THE
POPULAR CULTURE
STUDIES JOURNAL

MidwestPCA/ACA

THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL

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THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL

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Welcome to
The Popular Culture Studies Journal!

Popular culture is at the heart of democratic citizenship. It serves as an engine driving technology, innovation, and information, as well as a methodological lens employed by the many scholarly fields that examine culture, often from an interdisciplinary perspective. Yet, despite its growing significance, we argue that there are not enough venues for publishing pioneering popular culture scholarship. Thus, the need for *The Popular Culture Studies Journal*.

The articles, essays, and book reviews in this inaugural issue of *PCSJ* demonstrate the scope and breadth the editorial team would like to pursue as this publication accelerates up to full speed. Taken as a whole, they encompass many critical areas: theory-development and building, exploration of contemporary challenges, links to the discipline's history, and innovative analysis and assessment across mass communications channels, including literature, television, and film. Andrew F. Herrmann's lead article, for example, demonstrates the way scholars might use popular culture in autoethnographic research. In addition, the piece also reveals how critical popular culture is as one creates, develops, and employs a worldview. Each article in *PCSJ* pushes the envelope in a similar manner.

The editorial team also wanted to use the launch of the new journal to showcase several innovations. Foremost, *PCSJ* is partnering with Laureano Ralon and his award-winning Figure/Ground Communication website (www.figureground.org) to feature an exclusive interview with an important popular culture scholar in each issue. We are proud that the first interview is with Arthur Asa Berger, one of the world's preeminent scholars across communications, mass media, research methodology, and popular culture. Berger is a towering figure in popular culture studies, thus an ideal first for *PCSJ*.

Also, to provide a new twist on traditional book reviews, *PCSJ* features "New Perspectives on Classics Texts," the opportunity for today's scholars to re-assess and reconsider a classic book and its influence over time. We hope readers will share other ideas with us, so that we can offer additional new advances.

In closing, the editorial staff has chalked up numerous debts in producing this double issue. First, we would like to thank the members of the MPCA/ACA leadership team and the members who comprised the Journal Committee. In addition, we would like to thank filmmaker Brent Jones for designing the splendid cover, which helps us create a brand immediately differentiated from other academic journals. Of course, we also thank the Editorial Advisory Board members for their diligent efforts. A special note of appreciation to Thiel College, the journal's academic home, and President Troy VanAken and Dean Lynn Franken for their warm support. We hope that each MPCA/ACA member finds *The Popular Culture Studies Journal* useful and important. Please dive into the journal and let us know what you think!

Bob Batchelor
Editor

Editorial: What is Popular Culture?

BOB BATCHELOR

After decades (or maybe centuries) of asking this bedeviling question, scholars around the world still agonize over how to express popular culture. Is it as water is to the fish, as our intellectual forefather Ray B. Browne concluded, or is it simply all that is not elite or high culture? Moving from the tactical to the strategic or meta-level, one might wonder if popular culture is even a thing. Perhaps it is more like the air or oxygen than water or maybe the atmosphere itself, something we know exists but cannot visibly see or easily explain. Maybe it is more like the sun, always there, essential to life, yet a thing we know relatively little about, particularly given its centrality to our very existence.

Regardless of one's specific definition, it is impossible to deny the ubiquity of popular culture in contemporary society. It is so rampant that it could be viewed as a kind of common or global language that links people across geographic, class, race, gender, and economic lines, though these factors certainly play a critical role in how one speaks or interacts with popular culture. The notion of standing around a water cooler at work and discussing last night's new television series or film debut is important in how culture breaks barriers—anyone can participate. This idea remains central even as the water cooler itself rarely exists in today's workplace and has more or less become a part of pop culture lore.

My inclination is to view popular culture as the connections that form between individuals and objects. It is one's engaging with a popular culture entity that then produces a feeling in the person that takes culture to an emotional level. I suggest that it is this instinctual link to culture that results in the chemical reaction that bursts in one's brain when encountering popular culture items. That rush can *feel* like or actually be chemistry, hatred, attraction, antipathy, or love.

Whether it is a favorite novel, particular film, or piece of music, we are chemically attuned to popular culture. Observer's claim that the brain is "hardwired" to comprehend many things, popular culture is one of the most critical. In examining literature, for example, scholar Richard M. Dorson explains:

> A tale is not a dictated text with interlinear translation, but a living recitation delivered to a responsive audience for such cultural purposes as reinforcement of custom and taboo, release of aggressions through fantasy, pedagogical explanations of the natural world, and applications of pressures for conventional behavior. (21)

Again, on an instinctual level then, popular culture is the manifestation of our physical desire for culture. I hazard this is why a baby will dance and sway to music long before she realizes what music actually is and why people are attracted to certain actors, narratives, and situations.

For additional clues, we might journey back in time, say more than 10,000 years, to examine what popular culture might have looked like then. In the era of foragers, which historian David Christian explains is "the first and by far the longest era of human history," early humans trekked across Africa and eventually into other areas, as far away as Siberia and Australia (*Fleeting* 1). Though details remain scant, according to Christian, the cave paintings found in Spain and France reveal artistic development. He explains that these small groups, occasionally bumping into one another, slowly evolved into networks, including marriage between groups, and most likely the ability to convey stories and culturally-shared activities, such as dancing (*Fleeting* 3, 10). What constituted "popular" at this time and for tens of thousands of years may have meant merely a handful of people or small groups that occasionally intermingled. During nomadic times, these groups may have ranged from 25 to 50 people and larger communities of around 500.

The more important aspect, however, is that these early humans experienced some kind of emotion, feeling, or information-sharing based on cultural interaction. At the same time, foraging communities developed new technologies and innovations, such as better hunting weapons and clothing. Just as in the last several hundred years the evolution of technology spurred a parallel outpouring of popular culture, one can imagine the more sophisticated and decorated clothing and other forms of artistry symbolizing a burgeoning growth in popular culture during that epoch.

Another idea to consider is that these lean, nomadic muscle machines with big brains for engines propelling the whole enterprise physically and emotionally must have had some of what we call today, "down time." They had to have space to let their bodies and developing brains rest. In studying recent nomadic societies

and some ancient civilizations, researchers can hypothesize that these early humans had feelings of spirituality, which scholar Fred Spier calls "religious needs" (136). Increased brain power would have led to increased complexity in thinking about self, society, and civilization, even if on a limited scale.

As the brain continued evolving, from about 200,000 years ago to 35,000 years ago, humans became more complex thinkers, explains historian Cynthia Stokes Brown, "producing cave paintings, carvings, figurines, grave goods, [and] ornamentation" (57). From J. R. McNeill and other world historians, we learn that the arrival of agrarian society, about 12,000 to 4,000 years ago created a cultural springboard, from political systems, religions and rituals, and other forms of "human cultural diversity." Later, McNeill informs us, the "process of cultural diversification, reversed itself" (108). Homogeneity ruled as those with power took over and consolidated. For example, religions grew, the number of individual languages dropped, and culture centralized.

Ray Browne once attempted to encapsulate popular culture, broadly stating, "It is the everyday world around us: the mass media, entertainments, diversions, heroes, icons, rituals, psychology, religion—our total life picture" (75). In pondering this definition and contemplating its link back to the earliest humans and beginnings of popular culture, I see a connection between today's iconic figures like George Clooney, Brad Pitt, or Angelina Jolie, and the early figurines, paintings, and tools that date back about 100,000 years ago.

Imagine, a leap back in time to about 40,000 to 35,000 years ago, when the last Ice Age began to blanket most of the earth in snow and cold. For the next 15,000 years, early humans grappled for survival. Most people did not live through the era, but thankfully for us, enough did to carry on the human race. Astonishingly, despite this ongoing battle for survival, what remains from the time frame is an artistic flourishing that staggers modern researchers. From human figurines found across Europe and Russia to cave paintings throughout Europe and Africa, one must surmise that our ancestors used art to cope with the changing circumstances and stresses of life in such a severe environment (Matthews and Mallam). Christian explains, "In harsh environments, knowledge is as crucial as tools…knowledge was highly valued, and carefully codified and stored in stories, rituals, songs, paintings, and dances" (*Maps* 197).

Scholars Rob DeSalle and Ian Tattersall point to artworks found in the Vogelherd cave in southern Germany that contained animal figurines of a horse, mammoth, and lion. Although these ancient trinkets are more than 30,000-years-

old, they are not straightforward renditions of the animals. The horse, for example, DeSalle and Tattersall report, "is a perfect evocation of the abstract essence of all horses: symbolic in every sense of the term" (196).

Although early artwork and animal figurines demonstrate early humankind's symbolic reasoning, the link between their world and ours grows closer when examining the Venus figures. These include the Venus of Willendorf, one of the earliest images of the human body made by humans, which archaeologist Josef Szombathy discovered on the banks of the Danube River in Austria in 1908. The Venus of Willendorf is about four and a half inches tall and dates back about 22,000 to 24,000 years ago. The figurine and others similar to it are notable for having exaggerated body female body parts, including enlarged breasts and hips (Matthews and Mallam).

Since few actual women probably looked like the Venus of Willendorf in a nomadic period of foraging and other Venus statuettes have similar body types, some researchers conclude that the figurine is of an idol or idealized female. Here the comparison with Pitt comes full circle, since Pitt himself is now more photographic or filmic image than real human being and certainly idolized on a number of levels. In certain films, Pitt has exaggerated male features designed to accentuate his star quality, from the oversized physique of *Troy* to the sleek extreme of *Fight Club*.

Another way to view the Venus of Willendorf/Brad Pitt connection is as cultural constructs. In other words, people within the culture are using ideal images as representations of adulation. We do not know for sure why specific characteristics of the Willendorf statuette are exaggerated or even the rationale for the figurine, but considering the craftsmanship it took to sculpt it, the sculpture possessed meaning. Conversely, we may think we understand why Pitt is super buff or beefed up for certain roles or even why he is presented as the ideal male, but I think this points to the foundational nature of culture. Perhaps attempting to link contemporary definitions of popular culture with its origins may someday lead us to the discovery of a culture gene, if not in fact, then metaphorically, which leads us deeper into the connection between human nature and popular culture.

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Daniel Amos and Me: The Power of Pop Culture and Autoethnography

ANDREW F. HERRMANN

Nearly everyone I know has a relationship with something in popular culture, whether it is *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* amassing *The Astonishing X-Men* comics, or collecting every version of every *Star Wars* movie. Relationships and pop culture: couldn't that make an autoethnography?

    This is a short version of my relationship with a band, Daniel Amos. I am not in Daniel Amos. I don't know the members of the band (although I am Facebook friends with them now). I first heard them in 1982 serendipitously. Or maybe it was destiny. Either way, they opened my eyes to the wonders, doubts, and excesses of my life, critiqued my faith, and brought me joy. I feel like I know them, and they me. Thirty-one years after first hearing them, I realize our relationship is one of the longest I have had. We grew up and are growing older together.

Popular Culture Autoethnography?

Pop culture and autoethnography: two terms seemingly at odds with each other. On the one side stands popular culture studies, with its interrogations of music (Albiez), television shows (Stern), video gaming (Dunn & Guadagno), movie genres (Carroll), characters (Herrmann, "C-can") – including individuals who become "characters" (Herbig 133) – and its examinations of power and discourses in popular texts, broadly defined (Stern, Manning & Dunn). On the other side sits autoethnography, the narrative first-person examination of the self, used as a jumping off point to interrogate cultural practices (Holman Jones, Adams & Ellis). One examines culture and identity from the outside in, the other from the inside out. Do the twain meet? We could say, "No," leave it at that, and go our disparate ways. No fuss, no muss.

This answer, while convenient, does not work. Pop culture impacts our identities indelibly and profoundly (Bennett). In media studies, millennials are called "digital natives," since they are comfortable with and have domesticated technology (Tyma). We *all*, however, are pop culture natives, and have been for generations. Like people with synesthesia who can see sound and taste color, we are embedded in popular culture. It impacts our emotional states and our differing tastes. Popular culture helps us define who we are, what we believe, and influences whom we befriend.

Similarly our identities help define what we believe is worthwhile pop culture and what is not. I am not talking about the supposed divide between high and low brow culture (Gans). (And, as an aside, wouldn't high-brow cultural theorists be disgusted with *both* pop culture and autoethnography?) Rather, I am implicating our identities as one determining factor for our beliefs about pop culture and our pop culture choices. We scan our pop culture surroundings, accepting some things and filtering out others. (Of course, our filtering mechanisms are not perfect. I sill recognize Justin Bieber songs when I come across them accidentally on the radio.) Our identities and identifications with popular culture artifacts assist in our creation of self. Our identities and pop culture have a long-term recursive relationship.

One way across the chasm is through examining our primary identities, the star groups we belong to and owe loyalty to, and "our most significant social and professional roles as well as the most compelling and meaningful experiences of our lives" (Krizek 148). My primary identities and music are intricately related.

The Double

> My double's sitting in another world.
> My double's laughing in the heavenly places.
> I am his double here, I can expect
> We'll be together when time is no more.
>   -- Daniel Amos, "Double"

Two confessions regarding my primary identities. One: I became a Christian in 1978 in junior high. It was an easy decision. I did not want to go to hell. We were Plymouth Brethren, an extremely conservative congregationalist denomination.

Women must wear head-coverings, which I sarcastically called "head doilies." King James Version of the Bible only. Women and children were to be silent. No women in leadership. No drinking. No smoking. No dancing. No card playing. No pastor (too authoritarian). No music during weekly Communion. No rock music. Their message: "Yes" to Jesus, "No" to everything else. Christian apocalyptic eschatology, such as the rapture and the *Left Behind* phenomenon, started with the Brethren. In comparison, this denomination makes most Southern Baptists seem liberal.

Two: I discovered punk rock around the same time. I still identify as "punk" (Herrmann "Never"). I played bass with my brothers Fred (guitar), and Jim (drums) before I left for college, and we jammed when I came home for the holidays, but we never melded the way bands that get regular jamming time together do. Still, we came up with a name, "The H-Factor," with the "H" for "Herrmann." We wrote lyrics to a few songs: "Jumping Jack Lalanne Flashbacks" and "Phil Collins Is Chasing Me," both of which abused the crass commercialism of the 1980s. I was immersed in punk and post-punk, with records by The Sex Pistols, The Cure, Black Flag, The Police, The Clash, PiL, etc. Or, as they referred to in my church, "THE DEVIL'S MUSIC!" I straddled two worlds. I lived a double life. I was a doppelgänger.

The Christian Bookstore

You play old music.
Well some of it's a bore.
To me it's all irrelevant,
Like Haight Street and love beads.
-- Daniel Amos "Memory Lane"

1982: As my brother Fred and I enter the Christian bookstore, my flat feet hurt. The walk is about two miles from home. The carpet under my soles feels wonderful. The store is quiet, except for some praise music. Heading toward the records, we walk past familiar best-selling books by Hal Lindsay and Billy Graham. Flipping through the albums, I sigh. As Johnston noted of his own experiences of the time, "Traditional Gospel, popular and easy-listening forms of

CCM [contemporary Christian music] dominated the shelf space" (118). Christian radio was the same.

Anything construed as different or potentially offensive was not played or displayed at the bookstore. Platitudes and jingoistic lyrics filled the songs. Mainstream Christian music was, as Fred would say with dismay, "A bunch of happy crap." There's Jimmy Swaggart, Michael Card, Scott Wesley Brown, and Sandy Patti…what we considered, "Old people music." I am a sophomore in high school and my friends listen to punk, metal, and new wave. They are rocking. I am too, but I feel guilty about it. I'm not *supposed* to like secular music. My church said so. Worse, all the Christian music I encounter is a variation on Kumbaya. *Why can't Christian music rock? Why is it so lame?*

I walk up to the counter, behind which stands a bespectacled man in his fifties.

"Jeez, he's not going to be any help," I think. He's looking at me with the suspicion a young, not-quite-normal-Christian teenager feels when looked at by his elders. My ripped jeans and purple rat-tail hair probably aren't helping. I steel myself.

"I was wondering if you had any music that's, ah, different."

"Have you heard of David and the Giants?" he asks.

"Yeah. I was hoping for something *quirkier*."

"I have Daniel Amos."

"Who's he?"

"Not a he. A band. Someone special-ordered two records by them, but returned them. He said Daniel Amos played country, and this can't be them, because it is too, um, *queer*. I'll give them to you half price, since they're opened," the clerk explained.

He hands me two albums. The first, *¡Alarma!: The '¡Alarma! Chronicles' Volume I,* shows a photo of the band with their eyes smeared out. The second has a photograph of a male mannequin standing in front of a window, his blank eyes

staring at me, with the words *Doppelgänger: The '¡Alarma! Chronicles' Volume II* along the bottom.

"Alarma Chronicles? What's that all about? And what's with the eyes?" I think to myself.

"I'll take 'em."

Doppelgänger

When we get home, I put on *Doppelgänger*. The music starts. It is playing backwards, and stays that way. I am reminded of the supposed satanic backwards masking on secular records by Led Zeppelin and Queen. Then Terry Taylor speak-sings over the backward music.

"We are the anti-men, we are the masked men. Resting together, cavity, stuffed with straw. Figure without shape, shadow without nuance. Impotent power, the empty men." (Daniel Amos "Hollow")

"This is *really* weird," my youngest brother Jim says.

"Yeah," I agree. "It's cool. I think some of those lyrics are from T.S. Eliot. I read him in English last year."

We keep listening. It is like no Christian music I had experienced. The music is angular, edgy, and disjointed. The straight rock songs are raw and full of power. These guys can really play. The cacophony speaks to me. *Doppelgänger,* with its strange metaphors, odd lyrics, weird background vocals, and emotional complexity was to become my all-time favorite album. I'd discovered alt-Christian rock.

Hard Questions…

Mainstream Christian music at the time was geared to what my brothers and I called "the old and the brain dead." It didn't talk to me about what was happening in my family and church. Christian platitudes were not useful. Unlike the easy, carefree Christian music at the time, life was not easy and carefree. It was chaotic.

> The feel good god, and the lord of science
> Democracy's blind and bewildered giants
> The hammer and the sickle and the modern appliance
> All the staggering gods.
> 　　　-- Daniel Amos "Staggering Gods"

We had hard questions. Not just because we were teens creating our own senses of identity. Our father's business failed. Our parents got divorced. They got remarried. Our stepmother was a junkie (Herrmann "Father's"). We experienced economic turbulence, falling in and out of the middle class. We were the neighborhood "freaks" with outdated clothing. Our cars were repossessed. The utilities got shut off. Our stepfather's business failed. We lost our home (Herrmann, "Losing"). A pipe bomb left on the porch of a suburban home, murders our friends, leaders in our church. The crime remains unsolved (Genzlinger; Herrmann, "Walking"). I staggered through high school and college. Within five years I lost trust in the financial system, the American Dream, the police, my parents, the church, and the government. A clean-cut Christian artist singing, "Jesus loves you" did not cut it. In fact, it pissed me off. Staggering gods, indeed.

…And No Easy Answers

These lyrics are literate, based on William Blake, T.S. Eliot, *The Book of Job*, and *Ecclesiastes*, a depth honoring the mystery of the spiritual, rather than putting God in Western civilization's rational box. They tell stories and ask insightful questions, without providing answers. "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity. And darkness is on the face of the deep. Who has failed, mankind or the church?" ("Hollow Man (Reprise)"). I laugh knowingly as they criticize the prosperity gospel: "I'm

one of the King's kids. I do deserve the best. The very very very very best. I'm one of the King's kids. I deserve the best. I wanna…a new car! Oh! Rock on Jerry!" ("New Car"). They sing about televangelistic abuse and the uselessness of materialism ("I Didn't").

I choke with laughter when they metaphorically use the golden arches for the gates of heaven ("Mall"). I smile conspiratorially as they poke fun at the prophecies for the future: "I thought by now I'd walk the moon, and ride a car without no tires. And have a robot run the vacuum, and date a girl made out of wires" ("Eighties"). They question the media's exploitation of women ("Real Girls"). They open my eyes to social consciousness, taking on sexism in the workplace: "Those good ol' boys say she's a little flirt. A dirty joke, a little feel. It's all in fun, no one is getting hurt" ("Working"). I cry with their more personal songs about disintegrating families, broken promises, and the death of loved ones "…now you're the catch in my throat" ("Flash"). This is not the normal Christian fare. *And they can really jam.*

I wander though the Christian bookstore using my new technique for finding alt-Christian music. I'm no longer looking for artists, but alt-Christian record labels: Star Song, Rooftop, Light, Forefront, Solid Rock, Refuge, Alarma! I've got limited funds, and label shopping pays off. I've discovered The Choir experimenting with haunting, textured music. The 77's meld new wave with blues rock. Steve Taylor pushes the limits of synth pop. Jerusalem pounds out metal. However, I always return to Daniel Amos.

Shrinking Man

Flash forward to the late 1980s: I'm no longer a practicing Christian, yet still find myself purchasing Daniel Amos albums. I can't help myself. I buy the textured *Fearful Symmetry,* playing both sides on my college radio show. I find *Motorcycle* in Tower Records, and pop it my DiscMan and rock the commute home. I discover *Mr. Buechner's Dream* in a used bookstore discount rack. I find their first album. *Son of a gun! They were a country band!*

Time passes. I work a job I loathe. Off work, I am drunk or otherwise altered. I am stuck in place. Directionless. Empty. I am uneasy, disturbed, and as much as I try to push out and drown out the uneasiness in my soul, it keeps pecking at me

like Poe's big black bird. After years of ignoring the stirring in my own soul, I pull out Daniel Amos. They are singing about me.

> Life's hysterical.
> You're holding on the best you can.
> You're incredible,
> Incredible shrinking man.
>   -- Daniel Amos "Incredible"

At that moment, I make a decision. It was time for a new beginning, a clean break, and a fresh start. It was time to renew my spiritual side, to get in touch with my beliefs, to begin my quest to find out who I was. Within two weeks I quit my job, pack my belongings, move from New Jersey to Chattanooga, and attend church regularly for the first time in a decade. I decide to be the best Christian I can be, which means dropping all the pretentious and soul crushing legalism of my Brethren upbringing. To paraphrase Kierkegaard, "I'm no exemplar of a Christian, but I'm doing the best I can" (38).

Miracles

Fast forward to 2010. A Facebook post pops up in my news feed. Terry Taylor, Daniel Amos' lead singer is in financial straits. People are asking for donations so he can keep his home, and pay his family's medical bills. I *know* what that feels like. I have been there, and it is gut wrenching. I donate, even though I am unemployed, because Terry has been a part of my life for thirty years.

Turns out a lot of people feel the same way and donate too. I watch Christianity, as it is supposed to be practiced in action, as people shower their care, appreciation, and donations on the Taylor family. I am reminded of the old hymn lyrics: "They will know we are Christians by our love."

Then it happens. I cannot believe it, and I have to catch my breath. I read the announcement again to make sure I am not delusional. Daniel Amos is going on tour. I *never* thought I'd *ever* see them live. On June 14, 2011, I take my brother Jim to a small Missouri church.

"I know what you're thinking," Terry Taylor says, laughing. "Man these guys got old!" For the next two hours, they jam, and so do we. I catch Jim laughing.

"What are you laughing about?"

"I *just can't believe* I'm sitting here, watching this band play songs from when I was eight years old."

"I know exactly what you mean."

Two years later Daniel Amos releases *Dig Here Said the Angel,* their first album since 2001. I order it as soon as it goes on sale, as well as the newly released double-disc set of *¡Alarma!.* It arrived two days ago. I burn it to my MacBook. I burn a copy for my car. After all these years, they still speak to me like an intimate friend.

> I closed my eyes and I ran like the wind.
> I had all my hair and perfect skin.
>   -- Daniel Amos "Waking"

Coda

My primary identities maintain an indelible hold on the person I am, the choices I have made, and what I believe about social and economic justice, faithfulness, and human relationships. They developed, in part, through the alt-Christian music in which I was embedded. I am still a Christian, but different. No longer a fundamentalist, the Sermon on the Mount now defines my religion and politics.

Daniel Amos is not just part of my pop culture surround, but a part of me. They do not merely speak *to* me. Sometimes I think *through* and *with* their music, lyrics, and the stories they tell within them. Songs that make me laugh, and cry, and dance. They are deeply connected to my primary identities: the Christian me, and the post-punk me. Daniel Amos did not save my soul, but their music changed my life.

I chose to autoethnographically explore my relationship with Daniel Amos in this piece, but I could have chosen any number of popular culture artifacts that

speak to me: Humphrey Bogart movies, the old and re-booted versions of *Battlestar Galactica*, my collection of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* comic books. We all have music, movies, television shows, comics, and a multitude of other popular culture artifacts that touch us deeply, that lift us to the heights of happiness, the apex of anger, or the depths of despair. Popular culture and autoethnography: the possibilities are endless, and there is interesting and important scholarship to be done by combining the two.

Start writing.

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When the Abyss Looks Back: Treatments of Human Trafficking in Superhero Comic Books

BOND BENTON AND DANIELA PETERKA-BENTON

Superheroes and Social Advocacy

Superhero comic book characters have historically demonstrated a developed social awareness on national and international problems. Given that the audience for superhero characters is often composed of young people, this engagement has served as a vehicle for raising understanding of issues and as a tool for encouraging activism on the part of readers (McAllister, "Comic Books and AIDS"; Thibeault). As Palmer-Mehta and Hay succinctly state:

> (They) have addressed a number of pressing social and political issues in narratives through the years, including alcohol and drug abuse, racism, environmental devastation, gun control, and poverty. In the process, they have provided a rich tapestry of American cultural attitudes and philosophies that reflect varying approaches to issues that continue to haunt, confound, and rile the American public (390).

The relationship of the superhero to topics of ongoing public concern appears to have been present even in the earliest days of the form. In Action Comics #1, Superman attacks a man abusing his partner stating "…tough is putting mildly the treatment you're going to get! You're not fighting a woman now!" (Siegel and Shuster 5). On the cover of Captain America Comics #1, the Captain is shown punching Adolf Hitler over a year before the Pearl Harbor attack at a time when non-intervention was a commonly held public sentiment (Jewett and Lawrence). In 1947, the popular Superman Radio Show produced the "Clan of the Fiery Cross." Superman's successful defeat of the KKK was heard by over five million

people and received immediate praise from the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the American Newspaper Guild, and the Calvin Newspaper Service, a chain of African American newspapers (von Busack). With the publication of X-Men in 1963, superhero stories explored how certain groups in America are isolated and oppressed. Superheroes were also ahead of public sentiment and public policy at the onset of the AIDS crisis. Marvel's Canadian superhero team Alpha Flight sympathetically portrayed a gay superhero who faced the disease in 1986, when widespread paranoia and homophobia made the topic taboo to discuss in other media (McAllister, "Comic Books and AIDS."). This advocacy on topics frequently ignored and hidden by other media extended beyond AIDS, as well. Captain America openly accepted a gay soldier in 1982 (Witt, Sherry, and Marcus), over two decades before the military seriously began consideration of ending its policy of excluding gays and lesbians. In Batman: Death of Innocents, Batman campaigns against the worldwide use and sale of landmines (O'Neil). In the period after the September 11 attacks, superhero comics also provided thoughtful and reflective commentary in the wake of the tragedy (Hall).

While this is not intended to be an exhaustive report of all superhero engagement on social and political issues, the frequency and depth with which superhero stories advocated on topics of concern is clearly in evidence. It would seem that some aspects of the genre perhaps make superhero stories more suited to engagement than other media. Some of the defining characteristics of superheroes include the possession of a secret identity, super powers, and a mission. The central feature of many of the previously mentioned social and political concerns is providing justice to those who have been marginalized and made powerless. In such cases, traditional outlets of institutional justice have been made inaccessible for those victimized. Thus, the idea of individuals committed to justice with powers greater than oppressive institutional forces makes for an ideal narrative vehicle. With this in mind, it is hardly surprising that superhero comic books have explored the issue of human trafficking as an opportunity to raise awareness for more than a decade.

The Human Trade

Even though institutionalized slavery was outlawed worldwide by the mid-1800s, human trafficking and smuggling have become some of highest revenue

producing illegal activities over the past three decades, which plague the entire world. In this illegal trade, men, women and children are lured, defrauded, manipulated, or straight out kidnapped by various means into what has become known as modern day slavery.

For several decades, the international community has tried to universally agree on a distinct definition for human trafficking and human smuggling. A consensus was finally reached in the formulation of the "The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime," which was adopted by the General Assembly in November 2000 and entered into force in 2003, creating the main international instrument in the fight against transnational organized crime. The Convention is supplemented by three Protocols, which target specific areas and forms of organized crime: the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air; and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition (UNODC).

The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons ("United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime And The Protocols Thereto") describes the process of human trafficking under Article 3 to involve the "recruiting, transporting, transferring, harboring or receiving a person through a use of force, coercion or other means, for the purpose of exploiting them" further outlining that exploitation shall include "at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs" ("What Is Human Trafficking?").

Many people associate human trafficking solely with sexual exploitation, which does constitute a main concern for many countries around the globe (Blackburn, Taylor, and Davis; Blackburn, Taylor, and Davis; Breuil et al.; Okojie; Rand; Subedi). However, as the UN Protocol outlines, many forms of exploitation can occur aside from that, including labor exploitation (Richards), bonded labor or servitude (Androff; Sigmon), which is "the status or condition arising from a pledge by a debtor of his personal services or of those of a person under his control as security for a debt" (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), child trafficking for adoptions (Leifsen), trafficking of organs (Meyer), exploitation of children as child soldiers (Becker), or any other form of organized exploitation for economic gain.

The actual extent of human trafficking is difficult to estimate due to the clandestine nature of the trade with humans, which mostly remain unnoticed by the general public. Bales estimated that as many as 27 million people are exploited as slaves including exploitation through bonded labor, forced labor forced child labor, and sexual slavery. In contrast, The International Labor Organization sets the number at 12.3 million, while the U.S. Government estimates 800,000 people to be trafficked across borders each year, with millions more being trafficked within nations (Lusk and Lucas). The United Nations estimate that 2.5 million people are subject to forced labor, including sexual exploitation, as a result of trafficking affecting approximately 161 countries worldwide. The majority of victims, 56 percent are from Asia and the Pacific and are between the ages of 18 and 24. In addition, an estimated 1.2 million children are believed to be trafficked annually. Close to half of all victims are used for commercial sexual exploitation, mostly targeting women and girls, compared to about one-third of all victims who experience forced economic exploitation. Overall the estimated global annual profits from all forms of human trafficking are believed to be as high as $31.6 billion (Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking).

In comparison to human trafficking, article 3 of the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime defines the smuggling of migrants as the "procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident." ("United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime And The Protocols Thereto"). Most definitions separate human trafficking form human smuggling through the elements of force, fraud, and coercion, a clear exploitation phase in human trafficking cases, as well as the fact that the primary focus of human smuggling lies on the illegal crossing of international borders.

While the UN Convention neatly defines human trafficking and smuggling as two distinct and different forms of the trade with humans, reality proves that the two forms do in fact overlap in numerous areas. Many instances are known, which begin as cases of human smuggling including consenting parties, which can then turn into human trafficking once the illegally smuggled migrants face force or fraud or even exploitation at the destination (Peterka-Benton). It is therefore

possible for illegal migrants to find themselves in truly life-threatening situations, as Stoecker and Shelly point out:

> Significant violations of human rights may occur even though the smuggling process began with a consensual relationship. Smugglers may physically abuse the humans they move, subject them to overcrowding, or deprive them of food or water or needed medical care (66).

As such both, human trafficking and human smuggling have evolved into popular processes to exploit vulnerable migrants oftentimes leading to unspeakable human miseries.

Method

For purposes of this research, we chose to focus on the treatment of human trafficking in superhero comic books. To identify relevant issues and story arcs, we searched several key comic-focused databases including *Comic Book Resources*, *Comics Worth Reading*, *Comic Vine*, *Comic Book Database*, *Grand Comics Database*, and *Comic Book DB*. Our search focused on key words related to human trafficking in the synopses of superhero comics. These key words included "human trafficking," "human smuggling," "sexual slavery," "child soldiers," and "bonded labor or servitude."

Because this is an investigation of the treatment of human trafficking in titles targeted toward a mass audience, the search was limited to the superhero comics of Marvel and DC who control nearly 60 percent of the comics market (McAllister, "Ownership Concentration in the US Comic Book Industry"). The time frame for the search was limited from 1991 to 2011. We chose the start date for our investigation because 1991 is traditionally considered to be the end of the Cold War and the beginning of a dramatic increase in the mobility of populations throughout the world. In some instances, trafficking was considered only a peripheral plot point and such comic stories were not included in the analysis (alien slave races and the like). As such, this is not intended to be an exhaustive categorization of all treatments of human trafficking in the comic book medium, but, rather, an investigation of several instances where mainstream, superhero titles directly engaged the topic.

With this in mind, the following issues and story arcs were selected for analysis: *Wonder Woman: The Hiketeia* (Rucka, Jones, and Von Grawbadger), *Punisher MAX: The Slavers* (Ennis and Fernandez), *Wolverine: The Brotherhood* and *Wolverine: Coyote Crossing* (Rucka and Fernandez; Rucka and Robertson)*, Ghost Rider #5* (Williams, Clark, and Arturo, *Ghost Rider #5*), *Batman: Ultimate Evil* (Vachss), and *Unknown Soldier: Haunted House* (Dysart & Ponticelli, 2009). For each of these examples, we identified how the topic of human trafficking was treated by looking at basic patterns and trends of the human trafficking process. This process usually includes three distinct steps, which all can vary greatly within each other: recruitment/abduction from victim's place of origin, transfer nationally or internationally, and exploitation at the destination. Based on these considerations, our content analysis focused on the identification of the following items:

1. Recruitment (type of recruitment, location, targeted group, traffickers)
2. Transportation (type of transportation, transnational or local, groups involved in transport)
3. Type of Exploitation (forms of exploitation, location – country, specific location of exploitation)
4. Response of Superhero Character (to both the traffickers and the trafficked persons)

After completing this analysis, we contrasted superhero treatments with how the issue is explored in *Borderland* (Archer and Trusova), *You're not for sale* (Council of Europe), and *Evelina* (Emoto and Gomez-Murphy). These are educational comics created by the International Organization for Migration, the Council of Europe and Cause Vision to inform at-risk populations about the dangers of human trafficking. *Borderland* combines seven stories about human trafficking, which are all based on testimonies of real Ukrainian human trafficking victims, with an expectation to explore human trafficking from a new perspective. This comic book is authored by Olga Trusova, who came to the Ukraine as a Fulbright Fellow collaborating with the International organization for Migration, and by Dan Archer, who considers himself a comic journalist with an emphasis of representing news stories in a visually appealing way (Archer and Trusova). *You're not for sale* is a contribution to the Council of Europe action to combat human trafficking and protect its victims, by alerting the Councils 47 member

states to this obvious human rights violation. This campaign was one of many to appear shortly after the adoption of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, which was adopted by its member states in 2005 marking the first European-wide treaty of that nature (COE Convention). Lastly, *Evelina*, was developed as an educational Manga by the non-profit organization CauseVision, which is planned to be "distributed through local grass roots organizations and international organizations that work in target communities, as well as to children and women in order to raise awareness about the risks of human trafficking" (Cause Vision). Recently the founder of CauseVision, the photojournalist and author Natsuko Utsumi, visited with teachers in Mexico City, which resulted in a demand of over 50,000 copies of Evelina, they would like to distribute to students and their families (Utsumi, personal communication, May 16, 2012).

Results

The comparative thematic analysis of the following comic books dealing with the subject matter of human trafficking revealed some interesting results:

1. *Wonder Woman: The Hiketeia*
2. *Punisher MAX: The Slavers*
3. *Wolverine: The Brotherhood*
4. *Wolverine: Coyote Crossing*
5. *Ghost Rider #5*
6. *Batman: Ultimate Evil*
7. *Unknown Soldier: Haunted House*

Wonder Woman: The Hiketia focuses on a girl who approaches Wonder Woman for protection. She enters into a religious bond with her where she trades loyalty for safety. The girl has killed a group of traffickers who took her sister. She is wanted by authorities and by Batman. Wonder Woman offers her protection, but has some reservation about doing so (though she feels sympathy for the girl's impulse for revenge).

Danielle's sister was trafficked when she received an offer by "talent scouts" to join an "entertainment group" that promised to make her a star. The trafficking

group said that she had to work to cover the cost of transportation from her hometown to the city. The work was posing for nude photos and ultimately coerced prostitution.

In *Punisher MAX: The Slavers*, Frank Castle is engaged in a typical Punisher story (namely the brutal execution of organized criminals). During a sweep of the city's underworld, he encounters a desperate woman held by the gangsters. After saving the woman's life, he learns that the woman has escaped an extensive human trafficking operation based in Eastern Europe that forces women into prostitution. After uncovering more about her horrific circumstances (which includes the death of her infant child) Castle's bloody mantra of vengeance is then fully directed toward the trafficking organization.

Wolverine: The Brotherhood tells of teen girls are kidnapped by an "end times" militia/cult. After being kidnapped, the girls are made into forced "brides" to service the cult leader with support and cooperation from corrupt local officials in small town Idaho. Families seeking the return of their daughters face threats from law enforcement with liberation of the girls falling onto the shoulders of Wolverine.

Departing from the overt good and evil of the trafficking narrative, *Wolverine: Coyote Crossing* focuses on the voluntary (but ultimately exploitive) human smuggling trade. The story focuses on a human smuggling operation from Mexico to El Paso, Texas. Poor Mexican migrants are provided transport in exchange for swallowing balloons filled with drugs to be smuggled into the United States. After 19 illegal migrants die in an unventilated tractor-trailer during transport, Wolverine intervenes to find the leader of the organization responsible.

Ghost Rider #5 explores the journey of the "new" Ghost Rider, Alejandra, who was recently selected by supernatural forces to be the "next" Rider. In this capacity, she is sent out to be "the spirit of vengeance" and seek "those most deserving of fire" (Williams, Clark, and Arturo, *Ghost Rider #5* 6). The trafficking presented in the story focuses on the coerced abduction of children in rural Mexico. The organization responsible is presented as large and multi-layered. Though the nature of their exploitation is not overtly stated, it is implied that it is horrific and unpleasant with the children described as being mere "produce for the market." As someone who was trafficked as a child, Alejandra feels enormous personal conviction in destroying the organization and its leaders.

Part comic book, part educational and advocacy piece, *Batman: Ultimate Evil* explores trafficking in the fictional country of Udon Khai. The authors state the

country was created to serve as a loose proxy for Thailand. After learning about child sex trafficking, Batman goes to Udon Khai. Using a false identity, Bruce Wayne goes through layers of contacts before arriving at a location to purchase a trafficked young girl. Working with a local guerilla group, he locates the girl's home village and learns that the large families and limited resources make child selling a profitable (but largely hidden business). After taking down the trafficking organization in Udon Khai, the conclusion of the book makes comparisons (though briefly and vaguely) to drug addicted sex workers in the U.S.

With meticulous research and precise details, *Unknown Soldier: Haunted House* explores the trafficking of child soldiers and sex slaves by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda. The story focuses on Dr. Lwanga Moses. An immigrant child of Ugandan parents, he returns to his homeland to assist in helping to rebuild the country. At a refugee camp outside of Acholiland, he witnesses a boy assaulted by the LRA. Overcome with rage, he mutilates his face and wages a one-man war against Joseph Kony's group.

The description the abduction of children and forced military service/sexual slavery in Uganda is quite accurately portrayed. The latter portion of the story focuses on his rescue of captured girls taken from a Catholic orphanage. While vengeance is certainly a story focus, the country's crushing poverty, corrupt officials, and exploitation by the U.S. government are prominent story features. Thus, while the reader may get satisfaction from Moses' revenge, there is an uneasy impression that vengeance will do little to stop the systemic problems that created the trafficking in the first place.

In regards to the type of human trafficking depicted, five of the books, including *Wonder Woman, the Punisher, Wolverine Brotherhood, Batman, and Unknown Soldier,* specifically deal with sexual exploitation. This is not surprising, as many people associate sexual slavery with human trafficking, not knowing that there are many different forms of exploitation that are utilized by trafficking organizations, such as previously noted. Two of the comic books mention child trafficking, with the *Unknown Soldier* (aside from a sexual exploitation storyline) focusing on child soldiers, and *Ghost Rider* suggesting it, without specifying any details as to how the children are being used. Lastly, *Wolverine Coyote Crossing* actually depicts the process of human smuggling, which at first sight may not fit into this analysis of human trafficking story lines. Looking more closely as the story develops, however, one can detect, how

smuggling operations sometimes turn into a process that includes force and coercion, which, following UN definitions, would actually constitute human trafficking.

A successful human trafficking organization will utilize traffickers who either force or convince their victims to leave their homes to travel with them. Many different methods are being used by traffickers, including recruitment via informal networks of families and/or friends, advertisements offering job or study abroad, false marriage offers, purchasing children from their parents, or complete coercion through abduction or kidnapping. According to the IOM Counter Trafficking Database, utilizing victim data from 78 countries collected between 1999 and 2006, "46 percent of victims knew their recruiter and 54 percent were recruited by strangers."(UNODC 12)

As the following figure shows, the majority of recruitment strategies involve some kind of developed personal contact between the traffickers and victims, followed by newspaper ads, and direct sale by family members. These strategies generally allow for a smooth transport to the final destination where exploitation will occur, as most victims are unaware about their final destiny. Therefore kidnapping as a recruitment method is hardly used.
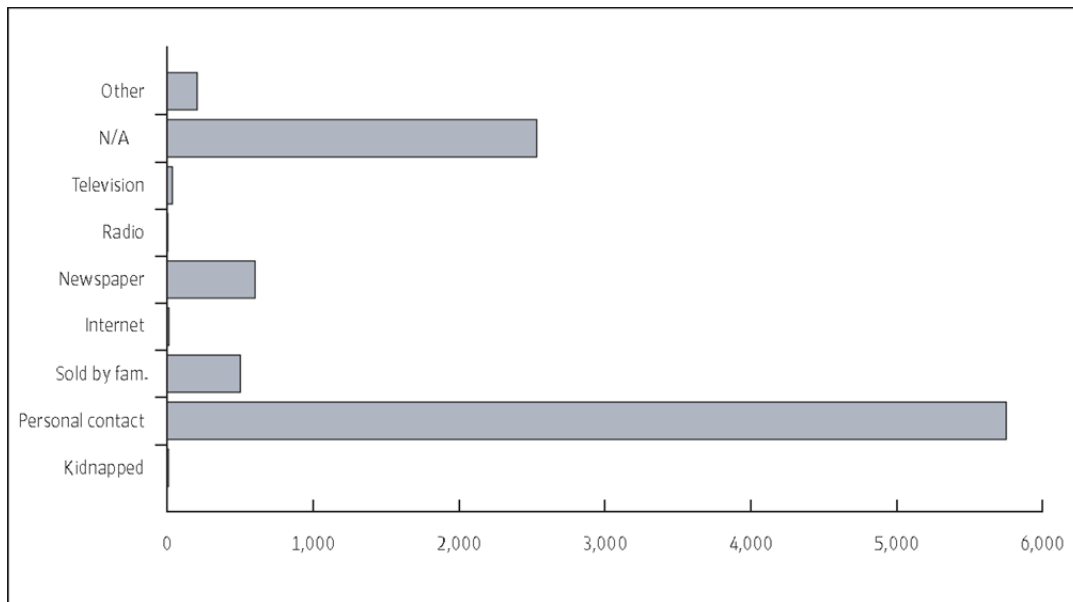

FIGURE 1. Number of victims by recruitment method (UNODC 12, International Organization for Migration, Counter-Trafficking Database, 78 Countries, 1999-2006)

The analysis of comic books reveals that four of them mention forced abduction as primary recruitment method, as depicted in *Ghost Rider*, *Wolverine: The Brotherhood*, the *Punisher* and *Unknown Soldier*. In *Batman*, children were bought from their parents with limited knowledge about their future fate, while *Wonder Woman* depicts deception by promises of legitimate employment in the entertainment industry to lure girls into forced prostitution.

Wolverine Coyote Crossing, as mentioned above, deals with a human smuggling operation and as it is typical in these situations, migrants contact the smugglers on their own free will, because they need this illegal service provider to cross the U.S./Mexican border. At this early stage of the process, migrants are consenting partners in an illegal operation.

Once the victims or unsuspecting migrants are in the hands of traffickers, the process moves to the second stage, which entails the transport of the victims to their final destination, which can either entail crossing borders covertly or overtly, or it simply means domestic transport from one region to another. Transportation routes and methods vary upon geographical conditions and can include trafficking by plane, boat, rail, ferry, road, or simply on foot. Related criminal offenses are "abuses of immigration and border control laws, corruption of officials, forgery of documents, acts of coercion against the victim, unlawful confinement, and the withholding of identity papers and other documents (UNODC 13).

While most people probably assume that human trafficking is primary done internationally, four of the analyzed books dealt primarily with domestic trafficking. In *Batman*, children of Udon Khai were bought from their parents, to stay inside the country for future sexual exploitation, a storyline that can also be found in *Wolverine Brotherhood* and *Wonder Woman*, which interestingly chose the United States as location for domestic trafficking. In *Unknown Soldier* as well, children are forced into military service/sexual exploitation within Uganda, their home country. Unfortunately none of the four books go into any detail about the specifics of the transport process. *Ghost Rider* and *Wolverine Coyote Crossing*, on the other hand, mention trucks as main transport method to move children and illegal migrants from Mexico into the United States. *The Punisher* details the story of one female victim, who was abducted from her village in Moldova and transported domestically to Moldova's capital where she was forced into prostitution. Later she was sold to a Rumanian, who brought her to America, to

again work as a prostitute. The book does not explain the details of either transport, domestically or internationally.

For many years, human trafficking for sexual exploitation has dominated discussions on this very issue, which possibly serves as an explanation as to why the majority of reviewed comic books have indeed used that particular form of exploitation as their primary story line. *Wonder Woman* realistically introduces its readers to the fact that victims are often drugged or under the influence of alcohol to make them willing subjects for prostitution or pornography. Most of those victims disappear in underground brothels or camps as depicted in the *Punisher* and *Batman* stories. *Wolverine Brotherhood*, places sexual exploitation in a more specific context by abducting teen girls for forced marriage and sexual exploitation by the leader of the group. *Ghost Rider* is vague about the type of exploitation the children will encounter, however refers to children as "product" for the "market," and that the children's experience will be very unpleasant upon their arrival in the United States. The primary role of captured girls in *Unknown Soldier* too, is to serve as sex slaves for the men and boys in those militia groups, though it is noted that they are armed as well. *Wolverine Coyote Crossing*, morphs over into a process of human trafficking when the migrants are forced to swallow balloons filled with drugs during their transport. Furthermore they are subjected to inhumane travel conditions, which again hint at the exploitive character of this business.

Lastly the analysis tried to identify the superheroes' response to the traffickers/smugglers and the victims of their actions. In six of the seven comic books, the superheroes choose brute violence in response to their encounter with this subject matter. Only Wonder Woman does not follow this trajectory, by only tacitly approving the violence that was used against the traffickers in this story, while Batman, who tries to apprehend the girl under Wonder Woman's protection, outright rejects violence against the traffickers by demanding the vigilante anti-hero of this story to be turned over to the authorities. Interestingly, none of the superheroes in those stories support the victims of trafficking, nor do they provide alternative avenues to prevent those illegal activities other than killing some or all members of the trafficking organizations involved. Solely the *Punisher* introduces the character of a social worker, who tries to help trafficking victims.

In contrast to these fictitious stories in the superhero universe, *Evelina, You're not for Sale* and *Borderland*, utilize the comic medium to provide easy-to-read

materials for at-risk populations and the general public to raise awareness about human trafficking. Due to their educational nature and the obvious absence of a superhero character, those comics were not included in the content analysis, but instead will be treated as a separate category.

Evelina follows a young Mexican girl, who is following her mother's cousin under false pretenses, only to find herself in forced prostitution in the United States. The story concludes seven years later, with Evelina now recruiting girls for the traffickers herself. The story is much more victim-based than the superhero comics, and even takes into account that many women eventually become part of the organization, while still under the control of its leaders. *Borderland* and *You're not for sale*, broadly describe different forms of human trafficking, through stories based on real people. *You're not for sale* depicts trafficking for sexual exploitation, forced labor, and bonded labor through four stories, all of which end up in this situation through deception through half-truths or promises of employment. *Borderland* also based all its stories on true accounts of seven trafficking victims, who all but one end up in forced labor situations, in which they were subjected to inhumane and life threatening conditions. Interestingly, the topic of forced or bonded labor seems more prevalent in the educational comics than in the superhero comics, which mainly focus on sexual exploitation.

Discussion

Having examined both the content of comics dealing with human trafficking and checking their accuracy when compared to real world circumstances, it is now important to consider assessment of the merit of these books in terms of awareness. Like the issue of human trafficking itself, there does not appear to be an easy answer in terms of evaluation.

When considering how trafficking is presented, many of the books skewed toward easy absolutes on what is a complicated and multi-faceted problem. The emphasis on abduction and sexual slavery (particularly as it relates to children) creates a more compelling superhero narrative. The idea of brute strength protecting innocence has almost been a generic requirement of the superhero since *Action Comics #1*.

"When will we shoot the poachers of children on sight?" (Vachss, Barret, and Cowan 17)

"I am the fury of innocence trampled and sullied. I am justice in its most ancient form… I am God's clenched fist." (Williams, Clark, and Arturo, Ghost Rider #5 11–12)

"Let's go kill every last one of these fucking little monsters." (Dysart and Ponticelli 51)

"I want to wrap his heart in barbed wire and fuck his corpse with it." (Dysart and Ponticelli 122)

Such statements clearly show a military metaphor in finding solutions to human trafficking, while ignoring the structural, developmental, and institutional solutions that must be a part of solving this problem. The concern raised by this militarization of discourse related to human trafficking is not hypothetical. In 2012, the social media sensation of the *Invisible Children* viral video and the subsequent "KONY 2012" campaign created unprecedented national and international interest. While many praised the campaign for raising awareness of human trafficking in Uganda, there was marked concern in the development community about the proposed solution: military action to capture or kill Joseph Kony (Shaikh). This emphasis on military solutions to a multi-layered problem presents a concern consistent with what this analysis identified. While it should in no way be inferred that these comics in any way fostered this attitude, the reflection of this perspective in these superhero texts certainly merits serious scrutiny.

To fully dismiss the role these superhero stories can play in educating activists, however, would be similarly shortsighted. Despite the excellent intentions and outreach to at-risk audiences of comic books like *You're not for sale, Evelina,* and *Borderland*, it is remarkably unlikely the dissemination of these books could approach the audience superhero comics enjoy. Thus, while the narrative structure of superhero stories may inhibit their accuracy in presenting social issues, the potential for awareness-raising cannot be overlooked.

It should also be noted that audiences for superhero stories may be sophisticated enough to understand the medium should not be read literally. The

generation that listened to "Clan of the Fiery Cross" story in the 1940s saw a Superman take down the KKK with his superhuman power. A decade later, those children became the civil rights activists who would fight injustice and segregation through the court system, protest, and civil disobedience. In short, the superhero story was understood as a source of education and inspiration and not read literally.

Much like Stetson Kennedy's work on Superman, Dysart and Ponticelli's *Unknown Soldier* reflects serious research into the problems faced by Uganda. While there is an overt emphasis on individual violent action as a solution to human trafficking, analysis by history and political science educators suggests that it still provides an ideal starting point for young people to begin asking hard questions about the justice of a globalized world. As Decker and Castro argue, "*Unknown Soldier's* intended status as a popular art provides a gateway for deeper understanding by undergraduates *because* it is not a scholarly tome" (178). The challenge for creators, educators, and critics is continued exploration of superhero engagement with social issues, applauding the facilitation of advocacy, but carefully considering the point at which exploration becomes exploitation.

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Being-in-the-Technologically-Mediated-World: The Existential Philosophy of Marshall McLuhan

MARCELO VIETA AND LAUREANO RALON

McLuhan and Phenomenology: A New Ground for an Old Figure:

A mostly unexplored area of inquiry within McLuhan studies is the connection between the *perceptual model* of experience and Heideggerian-inspired existential/hermeneutic phenomenology.[1] Without intending to dress McLuhan in the robes of an existential thinker *tout court*, this paper proposes to bring some aspects of his general media theory – grounded in the senses, embodiment, and mediation – into contact with aspects of existential/hermeneutic phenomenology – grounded on existence, meaning, and lived-through world experience. Simply put, we believe there is a hidden existential aspect to McLuhan's thinking that remains virtually unexplored and should be examined for the mutual benefit of media ecology, phenomenology, and the philosophies of technology.

A general affinity between McLuhan and phenomenology has been identified in passing by a number of authors, including Heim, Kornelsen, and Striegel. The aim here is to more thoroughly develop the link we introduced in McLuhan and Phenomenology (Ralon and Vieta, 185), particularly the common elements that have also shaped the emergence of a "philosophy of technology." Indeed, McLuhan's probe-based approach has been criticized for merely scraping the surface of phenomena, or for being outright incoherent (Genosko 115). For example, Heim declares that "Empedocles fell into the volcano and Marshall McLuhan fell into the random, fragmentary world he was describing" ("Electric language" 11). However, as Roman Onufrijchuk points out, "a significant aspect of McLuhan's contribution to media theory may also be found in what he did not say [directly] but implied throughout his work" (202). Moreover, as convincingly demonstrated by J.F. Striegel, there *is* a coherent general theory to McLuhan's project – one consistent with phenomenology. In light of this, it is somewhat ironic that the usual charges

against McLuhan – e.g., that he was a "fragmentary" thinker; that he relied too much on puns for his arguments; that he is a technological determinist – are themselves often based upon equally superficial readings of his texts.

Part of the problem, we think, is that more than three decades have passed since the death of McLuhan, and what seems to have remained most alive about his extensive oeuvre is a simplified take on some of his deepest insights, probes, and aphorisms (i.e., "the medium is the message," "the global village," "hot and cool media"). It is troublesome that, to this day, many commentators continue to encounter McLuhan through these and other metaphors without examining the significance within his greater general theory. In his introduction to *The Question Concerning Technology*, translator William Lovitt wrote of Martin Heidegger: "Every philosopher demands to be read in his own terms. This is especially true of Heidegger. One must not come to him with ready-made labels, although these are very often given" (xiii). So too with McLuhan.

We shall rely extensively throughout the remaining pages on McLuhan's actual words; we believe that he should speak for himself when appropriate by way of direct quotation and paraphrasing drawn not only from his principal books, but also from background knowledge derived from his biographies (Marchand; Gordon), his media appearances, and his posthumously published letters (Molinaro et al.). Taking McLuhan seriously requires a *pressing toward inherent possibilities* that emerge, however tentatively, from background areas of his writings. In fact, the possibilities of a phenomenological McLuhan are latent in his work, as suggested by these and other statements we have identified throughout his work:

> "Heidegger surfboards along on the electronic wave as triumphantly as Descartes rode on the mechanical wave." ("The Gutenberg Galaxy" 248)

> "Existentialism offers a philosophy of structures, rather than categories, and of total social involvement instead of the bourgeois spirit of individual separateness or points of view." ("Understanding Media" 47)

> "People now have to encounter themselves in the inner world - Kierkegaard or existential style - in order to know who they are." ("Private Identity")

In order to map out McLuhan's phenomenological theory of technologically-mediated life, we first make connections between McLuhan's "perceptual model" and Heidegger's existential phenomenology; Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body and perception; and Hans-Georg Gadamer's and Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenologies. We then draw McLuhan further into the phenomenological paradigm by comparing Don Ihde's existentially-centered, human-technology phenomenology with McLuhan's tetradic model.

McLuhan's Communicational Intentionality

Heideggerian-inspired phenomenologies propose that we come to know ourselves via daily, practical encounters in, with, and through the world. We propose here that McLuhan's program puts forward that we come to know both ourselves and our world (saturated as it is in technological rationality, human artefacts, and electric and digital information) in a general disposition that could be termed being-in-the-technologically-mediated-world – a condition guided by what we understand to be a "communicational intentionality."

The notion of intentionality in phenomenology was introduced by Franz Brentano and further developed by Edmund Husserl to refer to the aboutness or directionality of the mind (Moran 16), i.e., the mental process by virtue of which human beings relate to objects in the world. For Husserl, intentionality meant that all consciousness is consciousness of something (Merleau-Ponty xvii; Dreyfus 50). By "communicational intentionality," however, we mean a primordial orientation toward the world grounded not on conscious awareness, but upon something similar to what Heidegger called being-in-the-world – the fundamental ontological structure whereby Dasein's character is defined existentially.

Being-in-the-world means that things are revealed to human beings when encountered, manipulated, or generally engaged with. In the processes of these practical engagements, human beings themselves are revealed as co-emergent with the world. We term the intentionality of being-in-the-world a "communicational intentionality" because, for Heideggerian-inspired phenomenologies, the notion of intentionality is not based solely or primarily on the mind (i.e., perception, cognition), but rather, is centered upon the lived-body as an existential/gravitational center; it is rooted in the bodily powers to interact

with the things and, thus, communicate with the world. For Heidegger, as such, the intentionality of being-in-the-world is a "practical" encounter with, or directionality toward, our objects of concern; it is a more bodily-based alternative to Husserl's consciousness-centred intentionality.

This existential way of being-in-the-world, then, is by definition centrally interactional (i.e., communicational). In this "communicational" reading of intentionality, we also draw from Merleau-Ponty's astute descriptions of this practical way of being-in-the-world. A close reader of Heidegger's existential phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty describes this communicational, and even dialogical, intentionality as:

> The passing of the sense-data before our eyes or under our hands is, as it were, a language, which teaches itself, and in which the meaning is secreted by the very structure of the signs, and this is why it can literally be said that our senses question things and that things reply to them…. We understand the thing...by taking up on our own account the mode of existence which the observable signs adumbrate before us…. [I]n the interaction of things each one is characterized by a kind of a priori to which it remains faithful in all its encounters with the outside world.... Thus, the thing is correlative to my body and, in more general terms, to my existence.... It is constituted in the hold which my body takes upon it…. (319-320)

Moreover, both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty point to an implicit form of understanding that Dreyfus calls "skilful coping" – a playful state of absorptive engagement with the world. As Dreyfus and Wrathall colourfully describe Heidegger's notion of understanding as " I am in the world understandingly when I am doing something purposively (5). Furthermore:

> All of these connections between activities and entities and ways of being are constitutive of the understanding of the world I possess. In the process of acting on the basis of that understanding, in turn, I allow things and activities to show up *as* the things and activities that they are (frying pans as frying pans, spatulas as spatulas, etc.) In acting in the world, then, I understand how things relate to each other – that is to say, I understand in the sense of "knowing how" everything in the world hangs together. (5)

There is a striking similarity between the last sentence of this passage and the claim by McLuhan that "the meaning of meaning is relationship" (McLuhan and Nevitt 86). For both McLuhan and Heidegger, not only is the whole larger than the sum of its parts, but things tend to bear on other things and find their way around by virtue of their place in a larger referential totality. Both McLuhan and Heidegger share this relational/ecological orientation toward world and self: we come to understand the world and ourselves by way of our engagement with things within our "manipulatory zone" (Schütz) via the lived body's intentionality. Following Merleau-Ponty, the body engages with the world four-foldedly – sensually, perceptually, motor-practically, and cognitively – and the objects of the world "answer back" accordingly.

As with existential/hermeneutic phenomenology's intentionality, for McLuhan reality is "something we make in the encounter with a world that is making us" (McLuhan and Nevitt 3). Accordingly, the world is, for McLuhan, neither directly accessible as it is in-itself nor subjectively constituted by a transcendental ego, but "approachable through several…modes of awareness, each imposing its own biasing influences on understanding" (Striegel 47). Furthermore, there is always more to the world than what we can isolate by way of conscious awareness and selective perception. "Everybody experiences more than he understands," claimed McLuhan, "[y]et it is experience rather than understanding, that influences behaviour" ("Understanding Media" 277).

Interestingly, this seems to parallel Heideggerian experiential interpretations of the world: "[J]ust as the world exceeds any perspective upon the world…I sense it within and not outside experience" (Ihde, "Experiential Phenomenology" 64). McLuhan also believed that experience comes before consciousness and is a "preconscious, cumulative totality of perception" (Striegel 47).[2] In short, for both McLuhan and Heideggerian-inspired phenomenologists, the understanding of who we are emerges existentially in an implicit, practical, and situated encounter with a world that is simultaneously making us.

Being-in-the-world, therefore, means that human reality is configured in a lived-through world experience of interactions that co-disclose world and self via "interpretive understandings" (*Verstehen*). Existential phenomenologists understand themselves as simultaneously and situationally contextualized: "*projective*…focused reference to the world" and a "*reflective*…movement from the world" (Ihde "Existential technics" 14). In phenomenological terms,

communicational intentionality for both McLuhan and Heidegger, tends to be an "interactional" form of "human self-conception" that positions the self in a world that is co-constituted by worldly encounters (14). We are made and we understand ourselves mainly in our pre-reflexive, pre-conceptual, and practical worldly encounters.

Phenomenological Conceptions of World and Self as Mediated by Technology

McLuhan and Heidegger's complementary conceptions of technology and its "environing" nature also contain similar views on *world* and *self* as mediated by technology. McLuhan's projective/reflective communicational intentionality – what we call his existential phenomenology's being-in-the-technologically-mediated-world – comes into focus when we tease out three well-known "percepts" he often used to understand how media influence our perceptions of our surrounding world and sense of self: sensory ratios, media as translators, and media extensions and amputations. In this section we examine each of them in turn.

Sensory Ratios

For McLuhan, the lived experience of *being-in-the-technologically-mediated-world* and interpretive recognition involved a perceptual interplay of the senses – visual, aural, touch, smell, taste – oscillating in constantly shifting "sense ratios" ("Gutenberg Galaxy" 314; "Understanding Media" 109). As McLuhan explains, "rationality or consciousness is itself a ratio or proportion among the sensuous components of experience" ("Understanding Media" 109); that is, in McLuhan's perceptual model, the subjective interpretations of worldly encounters are constituted by the constant relational play between each sense working simultaneously and in tandem in varying degrees of influence at any given time (Striegel 47).

In turn, which sense predominates is influenced by a medium's selective biases stressing one sense while withdrawing or reducing the others. This relational interplay of the senses influences our field of awareness. As McLuhan

and Powers explain: "technology stresses and emphasizes some one function of man's senses; at the same time other senses are temporarily dimmed down or obsolesced" (3). This dynamic shapes *how* the things of the world are perceived and is always oscillating between modes of awareness (figure) and modes of unawareness (ground). All the while, our senses perpetually work in *homeostatic ratios* that constantly seek balance between them. In mediated activity, the instruments or tools between the person and the world impose their structures on our modes of sensory reception, biasing our perception of the thing being communicated and, thus, our understanding of the world being mediated. So, for McLuhan, the medium is more important on our perceptions than the content because:

> 'media' in terms of a larger entity of information and perception which forms our thoughts, structures our experience, and determines our views of the world around us…provid[ing] the information upon which we order, or structure, these experiential perceptions. (Striegel 33)

Thus, "the medium" *was* "the message": it is the very structures of the media of communication that constantly play on our sensory ratios and capacities, as well as perpetually transform our reality as they bend our perceptual capacities according to a medium's biases.

To McLuhan, this interrelationship between the senses was known as "tactility," a worldly and bodily encounter that "touched" or "grasped" the world, not only through skin, but also by means of all the senses working together. He writes:

> Our very word 'grasp' or 'apprehension' points to the process of getting at one thing through another [mediation] of handling and sensing many facets at a time through more than one sense at a time. It begins to be evident that 'touch' is not skin but the interplay of the senses…of sight translated into sound and sound into movement, and taste and smell. ("Understanding Media" 60)

This multi-sensual process of "apprehension" has clear affinities with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception and his bodily and communicational intentionality we described earlier.

Media as translators

The sensorial explanation of how we "grasp" the world via mediated encounters subsequently allowed McLuhan to make an innovative ontological move that redefined the notions of "medium" (noun) and "to mediate" (verb). In a theoretical refining of his notion of technological environments, medium means: "something that goes between" (Gordon 188), bringing entities of the world together, *and*, in a major contribution to technology studies, we feel, anything that "extends" *and* "translates" – or transmits and transforms – human experience ("Understanding Media" 56-61). Again, for McLuhan, this also meant that all technologies had the characteristics of being "media" because all human artefacts, simultaneously, mediate, "store," and transform human activity, experience, and consciousness:

> For man…possesses an apparatus of transmission and transformation based on his power to store experience. And his power to store, as in a language itself, is also a means of transformation of experience. (59)

For example, *language* (one of the earliest media) via speech and writing transmits, translates, stores, and, most importantly, transforms human thought from an individual's solitary activity to a social function that extends thought and memory outward while compressing space and time. *Writing* specifically makes linear thought and indexing possible, while further extending thought and memory temporally and spatially. Moveable type and the printing press, key technologies that helped shape the modern mind for McLuhan, reduce the opportunity costs of disseminating ideas to broad audiences, eventually transforming illiterate masses into a reading public and creating the capacities for archival innovations.

McLuhan asserted, "For just as a metaphor transforms and transmits experience,"so do the media" ("Understanding Media" 59). Late in his career McLuhan began to draw inspiration for the transformational and translational role of media as a form of language, or text, from hermeneutic phenomenology, such as Ricoeur's *The Rule of Metaphor* . Somewhat aligning themselves with Ricoeur's position regarding the powerful transformational role of language and metaphor, McLuhan and Powers assert that "the media themselves, and the whole

cultural ground, are forms of language. The transforming power of language," they continue, "is recognized by contemporary phenomenology and linguistics as well" (27).

Drawing heavily on existential phenomenology, Ihde similarly writes of the "transformational" ("Existential technics" 48) and potentially "hermeneutic" (54) nature of all media, again unintentionally paralleling McLuhan with his own existentially-minded phenomenology of human-technology relations.

Using the phone as an illustrative example, Ihde thus defines a medium as a communicational tool or go-between that "withdraws" in a ready-to-hand fashion as the "other" is made present in "space-time" (56). In this sense, the "[the phone] materializes us to each other" (56) in what Ihde calls the "amplificatory dimension" (56). In the act of talking over the phone, then, my communicative space and the site for interaction with another is, in McLuhan's language, brought together, translated, and transformed as my reach out to the other and the reach of the other to me are extended at the same time that we are brought together via the reduction of spatial distance. "But, at the same time," continues Ihde in a similar circumspectful tone to McLuhan's, "the advantage [of the phone via its amplificatory possibilities] is gained at a price" (56).

The telephone presence is a "reduced" presence, Ihde explains, a trade-off innate to interacting on the phone. In this "reductive dimension," the telephone lacks the perceptual richness of face-to-face encounters. While certain things are gained, as two or more people distanced by geography are able to communicate synchronously and frequently despite geographical separation, other things are, at the same time, lost in a mediational act that allows for faceless and disembodied interactions. We can reach others in an amplification and extension of our voices, but we cannot see the other's facial reactions to our dialogue, touch them, smell the food being cooked in the kitchen they are talking from, or see the snow falling outside their window. "This amplification/reduction," Ihde asserts in a McLuhanesque echo, "makes a medium non-neutral or transformative of human experience…and is a feature of every technology," underscoring McLuhan's notion of the transformational and translational natures of all media (56).

Media extensions and amputations

Ihde's analysis of the mediation of the phone also links his existential phenomenology of technology to McLuhan's claim that all media not only *extend*, but also *obsolesce* some aspect of our bodies, actions, thoughts, social-cultural dimensions, and environments. For McLuhan, media extensions, as with Heidegger's notions of "disclosing" and "concealment," always come at a cost. Micro-perceptually, for instance, as we already mentioned, since any medium favors one sense over another, that medium extends that particular sense while, at the same time, dimming down or temporarily obsolescing other senses; the gains of media extensions also bring with them inevitable losses, or "obsolescences."

It is true for McLuhan that the extension enabled by any tool of mediation opens up and, in Heideggerian terms, "reveals" the world in new ways that extends our perceptual fields or perhaps, as in the case of prosthetics, replicates and restores a damaged sense or human function. As such, and like Merleau-Ponty's blind man's cane, extensions can "cease to be an object" for the user just like the cane for the blind man, in a mode of readiness-to-hand, is "no longer perceived for itself" as it "[extends] the scope and active radius of touch" (Merleau-Ponty 143) all the while "becoming part of the structure of the body" (Leder 33). Similarly for McLuhan, cars and bicycles, as extensions of the foot and of bodily mobility and speed, open up the world in new ways. For example, the car makes possible living in the country while working in the city, which extends living space. At the same time, however, in a car one's feet are only partially used or not used at all. Certainly, as McLuhan pointed out, the foot cannot perform its basic function of walking when one is riding a bike or in a car. This is a loss. So, while the car allows us to move faster and farther, one's feet and legs are left immobile, metaphorically atrophied. These reductions he more graphically termed "amputations" (obsolescences), the flip side to technological extensions.

McLuhan claimed that this extension/amputation dynamic was present in some way or another with the use of any technology. Given his era, McLuhan found the technological extensions of our minds and thoughts via "electronic media" important. Crucial for McLuhan is the notion that the extension and amputations caused by electronic communication technologies were effectually and subjectively different from those of mechanical technologies because "previous technologies were partial and fragmentary, and the electric is total and inclusive" ("Understanding Media" 57). That is, electronic media are perceptually the most "all-encompassing" of technologies, having the potential to engulf all of

our senses and thus deeply influence the autonomy of our interpretive awareness (or our *Verstehen*, in hermeneutic terms) because electronic communication technologies translate and transform our very cognitive capacities, extending consciousness outward, while requiring us to use less of these capacities such as memory or intuition. He explains:

> In this electronic age we see ourselves being translated more and more into the form of information, moving toward the technological extension of consciousness…. By putting our physical bodies inside our extended nervous systems, by means of electric media, we set up a dynamic by which all previous technologies that are mere extensions of hands and feet and teeth and bodily heat-controls – all such extensions of our bodies…will be translated into information systems. (57)

To decipher the transformational powers of all media, especially electronic media, late in his career, McLuhan developed his dynamic and, we claim, existentially phenomenological "tetrad," which encapsulated his four-fold "laws of media" into a tool for technological assessment. In the next section we briefly describe McLuhan's tetrad for gauging the effects of technology, sketching out similarities and links between the tetrad and Ihde's own, and similar, four-part model of human-technology relations.

A Shared Method for Technological Assessment

The affinities between McLuhan and existential phenomenology regarding the embodied nature of the self, technological-mediated reality, and how the world practically unfolds can also be witnessed in a shared *method* – a shared epistemology – for coming to know our being-in-the-technologically-mediated-world. Let us consider the following passage by Ihde, which, purposefully or not, parallels many of McLuhan's insights enfolded into his tetradic method:

> Artists and phenomenologists share a certain practice, the practice of exploring the possible and of doing it in variant ways. Phenomenologists name this practice: it is the exploration of variations in order to discover invariants or structures. It is the purposeful reversal of figure/ground. It is

the extension from figure to field of horizon, and so forth. But artists practice the same arcane path, for they show us reversals and deconstruct our metaphors, and in so doing, construct new ones with new perspectives. ("Experimental phenomenology" 31)

In this section, we will concentrate on the affinities between Ihde's conceptualization and applications of notions of *reversal*, *extension*, and, most importantly, *figure/ground*, that are central to both his phenomenological tool of technology assessment and McLuhan's similar tool, the tetrad.[3] But to before grasping McLuhan's tetradic laws of media and Ihde's four-folded human-technology relation model, one must first understand its underlying figure/ground dynamic.

   Figure/Grounds

As with both existential and hermeneutic phenomenologies, McLuhan saw lived experience as being in constant flux; human experience, he believed, is process rather than product. To make sense of this relationship, and borrowing from Gestalt psychology, McLuhan developed the tetrad and the laws of media to show how technological innovation causes change in human perceptions and environments due to constantly changing figures (areas of attention), changing grounds (areas of inattention), the changing relationships between grounds and figures, and the new environments created in the figure/ground oscillations.
As Striegel suggests, for McLuhan "reality is a pragmatic construct, an artefact of the linguistic forms used to communicate it, and only a part of individual consciousness" (47), a consciousness that oscillates between areas of awareness (figure) and unawareness (ground). Similarly, for existential and hermeneutic phenomenologists, that we are in a state of constantly emerging encounters with the world also means that our reality is consistently in the process of being made. To both McLuhan and Heideggerian phenomenologies, then, there is an evolving structure to human experience, which is, as it were, processsual, an already-always becoming. And as process, lived experience is a kinesis – a movement, dynamic, evolving, emergent.
   By the 1970s, McLuhan claimed that only by understanding the interplay between figure and ground unleashed by the introduction of any media into a

particular social or cultural setting could one anticipate the obscured and unforeseen risks brought by any technology, as well as properly plan for its appropriate applications. McLuhan's writings from the era are preoccupied with the double nature of technological existence from the perspective of the Gestalt-inspired figural areas of awareness (content) and the constantly shifting grounds of unawareness (infrastructures of media and their "environments," as we explained earlier).

The concept of figure/ground in McLuhan's media theory adds yet further phenomenological hues to his two-folded nature of technology:

> [a]ll situations are composed of an area of attention (*figure*) and a very much larger area of inattention (*ground*)…. *Figures* rise out of, and recede back into, *ground*…; for example, at a lecture the attention will shift form the speaker's words to his gestures, to the hum of the lighting, street sounds, or to the feel of the chair or a memory or association or smell,[4] each new figure alternately displaces the others into ground…. The ground of any technology is both the situation that gives rise to it as well as the whole environment (medium) of services and disservices that the technology brings with it. (quoted in Molinaro et al. 408)

In everyday life, the connections between the "services" and "disservices" of any technology remained hidden, McLuhan observed. This concealment is the "side-effect" of technological existence as technologies "impose themselves willy-nilly" and create new environments and even new forms of culture ("Laws of Media" 408). For example, cars bring with them both macro-perceptual and micro-perceptual effects, while the relationship between the car and the culture and environment it influences often go unnoticed: Macro-perceptually, the car (figure), apart from extending the mobility of humans, creates environments (grounds) of services (service stations, roads, off-ramps, traffic police, and municipal infrastructure) *and* disservices (traffic jams, increased crime, pollution, and other ecological consequences). The car and its infrastructures, for example, help contribute to crime and urban blight caused by a highway dividing a downtown core, but this is not immediately obvious. Micro-perceptually, in extending areas of private space and the house, the car can be said to also obsolesce aspects of family time and civic involvement due to the time spent commuting.

McLuhan developed his tetradic-analogic model for measuring "the modality of consciousness" influenced by human-technology relationships (Striegel 109). This analogical tool could gauge the areas of awareness and unawareness constituting each technologically-mediated human experience and was meant to decipher the unforeseen consequences of *any* human-artefact interaction. Rather than approaching the unravelling of media effects from a logical and linear "left-brained" form of cognition and argument favored by Western, visually-focused social science, McLuhan claimed the tetrad to be intuitive and "right-brained," developed partially in response to the "[m]odern scientific causality [that] abstracted figures from ground" (McLuhan and Powers 3).

   With the tetrad, McLuhan proposed that the structures of all human-technology experiences – that is, in Heideggerian terms, the patterns of concealment/unconcealment and presencing/absencing that any and all instrumentally mediated human experience brings with it – consists of a fourfold perceptual or experiential configuration that happens, more or less, simultaneously, as follows: Every artefact or technology put to human use ultimately (1) enhances, amplifies, or extends some human action, capacity, or perception; (2) obsolesces some other related aspect of that action, capacity, or perception; (3) retrieves something from a previous activity or capacity; and (4) when taken to its limit (when pushed too far beyond its initially intended scope), reverses or flips into its opposite.

   These were, essentially, McLuhan's four laws of media. With the tetrad and its "appositional" interplay of figure/ground relationships between each of the four laws, McLuhan contributes two further structures, we propose, to the phenomenology of human-technology relations of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Ihde. Not only does any innovation enhance/reveal/presence and obsolesce/conceal/absence, but it also "retrieves" a past mode of activity or innovation once itself obsolesced *and* "reverses" into its opposite when overextended. These are, we claim, two additional human-technology realities heretofore unexplored before in McLuhan's work.[5]

   For McLuhan, all of us who dwell in technologically-mediate realities, not just trained specialists, need to develop the capacities to gauge for any

innovation's four-fold nature to enhance, obsolesce, reverse, and retrieve. It is with this spirit that he developed his tetrad as a tool to refine our abilities to interpretively recognize the potentially multidimensional roots and consequences of any medium's effects. This means that we need to understand the "resonating interval" (McLuhan and Powers 3-12) that makes up the *relationship between* the ever-present grounds of every technological figure that can create "comprehensive" or "integral awareness" insights or ("Global Village" 180). In other words, to have "integral awareness" of our technologies and their impacts on our lives is to remain consciously aware, or circumspect, of their existential patternings by interpretively recognizing the figures *and* the related grounds of that technological reality.

Ihde's human-technology relations

This notion of pattern recognition – i.e., having "integral awareness" – with our technologies is, we believe, also present in subsequent work inspired by Heidegger's philosophy of technology. Borrowing substantially from Heideggerian-inspired hermeneutics, and also using Gestalt psychology's figure/ground to unravel the subtleties of human-technology relations, Ihde proposes an existentially phenomenological model for understanding the "experiential involvement with our own creation, technology" ("Existential technics" 1). While his model is most directly inspired by Heidegger's equipmentality and Merleau-Ponty's corporeality of perception, it bears close resemblance to McLuhan's four-fold tetradic laws of media.

A culturally contextualized model for helping unravel the interplay of technologies and the self within the life-world, Ihde's program outlines the variants and invariants in human-technology relations and, in strong approximation to McLuhan's tetradic program, turns existentialism to the mediated experiences of the world in order to get a "sense of human action engaged with, through, and among concrete artefacts or material entities" – what Ihde terms "existential technics" ("Existencial technics"). Similar to McLuhan's project of recognizing technology's effects, Ihde ultimately asks:

> [If t]he problem for the inhabitant of any given 'world' is that it is so familiar to him or her that little distance is to be found, how does [the]

projection, repetition, and ritual renewal of technologized life [alter our
self-conceptions and our lifeworlds]? ("Existential technics" 19)

In sum, Ihde's four-stage spectrum of human-technology relations helps with
gauging, in complement to McLuhan's tetradic method, the *gradations* or *degrees*
of amplifications and reductions and perceptual gains and losses inherent in
technologically mediated processes.

Ihde calls the first of four possibilities for technological mediation
"embodiment relations" with a technology, or "technics embodied"
("Phenomenology of Technics" 504). It is a *relation to the world through*
technology as subjectively embodied. The world becomes known by extension via
the bodily assimilation of the technology and the technology withdraws from
consciousness, absenting itself as other things are simultaneously made present by
its mediation (and its absence). Technologies facilitating this type of relation to
the world include things such as eyeglasses, hearing aids, or a blind-person's
cane. Technologies that can be embodied are the most subjectively assimilated
and have the potential of becoming "quasi-me" technologies (528) (i.e., my
eyeglasses not only help me to see the world better, but I am perceived and I
perceive myself as a wearer of eyeglasses as the technology infuses itself into my
personal identity and sense of self). These relationships, Ihde explains, can be
illustrated in the formula "(I-technology)-world" (508).

The second possibility for human-technology interactions are known as
"hermeneutic relations" or "hermeneutic technics," encapsulating technologies
that help us in the *interpretation of the world* (512). This is now a more indirect
relation to the world than experienced in embodied technological relations; the
world is now made known via representation through the interpretation facilitated
by the tool. The world becomes known through interpreting a "textual" reading of
the technology (512). Metaphor, analogy, linguistic conventions, alphabets,
diagrams, charts, maps, and thermometers, Ihde says, are all indirect ways of
experiencing something as a form of "referential seeing" (515). In many ways,
online interactions via textual communications are also hermeneutic technics.
This relation can be viewed thusly: "I-(technology-world)" (515).

The third type of human-technology relation Ihde calls "alterity relations"
(522). In alterity relations the world remains in the background and the
technology emerges as the focal object. It is about "*relations…with a technology*"
(522) or technology as an "other." As opposed to the embodied relations
becoming a quasi-me, these relations turn machines into "quasi-others" (528)

tending to – problematically at times – anthropomorphize a technology in degrees of personification from "serious artefact-human analogues" (527) such as AI to trivial and harmless affectations for artefacts (cars, cell phones, Aibo, iPods). This can be shown as: "I-technology-(world)" (528).

Finally, Ihde proposes that many technologies fall into what he terms "background relations" (p. 528). This can be viewed as the "technological texturing" of our world ("Existencial technics" 109); that is, certain technologies "texture the immediate environment" (109). Here we are looking at technologies that remain in the background of our experience *within degrees of transparency and opacity* (degrees of concealment/unconcealment). These technologies include lights, insulation, air circulation mechanisms, imbedded technologies, broadband networks, microchips, etc.

There are striking similarities with McLuhan's four-folded figure/ground analysis of the tetrad and Ihde's Heideggerian-inspired phenomenology of "human-technology structure" ("Technology and the lifewords" 74). Taken together, Ihde's four-folded human-technology relationship model could help to bring out the phenomenological potential in McLuhan's own tetrad. Recall that to McLuhan (as with Heidegger), technology extends some aspect of human activity, while always obsolescing some other possible human activity. To Ihde *what* and *how much* is extended, amplified, disclosed, revealed *and* obsolesced, reduced, undisclosed, and concealed falls within a spectrum of possibilities ranging from the consequences of fully embodied to completely background technologies. Applied to McLuhan's theories of figure/ground and the laws of media, Ihde's structures of human-technology relations phenomenologically contour McLuhan's extensions, amputations, retrievals, and reversals by adding the additional dimensions to technologically-mediated reality that highlight the spectrum between the two polls of the "quasi-me" and the "quasi-other" together with the background textures of human-technology interactions. McLuhan, in turn, layers in the varying oscillations of figure/ground within the spectrum of human-technology relations and, through the four-pronged tetradic tool, the additional two figure/grounds of retrieval and reversal which is absent explicitly in Ihde's model.

Thus, McLuhan and Ihde move phenomenological inquiry of human-technology interactions beyond the speculative or theoretical and into the realm of the *praxical*. Together they could be used to establish a robust existential phenomenological protocol applied not only social science methods such as

participant interviews and data analysis regarding some aspect of the experience of technological mediation, but also for everyday use by anyone so inclined to know more about how technologies impact their everyday lives. This would provide a more complete picture of the myriad possible typologies of technological mediation by: 1) articulating the figures and grounds of any innovation (i.e., artefact, media, or technology) (that is, what is extended, obsolesced, reversed, and retrieved in the introduction of that innovation); 2) pointing out the *how*, *if*, and *to what degrees* technologies are embodied, hermeneutically assimilated, "othered," or stay in the background of experience; 3) specifying how much the technology withdraws itself or makes itself known (that is, the degrees of present-at- or ready-to-hand and the figure/ground oscillations unleash by any technology); and 4) more thoroughly allowing the social scientist and technology user ways to describe how the world is made known through the filter of mediational tools. As such, we feel that drawing McLuhan closer to phenomenologically-centred theories of technology is not only important for pushing forward philosophies of technology, but that there are also pragmatic, methodological, and practical implications for better understanding our technologically-mediated world.

Conclusions

In sum, in close affinity with Heideggerian-influenced phenomenologies, McLuhan's self and world are hermeneutically and existentially made known (i.e., "disclosed") in the act of encounter with the world in lived experience as we grapple with the things of the world. McLuhan, however, contributes a crucial dimension to the interpretative and existential ways we come to know ourselves and the world. For McLuhan, technologies as media explicitly interplay with and influence, in varying degrees, how the world is encountered, projected onto, and reflected upon as the medium of interaction shapes us and our world at the same time that we and our world shapes the medium. From our own re-reading of a good portion of McLuhan's oeuvre, McLuhan's original – albeit unintended – contribution to Heideggerian-inspired phenomenologies of projective/reflective worldly encounter – being-in-the-world – is to layer in the structures of mediation to the understanding of human experience as we communicate with each other and interact with the things of the world via an environment of human artefacts

and communication technologies. This, we claim, is McLuhan's ontology of being-in-the-technologically-mediated-world, a condition of existence whereby media not only transport ideas and content but, more importantly, interplay with, restructure, and "translate" (i.e., transform) our experiences and understandings ("Understanding Media" 56-61). Brought together in his technology assessment tool of the tetrad, McLuhan's ontology of technologically-mediate reality, we argue, encapsulates McLuhan's major contributions to the philosophy of technology and convinces us that he should be included within the tradition.

What if McLuhan had more explicitly turned to phenomenology?

In these parting passages, we would like to speculate on what McLuhan's general theory of media effects might have been had he explicitly turned to phenomenology. What would his *being-in-the-technologically-mediated-world* have looked like? First, had McLuhan read phenomenology sooner perhaps he would have aligned himself with existentialist phenomenology's methods of assessing the focal, figural, and horizontal aspects of perception, adding further analytical dimensions to his tetradic tool and adding a phenomenologically-strengthened layer to his own figure/ground analysis.

The compatibility of Ihde's and McLuhan's respective models, for example, at least suggests that each theorists' studies of technological mediation can and should be looked at in concert if one seeks to judiciously conjecture on the impacts of innovation on personal, social, cultural and ecological well-being. Had he read existentialist and hermeneutic phenomenologies more deeply, he would have surely noticed that Hedeggerian-inspired phenomenologies outright reject the possibility of decontextualizing oneself, as researcher, from the situatedness (the ground or life contexts) that structure all human experience. Indeed, McLuhan could have even found the structures to mediated human experiences he searched for by the early 1960s (quoted in Gordon 319-322). As Dreyfus writes, Heidegger's position in *Being and Time* was that "the commonsense background [of one's daily encounter with the world] has an elaborate structure that it is the job of an existential analytic to lay out" (7). Perhaps McLuhan would have even explored and clarified for us in the context of media studies Heidegger's much discussed, provocative, yet abstruse concepts such as "worldliness,"

"equimentality," ready-to and presence-at-handness, the enframing essence of technology, and Heidegger's own notions of "*gründen*" (ground) (58).

Had McLuhan been more open to looking into phenomenological methodologies, we also think he would have approved of phenomenology's penchant for relying on human experience for disclosing the objects of the world before theorizing about them, finding sympathetic links with his own claim of "percepts" over "concepts" and for intuitional and provisional inquiries ("probes") over fixed*, a priori* theories. Indeed, the hallmark of all phenomenological inquiry into human experience – and unfortunately overlooked by McLuhan – is to describe things as one experiences them before theoretical explanations. It is our belief that all of these phenomenological tools would have certainly added additional fuel to, if not replaced, McLuhan's highly metaphorical and still-debated pseudo-positivistic left/right brained explanations of human consciousness.

Finally, we believe that we would have subsequently seen an explicitly articulated communication intentionality to McLuhan's general theories of media, perhaps resembling Ihde's Heideggerian-inspired projective/reflective intentionality. We believe McLuhan would also have found, as Ihde does his human-technology phenomenology, that in our technologically-mediated existence we are simultaneously projected to the world, reflected in the world, and contextualized in our socio-biographical, socio-cultural, and environmental realities via the instruments we encounter the world with. In these communicationally intentional encounters, McLuhan might have not only articulated the effects of media on society, culture, history, and individuals (as he did so forcefully), but might also have shown explicitly how others are intersubjectively known to us and we to others via the structures imposed on social settings by communication media – the structures of "mediated intersubjectivity" as it were. Indeed, there seems to be lacking a middle-layer "intersubjective" dimension to McLuhan's general media theory that exists between the macro- and micro-perceptual areas of everyday life. Tipping his hat to Heideggerian notions of facticity, equimentality, the self-interpretive nature of humanness, and Merleau-Ponty's notion of intersubjectivity – all latently present in McLuhan's own perceptual-historical-analogical model, as we have shown in this article -- perhaps the "medium is the message" could have also become "being-in-the-technologically-mediated-world is the message."

In conclusion, phenomenology, we feel, would have added theoretical and methodological rigour to McLuhan's suggestive work on the human-technology interplay. We are also certain that it would have also brought McLuhan, especially in the last years of his life, much-needed intellectual kinship. Lastly, we think that, if McLuhan has turned more explicitly to phenomenology, he might have become, as we argue he should be, a central theorist in the philosophy of technology tradition.

Notes

[1] According to J.F. Striegel, Marshall McLuhan had a general media theory in the sense of an organized, coherent body of research, which consisted of a three-folded program: an analogical model, a historical model, and a perceptual model. He argues that this program was, despite its multi-disciplinarity and breadth of scope, incredibly coherent throughout his 30 years of media studies. Streigel, for instance, claims that McLuhan provided a cogent "general theory" of media effects (4) that could be 1) "described as integral into itself" (5) and that 2) was "based on its utility,…[because of] the relevant relationships it reveals among differing disciplines and the potential for synthesis and integration it offers" (5).

[2] In his perceptual model, and also in tune with existentialist thought, for McLuhan there is an unsettled nature to the meanings behind our experiences that leads Striegel to conclude that there is a "precarious nature of our perception and understanding of our environment" (50).

[3] Graham Harman has made an important contribution in this area by comparing and contrasting the tetradic method with the phenomenological reduction.

[4] Interestingly, the example of the figure/ground elements of a lecture is also William James' example of the dynamics of the "focal/fringe" of perception and is also used often by Gestalt psychology and existential phenomenologists (see Pollio et al.).

[5] See *The Laws of Media: The New Science* for numerous examples of how McLuhan operationalizes the tetrad.

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9/11 Did Not Take Place: Apocalypse and Amnesia in Film and *The Road*

JESSE KAVADLO

On September 10, 2001, Americans had two favorite kinds of action movies: special effects-laden depictions of New York City's gratuitous destruction; and special effects-laden discoveries, preferably involving gratuitous destruction, that our perceived reality is simulated and unreal. Although the director of *Independence Day* and *Godzilla*, Roland Emmerich, tried to repeat New York's devastation in *The Day After Tomorrow* in 2004, critics and audiences would not have it. Who could feel as though Manhattan's destruction would be a fear, or even an anti-East Coast wish? It had come to pass. Who could feel as though *The Truman Show* and *The Matrix* contributed a new truth, that American safety and complacency were tenuous illusions? That, too, had come to pass.

Instead, in the years immediately following 9/11, Americans intuitively moved from both genres' operative narratives, a compulsion to uncover the truth—about alien menace or techno-conspiracy—to a desire to forget it. Slovoj Zizek writes that television responded to the national trauma with "the compulsion to repeat and jouissance beyond the pleasure principle: we wanted to see it again and again; the same shots were repeated ad nauseum, and the uncanny satisfaction we got from it was jouissance at its purest" (12). But on film, the compulsion to repeat took a new form: toward depicting, and thus mirroring, the traumatic amnesiac, who simply, and dangerously, forgets.

The 2000s may be remembered, or, forgotten, as the decade of amnesia. Both of Jim Carrey's post-*Truman* dramatic efforts, *The Majestic* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, involved characters who have their memories erased. Retrospection has, I believe, proven Zizek hasty. Yes, the attacks of 9/11 enacted, and thus undermined, apocalyptic film fantasies of aliens destroying New York or men discovering that their happy reality was an artificial construct. But in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks,

Americans moved from a desire to repeat 9/11 to a desire to forget 9/11, to erase it from consciousness and memory. The terrorists may have destroyed the towers, but immediately after 2001, popular culture, through erasure and amnesia, seemed bent on annihilating their emblematic existence, even their history. But as I will argue, the best of the amnesia movies also offer a warning against letting the past disappear. And in *The Road*, Cormac McCarthy, writing with a half-decade's hindsight, has rewritten the apocalyptic imagery of pre-9/11 fantasies as an elegiac, chastened mediation on the balancing nature of forgetting and faith, and of terror and storytelling.

Erasing the Past

Immediately after 9/11, erasure as symbolic destruction seemed eerily literal: HBO's "Sex and the City" digitally removed the Towers from its introduction (Salamon); Chock Full o' Nuts Coffee removed its small, signature skyline from the bottom of its cans (Barry); "The Simpsons'" Twin Towers-themed episode, "The City of New York vs. Homer Simpson," was temporarily pulled from syndication; trailers and posters for *Spider-Man* showing the towers were shelved, and *Serendipity*, *People I Know*, *Zoolander*, *Men in Black II*, and the remake of *The Time Machine* re-shot scenes to circumvent the towers or cut scenes deemed egregiously destructive to New York City (Page 204). Also, the films *Collateral Damage*, *The Heist*, and *Sidewalks of New York* pushed back release dates (Page 206-207). Finally, while the establishing shot of New York in *Maid in Manhattan* indeed depicts a tower-less Financial District, the movie poster substitutes the inoffensive Empire State Building for the standard filmic skyline that has dominated images of Manhattan since the 1970s. Of course, this erasure makes sense.

As Max Page writes, filmmakers "claimed that they were simply trying to avoid offending and disturbing audiences unnecessarily. It seems equally likely that filmmakers worried that the sight of the towers would detract from the narrative and undermine the escapist pleasure that is the essence of Hollywood films" (204). Consumers may have had little appetite for a reminder of the towers with their coffee, or for the memory of the towers to intrude, in their absence, upon the American Cinderella fantasy of *Maid in Manhattan*.

But the deletions reveal more than mere good commerce, or good sense. Through these cuts, the towers intrude in their absence, as erasure always leaves traces of the original. As Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak writes in the "Translator's Preface" to Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*:

> [P]redicament is an analogue for a certain philosophical exigency that drives Derrida to writing "sous rapture," which I translate as "under erasure." This is to write a word, cross it out, and then print both the word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible.)… In examining familiar things we come to such unfamiliar conclusions that our very language is twisted and bent even as it guides us. (xiv)

In this sense, 9/11 represents an act of destruction and deconstruction, twisting the familiar into the unfamiliar and violently demonstrating the ways in which the destruction of the towers, like the crossed-out word, only calls attention to its former existence.[1] Art Spiegelman's September 24, 2001 *New Yorker* cover,[2] and later book cover, superimposing black towers against black background, illustrates this point: erasure creates absence, certainly, but also ensures its own paradoxical presence, as eloquently suggested in Spiegelman's book title, *In the Shadow of No Towers*. Similarly, "Tribute in Light," the 2002 spectral display of high wattage lamps that now annually pays homage to the Twin Towers, wrote their intangible, luminescent outlines over the erased towers like a palimpsest, emphasizing not what is there but what formerly existed underneath.[3]

In his introduction to the 2002 collection *Film and Television after 9/11*, Wheeler Winston Dixon suggests that "in this bleak [post-9/11] landscape of personal loss, paranoia, and political cynicism, American culture has been forever changed" (3), and despite the propensity to use movies as escapism, "one salient fact remains: the memory of 9/11 can never be obliterated from the American national consciousness…" (3). But Dixon's familiar "we will never forget 9/11" maxim runs counter what movies after 9/11 have depicted: Americans seem desperately nostalgic, desperate to forget the present, and want desperately to go back to a prelapsarian September 10th, when Americans were free to enjoy our fictional apocalypses without fear or guilt.

With all of the "never forget" rhetoric surrounding 9/11, how can such amnesia be possible? While politicians, the architects of the new World Trade Center, and victims have not, of course, forgotten the Twin Towers, Americans,

bumper stickers to the contrary, certainly wish to. Even in 9/11's immediate aftermath, Art Spiegelman saw the divide between New Yorkers, who had no opportunity to forget 9/11, and the rest of the country, for whom New York was only ever a celluloid simulation ripe for destruction:

> Only when I traveled to a university in the Midwest in early October 2001 did I realize that *all* New Yorkers were out of their minds compared to those for whom the attack was an abstraction. The assault on the Pentagon confirmed that the carnage in New York City was indeed an attack on America, not one more skirmish on foreign soil. Still, the small town I visited in Indiana … was at least as worked up over a frat house's zoning violations as with threats from "raghead terrorists." It was as if I'd wandered into an inverted version of Saul Steinberg's famous map of America seen from Ninth Avenue, where the rest of the known world ends at the Hudson; in Indiana everything east of the Alleghenies was very, very far away. (unpaged)

Yes, right-wing politicians have continuously used the attacks for political posturing; most famously, Joe Biden referred to then-Presidential candidate Rudolph Giuliani's entire rhetorical repertoire as "a noun and a verb and 9/11." But at best, in keeping with Zizek, turning "9/11" into a repeated mantra has made it an empty signifier. At worst, in keeping with this essay's argument, Giuliani, other conservatives, and many Americans have, in fact, forgotten about 9/11, epitomized by Giuliani's remark that "We had no domestic attacks under Bush; we've had one under Obama." Dan Amira goes further, saying "There is a strange amnesia permeating the Republican ranks lately," including Giuliani, Dana Perino, and Mary Matalin, each of whom "seems to be jumping on the '9/11 never happened or at least not on Bush's watch bandwagon." The gap between remembering the date and agreeing about the nature of an event's cultural, historical, and political significance has grown even vaster in the past decade. For a few years, amnesia became the new apocalypse.

Erasing Forgetting the Past

Giuliani and Spiegelman to the contrary, however, Americans traumatized by the attacks could not easily gain comfort in merely erasing or deleting images of the Towers. The only symbolic recourse remaining, then, was to erase the memories of the trauma. And forgetting is precisely the trope that cinema embraced after 9/11. Amnesia has long been a dubious film scenario, so much so that "the Screenwriters Guild went so far as to prohibit amnesia as a plot device" (Flora 24). Yet amnesia's new form seems different—post 9/11 films do not use amnesia to exemplify American archetypes of rebirth, youth, or lack of history. As Terrence Rafferty suggests, amnesia is the down side of "one of the most unshakable American values: our conviction that we should be free to invent ourselves, and reinvent ourselves, at will." Instead, the best of these movies discordantly center on the loss of a morality that accompanies loss of memory, and by extension, the loss of identity. Writing just before 9/11, Jonathan Lethem began to observe this upcoming urgency in his introduction to *The Vintage Book of Amnesia*: "Amnesia appeared pulsing just beneath the surface, an existential syndrome that seemed to nag at fictional characters with increasing frequency, a floating metaphor very much in the air.

Amnesia as concept and plot device went on to shape and inspire at least thirty post-9/11 releases, many with top actors, writers, or directors: Jim Carrey in *The Majestic*, Tom Cruise in *Vanilla Sky*, Guy Pearce in *Memento*, Matt Damon in three *Bourne* movies, Ben Affleck in *Paycheck*, Halle Berry in *Gothika*, Finnish director Aki Kauronaki's *The Man Without a Past*, Woody Allen's *The Curse of the Jade Scorpion*, Adam Sandler in *50 First Dates*, Pixar's *Finding Nemo*, Brian Singer's two *X-Men* films as well as *X-Men III* and *Wolverine*, Ashton Kutcher in *The Butterfly Effect* and *Dude, Where's My Car?*, David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*, screenwriter Charlie Kaufman's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill: Vols. I* and *II*, Denzel Washington in *The Manchurian Candidate*, Julienne Moore in *The Forgotten*, Milla Jovovich in *Resident Evil*, Robin Williams in *The Final Cut*, the documentary *Unknown White Male*, Liam Neeson in *Unknown*, Daniel Craig and Harrison Ford in *Cowboys and Aliens*, and Nick Cassavetes's *The Notebook*.[4] *The Notebook* is unusual, in that the amnesia was brought on by Alzheimer's disease. But its exception underscores the problem: amnesia, an exceedingly rare condition in non-elderly

people, has likely occurred more frequently on film in the past decade than at any time in real life.

Of course, several of the films, most notably *Memento* and *Mulholland Drive*, cannot be thought of as conscious reactions to 9/11, and neither can Lethem's analysis. Analyzing the amnesia trend, *New York Times* film critic John Leland says that while "it may be tempting to relate them to Sept. 11, the movies were all conceived years before, during the economic boom, which produced waves of collective amnesia." Instead, Leland connects the films to irrational market exuberance, fixation on status, and the fluidity of identity that accompanied the technological capitalism of the late 1990s, when the films were conceived and shot, rather than in the after-effects of September 11, 2001, when they were screened and reviewed. Leland's analysis fairly and, I think, correctly identifies the conditions under which the films were made. But by the time the films emerged, were viewed, and were available for cultural interpretation, the context crucially, changed. Had the movies not appealed to viewers' newfound psychic vulnerability, they may have failed and, perhaps appropriately, been forgotten. Instead, *Memento* and *Mulholland Dive* have become cult classics, and Hollywood, as always, took notice. The films' reception remains more salient than their geneses.

In place of the chronological, and certainly in place of the scientific, since "the overwhelming majority of films that portray amnesia do so in a grossly inaccurate fashion" (Merckelbach et al 37), I would substitute the semiotic and the metaphorical. Indeed, James Gorman writes that amnesia films "may seem realistic, but they are really fairy tales… An old-time Freudian might take these movies as public dreams and look for a hidden wish. What it would be is clear. Enough! Enough collecting of information. Enough creation of new records." While Gorman does not connect amnesia to 9/11, his point echoes Zizek, who, in his analysis of the pre-9/11 movies that destroyed New York, writes: "[T]he unthinkable which happened was the object of fantasy, so that, in a way, America got what it fantasized about, and that was the biggest surprise" (16). Zizek's "fantasy," the not-so-hidden wish, is renewed but revised through the amnesia imagery. Annihilating civilization is not enough. Instead, amnesia represents the will to annihilate even the memory of civilization. Gorman's "Enough!" rejects technology or bureaucracy, but it also represents a wish to escape psychology, history, and even narrative itself. The prevalent amnesia imagery turned the pre-

9/11 apocalypses inside out; rather destroying the external structures of civilization, the new films destroyed its internal frameworks.

Even so, the amnesia plot device is, of course, nothing new. Soap operas have used it for decades as a slipshod way to bring back written-off characters, explain narrative inconsistencies, or create cheap thrills. Pulp mystery and harlequin romance novels use it routinely as well, for its obvious and readymade drama. But many of the new films are different: together, they represent a post-9/11 ambivalence, the mixed wishes and fears of forgetting the recent past, and the final extension of post-9/11 desire to erase the World Trade Center images from posters, screens, and coffee cans, to the desire to erase the towers from our collective memory.[5] And the best of these films, *Memento*, *Mulholland Drive*, and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, do not just use amnesia as high concept; in addition, they construct a cinematic language of the amnesiac experience, and this visual and aural aesthetic of amnesia places the viewer into the amnesiac's perspective. Lethem's analysis of amnesia in fiction clearly applies to these films: "I had in mind a fiction that, more than just presenting a character who'd suffered memory loss, entered into an amnesiac state at some level of the narrative itself— and invited the reader to do the same.

Fiction that made something of the white spaces that are fiction's native habitat or somehow induced a dreamy state of loss of identity's grip" (xvi). Even genre films, like *Paycheck* and the *Bourne* sequels, withhold key information, functioning like the third person limited perspective in a novel, so that the viewer only knows as much as the characters do, and often even less. September 11th may not have been the end of irony, as some pundits hastily predicted, but it challenged dramatic irony: the venerable literary device, where viewers connect and understand that which characters cannot, seems notably absent from amnesia pictures. Instead, the viewer is forced to identify with the amnesiac's plight, confusion, and struggle for comprehension. The ruined topography of pre-9/11 apocalypses turned inward, to the shattered setting of the mind.

In keeping, after beginning with a murder literally in reverse (shooting a double exposure of a backwind), *Memento* constructs its narrative through fragmented alternation between chronologically backward episodes in color and forward moving scenes in black and white, continuously reenacting various beginnings and endings. The viewer, like amnesiac protagonist Leonard Shelby, understands the unending shock and dislocation of memory loss. Leonard spends the film attempting to track down the man who murdered his wife and inflicted

the injury that stole his memory, but he must rely on Polaroids, Post-It notes, and even his own tattoos in order to have any sense of where, or even at times who, he is. In keeping with the low-tech high-jacking of planes on 9/11, Leonard uses reliable but primitive pre-digital devices, resorting even to his own body as a repository of information. Writing on the body becomes a last refuge against a mind that refuses to accept the indelible; tattoos literally keep Leonard from being a *tabula rasa*, here a state of ignorance over innocence. The film's fragmentation coalesces at the end, which is really the story's beginning, when the viewer finally understands that Leonard may know himself even less well than he, or we, thought.[6]

Mulholland Drive is visually and narratively confusing as well—the viewer is left unsure of its main characters' identities, the scenes' chronology, and even whether sequences are dreams or reality. After the opening's car accident, a beautiful woman is left unsure who she is. Calling herself Rita, based on a poster of Rita Hayworth, she is discovered and cared for by another woman, Betty, a saccharine aspiring actress new to Los Angeles. Together, they attempt to piece together Rita's mysterious identity. It, too, though, seems to put the end at the beginning, forcing the viewer to reconcile the film's final act, in which it seems as though Rita's amnesia, as well as Betty's earnest innocence, may be a dream, sexual fantasy, or projection. Using frequent blurs, ambient sub-bass noise, and surreal juxtaposition, the visual and sonic aesthetics of the movie attempt to recreate the amnesiac experience, and viewer frequently feels as lost as Rita does, by design.

Of all the recent amnesia films, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is the most visually reminiscent of 9/11 itself. Jim Carrey's Joel undergoes a procedure to erase his memories of ex-girlfriend Clementine, after discovering that she has done the same of him. Like *Memento*, the film begins near the end, although the first-time viewer has no way of knowing this: it seems to show Joel and Clementine's first meeting, but actually reveals their post-amnesia reunion. Through flashbacks within flashbacks, the viewer witnesses the memory erasure from inside Joel's head, so that, as in *Mulholland Drive*, voices are out of synch with mouths and various buzzes and muffling effects obscure dialogue. But in addition, people, like words, disappear in blurs, fog and water darken backgrounds, and, most disconcertingly, buildings shake, collapse, and crumble. The destruction of matter signifies the destruction of memory, and viewers understand that this renewed demolition of New York (even if it is upstate New

York, *Spotless Mind*'s location), unlike in *Independence Day*, within the movie is representational rather than literal. But it was the symbolic as well as literal destruction of New York that 9/11's terrorists sought. If these films' characters emblemize our need to forget, they also bring to the surface our repressed post-traumatic turmoil. And in the place of disintegrating buildings, *Spotless Mind* (as well as *Paycheck*) shows images of brains on computer screens, with lit up neurons targeted and obliterated, along with metaphorical or hypothetical buildings collapsing.

In *Requiem for the Twin Towers*, Jean Baudrillard suggests that:

> although the two towers have disappeared, they have not been annihilated. Even in their pulverized state, they have left behind an intense awareness of their presence. No one who knew them can cease imagining them and the imprints they made in the skyline from all points of the city. … By the grace of terrorism, the World Trade Center has become the world's most beautiful building—the eighth wonder of the world! (48)

Despite his powerful rhetoric, the luminous, numinous efforts of "Tribute in Light," or Art Spiegelman's sublime work, however, Baudrillard, like Zezik, spoke too soon. The Towers' symbolism is endangered, overpowered by the culture's need to erase and forget. Baudrillard's own conclusion about the first Gulf War, published in 1995, now seems more applicable to the fall of the Twin Towers. At the time, he wrote:

> There is no interrogation into the event itself or its reality; or into the fraudulence of this war, the programmed and always delayed illusion of battle; or into the machination of this war or its amplification by information, not to mention the improbable orgy of material, the systematic manipulation of data, the artificial dramatization… If we do not have practical intelligence (and none among us has), at least let us have a skeptical intelligence towards it, without renouncing the pathetic feeling of its absurdity. (253)

If Baudrillard still maintains that the criteria for symbolic or actual existence of an event is "interrogation into the event itself or its reality," or "the programmed and always delayed illusion of battle," or "its amplification by information," or "the

systematic manipulation of data, the artificial dramatization," or "practical intelligence," or even "skeptical intelligence," then 9/11 never took place. If, thanks to the disappearances of images, the towers never existed, then they never fell. If all traces of the towers are erased from memory and culture, if moviegoers and Americans are metaphorical and metaphysical amnesiacs, then the symbolic violence of this amnesia and erasure completes the work of the terrorists. For their goal, as Baudrillard implies, was not just to demolish the towers themselves, but to destroy the towers' very significance. It is now our own unwillingness to bear witness to the towers that is annihilating them, expunging them of their posthumous symbolism.

Our hope to forget is forgivable. Just as we found comfort in the apocalyptic imagery of *Independence Day* and *The Matrix* for depicting our simultaneous worst fears and dearest wishes, or maybe dearest fears and worst wishes, we now find comfort in the wave of amnesia, with films that allow us to escape the twin prisons of identity and chronology. What's more, the movies replicate but ultimately reverse one of the most insidious and pervasive fears in the post-9/11 world: that the terrorists lived in America and held jobs, and then one day were activated, the word equally applicable to terrorist cells and time bombs.

Amnesia films invert this anxiety. *Memento*'s Leonard, formerly a mild-mannered insurance assessor, suddenly becomes capable of detective work, gunplay, and murder, with no explanation; *The Bourne Identity*'s Jason Bourne discovers amazing fighting abilities unbeknownst even to himself; in comic-book films *X-Men* and *X2*, Hugh Jackman's Wolverine possesses superhuman healing abilities, an unbreakable metal skeleton, and retractable claws, but no clue about how he became this killing machine—or anything before his mysterious trauma. Later sequels reveal that Bourne and Wolverine were created to be American right-wing quasi-terrorists themselves, reversing the reality of the 9/11 suicide bombers in heroic American fashion: we can all wake up from our everyday lives and routine normalcy capable of detective work, superheroics, and killing, but crucially as an autonomous, heroic individual unattached to a government or even ideology, working only to solve the personal, existential mystery of who we really are.

Like this reversal of moral alignment, perhaps the amnesia films may be less interested in erasing than in warning us, like *Hamlet*'s Ghost, to remember. In their dénouements, the best of these films do not ever espouse amnesia as much as alert us to its dangers. Like the best film apocalypses, they function as cautionary

tales rather than exemplars, correctives for, rather than perpetrators against, destruction, in this case, of memory. Even as they embody our post 9/11 wish to become, in Gore Vidal's disparaging phrase, a "United States of Amnesia," they demonstrate amnesia's ultimate harm. While some, like *Paycheck* or *The Majestic*, with their hackneyed happy endings, imply that amnesia is bliss, opportunity, or resurgence, more serious films self-consciously challenge their own cinematic assertions.

In *Memento*, viewers discover that Leonard is incapable of true revenge; instead, in keeping with his former profession, he is using his condition to release himself of any moral accountability, since he remembers neither vengeance, nor any crimes committed toward his ends. Indeed, like Leonard's impotent but dangerous retribution, our post 9/11 War on Terror—even now, after the moniker has been discarded—is by definition a war without end, as we moved from Afghanistan to Iraq, with Libya or Pakistan or Syria or Iran on the horizon even after the death of Osama bin Laden. Our 9/11 retaliation, it seems, is doomed to be as short lived and continuously deferred as Leonard's revenge.

In *Mulholland Drive*, after much confusion, by the end it seems as though Rita's amnesia really is part of Betty's fantasy, one of starting over sexually, romantically, and personally. And in *Eternal Sunshine*, Joel realizes that he needs his memories, despite as well as because of their pain. While he and Clementine understand that their reconciliation may be doomed, they venture on nonetheless. The pleasures of life and love are more valuable than the ignorant safety of amnesia. Like *Eternal Sunshine*'s memory erasure, these amnesia movies seem a way to ease our collective pain and embody our collective desires. Instead, though, the surprise endings of *Memento* and *Mulholland Drive* depict the dark consequences of amnesia, while *Spotless Mind* suggests its corrective: faith. Perhaps the new American wish and fear is not the complete destruction of time. Warning of the danger of individual and collective amnesia, the films depict specific memories as visible, discrete, separable, and destroyable entities in the mind, substituting vanishing neurons for *Independence Day*'s demolition of New York and *The Matrix*'s ravage of reality.

Yet in the end, the films' amnesias differ medically, not just metaphorically. *Memento* depicts anterograde amnesia: the inability to remember ongoing events *after* the incidence of trauma; *Mulholland Drive*, retrograde amnesia: the inability to remember events that occurred *before* the incidence of trauma. *Spotless Mind*'s electronic targeting of specific memories is science fiction. Their warnings, thus,

are different but equally important: if we as a culture, like Rita, forget everything that happened before the trauma, we are childlike, helpless ciphers for whatever delusion or fantasy those in power choose to impose upon us. But if we forget all that occurs after the trauma; if, like Leonard, we live in a perpetual present; if we lose our ability to form a new future, and by extension a new understanding of the past, than we will be forced, futilely and forever, to relive our suffering. Rita loses her consciousness; Leonard, his conscience. Americans in the aftermath of 9/11 seem in danger of losing both. And if we do, then that loss would be far worse than merely losing our collective memory, or even losing the world, as we have on film so many times. Unlike memory, which in real life, although not in movies, is frequently recovered; or buildings, which are nearly always rebuilt, delays to the new World Trade Center to the contrary, consciousness and conscience are delicate, precious, and irreparable. Life after 9/11 has been painful, even excruciating. But like Joel of *Spotless Mind*, we must not only reject amnesia; in addition, we must cherish our memories, even our pain. Despite that Clementine reminds Joel that "you will think of things" that he won't like about her and that "I'll get bored with you and feel trapped because that's what happens with me," in the end, we must emulate Joel and Clementine's reply and agree to press forward:

"Okay."
"Okay."

The Road ~~to~~ from 9/11

Not surprisingly, as the decade progressed, amnesia set in with filmmakers and audiences. Yes, Roland Emmerich's *The Day After Tomorrow*, title to the contrary, appeared too soon, but a score of superhero movies and television shows (the *Spider-Man* and *Batman* franchises, *Heroes*), *The War of the Worlds*, *I Am Legend*, *Cloverfield*, and Emmerich's next attempt, *2012*, did not. Whereas in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, movies displayed atypical sensitivity, by 2006 it was safe for Hollywood to destroy New York, and the world, once again.

Writing independently of any Hollywood trends—independently, it would at first seem, of anything— Cormac McCarthy authored *The Road*, a book that would go on to win the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. At first glance, the novel seems in keeping the post-apocalyptic resurgence of the above-named films, the

old fears of a post-nuclear holocaust renewed in the aftermath of fresh disaster. Its main conceit—the plight of solitary survivors in a ravaged world—was already well-worn by 1981's *The Road Warrior*, let alone by *The Road*, decades and dozens of dystopian narratives later.

But context is crucial. The shadow of no towers envelopes the novel. Of course, just as *Cloverfield* and the rest are not "9/11 movies" in the manner of *World Trade Center*, *United 93*, or *25th Hour*, *The Road* is not a "9/11 novel" in the sense of Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, Jonathan Safren Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, and others in the emergent field. McCarthy certainly does not depict the events of the attack on New York or Washington, D.C., refer to the escape or death of anyone trapped in the World Trade Center, or connect his world in any clear or linear way with America in the 2000s. As Richard Gray suggests, though, "it is surely right to see *The Road* as a post-9/11 novel, not just in the obvious, literal sense, but to the extent that it takes the measure of that sense of crisis that has seemed to haunt the West, and the United States in particular, ever since the destruction of the World Trade Center" (39-40).

Moreover, the novel clearly displays the apocalyptic tropes of the post-9/11 world: its imagery of the dazed and traumatized man, walking amidst blackened ash and amorphous organic and inorganic debris; its consistent sense of looming, impending, but mostly nameless terror; the haunted vision of a crippled America; and the renewed emphasis on hope, struggle, masculinity, and family that characterized sentiments in America after the attacks. And unlike the aliens, monsters, super-villains, and zombies that infest film's post-apocalyptic imagination, humans themselves represent the worst blight, even amidst McCarthy's ruined landscape. *The Road*'s America is despoiled, but even more troublingly, most of its survivors are morally contaminated as well.

More importantly, however, like *Memento*, *Mulholland Drive*, and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *The Road* consistently emphasizes the danger of forgetting one's personal and national past, balancing the dual danger of apocalypse and amnesia. In fact, the unnamed man and his son's physical peril distracts them from the moral danger of their impending, and maybe inevitable, cultural amnesia. As the man explains to his son early in the novel:

> Just remember that the things you put in your head are there forever, he said. You might want to think about that.

> You forget some things, don't you?
>
> Yes. You forget what you want to remember and you remember what you want to forget. (12)

The man's combination of cliché with antimetabole emphasizes the way in which Zizek's televisual repetition of trauma may not be at odds with the amnesiac's compulsion to forget: people may repeat some elements of the past and suppress others, with the unfortunate likelihood that they will repeat the harmful and suppress the valuable. *The Road*'s intersections between trauma, memory, and redemption thus function as an ethical and literary response to the shock of 9/11, even more than its apparent warnings of disasters environmental or eschatological.

Even referring to "the man" and "the boy" underscores the novel's central preoccupation with forgetting, along with the novel's early detail that the man "hadn't kept a calendar for years" (4). While other novels (*Invisible Man*, *Fight Club*) and movies (Clint Eastwood's Westerns) deliberately do not name their main characters, *The Road* goes further: only one character, Ely, is ever named.[7] The lack of proper names certainly suggests McCarthy's allegorical intentions, as other critics have explored.[8] Yet it is not that the characters do not have proper names; rather, their names are under erasure, representing a forgotten past, and by extension lost future, as well as a present in which names no longer serve any purpose. At the same time, the lack of names, like the amnesia movies, continuously forces the reader into the sustained acceptance of narrative ambiguity.

In an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine, unusual for the reclusive writer, McCarthy describes his experience of becoming a father again:

> Soon after, in 2001, [McCarthy] was visiting Tennessee when the attacks of 9/11 unfolded. Being a septuagenarian dad in the modern age is sobering. "When you're young and single, you hang out in bars and don't think about what's going to happen," McCarthy says. "But in the next fifty years when you have kids, you start thinking of their life and the world they have to live in. And that's a sobering thought these days."

McCarthy began to wonder about the future facing his boy. "I think about John all the time and what the world's going to be like," he says. "It's going to be a very troubled place." One night, during a trip to Texas with John, McCarthy imagined such a place. While his son slept, McCarthy gazed out the window of his room and pictured flames on the hill. He later decided to write a novel about it; *The Road* is dedicated to his son. While McCarthy suggests that the ash-covered world in the novel is the result of a meteor hit, his money is on humans destroying each other before an environmental catastrophe sets in. "We're going to do ourselves in first," he says. (Kushner)

September 11 looms in the background of the novel's genesis, because the attacks, unlike McCarthy's extra-textual meteor strike, actually occurred. And while Gray notes that "many reviewers of the book referred to the setting of *The Road* as post-nuclear," (39), unlike *Dr. Strangelove* at the beginning of the Cold War and *The Day After* near its end, *The Road* never explicitly names, discusses, or even mentions the cause of the catastrophe—not as human-made atomic fallout (Gray observes that "there are no signs of radioactivity, and none of the characters suffer from radiation sickness" [39]), and certainly not meteors. This decision starkly contrasts nearly all post-apocalyptic movies. The catastrophe is supposed to establish the narrative—say, the war and subsequent plague that kill almost everyone in *The Omega Man*. Or the true cause of the catastrophe must reveal itself in the climax: the surprise that "Soylent Green is people!," or in *Planet of the Apes*, that "I'm back. I'm home. All the time, it was... We finally really did it," to cite Charlton Heston's dystopias alone. In *The Road*, the cause, or discovery at the end, is irrelevant and, like the characters, never named. Perhaps it has been forgotten. The novel is not interested historical urgency, political commentary, or straightforward adventure. Instead, the book lyrically but discordantly dramatizes the suspended state of an amnesia-like perpetual present: "Like the dying world the newly blind inhabit, all of it fading slowly from memory" (18).

The novel channels the raw shock and suffering after 9/11, the fear of and for the future, and recasts it as a poetic rumination on the stripped down existence of the man and his son. Certainly other post-9/11 apocalypses draw upon the same semiotics of the attacks. But *The Road* is very different from, say, *Cloverfield*. As Stephanie Zacharek suggests, "*Cloverfield* harnesses the horror of 9/11—

specifically as it was felt in New York—and repackages it as an amusement-park ride. We see familiar buildings exploding and crumpling before our eyes, and plumes of smoke rolling up the narrow corridors formed by lower-Manhattan streets, images that were once the province of news footage and have now been reduced to special effects." McCarthy does nearly the opposite: no explosions, no falling men or falling buildings, and any plumes of smoke are relegated to the archetypal, burned-out image of "the road," which here has little in common with "lower-Manhattan streets." The book is no amusement-park ride: not the brief, safe, and wordless thrill of simulated physical excitement, but a slow, emotionally painful linguistic reflection on what the end of things would mean not just for humans, but for our humanity.

John Cant writes that "*The Road* is a literary return, a retrospective on the author's own previous works, a re-viewing of his own work that offers a different perspective to that of the young man whose vision was structured by the oedipal paradigm that we find in…*Suttree* and *Blood Meridian*" (184). But while Cant then analyzes the novel primarily in terms of its "poetic language and expression of profound ideas" (191), the main theme of the novel is *itself* "return" and "retrospective," the wishes and fears of remembering and forgetting in a dying world. Indeed, a concordance of all the pages in *The Road* that use the words "memory," forms of "remember," or forms of "forget" threatens to run nearly as long as the novel itself. Yet the ways in which it evokes memory suggests a man who needs his past and his memories even as he finds them painful and futile. Returning to his old house, the man finds "All much as he remembered it" (26). Later, he tells the boy "Old stories of courage and justice as he remembered them" (41). While lost, "He tried to remember if he knew anything about it or if it were only a fable. In what direction did lost men veer?" (116-117). Before scouting and leaving the boy, "He thought about waking him but he knew he wouldn't remember anything if he did" (118-119). Setting up camp, he thinks, "It was as long a night as he could remember out of a great plenty of such nights" (125).

Yet the most troubling description comes when, finding a deck of cards, the man tries:

> to remember the rules of childhood games …. Sometimes the child would ask him questions about the world that for him was not even a memory. He thought hard how to answer. There is no past. What would you like?

> But he stopped making things up because those things were not true either and the telling made him feel bad. The child had his own fantasies. How things would be in the south. Other children. He tried to keep a rein on this but his heart was not in it. Whose would be? (54)

The only thoughts worse than the memories are the fictions we create in memory's absence. With the man's—and the world's—past nearly gone, there can be no future. The opposite of memory here is not forgetting; it is "making things up," "fantasy," or falsehood.

In keeping with Cant, readers of *The Road* will notice the hallmarks of McCarthy's earlier style: the poetic turns of phrase, frequent use of fragments, and unusual word choices, all exemplified by this sentence on the opening page: "Their light playing over the wet flowstone walls" (3). And as McCarthy's readers have come to expect, no dialogue is rendered using quotation marks. Certainly, unnamed characters, lack of quotation marks, missing apostrophes ("wont," "cant"), and frequent sentence fragments are not unique to *The Road*, much less to McCarthy. Yet this minimalist rhetoric, derived from Hemingway and Faulkner and developed throughout McCarthy's *oeuvre*, here becomes a powerful symbol within the larger context of this particular novel and its response to 9/11. Here, the characters, and the world, have been reduced to their most spare. As the duo scavenges for ever-scarcer food supplies (17, 29, 158, 181, and *passim*) or drops of oil (136), McCarthy also uses his words and punctuation marks as though they might soon run out. Similarly, his idiosyncratic vocabulary choices here feel less like poetry and more like makeshift devices, as though he were using the only word left in his verbal shopping cart, just as the man "went through the drawers but there was nothing there that he could use. Good half-inch drive sockets. A ratchet" (6).

Like everything in *The Road*'s barren world, punctuation marks and words have been laid waste, reduced to their bare minimum, so that some sentences are a single word or handful of words, while others run comma-less, powered by their own rolling inertia: "He pushed the cart off the road and tilted it over where it could not be seen and they left their packs and went back to the station" (7). Apostrophes after the apocalypse seem wasteful. The lack of quotation marks is even more ominous: even the novelist, it seems, lacks the power, the memory, to recreate words as the characters spoke them. The best we can hope for, in this world, and possibly ours, is the imperfection of indirect discourse, the

approximation of what people said based on our fallible and waning memories. *The Road*'s style and language, for what it provides as well as what it withholds, presents the perfect medium for its bleak, terrifying, but ultimately redemptive story.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, despite the awards and critical accolades, *The Road* was voted by online readers the most depressing novel of all time, over Sylvia Plath's semi-autobiographical novel about suicide, *The Bell Jar*, and Elie Wiesel's *Night*, about Nazi atrocities (Laming). Throughout most of *The Road*, life seems hopeless, except for the man and boy's bond. Even then, the man is burdened by his memories; the boy, by his amnesia-like ignorance:

> Did you have any friends?
> Yes. I did.
> Lots of them?
> Yes. Do you remember them?
> Yes. I remember them.
> What happened to them?
> They died.
> All of them?
> Yes. All of them. (60-61)

Yet at the end of the novel, despite the man's death, the boy survives and is found by a full family. Just as the man hoped, "Goodness will find the little boy. It always has. It will again" (281). And so when the new unnamed man, the possible adoptive father, finds the boy, the boy asks,

> Are you carrying the fire?
> Am I what?
> Carrying the fire.
> You're kind of weirded out, aren't you?
> No.
> Just a little.
> Yeah.
> That's okay.

So are you?
What, carrying the fire?
Yes. (283)

As Amy Hungerford observes, "It is hard to decide whether the boy's light is nothing or everything" (135). Clearly, many readers fear it means nothing. Yet the light, the fire, is a clear-cut symbol that the man, the boy, and the new family are, in a refrain repeated as though for light and heat throughout the novel, "the good guys" (77, 103, 129, 137, 140, 115, 184, 245-6, 278, 283). Fire and light also seem straightforward images of divine wisdom and hope, whether that divinity is Prometheus and his gift to humankind, the Hebrew Bible's Creation story, or Jesus saying, "I am the light of the world." And McCarthy's fire and light can be each of these. Certainly a novel that begins in a cave and refers to fire dozens of times pays homage to Plato. Like "the man" and "the boy," the language feels allegorical, as though McCarthy were less interested in the road than the spiritual journey. Yet I'm not ready to accept mere allegory. The novel, unlike Plato's Allegory of the Cave or Medieval morality plays, forces the reader to identify emotionally and often viscerally with the man's struggle and danger, and with his fervent, animal love for his son. For an allegory, the novel painfully details the minutiae of physical survival: keeping alive, staying sheltered, finding food, protecting oneself from the elements and bands of marauding cannibals, and moving on. The fire in the novel, then, is God, hope, light, and wisdom. But in the aftermath of 9/11, when physical and metaphysical seem inextricable, sometimes the fire means fire: "He threw the branches on the fire and set out again" (96); "He kept a fire going" (237), and many other instances. The fire may be a metaphor, but it is not an allegory; unlike allegory, metaphor balances relationship between the literal and figurative. The novel as a whole, then, is also not a mere allegory for 9/11. It is a moving, multi-layered metaphor not easily reduced to post-9/11, Manichean oppositions. It is both terrifying but, in the end, like the best apocalyptic tales, strangely comforting. When the man reassures the boy that "I'll be back and then we'll have a fire and then you wont be scared anymore" (72), the boy believes him, and so, within and beyond the novel, do we.

Yet if the fire must be more than fire, and surely it must, then it is not just spirituality or sanctity: it is also memory. When the man sees "a forest fire making its way along the tinderbox ridges above them[, …], [t]he color of it moved something in him long forgotten. Make a list. Recite a litany. Remember"

(31). And thus when, in the end, the boy is assured that the new people—a nuclear family of father, mother, little boy, and little girl—are "good guys" and "carrying the fire," the narrative shifts to the boy's perspective for the first time: "I'll talk to you every day, he whispered. And I wont forget. No matter what. Then he rose and turned and walked back to the road" (286). Perhaps this ending is too conventional or conservative for some readers. Yet I believe that McCarthy's moral urgency, represented by both the boy's survival and memory, rescue what seems like a post-War on Terror Manichaeanism of "good guys" and "bad guys." Richard Gray sees the conclusion's "sheltering confines of American myth" as "deeply unconvincing" (47). Instead, I would suggest that the original, evocative, and elegiac language, rather than its plotline, allow readers to move beyond apocalypse and toward McCarthy's literary and spiritual redemption.

This final series of tensions—originality and formula, life and death, past and present, end and beginning, memory and forgetting—even more than soot-stained, solitary figures amidst broken buildings and landscapes, evokes McCarthy's, and film's, ultimate narrative response to 9/11. And in one of the novel's last quotation mark-less dialogues, the new man and the boy, exactly like *Eternal Sunshine*'s Joel and Clementine, assure each other that it's "okay":

> And can I go with you?
> Yes. You can.
> Okay then.
> Okay.

Still, McCarthy does not end the novel here, or with the boy's quiet eulogy. Instead, the novel concludes with its own tribute to the dead world, one far beyond any potential misgiving about the novel's seemingly conventional conclusion: "Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains" (286). But despite the poetry, the fish can never return, and there is no "happily ever after" to close the "Once there were…" construction. The world represented by the "vermiculate patterns" on their backs would "not be right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery" (287). Life after the apocalypse can never return to its previous bliss, if such a state ever really existed. But we can take comfort in knowing that time, in its attendant mystery, exists independently of human loss or memory. There can be no return to September 10th, no uncomplicated erasure, no painless amnesia.

Nor should there be. But in *The Road*'s post-apocalyptic world, or perhaps our own post-9/11 one, saying "okay" to our past, present, and future is good enough. We will have a fire and then we won't be scared anymore.

Notes

[1] Artist Damien Hirst and composer Karlheinz Stockhausen were both excoriated for viewing the destruction of the Twin Towers as a work of art. It does seem clear, though, that the attacks were a form of criticism, although not in the analytical sense of the word. Art Spiegelman sardonically writes that "if not for all the tragedy and death, I could think of the attack as some sort of radical architectural criticism" (unpaged).

[2] "9/11/2001" by Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly, September 24, 2001, viewed at http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2011/09/ September-11th-covers-mouly-spiegelman.html#slide_ss_0=1.

[3] Derek Jensen, "Tribute in Light," Derek Jensen, 11 September, 2004, viewed at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wtc-2004-memorial.jpg.

[4] The fact that many of the amnesia films are remakes or adaptations whose sources long predate September 11th does not discount them; I see them as suggesting a sudden interest, immediacy, and relevance to the material.

[5] Jess Walter's under-examined novel *The Zero* also provides an interesting intersection between the political and metaphorical concerns of 9/11 and amnesia.

[6] The distinction in Russian Formalism between "story" ("*fabula*"), or the chronological sequence of events, and "plot" ("*syuzhet*"), or the events in the order in which they're presented to the reader, seems crucial to understanding how these films work. In *Memento*, the *fabula* essentially runs in reverse of the *syuzhet*, making the film's opening shot an important visual, narrative, and symbolic cue to the viewer, even as he or she cannot appreciate its significance during the initial viewing.

[7] Another post-9/11 post-apocalyptic movie, *The Book of Eli* (2010), serves as a foil to the film adaptation of *The Road* (2009): both revolve around a male survivor's journey through dangerous, burned out landscape. Yet *The Book of Eli* is a straightforward adventure with attendant Hollywood violence, despite that the quest turns out to be the delivery of the last Bible. In *The Road*, the violence is far more harrowing, in part because the characters' survival does not

seem self-evident, and because the film, thanks to its source material, dramatizes the love between the man and his son.

[8] The range of allegorical interpretations is wide, from John Vanderheide's "allegorical daemonism" (111) to Carl James Grindley's reading of *The Road* as an unambiguous "document of the so-called Tribulation of Judeo-Christian mythology" (11).

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"I Did Them Things So You Wouldn't Have To": Secret Window and the Characters Who Won't Stay Dead

JAN WHITT

"You stole my story," the man on the doorstep said. "You stole my story and something's got to be done about it. Right is right and fair is fair and something has to be done" (253). The first paragraph of the novella "Secret Window, Secret Garden" is vintage Stephen King. Who could possibly stop reading without learning who stole the story? And what story? And who is the man on the doorstep? And if something has to be done, what is that something (and who will do it)?

"Secret Window, Secret Garden"—which became the 2004 film *Secret Window* starring Maria Bello, Johnny Depp, Timothy Hutton, and John Turturro—explores how authors may appropriate the ideas of others and how the characters they create may come alive, seeming at times to move and breathe on their own. With Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) as the most compelling example, fictional characters may become more real than we dreamed and may dominate our consciousness in ways we could not, quite literally, have imagined.

Whether or not we teach King's work in American literature or popular culture classes, "Secret Window, Secret Garden" poses seductive questions about the production of narrative. In "A Note on 'Secret Window, Secret Garden,'" King expresses his longtime interest in the impact of fiction, his desire to engage questions about plagiarism broadly defined, and his focus on why authors create particular characters. He writes:

> A few years ago, I published a novel called *Misery* which tried, at least in part, to illustrate the powerful hold fiction can achieve over the reader. Last year I published *The Dark Half,* where I tried to explore the converse: the powerful hold fiction can achieve over the writer. While that book

was between drafts, I started to think that there might be a way to tell both stories at the same time by approaching some of the plot elements of *The Dark Half* from a totally different angle. Writing, it seems to me, is a secret act—as secret as dreaming—and that was one aspect of this strange and dangerous craft I had never thought about much. (250)

This study addresses the creative process by acknowledging the impossibility of articulating entirely new thoughts or producing wholly original texts. According to Ecclesiastes 1:9, "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun." William Shakespeare makes the same argument in the first five lines of "Sonnet 59": "If there be nothing new, but that which is/Hath been before, how are our brains beguil'd,/ Which laboring for invention bear amiss/ The second burthen of a former child!" A more recent example from popular culture is Led Zeppelin's 1999 album "There Is Nothing New Under the Sun," which was reissued in 2007 by Missouri band Coalesce, a group of musicians fully aware of the ironies in their project.

In addition, the study addresses comments by King and film director David Koepp about the role of the author. In the film, John Shooter (John Turturro) says to his own Victor Frankenstein, Morton Rainey (Johnny Depp): "I exist because you made me. Gave me my name. Told me everything you wanted me to do. I did them things so you wouldn't have to." But why do authors develop certain characters? Are those characters reflections of themselves? Do characters act out in ways the author fears to behave? Do some characters—such as Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men* or Joe Christmas in *Light in August* or the Misfit in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"—so dominate the narrative that they haunt both the authors who gave them their existence and the readers who encounter them?

Finally, "Secret Window, Secret Garden" is at home in the Gothic tradition of literature popular in Germany, Russia, the American South, and elsewhere. Although the doppelgänger is not exclusive to Gothic literature, authors as diverse as Joseph Conrad, Herman Melville, and Robert Louis Stevenson have created characters who do not exist fully without their double; in the case of the reclusive writer Morton Rainey and his violent visitor from Mississippi, however, Rainey is complicit in his own fate, having created the agent of his own demise. Stark differences exist in the adaptation of the novella into the film, and although the study stops short of detailed aesthetic analysis, some of David Koepp's

decisions—especially with respect to the ending of the dark tale—are more artful, less manipulative, and significantly more realistic than Stephen King's.

Plagiarism and Its Discontents

Six months after he discovers his wife Amy Rainey (Maria Bello) making love to another man, Mort Rainey sits alone and disoriented in his lakeside cabin. A stranger appears, introducing himself as "John Shooter" and accusing Rainey of having stolen his story. In the novella, Shooter tells Rainey that he wrote "Sowing Season," which Rainey published as "Secret Window, Secret Garden," seven years before and asks, "How in hell did a big money scribbling asshole like you get down to a little shit-splat town in Mississippi and steal my goddam story?" In King's fictional universe, plagiarism may be defined as the theft of another's intellectual property or more broadly defined as participation in a free-flowing marketplace of ideas, a theme that lies at the heart of the novella "Secret Window, Secret Garden" and the film *Secret Window*.

Without making excuses for those who deliberately steal another person's work and publish it as their own—as central character Mort Rainey most assuredly does—King and Koepp explore the ways in which the truths of human experience inevitably repeat in film, literature, music, television, and other creative projects. "When two writers show up at the same story, it's all about who wrote the words first," Mort Rainey tells his alter-ego, John Shooter, who comes from Mississippi to Tashmore Lake in upstate New York to reclaim his stolen story. The seriousness of the duel is obvious later in the film when Shooter tells Rainey that their war will not end "until one or the other of us is dead." In an even more sinister statement, Shooter tells Rainey, "I will burn your life like a canefield in a high wind" (361).

In "Secret Window, Secret Garden," Rainey is tortured by the memory of having stolen a short story by fellow student John Kintner in a creative writing class at Bates College. Confronting the dissolution of his marriage and his sudden inability to write, Rainey begins to question whether any of the work that followed his misappropriation of Kintner's short story is authentically his own. King writes:

…Had he ever stolen someone else's work?

For the first time since Shooter had turned up on his porch with his sheaf of pages, Mort considered this question seriously. A good many reviews of his books had suggested that he was not really an original writer; that most of his books consisted of twice-told tales. He remembered Amy reading a review of *The Organ-Grinder's Boy* which had first acknowledged the book's pace and readability, and then suggested certain derivativeness in its plotting. She'd said, "So what? Don't these people know there are only about five really good stories, and writers just tell them over and over, with different characters?"

Mort himself believed there were at least six stories: success; failure; love and loss; revenge; mistaken identity; the search for a higher power, be it God or the devil. He had told the first four over and over, obsessively, and now that he thought of it, "Sowing Season" embodied at least three of those ideas. But was that plagiarism? If it was, every novelist at work in the world would be guilty of the crime.

Plagiarism, he decided, was outright theft. And he had never done it in his life. *Never."* (335-36)

[P]redicament is an analogue for a certain philosophical exigency that drives Derrida to writing "sous rapture," which I translate as "under erasure." This is to write a word, cross it out, and then print both the word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible.)… In examining familiar things we come to such unfamiliar conclusions that our very language is twisted and bent even as it guides us. (xiv)

Losing both his marriage and his sanity, Rainey eventually confronts the reality of his crime against the profession he reveres, on which he has based his identity, and from which he derives his self-esteem. In part to address his guilt, Rainey creates a dark figure who stalks him and carries out the crimes that ordinarily would make him recoil with horror.

Mort Rainey and John Shooter as Doppelgängers

"Secret Window, Secret Garden," one of four narratives in Stephen King's collection entitled *Four Past Midnight,* introduces the mysterious John Shooter, a dairy farmer with a Southern accent, a distinctly Gothic sensibility, and a stubborn claim that Mort Rainey has stolen his intellectual property. Suffice it to say that overt plagiarism rarely ends well, and Rainey begins a voyage into his past that will culminate in his own annihilation.

Murder and psychosis collide in a screenplay adapted by director and screenwriter David Koepp *(Jurassic Park, Mission: Impossible, Panic Room, War of the Worlds, Ghost Town, Jack Ryan,* and other films). Given the intricacies of the creative process that Stephen King and David Koepp seek to unravel, one wonders if they discussed the "plagiarism" involved in adapting King's story into a screenplay and, ultimately, into a film; the final project results from—not only the desire of the original author, director, and scriptwriters—but also decisions made by actors such as Johnny Depp, known for his extemporization on the set, and by casting directors, marketing executives, and others committed to an artistic and commercial success.

Koepp is no stranger to nightmares, during which his characters are not certain whether they are awake or asleep as they seek to survive, among other things, alien attacks, a bizarre invasion of a four-story brownstone on the Upper West Side of New York City, and an amusement park filled with cloned dinosaurs. In the haunted universe of *Secret Window,* people and pets die and a betrayed husband goes quietly insane. Darkness, doppelgängers, horror, and romance identify the film as part of the Southern Gothic tradition and propel viewers into a world in which they must identify with a man who is either a victim or a monster—or both.

In "Gothic Fiction Tells Us the Truth About Our Divided Nature," Alison Milbank argues that by the 19th Century, attention had shifted from concerns about the value of religious belief in Gothic fiction to "the horrors that lurk in our own psyche" (n.p.). Citing Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and quoting Sigmund Freud, Milbank writes:

> Although the haunting by a second self may appear to confirm the existence of the supernatural, ever since Freud this apparition has been understood not as a true spiritual presence but as a figure of repression.

> The eeriness of two selves where there should only be one is, Freud
> argued, an irruption of disquiet caused by our separation from our origin
> in our mother's womb. (n.p.)

The relationship between authors and their characters lies at the heart of the film *Secret Window,* as voices take over Mort Rainey's mind. One voice says, "There is no John Shooter. There never has been. You invented him." Rainey yells back: "Leave me alone!" The voice whispers, "You are alone." Wearing John Shooter's black 10-gallon hat, Rainey gazes at himself in the mirror and asks, "What is happening to me?" To save himself, Rainey tells Shooter, "You don't exist." Shooter assures Rainey that he most certainly does exist and, more importantly, that Rainey created him and keeps him alive.

The foray into what Koepp calls "dual identity" becomes far more than an exploration of an author's divided self. In the film, as Koepp states in "From Book to Film," there is a "dark awful part" of each person, and Mort Rainey imagines this part of himself as a "wholly separate person" with the ability to kill. Depp himself suggests that mirrors and windows in the film are portentous and deeply symbolic, providing glimpses into the multiple facets of our essential selves. Hutton alludes to the phrase "keep passing the open windows," which he interprets to mean that we should take seriously our choices. (Interestingly, Hutton incorrectly attributes the phrase to a novel by William Faulkner instead of the film *Hotel New Hampshire,* which is based on John Irving's novel by the same name. The band Queen, too, produced an album entitled "Keep Passing the Open Windows." Here again, it is appropriate to understand that artists borrow ideas, methods, and perspectives during the creative process, prohibiting general consensus about what constitutes an act of plagiarism.)

As Rainey loses his grasp on his marriage and his sanity, the home he created with his wife burns—the result of arson—and dire events become the rule of the day. In the novella, Bump, a friendly cat beloved by the couple, is killed, his neck broken before he is nailed to the roof of the garbage bin "with a screwdriver from Mort's own shed" (291). Rainey becomes less able to manage his rage, displacing it and becoming more and more agitated. For example, as the phone rings, Rainey gives a "screaky little cry" and falls backwards, "dropping the telephone handset on the floor" and almost tripping over "the goddam bench Amy had bought and put by the telephone table, the bench absolutely no one, including Amy herself, ever used" (294).

Clearly, it is his wife—not the bench—whom Rainey would like to hurt; her betrayal and the relentless pain that followed it precipitate Rainey's mental collapse. Ironically, Rainey talks to himself about the way people try to shield themselves from loss:

> Mort didn't believe that people—even those who tried to be fairly honest with themselves—knew when some things were over. He believed they often went on believing, or trying to believe, even when the handwriting was not only on the wall but writ in letters large enough to read a hundred yards away without a spyglass. If it was something you really cared about and felt that you needed, it was easy to cheat, easy to confuse your life with TV and convince yourself that what felt so wrong would eventually come right…probably after the next commercial break. He supposed that, without its great capacity for self-deception, the human race would be even crazier than it already was.
>
> But sometimes the truth crashed through, and if you had consciously tried to think or dream your way around that truth, the results could be devastating: it was like being there when a tidal wave roared not over but straight through a dike which had been set in its way, smashing it and you flat. (309-10)

Rainey's loss of his wife and home prevents him from attaining self-awareness. There is no longer a window through which he can see himself clearly, as he grows increasingly disassociated from his essential nature. Intellectually, he understands; emotionally, he is distraught and immobilized. "It was over," King writes. "Their lives together were history. Even the house where they had shared so many good times was nothing but evilly smouldering beams tumbled into the cellar-hole like the teeth of a giant" (310). As Rainey's mind unravels, he remembers in particular his wife's love for a room in the house, a room that becomes symbolic and the basis for the title of the film and novella:

> The room was well away from the main house and she liked the quiet, she said. The quiet and the clear, sane morning light. She liked to look out the window every now and then, at her flowers growing in the deep corner formed by the house and the study ell. And he heard her saying, *It's the*

best room in the house, at least for me, because hardly anybody ever goes there but me. It's got a secret window, and it looks down on a secret garden. (315-16)

Rainey's descent into madness becomes more and more obvious. Even when Amy Rainey is with him in the actual moment, he confuses "her real voice with her voice in his mind, which was the voice of memory. But was it a true memory or a false one?…Wasn't it at least possible that he was having a…well, a recollective hallucination? That he was trying to make his own past with Amy in some way conform to that goddam story where a man had gone crazy and killed his wife?" (316). Later, King describes Rainey as he pursues and confronts the hallucination he calls "John Shooter":

He turned the knob of the bathroom door and slammed in, bouncing the door off the wall hard enough to chop through the wallpaper and pop the door's lower hinge, and there he was, *there he was,* coming at him with a raised weapon, his teeth bared in a killer's grin, and his eyes were insane, utterly insane, and Mort brought the poker down in a whistling overhand blow and he had just time enough to realize that Shooter was also swinging a poker, and to realize that Shooter was not wearing his round-crowned black hat, and to realize it wasn't Shooter at all, to realize it was *him,* the madman was *him,* and the poker shattered the mirror over the washbasin and silver-backed glass sprayed every whichway, twinkling in the gloom, and the medicine cabinet fell into the sink. The bent door swung open like a gaping mouth, spilling bottles of cough syrup and iodine and Listerine. (328)

Madness does not protect Rainey entirely from the gradual realization that he is violent. By the end of the macabre tale, Rainey cannot avoid looking into a mirror and taking on the identity of his nemesis:

He stood in the front hallway, not sure what he wanted to do next.…and suddenly, for no reason at all, he put the hat on his head. He shuddered when he did it, the way a man will sometimes shudder after swallowing a mouthful of raw liquor. But the shudder passed.

And the hat felt like quite a good fit, actually. (349)

As "dark horror stole over his brain" (382), Rainey rejects his role in the arson, in the killing of his pet, and in the murder of Tom Greenleaf, but his denial is short lived. King writes:

> *…Would you like to do something that does make sense? Call the police, then. That makes sense. Call the police and tell them to come down here and lock you up. Tell them to do it fast, before you can do any more damage. Tell them to do it before you kill anyone else.*

> Mort dropped the pages with a great wild cry and they seesawed lazily down around him as all of the truth rushed in on him at once like a jagged bolt of silver lightning. (380)

Eventually, even Rainey must confront his demon, the part of himself that can maim and kill and bury the bodies of his wife and her lover—and then calmly go to the market, chat with other customers, and complete a manuscript.

The Role of the Gothic in the Development of Character

Commonly accepted characteristics of the Gothic tradition, according to Robert Harris, include: 1) a mansion, or in the case of "Secret Window, Secret Garden" and *Secret Window,* an old cabin, in which shadows create a "sense of claustrophobia and entrapment"; 2) fear, mystery, and inexplicable events; 3) dreams and other portents; 4) highly dramatic occurrences; 5) "anger, sorrow, surprise, and especially, terror" ("Characters suffer from raw nerves and a feeling of impending doom," Harris writes); 6) women in peril; 7) and a mood of "gloom and horror."   Like Edgar Allan Poe, whose Gothic characters often slip into madness ("The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Pit and the Pendulum," for example), other authors introduce dark and mysterious settings and create characters in the throes of confusion and loss. Examples include the Brontë sisters *(Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights),* Charles Dickens *(Bleak House, Great Expectations, Oliver Twist,* and other novels), Oscar Wilde *(The Picture of Dorian Gray),* Bram Stoker *(Dracula),* Daphne du Maurier *(Rebecca),* and novels

and short stories by William Faulkner, Harper Lee, and Flannery O'Connor that are too numerous to mention.

Similarly, in "Secret Window, Secret Garden" and *Secret Window,* we encounter yet another isolated figure struggling to deal with a fragmented identity in a dark and frightening universe. Mirrors in the cabin suggest the distortions between real life and fiction, between sanity and madness. In the film, townspeople tell Rainey, "I don't think you're really all that well" and "You really don't look well at all." But Rainey continues his dialogue with himself, even when Shooter tells him that if he himself is wrong about the author of his story, he'll turn himself over to authorities: "Then I'd turn myself in. But I'd take care of myself before a trial, Mr. Rainey, because if things turn out that way then I suppose I am crazy. And that kind of crazy man has no reason or excuse to live."

Mort Rainey's inability to separate dreams from reality becomes apparent in "Secret Window, Secret Garden" and underscores his connection to characters in stories by Dickens, Poe, and others. King describes a nightmare from which Rainey cannot escape:

> He dreamed he was lost in a vast cornfield. He blundered from one row to the next, and the sun glinted off the watches he was wearing—half a dozen on each forearm, and each watch set to a different time.
>
> *Please help me!* he cried. *Someone please help me! I'm lost and afraid!*
>
> Ahead of him, the corn on both sides of the row shook and rustled. Amy stepped out from one side. John Shooter stepped out from the other. Both of them held knives.
>
> *I am confident I can take care of this business,* Shooter said as they advanced on him with their knives raised. *I'm sure that, in time, your death will be a mystery even to us.*
>
> Mort turned to run, but a hand—Amy's, he was sure—seized him by the belt and pulled him back. And then the knives, glittering in the hot sun of this huge secret garden— (268)

The Adaptation of "Secret Window, Secret Garden" into Film

The novella "Secret Window, Secret Garden" is different from the film *Secret Window* in significant ways, including the reader's introduction to the story, John Shooter's corporeal presence, and the fate of Amy Rainey and her lover Ted Milner (Timothy Hutton). Some of the changes make little difference at all. For example, in the novella, it is a cat named Bump who dies; in the film, a dog named Chico. In the novella, two townspeople, Tom Greenleaf and Greg Carstairs, die; in the film, Detective Ken Karsch (Charles S. Dutton) and Greenleaf (John Dunn-Hill) die.

Secret Window opens with a snowstorm, as Mort Rainey flees a motel in which his wife Amy Rainey and Ted Milner are making love. As the wipers thump across the windshield, Rainey sits behind the wheel of his Jeep and argues with himself: "Don't go back. Do not go back there." The cacophony of voices begins, but we do not yet understand their significance. Rainey ignores his own warning, takes a key from the front desk, enters the couple's room, points a gun at them, screams, and leaves, his SUV careening away from the scene of his humiliation. But the debilitating pain that follows such a discovery has just begun. Only later do we learn that Rainey's voices are evidence of separate identities that are beginning to manifest themselves as he goes slowly and privately insane. The snowstorm heightens the intensity of the scene, as wind and snow reflect Rainey's own swirling emotions. The initial moment in "Secret Window, Secret Garden"—the instant when John Shooter appears at Mort Rainey's front door—is equally powerful but less dramatic for a medium that relies upon visual impact.

From the moment in the film that Tom Greenleaf claims he sees Mort Rainey alone by the side of the road—not with Shooter, as Rainey claims—there are inklings that Rainey is losing his battle against his baser self: "I am *not* having a nervous breakdown," he whispered to the little voice, but the little voice was having none of the argument. Mort thought that he might have frightened the little voice. He hoped so, because the little voice had certainly frightened *him"* (374-75). In the novella, however, Greenleaf looks in the rearview mirror and sees "another man with Mort, and an old station wagon, although neither the man nor the car had been there ten seconds before. The man was wearing a black hat, he said…*but you could see right through him, and the car too"* (398). Koepp

deletes the ghostly presence of John Shooter, making the film more believable than the story (in Koepp's version, Shooter exists only in Rainey's mind).

In the film *Secret Window* and the novella "Secret Window, Secret Garden," Amy Rainey drives to Tashmore Lake to ask her husband to sign divorce papers. As she gets out of the car, King writes, "the hand pulled the shade in Mort's head all the way down and he was in darkness" (383). In both the film and the novella, the man in the black hat—who is and isn't her husband—tells her Mort Rainey is dead—that he died by his own hand—and then he comes after her with scissors, on which the sun "sent a starflash glitter along the blades as he snicked them open and then closed" (386). In both texts, when Amy Rainey visits the cabin, she discovers the word "Shooter" ("Shoot Her") etched into and painted onto walls. Perhaps her surprise and terror mirror her husband's on the night when he found her and Milner in a motel room.

The final scenes differ in each medium. In the novella, Amy Rainey understands the meaning of the word "Shooter," but she survives the attack. In the film, viewers learn the meaning of the word moments before Mort Rainey murders Amy Rainey and her lover. In neither text does Amy Rainey immediately believe that her husband will kill her, thinking that if he were capable of murder, it would have been at the motel when he found her with Milner. Even after the murder attempt that occurs in the novella, Amy Rainey attributes her husband's violence to the madman who seems to possess him. As Rainey comes after his wife, she realizes she is dealing with someone she no longer recognizes—"But this wasn't him" (386), she thinks. Suddenly, Fred Evans, an insurance investigator, appears at the cabin at the last moment and shoots and kills Mort Rainey. He and Amy Rainey explain her husband's behavior as a "schizophrenic episode":

> "He *was* two men," Amy said. "He was himself…and he became a character he created. Ted believes that the last name, Shooter, was something Mort picked up and stored in his head when he found out that Ted came from a little town called Shooter's Knob, Tennessee. I'm sure he's right. Mort was always picking out character names just that way…like anagrams, almost." (395)

In King's version, Amy Rainey and Fred Evans deal for many years with the events at Tashmore Lake: "Both he and the woman who had been married to

Morton Rainey woke from dreams in which a man in a round-crowned black hat looked at them from sun-faded eyes caught in nets of wrinkles. He looked at them with no love…but, they both felt, with an odd kind of stern pity" (399). In a startling twist, Shooter leaves a conciliatory note for Amy Rainey, which she retrieves from inside the black hat he left behind.

Viewers who like Amy Rainey or who simply prefer a happier ending will appreciate King's denouement more than Koepp's. Those who understand that every destructive action prompts an even more devastating reaction are more likely to appreciate Koepp's tidy (albeit horrific) finale. In both texts, of course, the function of the ending is to explain the doppelgänger and the hold that fiction can have over us. Both the novella and the film include references to Shooter's demand that Rainey "fix " his story. However, fixing the story does not mean resetting the clock to the moment before Rainey appropriates and publishes Shooter's work. Instead, it means correcting the ending, tying up loose ends by meting out a punishment that (more than) fits the crime, and preserving the integrity of the events as Shooter understands them. To "fix" Shooter's story, Amy Rainey and Ted Milner should die, although in the novella, Mort Rainey dies before he can kill them. Their deaths are the price for their thoughtless cruelty and their own particular duplicity. In the film, the two people who set disastrous events in motion die, and the end to Mort Rainey's story—or is it John Shooter's?—is a calm writer back at his computer, eating an ear of corn near an open window that looks out upon a secret garden. Beneath the garden, and feeding the cornstalks, are the still recognizable, decaying corpses of Amy Rainey and Ted Milner. We hear, "I know I can do it, [he] said, helping himself to another ear of corn from the steaming bowl," reads the narrator at the end of the film. "I'm sure that in time her death will be a mystery, even to me."

Conclusion

This study relies upon comments by William Faulkner—whose strongest connection with the wildly popular Stephen King may be his Gothic sensibility—and upon statements by King himself. In fact, King refers to Faulkner multiple times in his novella-turned-screenplay. For example, in "Secret Window, Secret Garden," King describes the reaction Mort Rainey has to John Shooter: "*This man doesn't look exactly real. He looks like a character out of a novel by William*

Faulkner" (254). Later, Rainey tells a detective that Shooter "didn't strike me as the house-burning type," and Rainey's estranged wife Amy Rainey surprises him with her literary acumen:

> "You mean he wasn't a Snopes," Amy said suddenly.
>
> Mort looked at her, startled—then smiled. "That's right," he said. "A Southerner, but not a Snopes."
>
> "Meaning what?" [the detective] asked, a little warily.
>
> "An old joke, Lieutenant," Amy said. "The Snopeses were characters in some novels by William Faulkner. They got their start in business burning barns."
>
> "Oh," [the detective] said blankly. (313)

And still later in the novella, Rainey shares what he tells students in creative writing classes when he is asked to talk about his work, a responsibility he does not enjoy: "Get a job with the post office," he'd say. "It worked for Faulkner" (367).

But it is not the allusions to Faulkner or his characters that most interest King (or the readers of "Secret Window, Secret Garden"). While speaking to a class on American fiction at the University of Virginia in 1958, Faulkner told students that his work "begins with a character, usually, and once he stands up on his feet and begins to move, all I can do is trot along behind him with a paper and pencil trying to keep up long enough to put down what he says and does." During the same occasion, Faulkner advises the students to "get the character in your mind": "Once he is in your mind, and he is right, and he's true, then he does the work himself" (n.p.). The same year, this time at Washington and Lee University, Faulkner talks about his characters in a similar fashion: "Then they all stand up" and "begin to move," and "all you've got to do…is to trot along behind them and put down what they do and say" (n.p.).

Mort Rainey and John Shooter are larger than life, figures that draw from the Gothic tradition so familiar to Faulkner. As Rainey's creation, Shooter overtakes, usurps, and ultimately destroys his master. The characters reign over a universe

that is unmerciful and unyielding. In short, artistic production can be both a fascinating and terrifying process. Characters take over our imaginations, sometimes surprising even their creators. "I think there *was* a John Shooter," Amy Rainey tells Evans at the end of the novella. "I think he was Mort's greatest creation—a character so vivid that he actually *did* become real" (398-99). In fact, John Shooter was so real that he destroyed the author who made him possible.

The profession that obsessed and sustained Mort Rainey became his undoing. "In tough times—up until the divorce, anyway, which seemed to be an exception to the general rule—he had always found it easy to write. Necessary, even," Rainey said. "It was good to have those make-believe worlds to fall back on when the real one had hurt you" (323). But clearly, as writers themselves, King and Koepp understand what occurs when the make-believe world, too, turns on us. "The writer's job is to gaze through that window and report on what he sees," King writes. "But sometimes windows break. I think that, more than anything else, is the concern of this story: what happens to the wide-eyed observer when the window between reality and unreality breaks and the glass begins to fly?" (251).

Other questions arise, as well: Is our intrusion into other people's lives prompted by an interest in alternative ways of being, or something far more sinister? Like talk show audiences, do we feel better about ourselves if we see the conundrums and frailties of others? Do we need film, literature, and television to entertain us, or do we need to escape from our own empty spaces? If the answers to these questions—and others like them—are complex, would it be wise to account for the duality of our own nature? Just as Mort Rainey stares into a mirror and confronts a startling image of himself, are we prepared to face our secret selves? And where is the line between imagination and action? Of what are we capable?

Writers create characters who do "them things" so they don't have to. They live vicariously through their creations and allow their readers to do so as well. However, where an author takes us may or may not be where we want to go. Like the unborn boy in the book *The Door in the Floor,* which became another 2004 film, do we really want to be born into a world in which there is a door in the floor? Do we really want literature to take us there?

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Boardwalk Empire: The Romantic Side of Crime and Capitalism

ASHLEY M. DONNELLY

Boardwalk Empire, HBO's series about Atlantic City during Prohibition, was adapted by Emmy Award-winning screenwriter and producer Terence Winter from Nelson Johnson's *Boardwalk Empire: The Birth, High Times, and Corruption of Atlantic City*. The series is a beautifully scripted piece of historical fiction, beginning in 1919 on the boardwalk of Atlantic City on the eve of Prohibition. The protagonist, Enoch "Nucky" Thompson, is based loosely on the real-life Atlantic City politician Enoch L. Johnson. Nucky is Atlantic City's treasurer, master schemer, and effective ruler of the city. The onset of Prohibition offers a new black market in the United States, and the ruling politicians and law enforcement agents of Atlantic City are eager for a piece of the pie, cheering as Nucky declares he will keep the city "wet as a mermaid's twat," despite the federal mandate. Nucky offers a unique vision of an American gangster with the aid of actor Steve Buscemi's skill at performing this complex character. Nucky also helps bring Atlantic City alive, allowing it to shine as the centerpiece of the show, a show that encourages its audience to cheer for a crooked anti-hero and all of the antics of those that produce a narrative perpetuating an idea that corruption is an inevitable part of U.S. culture and that the black market and flesh trade are somehow linked with escapism and harmless civil disobedience.

The Gangster

From the rise of the mafia to the biker gangs of California, certain attributes have become associated with the archetype of "gangster:" he swaggers, he is physically dominant, he is quick to anger, his emotions are on the surface, and confrontation is not something he avoids, but often seeks. Nucky offers a different set of characteristics, as well as a new definition of toughness.

Buscemi, typically a character actor with a litany of incredibly awkward, strange supporting roles in films on his résumé, seems an odd casting choice for protagonist. However, audiences are first introduced to him in the title sequence, where he stands, in suit and wingtip shoes, on the shore as waves crash over his feet. Empty liquor bottles roll in with the tide and bounce around him as he calmly smokes and thoughtfully gazes out over the Atlantic Ocean. As a wave recedes and cleans his shoes of sand, he turns to head back to the boardwalk. His gaze is focused and determined, and the bizarre Buscemi roles of his past seem to dissipate as a new, focused, leader emerges. But as he turns back toward the boardwalk, he *waddles* in that awkward way most of us do when trying to negotiate sand and a hill in inappropriate footwear. It is a very subtle waddle, but obvious enough, and a clear indicator that Nucky is a unique character who will continuously challenge audience expectations. Though he is the true protagonist of the series and a sympathetic rogue, his core desire for power and wealth render him not much more than a complicated Horatio Alger character, a champion of unbridled capitalism who makes political corruption seem not only a given, but somehow thrilling and romantic.

Buscemi is 5 feet 9 inches tall and slight in build. He stands in stark contrast to his HBO predecessor, gangster Tony Soprano of the popular series *The Sopranos* (1999-2007). The character of Nucky is not outwardly intimidating and not outwardly bombastic, impetuous, or emotional. His emotions are closely guarded. Buscemi's characterization of Nucky is not as a man who would resort first to his fists in a fight. He is always immaculately dressed in a formal, vested suit and tie with a trademark red carnation in his buttonhole. His most powerful weapon is his intelligence. Strategy, patience, and an incredible poker face are Nucky's main arsenal, and Terence Winter is able to challenge the tropes of the American gangster and twist the genre expectations in a way that is slight yet remarkable, particularly as it elevates intelligence as the mark of a leader among the common mainstream message of anti-intellectualism on television.

Nucky is calculating, corrupt, and deadly when crossed, yet these traits are often balanced for the audience by his humanity. He is an anti-hero who is easy to root for, particularly in contrast to the characters he comes up against. He is the Prohibition rogue, maintaining a fun "getaway" as a place for an escape, which initially seems harmless. He is also a businessman—organized, efficient, and smart enough to treat those in his city with kindness, a kindness that is often genuine. The fact that Nucky is challenged again and again, yet uses his intellect

to come out on top makes him extremely likeable and admirable. Though as a character he is unique, among popular gangster fictions he is reminiscent of Michael Corleone in that he is sympathetic, relatable, and at times easy to forgive (or at least understand) when he commits a particularly heinous act.

The *Godfather* tradition and the tropes of gangster entertainment run rampant through the series, but Nucky challenges this trend. While many of the traditional gang dramas highlight the negotiation between family and "the Family," as *The Sopranos* did so well, Nucky is negotiating politics with real family, however there is no true gangland Family in his world, as will be discussed below. What is romanticized in *Boardwalk* is not the gangster lifestyle as it has become typically fictionalized. In contrast, gangster life is shown as ugly, brutal, treacherous, and utterly devoid of any false notion of some kind of "brotherhood." With Nucky there are no second chances and no bonds that cannot be broken or people who cannot be used as pawns in his master plan. His wife, his only brother, even his surrogate son suffer at the hands of Nucky's ambition and self-preservation.

What is glamorized is Nucky's opulent lifestyle and those of the other criminal kingpins in the series, such as Chalky White, who lives in a beautiful home with his wife and highly-educated children despite the difficulties of being a black man in the early part of the twentieth century, and Arnold Rothstein, who is consistently shown in billiard rooms, surrounded by silver tea trays and delicate china cups. The implication is that it is the power behind the criminals that truly matters, and he who can distance himself from actual wet work is the most skilled and the most masterful in the world of Prohibition gangland.

Though initially a seemingly innocuous, if corrupt, politician, Nucky inwardly deteriorates quickly as he transcends from dirty politician to full-on gangster. Yet Winter makes no huge jumps or character inconsistencies in his depiction of Nucky. The poker face remains, though he becomes deadlier and less stable as the show progresses. But this transformation is subtle. He does not suddenly become a sociopath or even spin noticeably out of control—he is not Scarface. Nucky's most obvious changes are played through Buscemi's facial expressions, his eye movements, and his jerky mobility. The times he loses control, when emotion is displayed, are shocking and extremely uncomfortable to watch. For example, in season 1, episode 7, after his abusive father's stroke and subsequent evacuation of the family home, Nucky offers his family homestead, in a gesture of goodwill, to one of his employees with young children. But when he takes a tour of the newly refurbished house, the memories of his childhood overwhelm him and he sets off

an inferno that destroys the home. He walks casually away and a composed Nucky emerges from inside the burning home, handing money to the family to assuage the damage. Yet this demented act betrays the layers of grief and anger that lurk just below the surface of his façade of unflappability.

Though he continues to instigate corruption and the detestability of his acts increases as the show progresses, Nucky remains a consistently sympathetic protagonist. This is largely due to Winter's writing and the way he weaves moments of honesty or tenderness into the fabric of Nucky's character at key moments. It also has a lot to do with the fact that few of the other characters are as fully developed and complex as the lead. Nucky's enemies, cronies, nemeses, and so forth are mostly two-dimensional and essentially loathsome.

No true "good guy" exists to serve as means of contrast to Nucky. There is no strong presence of purity in the show. With minor exceptions, the characters of *Boardwalk Empire* are all twisted by the lives they lead, even the ones who seem the most innocuous and lovable, such as Angela, Jimmy's wife, and Margaret, Nucky's eventual wife. Arguably, besides Nucky, the women of the show prove the most complex in their characterizations. And though I will discuss Margaret in some detail in the following, a more thorough analysis of *Boardwalk's* women would be too substantial for this particular discussion.

From Serial Killing to the Charleston

Nucky Thompson is a perfect protagonist for a series that utilizes nostalgia to create a loss of historicity, enabling the romanticizing of criminal behavior and embedding corruption in politics as a given part of American culture. He helps bring Atlantic City to life. Atlantic City has a fascinating past and, really, any era chosen as the backdrop to *Boardwalk* would have proven interesting. But Winter chose the 1920s because it was the era that "most struck [his] creative fancy" (Johnson xii). Atlantic City in the 1920s, he offers, "was a place of excess, glamour, and most of all, opportunity. Loud, brash, colorful, full of hope and promise—it was a real microcosm of America. A place of spectacle, shady politics, fast women, and backroom deals" (Johnson xii). Inevitably, regardless of decade, using an iconic landscape such as Atlantic City allows nostalgia to be a conduit for audience connection. "Nostalgia" can be a contentious term,

particularly for scholars. The connotations related to nostalgia range from a whimsical desire for a past unknown to a destructive homesickness.

Fredric Jameson stands out in his use of the term in his goliath *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* in which he introduces "nostalgia mode" to describe the way in which contemporary culture, through pastiche, detaches past style, icons, and images and imagines them through the lens of current culture, resulting in what he identifies as a "loss of historicity" (159). Hila Shacher argues that the

> idea that our modern culture functions via the flattening out of history as a marketable "image" or a commodified "style" is assumed as fact. And it is a fact that is applied to a whole host of contemporary historical and period films that utilise the appeal of the past through a type of museum aesthetic, where the cultural legacy of the past is displayed as a pleasing aesthetic, and nothing more. ("Seeking Substance," par. 2)

Of course, many critics, such as Linda Hutcheon, take issue with Jameson's theory of nostalgia and the loss of historicity, arguing that the use of past artifacts and their manipulation can be used self-critically, opening a space in the discourse on one's evaluation of the social past (*Poetics* and *Politics*). I, however, agree with Jameson's argument and, like Baudrillard, see the mediation of the past in particular as unable to produce anything more than simulacrum. Thus, placing the script of *Boardwalk Empire* within a simulated past allows a manipulation of fact and a loss of historicity.

Dylan Trigg argues in *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia, and the Absence of Reason*, that

> the divergence between universality and the temporal present is compounded as ideas are mistaken to be intuitive, humanistic, or otherwise innate: terms which justifiably warrant suspicion. In the absence of such suspicion, the familiarity of reason prevents it from disbanding. The implications are twofold. Disillusionment and dogma are the likely consequence as a society adjusts to the void between a static principle and the mutable world in which that principle exists. (xxi)

A loss of historicity, consistently perpetuated by a culture that is mediated in a manner never before imagined, rather than offering opportunities of creativity and empowerment through art and entertainment, has blurred the line between reality and fiction to a moment of crisis. The more we lose of history, whether as a people, a nation, or a disenfranchised group, the more ground can be lost as the lessons we were supposed to have learned return, mutated and mediated. This is not self-reflexive, but a loss of the self. It is not ironic, but terrifying. Though Trigg's argument seems apocalyptic within the context it has been placed in this article, to fear the new ideological notions that seem "intuitive, humanistic, or otherwise innate" seems entirely logical.

Boardwalk Empire is offered as a simple, somewhat milder example of this phenomenon when I argue that presenting political corruption alongside brothels, speakeasies, and the fantasy playhouse of 1920s Atlantic City further perpetuates the underlying notion that corruption is already always present in American politics. With messages such as the omnipotence and omnipresence of corruption in politics, it is possible and of grave concern that the apathy and discouragement may be easily absorbed by audience members when such messages are repeatedly shown on television. Shooting scenes in which scandalous political dealings are waged besides the bare breasts of giggling prostitutes emphasizes the spectacle of politics, reducing it to entertainment. In a world where politics has truly become a mediated spectacle, this is not shocking, but seemingly natural.

The location of Atlantic City, particularly in the 1920s, most certainly helps perpetuate all of these ideas. Both Trigg and author Elizabeth Wilson discuss the issue of nostalgia in connection with place, cities in particular. This is, of course, covered extensively in European-based study of nostalgia and romanticism, or, in Trigg's case as with many others, tragedy. In the United States, nostalgia, as it pertains to cities or "place" in general, seems to inevitably harbor some form of decadence, some desire for debauchery and "freedom" that is longed for. The thong-bikini-lined South Beach along Ocean Drive in Miami; the roller-skating, bikinis, and weight-lifters of Venice Beach; the blinding lights of Times Square in New York City; and the gaudy indulgences of Los Vegas all come with connotations of desires fulfilled, fantasies indulged, and the everydayness of life truly escaped. Winter has reminded us of how Atlantic City fits in with these nostalgic dreams, even as it currently faces a steep decline in attraction. Within the series, the symbol of the boardwalk has come to stand for other American landmarks of excess and self-indulgence.

Self-indulgence, excess, debauchery, escape—all of these suggest a certain kind of freedom and autonomy. "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas," the hip catchphrase of Sin City, implies not only the discretion of a place one goes to indulge, but also says something about the very indulgence itself. To suggest that one must not speak about his/her behavior in Vegas outside the city suggests that the moral turpitude in which one must have engaged is so vile or so outside of what stands as normalized behavior that it must not be revealed in one's everyday life, for fear of some kind of repercussion. With this dichotomy established—fun in Vegas versus punishable offenses in Real Life—the notion that one is not truly free within the confines of one's day-to-day existence has been established. The quest for freedom, fun, and escape becomes a modern-day form of nostalgia in relation to place. There are certain places one can *go* to enjoy life, while normal existence means restriction, prohibition, and regulation. Outside of cities, vacation spots, fun parks, and resorts rely on the implication that a trip to their location will somehow change, free, and/or empower citizens. Parents are shown acting like teenagers to the dismay of their children in a popular cruise-liner's advertisements. Theme parks show adults reverting back to children and experiencing the pleasures of the park as a child might. Resorts suggest that they can restore romance to a relationship. The ads and temptations to "escape reality" are endless, really.

But again and again, what is unsaid is that life—real life, outside of a vacation—is restrictive and tedious. It appears as though the United States has drawn a clear line between the two that encourages a playful rebelliousness. It also appears that in order to have fun one must consume and commodify the elements of one's escape, perpetuate the materialist, late consumer culture in which the US is so mired.

The Loss of Historicity

To set a series in the time of American Prohibition taps into that same rebelliousness. For a culture that assumes real adult life to be boring and constricting, looking back on the Volstead Act (the act that enforced Prohibition/the 18th Amendment) appears to show us a people who rose up against something intended to end their freedom of extracurricular fun. Flappers and speakeasies have become symbols of innocent mutiny, a simple civil

disobedience. Trading in alcohol and challenging social morals, those involved in the 1920s liquor industry, it seems obvious, were simply paving the way for a celebration of personal liberty.

In reality the political and social violence of Prohibition touched the lives of the working class, immigrants, people of color, Jews, and Catholics in ways unmentioned in the series. Much of the discourse surrounding the debate between "wets" and "drys" was surprisingly ethnocentric. The "drys" in Congress fought for deportation of those found in violation of the Volstead Act. The Immigration Restriction Act was passed in 1924, severely limiting the number of immigrants, particularly those from non-Protestant, non-"Nordic" nations (Orkent 238–39). It was not actually a crime to consume alcohol, thus those with wealth and influence could maintain their private stocks, leaving the messiness of cooking new bottles of booze and selling them to those who needed money the most. This era in United States history was incredibly difficult for men and women of color, but also extremely difficult for Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants, a fact that *Boardwalk Empire* seems to either be ignoring or playing with, as its most powerful characters happen to be from the most oppressed groups. The Roaring Twenties was not a time of dancing and shorter hemlines, but a battlefield of years for women, immigrants, the working poor, people of color, and returning veterans of World War I.

To The Lost

Boardwalk Empire has received numerous accolades for its dedication to historical accuracy. The show is particularly notable for the nuances it includes, such as Arnold Rothstein's diet of cake and milk, and the subtle ambiguity of the relationship between Harry Daugherty and his accomplice Jess Smith. Even Luciano's gonorrhea, which he contracted to avoid going into battle during World War I, is explored in excruciating detail (Winter, qtd. in Watercutter par. 26). The detail of the architecture, the precision of the costuming, and the news of the time is beautiful and precise, and Winter and his team are proud of their accomplishments. This precision also helps the plot; the storylines are moved along and the characters are developed sometimes simply by the props around them or the events to which they refer. For example, season 3 features an Egyptian-themed New Year's Eve party at the Thompson residence. King Tut's

tomb had only been discovered a few months prior, leading to an explosion of Egyptian references and themes throughout popular culture in the few years that followed. Margaret, this shows the audience, is on the cutting edge of culture, thriving as a "society" wife and hostess, demonstrating her transition over the fourteen-month gap between seasons 2 and 3 (Winter, qtd. in Watercutter par. 63).

Beyond the superficial and the spectacular, one of the most powerful historical component of the series is the ever-present ghost of World War I that lingers among the men, the families, and the violence of the series as a whole. The pilot episode introduces Jimmy Darmody, at age twenty-two a three-year veteran of World War I who came home with a damaged leg and a Pandora's Box of memories from his time overseas. He returns to his fiancé and young son, his mother, and the man who had been his life-long father figure, Nucky Thompson. Jimmy returns with expectations of rising quickly within the ranks of Nucky's organization in Atlantic City, but is surprised to be relegated to driver and bodyguard with an offer of an assistant clerkship. Nucky gently but firmly rebuffs Jimmy's frustration, reminding him that had he stayed at Princeton instead of going to war, he'd be in a better position at this point.

> Outside of Nucky's celebratory dinner on the eve of Prohibition, he corners a sulking Jimmy:
>
> Nucky: What's with you? And don't tell me it's your stomach.
>
> Jimmy: (pause) You wanna know what's with me? You expect me to go to work for Ryan, that mick?
>
> Nucky: You'd rather be my driver?
>
> Jimmy: Of course not. You make Ryan clerk? I could run rings around that chump.
>
> Nucky: Well, listen to Bonnie Prince Charlie . . .
>
> Jimmy: Come on, Nuck. You were assistant sheriff when you were my age.

Nucky: And for eight years prior to that I spent night and day kissing the Commodore's ass.

Jimmy: I've been kissin' your ass since I was twelve!

Nucky: Yeah? Well what about the past three years?

Jimmy: (Pause) I wanted to serve my country.

Nucky: And nearly get yourself killed. . . . You know who dies for their country? Fucking rubes. ("To the Lost," season 2, episode 12)

This discussion plays out with Jimmy looking like an impetuous adolescent and Nucky an overly strict parent. But it is through Jimmy that the audience is able to bond more firmly with Nucky. He is introduced early on as a benign father figure, despite his underhandedness and corrupt dealings in office. He is seen as parental, not just with Jimmy, but also with his vapid showgirl mistress, Lucy, playing the straight man to her impish ridiculousness. We see his tolerance and willingness to indulge her and a side of him that desires, enjoys, and escapes—a slice of wildness that he hides behind his normal façade of detached coldness.

Lucy is frivolous, excessive, outlandish, and brash: the physical embodiment of Atlantic City. And she is Nucky's sexual plaything. And though he enjoys her wiles, he provides for her and treats her with a kind of paternal indifference, ensuring she is pacified and taken care of without having to do any work. The quintessential "here's some money, go buy yourself…" line often passes between them. He treats the city the same way, ensuring it is cared for and happy, as long as it offers its favors in return. Though sleazy and corrupt, Nucky manages to keep the city like a happy mistress.

In the pilot episode, when he first meets Margaret and listens to her story and grief, Lucy stumbles out of his bedroom into the meeting, leaving Nucky, who had the night before addressed the women's Temperance League, in an awkward position. Yet his generosity and warmth toward the then-Mrs. Schroeder muffles the immoral audacity of the moment. Looking at the photo of his wife and then looking back at the heavily pregnant woman, his face softens as he listens to her plight. And she, knowing her place, ignores the broach in his moral conduct.

A Worthy Opponent

Margaret plays the final role in setting up Nucky as a benevolent anti-hero in the pilot episode. She comes to him as a beaten wife with two young children, scared for their well-being as winter is approaching and her husband lacks work. Nucky gives her a shoulder to cry on and enough money to tide them over until her husband is taken back onto his job as a baker's assistant when the busy season once again starts. He ensures that the pregnant woman is safely driven home and then goes about his dealings. This seemingly uneventful moment unfolds into a series of life-changing events. Margaret's brutish husband finds the money for the children, punishes her with a beating, and then steals the money. When Nucky and he have a run-in at one of the city's casinos and Nucky has Schroeder physically removed, the drunken man goes home and beats Margaret so severely that she suffers a miscarriage and ends up in the hospital. Nucky has the police pick up Schroeder, beat him to death, and dump him in the sea. His body is caught in a fishing net and thrown back onto the boardwalk the next day.

Nucky's order is an act driven by emotion. This act is what many might identify as a kind of vigilante justice, the sort of action that makes a violent anti-hero seem a humanist hero. Nucky's passions, glimpsed as they escape his cold, heartless persona, are flames that burn as brightly as the inferno he starts at his father's house, but they cut Nucky both ways. The ones to which audiences may be attracted—his struggles to overcome his childhood victimization, his desire for Margaret, his affection for Jimmy—are beautiful in their humanity and depth. His father was a brute, unforgiving, and physically dangerous, leaving Nucky with plenty of scars. It is obvious that as the oldest boy he felt the need, even as a child, to protect his family and somehow protect those around him and it often leaks through his stone-faced demeanor that he has to try hard not to become his father. However, his desire for control and power guided him to decisions that destroy those around him and chip away at his humanity one bit at a time. The Nucky of the pilot episode, who is patient with Jimmy, kind to Margaret, and pained by memories of his deceased wife, becomes a self-contained monster fueled by selfish desire by the end of season 2. This degeneration of the audience's key protagonist, however, does not seem intended to taint the glimmer of Atlantic City or the dramatic appeal of the show.

The complexity of his character makes him even more fascinating and the drama of the series more intense. And though he is clearly the protagonist of the

show, the inner workings of his mind are still mostly hidden. Often in dramatic serials, the lead characters' thoughts or emotions are revealed through voice-overs or in-depth dialogue sequences. Even within the complex narrative of *The Sopranos*, Tony Soprano had his therapy sessions that helped reveal more of his inner world. With characters as complex as Nucky, what writers often do is posit them against a nemesis whose insights and dialogues with others help the audience to further understand the character. In Nucky's case, one would expect law enforcement officers or some kind of opponent of strong moral standing to offer these insights as they oppose him. Yet each time a character appears on the show who pursues Nucky in the name of law or "good," the character falls—if not under his spell, then to the corruption that surrounds them all, leaving audiences with only vague ideas of Nucky's scheming. He is never profiled and never truly challenged to the extent that he opens up or becomes vulnerable enough to reveal his inner workings.

In terms of opposition, the moral opposition of lawless or corrupt behavior is slim, almost nonexistent in the series narrative. The two main characters of moral order initially appear to be Mrs. McGarry, the president of the Atlantic City Women's Temperance League, and Father Brennan, Margaret's son Teddy's parochial schoolmaster and her priest. Both figures surround Margaret, but not Nucky. Their guidance and ability to provide a moral compass for Margaret becomes complicated as the series progresses. Mrs. McGarry is earnest in her desires to perpetuate the Temperance movement, and she seems a model of first-wave feminism—demure, domestic, and willing to work within the political system dominated by men to achieve her goals. However, as the series progresses, the audience learns that Mrs. McGarry is much more of a radical than at first glance, telling Margaret that she uses her deceased husband's wealth to be a land-owning, independent woman intent on helping other women. So though she is strong, noble, and admirable, her position in Margaret's life becomes less of an oppressive source of feminine guidance and antiquated "morals" and more of a progressive source of wisdom as she teaches her about birth control and helps her navigate her relationship with Nucky.

Father Brennan is also a complicated figure in Margaret's life. She first encounters him in discussions about her son and is essentially forced back into the church to help Teddy with first communion. Father Brennan is the one to whom she confesses and the person she goes to for guidance when her daughter Emily is stricken with polio. His directive that she examine herself and her actions before

she asks anything of God forces her to once again examine her relationship with Nucky, her fixation on monetary stability, and her affair with Nucky's young Irish bodyguard Owen. But after she ponders her sins and takes "action" in the form of donating a significant amount of money to her church, we see that Father Brennan might be slightly less concerned with her soul than he is with her money, as he guilts her into giving even more. Though we see the strikingly intelligent Margaret change and develop early in the series, her skills at manipulation and deception gain significant traction by the end of season 2, and the woman whom, perhaps, the audience may have used as a moral contrast to Nucky has simply become more like him. Margaret's role reinforces the series underlying messages of innate corruption and inevitable debauchery.

Nucky does face jurisprudence to some degree, and there is tension at times between the legal system and his preferred way of doing things. In season 1 this comes in the form of Agent Van Alden, an overly earnest Prohibition officer. He develops an obsession with Nucky, recognizing that he is "running the show" in Atlantic City. All of his evidence falls on deaf (and corrupt) ears, and Van Alden realizes that his presence in Atlantic city mere lip service to enforcement; he is more of figurehead, a simulacrum of an enforcement officer when he recognizes that the extent of bootlegging in the city can barely be touched by the resources he is given. He flexes his muscle when he can, making example busts—some legal and some not. For example, when his long-suffering wife comes to visit, he attempts to show her the "good" side of Atlantic City as she is an extraordinarily devout Christian woman who would be appalled at the real world of the City. One evening, as they dine, she notices the presence of alcohol on the premises. To show off for her, Van Alden instigates a brawling, unsupported bust-up of the restaurant, issuing threats and throwing around orders.

The tightly wound agent, initially so strict in his religious code that he self-flagellates after having lustful thought, begins to unravel as he recognizes his position of weakness. To be clear, he does more than unravel. He explodes. He kills his deputy and he impregnates Nucky's ex-mistress, Lucy, and keeps her secretly hidden away in an apartment during her pregnancy in the hopes that he can eventually buy her baby for his infertile wife. His wife, however, discovers his betrayal and divorces him. Lucy tricks him out of money and abandons their daughter. His attempts at redeeming himself by helping the Assistant U.S. Attorney in her case against Nucky for election rigging backfires, and he shoots

her clerk and flees Atlantic City with his newborn child and her sexy Scandinavian nanny.

In season 2, Esther Randolph, the Assistant U.S. Attorney, comes to Atlantic City to build a case against Nucky for election rigging. She digs into all aspects of Nucky's dealings, finding scores of skeletons in his decadent closets, unearthing his years of entertaining every crook and politician on the East coast, his intimate knowledge of the flesh trade, and his multiple holdings and properties. Her pressure becomes a force of nature and her zealous desire for justice nearly matches Van Alden's, though it lacks the obsessive insanity.

Nucky is forced into a complicated kind of chess match with the legal system while he deals with strife in his city as many of his loyal followers have turned against him. Although Randolph is really on the side of good and attempting to stop a tidal wave of corruption, her demeanor and manipulations make her an unsympathetic character. Father Brennan, Van Alden, and Randolph all underscore the weight of ever-present political corruption. The audience is shown how corruption perpetuates corruption, is shown that it is an impenetrable force, and a goliath that cannot be tackled by ethical means.

In *Boardwalk Empire*, the audience's affection for Nucky puts those watching on the side of the corrupt. After having invested so much time in his development, we as an audience do not want Van Alden to succeed or Randolph to put Nucky in jail, and we certainly do not think too deeply about Father Brennan's methods of garnering funds for his parish.

 Nucky, despite his misdeeds and the blood on his hands, remains the protagonist and the implied character for whom the audience is to root. It is his master plan that we follow as an audience and his intellect and calmness under pressure that come across as heroic. Even after the largest scene of bloodshed in the series, which he instigates to free himself of vote-rigging charges and his disavowal of both his brother and young Jimmy, when he and Margaret discuss their life and a possible trip with the children, we are pulled into the domestic bliss, hoping for a happy outcome. His anti-hero status remains, despite the waves of destruction he wrought simply to maintain his wealth and power.

In the end of season 2, however, Winter throws the audience a narrative curve ball when Nucky kills an unarmed Jimmy by shooting him at point-blank range, all the while screaming "I'M NOT LOOKING FOR REDEMPTION!" It is a frightening moment. All of Nucky's mannerisms change, his voice changes, and all of the rage that he pockets away lunges forth in a moment of violence intended

to send audiences reeling. Jimmy, to whom Nucky had been a surrogate father and who had been a primary character on the show, dies violently for turning on Nucky, though he was prepared to atone for his betrayal. The twist ends season 2 and, perhaps, forces audiences to question their support of Nucky.

Thinking about the series' point of departure in contrast to the finale of season 2, in some regard Nucky has indeed changed. His character has become more aggressive, more bloodthirsty, and more of a stereotypical gangster. But the corruption and the things for which he fights never change. The audience is brought into the series with Nucky lying to a room full of women in order to garner their future vote and then taking Jimmy to a dinner table surrounded by men already corrupted in their politics, plotting to squeeze more money out of the game. The corruption is there from the beginning. And Nucky Thompson carries it through to the end of season 3, when he rises from the ashes of a bloody and deadly turf war, recapturing his city. He never lies to the audience, never pretends to be anything he is not. That he bloodies his own hands killing Jimmy is shocking, but the amount of bloodshed he instigated or that simply followed in his wake is enormous. Seeing him as anything other than a villain is frightening, yet the entire series enraptures the audience and encourages them to bond with the single-mindedness of a man who will do anything for wealth and power, a man that refuses to hide from himself or anyone else. The narrative of *Boardwalk Empire* ensures its audience is aware of the depth and breadth of corruption in US politics. Through a loss of historicity and a close correlation of escapist amusement and issues such prostitution and the black market, inextricably binds together romance, fun, depravity, and the desecration of political institutions.

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Why Engaging with Ray Browne and Marshall Fishwick Matters: A Review Essay

BOB BATCHELOR

Ray Browne on the Culture Studies Revolution: An Anthology of His Key Writings. Eds. Ray B. Browne and Ben Urish. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011.

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Legend is a term used pretty loosely in contemporary culture. For better or worse, the standard for deeming something or someone as an icon or iconic has dropped in reverse proportion to the number of mass communications channels available for such inflation. In this hyped-up technology age, almost anything that survives beyond Warhol's infamous 15-minute mark seems to fall into some exclusive category, even if placing it there cheapens the moniker. I, myself, have fallen victim to this simple labeling device, calling many people or things iconic across a broad swath of popular culture publications, from Patrick Swayze and Michael Jordan to Huggies diapers and *The Simpsons*. Was I right or wrong…well, as The Dude might say, "That's, like, just your opinion, man."

One thing we can rest assured as factual, though, is that Ray B. Browne and Marshall W. Fishwick are icons in popular culture studies. Even here, though, before we simply accept this point, let us place the two pioneers in context for today's students, scholars, and readers. For the most part, Browne is most widely regarded for his work in founding the Popular Culture Association (PCA) and popular culture as a *legitimate* academic pursuit (even if many scholars still have to battle that point to tenure & promotion committee members and amongst more theory-based colleagues).

His friend and colleague Fishwick, though, has faired less well, certainly remembered for his part in founding the PCA and that he taught famed new journalist/novelist/white suit-wearing *icon* Tom Wolfe at Washington and Lee University. Alas, however, Fishwick has essentially slipped from the collective memory in comparison to Browne. For example, in all my years as a popular culture scholar attending national and regional meetings and in general conversations with members younger and older, I have never heard anyone mention Fishwick or reference one of his many books. This, despite a quick "Marshall Fishwick" Google Scholar search revealing 666 results on his name and another 8,990 Google Search hits.

In this collective retrospective of ideas and issues past, mainly featuring Browne and Fishwisk as popular culture's Batman and his trusty sidekick Robin, the goal is that a fresh assessment demonstrates how central these thinkers' ideas still are today. In other words, I hope that we can collectively move away from the image of Ray Browne as popular culture's jolly Santa Claus and reestablish him as a radical scholar and theoretician who repeatedly put his reputation and livelihood on the line for the discipline. For Fishwick, the aim is as direct – can we rediscover this great scholar and provide him with a well-earned place on popular culture's Mount Rushmore?

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

Some 21 years after its publication, *Rejuvenating the Humanities* remains a provocative and insightful essay collection. A relatively slim volume, the book features 20 essays by 17 scholars, addressing an array of topics, from animal rights and the humanities (Michael Pettengell) to television and the crisis in the humanities (Gary Burns).

What strikes this reviewer on re-reading the book is the radical tone that Fishwick and Browne adopt, yet couching their delivery in philosophical and theoretical language that makes the delivery erudite, rather than simple shouting from a large soapbox. More importantly, the ideas and opinions of the lead editors and their posse of scholars still hold up today as academe continues the "Battle for the Humanities" that graces the pages of the *New York Times* and *Chronicle of Higher Education*, as well as hold center stage in stage legislature's from Texas and Arizona to Wisconsin and Pennsylvania. The battle rages on because we (arguably) live in the most anti-intellectual age the republic has yet experienced. Browne and Fishwick explain in the Prologue how important the humanities are, an idea that still holds up in the current battle:

> The Humanities are perhaps the single most important and useful cultural philosophy driving societies and human actions. They oppose greed and lust and unbridled individual rapacity. They drive toward what is good in and necessary in society. To let the Humanities languish is to deprive life of the major beneficial living force in—or capable of being introduced into—society today. (3)

One can imagine this kind of language in an op-ed in a major newspaper or website, and the typical reader (particularly the anti-intellectuals) left wondering…rapacity?

Later, in an essay confronting the "crisis" in the Humanities, Fishwick delivers his typically delicious language, describing existentialism in a comprehensible way. He explains, "Existentialism has permeated our culture as dye permeates a jar of water. Even those who have never heard the word are haunted by the questions it raises. How can I exist genuinely" (12). Fishwick then ties existentialism to commitment and wonders aloud: "As we enter the final years of the twentieth century, what are we committed to?" (12). Unfortunately, in the decades that have passed, people seem no closer to answering that query, perhaps, unless we take an *Idiocracy* vision of life—nothing matters unless it is deep fried, sophomoric, violent, or sex-laden.

Browne's radical perspective cuts deepest when it is turned on those academics that dismiss popular culture's importance. Over and over again, Browne's rapier slices at faculty members who rely on (he might say "hide behind") theory and the latest fads, rather than content analysis, critical thinking,

or one's personal experience. In his essay, "Folk Cultures and the Humanities," for example, Browne says:

> Academics like to sail their yachts down the gentle current of so-called intellectuality and come to anchor at some small island which represents the latest fad in theory-making. But the flotsam soon passes, the theory fades, and it is time to weigh anchor and drift to the next island … Ponce de Leon could not find a fountain of youth. Intellectuals cannot find rich soil for their cultivation because their plows are too shallow. (33)

Browne had previously launched a similar attack in *Icons of America* (1978), another collection he co-edited with Fishwick. The book contains 23 essays by 24 authors that assess the notion of *icon* from numerous popular culture perspectives, ranging from comic book superheroes to Shirley Temple and George Washington.

In a scathing indictment of academe, Browne's essay is titled, "Academicons—Sick Sacred Cows." In this essay, Browne is at his angriest, comparing academics with religious orders that exist to elevate themselves and construct a social hierarchy that is beyond outside censure. He explains:

> These academicons are in effect sacred cows that clutter and dirty the streets of academia and, because the flow of traffic is generally from the college campus outward to the world, therefore they spread out and all over non-academic communities. Although there are numerous incubi and succubi offshoots, the major academicons consist of a kind of secular holy trinity: the Ivory Tower, the curriculum and "standards." (293)

As sacred cows, Browne reports, academics repudiate what they know to be strengths of the humanities, such as critical thinking or developing intellectual curiosity, instead focusing on "self-interest" and "self-perpetuation" (295). In a comment that all educators (K-16+) should take to heart, Browne says:

> Scratch the professor of Humanities and you often find an inhumane person. Such professors do not teach the mind to think independently and search out new truths and new richness to life. Instead they are more likely to teach students to remember facts and to be safe by searching only along fairly well known paths. (295)

Browne's comment flies in the face of so much of the K-12 obsession with standardized management, whether symbolized by the tragic failure of No Child Left Behind or the newly-polished Common Core Standards. As a result, colleges and universities are left holding the bag for a primary and secondary education system that has gutted creativity, critical thinking, and historical nuance. Browned pointed to the tendency of academics to polish the "Curriculum," rather than "real and full scale revamping of the whole program" (295). If only those who sanctified the "Curriculum" some 35 years ago could have foreseen that the twenty-first century democratization of higher education would seek to eliminate the humanities altogether, not just keep them cloistered away from the masses!

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

It is difficult to count the number of books that Fishwick and Browne wrote and edited, even with access to several databases [the Library of Congress catalog would shed light on these figures, but is unavailable due to the government shutdown]. Yet, we can get a clear sense of both men's importance in the popular culture movement in the classic *Pioneers in Popular Culture Studies* (1999), edited by Browne and Michael T. Marsden. A collection of profiles, the book provides in-depth biographical and intellectual profiles of the leaders chosen for inclusion. With Browne's *Mission Underway: The History of the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association and the Popular Culture Movement, 1967-2001* (2002), the two books provide a full treatment of the establishment of the movement directly from its leaders.

What is striking in both books, particularly in *Pioneers*, is the way scholars who wanted to study popular culture and formalize it as a discipline put their careers in jeopardy. For example, Browne's tenuous relationship with colleagues who did not share his belief in the democratization of education and topics of study cost him dearly. As the eminent Gary Hoppenstand outlines in *Pioneers*, Browne's chair at the University of Maryland told him he would be awarded tenure on a Friday and then revoked the decision the following Monday after a senior professor intervened. Thus, Browne had to leave the college, even though he had purchased a house nearby over the weekend. Although Hoppenstand notes that Browne left, "without a deep-felt bitterness," it is hard to imagine that the

wound did not ache for years (40). His straightforward, yet slightly flippant explanation of the events surrounding being denied tenure outlined in *Mission Underway* undercuts the rosy picture. While this episode may shock today's younger readers, it is even more appalling that Browne also faced intense criticism and resentment at Bowling Green, a mix of academic jealousy based on the publicity and growing fame he enjoyed and a deep conservativism by those in the old guard.

Fishwick's journey seems less tenuous and combative from his profile in *Pioneers*, yet he too moved around quite a bit in his career (four universities and a 2-year stint in a non-teaching position in an era where most scholars stayed where they received tenure), despite being acknowledged as a prolific scholar and captivating classroom teacher. According to fellow popular culture scholar Daniel Walden, Fishwick "and many of us have been ignored, or shunned, or punished for pursuing popular culture, a movement, although it is not clear if it's a discipline, or a branch of the humanities or social sciences" (*Pioneers* 106).

While I certainly do not mean to be indelicate, what strikes me in spending time with Fishwick's lucid and thought-provoking writing is that more prestigious or general trade publishers did not snap him up. For example, without stepping on toes, Fishwick and I shared a publisher – the former Haworth Press (purchased by the Taylor & Francis Group and then becoming part of Routledge). Given the importance of branding and book covers in contemporary publishing, Haworth killed *Popular Culture: Cavespace to Cyberspace* (1999), *Popular Culture in a New Age* (2001) and *Probing Popular Culture On and Off the Internet* (2004) with horrendous covers featuring cartoonish drawings that would not pass muster in my eight-year old daughter Kassie's classroom. Like all of Haworth's books, they were also priced beyond the budget of general readers, even in less expensive paperback editions.

Again, not wanting to stir up trouble for yesterday or today's popular culture scholars, might I suggest that Browne having to found his own publishing arm and Fishwick publishing what could be considered his life's works with Haworth rather than Knopf or Oxford University Press demonstrates what Walden emphasizes above, the fact that popular culture scholars have been "ignored" and "shunned" for pursuing it as a primary line of inquiry.

Certainly, not every scholar even wants to write "general" or "trade" books or publish in stylish, glossy magazines, but if the true greats like Browne and Fishwick did not, is there something afoot here? No one would deny that a trade

publisher might have provided the marketing and sales push that would have granted either of them a vastly larger audience. If nothing else, a large publisher may have ensured that even more potential readers would engage with their ideas. Now, admittedly, I do not have many of the details about the publishing agendas of Browne and Fishwick (in *Mission Underway*, scholars can learn about the founding and success of the Bowling Green Popular Press). Thus, my conclusions could be wildly off base, yet even if they are, I believe that there is some truth in the extent that popular culture scholars have been (and continue to be) marginalized in varying degrees.

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Ben Urish's *Ray Browne on the Culture Studies Revolution* is a fine start on what should be a slew of future books and articles about Browne and his consequences as a key American intellectual. Urish must be commended for working with Browne while he lived and then completing the project after his death, resulting in a foundational text for those scholars and readers interested in understanding the depth and breadth of Browne's academic work.

Ironically, as Urish tells, he quickly learned while a graduate student at Bowling Green State University the cruel fact about Browne's standing – students respected his work in founding the field of study and PCA, but did not actually read his voluminous writings (5). And this fact at Bowling Green! Urish correctly concludes, "Browne's work was unjustly overlooked" (6)

One could certainly argue that this state of non-readership continues, for example, in that Browne's work is not properly acknowledged or cited in most "popular culture" readers currently on the market, whether the second edition of Marcel Danesi's *Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2012) or LeRoy Ashby's mammoth 712-page *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture since 1830* (University of Kentucky Press, 2006). In each of these cases, there is no reference to Browne's writing in either. Certainly, individuals who knew Browne and the many academics that studied under him have kept his memory alive via PCA and regional association meetings. (In my own case, I think Gary Hoppenstand and Kathy Merlock Jackson are sick of hearing me ask questions about Browne and what it was like

to work with him.) The sad fact, however, is that many popular culture scholars—and particularly young scholars—are not engaging with him intellectually.

As such, Urish's volume is critical in "reintroducing" Browne to a new generation of scholars who should not only acknowledge his role in creating multiple spaces for popular culture scholars to disseminate their work, but also read and re-read Browne as a foundational thinker (7). "Browne's far-reaching but malleable underlying ideas, and his deep readings of the social effects and affectations of democratic-capitalistic enterprises," Urish explains, "make him an especially insightful and invigorating (if unrecognized and unacknowledged) cultural studies voice" (6)

One of the most compelling essays included in Urish's collection is "The Theory-Methodology Complex: The Critics' Jabberwock." Originally publishing in *Journal of Popular Culture* in 1995, the piece may be one of Browne's most-read articles. However, it might also be one of his most misinterpreted, given that it stands as a kind of anti-theory screed in many people's minds. That misconstrued notion has had far-reaching consequences. One often hears repeated at national and regional PCA meetings that the guiding spirit of the organization is taking a stance against theory. Urish's introductory notes on the essay clear up this confusion and should get today's readers pointed in the proper direction. Browne, for his part, is clear that popular culture scholars should be open to a myriad of theories and methodologies, explaining, "Not basing our whole point of view and theory and methodology on one approach, we can more easily shift gears and see other points of approach and view" (97). Clearly, this is not *anti*-theory, but all-inclusive and not reliant on the latest fads. Instead, the researcher should employ the tools needed to complete a job, pulling from disciplines that make sense to the project.

My minor quibble with Urish's collection probably seems pretty evident at this point. Rather than offering up what is essentially Browne's "greatest hits," I would have liked to see Urish dig a bit deeper and uncover the radical Browne that grabbed readers by the throat with a sense of urgency that is sorely lacking in today's scholarship. The examples I have presented above point to this kind of aggressiveness and Browne's willingness to put himself "out there" in a bold way, despite the potential backlash, which more or less a guarantee in academic circles.

*   *   *

One finds distractions easy in a world where an infinite amount of "content" is available at one's fingertips. For example, a YouTube search for "Ultraman" (the 1960s live-action superhero series from Japan later introduced to American audiences) returned 202,000 clips, which means a fan could spend countless hours reliving reruns and other tangential videos. In this blur of information from the past and accumulating at an even more rapid rate each day, one might find it easy to reduce our icons to sound bites. In such a scenario, great scholars like Browne and Fishwick might be viewed as veritable statues or portraits hung on the wall to honor them for their accomplishments.

What I hope this review essay demonstrates, however, is that not engaging with these scholars on an intellectual basis does a disservice to them and their legacy we have inherited. Browne and Fishwick (along with the dozen or so other popular culture studies founders) are foundational intellectuals and might well guide us into the future as we battle on numerous fronts: the warfare over the state of the humanities, the status of contingent faculty members, the "jobs" rhetoric emanating from the national political parties, and some online degree programs as semi-sanctioned diploma mills.

Scholars today have no obligation to return to their roots. As a matter of fact, some academics rejoice in tearing down sacred walls, hoping to start anew. If I can be so bold as to make a request, though, please carve out the time to revisit Browne and Fishwick. Yes, they deserve a place in our hearts for founding the associations and publications that we covet. More importantly, however, these great scholars merit a space in our minds as we navigate and negotiate our lives as intellectuals.

Works Reviewed

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Figure/Ground Communication

Interview with Arthur Asa Berger
Professor Emeritus
Broadcast and Electronic Communication Arts
San Francisco State University

LAUREANO RALON

What attracted you to the academy?

I got a B.A. in literature and philosophy, assuming that a good education would fit me for any job. I didn't have the slightest idea of what I wanted to do, but recognized I'd need more education, so I applied to graduate school in journalism, thinking that I liked to write and might find journalism an interesting career. I was accepted into the University of California Berkeley journalism school and started there in the summer of 1954. While there I got a letter from the University of Iowa in Iowa City, offering me a small fellowship. Since it had a good writer's workshop that I could also attend, I went there instead and began in the fall of 1954. I focused on magazine journalism because I thought long form writing (long articles) would suit me best, but I also studied in the workshop with the wonderful and mad Marguerite Young. I was also able to take a couple of philosophy courses with Gustav Bergmann from the Vienna Circle. While at Iowa I was the "Cultural Commissar" of the university, being the music, art and theater critic.

I was drafted in the summer of 1956, eleven days after I received my MA. I got out of the Army in 1958 and went to Europe for a year. I had written high school sports weekend evenings for the *Washington Post*. I recognized in the Army that 9 to 5 jobs were not to my liking, so a year after I came back from Europe, I enrolled at the University of Minnesota's program for a Ph.D in

American Studies – a nice interdisciplinary program that would allow me to fashion my own course of studies, more or less. I realized that I had "intellectual" interests and figured becoming an academic and hanging around an institution of higher education would suit me best.

In time, I ended up teaching in a media department as San Francisco State University where I taught courses on writing and media criticism. I was able to make good use of my training and what I taught myself in my teaching. You can get a better idea of my interests by visiting the website (http://www.enculturation.net/writing-myself-into-existence), which reprints a selection of a memoir I wrote (and self-published).

Who were your mentors in graduate school?

There were two professors who were my mentors. The first was a political scientist named Mulford Q. Sibley. I did my dissertation on Li'l Abner under him. He was a political theorist and I literally took all the courses he taught that I could fit into my program. He died a number of years ago. He was a great man as well as a distinguished scholar. It turns out that I had written a paper in a course on American politics on Li'l Abner and he suggested I add to it and do my dissertation on the comic strip. I did. The second mentor was an intellectual historian with whom I studied; he is still alive at around 90 and still my friend. We corresponded for more than 40 years. What I learned from them both was the value of following your interests regardless of intellectual fashions and fashioning your own perspective on things.

What advice would you give to young graduate students and aspiring professors?

For young grad students I'd remind them that academia is full of landmines from the administration, other faculty members, and students (who now seem to have a sense of entitlement). How I survived academia without losing my mind or my sense of humor is beyond me. I have written a number of darkly comic academic murder mysteries that have helped me deal with the traumas I experienced at San

Francisco State University. A great deal depends on your colleagues, I guess; it is a place full of some wonderful people, but also upwardly mobile careerists who won't think twice about sticking a knife in your back. The politics in academia are incredible and often nasty.

For university professors, I would suggest they only dine with their backs to walls, and not let their battles with other professors destroy their younger colleagues and their students. The Broadcast and Communication Arts Department where I taught was full of really moral and decent people, but we still had some opportunists and careerists. One faculty member who joined our department had been to lunch with everyone important in the school in the first semester there and eventually moved on to a "real" university, without the publications that such a position required. The professor got the position due to friendship with a famous professor at a different university. I retired from S. F. State because one year I had five books published and didn't get a merit award. "Why hang around this place when I don't have to," I said to myself. My system had a program that enabled you to teach part time and be generously rewarded so I taught part time for five years and retired for good in 2003. Since then, I've been a full time writer. So the moral of it all: be careful. And remember that a sense of humor will help at all levels.

In your experience, did the role of the university professor – and in particular, student-professor relations – "evolve" since you were an undergraduate   student?

Since I got my B.A. in 1954, if universities (and all other institutions) didn't evolve it would be a miracle. Institutions are always evolving. Now that many universities are fighting for students (with the possible exception of the top ones, which are fighting off students), they have become more like businesses. Probably all are more like businesses now and less like isolated groves of academe where people pursued knowledge more for its own sake than for commercial rewards. Universities are probably more student-centered as well, as in "attract students and keep them." Of course, dealing with seventeen- and eighteen-year old persons is not fun, and as I understand it, lots of students transfer after their first or second

year. Students now take six years to graduate, whereas when I went to school in 1950, we graduated in four years.

To cater to students, many universities are simulating resorts with fancy student unions,
swimming pools, etc. Probably student-faculty relations are better than in the past. Professors are not so remote anymore, but many young students, having been told how wonderful they were all their lives, have a sense of entitlement that causes problems. Student evaluations are very destructive in universities; the patients are now running the asylum. I know that many of my colleagues inflated their grading to get good reports. If professors are judged on their ability to entertain students, which I fear is often the case, it is a bad omen. Here's a comic poem I wrote about universities and students who try to go to the best ones:

Many try Harvard
And many fail.
Who then go to Princeton
Or to Yale
While those with a brain
The size of a pea.
Have a hell of a time
At USC.

Actually, I understand USC has now raised its standards for undergrads, which makes sense because it is an excellent school.

I also wrote some academic mysteries that were really textbooks, and that is a way to interest students. My book *Postmortem for a Postmodernist* is really a book on postmodernism and my book *Durkheim is Dead* is about social theory. I understand there are a number of novels written by professors to teach students various topics and I think it is an excellent idea. In addition, I found that teaching by playing learning games was a good way to teach students how to apply theories I taught them about semiotics, psychoanalytic theory, etc. I understand many professors are getting away from straight lecturing.

As I mentioned, I last taught in 2003 and since then I've been a full-time writer. Actually, I think of myself as a writer who taught, rather than a teacher who wrote. Not all professors write and there is no reason for all of them to write. I once asked a colleague from another department, "What do you do with

your time?" He answered, "I think!" There's no written record, alas, to show what he thought about anything, other, perhaps, than how to become chair or dean.

What are universities for in the first place? Do you think the academy as an institution is in "crisis"?

Universities are in crisis because all institutions are in crisis and almost always are in crisis. Maybe professors will become commentators on courses taught by "great" professors at Ivy League schools and other top-ranking institutions. They'll teach remedial English and remedial math and various low-level courses. As things stand now, many universities exploit people with doctorates who are not in tenured positions; these road warriors do a lot of teaching for cheap. In many fields, it would seem the prospects for tenured positions are very limited. In any case, different kinds of professors use universities for different purposes. Some, that I knew, tried to use their schools as country clubs and played a lot of tennis – when they were not "starring" on committees. I wrote a comic poem about committee stars:

Good on committees
For which he was cherished.
He never published
And he never perished.

There are many professors who really are interested in their subjects and their students, and they make universities worthwhile places. You never can escape politics so you might as well be in a place where you can play around with ideas, as long as you have tenure. For students, universities are places where they can experience failure and it is not a disaster. They may start our as pre-med and after a course in organic chemistry decide that elementary education or business administration is best for them. They also benefit from being in a place where ideas are valued, though so many now think of universities as places to train for jobs that to some degree universities are more like community colleges, except at a higher level.

I would like to know more about your experience at the University of Minnesota's Ph.D program in American Studies. You said it was a nice interdisciplinary program that granted you a lot of freedom. Do you still believe in inter-disciplinarity?

I was in the American Studies program at the University of Minnesota, which allowed me to design a course of study around my interests. I found that very useful. What I created was, in a sense, a cultural studies program in which I studied American music, literature, social thought, political thought, philosophy, etc., along with other courses of a more general nature.

I don't know what the faculty there is like now, but I had some wonderful professors and enjoyed being in a multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary, pan-disciplinary program. When I saw *Rashomon*, I got my methodology set. There are many ways of looking at anything and one must expect that different people with different perspectives will disagree on what they are seeing. And maybe they are all correct.

I wrote a book, *Media Analysis Techniques,* published in 1982. I just sent in the fifth edition of the book to the publisher. The first part of the book has chapters teaching semiotics, psychoanaltytic theory, Marxist theory, and sociological theory. The second part of the book has chapters on various topics in which I show students how the theories might be applied. My idea for a final examination: show students a television show and ask them to write four different interpretations, based on the techniques they learned: semiotics, psychoanalytic theory, Marxist theory and sociological theory.

The one problem with multi-disciplinarity is figuring out how to put things together, but the Rashomonic approach is very interesting in that regard.

I also just got the cover for my forthcoming book: *Dictionary of Advertising and Marketing Concepts*. I made the cover drawing myself, so I now write and illustrate my books. The fifth edition of *Media Analysis Techniques* will have thirty or forty of my drawings. I get a lot of pleasure from writing and from illustrating my books. So I now have two books in production. My best year I published five books; this year maybe four. Most years one, if I'm lucky.

One might think that generalist programs in American and Canadian studies are more important than ever as nation states try to reassess their identifies in a post-globalization age. Yet Canadian studies programs were among the first to take a hit when massive budget cuts were implemented throughout Canada in 2008. And last year, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (DFAIT) decided to abolish the Understanding Canada-Canadian Studies Program, which offered grants to graduate students pursuing research in Canadian studies. What do you make of this situation? Do you see a similar trend happening in the United States?

Money is tight nowadays and politicians probably feel that spending funds on basic scientific research has more payoff than courses dealing with matters such as national identity. I've been out of academia for ten years now. I retired in 2003 and I am not up on what is happening in American Studies and Canadian Studies programs, though you point out that they are not being supported in Canada and I can understand why, given the politicians' mind set.

I believe that the American Studies program at the University of Minnesota is going strong, and probably Yale's American Studies program or department or whatever it may be right now still is very popular. Interdisciplinary programs sound good, but I don't know whether they have delivered much, except, perhaps, when they have a focus on American or Canadian or some other culture. And even then I wonder: I always sensed that American Studies faculty members felt a bit less important than English or History or core discipline faculty members, who probably saw American Studies as a fad that would soon pass. In their search for acceptability, many American Studies professors wrote deadly dull papers on subjects that seemed important to them. They wanted to show they could write papers as dull as those written by historians and literature professors. Cultural Studies now has changed things and I see American Studies as a focused form of cultural studies. It seems to still be going strong, despite what happened at Birmingham, which is where it all started.

How did Cultural Studies evolve since Birmingham? Did the field as
we once knew it die out as postmodernism faded in recent years?

Cultural Studies is alive and well. I searched for it on Google and found there are
123,000,000 sites that have something about cultural studies in them. There are
also 173,000 books on cultural studies at Amazon.com. I would imagine there are
many courses in universities that involve cultural studies but don't use the term in
course descriptions.

Below is a description of the cultural studies program at UC Davis:

*Cultural Studies is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of culture
and society that responds to and builds upon, critical analyses of
traditional disciplines and epistemologies as well as upon developments
specific to gender, ethnic, and sexuality studies that have emerged over
the last thirty years. Key to the Cultural Studies approach is the
perception that language, gender, race, sexuality, nationality, and class
organize identities, complex social relations and cultural objects. Also key
is the assumption that the study of culture in all of its complexity requires
cross-disciplinary work.*

*Cultural Studies assumes that the object of knowledge will determine the
methodologies to be used. It actively encourages the crossing of
disciplinary boundaries and promotes the innovative interweaving of
methodologies that have been traditionally associated with a wide range
of disciplines. Cultural Studies flourishes within formations that facilitate
communication and collaboration among scholars from diverse fields.*

There is also a cultural studies program at the University of California at
Berkeley, and I would imagine interdisciplinary courses in many other
universities in the San Francisco Bay Area – taking a local perspective on the
subject. When I taught a course on the analysis of the public arts at San Francisco
State University, it had a cultural studies approach. I would imagine that programs
in American Studies, Latin-American Studies or Asian-Pacific Studies, all have a
cultural studies perspective, so it is flourishing even though many programs do
not use the term "cultural studies" in descriptions of what they offer.

I had an interesting experience relative to cultural studies. I compiled a dictionary of terms used in cultural studies and sent it to one of my publishers. My editor there informed me that their dictionaries were all very large texts and my manuscript was too small. So the next day I went to the computer and wrote an introduction about cultural analysis, then I put all the terms relative to literary theory in one chapter, all the terms about semiotics in another chapter, and I did the same for psychoanalytic theory and Marxist theory. I called it *Cultural Criticism* and my publisher (Sage) took it. My chapters on semiotics were longer and more detailed than the ones in my *Media Analysis Techniques.* In *Cultural Criticism* I did one of my best.

I'm not sure Postmodernism is dead. When I see young people all wired and spending their lives gazing into their smart phones and texting like mad, it would seem to me that they have all been affected by pomo and reflect it. That is, it has triumphed and because it is so all-pervasive, it has lost its fascination for many scholars – but not all.

American Studies at Minnesota was really cultural studies with a focus. It saved me from the English department at Minnesota, which was, at the time, a death trap. I did not like the course requirements and many of the grad students in the program felt terrorized. So American Studies was my salvation. In the course of my career I morphed from American Studies into Cultural Studies. To my mind, it was six of one thing, half a dozen of another.

How does it feel to be one of the "founders" of contemporary popular culture studies?

It is kind of hard to think of myself as a founder of contemporary popular culture studies since I'm only 80-years old and still alive and kicking, but I guess my work on Li'l Abner and my books on pop culture, media, and related concerns might qualify me for that status. I'm still writing all the time and it is hard to think of myself as a founder since founders of anything are dead and buried. After they've been dead a while, someone labels them a founder of this or that.

I've always been interested in everyday life and in vernacular art forms and in the life experiences and thought processes of ordinary people, so it was natural for me to become interested in popular culture. One of my former colleagues at San Francisco State University told me that popular culture was irrelevant; he was

interested in an important topic and published maybe one article in forty years of teaching. And it was on teaching. Once I was at a conference at Stanford, filling for someone who was snowbound, and an "eminent" sociologist told me he does popular culture in half an hour. I had a moment of great pleasure when I found that a big, thick introduction to sociology that he wrote bombed. If I am a founder of popular culture studies (and I've been reputed to be, not only by you, but by a few others), I probably don't have any sense of what it means because I've not founded a school or even a working group.

The short answer is, if I am, actually one of the founding fathers of popular culture studies, it feels good – because it means that some scholars might be interested in investigating the matter in future years. I also have the pleasure of knowing that I have written some academic mysteries, which means I'm not only a study of popular culture but someone who has created some popular culture...of dubious value, but that's what nice about pop culture – most of it is of dubious value.

What are some of the texts from the Cultural Studies canon that you think young graduate students and aspiring university professors should read?

There are some core books that have influenced my work and thinking:

Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, Interpretation of Dreams,* and all of his other books
Karl Marx, assorted books and works
Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*
Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktales*
Roland Barthes, *Mythologies, Empire of Signs* and other books
Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride*
Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*
Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*
M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*
John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*
Jean Baudrillard, *System of Objects*

Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*
J.F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*
Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics, Role of the Reader,* etc.
C. Jung, *Man and His Symbols*
E. Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*
J. Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text* and other books
R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature* and other books
H. Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*
C. Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*

Those books should be people interested in pop culture off to a good start.

What attracted you to Roland Barthes and how did you interpret his work?

Roland Barthes was one of the most influential thinkers of recent years and produced an enormous amount of seminal books on literature, popular culture, everyday life, etc.

His book *Mythologies* dealt with French popular culture and everyday life. The first chapter in the book is on wrestling and offers any number of insights into what wrestling is really about (in France). He also has essays on soap detergents, toys, and steak and frites, among other things. That book suggested that Marxist-informed semiotics focusing on what might seem to be significant trivia could yield interesting results. I had written on the politics of wrestling myself before I discovered the book, so I was very much interested in what he had to say.

One of his books, *Empire of Signs,* is about Japan, and provided me with a methodology for doing the books I've written on tourism – but really the cultures in countries where tourism is important and on the nature of travel. In his book on Japan, Barthes wrote that he was interested in dealing with certain topics that struck his attention, such as Japanese eyelids, the empty center in Tokyo, subway stations, etc. All of these are signifiers that he analyzed.

I used this model for writing books on tourism in a number of countries: India, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, Bali, the United States, etc. I've also done a book on iconic buildings in places all over the world, and another on iconic places in

America. So I owe a great debt of gratitude to Barthes for providing me with a methodology. He said he was interested in "flashes," and not in writing a history of Japan or anything like that. In my books I dealt with tourism in the countries, but mostly on important icons and signifiers found in each country.

You mentioned that you've been out of the academy since 2003, but you've hinted that you remain intellectually active otherwise. What are you currently working on?

I recently found a book I wrote about English culture (from London) in 1973. It was typed. So I found a way to copy it using OCR and now I am going over the manuscript. I called it *The UK,* taking off from a study of the IK, a tribe in Uganda, I think. When it is done I will self-publish it as I don't imagine many publishers would be interested in a book written around fifty years ago. It is full of my speculations about English culture and pop culture, everyday life, etc.

The publisher of my advertising book asked me to do one on communication, so I'm writing a book on all kinds of communication, not just media. I have no deadline for that book.

I am also writing an introduction to Orrin Klapp's 1962 book *Heroes, Villains and Fools.* It will be reprinted by Transaction books.

So all of this is enough to keep me busy, but not terribly busy. I'm retired and don't play golf or tennis, so I have to write or I'd be bored out of my mind. I never could have imagined when I was young how my career would turn out, but I'm not complaining about what's happened. My wife and I love to travel, so I spend a lot of time planning our trips and then taking them.

BOOK REVIEWS
NEW PERSPECTIVES ON CLASSICS TEXTS

Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870. Karen Halttunen. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

In this pioneering work, Halttunen argues that during the period 1830-1870 the "sentimental ideal of sincerity that shaped the norms of middle-class conduct in the antebellum period was central to the self-conscious self-definition of middle-class culture during the most critical period of its development" (xvii). Genteel women and men in America's growing cities worried about their precarious social status in a fluid society. A confidence man, or a painted woman, could play the part of a virtuous member of the urban middle-class while harboring less than virtuous motives. Authors of advice and etiquette manuals helped their readers navigate this confusing social milieu by outlining the behaviors and fashions that reflected inward virtue. These authors never fully came to terms, however, with the idea that hypocrites might affect middle-class behaviors without possessing middle-class virtue. Because women supposedly could not hide their thoughts and emotions as well as men, they were the special guardians of sincerity and so restrained the tendency of the men in their lives to be less than honest as they contracted business in antebellum cities. The domestic sphere consequently became the arena in which the members of the middle class tested one another's sincerity. Only those who displayed impeccable character through adherence to precise middle-class parlor rituals were truly genteel.

Halttunen skillfully unpacks her argument for the reader. She opens with a discussion of the rapidly changing urban environment in antebellum America. More young men, for example, left farms and did so at earlier ages. These naïve young men lacked the faculties to discern a true friend from a confidence man. Halttunen next discusses how advice manuals, cheap fiction, and journals such as

Gody's Lady's Book set forth rules of conduct for the middle-class in three areas: fashion, etiquette, and mourning. In each case a flawed internal logic doomed what Halttunen calls "the genteel performance." Gentility demanded "a system of polite conduct" that ultimately rang "hollow-hearted and hypocritical" (122). In fact, middle-class etiquette existed in a "vicious circle" wherein "sincere social forms and rituals" begat "heightened concerns about hypocrisy" (196). These concerns led to more rituals, which in turn, led to greater fears. Antebellum social critics and storytellers ultimately could not draw direct connections between outward appearances and inner virtues.

Those in the urban middle class escaped the vicious circle by embracing the genteel performance for what it was – a performance. Halttunen illustrates middle-class acceptance of the performance in her excellent final chapter on parlor entertainment. Beginning in the 1850s, genteel men and women began to entertain themselves with amateur theater performed at home. What had been the proving ground for sincerity now became the site of deliberate artifice. Amateur players enacted charades, tableaux vivants, and skits, some of which exposed and poked fun at the genteel performance. That middle-class performers might lack sincerity no longer troubled those who aspired to gentility. The willingness and ability to enact the genteel performance actually became the marker of middle-class identity, regardless of the sincerity of the performer. As Halttunen argues in the Epilogue, heroes of late nineteenth century fiction like Horatio Alger's Ragged Dick might even have served as confidence men themselves. Their ability to play a part reflected intelligence and "pluck" rather than moral degradation.

Confidence Men and Painted Women received generally positive reviews after its release. Paula Fass in the *Journal of Social History*, David Grimstead in *The Journal of American History*, and David Reynolds in the *American Historical Review* all praised the book. Fass offered the most substantive critique, charging that Halttunen's "discussion of social dynamics and social change seems borrowed and sometimes inconsistent" (Fass 141). Fass nevertheless lauds *Confidence Men and Painted Women* as "a subtle book that gently unfolds from [Halttunen's] mastery of the subject and intelligent prose" (Fass, 141). She also writes that Halttunen has "thickened our history with anthropology and steeled it with sociology." With her praise, Fass identifies one of the hallmarks of American cultural history – the use of tools from the social sciences to study the American past as an anthropologist would another culture.

In Halttunen's case, she draws on both Mary Douglas's idea of the trickster and Arnold van Gennep's concept of liminality to describe the dangers posed by the confidence man (24-7). She also cites Vic Turner's argument that liminality can become institutionalized (30). Halttunen was not the first to integrate insights from other disciplines, but her application of these thinkers' to the confidence man of the nineteenth century is an exceptionally clear example of how cultural historians have done so.

Halttunen's work also foreshadows different ways that cultural historians of the 1980s and 1990s would define "culture." First, and not surprisingly, Halttunen displays what Jay Cook and Lawrence Glickman call the "'anthropological' concept of culture." Culture is a "way of life," a means of ordering society. Glickman and Cook also identify Halttunen as one who treats culture as a "discursive system" that provides coherent meaning for existence in society. Because middle-class culture for Halttunen is centered on the genteel performance in the front rooms of middle-class homes, she also appears to define culture as "an institutional sphere" where "collective forms of meaning are made" (Cook and Glickman, 12-4).

Confidence Men and Painted Women is of course not perfect. Although the northeast was the most urban part of the nation during the antebellum period, there were cities in other parts of the country. The reader does not get any sense, however, that urban middle-class culture in Philadelphia and Boston was any different than genteel culture in cities such as Charleston and New Orleans. Halttunen also largely ignores questions of race even though all of her sources assume that the middle-class ideal was white. She does mention that amateur parlor actors performed in blackface and put on darker make-up when portraying Indians (178). This tantalizing detail begs a number of questions that Halttunen does not explore. For example, what roles did black characters play in these amateur theaters? Were there black servants in urban middle-class homes, and what do the sources say about middle-class attitudes toward them? Do any sources discuss the social rituals of the extremely small black middle class? Later studies would treat all of these questions and more, but Halttunen does not touch on them.

These criticisms do not diminish *Confidence Men and Painted Women* as a classic of cultural history, and a model for how cultural historians analyze sources and frame arguments. It displays that Halttunen herself would later call both the "empathic" and "discursive" models of cultural history. In other words, Halttunen

explores both how her subjects shaped culture, and how their culture in turn shaped them (Halttunen, 418). Thus, *Confidence Men and Painted Women* serves as an excellent introduction to the complex field of American cultural history.

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Nathan Saunders
University of South Carolina

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BOOK REVIEWS

REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

Gaga Feminism: Gender, Sexuality, and the End of Normal. Judith Halberstam. Boston: Beacon Press. 2012.

Judith Halberstam's *Gaga Feminism: Gender, Sexuality, and the End of Normal* presents an overview and a straightforward interpretation of the new wave of feminism that has evolved from the music and public performances of Lady Gaga. Halberstam integrates autobiographical accounts of her lived experiences and social realities as they relate to gender, sexuality, and normalcy, while highlighting relevant cultural references to support her contention that Lady Gaga "is a symbol for a new kind of feminism" (xii) transversing the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality by expanding the definitions of heterosexuality and normalcy through her song lyrics and public appearances.

Utilizing gender theory, feminist theory, and queer theory, Halberstam draws on works by Elizabeth Freeman, Michel Foucault, Camille Paglia, Micha Cardenas, and Donna Haraway to list but a few. Furthermore, Halberstam expounds on the phenomenon surrounding Lady Gaga through the inclusion of relevant examples from music artists (Madonna, Grace Jones), television shows (*SpongeBob Square Pants*, *Desperate Housewives*), and movies (*Set it Off*, *Thelma & Louise*, and *The Hangover*). Featuring recent media productions, Halberstam integrates pertinent symbols, icons, and other discourses into her discussion of the feminist ideologies that have developed as a result of works produced by Lady Gaga. Halberstam uses the notion of "gaga feminism" to advance her argument that Lady Gaga is a symbol of popular culture, as well as a political activist challenging dominant discourses of gender, sexuality, and normalcy in her music, public appearances, and public performances.

Halberstam has structured *Gaga Feminism* in a way that figuratively takes readers by the hand and walks them through the processes employed to construct and expand the author's notion of "gaga feminism" which is defined as "a politic

that brings better mediations on fame and visibility with a lashing critique on the fixity of roles for males and females" (5). In the introductory chapter, Halberstam's details the personal journey that was undertaken as part of her movement toward non-gendered classification based on the binary of male/female. This inspired Halberstam to explore the ways in which conventional definitions of gender, sexuality, and normalcy are being redefined and/or reappropriated through the utilization of "gaga feminism." Incorporating the meteoric rise of Lady Gaga, in 2010, and her manipulation of traditional notions of gender, sexuality, and normalcy, Halberstam uses her concept "gaga feminism" to clearly and concisely rearticulate the reappropriation of larger societal discourses of male/female that have become blurred in the years following Lady Gaga's arrival on the popular music scene.

In chapter one, Halberstam introduces "gaga feminism" as a youth social movement. The author described the ways in which her lyrics and public performances are used for social positioning by marginalized groups in larger societal conversations through the creation of a here-and-now consciousness reappropriating gender, sexuality, and normalcy discourses. Halberstam then discusses the perceived bonds of mother-daughter relationships as the foundation of gender role construction and the promotion of heterosexuality. This chapter is situated against discourses of "woman" and "womanhood;" thus, extending intergenerational discourses commonly associated with gender beyond physical attributes through the inclusion of aesthetics as sonic revolutions of individual mental and social empowerment.

Exploring gender as a hierarchy, Halberstam uses chapter two to examine the notion of transgendernism as an alternative classification beyond male and female. The author poses questions such as: Who can become pregnant? How can individuals conceive children? What constitutes a family? Using the story of the "first pregnant man and a similar case," Halberstam explores the discourses surrounding transgendered women who bore children after beginning the process of becoming male. The notion of "pregnant men," she argues, disrupted traditional social ideas associated with reproduction and redefined the nuclear family as a model of normality. Halberstam uses this line of inquiry and social responses to show the ways in which "gaga feminism" redefines the accepted conventional concept of "family" by including alternative kinship bonds such as single-parent households, same-sex parenting, and blended families.

Addressing broader social meanings associated with larger societal ideas of heterosexuality in chapter three, Halberstam encourages the development and use of a new gender classification system embedded in the idea of heteroflexiblity. Halberstam defines heteroflexiblity as the "reconfiguring of the meaning of sex and gender in ways that favor heterosexual women in particular." Drawing on the character Dory from the film *Finding Nemo*, Halberstam describes Dory as a masculine female who is knowledgeable of female discourses, although she chooses not to fully engage in the associated dialogues. The author suggests that Dory embodies the use of "gaga feminism" through her fluid transitions between being female, a parent, and attracted to others in a romantic way. It is Halberstam's position in this chapter that "gaga feminism" explores the world using multiple points of view and enable individuals or groups to reposition themselves in larger societal dialogues, while bringing their marginalized discourses to the center of larger societal conversations.

Investigating the significance of marriage in the era of "gaga feminism" chapter four, questions the ramifications of the legalization of gay and lesbian unions, Halberstam articulates the desire for social acceptance and feelings of normalcy as the rationale behind the social movement for marriage equality. Using her narrative, Halberstam considers herself "grumpy about gay marriage" (97). The author describes an incident in which she was asked to sign a petition for the legalization of gay marriage in California. Refusing to sign she instead questioned the logic of the individual in his recruitment of signatures for an institution that gays and lesbians have already been excluded from entering. Halberstam contends that although Lady Gaga advocates marriage equality that "gaga feminism" embraces alternative forms of committed relationships that are not necessarily socially recognized by the larger society such as cohabitation and commitment ceremonies. Offering a "new form of politics," Halberstam asserts that "gaga feminism" is an all-inclusive philosophy that promotes liberatory praxis for marginalized groups in discourses of gender, sexuality, and normalcy across the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality (133).

Gaga Feminism initiates novice scholars to the role of popular culture in politics, theory, and discourses of gender, sexuality, and normalcy. Halberstam provides a narrative synopsis of the influence of Lady Gaga on conventional notions of gender theory, feminist theory, and queer theory. Using each section of the book to solidify her argument, regarding Lady Gaga as "a symbol for a new kind of feminism" (xii), Halberstam uses cultural references and other relevant

examples to connect her assertion across chapters. This book contains a preface, introduction, and detailed notes that presents the reader with several sites for continued studies. The structure of *Gaga Feminism* may be useful as a primer for beginning theoretical courses, popular culture courses, cultural studies and foundations courses, as well as women and gender studies courses. Overall, Halberstam expanded the breadth and understandings of traditional notions of gender theory, feminist theory, and queer theory in this book by providing a comprehensive exploration of the politics associated with Lady Gaga that have emerged and redefined these conventional conceptual frameworks.

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Tammie Jenkins
Louisiana State University

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Harry Potter and the Millennials: Research Methods and the Politics of the Muggle Generation. Anthony Gierzynski with Kathryn Eddy. Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press, 2013.

A common belief about the millennial generation is that we are narcissistic, lazy, technologically dependent, and forever leeching off our parents. Anthony Gierzynski and Kathryn Eddy's book *Harry Potter and the Millennials: Research Methods and the Politics of the Muggle Generation* (2013) challenges this notion. Essentially, the thesis argues that those who have read the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling have a higher chance of being open-minded, accepting of diversity, and politically liberal (Gierzynski 6). The *Harry Potter* series is a coming of age, or bildungsroman tale, in seven volumes, of a young boy who discovers he is a wizard and enters into a secret magical society. *Harry Potter* fandom has spawned countless websites, blogs, podcasts, tribute bands, and games. Even some of Rowling's terms such as a Muggle or Voldemort, have entered into our common lexicography. Fanfiction.net currently has 659,000 stories about Harry Potter. It is clear there is a strong fan-base for Harry Potter and it is not disappearing.

Gierzynski and Eddy are clear in their point of view: fans may not necessarily exhibit all of the above-mentioned traits, but they have a higher chance of doing so due to the cultural hysteria behind the *Harry Potter* books. The authors discuss

the principals of cultivation theory, which in quick summary, concludes that the repetition of the lessons of Harry Potter had a larger impact in fans seeing the world in a similar way (Gierzynski 29). Gierzynski clarifies the central proposal with comparisons from the past, explaining, "Leaving Harry Potter out of the history of the millennials would be like leaving Star Wars out of Generation X" (Gierzynski 40). Gierzynski uses the definition of millennial (individuals born between 1982 and 2002) from the work *Millennials Rising* by Howe and Strauss. Within Harry Potter's magical world, readers find numerous parallels to their own lives, especially in politics. The most fallible characters are those who want power at all costs.

According to Gierzynski and Eddy, millennials who read *Harry Potter* were more likely to vote for Obama for president and have a pessimistic viewpoint of the Bush era presidency. He specifically cites an 83 percent negative viewpoint of Bush for those who read *Harry Potter* compared to those who have not (59). The authors derive their results from a survey of 1,141 college students. While the sample is diverse, from universities to community colleges and religious colleges, they conclude that a more refined statistical analysis needs to be compiled from the results (62). That is a fair point. If the survey were opened up to more college communities, there would be a better opportunity for extended and in-depth research.

The most interesting conclusion from Gierzynski's research from an English and reading standpoint was not the political ramifications of Millennial *Harry Potter* readers, rather that Millennials have a higher likelihood of being readers due to Rowling's series (Gierzynski 45). Harry Potter novels served as a gateway text to other fantasy works, such as *Lord of the Rings*, *Golden Compass*, and a *Series of Unfortunate Events*. Reading, in turn, encourages members of the population to become more civic and active in government, thus increasing perception.

The films are also taken into consideration in the analysis, but it is weighted less heavily. In addition, the *Harry Potter* books were considered to have a more powerful effect on those born in between 1982 and 1992. Millennials between the ages of eight and eighteen when the *Harry Potter* series become wildly popular were the most affected (Gierzynski 42), as well as those whose parents encouraged them to read the books (Gierzynski 65).

Gierzynski's text meditates on how we become politically socialized. It is our parents, friends, and teachers, as well as our entertainment that shape who we

become. From the Millennial age, we learn that it is our popular culture that helps us become who we are today. Moving past texts that serve as required reading in the school system, evaluating what students read for entrainment is crucial in determining one's future political beliefs.

The real magic in Harry Potter is not the witches and wizards or even the flying hippogriffs; instead, it is the contribution to a politically-conscious society. Although it is primarily a political science text, *Harry Potter and the Millennials: Research Methods and the Politics of the Muggle Generation* is written in a compelling format. Fans of the books might be especially interested in its findings, however, non-readers would also benefit from taking a look at this smart, well-written analysis about how Potter influenced politics.

Veronica Popp
Triton College and College of DuPage

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

BOB BATCHELOR is the James Pedas Professor of Communication and Executive Director of the James Pedas Communication Center at Thiel College. A noted cultural historian and biographer, Bob is the author or editor of 24 books, including *John Updike: A Critical Biography* and *Gatsby: A Cultural History of the Great American Novel*. He edits the "Contemporary American Literature" book series for Rowman & Littlefield. Bob is the founding editor of *The Popular Culture Studies Journal*, published by the Midwest Popular Culture / American Culture Association. He is a member of the editorial advisory boards of *The Journal of Popular Culture* and the *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning*. Bob also serves as Director of Marketing & Media for The John Updike Childhood Home Museum in Reading, PA. Visit him on the web at www.bobbatchelor.com.

BOND BENTON is an assistant professor in the SUNY Fredonia Communication Department. His doctorate is from the University of Vienna with his dissertation focusing on the influence of culture on meaning. A particular focus of Dr. Benton's research is the interaction of media, popular culture, and cross-cultural communication as it relates to the values and decisions of constituencies. As popular culture is frequently viewed as a foundation for shared social meaning, Dr. Benton's research also reflects his interest in pop cultural artifacts such as graphic novels, professional wrestling, and video games. Dr. Benton's essays and research articles have appeared in journals and anthologies including *The Palooka Review*, *Vienna Views*, *Studies in Communication* Sciences, *Argumentation and Advocacy* and *Icons of the American Comic Book*. His first book, *Why People Hate Working for Americans*, will be released in 2014. Dr. Benton enjoys cheering for bad guy wrestlers and professional sports teams that never win.

DANIELA PETERKA-BENTON currently serves as the Program Director and Internship Coordinator for Criminal Justice at SUNY Fredonia. Her doctoral research dealt with a quantitative analysis of illegal migrants in Austria relating to organized human smuggling. Dr. Peterka-Benton's current research focuses on transnational crimes, in particular the illicit trafficking of people and goods, and crime and media. Aside from that Dr. Peterka-Benton has been actively involved with the local county jail which has led to several research projects in regards to mentally inmates in the correctional system. Prior to working at SUNY Fredonia, Mrs. Peterka-Benton taught at Norwich University, a private military college in Vermont, and worked

as a project coordinator in the field of diplomatic security for almost seven years for the U.S. State Department and Group 4 Falck, one of the world's largest private security companies.

ASHLEY M. DONNELLY is an Assistant Professor of Telecommunications at Ball State University and has taught at a variety of colleges and universities covering subjects in English, Communication, and the Humanities. Her current courses focus on media ethics, media analysis and criticism, screenwriting, television studies, graduate student creative development, theory courses, and controversial cinema studies.

She interested in examining contemporary American culture and her research areas include gender, film, television and general media studies. Her first book, *Renegade Hero or Faux Rogue: The Secret Traditionalism of Television Bad Boys,* is currently in press with McFarland Publishing. Recent articles include the study of Internet profile culture and young women's online communication, an analysis of the hit television series *Dexter*, as well as heteronormativity and patriarchal ideologies in the *Twilight* series. She is an active researcher, and she presents her works regularly at national conferences.

Donnelly received her Ph.D. from the University of South Florida in literature and film studies and her M.A. from Birkbeck College at the University of London in cultural and critical studies.

ANDREW F. HERRMANN (Ph.D., University of South Florida) is an Assistant Professor of Communication at East Tenessee State University, where he teaches courses in organizational, group, and technology communication. His critical communication research focuses on the intersection of personal identity and narrative in organizational, occupational, and mediated contexts. Similarly, he interrogates portrayals of oganizations and identity within popular culture. His publications can be found in *Communication Theory, Journal of Organizational Ethnography*, *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management,* and *Slayage: The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association*, among others. He is currently researching cosplay and cosplayers at comic conventions in the United States.

JESSE KAVADLO is a Professor of English at Maryville University, where he directs the Writing Studio, coordinates the University Seminar program, and teaches traditional and online courses in writing, American literature, film, and the humanities. He is the author of *Don DeLillo: Balance at the Edge of Belief;* co-editor (with Bob Batchelor) of the forthcoming collection *Michael Chabon's America: Magical Words, Secret Worlds, and Sacred Spaces;* and President of the Don DeLillo Society. His work has appeared in numerous collections of essays as well as journals such as *Critique*, *Studies in 20th Century Literature*, *Studies in Popular Culture*, and *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*.

LAUREANO RALON is the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of the award-winning website Figure/Ground Communication, an open-source, para-academic, inter-disciplinary collaboration. Figure/Ground investigates central problems across academia through in-depth conversations with scholars, researchers, university professors as well as artists, filmmakers, and creators of every stripe.

Laureano earned his Bachelor's and Master's degrees graduate from the Simon Fraser University School of Communication. Complementing his graduate studies, Laureano worked as a teaching assistant for SFU's Center for Online and Distance Education, and as a research assistant for the Center for Policy Research on Science and Technology, the New Media Innovation Center, and Canada's 2006 Telecommunications Policy Review Panel. He produced numerous articles and essays on various topics related to communication, technology and society, and interviewed an impressive score of internationally renowned scholars – from Eric McLuhan to Douglas Kellner to Noam Chomsky.

Alongside his academic career, Laureano worked as an English-Spanish-French interpreter. Putting his communication and interpersonal skills at the service of new immigrants to the Greater Vancouver Regional District, he gained an understanding of the challenges facing newcomers to Canada. Working for the Provincial Language Service – part of British Columbia's Provincial Health Services Authority – he provided language assistance to skilled workers and refugees in a wide variety of settings.

MARCELO VIETA is a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. A social science researcher and critical theorist with a PhD in Social and Political Thought from York University, his dissertation, *Taking Destiny Into Their Own Hands: Autogestión and Cooperation in Argentina's Worker-Recuperated Enterprises* was defended "with distinction" and "without revisions" in 2012. Prior to joining the Ontario Institute, Marcelo was a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises (EURICSE) at the University of Trento, in Italy. He was also a Research Associate at the York University's Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC) and the International Secretariat for Human Development (ISHD), an associate member of the Applied Communication Laboratory (ACTLab) at Simon Fraser University's School of Communication, a co-organizer and member of the Toronto School of Creativity & Inquiry (TSCI), and serves on the board of the Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation (CASC).

JAN WHITT, winner of the 2013 Edward R. Murrow Teaching Award, is a professor of literature and media at the University of Colorado at Boulder. She has published numerous journal articles in American literature, media studies, and women's issues. Her books include *Allegory and the*

*Modern Southern Novel (*Mercer University Press), *Burning Crosses and Activist Journalism: Hazel Brannon Smith and the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement* (University Press of America), *Dangerous Dreams: Essays on American Film and Television* (Peter Lang International), *Rain on a Strange Roof: A Southern Literary Memoir* (Hamilton Books), *Reflections in a Critical Eye: Essays on Carson McCullers* (UPA), *Settling the Borderland: Other Voices in Literary Journalism* (UPA), and *Women in American Journalism: A New History* (University of Illinois Press). She is working on a book about Terry Tempest Williams for Mercer University Press and another about Truman Capote and *In Cold Blood* for the "Contemporary American Literature" series with Rowman & Littlefield.

THE POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL

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Bob Batchelor, Editor
The Popular Culture Studies Journal
Thiel College
Department of Communication
75 College Avenue
Greenville, PA 16125
Email: bbatchelor@thiel.edu

MidwestPCA/ACA

The Midwest Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association is a regional branch of the Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association. The organization held its first conference in Duluth, Minnesota, in 1973. After a five-year hiatus during the 1990s, the organization held a come-back conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 2002.

MPCA/ACA usually holds its annual conference in a large Midwestern city in the United States. In the last several years, conferences have been held in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Ohio. Upcoming conferences will be held in Missouri and Indiana. The conference typically is held in October.

Anyone is welcome to join and submit proposals for consideration at the MPCA/ACA conference. Membership in MPCA/ACA is by no means limited to those working or living in the Midwest or even the United States. In fact, presenters have come from as far away as Florida and California, and Norway and Australia.

Thank you for those joining us in St. Louis for the 2013 conference. We look forward to seeing you next year in Indianapolis.

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Thiel College
75 College Avenue
Greenville, PA 16125
1(800)24-THIEL (84435)

www.thiel.edu