *DVD Exclusive.com*. A Variety Group Publication, 7 Nov. 2005. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Lüthe, Martin, and Sascha Pöhlmann. 'Introduction: What is Unpopular Culture?' *Unpopular Culture*. Ed. Martin Lüthe and Sascha Pöhlmann. Amsterdam: Amsterdam U P, 2016. 7–29. Print.

Malin, Brenton J. *American Masculinity Under Clinton: Popular Media and the Nineties' 'Crisis of Masculinity.'* New York: Peter Lang, 2005. Print.

On Deadly Ground. Dir. Steven Seagal. Perf. Steven Seagal, Michael Caine, and Billy Bob Thornton. Warner Bros., 1994. Film.

Saldivar, Ramón. 'Historical Fantasy, Speculative Realism, and Postrace Aesthetics in Contemporary American Fiction.' *American Literary History* 23.3 (2011): 574–99. Print.

—. 'Imagining Cultures: The Transnational Imaginary in Postrace America.' *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 4.2 (2012): 1–17. Print.

Sarris, Andrew. 'Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962.' *Film Culture Reader*. Ed. P. Adams Sitney. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970. 121–35. Print.

Storey, James. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. 5th ed. Harlow, England: Pearson Longman, 2010. Print.

the-numbers.com. Nash Information Services. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Truffaut, Francois. 'A Certain Tendency in the French Cinema.' *The Film Studies Reader*. Ed. Joanna Hollins, Peter Hutchings, and Mark Jancovich. London: Arnold, 2000. 58–63. Print.

Vern. *Seagology: A Study of the Ass-Kicking Films of Steven Seagal. Updated and Expanded Edition*. London, Titan Books, 2012. Print.

Wexman, Virginia Wright. 'Introduction.' *Film and Authorship*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2003. 1–20. Print.

Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford UP, 1983. Print.

Unpopular Sport Teams and the Social Psychology of 'Anti-Fans'

Karsten Senkbeil

It is one of the most peculiar phenomena in sports cultures worldwide that the most successful team with the most fans in any given country or city is often at the same time the most unpopular among everybody else in the country, city, or league. The New York Yankees, for example, continue to maintain a love-hate relationship with baseball fans across the USA and even with fans in their hometown New York City, where in the past the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Mets used to fascinate urbanites with their image of the likable though unsuccessful underdog. The top European soccer teams with a comparable magnitude in their respective leagues, such as Juventus F.C. in Italy or Bayern Munich in Germany, experience the same. Fans who usually find it hard to agree on anything (be it referee decisions, the likability, or the talent of certain players) because they are emotionally attached to different teams come together in the same blog or Facebook group to agree on one thing: that Juventus, the Bayern, or the Yankees are simply despicable. Sport teams thus represent a simple, yet most fitting example of Lüthe's and Pöhlmann's assessment that today, cultural products are often popular and unpopular at the same time (cf. 21).

Why, then, do fans from across the country unite[1] in their overt contempt for a specific team? What is the psychological setup and the sociocultural rationale of the 'hater fan'?[2] Why do people fervently and outspokenly assign to themselves the role of a *non*-member of a certain fan group, instead of simply ignoring that which they do not care for?

The Sociology of Sport Fandom

Sports fandom and the social psychology of people who are interested in sports, who cheer and care for the team of their hometown or alma mater, and who choose to come together in small self-selected collectives to amplify their emotional attachment to that sport and team, are fairly well-understood cultural phenomena. Sociologists and anthropologists in the late twentieth century have identified the most significant sociocultural reasons, motivations, and mechanisms behind fan cultures

in sports. Landmark studies that defined the theoretical framework in which sociologists understand sports fandom include Bourdieu's essay 'How can one be a sports fan?' (1978), in which he both asked and answered the question in its title by applying one of his core concepts, the 'habitus', to different types of sports. Bourdieu concluded that different social strata are fascinated by different types of sports, which mirror and reinforce social cleavages by being relatively exclusive for members of different social classes. Fiske's influential work on 'The Cultural Economy of Fandom' (1992) adopted Bourdieu's fundamental idea of sports participation and fandom as a production and accumulation of non-monetary 'capital' (cultural, social, or ideological), while overcoming some of the oversimplifying dichotomies that divided sports into either working-class or bourgeois pastimes without any leeway for ambiguity. Still, for Fiske fandom continued to be 'associated with cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people [...] particularly with those disempowered by any combination of gender, age, class, and race' (30). Empirical studies in sociology, psychology, and communication that prove Fiske's point exist in abundance (e.g. Carrington, Miller, Kay, to name only three representative examples). Yet today, 22 years after Fiske's insightful argument, it appears necessary to re-evaluate Bourdieu's and Fiske's central idea that sports fan communities are always spawned by a deficit in official forms of cultural capital of those involved. As I will show later, it appears as if the identity construction as a sports aficionado and a knowledgeable sports small-talker, even about sports that used to imply the habitus of a lower class (such as soccer in Europe and American football in the USA), has become a form of socially acceptable, even beneficial behavior also for those who are flush in money and education, i.e. forms of official cultural capital.

In a different branch of social theory, but with clear relevance to the dynamics of sport fan groups, Maffesoli's hypothesis about a new *Time of the Tribes* (1996) in postmodern urban societies can be readily applied and connected to the Bourdieuian approach. As I show elsewhere, several core characteristics of sports teams (the relevance of ritualized chanting and singing, sport's ability to produce heroes and induce nostalgia, their being rather stably tied to their respective urban centers, thus spawning local patriotism) in fact render them potent foci of crystallization for post-modern 'pseudo-tribes' (Maffesoli x; cf. also Senkbeil, *Ideology*).

Numerous empirical studies affirm some of the core arguments of said scholars, while at the same time differentiating and nuancing the complexities of sports fandom, and sometimes cultural differences in different parts of the Western world (cf. for example Sugden and Tomlinson or Whannel).

The established lines of argument of Bourdieu, Fiske, and Maffesoli therefore form the foundation for the argument outlined in this paper. Yet, it appears as if the phenomenon of a collective disdain or even 'hatred' towards certain teams in modern team sports represents a distinctive subcultural phenomenon, which the work of the scholars mentioned above fails to fully account for. Fiske argues that being an active fan 'is functional, it must be *for* something' (35, my emphasis), indicating that participation is mostly purposeful on a social level; now it stands to argue whether one can be a fan *against* something, and whether the social functions are still comparable then. Sports sociology shows that 'normal' sports fans seek moments of joy and strong emotional involvement as central motivations for their participation in the stadium, particularly as modern life has increasingly become emotionally stale (cf. Dunning and Elias 16). Furthermore, prestige within one's peer group belongs to the strong social functions of participatory fandom. At first glance, being a fervent hater or anti-fan seems to make less sense, as hatred, anger, and continued frustration (because the hated team usually continues to dominate the league financially and athletically) seem to be neither psychologically nor socially desirable effects.

Thus, departing from those landmark texts that have been introduced here, I attempt to show how anti-fan-culture can be seen both as an extension of and in opposition to more 'normal' fan culture in today's Western societies. In a second step, a tentative qualitative study of the social semiotics within said anti-fan groups online will sketch a typology of anti-fans, and attempt to extract three central reasons for why people choose to acquire and perform an anti-fan identity. Firstly, I argue that class dynamics in developed capitalistic societies are central in pushing certain fan groups to the margins, thus 'producing' hater fans while consumerism woos the normal ones. Secondly, I intend to show how an almost 'mock-bourgeois' form of traditionalism informs much of the scorn and insult towards hated teams. Finally, I will discuss how anti-fan performances serve social functions whose motivations go beyond class but rather include power dynamics on the axes age and gender.

Anti-Fans vs 'Normal' Sports Fans: A Comparison

First, it appears necessary to shortly recapitulate the reasons that the Bourdieu-Fiskeian school of thought defines as decisive for 'normal' sports fans' performances and identity constructions. Then, based on qualitative empirical research, it will be possible to test whether the same arguments

hold for hater fans and their loose collectives that can be found on Facebook and other forums online. Why do 'normal' sports fans—those who cheer fervently for their favorite team at every home and many away games—do what they do?

Bourdieu's theory of sports participation differentiates between cultural tastes and competences common among the privileged members of a society versus cultural tastes of those deprived from economic and official cultural capital (cf. Bourdieu 352–53). As the lower classes lacked access to those institutions that taught the competences and tastes for official[3] cultural forms (such as opera and the fine arts), they founded counter-cultural forms of 'non-official' cultural and social capital among the peer group of likeminded fans. This countercultural habitus included rougher, more physical forms of behavior, which is why physically aggressive sports were long considered typical working-class pastimes (such as for example boxing, soccer, rugby, and, though to a lesser extent, American football), as opposed to culturally more 'refined' but less physical sports (such as golf and tennis). When spectatorship of popular (in the sense of 'non-elite') sports developed into fan culture, the commitment to that particular form of habitus thus always formed outside of official institutions and usually with an implicit rebellion against established official culture.

The 'shadow cultural economy' (30) of fandom, as Fiske calls it, picking up the Bourdieuian train of thought, usually expropriated certain mechanisms and characteristics of that official culture to which it was (allegedly) opposed. To name just the strongest parallels: the gate-keeping and policing of the borders between the community of fans for team A (versus those of team B) continues to work remarkably similar to gatekeeping practices and processes in 'higher' cultural forms. Also, the background knowledge of historical events, personalities, and ritualized forms of behavior that an 'initiate' or 'newcomer' needs to show before he or she can be accepted among the ranks are as strongly marked as (maybe even more pronounced than) those within the communities of official culture. Also, it needs hard work and dedication to become a leading figure within a sports fan group, just as it needs hard work and lots of practice to be accepted as a knowledgeable arbiter of official culture. Moreover, 'authenticity' remains an essential criterion in the accumulation of official cultural capital, as the authentic sound of a particular orchestra, the authenticity of a painting, and the competence to recognize and ultimately own said authenticity remains at the core of official culture connoisseurship. This is reflected by the authenticity of one's emotional involvement as a sports team fan: among 'ultra' fans, it is met with the greatest amount of scorn when non-ultras (or

politicians, or the media, or advertisers) try to fake the emotional highs and lows of the 'true believer' (cf. Langer 54–66).

Moreover, despite the fact that early sports fan cultures (in the twentieth century) were considered grass-roots movements opposed to the upper class, the social return of investment of sports fans strongly resembled the usual forms of social capital. Being an accepted member of a fan collective grants a young man the esteem of his peers, respect and social status within the group, a feeling of solidarity among his 'pseudo-tribe' (Maffesoli x), i.e. with people who are neither his family nor close friends, but rather a 'self-selected fraction' (Fiske 30) of the people, whose commonalities are often restricted to comparably small details.

For Bourdieu and Fiske, the huge difference between official culture and the shadow economy of fans' cultural capital was that subcultural capital within the sports fan peer group could not (or only with a lot of difficulties) be translated into real economic capital. If anything, being a deeply involved fan of a working-class sport more often than not encumbered social upward mobility up until the late twentieth century. In opposition, official cultural capital, and this included the cultural capital acquired through membership in upper-class sports circles, usually produced social privilege and distinction, enabled networking with likeminded members of the upper class, and thus often represented an important step towards more economic capital down the road.

Bourdieu strongly emphasized this class dimension, and in the last decades both theoretical and empirical works have made the point that this simple dichotomy of bourgeois vs working-class sports fandom must be problematized and extended (cf. Sugden and Tomlinson, for example). We know today that fandom in almost all popular cultural forms is just as dynamic with regard to the axes of ethnicity, gender, and age. A look at the demographics of sports fandom shows that age appears to be a particularly significant variable for sports fandom. The most dedicated fan groups in stadiums mostly consist of young men (and few young women) intent on differentiating themselves from the official cultural norms of their parents and teachers (cf. Langer 51). At the same time, age is the one dimension of difference that inescapably changes over time for each and every one of us. From that perspective, it comes as no surprise that the self-proclaimed counterculture of sports fans emulates and reincorporates many characteristics of official culture: in fact, the quasi-bourgeois mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion mirrored in sports fan groups prepare their participants for similar mechanisms in later life. Not coincidentally, a large fraction of the most devoted, enthusiastic, noisiest sports fans are in fact students at

high school or university (aged 15–25)[4] (cf. Schwier), i.e. young people who are currently preparing themselves in official educational institutions to later in their lives become parts of the official culture they (think they) are symbolically opposing in their youth.

Testing the outlined arguments about 'regular' sports fans for a certain team with regards to those who call themselves 'haters' of a certain team, we find only little differences in the social-psychological rationale that probably motivates that self-identification. The policing of borders and mechanisms of exclusion may be less strict: becoming a member of, for example, the Facebook group called 'Because I'll always hate F.C. Bayern'[5]— which has more than 86,000 followers—is voluntary and unrestricted,[6] but group founders and administrators keep an eye on which posts are deemed appropriate. For example, hateful remarks about single players of that despised team are acceptable, even celebrated, unless overt racism plays into them: even hater fans have to obey some of Facebook's norms about political correctness. Those group members with the most cutting or witty remarks acquire high amounts of 'Likes', today's common currency for desirable yet non-transferable subcultural social capital. Others put in hard work and effort, photoshopping the colors or jerseys of the hated teams into images of pigs (or other unfavorable animals), players' heads onto animal bodies or into photos with humiliating sexual contexts, to gather 'Likes' and praise for their 'artwork'. Participants are most often young and male, their sense of humor (often) decidedly adolescent and intentionally 'tasteless'—a hint at the fact that hater fans position themselves as opposed to the mainstream, though probably subconsciously (as opposed to punk rock bands, for example, who *intentionally* make 'bad taste' a part of their agenda). In that sense, the social psychology of the hater fan mirrors to a large extent that of the normal fan—if maybe a bit more extreme in their neglect of the standardized rules of politeness and political correctness. In fact, it appears very likely that both groups significantly overlap.

Particularly when it comes to the 'rowdiness' and 'bad taste' of anti-fan groups, it is most worthwhile to recapitulate Fiske's statement from 1992, in which he discussed the same kind of behavior among (normal) soccer fans in Great Britain and concluded that those fans,

> many of whom are socially and economically disempowered males, can, when wearing their colors and when in their own community of fans, exhibit empowered behavior that only rarely really becomes violent and dangerous, but which more typically confines itself to assertiveness. (38)

Today, the internet seems to be a prime medium to enable said symbolic assertiveness and rudeness, which never becomes really dangerous for anyone because of the spatial distance between the aggressor and potential retaliators who might feel insulted. This symbolic act of aggression, Fiske continues, is willfully 'socially offensive, and deliberately challenges more normal social values and the discipline they exert' (38). This behavior is, in fact, intended to 'call forth considerable adult disapproval' (Fiske 38). On the one hand, this idea echoes Lüthe's and Pöhlmann's remarks about intentional unpopularity as a means to define an 'underground' aesthetic (cf. 8). In that respect, deliberately tasteless noisecore bands and rowdy soccer fans share some characteristics. On the other hand, the term 'adult disapproval' in the quote above draws our attention back to age as a significant dimension of difference. 'Adult' probably need not necessarily be taken literally; we should consider it a metaphor for 'the powers that be' in society. Most rowdy soccer fans are young, but in fact of age; many of them are well-off, young, middle-class men at university (cf. Schwier) who behave like responsible adults in their day-to-day lives. Thus, differentiation along the axis of age—the (real or metaphoric) conflict between teenagers and adults—may be one key to understand anti-fans. I will return to this idea later.

So, even though the Fiskean-Bourdieuian argument holds not only for 'normal' soccer fans but also for hater fans, it appears necessary to expand on one dimension in which the justifications and reasoning in these groups are not congruent: their entanglement with consumerism. As mentioned earlier, Fiske and most other Cultural Studies scholars today agree that a clear distinction between the so-called popular as clearly distinguishable from and opposed to official or high culture is an oversimplification. Also, the definition of 'subculture' has become increasingly difficult, since in virtually all fields of popular culture we can observe mainstream culture's power to absorb any new subcultural forms after a while, incorporating them into the hegemonic system, adapting them to mainstream aesthetics and values, even 'inventing' or creating high-cultural validity to draw the socially and economically privileged towards the trend. There exist various theoretical superstructures with which to explain this; one of them, the hegemony-theoretical approach based on the neo-Gramscian school of thought would argue that cultural hegemony (of modern mainstream consumer capitalism) is a form of dominance that is founded on the consent of its subjects to prevent their opposition. The smartest form to ensure the consent of the young and potentially rebellious (here: sports fans) may be to include their subcultural forms and practices (here: highly emotionalized

participation in the stadium) into the midst of mainstream consumer culture.

A look at media communication in sports (cf. for example Senkbeil, *Ideology*; Sage) shows how for a few decades, sports fans, particularly the most passionate ones, have become the target of consumer culture: they are wooed and flattered by advertising, welcomed by TV producers as 'intense background noise' to their sports broadcasts, applauded by cultural critics for their 'authenticity' and 'loyalty', and increasingly accepted and pursued as customers by big business.

A case in point is the emergence of the so-called *Fanmeilen* in German city centers during every big international soccer event following the FIFA world cup in 2006. There, the possibility to communally watch the games on a huge screen with thousands of others is cleverly surrounded by venues selling official merchandise and FIFA-licensed food and drink. An American example is the trend towards centrally organized and brand-sponsored 'tailgating parties' around American stadiums. Tailgating, after all, was 'invented' as a reaction to the lack of reasonable public transportation to many American stadiums (which is why American fans go to the stadium by car) and, particularly, as a reaction to the outlandish prices for food and alcoholic beverages within stadiums. Thus, American fans used to barbecue and party out of the trunks of their cars before games to specifically *avoid* the excessive consumerism in stadiums. Today, brands (barbecue grill producers, beer brands, etc.) sponsor 'official' tailgating parties, a perfect example of the assimilation of a countercultural form into consumer culture.

This process is observable in the sports cultures of all wealthy (post-)industrial countries today, and it usually goes hand in hand with higher ticket prices, more VIP boxes, a growing amount of 'pay-per-view' TV broadcasts, and other developments subsumed under the term 'gentrification'. England serves as a prime example: the ticket prices for the stadiums (or arenas) of the top soccer teams in London or Manchester (Arsenal, Chelsea, Manchester United, Manchester City) often start in the three-digit numbers (of pounds), available only to those with plenty of actual monetary capital. Subcultural capital among the fan community alone will not suffice to participate actively in fan culture in England.

If we connect these developments with the Fiskean theory, it appears as if what Fiske called the 'shadow cultural economy' (30) of sports fans has thus lost its 'shadow' aspect. Sports fan culture today is part of official culture, a regular and acceptable part of an upper-middle-class citizen's life, both in the USA and Europe. Still, while the status and prestige of being a sports fan has drastically changed, large parts of young, poor or

otherwise disenfranchised social strata certainly retain the inherent wish to differentiate themselves from official culture and the powers that be. Consumerism's grasp of sports fan culture cannot extinguish the fact that people with little or no access to official cultural capital still exist, and that they are still interested and emotionally invested in sports. The growth of hater groups or anti-fan communities may be connected with the need of a new, symbolically rebellious cultural form for these groups. In a way, I argue, the disenfranchised have migrated to a 'sub-subcultural' form—hating a certain team—because 'only' loving a team has become too mainstream, too middle-class, too 'official' in Bourdieu's terms, and too much part of the hegemonic system that some experience as unjust and exclusive.

As the mainstream certainly considers hatred a most irrational, intrinsically negative, and thus the most unpopular of emotions, it appears to be particularly 'unsexy' for, maybe even inherently opposed to, market capitalism. This renders hate the 'weapon of choice' for young, mostly male individuals who feel disregarded or disrespected by official culture, including official sports culture. It should appear as if passionate spite against a popular cultural phenomenon could hardly be packaged or sold. Still, the mechanism of consumerism may find inroads into the domain of hater communities as well. As of recently, fan scarves—a standard accessory for European soccer fans—that feature scornful, though not very creative messages targeting the opponent (e.g. 'Scheiß-Bayern' as the main slogan on a blue-and-white Schalke 04 scarf) are sold by unofficial, unlicensed, 'semi-legal' vendors around the stadium on match day. In the United States, one can order a rib-knit baby one-piece (for age 3–6 months) by American Apparel online, carrying the slogan 'I can't even talk yet, and I already hate the Yankees' (*Skreened.com*). There seems to be a niche target group for said items, another proof for the difficulty, maybe even impossibility of subcultures to be and remain completely unpopular and outside of 'the system'.

A Typology of Anti-Fan Motivations

After the deductive approach to the question at hand—applying existing theories of fan societies to this new phenomenon—a brief inductive, qualitative study concludes this paper. For that, I have conducted a discourse-analytical examination of the contents and discussions in hater communities online. The dataset included freely accessible texts, comments, and images in comparably large Facebook groups that deal with the

hatred towards certain clubs in the USA (New York Yankees, LA Lakers), Germany (TSG Hoffenheim, Bayern Munich), and England (Chelsea F.C.). Obviously, users in said groups use different languages, i.e. Hoffenheim and Bayern haters communicate in German, which is certainly a point in case of the assumed restrictedness to national leagues or cultures. Soon during research, it became clear that visual elements—photoshopped images and 'internet memes' to mock or insult players or opponent fans—also play an important role in these groups, which is why a combination of methods that pay close attention to pragmalinguistic details (such as outlined in Wodak and Krzyzanowski, for example) with a method that addresses the semiotics of visual media (cf. Van Leeuwen and Jewitt's edited volume) was applied, while keeping in mind the communicative particularities of multimedial, 'Web 2.0'-based discourses (cf. Hinton and Hjorth).[7] The result is a tentative typology of hater fans, which reflects some of the prior arguments well, while extending others.

The first and very central reason for the overt contempt of one team across a whole country or sports culture can of course still be found on the axis of class. Teams that dominate a certain league over a longer period of time usually do so because of their financial dominance; naturally, their continued success often leads to an even larger gap between 'poor' and 'rich' teams. One of the central problems of capitalism—'the rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer'—seems to be mirrored in sports. Though of course the market logic in sports is actually much more complicated (cf. Sage; Senkbeil, *Ideology*), young men may have their first contacts with the injustices of the capitalist order through sports. Professional team sports are easy to understand, and they blatantly show how 'inherited' wealth and success are inseparably interconnected, which some consider unjust and in seeming opposition to the ideal of a 'level playing field'. This makes it relatively easy to hate the 'fat-cat capitalists' in New York, London, or Munich. The fact that this first underlying principle of fan hatred seems to have a clearly anti-capitalist dimension should by no means be mistaken with the idea that all hater communities are politically left-leaning. In fact, I have demonstrated elsewhere that discourses of anti-commercialization in sports cultures surprisingly often stem from conservative, even reactionary political stances (cf. Senkbeil, *Ideology*, 136–48).

As a counterpoint to success through financial dominance, anti-fans usually argue that poorer teams have more authentic emotions and 'passion'. For instance, a widely bought and worn baseball fan T-shirt from Boston reads that any game against the New York Yankees is a contest of 'Passion vs Payroll' (cf. *Facebook.com*; community 'The Boston Red Sox Block'). Ironically, the

Red Sox from Boston are not a team with a particularly small payroll either; their self-proclaimed image of a team from and for the working class is a clever PR invention rather than an accurate representation of reality. A look at this and a large number of other statements and images online reveals that hater fans do not need logical reasoning or factual evidence for their claims. This observation is largely congruent with Maffesoli's argument that postmodern pseudo-tribes often celebrate irrationality (cf. 143–45), hence defining a counterpoint to the rationalized work-ethic-driven everyday life in Western capitalist societies. Also, a related study has shown that overly emotional, irrational, 'passionate' behavior and statements belong to the characteristics that many sports fans ('normal' fans and haters alike) cherish most, not only among themselves but also with regard to their heroes on the field (cf. Senkbeil, 'Apollo').

The second pattern that can be found among hater groups, complicating the prior argument a bit, has to do with a differentiation of 'old money' versus 'new money'. Recently, the newly found wealth and success of some teams stem from external sources, i.e. billionaires who bought themselves into a leadership position of a sports team and now support that organization with money they earned in non-sports-related businesses. Leading examples from Europe include Dietmar Hopp, software mogul and one of the richest men in Germany, whose funds helped the village club TSG Hoffenheim join the top ranks of German soccer. The largest community of 'Anti-Hoffenheim' fans blames that club for being 'without tradition, without values, whores of commercialization'[8] (cf. *Facebook.com*; community 'Anti-Hoffenheim'). The choice of words here, in its offensiveness and explicitness, is in fact quite representative; many insults directed at players and managers of the hated clubs include sexualized overtones, sometimes interwoven with misogynistic or homophobic tendencies. I will revisit how gender intersects with hater fans performances later.

Another example is Roman Abramovitch, a Russian billionaire who owns Chelsea F.C. and whose money transformed it from a mediocre working-class club into a UEFA Champions League winner. English fans of teams without such external support hence consider Chelsea the 'scum of the land' (cf. *Facebook.com*; community 'I hate Chelsea, scum of the land'). In the USA, Mikhail Prokhorov, another Russian industrialist billionaire, was the key figure behind the recent transformation of the notoriously unsuccessful basketball franchise New Jersey Nets into a cool, hip, urban brand, the Brooklyn Nets. Not only local communities were skeptical of the consequences of the influx of external money on the borough of Brooklyn and on American basketball in general. This development marks the most

recent one (the Nets have played in Brooklyn since 2012), and it will be most interesting to observe the reaction of American basketball fans across the nation when the Brooklyn Nets actually start winning championships.

Either way, newly found success based on external funds often generates strong condescension from the self-ascribed traditionalists within a sports community. In this respect, supporters of notoriously underfunded but traditional teams (a German example would be 1. F.C. Nürnberg) interestingly come to fully agree with fans of traditionally big, rich, and successful teams (e.g. Borussia Dortmund). As mentioned above, popular cultures' fan communities often adapt the mechanisms of 'social hygiene' from the official culture that they are allegedly opposed to. From that perspective, the traditionalists' backlash against nouveau riche teams does not come as a surprise: traditionalism and discrimination against newcomers—and particularly towards the nouveau riche—is and was one of the core strategies and practices of gatekeeping and exclusion in aristocratic and later bourgeois forms of high culture. With that argument—'they don't belong here; only we do, because we have a long tradition of being here'—anti-fans showcase a logic and behavior that is decidedly conservative and 'petty bourgeois'. It stands to argue whether this second set of reasons for hatred towards a certain team is more prominent in Europe than in the USA. It would not come as a surprise if the different cultural and social histories on opposite sides of the Atlantic have rendered overt contempt towards the nouveau riche a European, and not a typically American reaction.

The third type of reason that I would like to discuss here functions outside the realm of economic realities and envy. Examining the discourses and semiotics in stadiums and online indicates that overt hate towards virtually all of the teams mentioned so far crystallizes around powerful men, whose name is inseparably interwoven with the rise to power of the hated team. Dietmar Hopp from Germany and Roman Abramovitch from England have already been mentioned. Uli Hoeneß, former president of F.C. Bayern, one of the most successful soccer clubs in Europe, fits into the same category. In the USA, George Steinbrenner of the New York Yankees, and Jerry Buss of the Los Angeles Lakers played a similarly singular role over a span of several decades. A closer examination of these public personalities reveals striking similarities, even though they functioned in geographically and culturally very distant places. These parallels thus deserve close attention.

Obviously, these owners and managers are all male, white, comparably old, and rich. Neither of them was born rich, but they all stem from a lower social class and became self-made millionaires. A look at their public performance and personas reveals that all of them are widely known as

strong-willed, uncompromising, bold, and sometimes brash in their way of doing business. When they appear in the media, they are portrayed as highly self-confident—their opponents often call them arrogant—as they like to showcase their power and influence in the sports scene and beyond. They seem to enjoy letting their fans and opponents know that they are convinced of their own managerial qualities, and have only little respect for opponents who show less talent and willpower than they themselves have shown in their careers. Within their clubs, their power and leadership is rarely questioned; in fact, these men often talk about their organizations in terms of 'a family', in which loyalty and mutual care play a central role, of course under the watchful eye of the powerful patriarch.

Let us connect these striking parallels with the observations about age and gender made above. Sports are today's prime field in which societies negotiate and define their desirable and undesirable types of masculinity (cf. Whannel 159–72). Symbolic rule-breaking and rebellion is not only a characteristic of hater fans, but, in fact, typical of a certain type of idealized masculinity (cf. Senkbeil, 'Apollo'). Young fans (normal ones and haters) are at a stage in their lives in which their masculinity is yet to be fully defined; many of them are still testing their limits and play with identity choices. Traditionally, adolescents (particularly males) have had to rebel against their fathers during that period, i.e. against older men, whom they experience as wealthier and more powerful than themselves, and who—to a teenager—appear arrogant and unwilling to compromise. In other words, I argue that sports fans 'love to hate' these powerful men and the teams they represent because they symbolically rebel against imagined father figures. I hold that this may be a particularly meaningful practice today, because we live in an era in which the real fathers of these young men often do not qualify as crystallization points for teenage rebellion. The old-school patriarch, i.e. a domineering, overpowering, sometimes tyrannical father, who only demands discipline and obedience from his children and otherwise totally inhibits their freedom, may still be a trope in popular culture, but is luckily rare these days in Western societies. The fathers of today's sports fans in their teens and twenties themselves grew up in the 1970s and 80s, i.e. in a period in which the biggest battles against the traditionalistic tyranny of family patriarchs had been already won, both in North America and Europe. Simply put, many young men at college age today probably have rather nice dads, on average.

This is where a virtual 'straw man' father figure (the old man at the top of the opponent team) may serve a collective psychological function in that he invites fans to communally join in rejecting this overpowering

male and his cause. This symbolic rebellion, which never becomes really violent or dangerous,[9] may (still) be part of growing up and of defining one's masculinity. Ironically, this behavior is marked as rejection of adult behavior on the surface, but on the level of the peer group it prepares young men to be accepted into the ranks of male domains in official adult culture later in life. Specifically, this may mean becoming a father yourself later, or becoming a successful, career-oriented, self-confident man at some point later in your life. The degree of aggression that these powerful men in the sports business have had to face is always caused by a mix of envy and pseudo-adolescent rebellion, but also by a fair share of (secret) admiration.

To conclude this tentative typology of haters based on an inductive analysis of Facebook group contents, it is probably safe to say that the three outlined rationales intersect at various points and influence each other. Jealousy towards the rich, a 'mock class struggle', and the mechanisms of a shadow cultural economy as an extension of and opposition to mainstream sports culture remain in place as strong motivations to hate a certain team. Yet, also in terms of the sociocultural work that this unpopular strand of fan culture is able to do, we should not underestimate the psychological undercurrents that deal with the negotiation and definition of young men's masculinity in opposition to real or imagined father figures.

Conclusion

The assessment of whether anti-fan groups are more or less comparable to 'normal' sports fans has shown that many typical characteristics of fans of any type of pop culture can indeed be applied to anti-fans as well. The parallels between anti-fans and other sub- or youth cultures included the distinction against the larger mainstream (here: of so-called 'fair-weather fans'), the active participation and creative work of individuals within the group, the accumulation of an elusive type of social capital (though on a smaller scale and nowadays mostly virtual, in social media), and also first attempts of consumerism to commodify the signifying processes of that subculture. To gather a full picture of the motivations and rationales of hater fans, who on the one hand find unpopular what the mainstream sports consumer finds popular, and on the other hand hope to make themselves unpopular with this 'mainstream other', we probably have to combine 'classic' economic reasons (symbolic class struggle, traditionalism, and jealousy towards the nouveau riche) with the dynamics of gender, particularly in the complex sphere of masculinity during adolescence.

Notes

1. In this chapter, I specifically focus on successful teams that are met with overt contempt *throughout* a nation, or more specifically the leagues in which they play (whose borders usually but not always coincide with national borders). That is to say, heated rivalries that are locally restricted to two cities, regions, or parts of town are explicitly not part of my argument here, as they usually follow more 'reasonable' rationales than those of the 'united haters' from all over the league. Bipolar sports rivalries often resemble remnants or aftermaths of serious political, ethnic, or religious conflicts in the past, such as in the rivalry of Glasgow Rangers and Celtic, or in the Madrid vs Barcelona rivalry in Spain (cf. Mandelbaum; Dunning, Murphy and Williams). Other traditional city rivalries seem to follow a Freudian psychological pattern, the 'narcissism of small differences', in their partly playful, partly serious teasing and mutual ridiculing, such as in the New York vs Boston rivalry, or the feud between Dortmund and Schalke in Germany. Hater fans, as I hope to show here, cannot be explained by either line of reasoning though, but follow different social psychological patterns.

2. For lack of a better term, I use the expressions 'anti-fans' and 'hater fans' synonymously throughout this paper, though clearly both are neither very precise nor satisfactory in explaining what these people do, and why. The English language in fact provides no clearer or more precise term for this phenomenon, a case in point of the general irritation that spawned the research for this paper: an 'anti-fan' is first and foremost an inherently paradoxical entity (much like the title of this volume, 'unpopular culture').

3. The term 'official culture' (a translation of the French '*culture officielle,*' describing the culture of the elites in French sociological discourses) may strike us as a bit imprecise from today's perspective. Cultural Studies scholars today might opt for more exact labels such as 'currently dominant' to describe the same practices, hinting at the ambivalence and mobility of what is deemed 'official' and institutionalized in a given time and place. I will nonetheless use the term 'official culture' in the discussion of Bourdieu's and Fiske's arguments in this paper, as it reflects the original diction of those foundational works most precisely, but also because it is exactly the shifting status of what used to be and what is today 'official' and 'unofficial' about sports fan culture that will prepare my later arguments.

4. In the U.S., the college sports system of course is a strong influence: college football and basketball games are known to draw much noisier and sometimes rowdier crowds than professional games, often due to the fact that those crowds largely consist of fellow students of the athletes. Still, in Europe, which does not have a comparable college sports scene, many leading figures of 'ultra' fan groups in soccer are eloquent and well-organized young men attending university (cf. Schwier 26–27).

5. 'Weil ich den FC Bayern für immer hassen werde' (trans. KS. *Facebook.com*)

6.   It is one of the ironies of the Facebook age that its members cannot simply indicate their 'hate' for anything but can only 'like' or 'become a fan'. A thumbs-down icon does not exist. The mentioned process of declaring oneself a hater of the Yankees (for example) thus only works via a logical detour ('I like that I hate the Yankees'), which is, on the one hand, syntactically quite revealing, and on the other hand highlights the unpreparedness or unwillingness of Facebook (today's main stage to define what is currently popular) to account for countercurrents and anti-fans of popular culture.

7.   For reasons of space, the details of this multidisciplinary methodological approach cannot be fully elaborated here; I refer to the mentioned original theoretical and methodological works. In this essay, an overview of the qualitative results will need to suffice.

8.   'Traditionslos—Wertlos—Kommerzhuren' (trans. KS).

9.   To my knowledge, none of the mentioned team owners and presidents have ever been really physically attacked or hurt by opponent fans. Aggression towards them is always limited to verbal abuse in stadiums or online.

Works Cited

Bourdieu, Pierre. 'How Can One Be a Sports Fan?' 1978. *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. Simon During. London: Routledge, 1993. 339–55. Print.

Carrington, Ben. 'Sport, Masculinity, and Black Cultural Resistance.' Sugden and Tomlinson 267–91. Print.

Dunning, Eric, and Norbert Elias. *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process*. Oxford/New York: Blackwell, 1986. Print.

—. Patrick Murphy, and John M. Williams. *The Roots of Football Hooliganism. A Historical and Sociological Study*. London: Routledge, 1988. Print.

Fiske, John. 'The Cultural Economy of Fandom.' *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. Ed. Lisa A. Lewis. London: Routledge, 1992. 30–49. Print.

Hinton, Sam, and Larissa Hjorth. *Understanding Social Media*. London: Sage, 2013. Print.

Houlihan, Barrie, ed. *Sports and Society*. London: Sage, 2003. Print.

Langer, Daniel. *Faszination Ultras: Aspekte und Erklärungsansätze zur Fussballfan- und Jugendkultur*. Bonn: Scientia Bonnensis, 2010. Print.

Lüthe, Martin, and Sascha Pöhlmann. 'Introduction: What is Unpopular Culture?' *Unpopular Culture*. Ed. Martin Lüthe and Sascha Pöhlmann. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2016. PAGE NUMBERS. Print.

Maffesoli, Michel. *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*. London: Sage, 1996. Print.

Mandelbaum, Michael. *The Meaning of Sports*. New York: Public Affairs, 2004. Print.

Miller, Toby. *Sportsex*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2001. Print.

Sage, George. *Power and Ideology in American Sport: A Critical Perspective*. 2nd ed. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1998. Print.

Schwier, Jürgen. 'Die Welt der Ultras. Eine neue Generation von Fußballfans / The World of the Ultras. A New Generation of Football Fans.' *Sport und Gesellschaft / Sport and Society* 2.1 (2005): 21–38. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Senkbeil, Karsten. *Ideology in American Sports. A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Study.* Heidelberg: Winter, 2011. Print.

—. 'Black Apollo, WhiteDionysus? A Two-level Approach to Sports Heroes in Western Cultures.' *Ethnic and Racial Identities in the Media. The Politics of Representation.* Ed. Eleftheria Arapoglou, Yiorgos Kalogeras, and Jopi Nyman. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. Forthcoming. Print.

Skreened.com. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Spitzmüller, Jürgen, and Ingo Warnke. *Methoden der Diskurslinguistik. Sprachwissenschaftliche Zugänge zur transtextuellen Ebene.* Berlin/New York: de Gruyter. 2008. Print.

Sugden, John, and Alan Tomlinson, eds. *Power Games. A Critical Sociology of Sport.* London: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Whannel, Gary. *Media Sport Stars. Masculinities and Moralities.* London: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Wodak, Ruth, and Michal Krzyzanowski, eds. *Qualitative Discourse Analysis for the Social Sciences.* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008. Print.

Popular, Unpopular

When First World War Museums Meet Facebook

Catherine Bouko

Let us start this paper with a simple question, which many cultural educa-
tion managers are asking themselves as we commemorate the centenary
of the First World War: how does one generate interest in this conflict
among the younger generations when they feel so distant from it? For
example, the British government plans to recreate the Christmas Day 1914
football match between the British and German troops. Here, popular
culture meets historical reconstruction, as football star and pop-cultural
icon David Beckham will be one of the players. Although widely accepted,
the paradigm of 'popular culture' is nevertheless not always clear. In the
opinion of Eric Maigret and Eric Macé, the expression 'popular culture'
is one of those concepts that emerged after the concept of 'mass culture'
and which clumsily glorify the cultural practices they purport to bring
together without really emphasizing the new forms of relationship that
these practices entail (cf. 10). As far as the media are concerned, the cultural
practices are currently becoming more *autonomous*; their legitimacy no
longer primarily depends on the domination of one social class over another.
While the relationship between 'popular' and 'unpopular' media practices is
less frequently subjected to these vertical social breakdowns, this does not
necessarily mean that domination has disappeared; rather, it is apportioned
in a different manner and also takes into account other important variables
(such as age). Nowadays, what differences do we find between the popular
and the unpopular? How do cultural media practices express these differ-
ences? This chapter aims at enhancing our understanding of the manner in
which historical museums, as traditionally 'sacred spaces' of high culture,
integrate the codes of popular culture to make the younger generations
sensitive to themes they are likely to consider unattractive. In other words, I
wish to examine how an institution nowadays often considered unpopular,
associated with the values of the traditional, unfashionable, and old, invites
the popular in its treatment of history.

In an attempt to answer these general questions, I have chosen to analyze
the story of the fictional First World War infantryman Léon Vivien that
was disseminated on Facebook. This unique experiment involved present-
ing a fictional approach to the Great War while also incorporating the

communicative codes specific to this social network. Over several months in spring 2013, on an almost daily basis, the DDB communication agency published online messages posted by the character Léon Vivien, devised on behalf of the Meaux Museum of the Great War (north-east of Paris). The story, illustrated by a large number of (audio-)visual documents, is based on the museum's substantial collection. Just as on any friend's Facebook page, Internet users reacted to Vivien's messages by commenting day after day. In total, nearly 7,000 messages were posted by followers and 60,000 people became 'fans' of Léon's page. We thus find ourselves faced with a media object that, in an original manner, hinges on a topic taken from high culture—History as presented in museums—with a media support, namely Facebook, that constitutes the jewel in the crown of popular contemporary media culture. Two paradigms intersect here: on the one hand, we observe the paradigm of an *emotional bond* and *intimacy* in the way in which History is dealt with. Initially apparent at the very heart of museums and in televised works of fiction, it is now translated on Facebook with Léon Vivien's personal page. On the other hand, we see the development of practices within the paradigm of 'connectivity' (cf. Van Dijck), of sociability specific to online social networks. Here, I will try to investigate how these two paradigms fit into the Léon Vivien project in order to give new readability and new visibility to the First World War, rendering it a unique cultural practice at the crossroads of popularity and unpopularity.

This chapter consists of four parts. The first section evokes the changing paradigm of historical culture in museums and in the media that we can observe today. Then, the chapter explores how Léon Vivien's Facebook page shows analogies with Hollywoodian codes (second section) and how its way of visualizing the war with photographs mixes fact and fiction (third section). In the fourth section, I will briefly mention my linguistic analysis of Léon's fans' comments to show how these online exchanges meet the specific characteristics of popular sociality on Facebook.

1.   How History is Treated in Museums and the Media: Ever-Increasing Emotion and Intimacy

Two concurrent phenomena appeared in France in the 1980s: the mass integration of television into homes and a new means of relating to History. The latter, supported by recourse to the emotional and an experience of war on a personal level, also characterizes the new approach to historical fact adopted by many museums.

In a number of seminal papers, Valerie Casey describes the evolution of museum practices. She distinguishes three categories in her typology: the legislating, the interpreting (on which we will focus), and the performing museum (cf. Casey, 'Museum Effect'; 'Staging Meaning'). These three types imply different approaches to the relation between the exhibited object and the museum, as well as to the authority of the institution regarding the production of knowledge. The legislating type bases its authority on the selection and presentation of objects (cf. Casey, 'Museum Effect' 4-5). In that case, the collections' displays tend to propose a transparent, unmediated relation between the object and the museum: Trofanenko quotes Bennett to highlight that 'when placed under the authority of the museum, artefacts become "facsimiles of themselves" (that function to represent their own past [...].) [...] This provided the illusion of certainty' (Trofanenko 52). In recent years, this transparent relation between the object and the museum's visitor underwent profound questioning; the 'new museology' (cf. Vergo) shifts the debate to the question of the *consequences* of the chosen displays and has, for example, contributed to unearthing selection processes for displays and exhibitions thereby complicating the very concepts of neutrality and objectivity. As Sherman and Rogoff have it: 'a broad range of critical analyses have converged on the museum, unmasking the structures, rituals and procedures by which the relations between objectives, bodies of knowledge and processes of ideological persuasion are enacted' (ix–x, qtd. in Trofanenko 52). For Casey, the second museum type particularly challenges the institution's natural authority by highlighting the processes of mediation. The interpreting museum no longer bases its authority on the intrinsic value of the object, but rather on its integration into interpretative displays. Historical reconstructions are the ultimate examples of this approach, and the Léon Vivien project shows that *par excellence*. Here, the object's status is modified: it is no longer significant by itself, but rather becomes illustrative, in the service of the museum performance. The interpretative performance becomes analogous with the object. The mediation by the museum is apparent; the visitor no longer comes in contact with the object but with the *performance* of that object. The evolution of the relation to fiction is important: we move from an object, which is put into a story, to a story illustrated by this object. To those who consider this a devaluation of the museum function, Casey replies that this insistence on mediation stimulates the visitor's critical mind, as s/he masters the codes of mass mediation and is thus able to decipher the fictionalization of the object. For Casey, we here find a marvelous opportunity to question cultural authority (cf. 'Museum Effect' 19). The third museum type—performing, as

in 'living museums'—immerse the visitor into a pre-aestheticized universe, reconstructed in a human-size in which actors are performing. Here, the visitor is invited to take part in the fictional world, even if his interventions are framed and limited. At such moments of encounter, 'the performance replaces the museum object' (Casey, 'Staging Meaning' 10) in its entirety. Casey's typology highlights the evolution towards a disembodiment of the object: it moves from the auratic to the illustrative, and even fictional, and ends up being substituted by the visitor in the museum-performance.

The fictionalization of History reaches its zenith in docudramas. In the eyes of Isabelle Veyrat-Masson (cf. 113), the Franco-British docudrama *D-Day, leur jour le plus long* (2004) signals a clean break in the way in which History is dealt with on television. Fiction now outweighs fact. History production in docudramas is accompanied by the controlled treatment of facts, leaving little room for controversy or the complexity of events. Notably, docudramas can exploit the assertiveness of fiction, in which it is not necessary to substantiate a story, in order to present true facts. In addition to the questions this raises regarding the relationship with the truth, these docudramas are designed to arouse the viewer's emotions. Anne Wierviorka highlights the way in which the broadcasting of a witness account on television is presented as an intimate moment with the viewer, who enters into a sort of 'compassionate pact' (179) with the witness. Docudramas exploit subjectivity and emotion as much as possible, to the extent of superseding factual accuracy. To accomplish this, docudramas can call upon the world of popular Hollywood cinema. The *Holocaust* series illustrates this, whereas the *Léon Vivien* project shifts this mechanism to social networks.

2. The Great War as Media Object: The *Léon Vivien* Experience and the Hollywoodian Codes

Before analyzing the Léon Vivien Facebook page as such, let us study its 'promise'. In François Jost's terms (cf. 48): to what media genre (real, fictional or playful) do the producers relate it? In other words, is knowledge or entertainment through fiction and/or game promised? If the promise is a bit ambiguous, it has also evolved over time. The press release of 10 April 2013, which launched the experience, includes formulations that refer both to the categories of reality and fiction. The release insists on the 'patronage by a historian' and defines this experience as a 'formidable instrument of knowledge and collective memory'. Beyond the formulation, which

refers to the two registers of the real and the fictional, the ambiguity of the press release also lies in the expression 'genuine human story', which functions almost like an oxymoron as it refers to seemingly contradictory ideas, 'genuine' referring to the historical truth, and 'story' to the fictional conventions.

The last message written on the Facebook page (on 24 May 2013), which is written by the Museum (and no longer by Vivien), mentions more modest objectives, which focus on its emotional charge: 'This page had no other goal than making you feel and share, as closely as possible to the human, what the soldiers of 14 could have lived, as well as the relatives remained in the back. Your thousands of comments, coming straight from the heart, showed us that we succeeded' (Musée de la Grande Guerre de Meaux on Léon Vivien's Facebook page, my translation). Here, the issue is not about its function as learning device but more about a touching, immediate, and lived experience. As we can see, the promise made to the Internet user is plural, meandering between knowledge device, emotional experience, and fictional entertainment. The studies on docudramas and other hybrid forms often invalidate their historical significance, as Brian McConnell's opinion illustrates: 'Docudrama does not represent historic fact, or history, or journalism, but crusading entertainment with facts carefully tailored to sustain a neat storyline and to suit a particular social, political or religious point of view' (54). The Léon Vivien Facebook page is not concerned with these questions inasmuch as it proposes to follow the daily experience of a called-up primary teacher and does not offer any political treatment of the conflict. Its point of view is only human size, which makes for its uniqueness and pedagogical interest. The proceedings of the war are not mentioned, neither are the specifics of space and geographic locale: we do not know the name of his training camp, of the trenches where he fights, of the name of the villages the soldiers cross, etc. The action evolves in a space-time that is indeterminate, totally fictionalized. The web surfer does not get any temporal indications either. Vivien's posts are dated but these dates do not refer to dates of real events that happened during the war.

We can draw a parallel between the fictionalization of this infantryman and some scriptwriting techniques of popular movies, and it is noteworthy that the museum deploys most of the successful strategies identified by the famous consultant in scenarios Linda Seger in her book *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film* (cf. 52-55), which I will discuss in the following.

2.1   A Rising Dramatic Line, Leading to a Strong Climax

It is interesting to notice that the building of the story, which indeed aims at a dramatic climax, can be divided according to Aristotle's three acts theory, which Seger recognizes. Here, the division sticks with the necessary balance between the acts: the first one lasts three months and a half; it serves to introduce the context and then the beginnings of the conflicts from an external point of view, as Vivien has not been called up yet. The second act is the longest (five months and a half) as it primarily serves to recall the everyday life in the training camps and in the reserves, while the third act is the shortest one (one month and a half) and the most dramatically intense: Vivien bears witness to the horror of the battlefront by evoking many particularly violent events in great detail.

In his book *Aristotle in Hollywood*, Ari Hiltunen shows how most stories, whatever their geographical origin and the period when they appear, are structured around the mythic journey of a hero. Most stages of this journey are also visible in Léon Vivien's story. John Truby insists on the importance of the quality of the plot, which is different from the story. Its quality greatly depends on the ways information is hidden and revealed to the reader. Léon Vivien's plot obeys that principle and spreads some touches of mystery. Mystery is produced when some posts conceal some of the information they evoke, while at the same time making our mouth water. For example, Vivien evokes the 'frightening rumors in the streets" (20/08/1914) but does not tell us which ones. Suspense is constructed when some central and dangerous events are announced step by step, which leads the reader to anticipate future developments and to be scared for his hero. For example, Vivien notes that he is 'called up by the military doctor'; it is only the day after that he announces his mobilization, while he often posts several messages a day and could have stopped the suspense earlier. Suspense reaches a climax with his last message, 'they (The Germans) are comi...' which he cannot finish. His death will be announced the day after.

2.2   Sympathetic and Univocal Main Characters

Nine characters make up the network of relationships. They all fulfill one of the four character's functions identified by Seger. Léon Vivien, Jules Derème and Eugène Lignan mainly fulfill the 'storytelling function': these characters provide most information. Besides, their personalities are very much alike: all three adopt a dignified behavior, nuanced words, without any sputters.

On the contrary, the other male characters fulfill the 'talking about, revealing or embodying the theme' (Seger 124): less used as conveyors of information, their posts mainly consist of spontaneous, vivacious and not necessarily nuanced points of view. Most of their comments show their feeling of unfairness or anger with the monstrosity of the war, which is a much-developed topic in this Facebook experience. They also fulfill the 'adding color and texture function' (Seger 124): these spontaneous characters, which contrast with the other first three and are never at a loss of words, provide a certain emphasis to the discussions. The name Lulu L'Andouille, which could be roughly translated as Lulu the numbskull is a first sign of it. His wife Madeleine Vivien fulfills two functions: the 'helping to reveal the main character function' (Seger 125): as a confidante who, through their signs of love, reveals a more intimate side of Léon. As she comments the war from an external point of view, she also participates in developing the theme of the horrors of the war and thus also fulfills the second function. The fictionalization is furthermore created via a process of simplification and lack of development of the characters as they seem deprived of any ambiguity and do not change their point of view in the course of the story. Only Léon Vivien is subjected to transformation: while the beginnings of the story highlight his patriotism, his posts in the third act demonstrate a more bitter point of view. The Léon Vivien experience is centered on the human before the soldier.

2.3   The Human before the Soldier

This humanization of the war comes true through three major strategies. Firstly, many posts evoke the details of the soldiers' daily experience, outside of military operations, or pick up personal anecdotes or precious and moving moments: he shows the picture of a human pyramid (14/12/14), the toilets (11/04/15), a picture of his baby (2/05/15), etc. Secondly, many posts mention the physical sensations felt by the soldiers, whose body is put through the mill. Descriptions in details of the sensations felt by the five senses offer a particularly precise sight of the ordeal endured by the soldiers: the bag which wrecks the back after a walking day (13/04/15), the corpses everywhere and the 'mud, even colder than the inert bodies' (22/04/15), etc. Thirdly, a tension between the common and the dreadful is developed. About twenty messages alternate between telling of the horror of the war and the daily life of the civilians or of the soldiers. For example, on 22 October 1914, Vivien announces that Madeleine is pregnant. His subsequent message indicates he is called up by the military doctor. Two crucial posts succeed each other,

and, by doing so, associate the private and military registers. This highlights even more its intensity; indeed, joy quickly gives way to fear.

We have already seen how some messages include a sensational dimension or a strong emotional charge, furthered by the tension between the common and the dreadful. The Facebook user is really invited to thrill with the character. Significantly, the post that was the most 'liked' (nearly 3,000 likes) is the one of their newborn's picture. The family also received many messages of congratulations. Other posts make use of the sensation strategy, mixed with emotion, by providing in details crude information: the story of a sergeant who tries to hold his entrails (19/14/15), of a foot snatched by a shrapnel (20/04/15), of a meal made of cat (11/05/15), of a soldier stabbed from end to end (15/05/15). The reader sensitivity is then severely tested.

The structure and the elements of the story as well as the strategies implemented to evoke the soldier's humanity as closely as possible obey the fundamentals of fiction, according to which the story must invite the reader to live a genuine experience. For Truby, 'good storytelling doesn't just tell audiences what happened in life. It gives them the experience of that life. It is the essential life, just the crucial thoughts and events, but it is conveyed with such freshness and newness that it feels part of the audience's essential life too' (6). Facebook is a great device for creating such freshness and liveliness.

3   Visualizing Leon Vivien's War

According to Seger (cf. 54), a story needs to be told visually. A real work on images has been produced for this Facebook operation. Generally, the docudrama's hybridity lies in its articulation between real events and their audiovisual re-creation. Steven Lipkin highlights how the docudrama implies a specific suspension of disbelief from the spectators: 'We are asked to accept that in this case, re-creation, is a necessary mode of presentation' (68).

In Léon Vivien's case, the aim of authenticity is not mainly produced by that re-creation of events. The impression of truth is above all based on the plentiful use of the Museum's rich collection of visual documents. Around a hundred images have been integrated into the story. These are authentic documents that have been fictionalized. The story is thus not based on real facts, but on documents that were integrated and adapted

to the story. At least five methods were used to that purpose. Firstly, the creators of Léon's Facebook page have customized blank documents. This method has been deployed twice by integrating the names of the characters and the dates in the blank spaces in these documents. For example, we can see Léon Vivien's personal call under the flag (4/11/14) and Eugène Lignan's 'war godmother' certificate (11/05/15). If the first document is easily understandable for the reader, the second one, less known, might remain unclear and ambiguous as it is not explained that war godmothers were soldiers' pen pals. We see to what extent the integration of documents does not primarily aim at providing explanations about the war but rather serve as a support for the fiction. Indeed, the comment that goes along with this document only refers to the fictional elements. Secondly, some objects have been contextualized through the use of photographs. A dozen pictures show a modification of the relation to the object: the original picture, which comprises a neutral frame and show the object as element of the Museum's collection, has been modified in order to include the narrative context. Vivien's comments emphasize this fictionalization. The object's value is no longer intrinsic but depends on its possible integration to the fiction. For example, the infantryman's backpack has been personalized for Vivien. It is now photographed in his bedroom. Some objects are photographed in the soldier's hands (an amulet on 27/04/15, a knife on 21/05/15). From a 'neutral' point of view, the audience moves to a subject-centered one, impregnated with the soldier-photographer's sight, who lives with these objects. Thirdly, some pictures' caption and context have been removed. Nearly ten pictures initially include a caption or a context that have been erased for their use in posts. These original frames are replaced by Vivien's comments, which situate them in the fictional space-time, as for the wake up in the bedroom (10/11/14), etc. These comments sometimes mention instants of life that happened before the picture, or will happen after it: the bedroom's picture would have been taken after a training session, etc. The image's production of a snapshot is integrated into a longer temporality. Fourthly, the portraits used for the profile pictures on Facebook have been drawn on purpose, in order to avoid any regrettable confusion between the character and a person that really existed. The characters' faces have been added to some authentic documents, like on the picture of Léon with Eugène (9/12/14), etc. And finally, some documents have been modified in order to 'stick' more with the story. One picture that is quite known has been modified so that it is no longer identifiable and not awkwardly positioned within the story. A half a dozen pictures have been deeply modified: the faces

and/or the frame have been changed; some elements have been added or suppressed. Some establishing shots have been altered (13 and 14 April 1915, 12/05/15). Apart from an adaptation to the story, these manipulations could also aim to create some visual effect by highlighting some elements of the document. These five techniques show how the goal consists in making the images talk in the fiction, making their content alive and human. Far from a political treatment of the war, this use invites us to follow day-by-day 'slices of life' which are more *likely* than true. They are more like 'symbolizations' than representations, according to Trouche (200, my translation).

This important use of images raises several questions. In his analysis of the documentary series *Apocalypse*, broadcast on a French channel in 2009, Robert Belot denounces the omission of the sources, which tends to de-realize the event by transforming it into fiction (cf. 172). Such as reproach cannot be made against the Leon Vivien experience, as it is presented as fiction, and thus precisely de-realizes the documents in use. But, as we have seen, the promise refers both to the authentic and the fictional categories. The producers do not mention the methods of construction of the fiction at any time. Without any interpretative frame, the power of truth inherent to images tends to give a status of authenticity to the Facebook page – authenticity that it does not claim but does not refute either. Niney reminds us of André Bazin's famous warning: 'The spectator has the illusion he observes a visual demonstration while in reality it is a succession of equivocal facts which hold together only thanks to the cement that goes along with them' (112, my translation).

The absence of information about the treatment of the documents provokes a real risk of interpretative misunderstandings concerning the value of images as traces of real events. Some comments written by followers give the impression that they sometimes forget the fictional treatment of the documents and approach them as a proof of reality. Here, the mediation typical of the 'interpretative museum type' (Casey) is not really visible. Consequently, in order to become a real pedagogical device, the Léon Vivien experience should go along with a reflection on the production and on the modes of diffusion of historical knowledge, and in particular on the complexity of images and their use as trace; it is necessary to show how it is a question of a deliberately constructed reality. In those years when education curriculums focus on critical analysis of historical sources, this Facebook experience as well as its analysis in class will become unique and exciting pedagogical activities.

4.   The Connectivity Paradigm, or how Facebook is Building Contemporary Online Sociability

In the analysis of the Léon Vivien story, we have observed the way in which the mobilization of Hollywood cinematographic codes contributes to familiarizing internet users with the Great War, by avoiding contradictory or less politically correct opinions and instead focusing on an emotional approach to an infantryman's life. Now we shall also see how Facebook, as the media support for this tale, contributes to rendering the historical treatment of the 1914–18 War more popular. We know that all testimonies constitute an undeniably social construct, consistently subjective and conditioned, in particular by the ideologies of the era to which they belong as well as the chosen distribution channel. Let us therefore briefly consider the way in which Facebook operates, as the foremost support for sociability and content sharing at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

According to Van Dijck, the initial 'participatory culture' of Facebook has been transformed into a 'culture of connectivity' (4–5); the initial utopian social design has been overtaken by automated technologies that strongly influence social practices on Facebook, which raises questions regarding the molding of cultural practices: with a 'shift from user-centered connectedness to owner-centered connectivity [...] do social media platforms stimulate active participation and civic engagement, or has collectivity become a synonym for automated collectivity?' (54)

What remains of the utopian ambition of the first few years? In Fabien Benoît's opinion, Facebook still conforms to an online 'Bisouland' (47), which we can translate as 'Kissland', populated with 'Care Bear' users. Sharing, friending and liking are not innocuous powerful ideological concepts: relativism rules while conflict and contradiction have no place on Facebook. Above and beyond the endogamy this creates—we become friends with people who are like us—and the social fragmentation this maintains—the most privileged social classes are the ones who most benefit from the network, particularly from a professional standpoint—the way in which Facebook functions prioritizes the sharing of emotions rather than a rational approach to the world with its complexities and differences. The simple fact of being able to *like* nearly everything, while a *dislike* function does not exist, stands as witness to this.

It is worth noting that the forms of sociability Facebook prioritizes can also be found in followers' comments. After each message from Léon or another character, many messages (and sometimes hundreds) were posted. However, the characters never replied to followers' messages. In
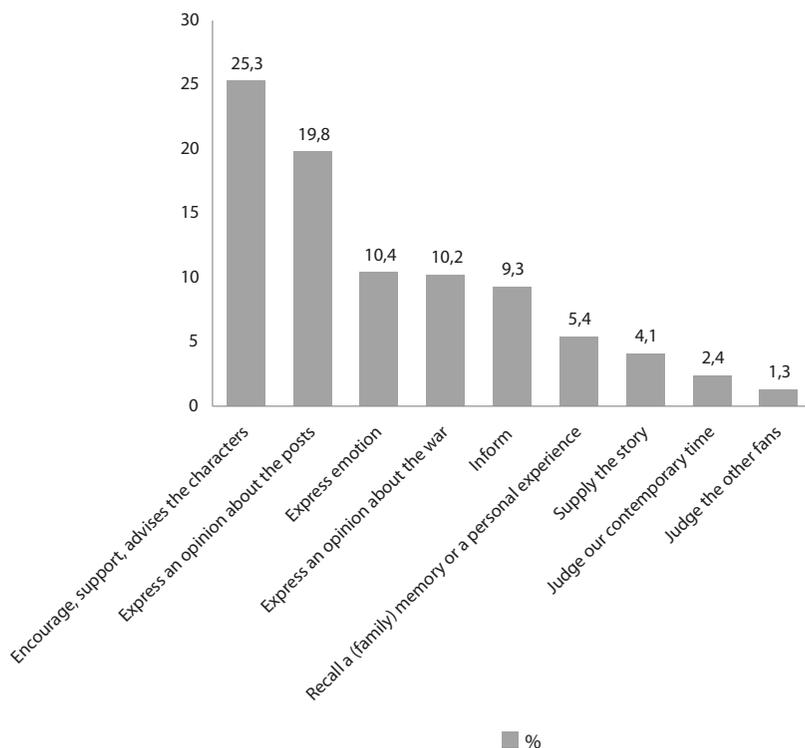
Figure 1: Types of comments written by Léon Vivien's fans, who follow this character's adventures on his Facebook Page

our examination of the 6,669 written messages, we identified the following practices, drawn from the 'affinity space' (Gee) surrounding Léon Vivien and the Great War, which confirm the hypothesis of a 'Kissland' conducive to emotion. First, it is observed that 58.2% of the comments show their author's adhesion to the fiction: the majority of the fans followed Vivien's story respecting his timeline, as any other Facebook friend's page. In 36.7% of the comments, the fans approach his story from a past stance. Very few comments explicitly indicate doubts about Vivien's truthfulness (only 0.1%). 40.9% of the messages are 'narrative' (based on experiences, beliefs, doubts and emotions), while 54.2% are non-narrative (based on natural (physical) reality, truth, observation, analysis, proof and rationality). Noticeably, the page did not primarily stimulate exchanges of information: only 9.3% of the comments can be classified in this category. Facebook's social mechanisms also characterize Vivien's affinity space (see fig. 1 below): like other

Facebook pages, it mainly appears as a conveyor for social interactions: his fans first used it to express an empathetic relationship with the characters (25.3% of the comments), by encouraging, supporting or advising them. Léon Vivien's fans also wrote comments to give their opinion about Léon's posts (19.8%), about the war in general (10.2%) or, more rarely, about our present time (2.4%). The sharing of emotions was also a common reason for writing a comment (10.4%).

As we have seen through the analysis of the Léon Vivien story as well as of the comments left by his fans, this unique way of presenting the Great War jostles the relations between the paradigms of high culture and popular culture in particular. Via a knowing blend of historical fact and fiction, the Vivien tale prioritized emotion and united fans in an *empathic experience* of the war. In doing so, the creators of this experience on Facebook somewhat pay homage to the soldiers' subjectivity. To some extent, they transpose the principles of the *New History* to this docufiction: 'creating an empathy with the past is surely at least as, if not more important, than any flawed attempt to resurrect the past under the belief that it comes back to us as it really was' (Munslow 147).

Note

1.   Léon Vivien's messages were only written in French. In this chapter, his messages in English are my personal translations.

Works Cited

Bazin, André. *Qu'est-ce que le Cinéma? Ontologie et Langage*. Paris: Cerf, 1975. Print.

Belot, Robert. '*Apocalypse*, un Documentaire sur la Seconde Guerre Mondiale.' *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'Histoire* 107 (2010): 171–75. Print.

Benoît, Fabien. *Facebook*. Paris: Usbek et Rica, 2013. Print.

Bouko, Catherine. 'Affinity Spaces on Facebook. A Quantitative Discourse Analysis Towards Intercultural Dialogue.' *MILID Yearbook 2014. Global Citizenship in a Digital World*. Ed. Sherri Hope Culver and Paulette Kerr. Göteborg: Nordicom, 2014. 107–20. Print.

Casey, Valerie. 'Staging Meaning: Performance in the Modern Museum.' *TDR* 49.3 (2003): 78–95. Print.

—. 'The Museum Effect: Gazing from Object to Performance in the Contemporary Cultural-History Museum.' Ecole du Louvre, Paris. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

DDB Paris. 'Press Release for the Launch of Léon Vivien's Facebook Page.' Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Gee, James Paul. 'Semiotic Social Spaces and Affinity Spaces. From the Age of Mythology to Today's Schools.' *Beyond Communities of Practice: Language Power and Social Context*. Ed. David Barton and Karin Tusting. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 214–32. Print.

Hiltunen, Ari. *Aristotle in Hollywood*. Bristol: Intellect Books, 2002. Print.

Jost, François. *Comprendre la Télévision et ses Programmes*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2009. Print.

Lipkin, Steven N. 'Real Emotional Logic: Persuasive Strategies in Docudrama.' *Cinema Journal* 38.4 (1999): 68–85. Print.

Maigret, Eric, and Eric Macé, eds. *Penser les médiacultures: Nouvelles pratiques et Nouvelles Approches de la Représentation du Monde*. Paris: Colin, 2005. Print

McConnell, Brian. 'Errors, Omissions and TV Docudrama.' *British Journalism Review* 11.54 (2000): 54–59. Print.

Munslow, Alun. *The New History*. London: Routledge, 2003. Print.

Niney, François. *Le Documentaire et ses Faux-Semblants*. Paris: Klincksieck, 2009. Print.

Seger, Linda. *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*. New York: H. Holt and Co., 1992. Print.

Sherman, Daniel, and Irit Rogoff. *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Trofanenko, Brenda. 'Interrupting the Gaze: on Reconsidering Authority in the Museum.' *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 38.1 (2006): 49–65. Print.

Trouche, Dominique. *Les Mises en Scène de l'Histoire*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010. Print.

Truby, John. *The Anatomy of the Story*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2007. Print.

Van Dijck, José. *The Culture of Connectivity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. Print.

Vergo, Peter, ed. *The New Museology*. London: Reaktion Books, 2011. Print.

Veyrat-Masson, Isabelle. *Télévision et Histoire, la Confusion des Genres: Docudramas, Docufictions et Fictions du Réel*. Bruxelles: De Boeck, 2008. Print.

Wieviorka, Annette. *L'Ere du témoin*. Paris: Plon, 1998. Print.

Unpopular American Natural Calamities and the Selectivity of Disaster Memory

Susanne Leikam

> Why are images [of destruction] ubiquitous? What makes disaster so fascinating, so thrilling, so involving? […] Who, exactly, needs disaster? In one sense everybody, or nearly everybody. The culture of calamity reveals a general psychological addiction to images and stories of disaster in our society, though this varies in significant ways across registers of class, gender, and race. There is also a decisive structural or ideological component to the American dependency on disasters.
> —Kevin Rozario, Introduction to *The Culture of Calamity: Disaster and the Making of Modern America* (2)

Introduction

When it comes to the nineteenth-century United States, Kevin Rozario's reflections on the 'American dependency on disasters' (2) and the 'intrinsically fascinating' nature of spectacles of calamity (5) in his seminal *The Culture of Calamity: Disaster and the Making of Modern America* (2007) seem to apply without restrictions. Calamities such as the Great San Francisco Earthquake of 1868, the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, Charleston's Great Earthquake of 1886, the Johnstown Flood of 1889, Galveston's Storm of 1900, and many more disasters from all around the world—whether in the form of embellished eyewitness reports, instant histories, literary adaptations or as dramatic stereograph views, photo series, and sentimental postcards—constituted an integral part of contemporary American cultures.[1] In spite of being often derided as frivolous entertainment, these frequently mass-produced and commercial items showed an immense popularity and a high circulation all through the nation and beyond.

This enthrallment with natural disasters[2] was not limited to the sensationalist 'low-brow' approaches but also extended to more rational philosophical or scientific 'high' culture treatments of calamities: newly

established branches of the natural sciences such as meteorology, pyrology, or geology (here especially the supporters of catastrophism) avidly conducted studies on these calamities to better understand the partly still mysterious natural phenomena; civil engineers, architects, and city planners were equally interested in the calamities for the purpose of constructing safe cities; and philosophers and theologians grappled with moral and ethical explanations of disasters and their implications for the nineteenth-century United States (cf. Cahan 3–13; Oldroyd 88–128; Tobriner 3–104). Yet, there was another category of calamities that was on the whole excluded from the popular disaster culture, nor was it generally a part of 'high' culture engagements with disasters.

Following Martin Lüthe and Sascha Pöhlmann's conceptualization of the unpopular as a third term 'that breaks open the dichotomy of high and pop culture, denoting that which is not part of a (perceived) mainstream mass culture but not part of a bourgeois high culture either' (18), these calamities can be described as 'unpopular'. This does not mean that they *always* remained culturally unproductive in both categories. Rather, it means that despite having had all the prototypical elements that made (natural) disasters 'intrinsically fascinating' (Rozario 5), i.e. a considerable amount of damage to human life and property as well as bizarre, sudden, and at the time mostly inexplicable natural spectacles, they were for a longer time period neither evidently popular in 'high' nor in 'low' disaster cultures. Unpopularity thus does not only pertain to the immediate reaction to the disaster but also involves the processes of its memorialization.

Cultural memory, which arises out of the 'production of inclusion and exclusion' (Hebel x) of historical events and which is consequently inextricably tied to forgetting, needs to be understood, according to Udo J. Hebel, as 'the place and process where past and present interact in instances of individual and communal self-positioning and definition' (x).[3] In this manner, an exploration of cultural (disaster) memory reveals crucial insights into the cultural, political, and economic concerns that necessarily have to be involved in a particular disaster in order for it to become a productive part of public discourses and to be visible in 'high' and 'low' cultural spheres. In the following, this chapter analyzes two particular case studies of natural catastrophes that were not (or only much later) taken up into the 'canon of great nineteenth-century American natural disasters'[4] in order to illustrate that the unpopularity of natural calamities is not an inherent condition or arises arbitrarily. Rather, I argue, it is the result of economic, cultural, and political endeavors struggling for hegemony in American

cultures and as such also often directly related to the popularity of other historical moments.

The nineteenth century constitutes an apt point of departure for a study of the cultural memory of natural disasters in the United States for several reasons. First, the growth of the cities, the rising population density, and the increasingly vertical extension of urban space exacerbated the number of fatalities and also resulted in costlier and also more eye-catching damages, which put these catastrophes even more prominently on the map of nineteenth-century America. Besides, the burgeoning print culture and the progress in publication technologies enabled a cost-efficient and fast dissemination of (illustrated) disaster news all through the nation and allowed for the publication of so-called instant disaster histories within few weeks after the calamities. Particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century, the illustrated magazines *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (1855) and *Harper's Weekly* (1857) as well as the self-pronounced 'Printmakers to the American People' Currier & Ives satisfied their readers' craving for images of disasters (cf. Casper 40–69; Gessner; Peters).

Moreover, the nineteenth century was also the time of the professionalization and institutionalization of the sciences, which, together with the refinement of empirical research technologies, enabled the establishment of specialized research disciplines concentrating on the study of very particular phenomena such as meteorology and seismology. As a result, major natural calamities were not only well-documented but also prolifically discussed in terms of their geophysical causation and with regard to their prevention (cf., e.g., Kutzbach; Oldroyd 88–128). Despite the strong influence of Enlightenment ideas, theological and philosophical explanations of these disastrous events, equally aiming to make sense of them, continued to produce similarly powerful debates in 'high' culture for most of the century. Ultimately, departing from the nineteenth century makes it possible to trace changes in the 'unpopularity' of natural disasters over the course of several decades to scrutinize how their status changes over time.

The New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811/12

The first case study explores the so-called New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811/12, which comprised over 3,000 distinct seismic shocks over a period of five months starting in December 1811. They would be referred to regionally as well as (trans)nationally as the *'Earthquake America Forgot'* (Steward and Knox) and as a natural calamity 'gradually and inexorably forgotten,

the memory […] dormant for over a century' (Valencius 11). With estimated magnitudes of up to 7.7, these tremors constitute the 'largest outburst of seismic energy in American history' (Steward and Knox 15). The three strongest shocks alone, according to the United States Geological Survey, rank among the greatest earthquakes ever to occur in the contiguous United States.[5] The epicenter of most tremors, and thus also the most devastating damage, was situated near the small town of New Madrid, which was located in the very south of the Missouri Territory right at the Mississippi River. Yet, the earthquakes must have been felt with varying intensity from Canada to New Orleans and from New England to the prairies in the West. At the time of the earthquakes, New Madrid had been an aspiring new 'gateway to the West' (Zeilinga de Boer and Sanders 126) and an up-and-coming central trade node in the Mississippi River traffic, but it was completely destroyed through the seismic shocks and therefore (temporarily) abandoned (cf. Rozario 57–63; Valencius 14–107; Zeilinga de Boer and Sanders 108–28).

At the time, there was no central authority to record the number of fatalities in the United States and the adjacent territories, which is why the figures can only be estimated. According to recent reassessments, the number is in the range of about 1,000 (cf. Steward and Knox 240). The continual earthquakes also caused substantial changes of the visible landscape spreading about 600,000 square kilometers around the epicenter (U.S. Geological Survey): seismic phenomena included the liquefaction of landmasses, causing entire settlements to slide into the river or be eroded by the strong currents, the sinking of many boats in the agitated river waves, spectacular sand blows, and the appearance of deep seismic cracks in the ground. Raised fault blocks further functioned as dams, famously reversing the flow of the Mississippi River for several weeks (cf. Fuller; Penick; Rozario 57–63; Zeilinga de Boer and Sanders 108–28).

In the early 1810s, the earthquakes constituted an immensely 'popular' subject matter for the numerous Native American tribes as well as for the European-American settlers in the region and they proved productive in, among others, news articles, religious as well as spiritual interpretations, and life-writing documents such as letters or eye-witness reports. Earlier in 1811, a solar eclipse and the appearance of a comet in the night sky—both at the time not commonly understood as regular occurrences—had already heated up the mood for widespread speculations about the nature of these 'mysterious' signs. When the earthquakes not only triggered a foul smell through the release of hydrogen sulphide from subterranean enclosures but later also a partial darkening of the sky due to dust dispersed in the rural

hinterland, these phenomena were taken as a continuation of spiritual and religious omens (cf. Zeilinga de Boer and Sanders 120–35).

The European-American settlers in the nearby Mississippi and Missouri regions interpreted the seismic tremors predominantly in a religious framework. Since the puzzling changes of the landscape occurred in the emotional atmosphere of the Second Great Awakening, the repeated shakings of the earth—some of them experienced during the actual open-air camp meetings—were interpreted as demonstrations of God's power, as calls to repentance, and also as warnings to return to a pious lifestyle. This resulted in the conversion of several thousand in the area to Evangelical faith and brought members to the local Baptist and Methodist congregations especially (cf. Kanon; Rozario 57–63; Valencius 145–74). The pervasiveness of religious interpretations of the tremors can also be seen in the institutional reaction. Asking for financial help from the United States, the Territorial Assembly of Missouri, for example, referred to the earthquakes—in a rather Puritan elocution—as one among the 'Catalogue of miseries and afflictions, with which it has pleased the Supreme being of the Universe, to visit the Inhabitants of this earth' (Clark).

The numerous native communities of the Mississippi Valley and the New Madrid hinterland similarly interpreted the earthquakes primarily as spiritual signs. Most prominently and most forcefully, the Shawnee leaders Tecumseh and Tenskawatawa rhetorically framed the earth's movement as an expression of the Great Spirit indicating the need to found an 'Indian league' to restore a bygone Indian world and counter European American influences in the West. At a time when the tribes had increasingly abandoned their traditional ways of life and when territorial conflicts with white settlers were a quotidian occurrence, the spiritual revival went together with calls to reunite and resist the encroachment of European-American settlers. The earthquakes, as Conevery Valencius states, hence 'added pressure on top of population disparities, overhunted environments, asymmetrical military force, and a tragically uneven burden of disease, forces pushing Indians out of lands that Americans wanted' (59). The native movements among the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Delaware, Muscogee (Creek), Miami, Shawnee, and several other local tribes sparked by theses spiritual interpretations did not only foster political and cultural federations but also resulted in violent conflicts and war about territory in the West and would ultimately culminate in the Trail of Tears. The New Madrid Earthquakes were thus present and visible in the tribal communities in the months and years after the strong temblors and assumed a crucial role in the foundation of strategic alliances (cf. Valencius 106–44).

In spite of this immense 'popularity' in the direct aftermath among both the European-American communities and the Native American tribes, people in the Mississippi and Missouri regions slowly grew acquainted to the numerous aftershocks that continued for several years, and the shaking ground lost its horror. This meant, as a local history noted, that those living close to the New Madrid seismic zone 'paid little or no regard to [the earthquakes], not even interrupting or checking their dances, frolics, and vices' (qtd. in Valencius 218; cf. also Zeilinga de Boer and Sanders 111). As a result, a considerable part of the religious converts—at the time rather disparagingly termed 'Earth-Quake Christians' (Penick qtd. in Rozario 57)—fell away from their faith and left the church communities again. Over the years, the accounts of the earthquake in the region increasingly turned into humorously exaggerated stories such as folk hero David Crockett's *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee: Written by Himself* (1834). In this manner, the seismic temblors of 1811/12 'became just another part of the tradition of [the embellished] American frontier tall tales' (Valencius 6), further effecting the events to lose their status as 'historical past' and moving them closer to the realm of legend and folk mythology.

These processes of forgetting on the regional level intensified with the influx of newcomers to the region and finally grew to such an extent that in the regions surrounding New Madrid 'the great earthquakes of 1811–12 were virtually forgotten for several generations' (Steward and Knox 4). This also meant that no measures were undertaken to prepare for the reoccurrence of seismic upheaval in the region well into the 1960s. While the New Madrid calamity was thus very present in the local disaster memory in the immediate aftermath, it soon began to fade into oblivion with new incomers that moved to the region and a business community seeking to minimize the dangers and the risks of their promoted settlements, among others. In this context, the drainage of the sunken lands, industrial agriculture, and the building of railroads partly removed the visible traces of the earthquakes from the land (cf. Valencius 235–49). Besides, American settlers were 'eager to erase Native knowledge and claims' (Valencius 205) to the land and hence disavowed Indian accounts of the earthquakes. When the New Madrid Historical Museum opened in 1974, it did not contain any information or documents on the earthquakes and, according to Steward and Knox, most local historians—as well as other residents—were not even aware of this episode in the city's history (cf. 2–3).

Despite the spectacular natural phenomena, the considerable number of fatalities, and the widespread damage, the New Madrid Earthquakes did not

constitute immensely 'popular' subjects beyond the New Madrid seismic zone. The War of 1812 and the conflicts building up to it dominated the national news to a large extent, yet the lack of national exposure is nevertheless surprising: on the one hand, the sensational press had already started their triumphal procession into American homes (cf. Bulla and Sachsman), and, on the other hand, seismological research and other 'high-brow' approaches were avidly engaged in the empirical study of numerous other natural phenomena and technological disasters at the time. For example, the Richmond Theater Fire in Virginia, which killed close to 100 people in December 1811, 'excited very much interest and feeling throughout the United States' (Kingston 3) and, as Meredith Henne Baker demonstrates in her seminal study of this event, emerged as a much sought-after topic in broadsides, press coverage, illustrations, and book publications, which circulated the entire nation for quite some time. Local newspapers did report on the New Madrid shakes as well as on the unfamiliar natural phenomena and published eyewitness accounts, but the 1811/12 earthquakes did not achieve the same popularity in national news or nationwide circulating broadsides or instant histories.[6] As a consequence, they were soon largely missing from the popular disaster memory until the end of the twentieth century.

There was only one major exception to this 'unpopularity' in national disaster discourse and it occurred in a very specific genre: starting from the middle of the nineteenth century and continuing well into the 1870s, publications started assessing the first decades of the history of the United States, creating a *Popular Descriptive Portraiture of* [...] *Great and Memorable Events* (Devens). With telling titles such as *Historical Collections of the Great West* (1854) or *Our First Century* (1876), these books performed cultural nationalism and sought to establish a collective past of the United States. As they had done in the regional frontier tall tales, the 1811/12 New Madrid Earthquakes signified the frontier setting and character traits in these publications. Anecdotes of the earthquakes accordingly highlighted the rough environment of the frontier and perpetuated the resilience of the 'pioneers' as a constitutive element of the 'American' character.

As mentioned above, the unpopularity of the New Madrid Earthquakes on a national level also included supposed 'high'-culture approaches, for example, in the natural sciences. This was rather unusual for the time: after the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755, the antipode to all unpopular disasters, the Marquis of Pombal Carvalho had sent out questionnaires to gain widespread observations about seismic phenomena, and France inquired about detailed on-site sketches of the damage to buildings from

the Portuguese government for the same reason (cf. Fonseca 95–123; Kozák and Čermák 133–34). The 1783 Earthquake of Calabria, Italy, incited an equal empirical interest in the scientific community, which is why the Neapolitan Royal Academy of Sciences sent a 'scientific expedition' (Keller 151) of surveyors and artists into the cities as well as into the rural backcountry in order to record the natural phenomena as systematically as possible. While so-called naturalists, private people with an interest in their environment, discussed the seismic phenomena in letters and articles, there were no institutionalized efforts to unravel the workings of the 1811/12 New Madrid Earthquakes. Not even eminent English geologist Charles Lyell's expedition into the region in 1846 changed this situation noticeably.

Over the years, the credibility of the reports of the New Madrid Earthquakes was thus disputed and at times even denied in scientific circles. In 1883, geologist James MacFarlane gave a 'celebrated paper' (Steward and Knox 8) at a conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science titled 'The Earthquake at New Madrid, Missouri, in 1811—Probably Not an Earthquake', in which he claimed that the earthquakes had in fact been mere landslides. While MacFarlane's proposition was refuted later, it nourished the legendary character of the New Madrid shakes and fostered their unpopularity (cf. Steward and Knox 8–11; Valencius 219). As a result, the first scientific study of the 1811/12 New Madrid Earthquakes was only conducted a century after the actual events, when Myron Fuller from the United States Geological Survey systematically recorded the visible alterations to the regional geology in 1911. Yet, in the decades to come, seismology concentrated mostly on the costal plate boundaries of the American East and West coast, which is why the mid-American earthquake region did not yet come into focus in the scientific community.

It was only in the 1970s that concerns about seismic risks and possible interferences of nuclear power with such hazards led the U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission to undertake large-scale multidisciplinary studies in the region, which involved a multitude of federal agencies and educational institutions. These studies exposed seismic activity and reactivated faults in the New Madrid seismic zone and propelled the 1811/12 earthquakes (back) into the consciousness of many Americans, albeit mostly in scientific contexts (cf. Russ and Crone iii–iv). Those people who did not learn about the scientific recovery found out about the New Madrid calamity at the latest when in October 1989 climatologist Iben Browning predicted a catastrophic repetition of the New Madrid Earthquakes for December 1990. While his forecast (luckily) proved wrong, the evocation of the risk of a recurrence of earthquakes along

the New Madrid seismic zone brought the New Madrid tremors abruptly back into consciousness and helped anchor them in the national disaster memory of both 'high' culture and popular culture alike (Zeilinga de Boer and Sanders 136–38). Last but not least, the much-publicized commemoration of the earthquakes' bicentennial, including conferences, public events, and information brochures by the U.S. Geological Survey certainly also helped strengthen this development.

The Peshtigo Fire of 1871

A second strikingly unpopular natural disaster, the Peshtigo Fire of 1871, occurred six decades after the New Madrid Earthquakes in the rural regions northeast of Lake Michigan. It annihilated an area of 2,400 square miles/1.5 million acres of forest terrain and therein destroyed several small towns such as, e.g., Peshtigo, Menekaune, and Williamsonville as well as numerous farming communities. With a death toll of up to 2,400 people and an estimated damage of 200 million U.S. dollars (cf. Haygood 12), this firestorm constitutes the 'deadliest' (Gess and Lutz; cf. also Pyne 7) and 'most destructive fire in American history' (Riney-Kehrberg 125) to this day. Despite the firestorm's destructive and spectacular nature, it did not achieve the popularity other nineteenth-century fires enjoyed in the public imagination and is 'perhaps the least known of all major natural disasters in the United States' (Riney-Kehrberg 126). This is even more astounding when taking into consideration that by then communication and media technologies had further pervaded the nation and progressed in quality, reach, speed, and possibilities (cf. Bulla and Sachsman; Darrah). Inter alia, it was the concurrent conflagration in Chicago—taking place on the exact same day—that reverberated strongly with the changes of modernization in the nineteenth-century United States and thus drew attention away from the Peshtigo region. Due to its exclusion from the popular disaster memory, the Peshtigo blaze has been nicknamed 'America's "forgotten fire"' (Pyne 7; cf. also Jones).

On 8 October 1871, a warm front moved north from the Gulf coast and collided with a cold front from Canada traveling south. This storm cell interacted with already ignited bushfires and turned them into a firestorm, sweeping through northeastern Wisconsin and northern Michigan and scorching a territory of the size of Delaware. With estimated wind speeds of 110 miles per hour, a heat of at least 2,000 degree Fahrenheit/~1,000 degree Celsius, and rapid shifts in direction, extensive walls of flames razed roughly 2,400 square miles of mostly forested land to the ground (cf. Gess and Lutz

101–02, 124; Riney-Kehrberg 126). As a consequence, several farms and parts of settlements were completely enclosed by flames from all sides, which accounts for the relatively high count of fatalities.

Causes for the unimpeded and rapid spread of the flames were multi-layered: first off, the local towns Peshtigo, Marinette, and Menominee sprouted rapidly growing lumber industries at the time, which thrived on the increasing urbanization and urban sprawl of the nineteenth century. With its dense maple forests and the close proximity to a river, especially Peshtigo occupied a strategic location and attracted numerous investors such as Chicago's Mayor William Ogden (cf. Gess and Lutz 18–24). Yet, due to the speedy processing of the trees, the roads and fields were littered with heaps of leaves, twigs, bark, and other harvest residue. On top of this, as fire historian Stephen J. Pyne illustrates, several other factors prepared the way for an area-wide firestorm:

> What we call the 'Peshtigo Fire' is a code name for a vast landscape burning. [...] A prolonged drought, a rural agriculture based on burning, railroads that cast sparks to all sides, a landscape stuffed with slash and debris from logging, a city built largely of forest materials, the catalytic passage of a dry cold front—all ensured that fires would break out, that some would become monumental, that flames would swallow wooden villages and metropolitan blocks with equal aplomb. (7)

Furthermore, the lack of functioning telegraph lines and other means of communication prohibited the calling in of outside help. Insufficient fire precaution, combustible gas build-ups in the lower atmosphere, and the erroneous belief that fire would eventually produce rain further aggravated the situation. Up to this day, the starting point of the firestorm has not yet been identified. What is clear, however, is the fact that already weeks before the massive conflagration numerous wildfires and man-made blazes—started either to clear the way for the railroads or to clear land—had gotten out of hand. Simmering for days, these lines of fire had built the base for the destructive firestorm to come (cf. Gess and Lutz 13–98; Riney-Kehrberg 125–26; Sawislak).

Just as the New Madrid Earthquakes, the Peshtigo Fire had everything that seemed necessary to feature prominently in public disaster memory: spectacular natural phenomena such as fire tornados and spontaneous combustion, dramatic eyewitness reports, close escapes, and tragic deaths. Since the wind speed was too fast to outrun it and the strong gusts of air carried the flames even over clearings, ditches, and plowed fields, bodies

of water were the only (more or less) safe ground. Accordingly, most of the people who survived either hunkered down with water up to their necks for hours in the cold Peshtigo River or hid in wells, where many nevertheless suffocated when the fire consumed the oxygen. Due to the immense human losses (which in some towns reduced the population by half or more) and the great destruction of property, the Peshtigo Fire was highly visible in contemporaneous life-writing documents such as Reverend Peter Pernin's eyewitness account and newspaper articles and it constituted a (sad) landmark in the local communities in the northeastern regions of Lake Michigan at the time. This also applied for 'high'-culture approaches such as scientific studies. Two weeks after the fire (when most reports were still thought to be highly exaggerated), a local committee investigated the genesis, course, and extent of the fire—without, however, being able to fully understand the at the time unknown physics behind the firestorm (cf. Gess and Lutz 165–67). Whereas religious reactions to and explanations of the earthquakes had featured large in 1811/12, these were not among the dominant reactions to natural disasters in the second half of the nineteenth century anymore (cf. Steinberg 4).

With the flight from the damaged rural farming areas in the long-aftermath of the conflagration, the arrival of new settlers in Wisconsin and Michigan, and the gradual loss of eyewitnesses to the firestorm over the course of time, the events seemed to have lost their immediate importance and, as in the case of many other historical American fires (such as the Baltimore Fire of 1904), began to fade in the cultural memory of the residents in the region in the first decades of the twentieth century (cf. Riney-Kehrberg 126). According to Denise Gess and William Lutz, '[o]ver time, the incomplete fragmented story took on the tone and winsome quality of a myth, a Paul Bunyan tale', which 'became a bit of regional elementary-school history' (205) in Peshtigo and the surrounding communities. Beyond the affected regions in Wisconsin and Michigan, the Peshtigo Fire was and remained rather unpopular—particularly in comparison to the enduring nationwide fascination with the Great Chicago Fire. This started right after the firestorm occurred: the remoteness of the rural settlements and the initial impossibility to communicate the calamity to outside communities (among others, due to the damaged telegraph lines) enhanced the public invisibility of the firestorm considerably. As a result, when the news about the Peshtigo calamity reached cities such as Green Bay, Madison, or Milwaukee (and from there the rest of the nation) on 10 October 1871, 'everyone in any position of authority had gone to the aid of Chicago' (Gess and Lutz 158), and with them hundreds of disaster tourists from around the country.

With the newspapers, magazines, and parlor-tables full of visual and written reports on the Chicago disaster, the Peshtigo Fire did not get attention in its own right outside the affected areas toward the end of the nineteenth century and was rather featured as a brief annotation to the Chicago tragedy in the nineteenth century.[7] The newspapers in the United States that did report on the Peshtigo Fire, as Denise Gess and William Lutz state, did not send their own agents to obtain first-hand reports as they had done in their coverage of the Chicago Fire but 'simply ran rewritten accounts from local papers in Wisconsin' (181; cf. also Lienhard). Even though the Peshtigo Fire was the dominant subject matter in the affected region in its immediate aftermath and sparked considerable financial and material relief from other American cities, it never emerged as a popular motif in the fashionable graphic accounts of instant histories, stereograph views, or lithographic prints in nationwide circulation at the time.

Whereas the Chicago Fire, according to historian Karen Sawislak, hence developed into the 'first great national "media event"' (17; cf. also Smith, 'Media Event') in spite of the fact that its size and the number of its fatalities amounted only to a small fraction of the firestorm that was raging 250 miles north on the same day, the Peshtigo Fire ended up as a mere 'historical footnote' to the events in the urban space (cf., e.g., Riney-Kehrberg 126; Sawislak 21). Since the creation of media events requires the selection of specific incidents (and the dismissal of others), the unpopularity of the Peshtigo Fire can also be seen as a result of the popularity of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. The interest in Chicago was not only limited to American popular culture at the time, but also included 'high'-culture approaches. All over the nation, engineers and architects equally focused on Chicago as a research subject hoping to achieve valuable insights into how urban environments and specific building materials fared in massive urban conflagrations (cf. Sawislak). A good month after the Great Chicago Fire, an official commission researched the origin and spread of the fire; yet, it would take almost a year for the U.S. Weather Bureau to come up with a similar report for Peshtigo. The fact that leading scholars contradicted each other regarding the proper causation of the firestorm (cf. Gess and Lutz 204–09) and eyewitness reports were often still doubted as incorrect might also have contributed to the dismissal of the Peshtigo Fire as a crucial point of reference for the study of fire and the weather up to the turn of the century.

Most importantly, however, like the Great Lisbon Earthquake (1755) a little more than a century before, the fiery destruction of Chicago seems to have reverberated intensely with the *zeitgeist*. At the time, Chicago with its

tall buildings, high degree of technologization, and rapid growth embodied progress, business acumen, and human ingenuity in the West. According to Carl Smith, the city's devastation offered an opportunity for all American urbanites to work through their anxieties about the urban disorder, change, and instability that had been raised to a new level by rapid industrialization, immigration, and urbanization (cf. *Disorder*). Besides, the eyes of the nation were turned on Chicago in order to find out whether the nineteenth-century American city would prove resilient and finally continue its economic and cultural rise. In this manner, Chicago presented the nation with a model of 'rising from the ashes'—convincing the public of the imminent comeback and rise of the city far beyond the previous wealth before the streets were even cleared of debris—which would often be repeated in natural disasters to come such as the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire (cf. Leikam ch.5).

The subject of lofty poetry collections (cf., e.g., Gerty's 1915 collection), socially critical novels such as Theodore Dreiser's 1912 *The Financier*, and popular box office successes (cf., e.g., *In Old Chicago* [1937]) and as a staunch reference point for the (scientific and quotidian) discussion of all later American fires (cf., e.g., reports on the Baltimore Fire of 1904 or the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire), the 1871 conflagration in Chicago—commonly referred to as *Great* Chicago Fire—showed a high cultural productivity in popular as well as 'high' culture into the twentieth century. The Peshtigo Fire, on the other hand, remained visible only locally—if at all. This changed in 1910, when devastating firestorms in the American West let the U.S. Forest Service 'unearth' the occurrences at Peshtigo and include these in their research. During the Second World War, the Peshtigo Fire was again brought to attention, this time by the U.S. Army studying the creation and handling of firestorms as possible military weapons (cf. Gess and Lutz 208–09; Riney-Kehrberg 126).

From then on, the Peshtigo Fire served as a particular model (the so-called 'Peshtigo paradigm') in the field of fire history and military use of fire, which is why Stephen J. Pyne rightly points out that this conflagration is treated in 'every survey of American fires' and has thus 'never long passed from our national consciousness' (7). Yet, despite the Peshtigo Fire being a household name in a very specialized field of science, the noteworthy inattention in American public cultures (to a certain degree locally, but mostly nationally) to it continued over the course of the century—a fact that both the opening of a local Fire Museum in Peshtigo in 1963 and the bicentennial of both fire calamities did not seem to have radically altered. Writing in 1995, Karen Sawislak, a historian of the Great Chicago Fire,

convincingly argued that the Peshtigo Fire was still only known by few people outside Wisconsin (21). Since then, a burgeoning fascination with 'forgotten' or 'lost' histories and a heightened interest in natural disasters following the environmental turn in the humanities have resulted in a wave of recent publications (cf., e.g., Gess and Lutz; Knickelbine; Pernin), bringing the Peshtigo Fire into the canon of great nineteenth-century fires.

Conclusion

The two case studies illustrate that—regardless of how terrible the loss of life, how spectacular the geophysical and meteorological phenomena, and how dreadful the devastation—some nineteenth-century natural calamities moved from a significant cultural productivity in popular as well as 'high' culture approaches into unpopularity. This unpopularity was not accidental but produced by economic, cultural, and political struggles for hegemony and for visibility in American cultures. In the transformation from popular to unpopular disasters, the simultaneous occurrence of other momentous newsworthy crises of national significance (so-called media events), driving the previously popular (natural) calamities out of the cultural consciousness, played a crucial role. In this manner, the impending War of 1812 and the Great Chicago Fire drew considerable attention away from the New Madrid Earthquakes and the Peshtigo Fire, respectively. Moreover, the Civil War also helped erase the memory of the New Madrid Earthquakes in the long run, since, as Conevery Valencius argues, '[t]he region of the New Madrid epicenters came to be associated with terrible battle, not terrible earthquakes' (222) and with racial strife in the decades after 1865.

In this context, cultural memory comes forward as disputed territory with regard to the question of whose stories are remembered and whose are marginalized. More often than not, the same processes that shape cultural and political hegemony in the United States today were productive in determining which disasters were included in the canon of nineteenth-century disasters and from which perspective(s) they should be told. Along these lines, the Civil War not only overwrote the New Madrid earthquake landscape (literally as well as metaphorically) but also obscured the long-standing Native American presence in the New Madrid seismic zone, 'along with the role of the region's earthquakes in pan-Indian spiritual and cultural revival' (Valencius 229). Whereas the recent 'rediscovery' of the earthquakes of 1811/12 also partly brought the Native American experiences (albeit often

mediated by 'white' travel reports such as John Hunter's *Memoirs* or by records of non-native anthropologists) on the disaster back into focus (cf. esp. Valencius), this is different in the case of the Peshtigo Fire. Scott Knickelbine's *The Great Peshtigo Fire* (2012), a historical nonfiction book for young readers, is one of the very few publications that point to the fact that the story of the 1871 firestorm also includes the local Menominee and Ojibwe tribes. Knickelbine states that '[t]here is no record of how many of [the many Wisconsin Indians] lived through the fire' (53), highlighting the struggle for narrative authority and commemoration and how this is often decisively influenced by the question of which documents are culturally recognized as significant and thus archived and which are not.

Furthermore, both regions, the New Madrid seismic zone and the forested area around Peshtigo, were rather sparsely settled and removed from the next urban centers in the nineteenth century. The lack of a local publishing industry and the missing communication networks prevented a rapid dissemination of the events and additionally diminished the credibility of eyewitness reports. Besides, the center of the New Madrid Earthquakes largely lay outside the national boundaries at the geographical periphery of the United States (mostly in Louisiana and Missouri Territory), which might have made the earthquakes not as newsworthy to scientists, publishers, and artists in the urban centers.

In addition, the transformation of the sciences from rather personal endeavors of interested 'naturalists' into highly specialized and institution-alized collective undertakings also contributed its share to the unpopularity of some of the contemporaneous disasters. Especially in the first half of the nineteenth century, individual reasoning on the workings of the New Madrid Earthquakes, mostly in the form of letters, for example, was for a long time not accredited as 'real' and quality science and therefore only very recently taken into account by seismologists (cf. Valencius 213–15). This state of scientific standards contributed to the dismissal of many records and discussions of early nineteenth-century natural calamities, which in turn also had a share in the forgetting of these events.

In the nineteenth-century United States, commercial motives further played a central role in the unpopularizing of natural calamities through the active masking of risks. The voracious speculation in the American West prompted many developers to hail land and settlements without disclosing previous calamities, which might have evoked fears of a recurrence in buyers. In the New Madrid seismic zone, for instance, railroad, timber, and agricultural companies advocated swamp drainage as well as an expansion of cultivable land and the infrastructure by suggesting that the earthquakes of 1811/12

were mere legends (cf. Valencius 235–50). Eager to draw investors to the forest around Peshtigo, newspapers in the region likewise barely mentioned the fires after 1871 but focused on positive news (cf. Gess and Lutz 192–97). This work, in the long run, led to an accelerated forgetting—particularly in the contexts of population expansion. In both cases, the influx of new settlers was immense, which also contributed to the dilution of the local memory of these calamities.

The two cases in point did not stay unpopular without end, however. Looking at how these unpopular disasters were brought back into popularity, it can be said that more often than not the driving force seems to have emanated from the nexus of military (research) and technology. From there, it subsequently also reached popular culture again. In the case of the New Madrid Earthquakes, the (legitimate) fear in the 1970s that nuclear power plants in the active seismic zone could cause radioactive contamination returned the tremors back into the spotlight of seismic and nuclear research (cf. Russ and Crone iii–iv). When climatologist Iben Browning predicted the recurrence of the New Madrid quakes in 1989 with much nationwide publicity, the potential risk caused strong fears, which bestowed a heightened visibility to the historical event. In the same way, the fear in the 1910s that firestorms such as the one at Peshtigo in 1871 might become more frequent promoted scientific studies, which were taken up and expanded during the Second World War, when the U.S. military conducted research on the possible use of firestorms as war weapons (cf. Gess and Lutz 208–09; Riney-Kehrberg 126). While issues of (national) safety and security—and the monetary interests and relationships connected to this—thus played a crucial role, there were other decisive factors at play.

In an age of information overload and the sheer endless and rapid spread of news, the retrieval of 'lost' stories seems to have gained a particular attraction as the recent flood of 'forgotten' or 'lost' histories of events in American history indicates. Besides, 'today's "obsession with memory" and memorials', which is 'grounded in a vastly expanded U.S. demographic and in heightened expectations of rights and representations among the nation's increasingly diverse publics' (Doss 19), is not only concerned with national narratives but at the same time—and in particular—with the publication of counterstatements and less visible (disaster) narratives. The unearthing of unpopular disaster tales and the new wave of publications on the New Madrid Earthquakes and the Peshtigo Fire in research contexts (e.g. Gess and Lutz; Kanon; Lovett; Riney-Kehrberg; Steward and Knox; Valencius; Zeilinga de Boer and Sanders) and popular culture (in the form of earthquake tours, popular histories, news articles, children's books, or reprints of eyewitness reports) hence show that the 'rediscovery' of the unpopular resonates with

the contemporary *zeitgeist*. In this manner, as Stephen J. Pyne remarked, by now the Peshtigo Fire's 'cachet as "forgotten" has paradoxically helped make it better known than almost any other rural conflagration' (7). As of today, the New Madrid Earthquakes and the Peshtigo Fire are quite popular in 'low-brow' and 'high-brow' approaches again (albeit in very different contexts) and have firmly entered the canon of 'great nineteenth-century American natural disasters'. The analysis of these two case studies has demonstrated that the research of unpopular disasters transcends the local frameworks and opens up a window into the processes through which American cultures have made sense of the world in the nineteenth century.

Notes

1. On the nineteenth-century American culture of disasters see, e.g., Steven Biel's *American Disasters*; David W. Bulla and David B. Sachsman's *Sensationalism: Murder, Mayhem, Mudslinging, Scandals, and Disasters in 19th-Century Reporting*; William Darrah's *The World of Stereographs* (esp. 156, 161–62); Susanne Leikam's *Framing Spaces in Motion: Tracing Visualizations of Earthquakes into Twentieth-Century San Francisco*; Christof Mauch and Sylvia Mayer's *American Environments: Climate, Cultures, Catastrophe*; Kevin Rozario's *The Culture of Calamity: Disaster and the Making of Modern America*; and Theodore Steinberg's *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America*. For a discussion of the ethics and aesthetics of picturing calamities, see Ingrid Gessner and Susanne Leikam's *Iconographies of the Calamitous in American Visual Culture*.

2. By employing the designation 'natural disaster'/calamity, I want to emphasize that the calamities discussed here were partly composed of dramatic natural spectacles such as wild fires and earthquakes and thus differ from 'purely' technological or industrial disasters. This terminology, however, should not indicate that the disastrous effects occur 'naturally' and are not triggered, aggravated, or brought about by human involvement. Rather, in accordance with the recent use of these terms in disaster studies, it is commonly assumed that, in terms of causation, there is no incident, regardless of how spectacular the natural phenomena involved may be, that is not in one way or another man-made, harming disadvantaged groups more than others. This conviction notwithstanding, the visible involvement of 'nature' nonetheless changes how people perceive these disasters and how they frame responsibility and the addressing of vulnerabilities for future disasters, which is another reason for utilizing the label 'natural disaster'/calamity (cf. Aragón-Durand 17–23; Hewitt; Steinberg).

3. While all experience is individual, experiences can be communicated and mediated and thus be collectively remembered. In this sense, cultural

(sometimes also termed collective) memory attests to the self-understanding and worldview of particular cultures or communities that stipulate certain past events constitutive of their present identity (cf. the seminal works by Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, and Jan and Aleida Assmann). Although emphasizing the intricate entanglements of both, Marita Sturken has differentiated cultural memory—understood as 'a field of cultural negotiations through which different stories vie for a place in history' (1)—from history by characterizing the latter as 'in some way [...] sanctioned or valorized by institutional frameworks or publishing enterprises' (4) and the former as exempt from these formal boundaries.

4. The canonization of (natural) disasters goes back at least to the Puritan sermons, which in their typological readings included long lists of biblical and historical disasters that were taken as models for the interpretation of more recent calamities. The tradition of discussing contemporaneous disasters in a framework of historical precursors and (trans)national reference points was continued throughout the nineteenth century, where, for example, the Galveston Storm of 1900 was contextualized by medieval Dutch floods, the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, earthquakes in San Francisco, and conflagrations in Chicago and Calcutta (cf., e.g., Lester 497–98).

5. Estimates for the magnitudes vary according to sources. While older publications list magnitudes of 8 and higher (cf. Steward and Knox 15), the U.S. Geological Survey places the strongest shock at 7.7 (n. pag.). More recently scholars have suggested lower numbers (7.5 or slightly below), which, however, does not dispute the overall momentous and disruptive nature of the New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811/12 (cf., e.g., Lovett).

6. Albeit geographically far removed, the Caracas Earthquake of March 1812 was met with considerable concern but also sensationalist interest in the news. Thus, the United States Government immediately responded to official requests for support from Caracas in 1812, while New Madrid had to fight hard for U.S. financial relief in the years after the calamity and only obtained it in 1815 (cf. Ewell 20–21).

7. Edgar J. Goodspeed's 1871 instant *History of the Great Fires in Chicago and the West*, for instance, devotes 38 chapters (550 pages) to Chicago's past, the impact of the fire, and the city's future, before elaborating in three chapters (or slightly more than fifty pages) on the fires in Wisconsin and Michigan. Other works such as Elias Colbert and Everet Chamberlin's *Chicago and the Great Conflagration* (1872) only mention the Wisconsin and Michigan firestorms together with a long list of other fires in world history in their appendices.

Works Cited

Aragón-Durand, Fernando de Jesús. 'Unpacking the Social Construction of "Natural" Disaster through Policy Discourses and Institutional Responses in Mexico: The Case of Chalco Valley's

Floods, State of Mexico.' Dissertation. Bartlett University College London, 2009. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Baker, Meredith Henne. *The Richmond Theater Fire: Early America's First Great Disaster.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2012. Print.

Biel, Steven. *American Disasters.* New York: New York UP, 2001. Print.

Bulla, David W., and David B. Sachsman. Introduction. *Sensationalism: Murder, Mayhem, Mudslinging, Scandals, and Disasters in 19th-Century Reporting.* Ed. David B. Sachsman and David W. Bulla. New Brunswick: Transaction, 2013. xvii–xxix. Print.

Cahan, David. 'Looking at Nineteenth-Century Science.' *From Natural Philosophy to the Sciences: Writing the History of Nineteenth*-Century Science. Ed. David Cahan. Chicago: Chicago UP, 2003. 3–13. Print.

Casper, Scott E., et al. *The Industrial Book, 1840-1880.* Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2007. Print.

Clark, William. 'A Resolution for the Relief of the Inhabitants of the County of New Madrid.' *New Madrid Bicentennial.* Alabama Geological Survey, Center for Earthquake Research and Information, National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program et al., 2011. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Darrah, William C. *The World of Stereographs.* Gettysburg: Darrah, 1977. Print.

Devens, Richard. *Our First Century: One Hundred Great and Memorable Events of Perpetual Interest in the History of Our Country.* Springfield, MA: Nichols, 1876. Print.

Doss, Erika. *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2010. Print.

Ewell, Judith. *Venezuela and the United States: From Monroe's Hemisphere to Petroleum's Empire.* Athens: Georgia, 1996. Print.

Fonseca, João Duarte. *1755—O Terramoto de Lisboa: The Lisbon Earthquake.* Lisbon: Argumentum, 2005. Print.

Fuller, Myron L. *The New Madrid Earthquake.* Washington, DC: GPO, 1912. Print. USGS Bulletin 494.

Gess, Denise, and William Lutz. *Firestorm at Peshtigo: A Town, Its People, and the Deadliest Fire in American History.* New York: Holt, 2002. Print.

Gessner, Ingrid. 'Epidemic Iconographies: Towards a Disease Aesthetics of the Destructive Sublime.' *Iconographies of the Calamitous in American Visual Culture.* Spec. issue of *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 58.4 (2013): 559–82. Print.

—, and Susanne Leikam. *Iconographies of the Calamitous in American Visual Culture.* Spec. issue of *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 58.4 (2013). Print.

Haygood, William Converse. Introduction. *The Great Peshtigo Fire: An Eyewitness Account.* By Reverend Peter Pernin. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Press, 1999. 12–13. Print.

Hebel, Udo J. Introduction. *Sites of Memory in American Literatures and Cultures.* Ed. Udo J. Hebel. Heidelberg: Winter, 2003. ix–xxxi. Print.

Hewitt, Kenneth. 'The Idea of Calamity in a Technocratic Age.' *Interpretations of Calamity from the Viewpoint of Human Ecology.* Ed. Kenneth Hewitt. Boston: Allen, 1983. 3–32. Print.

Jones, Jay. 'Making Sense of a Deadly Inferno in Wisconsin.' *Los Angeles Times.* LA Times, 9 Oct. 2011. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Kanon, Tom. '"Scared from Their Sins for a Season": The Religious Ramifications of the New Madrid Earthquakes, 1811–1812.' *Ohio Valley History* 5.2 (2005): 21–38. Print.

Keller, Susanne B. 'Sections and Views: Visual Representation in Eighteenth-Century Earthquake Studies.' *British Journal for the History of Science* 31.2 (1998): 129–59. Print.

Kingston, John. Preface by the Publisher. *Particular Account of the Dreadful Fire at Richmond, Virginia, December 26, 1811.* Baltimore: Kingston, 1812. 3. Print.

Knickelbine, Scott. *The Great Peshtigo Fire: Stories and Science from America's Deadliest Firestorm.* Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society P, 2012. Print.

Kozák, Jan T., and Vladimír Čermák. *The Illustrated History of Natural Disasters*. Heidelberg: Springer, 2010. Print.

Kutzbach, Gisela. *The Thermal Theory of Cyclones: A History of Meteorological Thought in the Nineteenth Century*. Boston: American Meteorological Society, 1979. Print.

Leikam, Susanne. *Framing Spaces in Motion: Tracing Visualizations of Earthquakes into Twentieth-Century San Francisco*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2015. Print.

Lester, Paul. *The Great Galveston Disaster: Containing a Full and Thrilling Account of the Most Appalling Calamity of Modern Times*. Chicago: Providence, 1900. Print.

Lienhard, John H. 'The Great Peshtigo Fire.' *Engines of Our Ingenuity*. University of Houston, n.d. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Lovett, Richard A. 'Quake Analysis Rewrites History Books: New Madrid Quakes Were Smaller than Originally Thought.' *Nature*. Nature Publishing Group, 29 Jan. 2010. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Lüthe, Martin, and Sascha Pöhlmann. 'Introduction: What is Unpopular Culture?' *Unpopular Culture*. Ed. Martin Lüthe and Sascha Pöhlmann. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2016. 7–29. Print.

Mauch, Christof, and Sylvia Mayer. *American Environments: Climate, Cultures, Catastrophe*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2012. Print.

Oldroyd, David R. 'The Earth Sciences.' *From Natural Philosophy to the Sciences: Writing the History of Nineteenth-*Century Science. Ed. David Cahan. Chicago: Chicago UP, 2003. 88–128. Print.

Penick, James L. *The New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811–1812*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1976. Print.

Pernin, Peter. *The Great Peshtigo Fire: An Eyewitness Account*. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Press, 1999. Print.

Peters, Harry Twyford. *Currier & Ives: Printmakers to the American People*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1942. Print.

Pyne, Stephen J. 'Foreword: The Peshtigo Paradigm.' *The Great Peshtigo Fire: An Eyewitness Account*. By Reverend Peter Pernin. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Press, 1999. 7–11. Print.

Riney-Kehrberg, Pamela. '1871 Peshtigo Fire.' *Disasters, Accidents, Crises in American History: A Reference Guide to the Nation's Most Catastrophic Events*. Ed. Ballard C. Campell. New York: Facts on File, 2008. 125–27. Print.

Rozario, Kevin. *The Culture of Calamity: Disaster and the Making of Modern America*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007. Print.

Russ, David P., and Anthony J. Crone. Foreword. *Landslides Triggered by Earthquakes in the Central Mississippi Valley, Tennessee, and Kentucky*. Ed. Randall W. Jibson and David K. Keefer. Washington, DC: GPO, 1988. iii–iv. US Geological Survey Professional Paper 1336–C.

Sawislak, Karen. *Smoldering City: Chicagoans and the Great Fire, 1871-1874*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995. Print.

Schur, Robert. 'Fires in American Communities.' *Encyclopedia of Local History*. Ed. Carol Kammen and Amy I. Wilson. Lanham: AltaMira, 2013. 191–92. Print.

Smith, Carl S. 'Media Event.' *The Great Chicago Fire and the Web of Memory*. Chicago Historical Society and Northwestern University, 30 Sept. 1997. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

—. *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The Great Chicago Fire, the Haymarket Bomb, and the Model Town of Pullman*. 2nd ed. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007. Print.

Steinberg, Theodore. *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Print.

Stewart, David, and Ray Knox. *The Earthquake America Forgot: 2,000 Temblors in Five Months—and It Will Happen Again*. Marble Hill: Richter, 1995. Print.

Sturken, Marita. *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1997. Print.

Tobriner, Stephen. *Bracing for Disaster: Earthquake-Resistant Architecture and Engineering in San Francisco, 1838–1933.* Berkeley: Heyday, 2006. Print.

U.S. Geological Survey, 'Historic Earthquakes: New Madrid 1811-1812 Earthquakes.' USGS, 2012. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Valencius, Conevery Bolton. *The Lost History of the New Madrid Earthquakes.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2013. Print.

Zeilinga de Boer, Jelle, and Donald Theodore Sanders. *Earthquakes in Human History: The Far-Reaching Effects of Seismic Disruptions.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005. Print.

The Unpopular Profession?

Graduate Studies in the Humanities and the Genre of the 'Thesis Hatement'

Sebastian M. Herrmann

'Don't do it. Just don't! [...] [G]raduate school lasts at least six years and will ruin your life in a very real way'. This is the bottom line of a 2013 article by Rebecca Schuman in the online newspaper *slate.com*. Noting that she is not the first to issue this warning, Schuman adds: 'well-meaning academics have already attempted to warn you, the best-known screed in this subgenre being William Pannapacker's "Graduate School in the Humanities? Just Don't Go". But this convinced no one. It certainly didn't convince me!' Looking back, she explains: 'In 2005 when I began my own Ph.D., I should have known better, but I didn't. Now that *you* know better, will you listen?'

At the time, Schuman's piece attracted considerable attention, not least from people procrastinating away in front of their computers while writing on or researching for their own Ph.D. theses. It quickly garnered Facebook likes and shares (over 38,000 to date), it invited comments on *slate.com* (over 1,800 by now), it was shared, tweeted, and retweeted, and it was responded to in blog posts and other articles. Writing about Schuman's text in *The New Yorker*, Joshua Rothman remarks that the responses were so multiple that it was 'as though a virtual symposium [had] been convened'. Looking at the social media interaction, however, one could observe that, ironically, Schuman's message was 'liked' by exactly those people who had reason to dislike it; or, more precisely, that the people most vigorously engaging with it through likes, shares, and comments were precisely those people who, according to the text, most emphatically ignored its content: practicing graduate students, who read the text, shared it, and then continued to work on their Ph.D. The social media circulation thus suggests that the text's audience did not read the article as intended, that they did not take the advice to turn one's back to academia, and it thus underscores the point that Schuman's article self-reflexively makes with regard to other, similar texts against graduate school: they '[convince] no one'. The tension between the text's decidedly, self-avowedly unpopular message and its mass-circulation—a tension between the texts self-proclaimed meaning and its pragmatic effect—thus parallels the contradiction Schuman herself

openly performs when she says that warning people against going to grad school most likely is a futile task—in the very moment of engaging in exactly this task.

These interlocking moments of contradiction, present in Schuman's essay as well as in other, similar texts, mark a particular paradox of un/popularity that warrants further exploration. Going to graduate school arguably is an unpopular life decision in several senses of the word: it is a decision that only comparatively few students will make, an elite decision, and it is one that is often emphatically and ostentatiously disliked. When asked, graduate students will quickly speak of the hardships of graduate school, not of the pleasures of learning and of grad school life. Yet, according to the logic of the texts by Schuman, Pannapacker, and others, getting a Ph.D. remains too popular a decision. Indeed, their texts work hard to tell people that they should like it even less, that even fewer people should do it, that it should be even more unpopular. These texts, in their circulation and in the images, stereotypes, and sentiments they invoke, constitute a popular genre advocating for the unpopularity of the humanities Ph.D.; clearly, they are shaped by complex and contradictory affective dynamics.

This paper will focus on these conflicted affective dynamics to argue that they are indicative of the role the humanities play in 'Western' society more broadly. My argument will proceed in four larger steps. I will first present Schuman's 'Thesis Hatement' in greater detail and will contextualize it with regard to the larger body of similar texts it is representative of, suggesting that they constitute a particularly precarious form of (mis)communication marked by irony and hyperbole. As part of my discussion of this genre of writing, I will, secondly, provide a brief discussion of the politics of these texts, arguing that they engage in conflicted and contradictory discussions of labor, class, income, and academia.[1] In a third step, I will then trace these contradictions on a textual level. To do so, I will attend to the somewhat limited set of metaphors this genre of writing typically employs in the attempt to express and come to terms with a presumed popularity paradox: if they convince no one, if they are advice literature that does not give advice to be followed, they have a particularly insincere, tropical quality, and this quality gets expressed and exercised in the tropes they use; attending to these tropes will thus help unfold the contradictions they negotiate. In a final section, I will look at the larger textual performance of thesis hatements to discuss in how far and how exactly these texts undermine their own presumed project. Thesis hatements, I will thus show, are a deeply conflicted genre. They do not mean what they say, they use metaphors to talk about this dynamic without talking about it, and they speak about

conflicted social constellations. As texts about the academy, they are indicative of the conflicted role the humanities play in contemporary US society.

1 Thesis Hatements as Genre

Rebecca Schuman's 'Thesis Hatement' is part of a larger body of texts that all advise students against going to grad school, and this body of texts, in turn, ties in to larger discourses on the subject position of the graduate student, on the university, and on education. Accordingly, I will briefly describe Schuman's piece and discuss how both its content and its particular sardonic tone connect it to larger textual environments.

Rebecca Schuman's 'Thesis Hatement' is a strange product all the way down from the two titles it bears, both of which already have a distant ring of (self-)ironizing mockery:[2] one is 'There are no academic jobs and getting a Ph.D. will make you into a horrible person: A jeremiad', and the other is 'Thesis Hatement: Getting a literature Ph.D. will turn you into an emotional trainwreck, not a professor'. The text describes Schuman's frustration at not getting a tenured position after completing her Ph.D. in German, a frustration that, she diagnoses, stems not least from the way in which academia has conditioned her to regard all non-academic work as inferior. Throughout the text, Schuman laments the exploitative, damaging environment of academia, the way in which she was 'broken down and reconfigured in the image of the academy', and she concludes that this stole her years of her life and did not set her up for any kind of reward but only for disappointment and low-income adjunct positions. The text is organized around Kafka's 'A Little Fable', the story of a mouse that discovers that its path is leading to a trap and, standing in front of the trap, is advised by a cat behind it to 'only change the direction'. She uses the fable to suggest that her current predicament is not the result of a recent decision of hers, but that she had understood far too late that she had been 'walking cat food' all along. Surprisingly, then, turning around is exactly the advice that Schuman presents to her intended audience of prospective and current graduate students at the beginning and end of her essay, thus underlining that her text, presented as a piece of advice, is actually not that.[3]

In its (self-)deprecating, semi-playful disdain for the humanities education, 'Thesis Hatement' is representative of a larger ecosystem of texts all denouncing going to grad school as a bad life decision and all painting graduate education, the Ph.D. degree, and the humanities as corrosive to a happy life. This corpus of texts can be defined narrowly, covering the

'"don't go" advice market' alone (Cottom), a segment or sub-genre I will refer to as 'thesis hatements' from hereon,[4] or it can be understood more broadly, covering a larger body of texts portraying graduate education with a particular ironic, sardonic twist and thus echoing (and propagating) the ambivalent feelings American culture holds toward higher education and intellectualism.[5] Such texts take many different forms across various media, often mockingly playing with clichés of what the typical graduate student is like and often foregrounding a distinct, semi-ironic pathos of suffering. Typically, they present graduate students as such an overdrawn spectacle of suffering, poverty, self-exploitation, and nerdiness, that it is impossible to not read their disdain as partly a caricature that at once invokes and mocks a set motif of US pop-cultural lore. To name just some examples: there is a grad student Barbie, complete with 'black circles under her delightfully bloodshot eyes', there is a famous *Simpsons* clip where Marge admonishes her son: 'Bart, don't make fun of grad students, they just made bad life choices', and there is the well-known series of Ph.D. comics, which was also made into a movie.[6] But there is also 'So you Want to Get a PhD in the Humanities', a viral Youtube clip about a professor destroying a young grad student's illusions about academia, which more squarely falls into the segment of thesis hatements. The more serious of these texts, however, emanate from a US university context, they are published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* or in *Inside Higher Ed*, and they address their audience with the gesture of offering well-meaning, serious advice—advice, of course, not to go to grad school.

Thesis hatements, those pieces of academic advice literature that tell students not to pursue a doctoral degree, thus participate in a larger and deeply ambivalent discourse about what it means to be a graduate student in the humanities and about what the humanities are. As a sub-genre, they share in how they warn students against pursuing a Ph.D. or an academic career more generally. Most typically, this warning comes from someone who has 'made it', someone who has tenure and who warns young students that getting tenure is nearly impossible, *especially now*. The most famous, most canonical of these is Thomas H. Benton's 'now-classic article' (Cook 30) 'Just Don't Go'.[7] With a tenured person explaining the impossibility of ever getting tenure, one can immediately see how this is a dysfunctional and in itself contradictory act of communication that sets up its audience for a significant double-bind: it tells readers that tenure is near impossible to get, but it suggests that knowing and ignoring this is part of getting tenure in the end. However, there are also thesis hatements by people who do not have tenure, who have left academia (or at least have given up the

quest for tenure) and who are now warning others to enter into it, their bitterness, again, often complicating their message. Rebecca Schuman's 'Thesis Hatement' is a representative of this type.[8] In either case, already in terms of authorship, thesis hatements are marked by a particular affective double-bind, and this double-bind, that I will trace in the next three sections as well, sits at the heart of how they negotiate the un/popularity of the humanities Ph.D.

2   The Politics of Thesis Hatements

As a body of writing, thesis hatements have a political quality that resides both inside and outside the academy: most immediately, they provide an arena to discuss changes to the job market that are particularly poignant in academia but that impact society at large. At the same time, they allow for and engage in displaced conversations about class in US society, most visibly so by discussing the relationship between income, education, habitus, and identity. Lastly, thesis hatements are about the role of higher education in US society, and in how they position the value of education they come with a politics of their own that is intimately tied to the social role both of the university as an institution and of the humanities as a particular configuration of practices and knowledge. These three different sets of politics first and foremost focus on a US cultural context, but some of their aspects travel widely and find resonance in other national (academic) cultures, their mobility giving evidence both of the transnational compatibility of what it means to be an academic and of the global(ized) reach of the neoliberal changes of the university they respond to.[9] Accordingly, I will use this section to outline these three dimensions of the politics of thesis hatements.[10]

First and foremost, thesis hatements are a response to a particular, ongoing reconfiguration of the job market in US higher education. As such, they speak of the decline of tenured, permanent positions and of the rise of low-income, no-benefits, non-permanent teaching jobs. At the core of each thesis hatement thus stands the realization, often positioned as a painfully honest moment of truth-telling, that the level of education and the intellectual capabilities of Ph.D. students will not end up giving them a reasonable chance at a tenured position—simply because there are fewer and fewer such positions. In this sense, thesis hatements speak of two different, interconnected, and abusive labor markets: one, the adjunct market that most graduate students, despite having spent years and years on their degree, will end up working on, employed, paid, and valued far

below their qualification. Two, the economic situation of graduate students during their studies: they delay their entrance into the job market, delay their (potential, private sector) careers, fail to build retirement funds, and often provide underpaid teaching labor to their university, all as part of an investment in their own future that, due to the decline of tenure, for the vast majority of them will never pay off.[11] Read thus as part of a conversation on the defunding of the humanities, on the reconfiguration of teaching, and on the need for a realistic assessment of what that means for Ph.D. students, thesis hatements serve a valid double function: they warn students of these two abusive labor markets, and they constitute a public discourse on these developments of the academic labor market.

In more abstract terms, however, thesis hatements are discussions of class. More specifically, they attempt to negotiate the relationship between income, wealth, social capital, and lifestyle/habitus, a configuration that is particularly murky in academia.[12] Thus, if William Pannapacker can 'only recommend graduate school in the humanities—and, increasingly, the social sciences and sciences—if you are independently wealthy', the particular, scandalous quality of his point to his audience lies in how it associates the humanities with a wealthy class position: doing a Ph.D., in this perspective, is not 'legitimated' as a career choice by the prospect of earning money; it is a leisure activity for the wealthy. It is not something you do to earn more, it is something you do if you have enough money to not worry about money at all.[13] This concern about the relationship between income, class, and education is even more pronounced in the particular imagery Larry Cebula evokes in his advice piece not to go to grad school: he contrasts, as two alternative roads to a fulfilled life, the (plausible, attainable) income of 'the manager of a Hooters' and the (implausible, unattainable) life of a 'happy mid-career faculty member who biked to work yesterday and met you in her sunny office with the pictures of her European vacation on the wall'. By setting up the contrast like this, with the barely decent Hooters on one end and biking and European holidays on the other, Cebula makes clear that there are two (upper-)middle class identities at stake: one based on income, an income that is solid enough to make up for the low social capital of operating a Hooters restaurant, and one based on habitus.[14]

The contrast, however, not only speaks about two different ways of marking class that students might choose for their life, it highlights the contradictory class configuration of being a graduate student in the first place: in terms of social capital, work ethic, habitus, and self-image, graduate students clearly align with an upper middle-class position (and part of this habitus precisely is not being in it for the money). In terms of income, most

often they do not. In terms of their daily work, research and teaching, they perform work that is highly valued, at least discursively, by society. In terms of the income this work earns them, they do not. Set against the background of the particularly unclear class designations in academia, thesis hatements thus engage a doubly contradictory class discourse: society's feelings toward graduate students are contradictory, and the graduate students' own situation, with the disparity between social and economic capital is, too.

Lastly, and in addition to the social issues they speak of, thesis hatements also in themselves pursue a politics of sorts. The politics of these texts and their circulation reside in how they individualize the social problems of graduate education and the adjunct market, how they depoliticize the social role of the university and the humanities, and how they thus participate in a project of delegitimizing the humanities (in the sense in which the humanities have claimed legitimacy since the 1970s). These politics begin with thesis hatements' generic move of telling students not to pursue a degree. As Andrew Kalaidjian points out, this advice constitutes a form of 'opting out of the conversation', and it prevents a more 'sustained critique of the state of intellectual labor as a problem of modernity and a cause for social activism in its own right'. Telling graduate students to 'Just Don't Go', in other words, foregrounds a private 'solution' to something that could and should be treated as a social problem instead. Indeed, Paul Cook makes a more fundamental point about the larger body of academic advice literature (under which he subsumes thesis hatements) and about the disciplinary and disciplining work it does: these texts not only 'delegitimi[ze] the possibility of large-scale change' (30), and they not only preempt any perspective that imagines the university as a starting point of social change. Instead, academic advice literature, as it is in circulation right now, 'constructs, constrains, narrows, and normalizes the way graduate students think of themselves as individuals constantly in need of introspective work on themselves in order to remain [...] employable' (Cook 25). It 'promotes a „turning inward" that has a way of deflecting attention away from social projects that require collective action' (Cook 25).¹⁵ There is, in other words, a double impulse toward depoliticization here: thesis hatements tell graduate students that their economic situation is a private, not a social problem, and they, more generally, depoliticize the humanities/the university as a site of introspection rather than of social change. Schuman's 'Thesis Hatement', then, as Tressie McMillan Cottom writes, may be 'on the far right extreme of the 'don't go!' advice market, but it is indicative of what that advice entails. It's some combination of an assessment of the academic labor market, the odds of getting a tenure-track appointment, the high cost of graduate

school, and the emotional toil'. It is in this particular configuration that the depoliticizing politics of thesis hatements as a genre lie.

As a genre, thesis hatements thus not only speak about exploitative labor markets, about the relationship between income, habitus, and class, but they have a politics of their own, more often than not delegitimizing the study of the humanities as neither good for one's wallet nor for one's self. They use the academy as a setting in which to discuss the contradiction between how US society values intellectual work and how it pays it, between what counts for upper middle class and what constitutes an upper-middle-class income, and they constitute an attempt at understanding (and regulating) what the academy is and what the humanities are.[16] While this political dimension of thesis hatements, or of academic advice literature more generally, has received some scholarly attention, it is substantially complicated by the texts' internal contradictions.

3   Metaphors and the Popularity Paradox

A particular and in the context of this essay particularly telling moment of contradiction in Rebecca Schuman's 'Thesis Hatement' is her observation that previous similar texts had failed to convince their readers. Notably, she is not the only one to make that observation, and there is even one text explicitly about this aspect: Nate Kreuter's meta-article in *Inside Higher Education*, an 'Essay on why Graduate Students Ignore Warnings about the Job Market'.[17] Kreuter argues that, by the time they enter graduate school, students are well-conditioned to ignore warnings that a task might be difficult. Pursuing a graduate career, to him, has much to do not simply with over-estimating one's own abilities (though this might be a factor), but with overestimating the role that merit plays in academia and with underestimating the role of luck, a point that I will come back to later. While such explicit meta-awareness is rare, most thesis hatements do visibly struggle to come to terms with the fact that students keep pursuing a degree against what, in their logic, would be the students' best interest. Rather than using this as a vantage point to question their own logic, thesis hatements perceive the alleged popularity of the Ph.D. degree as paradoxical and in need of explanation. Most often, this explanation comes in the form of the limited sets of metaphors these texts employ.

Not surprisingly, the first set of such metaphors is financial in nature. Typically, it frames graduate school as either a form of lottery, with the odds so insane that one should not gamble on ever getting tenure (or any

other job adequate to years and years of working on a Ph.D.), or it tries to cast academia as a form of Ponzi scheme, an economy that works only as long as enough gullible people keep buying in at the bottom. While the comparison does not work out on all levels, its central allegation, of course, is plausible enough to do the work: it takes for granted that students perceive graduate school as an economic decision, an investment into a particular socio-economic future. It then proceeds to shock its audience by maintaining the larger framework—graduate school as an investment—while simultaneously shifting a metaphor to that of 'unreasonable' investments, investments that are almost guaranteed not to pay off financially. Not surprisingly, an article in *The Economist* (which was published without an author designation in the Christmas edition 2010 under the title 'The Disposable Academic') puts forth the Ponzi scheme, whereas the lottery paradigm finds use, among others, in Benton's 'Just Don't Go'. In both cases, the popularity of graduate school, its ability to attract students despite being a bad decision financially, is cast as a cognitive mistake within a framework of investment and return, thus validating the question of financial return as a particularly legitimate frame of reference.

The second dominant set of metaphors pathologizes graduate school as either a form of addiction or as a cult. In both cases, the texts note a form of dependency, an addictive quality of academia that, much like substance abuse or membership in a cult, leads people to disregard their normal lives, their non-academic friends, and their self interest. If people manage to (or try to) leave academia, they accordingly need to detox, to rediscover a meaning in things nonacademic, to readjust their values and discover a new sense in life. In fact, many post-academia blogs trace this particular form of recovery. Poignant examples of this paradigm of pathology would be Thomas H. Benton's much-cited 'Is Graduate School a Cult?' published in the *Chronicle* in 2004, and a blog, published anonymously, under the title *Chronicles of a Recovering Academic*.[18] Schuman, in her text, likens academia to cigarettes: highly addictive, highly carcinogenic, and ultimately lethal to almost all. When written in a first-person perspective, texts operating within this tropical paradigm often read like autobiographical illness narratives. They tell stories of illness, of survival, and of recovery, sometimes even offering a hint of 'survivor guilt'.[19]

The third major metaphoric paradigm attempts to rationalize the presumably irrational decision for graduate school by portraying it as a mistaken decision of the heart. Operating the metaphor of a bad relationship, these texts portray graduate students as taking all kinds of abuse—long working hours, blows to their self-esteem, and low income (at best)—with very

little reward. Looking at the situation this way, graduate students seem to be masochistically attracted by the bad treatment they receive from their partner, academia. And no matter the pain, no matter the disappointment, they keep going back. What to outsiders looks like abuse apparently seems to them like an emotionally gratifying relationship, and this blindness to the abusive nature is at the core of this third metaphor. As one blog post, responding to Schuman's article, put it: 'We cut the same heartbreaking figure as a woman who has become attached to a cold man, sacrificing more and more to win his love, willfully ignoring signs of his indifference because the alternative has become too terrifying to contemplate' ('In Valley and in Plain'). Indeed, as a metaphor, love does particularly interesting work. As, once again, William Pannapacker aka Thomas H. Benton observes, linking 'work' and 'love' is characteristic of particular sectors of the job market, and the rhetoric of love typically 'supports the transfer of resources from one group to another, typically from women to men, from minority to majority'. Love, in other words, is a highly gendered and gendering metaphor, typically reserved for sectors that are marked by economic exploitation.[20] At the same time, it does describe a manifest and positive experience. As Benton explains, people often stay in graduate school because they perceive the 'so-called bohemian lifestyle', the thrill of discovering new knowledge, the conversations, the mentoring, and even the focus on immaterial gain as a whiff of a good life. In fact, Benton's piece is a particularly telling example of the 'ambiguous meaning' (Pannapacker) of love, and of how the feeling comes back even in the process of writing about it critically.

   All of these metaphors are similar in that they try to explain why graduate students cannot be swayed away from academia. Implying a particular understanding of why people should or should not pursue an academic career, one that is rooted in individual, economic gain, they suggest that it would be in the students' best interest if they simply quit. Not quitting, in this logic, is a weakness, a sign of impaired agency. In other words, these metaphors try to resolve the presumed and presumably unjustified popularity of the Ph.D. degree by reading graduate students as mistaken, intellectually or emotionally, and in need of treatment, psychological or intellectual, so that they can make a better decision for themselves. Notably, in using (a limited set of) metaphors, these texts attempt a 'tropical' solution to the problem they have as texts. Giving advice that 'convince[s] no one' (Schuman), struggling, in other words, with a disconnect between their textual project and their textual effect, between denotation and pragmatics, these texts use metaphors of mistaken self-perception to explain this very failure.

4   The Pragmatics of Unpopularity

In this last section, I want to use a different angle to speak about this discon-
nect between thesis hatements' textual project and their textual effect and
about the discrepancy between graduate students' presumed unhappiness,
the presumably mistaken quality of their life decision, and the alleged
popularity of the Ph.D. in the humanities. To do so, I will look even more
closely at the discrepancy between what 'thesis hatements' say—'Don't do
it'—and the effect they have—'they convince no one'. This discrepancy
between denotation and pragmatic effect, this textual schism, is crucial to
understanding the complex and contradictory affective dynamics at stake,
dynamics that inform not only this genre but also the cultural meanings
of academia as a social institution. Accordingly, I want to use the next
few paragraphs to explore moments in which these texts end up being
affirmative of the Ph.D. in the very moment in which they claim to reject it.

The first (self-inflicted) challenge to the argumentative effective-
ness of thesis hatements lies in the straw man nature of the argument
they set up: their graduate students are usually ridiculously naïve. In
Schuman's text, this dynamic comes to the fore in the first paragraphs
already: 'Who wouldn't want a job where you only have to work five
hours a week, you get summers off, your whole job is reading and talking
about books, *and* you can never be fired? Such is the enviable life of the
tenured college literature professor, and all you have to do to get it is
earn a Ph.D. So perhaps you, literature lover, are considering pursuing
this path'. Clearly, no graduate student will actually think that this is
what a professorship is like. The effect of disillusionment, accordingly,
does not happen, because the reader does not feel addressed. Instead, the
text presents a foil of particularly naïve students that, ultimately, do not
deserve success because what they are after is a utopian illusion to begin
with. I will come back to this straw man argument below. In any case,
it marks a first instance in which the textual work of a thesis hatement
defies its presumed pragmatic purpose. If thesis hatements project such
ridiculously naïve implied readers, they cannot meaningfully convince
their actual audience and instead open up a subject position from which
to look down at such naïveté.

A similar yet slightly more complex dynamic can be traced via genre:
Schuman's text self-identifies as 'a jeremiad', and many commentators agree
that this is exactly what it is. This designation draws attention to a form
of textual performance whose pragmatics has been analyzed prominently
by Perry Miller in his seminal 'Errand into the Wilderness'. Regardless of

whether Schuman's text is a jeremiad, strictly speaking, Miller's observations hold for thesis hatements as much as for the jeremiad:

> If you read them all through, the total effect, curiously enough, is not at all depressing: you come to the paradoxical realization that they do not bespeak a despairing frame of mind. There is something of a ritualistic incantation about them; [...] in [the realm] of psychology they are purgations of soul; they do not discourage but actually encourage the community to persist in its heinous conduct. The exhortation to a reformation which never materializes serves as a token payment upon the obligation, and so liberates the debtors. (11)

For their authors and, more importantly, for their readers, thesis hatements might indeed constitute 'purgations of the soul'. If they 'convince no one', this might be because their purpose is not to trigger actual 'reformation'— quitting academia, quitting the Ph.D.—but to perform a 'token payment' to anybody 'outside' of the logic of grad school. By reading, sharing, or subscribing to thesis hatements, graduate students, in other words, might perform a particular ritualistic, symbolic gesture that replaces action in the real world.

Indeed, rethinking the genre affiliations of the thesis hatement helps unlock yet another layer of how the textual pragmatics are at odds with the denotation of the text. Thesis hatements presume to offer advice, and they arguably fail to effectively do so. However, as Joshua Rothman points out in an insightful article in *The New Yorker*, 'advice helps people when they are making rational decisions, and the decision to go to grad school in English is essentially irrational. In fact, it's representative of a whole class of decisions that bring you face to face with the basic unknowability and uncertainty of life'. Other texts similarly assert that one cannot know whether this is a good decision. As Thomas H. Benton aka William Pannapacker confesses: 'I realize that nothing but luck distinguishes me from thousands of other highly-qualified Ph.D.s in the humanities who will never have full-time academic jobs' (Benton, 'Is Graduate'). So, clearly, advice is not in order, but why is it given anyway? The reason is that it constitutes a textual performance that goes beyond the content of the advice: when thesis hatements cast this decision, that is characterized by the frightening 'unknowability and uncertainty of life', in terms of rational knowability, they reintroduce, *ex negativo*, rationality into the game. Even though advice literature on the Ph.D. hardly ever gives good, rational reasons to pursue a Ph.D., it thus reinscribes rationality, if only so that it can be discarded.

In other words, via thesis hatements graduate students are able to understand, embrace, and affirm that their decision is ultimately not rational. About to do something that may—by normal, mainstream, popular, economic standards—most likely be a 'bad life decision', graduate students can use thesis hatements to make this 'irrational' decision a conscious one. Indeed the foil of the naïve graduate student who has ridiculous ideas about the profession, the straw man I spoke of before, feeds into this dynamic. It allows authors and readers of thesis hatements to discursively Other these naïve graduate students. After reading a thesis hatement, the decision to continue pursuing a Ph.D. is not less irrational, but it is done *after* learning all the rational reasons against graduate school, it is a decision whose irrational nature has been accepted after rational deliberation.

Moreover, these texts that explain why something is being done against all good reason speak strongly of intrinsic motivation precisely in rejecting it. Indeed, the unpopularity of the decision, by common standards, might thus be what makes it particularly attractive. In reception and in production, thesis hatements are stories of people doing the Ph.D. *despite* its presumed drawbacks in life quality. These texts thus open up and invite into a subject position marked by disdain for worldly and extrinsic motivation, by practicality and by economic reasons. Again, Schuman's text is telling in this regard in that it juxtaposes economic and intrinsic motivation:

> Don't misunderstand me. There is unquantifiable intellectual reward from the exploration of scholarly problems [...] even if that means doing bat-shit analysis like using the rule of 'false elimination' to determine that Josef K. is simultaneously guilty and not guilty in *The Trial*. But there is one sort of reward you will never get: monetary compensation from a stable, non-penurious position at a decent university.

In juxtaposing the 'unquantifiable intellectual reward' with 'monetary compensation', Schuman's text makes clear what is at stake: quantifiable monetary compensation or unquantifiable intellectual reward, and no matter how much the text argues for the former, it still opens up and casts as an alternative the latter. Even if 'unquantifiable' here does not mean 'big' but only 'impossible to measure', this operation creates and maintains a binary rather than questioning whether this binary makes sense in the first place.

Ultimately, then, one central aspect of the textual work of thesis hatements is how they cast the decision *for* academia as a decision that is untenable by common, popular standards while they, simultaneously, open up a 'heroic' subject position from which to make this unpopular decision

for an unpopular profession by upholding the notion of the unquantifiable reward of intrinsic motivation. Indeed, while their politics may work to delegitimize the decision for a Ph.D. degree in the humanities, they simultaneously provide the psychological mechanisms required to make exactly this decision: to Other graduate students as naïve, to perform a 'token payment' acknowledging the irrationality of the decision, and to hope for unquantifiable reward in exchange for it. In other words, whenever they fail to convince, they simultaneously open up a position from which to take pride in an unreasonable decision for an unpopular profession.

Conclusion

Thesis hatements are a troubled genre: they offer contradictory advice, and their pragmatics are at odds with what they claim to say. Asking their readers to do one thing while in fact encouraging them to do another, they constitute contradictory acts of communication at best, and insincere ones at worst. At the same time, however, thesis hatements often are honest attempts to come to terms with a highly contradictory subject position: that of a graduate student, and both this textual work and the contradictory quality of this subject position become particularly visible in the metaphors thesis hatements employ. Looking at their inner contradictions, then, is telling: It underscores that this genre does not simply offer advice to graduate students. Instead, it wrestles with important social questions, among them questions of class and of intellectual labor, and it works through the complex affective dynamics and the conflicting values that determine both an individual student's decision to pursue a humanities Ph.D. and the perception of the humanities in contemporary U.S. society.

Notes

1.   In fact, gender also is an important dynamic in these texts, and while I do not have time to develop a more detailed argument about the relationship between (occupational) gender (cf. Hoberek 374), academia, and class here, I will, throughout this paper, point out moments in which this subtext becomes particularly poignant.
2.   The first of the two titles is used in the <title> tag of the web page, thus showing in the browser window only, the second, consisting of title and subtitle, is visible as a headline on the page itself. Using two different titles is a common SEO strategy employed by slate.com

3. This derailed metaphor indeed is telling in that it speaks of Schuman's difficulties of coherently conceptualizing the experience of graduate school. Assuming that, as a Kafka scholar, she does not want to use the fable simply as a flowery version of saying 'bad situation', mapping the metaphor onto graduate school is difficult: is the mouse the grad student? Is the trap the unsuccessful quest for tenure? Does the cat correspond to private sector employment? Ultimately, these questions seem to speak strongly about the ambivalent desires and fears negotiated in her piece.

4. Cf. Nicholas Barber, who also refers to thesis hatements as a 'rapidly expanding sub-genre' of essay writing.

5. The question of how to slice genre affiliations here is not easily answered. One way to look at thesis hatements is as a 'relatively packed genre of recent works on the decision to go to grad school or not (which is probably just a subgenre of bearish pieces on academia)' (Cleveland). The larger segment of ironically (self-)deprecating portrayals of graduate education have a much longer tradition. Speaking even more broadly, the argument over whether studying the humanities is a good decision might be as old as the humanities themselves. As Anthony T. Grafton remarks: 'To become a trained humanist [...] is to join a tradition, which has usually been embattled, while parents scream 'No, for God's sake go to law school!' (That is what Petrarch's father said to him, thereby inaugurating a great tradition.)'

6. Cf. Piled Higher and Deeper.

7. Benton is the pseudonym of William Pannapacker; the piece was also mentioned in the Schuman quote at the beginning of this paper. Another typical representative is Larry Cebula's 'Open Letter to My Students: No, You Cannot be a Professor.'

8. With tenure remaining an attractive perspective even for those academics who announce having given up, thesis hatements by non-tenured authors always smack of an attempt to scare off job market competitors. I am grateful to Sascha Pöhlmann for pointing out this particular dynamic.

9. As one anecdotal case of such transnational reception: I came across Schuman's piece like most of its audience must have, via Facebook. A friend of mine, a German scholar living in California at the time, had shared it on her Facebook wall. Reading it about six month away from finishing my own dissertation, I immediately identified with its ethos (or: pathos) of suffering, an ethos that I was very much acquainted with and that I had learned to embrace as well. The text also echoed my impressions at the German Association for American Studies' Postgraduate Forum at Leipzig where a group discussion about German academia and one's place in it had quickly morphed into something akin to a meeting of Academics Anonymous, or so it had seemed: how else does one make sense of a room full of people speaking of the plight of the dissertation and of the lack of a perspective for the time after—none of them having to do it, and none of them seriously considering to quit? For a brief mention of the 'prekäre[n] wirtschaftlichen Situation, in

der sich der Großteil der Promovierenden befindet' cf. the conference report ('Tagungsbericht'). Cf. also Bordel and Ritter, as well as the debate on the 'akademisches Prekariat' that briefly flared in German public discourse in 2011/12.

10. This section profited greatly from discussions at the Unpopular Culture conference. I am particularly grateful for the remarks by Barry Shank, J. Jesse Ramirez, and Martin Lüthe.

11. Cf. Grafton for a particularly bitter phrasing of the use of graduate students as a way to provide cheap teaching: 'Administrators, meanwhile, began to treat systematic underemployment as a feature, not a bug, and made of it a management tool. They realized that they could finance elementary teaching by taking in large numbers of graduate students, keeping them at work for eight or nine years on low pay, running sections and occasional courses, and then spewing them forth unemployed or re-employing them as adjuncts.' Cf. also the attention the case of Mary Margaret received, an adjunct at Duquesne 'who died sick, alone and penniless' after not being able to build up retirement money from her meager payment (Flaherty; cf. also 'Reality Check').

12. Note in this context the debate about the study of class in academia that, Keith Gandal argues, has been hampered by the lack of poor professors. In the complex class identities at stake, it remains unclear whether 'facing or anticipating economic difficulties' constitutes enough of a 'poor identity' to energize 'literary-critical poverty studies.' The debate has recently been energized not just by the last economic crisis but also by Walter Benn Michaels's 2006 *The Trouble with Diversity*, which opens with a discussion of whether the difference between rich and poor people is simply a matter of having or not having money (cf. 1–3).

13. This view, of course, plays into a concern haunting the humanities at least since the revisionary interventions of the 1970s, the democratization of the university, and the broadening of university access: the concern that the humanities might be a class sanctuary, that their presumably universal quality might hide mechanisms of exclusion.

14. Note, of course, the conspicuous gendering that aligns the economically responsible decision to earn money with the (presumably) male job of the Hooters managers and that associates the humanities with femininity, as well as the unspoken allegation that graduate students fail to grow up; in these arguments, graduate school often features as a failure to grow up into an male adult breadwinner role, pointing at the nexus of gender, age, and economy.

15. Cf. also Tressie McMillan Cottom, who points out that the 'blanket advice' of thesis hatements comes from a privileged white position, and that minority students may require the credentials of a Ph.D. (even for non-academic jobs) to offset the negative hiring effect of their minority status. 'Plainly put, black folks need credentials because without them our 'ghetto' names get our résumés trashed, our clean criminal records lose out to whites with felony convictions, and discretion works against our type of social capital (and weak ties and closure of information) to amount to a social

reality that looks and feels a lot like statistical discrimination.' As Kalaidjian summarizes her point: the advice to opt out of academia 'ignores questions of race, gender, and class, indeed, the very social bedrock upon which the humanities staked many of its claims in the 1960s.'

16. Cf. also Michael Bérubé's observation that 'the contemporary university is so amorphous that it can be described as the research wing of the corporate economy, the final resting place of the New Left, the last best hope for critical thinking, the engine room of global technological advance, the agent of secularization and the advance of reason, the training ground for the labor force, the conservatives' strongest bastion of antifeminist education, the progressives' only bulwark against the New Right, the natural home of intellectual isolates, the natural home of goose-stepping groupthinkers, and the locus of postmodern skepticism and fragmentation' (147).

17. This text, too, bears two titles. One, marked down in the html title tags, is given above. The main title on the page reads 'You Aren't the Exception.'

18. Cf. also Newhouse's 'Deprogramming form the Academic Cult.'

19. On the sub-genre of survival guides in academic advice literature, cf. Cook. For an example of 'survivor guilt', cf. Thomas H. Benton's self-indictment that 'nothing but luck distinguishes me from thousands of other highly-qualified Ph.D.'s in the humanities who will never have full-time academic jobs' ('Is Graduate'), a quote I will come back to below.

20. Outside of academia, nursing comes to mind as one such sector. Note that Pannapacker also sees this dynamic inside the academy with the humanities on the one side and the 'male-dominated 'hard' fields, such as physics or engineering' on the other. On the particular class dimension of the metaphor, cf. also Jacqui Shine's article on 'Love and Other Secondhand Emotions'. Shine argues that people from lower class backgrounds have a fundamentally different understanding of what it means to 'love' one's work. She thus asks 'whether our reliance on using love as a way to measure one's suitability for their work has the effect of excluding low-income and working-class people from the academic professions. If the love question is, in fact, a kind of gatekeeping thing—and I think it is—then we run the risk of stacking the deck with people from middle- and upper-income backgrounds, folks who can understand and answer the question affirmatively and who have the luxury of ignoring the hard economic realities of the academic job market.'

Works Cited

Barber, Nicholas. 'Grad School's Not the Problem, You Are.' *The Huffington Post.* 9 May 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Benton, Thomas H. 'Graduate School in the Humanities: Just Don't Go.' *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 30 Jan. 2009. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

—. 'Is Graduate School a Cult?' *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 28 June 2004. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Bérubé, Michael. 'The Abuses of the University.' *American Literary History* 10.1 (1998): 147–63. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Cebula, Larry. 'Open Letter to My Students: No, You Cannot Be a Professor.' *Northwest History* 13 Nov. 2011. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

'Chronicles of a Recovering Academic | …on Being a Sheep in Wolf's Clothing. Sort Of.' n.d. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Cleveland, Grover. 'Should You Go to Grad School? Taste the Bitterness.' *Pileus*. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Cook, Paul. 'Survival Guide Advice and the Spirit of Academic Entrepreneurship: Why Graduate Students Will Never Just Take Your Word for It.' *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor* 0.22 (2013): n. pag. Web. 27 Apr. 2016.

Cottom, Tressie McMillan. 'Does Blanket "Don't Go to Graduate School!" Advice Ignore Race and Reality?' *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 15 Apr. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

'Doctoral Degrees: The Disposable Academic.' *The Economist* 16 Dec. 2010. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Flaherty, Colleen. '#iammargaretmary.' 19 Sept. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Gandal, Keith. 'Poverty Studies | Inside Higher Ed.' *Inside Higher Ed*. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

'Graduate Student Barbie.' *Karen Zgoda*. n.d. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Grafton, Anthony T. 'Humanities and Inhumanities.' *The New Republic* 17 Feb. 2010. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Hoberek, Andrew P. 'The 'Work' of Science Fiction: Philip K. Dick and Occupational Masculinity in the Post-World War II United States.' *Modern Fiction Studies* 43.2 (1997): 374–404. *MUSE*. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

'"In Valley and in Plain": A Job Market Theodicy.' *A Christian Thing* 26 Apr. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Kalaidjian, Andrew. 'The Hardest Task: Work and the Modernist Novel.' *Modern Horizons* (2013): n. pag. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Kreuter, Nate. 'You Aren't the Exception.' *Inside Higher Ed* 21 Nov. 2011. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Michaels, Walter Benn. *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*. New York: Metropolitan, 2006. Print.

Miller, Perry. 'Errand Into The Wilderness.' *The William and Mary Quarterly* 10.1 (1953): 4-32. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Newhouse, Margaret. 'Deprogramming from the Academic Cult.' *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 9 Apr. 1999. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Pannapacker, William. 'On Graduate School and "Love".' *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 1 Oct. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Piled Higher and Deeper. Dir. Vahe Gabuchian. 2011. Film.

'Reality Check: Knowledge Is Cheap.' *Right Scholarship* 25 Sept. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Rothman, Joshua. 'The Impossible Decision: On Whether or Not to Go to Graduate School'. *The New Yorker,* 23 Apr. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Schuman, Rebecca. 'Thesis Hatement.' *Slate* 5 Apr. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Shine, Jacqui. 'Love and Other Secondhand Emotions.' *Vitae | The Chronicle of Higher Education*. n.d. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.

Simpsons Funny Scene Grad Students. 2013. Web. 7 Apr. 2016. www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsDOvBT18Sg

So You Want to Get a PhD in the Humanities. 2010. Web. 7 Apr. 2016. www.youtube.com/watch?v=obTNwPJvOI8

Contributors

Catherine Bouko is a postdoctoral researcher and associate professor at the Department of Information and Communication Sciences at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium). Her works primarily concern digital performances as well as the use of social media in order to transmit cultural heritage. She has published the book *Théâtre and réception. Le spectateur postdramatique* (2010) and edited *Corps et immersion* in 2012.

Martin Butler is junior professor of American literature and culture at the University of Oldenburg. His main areas of research include the study of popular culture, particularly focusing on the history of political music, forms and figures of cultural mobility as well as cultures of participation in Web 2.0 environments. Apart from a number of articles in these areas, he has published a monograph on Woody Guthrie (*Voices of the Down and Out: The Dust Bowl Migration and the Great Depression in the Songs of Woody Guthrie*, 2007) and has co-edited an essay collection on protest songs (*Da habt Ihr es, das Argument der Straße: Kulturwissenschaftliche Studien zum politischen Lied*, 2007, with Frank Erik Pointner), *Hybrid Americas: Contacts, Contrasts, and Confluences in New World Literatures and Cultures* (2008, with Josef Raab), *Sound Fabrics: Studies on the Intermedial and Institutional Dimensions of Popular Music* (2009, with Patrick Burger and Arvi Sepp), *EthniCities: Metropolitan Cultures and Ethnic Identities in the Americas* (2011, wit Jens Gurr), *Pop / Wissen / Transfers: Zur Kommunikation und Explikation populärkulturellen Wissens* (2014, with Susanne Binas-Preisendörfer and Jochen Bonz), and a special issue of *Popular Music and Society* on musical autobiographies (2015, with Daniel Stein).

Jeroen de Kloet is professor of Globalisation Studies and Director of the Amsterdam Centre for Globalisation Studies (ACGS) at the University of Amsterdam. His work focuses on cultural globalisation, in particular in the context of East Asia. In 2010 he published *China with a Cut - Globalisation, Urban Youth and Popular Music* (Amsterdam University Press). He wrote, together with Yiu Fai Chow, *Sonic Multiplicities: Hong Kong Pop and the Global Circulation of Sound and Image* (Intellect, 2013) and edited together with Lena Scheen *Spectacle and the City—Chinese Urbanities in Art and Popular Culture* (Amsterdam University Press, 2013). See also www.jeroendekloet.nl.

James Dorson is an assistant professor at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies, Freie Universität Berlin, where he received his doctoral degree in 2011. Among his publications are essays on the critical reception of '9/11', Cormac McCarthy and the law, Edith Wharton and emotional labor, and David Foster Wallace. His research interests include critical theory, narrative theory, the affective turn, and science and literature. His current project deals with the relationship between American literary naturalism and the rise of managerialism around the turn of the twentieth century.

Dominika Ferens teaches American literature at the University of Wrocław, Poland. Most of her research explores minority literatures through theories of race, gender, and sexuality. In *Edith and Winnifred Eaton: Chinatown Missions and Japanese Romances* (2002), she examined the paradoxes of Orientalism in the work of two writers of Chinese-English-Canadian descent. Her book *Ways of Knowing Small Places: Intersections of American Literature and Ethnography since the 1960s* (2011) looked at literature's quarrels and affinities with ethnography in the age of multiculturalism. Using the framework of postcolonial and gender studies, she has also analyzed the fiction of such popular American and European writers as Karl May, Henryk Sienkiewicz, Zane Grey, and Ernest Hemingway.

Paola Ferrero holds a Ph.D. in English Language Literatures from Sapienza University of Rome, Italy. Her research work focuses on African-American culture, specifically music and performance, African-American women's literature, and American music. She is currently working on a research project on the diaspora of African-American blues and jazz musicians in Europe between the 1890s and the 1920s.

Bärbel Harju teaches American Studies at LMU Munich. She holds a Ph.D. in American History (LMU, 2011). Her dissertation, *Rock & Religion. Eine Kulturgeschichte der christlichen Popmusik in den USA* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012), critically surveys Christian pop music in the U.S. In 2015, she co-edited a collection of essays entitled *Cultures of Privacy. Paradigms, Transformations, Contestations* (with Karsten Fitz). Her research interests include popular culture, music, religious history, film and visual culture. Her current research project focuses on the cultural history of privacy in postwar America.

Sebastian M. Herrmann works as assistant lecturer at American Studies Leipzig. His dissertation on *Presidential Unrealities: Epistemic Panic, Cultural Work, and the US Presidency* was published in 2014, and he has co-edited several volumes on the politics of popular culture, among them *Poetics of Politics: Textuality and Social Relevance in Contemporary American Literature and Cultur*e. He is also the founding head editor of *aspeers*, the first and currently only graduate journal for European American studies, a teaching and publication project on the MA level he has also chaired for five years. He is a grantee of stipends from the Evangelisches Studienwerk Villigst, the Fulbright Commission, and the DAAD, and he has been awarded a Christoph Daniel Ebeling Fellowship to do research for his postdoc project on Big Data Imaginaries in the nineteenth century.

C. Richard King, professor of Comparative Ethnic Studies at Washington State University, has written extensively on the Native American mascot controversy, race and popular culture, and white power. He is also the author/editor of four books, including *Team Spirits: The Native American Mascot Controversy*, a CHOICE 2001 Outstanding Academic Title, *Unsettling America: Indianness in the Contemporary World*, *Beyond Hate: White Power and Popular Culture*, and most recently *Redskins: Insult and Brand*.

Jaap Kooijman is associate professor in Media Studies and American Studies at the University of Amsterdam. His articles on pop culture and politics have been published in journals such as *The Velvet Light Trap*, *The Journal of American Culture*, *Post Script*, *GLQ*, *Celebrity Studies*, and *Thamyris*, as well as in essay collections published by New York University Press, University Press of Mississippi, Routledge, Ashgate, Edinburgh University Press, Wallflower Press, and University Press of Kentucky. He is the author of *Fabricating the Absolute Fake: America in Contemporary Pop Culture* (Amsterdam University Press 2008), for which he won the 2009 ASCA Book Award. A second, extended and revised edition was published in 2013. Kooijman is associate editor of the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* and co-founding editor of *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies*.

Elizabeth Kovach is a doctoral candidate and Publications Coordinator at the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture, Giessen. Her dissertation is entitled 'Novel Ontologies after 9/11: The Politics of Being in Contemporary Theory and U.S.-American Narrative Fiction'. She received her BA in English from Barnard College, New York and her MA in Comparative Literature from Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich.

Susanne Leikam is assistant professor of American studies in the American Studies Department at the University of Regensburg, Germany. In her research, she focuses on visual culture studies, memory studies, disaster studies, and ecocriticism and currently works on a project located at the nexus of environmental justice and transnational American studies. Her dissertation *Framing Spaces in Motion: Tracing Visualizations of Earthquakes into Twentieth-Century San Francisco* (Winter; 2015) analyzes the development of the visual repertoires and interpretive framings of earthquakes from early modern Europe into the twentieth-century United States. Further publications include, among others, *Iconographies of the Calamitous in American Visual Culture* (special issue of Amerikastudien/American Studies; co-edited with Ingrid Gessner; 2013), '"Transnational Tales" of Risk and Coping: Californian Disaster Narratives in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries' (*Transnational American Studies*, ed. Udo J. Hebel; 2012), 'Environmental Imaginations of the California Channel Islands and Ecological Crisis in T.C. Boyle's *When the Killing's Done*' (*Ecozon@*; 2014), and 'Picturing High Water: The 2013 Floods in Southeastern Germany and Colorado' (*Extreme Weather and Global Media*, eds. Julia Leyda and Diane Negra; 2015).

Martin Lüthe is assistant professor at the John-F.-Kennedy Institute for North American Studies (FU Berlin). Lüthe published the monographs *'We Missed a Lot of Church, So the Music Is Our Confessional': Rap and Religion* (Lit Verlag, 2008) and *Color-Line and Crossing-Over: Motown and Performances of Blackness in 1960s American Culture* (WVT, 2011) and is currently working on a project tentatively titled *Wire Writing: Media Change in the Culture of the Progressive Era*.

Dietmar Meinel is currently working as a research assistant in American Studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen. He has written his dissertation as a doctoral fellow at the Graduate School of North American Studies at the John F. Kennedy Institute (FU Berlin). Meinel published the monograph *Pixar's America: The Reanimation of American Myths and Symbols* (Palgrave MacMillan 2016). Together with Laura Bieger he also edited *Black, White & In-Between* (2008). His research interests include popular culture, visual culture, the colonial period, and literary and cultural theory.

Sascha Pöhlmann is associate professor in American Literary History at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich. He has published the monographs *Pynchon's Postnational Imagination* (Winter, 2010) and *Future-Founding*

Poetry: Topographies of Beginnings from Whitman to the 21st Century (Camden House, 2015). He is the editor of essay collections on Pynchon and Mark Z. Danielewski as well as the co-editor of collections on places of beginnings in Modernity (with Maha El Hissy), electoral cultures (with Georgiana Banita), and America and the musical unconscious (with Julius Greve). Pöhlmann is a senior co-editor of the open access journal *Orbit: Writing Around Pynchon*, and he has written essays on topics such as Walt Whitman, assassinations, queer theory, poetry and 9/11, Western films, *The Cremaster Cycle*, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Don DeLillo, Sesshu Foster, Shelley Jackson, and Black Metal.

Christian Schmidt is assistant professor for American and Intercultural Anglophone Studies at the University of Bayreuth. In addition to his most recent book publication, *Postblack Aesthetics: The Freedom to Be Black in Contemporary African American Fiction*, he has published widely on various aspects of postblack literature (in particular on the oeuvre of Percival Everett). He has also published a number of essays on American country music, most recently "Nashville—The Authentic Heart and Soul of Country Music?" (2015) and "All Kinds of (Queer) Rednecks: The Sexual Politics of Contemporary Country Music" (2015). Together with Jeanne Cortiel he has co-edited a special issue for the online journal *Act: Zeitschrift für Musik und Performance* entitled *Sounds of the Future: Musical and Sonic Anticipation in American Popular Culture*. Currently, he is studying the (un)popularity of Taylor Swift as a country artist and her role as *the* pop star of the 21st century.

Karsten Senkbeil is assistant professor at the University of Hildesheim, teaching Cultural Studies and Intercultural Communication Studies, particularly with a transatlantic perspective. He is the author of *Ideology in American Sports: A Corpus-Based Discourse Study* (Winter, 2011). His research interests include sports cultures around the world, intercultural transfer processes of popular culture, and the application of cognitive and pragmatic linguistic theories and methods to inter- and transcultural communication.

Barry Shank is professor and chair of the Department of Comparative Studies at Ohio State University, where he teaches courses in American studies, popular music studies, cultural theory and interdisciplinary methods. He is the author of *The Political Force of Musical Beauty* (Duke University Press, 2014), *A Token of My Affection: Greeting Cards and American Business Culture* (Columbia University Press, 2004), and *Dissonant Identities: The*

Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas (Wesleyan University Press, 1994). He is the co-editor of *The Popular Music Studies Reader* (Routledge, 2005) (with Andy Bennett and Jason Toynbee), and *American Studies: A New Anthology* (Wiley/Blackwell, 2009) (with Janice Radway, Kevin Gaines and Penny Von Eschen). He has published in such journals as *American Quarterly, American Studies*, *boundary 2*, *The Journal of Popular Music Studies*, and *Radical History Review*, and he has served on the editorial boards of *American Quarterly* and *Popular Music*.

Dan Udy is a doctoral candidate in the Department of English at King's College London, working on a dissertation titled "Going Viral: Queer (Re) Mediations in the YouTube Decade". He holds a BFA in Fine Art and MSt in the History of Art and Visual Culture from the University of Oxford, and his research interests include Reality television, video streaming and HIV/ AIDS activist media.

Florian Zappe is assistant professor of American Studies at the Georg-August-University Göttingen. He is the author of books on William S. Bur-roughs (*'Control Machines' und 'Dispositive'—Eine foucaultsche Analyse der Machtstrukturen im Romanwerk von William S. Burroughs zwischen 1959 und 1968,* 2008) and Kathy Acker (*Das Zwischen schreiben – Transgression und avantgardistisches Erbe bei Kathy Acker*, 2013) and has published essays on a variety of topics. His research interests range widely from the theory and history of the avant-garde, critical and 'French' theory, pop(ular) culture, the history of European and American cinema (with a focus on independent and experimental film), modern and postmodern literature to surveillance practices and their effects on our culture.

Index