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Thematic Section:
Pursuing the Trivial

Edited by

Roman Horak, Barbara Maly, Eva Schörghuber & Monika Seidl

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Introduction: Pursuing the Trivial

By Barbara Maly, Roman Horak, Eva Schörgenhuber & Monika Seidl

During a trip to the United States of America, a visit to the local supermarket can be a truly pleasurable experience. Especially from an outsider's perspective, one is delving into a completely different world of supersized products, where endless shelves are stacked with altogether new groceries and food. To the art-interest mind, however, several goods might be ever so familiar as they resonate a much larger discourse established prior to the supermarket visit. The intersection between the ordinary and the artistic, between 'low culture' and 'high culture', was explored in the 1960s with the creation of the art piece *Brillo Box (Soap Pads)*. For this, the American pop art artist Andy Warhol created a replica of the said product out of silkscreen ink on plywood box supports and put 24 pieces of it in the Stable Gallery in New York City (BBC.co.uk). The sculpture evoked manifold reactions, but first and foremost it highlighted the fact that a replica of a seemingly ordinary product deliberately placed in the space of an art gallery instantly possessed a different connotation. John Rockwell comments on Warhol's piece as follows:

A Brillo box isn't suddenly art because Warhol puts a stacked bunch of them in a museum. But by putting them there he encourages you to make your every trip to the supermarket an artistic adventure, and in so doing he has exalted your life. Everybody's an artist if they want to be. (Rockwell, as quoted in Storey 189)

Warhol, because of his status as an artist, had the opportunity to openly refuse to take the distinction between commercial and non-commercial art seriously. On this rather literal level, the separation of high and low culture vanished to a great degree and shed new light on the everyday life mirrored in the commercial good of the soap pads. The same happened with his art object of Campbell's tomato soup, a product which can still be bought in any American supermarket, and the question arises: is it art, due to the connotations it has now or is it just plain ordinary tomato soup? Whatever the answer may be, the fact that Warhol elevated insignificant items such as pads and soups from the everyday, is something noteworthy and a good example for understanding how 'the trivial' is dealt with in the present journal.

The idea of highlighting seemingly unimportant aspects of everyday life can also be found in today's world of art. In 2013, Tilda Swinton recreated a piece of performance art she first did in London in 1995. *The Maybe* shows the Scottish actress sleeping in a glass case in the middle of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, the label beneath her unusual bed reads: "The Maybe 1995/2013:

Living artist, glass, steel, mattress, pillow, linen, water, and spectacles” (AnO-thermag.com). Due to her unannounced and rare performances of the piece in 2013, the museum visitor was not guaranteed a sight of Swinton. However, the mere fact that the actress brought the everyday practice of sleeping to the insides of a museum resonates Warhol’s idea to a large degree. Reactions from people all across the world were as manifold, and both negative and positive. A person on the Internet, for example, responded to the events by saying: “I might just do a Tilda and sleep as long as I want and call it art. I’ll be in my bed though.” (Tumblr.com). This rather critical comment on Swinton’s performance underlines the ordinariness of her actions: sleeping can be, and is, done by everybody and putting an emphasize on it might seem odd at first, but it also makes us aware of the fact that the seemingly trivial might be more complex after all.

This thought is also mirrored in the present collection, which has at its core the understanding that the trivial is not as insignificant as it may seem. Internalized daily routines and practices, everyday objects and products shape our daily lives and therefore our perception of the world. The baffling and bewildering effect of a supermarket far from home, mentioned at the beginning, makes the contingencies of the ordinary, the everyday and the trivial all too obvious.

The collection of articles in this journal are based on a 2012 postgraduate conference with invited speakers that emerged from a collaboration of the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna and the Department of Art and Cultural Sociology at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. Organized by Monika Seidl and Barbara Maly (University of Vienna) and Roman Horak (University of Applied Arts Vienna), the symposium aimed at exploring meanings, roots and routes of mundane practices, texts and artifacts through the ages and how they relate to gender, class or race identities, to language and communication, to genre, media and technology, to politics and power to local and global impacts and to material and economic contexts.

Historical Background

The understanding that the trivial matters echoes the emergence of popular culture as a form of academic interest. Matthew Arnold an later F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis vehemently argued that only the cultural products and practices of the educated minority, of cultivated and cultured people, were valuable and worth bringing into an academic context. In contrast, the popular culture of the emerging 19th century working class and imported American goods in the 1930s posed a threat, were seen as worthless and could only be fought by education and, particularly, by teaching discrimination techniques so that everyone ideally learned how to resist the temptations of popular culture.

Fast-forward a couple of decades to the 1950s, and the perception changed with the emergence of the scholarship boys and British Cultural Studies as we

know them today. Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson highlighted working class culture and considered it as a significant contribution to the cultural landscape of the time. Not being condescending towards working class culture, and popular culture in general, was a completely new thought at that time and made visible the doings of an entire class that had previously been relatively unnoticed. Shedding light on the importance of everyday practices, such as going on a seaside holiday or watching a movie in the cinema, gave the study of culture in the academic sense a completely new level of depth.

The Trivial

The trivial, so aptly described in the Oxford Online Dictionary as being “of little value or importance”, deeply shapes our daily lives. Whether it is a feeling in a video game, the practice of walking or Josephine Baker’s visit to Vienna in the past, the trivial constructs our reality so importantly that it should no longer go unnoticed. What has become internalized and blends into our daily routines might shape our world more than the things that are done and encountered consciously.

It therefore seems necessary to deliberately place oneself outside of the mundane in order to gain the ability of viewing the insignificant as something worth studying. This is also mirrored in the well-known Marshall McLuhan quote “We don’t know who discovered water, but we know it wasn’t the fish”. When we are immersed in and completely surrounded by something such as the little things in life, we may come to accept them as part of the natural world and no longer question them. They become the embodiment of the phrase ‘taking something for granted’.

Taking a step outside our daily practices might enable the critic to uncover a structure that goes much deeper than the understanding of the mere existence of these things. Reflecting the idea of Raymond William’s “structures of feeling”, this present journal tries to give significance to the seemingly insignificant in the world. With the help of various disciplines, as well as products and practices, the following articles will dig deeper in order to come to a better understanding of today’s but also the past’s, structures of feeling.

Following the general outline of the conference schedule, the present book will move from the past to the present until arriving at ideas of the trivial in emerging cultures. The essays presented here cover heterogeneous approaches and theoretical frameworks. As the insignificant, the trivial and the mundane can be virtually anything that is encountered on a regular basis, the topics of the following articles are as manifold as life’s encounters.

First, a reflective view on the ordinary life of the past is taken in Steven Gerrard’s article “The Great British Music Hall: Its Importance to British Culture and ‘The Trivial’”. By shedding light on the history of the music hall, Gerrard draws attention to the prominence of this popular entertainment at its peak, enlarges on

the varied contents of the shows and sketches the manner in which they were gradually replaced by cinema, television or radio in the 1960s. In the second article, by Roman Horak, titled “‘We Have Become Niggers!’: Josephine Baker as a Threat to Viennese Culture”, the author explores various discourses that constructed Baker’s visit to the Austrian Capital in early 1928. At the center of these reports lie ideas of racism and sexism and the subsequent creation of ‘blackness’ and ‘black cultural expression’.

After uncovering some roots of the everyday life in the past, the next chapters leap into the present, focusing on Indoor/Outdoor activities at first. Yi Chen, for example, investigates how walking is experienced and how it is interrelating people and things in a temporal-spatial unfolding. “‘Walking With’: A Rhythmanalysis of London’s East End” has at its core a rhythmanalysis and looks at the film *Fergus Walking* (1978) as well as a East-West Road campaign in the early 1980s. Georg Drennig’s essay “Taking a Hike and Hucking the Stout: The Troublesome Legacy of the Sublime in Outdoor Recreation” takes the reader out into the wilderness and critiques the common conception of walking as outdoor recreation. Drennig stresses the cultural constructedness of the wilderness and sees it as the opposing pole to industrial civilization. Moving back inside the privacy of one’s home, Anna König’s article “A Stitch in Time: Changing Cultural Constructions of Craft and Mending” discusses the revival of domestic craft activities after a societal drift towards cheap, mass-produced and, above all, easily disposable fashion products. König questions the authenticity of the resurgence of these household skills and intertwines gender, class and aesthetics in doing so.

Games have always been a great source of entertainment, whether they are meant as a professional sport or for pure pleasure. Daniel Kilvington broaches the issue of the under representation of British Asians in English professional football. In his article “British Asians, Covert Racism and Exclusion in English Professional Football” the author tackles the still persistent issue of institutional racism as well as the tendency of coaches to stereotype, while underscoring his line of argumentation with the help of oral testimonies. Focusing on technological games, Sabine Harrer in her essay “From Losing to Loss: Exploring the Expressive Capacities of Videogames Beyond Death as Failure” moves away from the conception of death in video games as something to represent failure but instead highlights the possibility of a rich representation of loss that foster deeply emotional responses in the player. By discussing games such as *Final Fantasy VII* (1997), *Ico* (2001) or *Passage* (2007), Harrer uncovers the essential and powerful ingredients needed to arrive at a deeper notion of loss triggered by the construction of symbolic landscape or experiential metaphors.

The articles in the chapter on fiction offer insights into trivial, mundane and ordinary aspects of narratives. In his essay “Narrated Political Theory Relating Theory, Political Agency and Pop Culture in Dietmar Dath’s Novel *Für immer in Honig*”, Georg Spitaler explores specific literary forms of narrated political theo-

ry. By using Dietmar Dath's novel *Für immer in Honig* as an example, Spitaler investigates the interrelations of political agency and popular culture, and shows how a common cultural-theoretical narrative is thereby challenged. Katharina Andres explores the relations of fashion and gender in her article "'Fashion's Final Frontier' – The Correlation of Gender Roles and Fashion in *Star Trek*". Having the *Star Trek* franchise as the basis of her study, Andres shows the evolution of the female officers' uniforms and puts them into dialogue with gender roles in contemporary American society.

The last section of the book has emerging aspects of the trivial at its center. The two concluding essays deal with products and ideas that are up and coming, stemming from contemporary society but already peering into the future. Timo Kaerlein takes a media studies perspective in his essay "Playing with Personal Media. On an Epistemology of Ignorance" and discusses personal media devices with regards to their interface and the complexity of the underlying software. The discrepancy between these two makes the device highly functional, yet any insight into its technological roots has become virtually impossible for its user due to the trivialized and stripped down surface appearance. In the article "Becoming Trivial: The Book Trailer", Kati Voigt explores the emerging medium of the book trailer to promote new literary releases. Emphasizing her line of argument with a number of examples, Voigt traces the history of this new form of representation, highlights its components and makes assumptions about the future potential of the book trailer.

The many possibilities to explore the topic of the trivial illustrate quite well how deeply we are steeped in these mundane things in every part of our lives. The snapshot offered by the articles collected here may serve as food for thought and may shed some light on what normally stays hidden, thereby making the normally invisible things more visible and bringing them into the well-deserved limelight.

Barbara Maly teaches courses in Cultural and Media Studies at Vienna University and is currently working on her dissertation on Raymond Williams, digital practices and media pedagogy. She is especially interested in researching popular culture, visual culture, digital literacy and identity politics. E-mail: barbara.maly@univie.ac.at

Roman Horak is professor and Head of the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. From October 1988 to March 1989 he was Honorary Visiting Fellow at the Department of Sociology, University of Leicester. He is currently on the editorial committee of 'Culture Unbound' and the 'European Journal for Cultural Studies' and a board member of the 'Association for Cultural Studies'(ACS). His research focuses on the politics of the popular. He

has published 16 books and over 100 articles in academic journals and books. His latest international publication is *About Raymond Williams* (ed. with L. Grossberg & M. Seidl), Routledge 2010. E-mail: roman.horak@uni-ak.ac.at

Eva Maria Schörgenhuber is a student of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna where she also works as a tutor and research assistant. Specializing in cultural studies, her research interests include celebrity/star studies, the theme of fragmentation in body studies and blurred gender representations in visual culture. E-mail: eva.maria.schoergenhuber@univie.ac.at

Monika Seidl is Professor of Cultural Studies at the English Department of Vienna University. Her research interests are wide-ranging with a focus on visual texts, literary classics and popular culture. She is currently Deputy Head of Studies of Vienna University. E-mail: monika.seidl@univie.ac.at

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The Great British Music Hall: Its Importance to British Culture and ‘The Trivial’

By Steven Gerrard

Abstract

By 1960, Britain’s once-thriving Music Hall industry was virtually dead. Theatres with their faded notions of Empire gave way to Cinema and the threat of Television. Where thousands once linked arms singing popular songs, watch acrobatics, see feats of strength, and listen to risqué jokes, now the echoes of those acts lay as whispers amongst the stalls’ threadbare seats.

The Halls flourished in the 19th Century, but had their origins in the taverns of the 16th and 17th Centuries. Minstrels plied their trade egged on by drunken crowds. As time passed, the notoriety of the Music Hall acts and camaraderie produced grew. Entrepreneurial businessman tapped into this commerciality and had purpose-built status symbol theatres to provide a ‘home’ for acts and punters. With names like The Apollo giving gravitas approaching Olympian ideals, so the owners basked in wealth and glory.

The Music Hall became *the* mass populist entertainment for the population. Every town had one, where *everyone* could be entertained by variety acts showing off the performers’ skills. The acts varied from singers, joke-tellers, comics, acrobats, to dancers. They all aimed to entertain. They enabled audiences to share a symbiotic relationship with one another; became recruitment officers for the Army; inspired War Poets; showed short films; and they and the halls reflected both the ideals and foibles of their era.

By using Raymond Williams’ *structures of feeling* as its cornerstone, the article will give a brief history of the halls, whilst providing analysis into how they grew into mass populist entertainment that represented *British* culture. Case studies of famous artistes are given, plus an insight into how Music Hall segued into radio, film and television.

Keywords: Music Hall, British, populist, entertainment, Victorian, cinema, low art.

True music hall is a place of light and laughter, a place of good cheer, of freedom, of do-as-you-please, go-as-you-please, where everyone is 'jolly good company' and where the cigars, cigarettes and pipes add their tint of blueness to the air and the gurgle of drinks mingles with gusts of laughter. It is a place where pals meet, where jokes are cracked, where, for a while, the outside world is forgotten. That is – was – Music Hall. (Walter 1950: 437-438)

(Music Hall) injure(s) the theatre both financially and artistically. They withdraw from the theatres many who are tempted by the freedom, the smoking, the promenades and the drinks in the auditorium of the music hall, advantages the theatre cannot have... And they tend to produce a degraded taste for hurried, frivolous and brainless drama.¹

One story describes her (Marie Lloyd – star of Music Hall) arriving with an umbrella, waving it in front of her to the point of embarrassment until it opened – 'Thank God! I haven't had it up for months'. (Banks et al. 1987: 8)

Introduction

This article will give a brief history of the British Music Hall, how it rose to prominence in Britain during the nineteenth century, some important artistes and types of acts incorporated in them and how it then segued into radio, cinema and television. Two case studies of British Music Hall/Film Stars, Gracie Fields and George Formby are examined to illustrate this development. Raymond Williams' 'structure of feeling' are utilized to give Music Hall a cultural aspect which will help understand both the culture of the Music Hall, its descendants and the cultural placement of it as an emotional experience when analysing why the *British* Music Hall is important to *British* culture.

Music Hall has, of course, been catalogued elsewhere: Dagmar Kift (1996) proposes in-depth deconstructions of it; Laurence Selenick's (1981) catalogue-approach to the topic offers lists of London's and the provinces halls, various artistes, types of architecture, regulation, etc. There are books by Music Hall artistes themselves: Peter Honri, nostalgically reminisces about his own family's time as performers treading the boards (Honri 1973). Each adds weight to the idea that the *British* Music Hall has something quintessentially *British* about it.

This quintessentiality is often seen through investigations about gender, class, and cultural outlook. But this is sometimes too precise a measure. Raymond Williams' notions about the almost-ethereal and intangible approaches of 'feeling' come into play here and will be examined later on. What is it that makes the British Music Hall so characteristically British? On a purely physical plane, the British Music Halls are set in Britain, much the same as the American Burlesque is set in the USA. That indefinable 'something', however, that makes the British Music Hall *British* is harder to define. When one mentions the Moulin Rouge, one immediately thinks of girls dancing the *Can-Can* and Toulouse-Lautrec painting Parisian life in the theatres. Does that make both *quintessentially* French? Yes. The same is therefore applicable to the British Music Hall. The halls incorporated many foreign acts

and often used ideas from the continent and beyond in its programs. But it is the 'overall' package, an indescribable 'feeling' that makes the subject of this article so difficult to pin down with any academic precision. That is not to say that it cannot be done. This article offers an account of the halls, its acts, and its importance to British culture through a variety of means: the history and its place in the populace affections are noted; acts are examined; case studies given. All will hopefully demonstrate how, by using existing literature, through close analysis, and by using ideas of 'feelings', just how quintessential and important the British Music Hall is to British culture, through its position first and foremost as an entertainment, and secondly as a reflection of the nation at times of turbulence and peace.

This article is divided into sections. Each section is clearly sub-headed, and an introduction to the subject is given followed by analysis. The first section will briefly highlight Raymond Williams' ideas about *Structures of Feeling*, including three dominant, residual and emergent visualizing categories linking to ideas of culture and how it can be related to 'the Trivia'. The second section provides a very brief overview of what the British Music Hall is. This includes its early history and how it rose from the taverns of the 14th Century onwards to become vast entertainment palaces. Facts about early entrepreneurs and costing will also be given to indicate how the populace could afford to visit the halls. The more-famous acts are examined, especially in relation to ideas about toying with sexuality and class. The third section will examine how the fortunes of the Music Hall changed, and the fourth demonstrates the importance of the halls helped to shape, develop and become an established part of early-British sound cinema, radio and television. Examples will be given at relevant junctures, and an in-depth look at the two major Music Hall stars, Gracie Fields and George Formby, will help to illustrate the significance of these two British megastars as being representative of both the populace and the country at the time of great economic and cultural uncertainty.

Structures of Feeling and Ideas About Culture

Raymond Williams (1977: 38; Highmore 2001: 91-100) suggests that we deconstruct and reconstruct through detailed analysis almost anything from the world around us: a period in history, an artifact, and a culture. This deconstruction may be through Marxist approaches, historical methods of investigation, or a psychoanalytical one, depending on one's own favoured method. He argues that whilst we may be able to do this with some accuracy, and that these approaches are complex and influential, they possibly shape our comprehension of that item under investigation into a 'whole' commonality.

However, breaking away from 'traditional' academic thoughts about how the deconstruction of said items may be approached, he then posits the idea that even though something may be broken down into its constituent parts and analysed, there

still remains something intangible for which there is no outside/academic equivalent. Williams calls this theory 'structure of feeling' which can only be readily measured through the experience of the period and/or work of art itself, as a whole product. By exploring the idea that this concept is not static, and to help conceptualize this theory, he uses three categories: dominant, residual and emergent. Whilst dominant comes to represent 'official consciousness' about a subject, both residual and emergent categories imply that there is an alternative or, indeed, oppositional position to the 'official conscious'. These oppositions are more experiential, relying on one's own concepts of, or experience around, the subject. They are at once fluidic – inasmuch as they are constantly evolving – but also have a contextualized framework as a hook on which to hang ideas about historicity, social change, and national identity.

Williams argues that there are three definitions for culture. The first is that there is the 'ideal' state, whereby a set of universal values reflects the human condition. Secondly, that 'documentary' provides us with the ability to investigate, to question, to value culture. Finally, a 'social' definition of culture occurs, whereby institutions, production structures, family, and communication are coalesced to form a structure of feeling that cannot be defined with pinpoint precision.

If Williams' notions are deemed as accurate, or at the very least enticing, 'structure of feeling' and ideas about defining the social aspects of culture can be used as the cornerstone of what would arguably be called 'trivial' subjects. Such 'trivia' might include the importance of public houses as a place of discourse, the feeling of melancholia at the end of a television series, the clothes found in science fiction serials – the list is endless. The fact that the subject may not be deemed as 'academically worthwhile' is therefore redundant, and whilst the investigator may *not* have experienced the subject directly, the subject can be given a structure of feeling, whereby *it* occupies a place or period either of importance to that investigator *and/or* as an almost intangible part of a collective-psyche.

With this in mind, Williams' ideas can be directly linked to the British Music Hall and its' traditions. As stated earlier, there is something indefinable about something so intrinsically a part of a nation's culture as Britain's Music Halls. By systematically going through the case studies I have offered in this text, I have attempted to apply Williams' theories with verisimilitude. For example, in the section regarding the history of the halls, I see Williams' ideas regarding nationhood as seen through a 'shared' perspective; the Music Hall does this – it was for all of society, where classes could intermingle: a *shared* culture. With regards to the acts themselves, they (in)directly reflect this *sharing* philosophy: this was done through comic patter or verbosity (and their reflection of the daily life around them), their outlook (from downtrodden to dapper, which again indicates a collective mentality), or their engagement with their audience about things that *mattered to them*. The humour was British: mostly saucy and innuendo-laden, often satirical and witty. The wordage reflected the world of its audience, and whilst Ferdinand de

Saussure's work on *langue* and *parole* delineates the vocabulary used, I would argue that Williams' work offers an extra countenance to this. Innuendo was the mainstay of the halls. Laden with meanings, directly applicable to the populace that watched them, audiences saw this humour as 'theirs', as being a part of their 'outlook'. This outlook formed the cornerstone to British humour, and the Music Hall took it and used it for its own ends: to entertain and to comment upon ideas of British life. This comes to the fore in my investigation into Gracie Fields and George Formby being a part of Williams' '*experience, contact and discovery*'. All the artistes in this article – and countless others in the halls, on the nation's airwaves or on television – became a part of the cultural heritage landscape of Britain. Whilst they may be seen as Low Art, they retain through the passing of time an even greater degree of cultural specificity. Although they may be frowned upon from the higher echelons of traditional academia, like Williams' theories they have gained more credence as time has moved on. Williams' work about *structures of feeling* becomes therefore an ideal tool to use when examining a topic like the British Music Hall. Whilst the Music Hall's fortunes faded only to be reborn through radio and television, one thing is certain: by employing Williams' work as a hook on which to hang my arguments, it will become apparent that the British Music Hall has written itself into not only the nation's affections, but into the very cultural fabric of the country itself.

A Very Brief History of the British Music Hall

The Music Hall was a populist construction that occurred in Great Britain after the mass migrations of the populace to new and expanding townships during and after the industrial revolution.² The public flocked to theatres to be entertained by the latest sketches, songs, dances, tumblers, ventriloquists, prestidigitators and illusionists, but its predecessors have been recorded before: Chaucer writes of an artiste in *The Canterbury Tales* (c.1387):

He used to dance in twenty different styles...
He played a two-stringed fiddle, did it proud...
And sang an high falsetto loud
And he was just as good on the guitar.
There was no public house in town or bar
He didn't visit with his merry face...

The traditions passed down to the Music Hall are evident – dancing, singing and instrument playing are important conventions of the Music Hall. The drinking tavern was *the* institution that accommodated wandering players and nurtured home-grown talent. From the 1500s 'beer taverns' and 'penny gaffs' appear and in Massinger and Field's *The Fatal Dowry* (1632) a 'a Singer and Keeper of a Musick House' points to the idea that the Music Hall found its roots in establishments of

the hostelry. As an example, Saddlers Wells Theatre in London had a stage for various acts, whilst drinkers sat watching from booths.

Cromwell indicates that the music room or music house in Elizabethan England (1558-1603) was to be found in a large house, cider-room, tavern or theatre. By the Jacobean era (1603-1625) these rooms were known as 'music houses' and their upturn in fortunes came through Oliver Cromwell's political and religious fervour, when all organs were removed from churches. These organs were bought by publicans and installed in specially built rooms to accommodate a crowd to watch various acts. After the Restoration music houses proliferated in number, as did the variety of acts, the quantities of these performers and the audience that readily went to these locations for drinking, revelry and entertainment.³

At the end of the Restoration until 1859, London's 'fashionables' could walk amongst arbours in New Spring Gardens⁴ where wandering players entertained the crowd and prostitutes plied their trade. Pepys mentions the gardens in his diary of 30th May 1668:

Over to Fox Hall, and there fell into the company of Harry Killigrew, a rogue newly come back out of France, but still in disgrace at our Court, and young Newport and others, as very rogues as any in town, who were ready to take hold of every woman that came by them. And so to supper in the arbour; but Lord! their mad talk did make my heart ake. (Pepys 1668)⁵

Entertainment included song singing, dance and dramatic plays. Famous singers included Mrs. Arne and Mrs. Beddeley, who leant a degree of civility to the evening's proceedings. Other acts included Ameson Santa 'The Mexican Wonder and his son' (the son slipping through the steps of a ladder 'like an eel' with the ladder balancing on his father's chin), Master Bridges and Madame Lamotte (tightrope walkers), Mr. F.A. Canfield 'The American Samson', Herr B. von Feitlinger (a celebrated Tyrolean vocalist), and Mr. Arthur Nelson, the 'Demon' Rock-Harmonic player, the American harmonist on the 'Pine Sticks' and 'Niagara Stones'.⁶

At 9pm 'The Cascade' was performed. This fifteen-minute long showcase was presented against a backdrop of a miller's cottage or mountain scene. The audience gathered around with all classes mingled alongside one another. Songs and music were played and Kalm (1753) writes:

Youth of London, almost every evening in the summer divert themselves... At 6 o'clock in the evening they begin to assemble, when the music commences at 7 or 8... (it becomes a place where) One can see and be seen. (Kalm 1753)

In the taverns, beer money paid for the entertainment. In 1751 parliament's Licensing Act meant that each hostelry had to possess a magistrate's license to house these attractions. Rather than limiting song and drink, it had the opposite effect. With the license came 'legitimacy': beer prices rose, landlords presented better artistes, and grander drinking taverns sprang up with landlords expanding their empires to produce greater 'leisure palaces'.

By the 1830s, Music Hall emerged from the ‘trappings’ of the drinking room to become a more-reputable pastime. Individuals such as Charles Morton, ‘the Father of the Music Halls’, who Bailey (1986) describes as a ‘pioneer leisure entrepreneur or “caterer”’ (Bailey 1986: x) separated their taverns from their music rooms (Bailey 1986: ix). Entertainment became commoditised with purpose-built halls constructed to showcase talent and make a profit.⁷ Morton’s Canterbury Hall in Lambeth, which opened in 1852, was massive, housing six hundred in the auditorium. It had a revolving *and* removable glass roof, illustrating his ambitions. One day per week was given over to ‘celebrating’ the fact that women could also attend the halls: Canterbury Hall’s ‘Ladies Thursday’ inferred that *ladies* of the middle classes could safely visit the theatre either with or without their respective husbands or beaus. It was also for men to ‘escape’ their wives for an evening to seek out prostitutes who frequented the venue.

The publicans sought elevation to the higher echelons of polite society, and as dramatic episodes were performed in the Music Halls so their reputation as procurers of highbrow entertainment was assured. Any criticism of the Music Hall craft was diverted due to the very nature of this ‘High Art’ approach.⁸ The halls had classical names: The Parthenon, The Coliseum, The Star, and The Constellation indicated the haughtier aspirations of the theatre’s proprietors (Bailey 1986: 145).

By 1860 the halls were flourishing. There were thirty-one in London alone and three hundred and eighty four around the rest of the kingdom (*The Era Almanack*: x). Almost every town had one. Many were grandiose, stylish, draped with expensive furnishings, and more-elaborate productions were performed (Marshall 1988, as quoted in Bailey 1986: 53-72). As Wilson (1985) attests:

You must understand that these halls are not confined to the Metropolis – there is not a town of any importance in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales but has its music hall or halls, and I am quite sure, from observations which I have made since I have had the honour of catering for your amusement, that they have created a great social and moral improvement amongst the working classes of this country.⁹

As entrepreneurs owned numerous establishments, so a standardization of ‘product’ began. This ‘product’ conducted provincial tours, fine-tuning or adjusting them to cater for different audiences. For example, the Northern England ‘tour’ would have had songs and jokes altered to incorporate localized stories and individuals. Virginia Woolf states the Music Hall had an indefinable ‘something natural to the race’ and that was its appeal to the majority of audiences (Selenick et al. 1981: 13). This appeal came through caricatured stereotypes (the skinny, bespectacled man, the buxom maid, the harridan, the ridiculed figure of authority), or through storylines that mocked and satirized British (mostly English) ways of life.

Music Halls were tailored for all social strata, although they catered (in the main) for the proletariat. Whilst the common notion for Music Hall’s connotations lies within an almost-mythical construction based around the populist ideas of a ‘safe

and secure' past of gentle-Victorian/Edwardianism, where all patrons mingle alongside one another, this was not the case. The public was not one analogous group, but a divided society that used the songs and routines of going to the Music Hall to navigate socially underlying themes such as age, class, gender, and ethnicity.

For the working classes, halls provided escape from the rigours of toiling in heavy industry. A male Liverpool worker stated, 'I work in a foundry and sometimes I and others go to the Coliseum just as we leave work' (*Liverpool Weekly Albion* 1878) which makes the hall a place of solace. It was somewhere where he and his community could be as one. Reach argues that in the Northern provinces female workers frequented the halls with more disposable income being available to spend on leisure activities (Reach 1972: 59). An 1849 edition of Manchester's *Morning Chronicle* recorded that the average audience demographic as:

...two thirds might be men: the others were women – young and old – a few of them with children in their laps, and several with babies at their breasts. The class of the assembly was that of artisans and mill hands. Almost without exception, men and women were decently dressed, and it was quite evident that several of the groups formed family parties. (Reach 1972: 81)

Despite their risqué songs and routines, the Music Hall was a place advertised for *all* the family; a communal area of fun, frivolity and enjoyment. Charrington and Chant claimed that Music Hall was a place of immorality, but Höher argues that the London Pavilion had been refurbished to cater for a more-discerning clientele that used 'legitimate' theatre (Höher 1986; as quoted in Bailey 1986: 85). Audiences entered vast auditoriums. The orchestra played a cavalcade of famous tunes. The lights would dim and a hush descended over spectators. The impresario would take his place at the side of the stage for the duration of the performance.

Impresarios provided whole acts themselves, introducing performers by exaggerated flourishes of arm-waving and extravagant exclamations whilst waving his gavel in an almost sexualized frenzy. Addressing the audience after a rendition of the National Anthem reassured most that any 'fastidious man in this city can safely bring his wife and family to witness' (Höher 1986: 101) giving a sense of 'harmless' fun to the evening's 'wholesome' proceedings. The fact that the national anthem was followed by 'saucy' onstage-antics gave the proceedings a sense of acceptability for those in attendance. As Boucicault (1986) writes: '(Music Halls were) stepping stones from the sensual enjoyment of the public house to the intellectual entertainment of the theatres' (*The Era Almanack* 1867).

Music Hall tycoons ensured that different audiences could attend together (Höher 1986: 87). With Victorian Britain held in sway by its strict social strata, different audiences went for different reasons: the working classes escaped their daily toll in heavy industry, to forget their miserable existences; the upper classes saw risqué acts they could then condemn to their equals; and the middle classes never wanted to feel left out of the proceedings. Williams argues that England's

powerful bourgeois culture held sway over educational, social and literary institutions and, in most cases the proletariat were exempt from accessing them. However, during the industrial and social revolutions of the 18-19th centuries the proletariat was slowly opening the doors to these. Williams perceived institutions, art and learning evolving from a bourgeois culture, to a *shared* one. He appreciated the distinctive working-class lifestyle, saying, ‘I think this way of life, with its emphases of neighbourhood, mutual obligation and common betterment... is in fact the best basis for any future English society’ (Williams as quoted in Highmore 2001: 96). If this is Williams’ case, then the Music Hall, with its primary target being the working classes, reverses High Art’s loftier aspects so that the entertainment, with its Low Art connotations, becomes a part of Williams’ shared culture. Despite there being a delineated boundary between the classes, the Music Hall was one aspect of British society that allowed for *all* to become a part of the Utopian-collective for that briefest of moments. This was no more evident than in the prices to watch the acts.

The cost of a ticket in Liverpool and Manchester are comparable to those in the capital, indicating that management aimed fees within certain price ranges to entice more people through the doors. The following diagram indicates this:

London:

Period	Name of Theatre	Seat Prices	Box Prices
1860	Alhambra Palace	6d. – 4s.	1gn. – 2gn.
1870		6d. – 5s.	1gn. – 2gn.
1870	Oxford Theatre	6d. – 1s.6d.	10s.6d. – 1gn.
1860	Canterbury Theatre	6d. – 1s.	-
1870		6d. – 4s.	10s.5d. – 1 gn.

Manchester (1868):

Name of Theatre	Seat Price
Victoria Theatre	2d. – 3d.
The People’s Theatre	2d. – 6d.
The London	6d. – 1s.
Alexandra Palace	6d. – 1s.

Liverpool (1878):

Name of Theatre	Seat Price
The Coliseum	1d. – 6d.
Alhambra Palace	1d. – 1s.
The Gaiety	2d. – 1s.
The Parthenon	6d. – 1s.
The Star Theatre	6d. – 1s.6d.

Some Important Music Hall Acts

So what of the acts themselves? Performers included singers, acrobats, dancers, comics, black and white minstrels (themselves based upon the Pierrot's of Europe), chorus girls, monologians, and the audience themselves, who were encouraged to partake in proceedings.

Most singers used original material bought from songwriters, paying sole performing rights for up to two pounds. Clauses written onto the sheet music stated that songs were *not* to be performed in the Music Hall. Following legal litigation in December 1892, whereby the singer Katie Lawrence's sole proprietorial use of the song *Daisy Bell* was negated by Lord Justice Smith meant that now *most* songs could be sung in the Music Hall by whoever wanted to. *Daisy Bell* probably remains the most famous Music Hall song of them all. Audiences were invited to sing along, and it was this affinity between audience and performer that proved to be at the cornerstone of the halls' achievements, whereby the strong bond between the two parties became an established, *vital*, aspect to the repertoire of the evenings' proceedings.

Arguably the most renowned female singer was Marie Lloyd (1870-1922). Lloyd was born in London, and as a child, she sang song songs at the Royal Eagle Tavern, Hoxton, London. By 1884 she made her professional debut with her sisters' act, The Fairy Bells. They aimed their turn at a clientele with a temperance leaning, which is ironic as Lloyd's last solo act in the halls ended with her staggering around drunkenly singing 'It's a Bit of a Ruin That Cromwell Knocked About a Bit'.

During her late-teens, Lloyd became a solo artist; her first professional engagement was at Belmont's Sebright Hall, where she was paid 15d per week. Her routine was soon sought after, and she was running from one theatre to another to do her act before an easily excitable audience. At the peak of her powers she starred alongside Dan Leno at London's Theatre Royal in 1891. It was for the traditional Christmas pantomime and she played the Principle Boy. Her appearance was one of pertness, but with a propensity to gain weight; her face was round, and she had proportionately large teeth. Her voice, from the recordings that survive, is disappointing, *but* what makes Lloyd remarkable is that her charm, vivaciousness and ability to fascinate and 'work' an audience were exemplary. Her saucy looks, illusions of beauty in frills, lace and ribbons, twirling a parasol coquettishly whilst giving 'knowing' winks to all in the audience, ensured that she was truly adored by her public. As Shaw says,

Miss Marie Lloyd, like all the brightest stars of the Music Hall, has an exceptionally quick ear for both pitch and rhythm. Her intonation and the lilt of her songs are alike perfect. Her step-dancing is pretty; and her command of coster-girls' patois is complete (Shaw as quoted in Hardin 1990: 25).

Singing sentimental songs like 'The Boy I Love is Up in the Gallery' ensured popularity with female audiences. The risqué 'A Little Bit of What You Fancy Does You Good' appealed to all those with a penchant for innuendo, in which she sang:

I always hold in having it if you fancy it.
If you fancy it, that's understood!
But if that's your bloomin' game,
I shall want to do the same,
'Cos a little bit of what you fancy does you good!

The innuendo comes thick and fast with Lloyd. In 'Oh! Mr Porter!' she sings of 'girls never having their ticket punched before' and Lloyd herself became a target for moral crusaders. At one investigative committee in which Lloyd was asked to explain her songs, she sang her repertoire with utter blandness. With the board satisfied that no impropriety was in evidence, she then launched into a rendition of 'Come into the Garden, Maude' that left assembled members speechless!

The comics' satire, wordplay, physical dexterity and innuendo took audiences into their confidence when telling jokes, and again a reciprocal relationship developed between the two parties. Jokes helped alleviate any societal 'problems'. Many were reliant on audience participation, both with subject matter and familiarity, and most revealed an underlying sense of hostility. This was in an era of no divorce, of burgeoning families, of debt, poverty and strife. Jokes reflected this and targets were usually mothers-in-law, sexual frustration, poverty and drunkenness. These targets were not restricted to British society, but the 'feeling' was that they belonged to ideas about *Britishness*.¹⁰

With the two main theories of laughter being *superiority* and *incongruity*, so joke-tellers relayed comic stories directly at the target audience. The working classes formed the majority of the spectators, but the jokes critiqued *all* classes, helping create a safety valve that could be turned on or off to help ease any tensions of the age. Even if the audiences were of mixed classes, they would feel comfortable from different viewpoints: the working classes saw the middle classes as incongruous; the middle classes saw themselves as superior. The joke becomes evident from both perspectives.

Being a comic with a boisterous crowd in front of them was a daunting task. Thick skin was the order of the day. Arguably the most famous Music Hall jokers were Dan Leno and Little Tich. Basing his act upon the most impoverished members of society, Leno used the squalor of the daily life around him to fund his routines. Dressed as a lodger, a landlady, pantomime dames, tramps, shop assistants, swimming instructors, schoolteachers, and more, he fashioned an act that commented upon the audiences' world. Grime, dirt and filth were magically transformed into happiness, and the poverty of living a hard life in slums and working in factories was converted into laughter. His excellence at mimicry vented streams of absurdity, and the employment of patois strains linked both time and place to the audience. Whilst his routine mixed pantomime and absurdities, he delighted audiences due to his familiarity/ridiculousness. Yet his act (and arguably the world he reflected) was his undoing. His life of rapid-fire jokes, manic dance routines and insane songs that all exposed the hardship of the age, killed him. Lloyd was reported

to have said, 'Ever seen his eyes? The saddest eyes in the whole world. That's why we laughed at Danny. Because if we hadn't laughed, we should have cried ourselves sick' (thedailymail.co.uk).

Tich was famed for his Big Boot Dance. Dressed in an ill-fitting jacket and trousers, broken top hat and crumpled shirt, he walked across the stage on two elongated shoes each approximately one metre long. He would 'shuffle' onto his toes and then whistle famous themes whilst balancing precariously on the tips of the shoes. He would lower himself down onto the stage and use the shoes as 'slappers' that would bang against the wooden floor. His other routines saw him parodying a French gendarme and an English tax inspector. However, he is forever associated with his Big Boot Dance and his influence has been felt in the work of the silent comedians, Jacques Tati and even Monty Python with their Ministry of Silly Walks sketch.

The cultural importance of the comic cannot be underestimated. Not only were they able to assuage the audiences' problems inasmuch as they would create, they projected back into the cultural arena difficult areas of social concern. Tich's tramp and Leno's downtrodden characters commented upon the real world around them, despite their caricatured form. Most of the comedians produced humour that was 'British' and indicative of the British way of life: laughter flavoured with melancholy. The characters, situations and punch lines were indicative of the society that produced them, and whilst I do not try to simplify ideas of the comic and comedy, the comics were part of a *British* consciousness, whereby their work was justifiably important in helping the populace to come to terms with the rapid social change occurring around them.

Toying with Sexuality

The arts have always toyed with notions of sexuality. Hercules dressed as a woman when a slave to Omphale; Thor dressed as Freyja; the plays of ancient Greece and Rome; Shakespeare, Johnson and others had men and women dressed as the opposite sex. This follows two traditions: the first is that the performance demands it as part of the social history of theatre; the second is that the character is a cross-dresser. Both methods are mostly used for comic effect, with mistaken identity at their core. The Music Hall was no exception, using sexuality as both a playful construction *and* as a direct critique on the morés of society. The walls of Victorian society were closely guarded, with men and women's roles 'firmly' entrenched within set guidelines. But these walls were eroding. John Stuart Mill failed to secure votes for women in his Second Reform Act (1867), which led to the formation of the Women's Social and Political Union and its members – the suffragettes – taking violent protests to the streets in order to gain the right to vote. Within the confines of the Music Hall, women dressing as men attempted to break down barriers of a male-dominated society, highlighting notions that the only way to break free from patriarchy was to become male. Ideas of patriarchy were eroded 'from within' and,

by seemingly, ‘one of their own’ – namely, a male shows the Music Hall as an arena where sexuality is being questioned. The enjoyment of these acts was the ambiguity; audiences knew that they were watching a woman dressed as a man who still sang with a woman’s voice. There was no deception, and by putting on pair of trousers, the women were behaving in unorthodox ways; gender was being questioned; and elements of both power and control were in evidence.

The most famous female male-impersonator, Vesta Tilley (1864-1952), examined ideas about patriarchy whilst delighting audiences with her act. Meticulously attired, Tilley’s numerous characters convinced audiences that they were watching a male: Algy was ‘the most perfectly dressed man in the house’; a Judge criticized the judicial system; a soldier. It was as this soldier that she acted as a recruiter during The Great War. Her songs ‘Jolly Good Luck to a Girl Who Loves a Soldier’ and ‘Six Days Leave’ inspired men to sign up for the conflict. Tilley was popular with female audiences who saw in her a symbol of independence, directly poking fun at the male establishment. Her most famous creation, Burlington Bertie from Bow, wore top hat and tails, brightly polished black leather shoes, waistcoat, and shirt and tie. Tilley wore men’s underwear, as her female undergarments would make the male-attire look odd. Her hair was never cut but put into braids and coiled under a wig and hat. She was always introduced as Miss Vesta Tilley, stressing – not hiding – her femininity. This breaking down of gender stereotypes ensured that she, and other performers, became objects of erotic beguilement opening up the sexual arena to more direct questioning than before.

Men dressed as women were seen as comedic when linked to ‘Low Art’ comedic traditions. Despite most female roles being played by males in legitimate (or ‘high art’) theatre, the rise of the populist Christmas pantomime saw an actor appearing as a ‘dame’ – a continuation of the traditional *en travesti* – in outrageous costumes, wigs, and make-up, acting in an exaggerated ‘camp’ manner, as the mother of the hero. The most famous dames are Widow Twankey in Aladdin and Cinderella’s two ugly sisters.

The Music Hall incorporated drag acts into their repertoire, and arguably the most famous was Malcolm Scott who was not as caricatured as the dame. He portrayed historical figures such as Elizabeth I, Boadicea and Nell Gwyn, and created the character Camille Clifford. Clifford was based on the 1890s Gibson Girl cartoons which were the ‘ideal’ of femininity at the time. Clifford was a modern woman, fashionable and independently wealthy. Clifford’s silhouette accentuated ‘her’ hourglass figure, with slender neck, bare shoulders, ample bosom, thin waist and broad hips. Later drag artists, whilst retaining a genuinely affectionate, playful look at women’s sexuality through sexual role reversal, caricatured this image. Drag artists of later years (such as Danny la Rue and Paul O’Grady) compliment/lampoon the past in their stylish costumes, wigs and finery, and form part of the tradition that Music Hall was justifiably famous for. If la Rue and Savage’s performances are examined, their interaction with the audience (through jokes, nudges, winks, and

innuendo mixed with gleeful and knowing wide-eyed innocence) offers a direct continuation of the past played out within modern trappings. Most importantly, sexuality is continuously being toyed with – and whilst in the main these roles are comedic, they do serve a purpose: the male impersonator highlights the inequalities between sexes in the Victorian era, whilst female impersonators are part of the theatrical lineage that celebrates drag.

A Change in Fortunes

There is one defining moment that changed the whole course of this variety panoply (Mellor 1970: 43). In 1912, King George V commanded that variety artists perform at the Palace Theatre, London on 1st July. Sir Edward Moss decided that the entertainment would contain the usual roster of acts, with the finale having one hundred and fifty artistes singing to the attendant audience and royalty. One artiste was notably absent from this list: Marie Lloyd¹¹ who was omitted due to her vulgarity despite the fact that she had said some time earlier:

I might as well say right here and now that my songs are not blue – at least not half as blue as they are painted... The trouble is that the people are looking for blue, and I can't help it...if they want to turn and twist my meanings...I don't make them blue. It's the people... (Marie Lloyd as quoted in *The New York Telegraph* 1897)

With numerous royals in attendance, including Princess Victoria, Princess Christian of Schleswig-Holstein, Prince Arthur of Connaught, and the Duke and Duchess of Teck, censorship of one act took place: Queen Mary asked that 'the gaze of the Ladies of the Royal Party be not directed at the stage' when Vesta Tilley walked on stage for fear of causing offence to their sensibilities. The event rose over £2500 for charitable causes and is kept in the eye of the public's gaze even today, where the annual Royal Variety Show broadcast on British television.

Whilst the proletariat often mingled with the middle classes, the royal seal of approval meant that any symbiosis between themselves as core audience targets, artistes and material would now no longer be applicable. Hands elaborates on this:

After the 1912 Royal Show music hall's fortunes declined sharply. The respectful reception accorded to the performers at the Palace by a predominantly establishment audience did not please those who admired music hall for its vulgarity and brash common touch. (Hands 1931)

As the Great War took its toll on the country Music Hall was at the forefront of recruitment drives.¹² Men would stand in line to sign up for King and country, their wavering signatures presided over by chorus girls singing of soldiers going to war, missed loved ones, and homecoming heroes. Siegfried Sassoon's chilling war poem *Blighters*, offered a critique of this:

The House is crammed: tier beyond tier they grin
And cackle at the Show, while prancing ranks
Of harlots shrill the chorus, drunk with din;
'We're sure the Kaiser loves our dear old Tanks!'

I'd like to see a Tank come down the stalls,
Lurching to rag-time tunes, or 'Home, Sweet Home'
And there'd be no more jokes in music halls
To mock the riddled corpses round Bapaume. (Sassoon 1917)

It must be remembered that the halls kept providing respite from the troubles of the age whilst nationalistic tendencies were endorsed. Whereas risqué songs such as 'Tuner's Oppor-tuner-ty' (Fred Coyne, 1870) linked the audience by innuendo, Music Hall became indicative of celebrating the Victorian trait of Imperialism. With such devastating loss of life in the horrendous conditions of trench warfare at The Battle of the Somme (1916) how could the Music Hall hope to keep up morale when soldiers returned as mere shells of their former selves?

Cinema and the Music Hall

Cinema began to shrug Music Hall from its complacency. Short movies became *cinemas of attraction*: the film, *Dan Leno Attempts to Master the Cycle* (GB 1900: dir. n/k.) was shown around the country's halls. As films' popularity grew, so halls incorporated them into their schedules. This finally became untenable, and entrepreneurs had theatres either newly-constructed to house the new art form, or halls were transformed to those capable of projecting images on a permanent basis.

With the political economy of Music Hall and Cinema interlinked, once a film had been bought the owner had to pay for the projector, projectionist and organist. Music Hall artistes, with their expenses and tantrums could now be 'relegated' to lower down the bill. The crossover between the two was apparent: Fred Karno made his Music Hall debut on the boards of The Crown and Cushion Public House, Nottingham in 1882, but he also wrote material for early cinema, including *Au Music Hall* (UK 1907: dir. n/k.) and *Early Birds* (UK 1907: Albert Bruett). Syd Walker (father of sixties and seventies exploitation filmmaker, Pete) lost his Lancashire dialect to become a Cockney-twang'd comedian with the catchphrase 'What would you do, chums?', making the successful transition to cinema via films such as *Royal Cavalcade* (UK 1935: Thomas Bentley and Herbert Brenon) and lending his vocal skills to the radio series, *Band Waggon* (BBC 1938-1940).

With the transition to sound, artistes had a platform to launch their own patter. Musical films are generally regarded as the sole invention of American cinema, with *The Jazz Singer* (USA, 1927: Alan Crosland), and *The Broadway Melody* (USA, 1929: Harry Beaumont) examples of tried-and-tested storylines being used to capture an audience. Britain looked towards cheaper modes of representation, employing talent from provincial Music Halls. These were cheap and cheerful outlets for Music Hall stars. Comedians like 'The Cheeky Chappie' Max Miller starred in *The Good Companions* (UK, 1933: Victor Saville) whilst Will Hay's *Those Were the Days* (UK, 1933: Thomas Bentley) celebrated Music Hall acts themselves.

These were budget-frugal and whilst narratives minimized allowing the ‘acts’ to perform, some films contained strands that permitted extensions or developments of the persona emerging away from the institution; Will Hay as his ‘seedy school-master’ in the comedic masterpiece, *Oh! Mr Porter* (UK 1936: Marcel Varnel) is probably the best example.

The coming of sound presented artistes with exploitable opportunities of the medium. Recorded sound brought diegetic material previously only available to a specific audience out to the masses. The ‘live’ performance of Music Hall was transitory whereas film could be watched repeatedly. The cross-consumption of a star as a viable economic commodity became an important reason as to why Music Hall talent was used in early British sound cinema. That cinema became a cultural force. Even though Dilys Powell (1948) argued, ‘There was no tradition of British films... The national characteristics of the British, whether good or bad, had not been fused into a national cinema’ (Powell 1948: 64), Music Hall cinema *does* establish a strand of British society in their films. Murphy writes:

It can be argued that the vigorous strands of popular culture evident in popular music hall based comedies of Gracie Fields, George Formby and Will Hay... do constitute a distinctive cinema of national identity. (Murphy 1997: 198)

Mundy (1999) demonstrates that films like *Elstree Calling* (UK, 1930: Andre Charlot, Jack Hulbert, Paul Murray and Alfred Hitchcock) broke free from Americanisms by incorporating homegrown stars in homegrown products (Mundy 1999: 142). It combined comedy and musical sketches with a narration based around a television set. This linking of film/radio/television and Music Hall, despite being an ‘unmitigated fuddle, which would have bored an infant’s school’ (Agate 1946: 59) showed that cross-media pollination occurred. Many *Elstree Calling* stars were part of the great Victorian Music Hall tradition. They were ‘ready made’ stars with a loyal audience. That cinema exploited Music Hall stars is important in showing how representations of a form of ‘national musicality’ could take place, which linked Britain together through these films. Benedict Anderson’s idea of an ‘imagined community’, in which “(Community) is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 1983: 2) does hold sway with how any country can never be wholly analogous. But Music Hall’s ‘cinema of attractions’ linked stars and routines into a national *esprit de corps*, the films reflecting contextual ideologies whilst navigating such social situations as mass unemployment in the Thirties.

This was found primarily in the films of two truly great iconic British Music Hall stars: Gracie Fields and George Formby. Their employment ensured that they were the ‘attraction’. With Formby it was his musical interludes, for Fields it was her embodiment of the working class female that encouraged audience attendance. The narrative mattered little. It was the ‘star’ and their ‘message’, that the populace wanted, however obliquely that message might manifest itself.

Gracie Fields, or 'Our Gracie', embodied the stereotypical Thirties 'Lancashire Lass' and played the same working class heroine that symbolised to her female audience direct cultural specificity. The dialect, the attitudes, the clothes, and her outlook on life was very much part of the 'North' in England.¹³ J.B. Priestley wrote: 'Listen to her for a quarter of an hour and you will learn more about Lancashire women and Lancashire than you would from a dozen books on these subjects' (Priestley 1976: 253). Fields' cultural background propels this representation back to the public as a means of negotiating conservative values to a downtrodden proletariat.

The thirties saw mass unemployment in Britain. Rumours of wars abroad were constantly in the public's minds. Fields and her 'never say die' attitude encouraged audiences to be prepared for sacrifice and communal kinship. This negates Anderson's *imagined community* and film titles such as *Looking on the Bright Side* (UK, 1932: Graham Cutts & Basil Dean), *Look Up and Laugh* (UK, 1935: Basil Dean) and the remarkable social commentary, *Sing As We Go* (UK, 1934: Basil Dean) showed that she had the power to coalesce an audience into a united and cohesive force through her cheerfulness. Her characters' courage and hope for a better life, usually achieved through a Utopian-collective approach of laughter over indifference and despair, provided respite to the masses in a decade that saw Britain slide into the Great Depression, unemployment rise to over three million, breadlines forming, and poverty on a mass scale.

Fields promoted working class ethics within a working class environment. She usually appeared in a gritty Northern town with woollen mills looming above dirty cobbled streets filled with the unemployed. This unglamorised world promoted ideas that working classes bonded together to ensure survival. For provincial audiences (the films were not successful in London) this reflected contextual social conditions, which found its output in Field's best-known film, *Sing As We Go*.

The film begins with the closure of Greybeck Mill. Gracie Platt (Fields) sings the title/anthem song, leading the workforce out of the factory. She rides on her bicycle to Blackpool, the cultural home of the northern working classes, with the promise of a boarding house job. Whilst there she laughs and creates laughter by falling into a pool, wrongly enters a Bathing Beauty competition and causes a riot with her rendition of *In My Little Bottom Drawer*. She returns to the mill with a new patent device that will alleviate unemployment for her fellow workers. She ends the film in communal triumph by leading her co-workers back to the mill.

Sing As We Go ends with a high-shot incorporating the townscape, Fields and her workers marching back to work in pride and jubilation. The crowd becomes representative of the audience, moving towards and then past the camera. *They are us* and as the crowd follow Fields to the factory gates and the image cuts to a close-up of her looking and winking directly into the camera. This momentous feeling of achievement and relationship with the character for the audience suggests that despite harsh economic times there *was* hope around the corner *if* the communal spirit

could successfully combine. The film was undoubtedly effective in capturing the zeitgeist of the era, and it reflects both the humour and optimism that people wanted to feel in such blighted, depressed, forgotten, downtrodden, and deprived areas that Fields' and the film represented. Justifiably impressive, the core of the movie is summed up when Fields sings:

Hee-hee, come on lads and lassies
The factory's opened again
Hee-hee, come on,
Ee, let's sing for it
A song and a smile make it right worthwhile
So sing-sing-sing-sing
As we go... a-long...

Fields' metaphorical representation of female emancipation formed one culturally specific ideal. Mass unemployment reigned, with the male workforce decimated, but females stood proud of their achievements by bonding together, as in motherhood, all aspects of societal kinship. Fields promoted the female as a force within the cultural specificity of the era. Her onscreen persona and her ability off-screen to 'reach out' to a mass audience created intimacy that not only derived from Music Hall traditions, but also remained faithful to her comedic roots in working class environs. Fields became part of a national identity and despite becoming a global star, did not betray her cultural roots, 'suggesting that by embodying national consensus she really did represent something the people wanted' (Richards 1984: 190).

From Williams' perspective, Fields' as a *persona* is part of Britain's *culture*. The films are cultural artifacts, and through them, common meanings that lead to an 'official consciousness' can be gleaned. Fields' *does* lead the workers back to the Mill, but she is still under the command of her superiors; the bourgeois have won out over the working classes. Whilst Williams would argue that the 'official consciousness' has won out (at least from a Marxist perspective), he stresses that society is created by the 'finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery' (Williams in Highmore 2001: 93) I would posit the notion that it is the three points – *experience*, *contact* and *discovery* – that exemplifies Fields (and therefore the Music Hall) as important in defining and re-defining the age in which they were made. The actress, her films, and the halls were fixed points within the public's affections. Each construction questioned, probed, and then commented upon the contextual world. For the masses, the concepts and their experiences around them provided a genuine sense of cultural belonging, of being part of an Utopian-collective: *of being alike* in a time of great social upheaval.

George Formby symbolised a different outlook upon the thirties. Already a well-established recording artist in his own right, with Decca's 1932 recording of *Chinese Blues* selling over 100,000 copies (Mundy 1999: 151), Formby was an economical commodity, with a loyal audience who were prepared to watch his movies, listen to his performances and buy his recordings.

Formby portrayed the Everyman – *us*. Whilst childlike and naïve, he was dependable, honest and hardworking. His characters represented ‘affirmations of working-class pleasures – pursuit of happiness, love and a little bit of money (which) sits alongside working-class ethics of working hard and the ethos of community’ (Mundy 1999: 152). Employed by John Blakely for the £8,000 production of *Off the Dole* (UK, 1935: Arthur Mertz), which grossed over £30,000 in the provinces (after never getting a release in London), Formby’s success ‘was extremely popular with regional audiences, not least because it addressed in its oblique comic manner the experiences of the unemployed during the depression’ (Mundy 1999: 152). Unlike the nationwide phenomenon of Music Hall, it was regional audiences that found favour towards Music Hall stars in films. London audiences demanded more prestigious productions to occupy their time. As producer Basil Dean (1973) said of Formby’s films, ‘...none of his films did worthwhile business in the West End of London, but elsewhere it was a case of ‘all seats sold’ most of the time’ (Mundy 1999: 152).

Through exercises such as the breathtakingly exciting *No Limit* (UK, 1935: Monty Banks), which sees George’s chimneysweep dreaming of winning the Isle of Man TT Motorcycle Race, they retained a semblance towards his regional roots. He lives out his fantasy leaving Wigan in the North West of England behind as his grandfather says: ‘Ee, when I was a lad we were content to stay where we came from’, calling the island ‘foreign’. Formby remembers his hometown through singing, *In a Little Wigan Garden*, performing it whilst blacked-up as a traditional minstrel in front of a crowded beach:

In a little Wigan garden,
Where the dandelions grow
With my sweet frowsy Flo,
Round the mulberry bush we’ll go

Under the Wigan palm trees
There I bring her up to scratch
We have such a game on the cucumber frame
I’d show her the cabbage patch.

When the morning mildew christens our shallots
Scented breezes coming from the chimney pots
In a little Wigan garden
When the soot is falling down
Oh, what a place, what a case
A disgrace to my hometown.

In a little Wigan garden with my little Wiganese
Getting stung with bumble bees
‘Neath the cabbage and the peas
‘Neath the Wigan water lilies
Where the drainpipe overflows
There’s my girl and me
She sits on my knees

And watch how the rhubarb grows.

By juxtaposing clichéd images of town-terraced houses with ‘soot falling down’ and ‘drainpipe overflows’ Formby created an identifiable world for the public. Though sentimentality was never far away in Formby’s repertoire, the emphasis on bodily attributes – though never *quite* mentioning them – became testament to his stature as a mediator between Music Hall, cinema and the audience. John Reith, director of the BBC, wrote condemningly of Formby and his song *When I’m Cleaning Windows* stating, ‘If the public wants to listen to Formby singing his disgusting little ditty, they’ll have to be content to hear it in the cinemas, not over the nation’s airwaves!’ (Bret 1999: 54). Formby used Donald McGill’s innuendo-laden, seaside postcard humour as a basis for his comedy/songs:

I go cleaning windows to earn an honest bob,
For a nosey parker it’s an interesting job
Now it’s a job that suits me,
A Window cleaner you will be
If you could see what I could see
When I’m cleaning windows.
The honeymooning couples too,
You should see them bill and coo
You’d be surprised at the things they do
When I’m cleaning windows.

In my profession I work hard
But I’ll never stop.
I’ll climb this blinking ladder
‘Til I get right to the top!

The blushing bride she looks divine.
The bridegroom he is doing fine,
I’d rather have his job than mine!
When I’m cleaning windows.

What makes the euphemistic lyrics enjoyable for the target audience is that not only were they laden with innuendo, and therefore *not* High Art, Formby used the medium as an unabashed display of his musical talent. The song has little narrative importance with performance winning over storyline cohesion. The ‘star vehicle’ story is constructed around the idea of the persona, not the storyline itself. The lyrics’ suggestiveness meant that audiences were sutured into this narrative and became part of an Utopian-collective activity whereby innuendo was used as a direct path to audience/persona empathy.

With war imminent Formby provided a vital component in British cinema’s war of propaganda. The Ministry of Information clearly understood the importance of comedy and entertainment as a valuable wartime tool saying, ‘If we renounced interest in entertainment as such, we might be deprived of a valuable weapon for getting across our propaganda’.¹⁴ From Williams’ perspective, Formby himself becomes part of the ‘official consciousness’ through the acts of others, the MoI.

With Formby becoming *Everyman*, his music and comic adventures dealt directly with threats of German invasion in his greatest success: *Let George Do It* (UK, 1940: Marcel Varnel). Formby plays George Hepplewhite, a hapless ukulele player who is mistaken for a British spy. He is sent to Norway to intercept German radio codes that are played via a local band at a certain time each evening.

George gets to play his most famous song, *Granddad's Flannelette Nightshirt*, which has nothing to do with the narrative, providing Formby with a showcase for his talent. But it does signify that when he plays the song to the assembled crowd of soldiers, sailors and other passengers in a train station bar, he (Low Art culture) and the crowd (society) become one body (shared culture) against a common enemy.

The other day I got an invitation
To go and join a nudist's colony
And as the life is healthy and in the open air
I trotted off as happy as can be

With my granddad's flannelette nightshirt
I walked up to the door.
Someone said, 'Now don't make a fuss!
Just take off your clothes and you'll be like us'.

I was bashful so I stayed by myself,
For with the girls I didn't want to flirt,
But when I was asleep,
They all came to have a peep
At my granddad's flannelette shirt!

Camera movements and edits are minimised until the image rests with him as the dominant focus propped up against the bar. When he plays his ukulele Formby looks directly at the camera, smiles and winks at *it* and therefore *us*. This Brechtian approach ensured commonality between performer and audience where both share the experience of performance. The filmmakers guaranteed a linking device between the two and again provide a sense of the Utopian-collective 'belonging' against a common enemy.

Whilst British cinema also produced such films as *The Thief of Baghdad* (UK, 1940: Michael Powell, Ludwig Berger and Tim Whelan) to provide the audience with an escape into the realms of fantasy and 'Magic Technicolour', propaganda was the order of the day. Documentaries like *Fires Were Started* (UK 1943: Humphrey Jennings), the class-critiquing *In Which We Serve* (UK 1942: David Lean and Noel Coward), *Millions Like Us* (UK 1943: Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat), which promoted the role of women in the workplace, and the jingoistic *Henry V* (UK, 1944: Laurence Olivier) ensured that the war effort was helped by cinema. With tickets surpassing one billion receipts per year, cinema had an important role in disseminating ideas society and culture during the conflict. Formby's films provided this role.

George's haplessness bridges Williams' ideas about both feelings and culture. Whilst the work of Formby (and therefore, by relation, Music Hall) has often been downplayed in terms of importance to ideas about British culture, the fact remains that contextually he was a box office sensation. His films reflected anxieties, traits, and outlooks of the era. His characters were representing the downtrodden masses; the narratives turned outwards to the audience, either via Formby nodding and smiling at the camera; the plots reflected both the disasters of economic depression in the Thirties *or* of the small man (Britain) standing up to authority (the Axis Powers) in the Forties. Through his films, Formby's and other Music Hall artistes in the canon, contribution to the war effort is often underestimated, as the subjects are deemed 'trivial'. The fact remains that they, and the Music Hall, were loved and adored by the British public. They offered the masses a place to go, to be with like-minded people, to be a part of the Utopian-collective. The films, the halls that had often been converted to house projectors, and the stars themselves provided arguably the last genuine collective-spirit (apart from, say, one-off events such as the World Cup Final or a royal wedding) that knitted together all elements of British society. They could be, as Williams wrote, part of the fabric of society, one that was seen as 'under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land'.

With the rise in popularity of both radio and television in the Fifties, the Music Hall and Music Hall cinema declined in fortunes. Formby's last film, *George in Civvy Street* (1946) was a box office flop; Fields had retired from cinema; The Crazy Gang had retreated back onto the boards; Will Hay had died. The halls were too expensive to maintain, the artistes too costly, and whilst Britain was retrenching further into consensus with its strict class divides still in evidence, Music Hall returned to radio and segued into the new, populist media of television. Music Hall stars could either be listened to, or watched from the comfort of the parlour. They were now *variety*.

Radio comedy was incredibly popular during the 1940s and 50s. People wanted laughter and radio helped alleviate peoples' troubles. Programmes such as *Billy Cotton's Band Show* (1946-68), and *Variety Bandbox* (1941-1953) launched many careers, including British comic actors Frankie Howerd, Tony Hancock and Peter Sellers. *Bandbox* remained firmly entrenched on the nation's radio waves, but *Band Show* moved into television in 1956, becoming a staple part of BBC Television's Saturday night line up providing a resolutely light entertainment production in which song and dance, comedy and famous guest stars (or those on their way to being famous, such as Petula Clark, Tommy Cooper, Matt Munro, Cliff Richard and Adam Faith amongst them) was a genuinely entertaining, unpretentious programme which audiences loved in their millions.

The BBC offered its viewers an unrepentantly nostalgic look at the Victorian and Edwardian Music Hall with the massively successful *The Good Old Days* (1953-83). Filmed in a genuine Music Hall (Leeds City Variety Theatre), which

provided an appropriate venue of plush drapes, and boxes in front of an audience who willingly dressed up in fashions of yesteryear, the show usually opened half-way through a chorus number with the audience singing. The impresario (Leonard Sachs) introduced acts with such hyperbolic exclamations as, 'Now, with verissimilitudeness, violent, ventriloquial, virtuosity, Mr...' and a traditional programme would follow: comedians, drag artists, singers, tumblers, and the audience who formed the 'core' to the programme. Each show ended with a tumultuous rendition of 'The Old Bull and Bush' from both acts and audience. The focus on the audience ensured that there was a genuinely warm and affectionate relationship between cast and audience, both in the theatre and at home.

ITV's Music Hall show, *Val Parnell's Sunday Night at the London Palladium* (1955-67 and 1973-4) was broadcast 'live'. Entertainers such as Tommy Trinder and Bruce Forsyth introduced each act. The first show starred Gracie Fields. The roster of acts would include dancers, acrobats or jugglers, ventriloquists, new comedians, and then during the second half 'big' stars such as Judy Garland, Bob Hope, The Rolling Stones and The Beatles would perform. The format was revived during the 1980s and 2000s as *Live From Her Majesty's* and *Tonight at the London Palladium* but neither was as successful as the original production, indicating that like its progenitor, Music Hall television had run its course.

However, as a final riposte, in 2007, ITV foistered the massively popular *Britain's Got Talent* onto the British public. Each week saw members of the public performing their variety acts to an assembled panel of professionals. *Svengali*-like Simon Cowell, with manicured hair, tight black sweater and cynical quips, judges contestants alongside his panellist cohort. Acts 'worthy' of progressing to the final have the chance of performing in front of Royal patronage at that year's Royal Variety Performance.

The competition has been won by Paul Potts (opera singer, 2007); George Sampson (child street-dancer, 2008); Diversity (dance troupe, 2009); Spellbound (gymnastic troupe, 2010); Jai MacDowall (singer, 2011) and the owner/dog act, Ashleigh and Pudsey (2012). With viewing figures for the final approaching 15 million people in the UK alone, it would appear that Britain still has, at its heart, an intrinsic desire to watch people perform Music Hall acts in front of them.

The format is not just for Britain. Germany's version, *Das Supertalent* (2007-) shares both similar formats and winners' accoutrement: Ricardo Marinello (opera singer, 2007); Michael Hirte (harmonica player, 2008); Yvo Antoni (Acting, 2009); Freddy Sahin-Scholl (often-falsetto opera singer also known as Galileo, 2010); Leo Rojas (panpipe player, 2011); Jean-Michel Aweh (pianist and singer, 2012). If one looks at a clip of Hirte on *YouTube*, he plays harmonica against a backdrop of a German castle – a clichéd and stereotypical image; for Rojas, his South American influence (his family were from Ecuador, he lived in Spain and moved to Berlin with his Polish wife) and his interpretation of 'El Condor Pasa' (an original Peru-

vian folksong re-interpreted by Simon and Garfunkel) indicates a multi-cultural aspect to the show. Both of these approaches are in keeping with Music Hall traditions. The fact that these are in the German version does not indicate that they are *German* per se; neither do the British acts mean that they are specifically *British* either. It would be churlish to argue that each country is separated in this phenomena; but on investigation, the acts are reflecting – in the main – the country of production.

Conclusion

By returning to Williams' idea of 'structures of feelings' and culture, it becomes apparent that the British Music Hall has, at its core, something intrinsically *British* about its construction that is simultaneously definable and indefinable. The acts, the songs, the innuendo-laden dialogue, the outlook, and even the reciprocal relationship between the audience, performer and stage can be clearly delineated as part of a long British tradition that has taken elements of carnival and burlesque into its structure.

However, the 'feeling' is that the British Music Hall, with all its foibles and celebrations, is both part of Britain's long theatrical tradition and 'outside' it. Whilst it does not aim for the 'superior' heights of 'High Art' and legitimate theatre, it found its niche within the alehouses, tawdry taverns, and entrepreneurial-owned establishments up and down the country. It was this direct linking of audience to profit-making that is at the cornerstone of Music Hall's rise to prominence. The majority of the public, the working classes that fuelled Britain's rise to global importance during and beyond the Industrial Revolution, wanted to be entertained. They wanted to be with like-minded people, who celebrated *their* culture, however 'low art' or, indeed, 'trivial' it was deemed.

To end with Williams' work, if one takes his 'social' definition as the tool with which to dissect the concept of the importance of British Music Hall to British culture, it becomes readily apparent that the whole panoply of acts, stars, ideas, comics, songs, audience participation, *et al.*, is based upon ideas of experience. One thing *is* clear: whilst Britain has produced such brilliant wordsmiths as Wilde and Shaw, the fact that the Music Hall is still around today, albeit in a transformed state as The Royal Variety Performance, Cowell's enterprises, pantomime or the Summer Season's up and down the coast at places like Blackpool or Brighton is testament to its marked resilience in the nation's affections. For those reasons Music Hall is a *vital* part of the structure of feeling that forms Britain's populist heritage. As such, Music Hall should be celebrated.

Dr Steven Gerrard is a Film and Visual Culture lecturer based at University of Wales Trinity Saint David. His interests include populist fare such as the Music

Hall, the British seaside and postcards, British 'low culture' cinema, *Status Quo* and *Doctor Who*. He has appeared on British national television, heard on British national radio, and written two published chapters about his doctorate subject: the *Carry On* films. E-mail: s.gerrard@tsd.ac.uk

Notes

- ¹ Public Record Office, H045/173738/4 taken from a 1909 Home Office memo of the Lord Chamberlain regarding Music Hall sketches.
- ² For information about this view please see: Willson Disher (1938); Scott (1946); Mander & Mitchenson (1965)
- ³ Cromwell, Thomas (publisher and date not known) *History and Description of the Parish of Clerkenwell (1828)* (London) taken from Cheshire 1974: 13-25.
- ⁴ For a detailed examination of New Spring Gardens/Vauxhall Gardens' history please visit: (Author not known) www.vauxhallgardens.com
- ⁵ Transcribed from the shorthand manuscript by Rev. Mynors Bright, and edited by Henry B. Wheatley. Please see: <http://infomotions.com/etexts/gutenberg/dirs/4/1/8/4189/4189.htm>
- ⁶ For an insight into what acts appeared at Vauxhall Gardens please see: http://www.vauxhall-gardens.com/vauxhall_gardens_performers_page.html (Author not known).
- ⁷ In 1861 Charles Morton had constructed the Canterbury Music Hall in Lambeth, and the Oxford Music Hall in London's West End. (Bailey 1986: x).
- ⁸ Bailey points to two progenitors of criticism against the Music Hall in its infancy: Frederick Charrington, a former brewer turned zealot, and Mrs. Ormiston Chant a moral crusader who campaigned against prostitution. (Bailey 1986: xii).
- ⁹ As Wilton states at the Proprietor's Benefit Show (12th February 1862) quoted in Honri (1985: 1).
- ¹⁰ This is particularly true when, alongside the rise of the Music Hall, the saucy seaside postcard tradition of Donald McGill and others, lampooned in both verbal and visual dexterity the targets listed here. McGill shows mothers-in-law to be large chested, barrel-bottomed, hair curler-wearing, rolling pin waving battleaxes; sexual frustration came about through either the mother-in-law curtailing sex (the couple are afraid of her catching them 'at it'), or the older man chases the younger girl as the wife looks on because *they* don't have sex (often the ten screaming children around the wife are shown to emphasise this point); and, drunkenness happens to males – usually the henpecked husband, vicar, magistrate, middle-class buffoon.
- ¹¹ Marie Lloyd is arguably the progenitor of that other great female Music Hall star, Gracie Fields, or 'Our Gracie' as her adoring public affectionately knew her. Traits of Lloyd are passed through the Music Hall directly into British cinema via Fields herself and then in the caricatures played out in the *Carry On* films by Joan Sims and Barbara Windsor.
- ¹² The artistes sang such songs as *It's a Long Way to Tipperary* and *Pack Up Your Troubles* to the attendant males, egged on by their sweethearts to fight for King and Country.
- ¹³ I would suggest that the reader looks towards such programmes as *Coronation Street* as modern-day examples for comparison.
- ¹⁴ Policy Committee Minutes, 26th July 1940, INF 1/849.

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‘We Have Become Niggers!’: Josephine Baker as a Threat to Viennese Culture

By Roman Horak

Abstract

Early 1928 Josephine Baker, by that time a famous dancer and singer, came to Vienna to be part of a vaudeville show. Even before her arrival the waves went high – her possible presence in Vienna caused a major uproar there. Various commentators constructed an image of Baker that was based on the assumption that she was seriously attacked on the values of traditional European culture and, furthermore, true Viennese culture.

In my essay, where I address the Viennese *Negerskandal* more directly, I explore the various discourses that produced this ‘event’ along the interface of mass culture/avant-garde and high/low culture. It is evident that these events centre on a construction of ‘blackness’ and of ‘black cultural expression’; it goes without saying that racism and sexism play a central role.

I will, however, try to contextualize the ‘nigger scandal’ in a broader setting: against the background of Vienna in the late 1920s the perceived threat of ‘Americanisation’ will be discussed.

Keywords: Blackness, Viennese culture, racism, Josephine Baker, Americanisation.

Introduction

On Thursday 9 February 1928, Karl Kraus held one of his famous lectures in the Architektenvereinsaal, the hall of the architects' association in Vienna. Kraus, whose favourite target in those days was still the Chief of Police, Schober, couldn't resist addressing recent events that had been reported by the National Socialist *Deutsch-österreichische Tages-Zeitung* under the heading *Negerskandal* ('nigger scandal') (*Deutsch-Österreichische Tages-Zeitung* 1928).

The 'scandal' itself was unleashed by the first Viennese stage appearance of the young singer and dancer Josephine Baker, who had been catapulted to stardom in Paris. Hot on the heels of Baker's performance came further causes of outrage: the successful premiere of Ernst Krenek's opera *Jonny spielt auf*, and the perceived threat to (German) Viennese culture represented by jazz – 'nigger music'.

It is in fact the case that Josephine Baker was presented over and over again as the Other of urban European modernity. 'As the embodiment of "life", "nature", "wantonness", the primitive took the guise of the repressed Other of civilisation', writes Nancy Nenno (1997: 150), adding with reference to Marianna Torgovnick that the 'primitive' does not constitute a singular, monolithic quantity but is rather a creation of modernity that takes various forms in response to specific needs (Torgovnick 1990). This 'primitive' has many aspects, ranging from 'threatening' through 'fascinating' to 'amusing', as Nenno has shown with reference to the culture of inter-war Berlin. 'The evaluation of each depends on the degree to which it could be assimilated into modern culture, as well as its potential threat to that order.' (Nenno 1997: 150) I will bear these considerations in mind in the discussion of the production and encoding of Josephine Baker in Vienna, although my concerns are admittedly not as broad.

In the following paper, where I address some distinctive moments of the Viennese *Negerskandal* more directly, I explore some of the discourses that produced this 'event' along the interface of mass culture/avant-garde and high/low culture. It is evident that these events centre on a construction of 'blackness' and of 'black cultural expression'; it goes without saying that racism and sexism play a central role. It remains to discuss these issues in the specific context of Vienna in the nineteen-twenties, Vienna as metropolis, ex-metropolis, almost-metropolis, Vienna a mere six months after the Palace of Justice Fire and six years before the Austro-Fascist putsch.

Following the overwhelming success of the 'Revue Nègre' in Paris – it ran from October until the end of November at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and completed its run in a smaller theatre at the end of December – Caroline Dudley planned an extended European tour, to include Moscow. But Baker had already accepted a contract with the 'Folies Bergère', whose rehearsal schedule would not allow for an extended tour, and so the winter of 1926 saw only isolated performances in Brussels and Berlin.

The first trip to Berlin was not only a huge success, reaping great acclaim for the 'Revue Nègre', but signified a change of track for Josephine Baker's future European career. Max Reinhardt, who had already seen her perform in New York in 1925, offered to train her as a 'proper actress' and wanted to keep her in Berlin. As she recalled a half-century later, she decided after some hesitation to stay with the 'Folies Bergère' and so to return to Paris, primarily because parts of the music for her new variety show were to be composed by none other than Irving Berlin (Baker et al. 1997: 49). Simplifying matters somewhat, one could say that in this confrontation between entertainment and high culture, music, jazz and spontaneous rhythmic dancing won out over the art of acting. This did nothing to dispel the sense that high culture was somehow under threat, as we shall see.

Baker's reputation as a singer and dancer had by this time reached Vienna. In a supplement to the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, entitled simply 'Josephine', Moriz Scheyer (1927) sought to account for the Baker phenomenon. This feature sparked off a discussion that was to reach a climax over a year later.

Scheyer was reporting from Paris, as is clear from the way in which his first-hand account does not just narrate the events but actually pinpoints their location. Josephine Baker is a ruler, an empress; Scheyer cannot resist relating this image to that of another Empress Josephine, namely Napoleon's wife.

Baker rules supreme, but only by the grace of snobbery: she holds court and all of Paris pays homage to her, and her residence, besides the Folies Bergère, the most venerable of all the Parisian music-halls, is 'Josephine Baker's Imperial', a 'boîte de nuit', a night-spot in the Rue Pigalle, that street that's so sober and depressing by day and that serves as an unholy route for all the pilgrims of Montmartre.

It is evident from the start of the text that the author takes no real pleasure in the Baker phenomenon. In the second column, the grounds for his displeasure are made more explicit:

Josephine Baker has so far had great success in exploiting the nigger-boom of our jazz age: she set her sights on conquering Paris, and her skin colour alone has guaranteed that she'll pot the black.

The cheap racist wordplay – more offensive instances of which we'll encounter further on – almost distracts the reader's attention from Scheyer's actual objections. The author's anxiety and displeasure is occasioned by the 'nigger-boom of our jazz age'. He nevertheless treats the reader to a full account of the impression made on him by Josephine Baker's performance, and confesses freely that 'the tropical Venus' has greatly disappointed him. Given Scheyer's obviously racist sentiments, this comes as no surprise.

To be sure, she has a barbaric appeal that's immediately striking. She exudes a cannibalistic, voracious sensuality as she tumbles about the stage under blaring lights, dressed in nothing but her own hair, combed down and shining with oil. To be sure, she is reminiscent all at once of an untouched Amazon of the jungle and a grotesque, unruly clown, like one of the Graces but more supple and bestial, exuberant as a young ragamuffin (...) But that is all there is to it. For what Josephine Baker offers

to the public by way of an 'artistic performance' is scant at best. Her greatest art seems to reside in turning her lower parts uppermost in a way that's agile as an ape and monstrously lewd (...) This all happens to the deafening din of an uninhibited jazz band, and to top it all Josephine makes onomatopoeic noises that are so deceptively convincing that one is tempted to hold one's nose as well as stop one's ears. Art? 'Art' that's paid for to the tune of thousands of francs....

Moriz Scheyer may end the paragraph with four ellipsis points, but he leaves us in no doubt as to what he means. He is concerned with art, and he can't recognise art in the performance of an 'Amazon of the jungle'. And because that which isn't intended as 'art' cannot be recognised as 'art', it poses a threat to 'art'. What the author senses here is the threat to the clear, neat boundary drawn between high culture and entertainment. His only consolation is to refer to the 'fools' who are repeatedly duped by this kind of thing.

An anonymous contributor to the same newspaper a few days later feels moved to draw different conclusions. 'Negroes', runs the heading of this two-column piece, which seeks to go further than Scheyer's feature. To begin with, the unnamed writer refers to the Josephine Baker feature, and goes on to formulate the following point of view: 'The case of Josephine Baker is no exception, but rather an example and symbol of the taste of our times, of an age that has lost its way and that flees from itself into raw exteriority' (*Neger* 1927).

The 'seemingly global understanding' reached after the war has 'extended our mental horizons beyond the world of European concepts and sensibilities', but to the author this represents a serious impoverishment:

Literature and music, dancing and entertainment have become black arts, and this en-niggerment (*Vernegerung*) is the last gasp in the development or rather decadence of the European. The cacophonies of the jazz band strike up the death dance of European culture, a death dance that unfolds with the speed of a film in the unrhythmical contortions of the Charleston and the Black Bottom.

What remains implicit in these pieces is to be formulated with increasing clarity, as we shall see. Europe's declining significance in the wake of the First World War has led to a westward shift in international power relations towards a new power-centre: the United States. This political development is expressed by these writers in terms of a philosophy of culture. The 'sacrifice of Europe in the World War and through the Peace Treaties' has led, so the argument goes, to the eclipse of the idea of Europe, an idea that has functioned 'since the battle of Marathon' as a 'cultural and moral concept, an idea and ideal that the best of all generations have upheld consciously and the nameless millions have served unknowingly yet with instinctive pride'.

Stripped of 'her ideal standard', the community of Europe faces an era of 'unprecedented selfishness', resulting in 'unbridled materialism. [...] The generation of 1918 did not know itself, did not live as itself, lived only for its labour, which was no true work but merely business.'

The phenomenon so vehemently decried by this unnamed writer was already known at the turn of the century as ‘Americanism’, a term later to be gradually replaced by ‘Americanisation’. The ‘Americanisation’ of culture manifested itself in the ‘jazz bands’, it expressed itself in the ‘unrhythmical contortions of the Charleston and the Black Bottom’, acted out ‘with the speed of a film’. This new kind of spectacle gave Europe something to worry about, and it originated in the USA.

The reference to ‘the speed of a film’ is no coincidence. During the twenties, the European film industry came under increasing pressure. Mass products from Hollywood met with growing popularity, and the European ‘art of film’ began to experience difficulties, especially in terms of its market value.¹

The ‘Americanisation’ of culture stood for the loss of the sublime, the true, the beautiful, the good, in favour of the wild and vulgar, in short: the popular. The term used by the unnamed writer clearly indicates his viewpoint. After the demise of Europe as a true standard or idea, the continent was ‘ripe for – *Vernegerung* (en-niggerment).’

Using repetitive structures to drive the point home, the author continues:

And so it came about that men worshipped the shameless nakedness of a negress; so it came about that the classical ideal of beauty embodied in the Apollo of Belvedere succumbed to the bullish neck and bestial chin of the fistfighter; (...) boxing matches are the spiritual and aesthetic climax of sensation in our era, the riot of a jazz band is its melody, the jerks of the Black Bottom its rhythm. (*Neger* 1927)

Sport may not have been an import from America, but it nonetheless sat well with the image of the new mass culture. There is a double emphasis on sport here, consolidating the popular culture argument, which is further backed up with a reference to the ‘Tarzan’ craze. By the end of his text, the author, who chose to remain unnamed, throws out a last despairing word, more a verdict than a conclusion: ‘We have become niggers.’

One final point needs to be clarified. When we speak of Baker as a ‘product of mass culture’, then this does not assume that the *phenomenon* Josephine Baker is essentially and merely a result of the external forces that define her. Josephine Baker herself played with her roles along the axes of ‘race’ and ‘gender’. By over-emphasising and simultaneously retracting them through irony and clownishness, she played with these roles in a distinctive way that can be seen in the context of ‘expressive black cultures’ as a manifestation of the ‘counter culture of modernity’ (Baumann). Following Paul Gilroy, I seek a perspective on these cultures that goes beyond their reduction to an expression of an ‘essential, unchanging, sovereign racial self’ or an endless, purely textual play of ‘racial signification’ (Gilroy 1993: 132).

Baker Appears in the Revue *Black on White*: The Event Itself

We have already seen how the role of the press has been mentioned several times as regards Baker, accused of spreading publicity for her, or even worse, of exercising opinion terror and leading the masses astray. These are familiar accusations, which today are generally levelled at the television. The press in Vienna in the 1920s really had developed into a modern medium, and the ‘case’ of Josephine Baker can give us a couple of indications of this.

On one hand, most magazines and newspapers carried out a heated debate for or against Josephine Baker, which in the final instance was conducted as a classical political debate – here the party newspapers, but also the *Neue Freie Presse* are particularly relevant. On the other hand, Baker also featured in forms of a new, modern entertainment press that was no less present in Vienna at that time. Star reports on the arrival of Baker in Vienna, on her various pets, her likes and dislikes etc are offered to the reader. The *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung* featured a ‘Josephine Baker-Bulletin’, which reported on the star’s sleepless nights as much as on her ten suitcases of clothes, which contained amongst other things 137 outfits, 196 pairs of shoes, and 64 kilos of powder (*Josephine Baker-Bulletin* 1928). The report is illustrated with two caricatures, one showing Baker and one showing her maid. The *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, which as we have seen was still writing about ‘en-niggerment’ a year before, published an interview including a photograph of Baker in private (*Josephine Baker in Wien* 1928).

Der Montag mit dem Sportmontag landed a special scoop. The newspaper managed to get the ‘sole printing rights in Vienna’ for Baker’s memoirs, which had just appeared in German, and published passages from these in several installments beginning on 6 February (*Der Montag mit dem Sportmontag* 1928).

To cut a long story short, these examples show that the media production of popular cultural heroes (and heroines) existed in Vienna in the 1920s as a modern phenomenon. It is however not just the content of these reports which constitute their modernity, it is also the way in which they are presented – the witty interview, the caricature, the photograph, the layout, the outsized blocked headlines etc. These modes of presentation are all clearly very different from the traditional modes of newspaper reporting.

Whatever the case, Baker’s actual performance had been prepared for in the best possible way. The revue *Black on White* was premiered in the Johann Strauß Theatre on 1 March. As practically all the important newspapers reported on it, they can be used to gain an impression of the spectacle. The revue consisted of a total of 42 scenes or ‘pictures’, put in order by Messrs Beda, Florian and Bekessy. Baker performed in only five of these. It must have been a pretty colourful affair, as the *Arbeiterzeitung* states: ‘The succession of scenes confused the eyes and ears and had no order at all; the last vestige of intellectual content, a linking plot, was dispensed with entirely’ (*Arbeiterzeitung* 1928). The *Kleines Blatt* was also

rather sceptical. Baker's performance was described as a very interesting variety turn, the turn of the 'eccentricity dancer' Nina Payne is praised, as she managed always to preserve 'ladylike grace despite her unbelievable flexibility. Otherwise the revue *Black on White* has been created by a production company with a speed that exceeds the usual measure of tastelessness and pretension. Girls, glittering gold on naked female flesh, noise, false sentimentality, ineffective humour, borrowed scenes, all just mixed up together. (...) (*Die Josephine-Baker Revue* 1928).

On the other hand, the *Neue Freie Presse* reviewer Emil Kläger was in raptures over the revue and particularly smitten by Baker: 'Such a surprise: this women is negro kraal and the latest in Parisian fashion at one and the same time, Africa and boulevard by night' (*Die Baker tanzt* 1928).

We do not need to go into his description in any further detail as it largely repeats what had been so lavishly celebrated about Baker in Paris a few years earlier. Alongside the foreign stars, Viennese celebrities such as Fritz Imhoff and Armin Berg performed in the revue; thus Baker was combined with a 'spring scene in the woods, during which Easter Bunny Girls dance the Charleston and the bells of spring ring' (*Arbeiterzeitung* 1928). In the end then, it was in fact Viennese.

After the exotics came the Europeans, 'Return to Schubert', a revue in a revue, to which no lesser man than Hugo Thimig speaks the prologue, introducing played, danced and acted Schubert songs (...) Thus the primal instincts of Baker were dissolved in Viennese 'Drei-Mäderl-Haus' mood. On the waves of the Swanee river followed 'I heard a stream rushing ... (*Die Josephine Baker Revue* 1928) [or better for a foreign audience: Thus the primal instincts of Baker were dissolved in a mood of Viennese Schubert nostalgia and the waves of the Swanee river were followed by the burbling of a Viennese brook].

Let's just have a closer look at these diverting images for a moment, later we will examine the revue *Black on white* in more detail. First of all, let us establish where the discourse strands are that I attempted to present in detail in the history of the Negerkandal in Vienna. In the introduction I said I wanted to tell this story in such a way that the different ways of dealing with the 'Other' became visible. Most of the strands of discourse which were formulated around Baker's case have already been sketched out.

One ran along the interface high culture/mass culture (Baker, that's not art, it's just wild jumping around, at best – slightly – erotic); then there was a second strand, the racist one, which as we have seen was not only to be found in the extreme nationalist camp. The variation on this strand to be found amongst the Christian Socials was combined with a clearly defined anti-modernism.² I claimed that they tended to have recourse to a 'timelessly popular' variation of what is considered typically Viennese, which was not the case for racists on the offensive. Aggressive racists were not concerned with 'good old Vienna' but with a modern – if we take the term to mean modern terror – ethnically pure Germany. (Modern dance is not the evil, the real evil are the Jews who dance it.) Finally we looked at the strand which could be described as the mass media encoding of Baker as a

product, and discovered impulses of modernism in the Viennese press. This in turn gives insight into the perceptions and forms of discourse of a political and cultural instance of modernisation, which so vitally influenced Vienna between the wars. We have arrived at the Social Democrats. In an article formulated along anti-capitalist lines published the day after the premiere, they sum up their attitude to Josephine Baker:

She was physically well developed (...), there was no doubt about it, she was also not really wearing very much: a loin cloth – bananas of all things, – a little jewellery and nothing besides. But her childlike high spirits, her scallywag freshness, her completely un-erotic gaiety meant that anything immoral or inflammatory was completely missing, (...) instead of a black she-devil, an unproblematic negro lassie jumped around on the stage (*Die nackte Frau und das nackte Geld* 1928).

Ernst Fischer found similar words to describe Baker in the article from the *Arbeiterwillen* that I have already quoted. For him the ‘beautiful negro was too natural, too uncomplicated, too un-erotic for the Viennese’ (*Arbeiterwille* 1928).

One is tempted to ask which show these reviewers had actually seen. A woman comes to Vienna who inspires freethinkers to go into raptures of ecstasy and Christians to organise a spate of penitential masses by openly presenting her sexuality on the stage, and the Social Democrats report on ‘an un-erotic, rascally, fresh negro lassie’. The nature of this strand of the discussion is clear enough and need only be named, it is one of de-erotising and de-sexualising. If sexuality or rather eroticism has to be equated with bourgeois decadence, the only non-racist encoding of the phenomenon of the black woman Josephine Baker is recourse to puritan squeaky-cleanliness. Fresh, a scallyway – a sexually neutral image is created to combat the conservatives’ discourse of over-sexualisation.

But there were also examples of more laid-back approaches. Already at the beginning of February, as the affair was really taking off, a short, two column commentary can be found in the *Wiener Allgemeinen Zeitung*, which – carried by the spirit of the liberal Jewish Viennese feuilleton – tries to offer a corrective. Against de-erotising on the one hand, and over-sexualisation on the other, but also against the discourse of art versus non-art, this article situates the Baker revue where it should have been all along.

Vienna wants to stay a cosmopolitan city, begs everywhere to be seen as such. In a cosmopolitan city however, high, pure art has the same right to exist as entertainment. And this – and nothing else – is what Josephine Baker is all about (*Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung* 1928).

Baker as Code, or: Don’t let Vienna Become Paris

The *Revue Nègre*, which had been causing an uproar in Paris since 2 October 1925, but also *Black on White* belong to the same genre. The revue was different from variety, although it was a related form of entertainment,³ and it had been growing in importance as variety declined in Europe’s cities (See also – classic-

contemporary – Möller-Bruck 1902), initially during the first decade of the century, but above all in the 1920s. In the form of what was known as the ‘Ausstattungsrevue’ (a show in which the sets and costumes were more important than the actual content), the revue was to all accounts also popular in Vienna after World War One. It had one major feature in common with variety: it was organised into ‘numbers’ or ‘turns’. Whilst the usual variety programme didn’t require a director, however, the revue couldn’t do without one. ‘He had to be capable of matching the quality of the individual scenes, making sure each performance had verve and charm, and balancing the relationship between sets, ensemble scenes and individual appearances’ (Jansen 1990: 200). For a successful revue it was particularly important to grab the audience’s attention and fire their enthusiasm with suitably impressive sets. The optical side of the whole production was mostly much more important than the individual scenes and numbers themselves. Whilst in variety the basic elements music, dance, comedy and acrobatics were indispensable, ‘producers staging a revue tended to engage dance and song numbers above all, which they combined with scenes played by cabaret artists and actors’ (Jansen 1990: 201) It should be noted here that song and dance took up more of the American variety shows than was usual in their European equivalents. This was to play a crucial role in the development of popular music in the United States (Tilgner 1993: 102).

So far so good: this is the outline of a model revue. In Vienna in the 1920s however they were presented to audiences in many different variations. Alongside the ‘Ausstattungsrevue’ there was also the satirical ‘Kleinkunst’ revue (shows played to audiences of less than 50, often in cellar theatres), the revue operetta and the variety revue. Revues were performed in many venues, but also in places which had actually been intended for variety performances, the Apollo and the Ronacher.

A particularly successful example of the genre was the ‘Ausstattungsrevue’ *Wien, gib acht*, written by Bruno Hart and the young Karl Farkas and directed by Emil Schwarz. It was performed several hundred times between 1922 and 1924 (see also Eberstaller 1974: 88; Eberstaller 1990: 102ff). Amongst other artists, this revue featured Hans Moser – here he performed the ‘Dienstmann’ [porter] sketch that was to make him famous – and Lilian Harvey, at that time not yet a film star. The particularly Viennese nature of this revue has been described by Eberstaller:

According to its nature, the revue was not actually a theatre play, but in Vienna it was often made into such to a certain extent by adding a plot which ran all the way through; it incorporated at least the skeleton of an operetta plot with conflict and finale (Eberstaller 1974: 93).

As typical examples Gerhard Eberstaller refers to the revue operetta *Journal der Liebe* by Karl Farkas and Fritz Grünbaum, for which Egon Neumann had composed the music, performed in 1925 in the ‘Bürgertheater’, and *Wien lacht wieder*, also by the duo Farkas/Grünberg, which ran from 1925 to 1927 in the ‘Stadtthea-

ter' (ibid.). In his guide to Vienna written at this time – which was published in a series with the title *What isn't in Baedeker* – Ludwig Hirschfeld airs the secret of the huge success of this revue, in a witty description.

It features, he writes, 'the right mix of decorative and costume luxury, young women, old jokes. Lack of toilets and superfluity of bosoms. Add to this girls, dances, hits, everything which today's sensibility desires' (Hirschfeld 1927: 98).

Operetta and revue, either in a hybrid mixed form, or taken separately, had a considerable influence on (popular) entertainment on offer in Vienna, alongside cinema, which was becoming ever more dominant. Operetta stars and producers of course complained about their waning importance, warning that the special nature of Vienna's golden operetta' would be lost. Even the periodical *Anbruch* which otherwise dedicated itself to serious Modernism,⁴ could not resist intervening in the debate. An editorial statement at the beginning of a new year in 1929 declares that in future the periodical will extend its field of activity and will 'energetically address the problem of easy listening music' (*Anbruch* 1929a: 3). And in actual fact, *Anbruch* published in number three of that very same year – a number dedicated to 'easy listening music' – three articles on operetta. Amongst these was an article by Ernst Krenek, entitled 'Operette und Revue. Diagnose ihres Zustandes' [Operetta and revue. A diagnosis of their current state], in which Krenek predicts the end of the operetta and interprets the revue as a sign of the 'complete lack of imagination of today's average person', because it 'even saves him the effort of erotic fantasising, which until now had been seen as something enjoyable, by showing him women as he would like to see them without having to invest any imaginative energy' (*Anbruch* 1929b: 105). But Krenek would not have had the great success he enjoyed with his opera *Jonny spielt auf* had he not been willing and able to significantly relativise this cultural pessimism (stemming from Adorno?) towards the end of his text. There he refers to American hit music, where occasionally 'excellent things are achieved', and he goes so far as to venture a declaration:

In any case, I believe it is an excellent exercise for every composer of serious music to try and write a hit melody every now and then. The feeling for precision, for a line which 'sits' well, for clear, comprehensible, undiluted and catchy formulations of an idea are better sharpened in this genre than anywhere else. (*Anbruch* 1929b: 107ff)

Let's just take a look at where we have arrived, nearly at the end of this paper, bearing in mind the background I have sketched to the Viennese Baker revue – and also bearing in mind the differences to the successful Paris production *Revue Nègre*. Girls (half naked) and golden glitter are reminiscent of operetta in Vienna, rather than being presented in all too lascivious a light, and Hofrat (Privy Councillor) Hugo Thimig declaims the prologue to a series of Schubert scenes. Immoderately erotic, expressive dance in Paris, in Vienna Easter bunny girls dancing Charleston and 'Drei-Mäderl-Haus' Schubert nostalgia. There the *Revue Nègre*, here *Black on White*, the differences are easily discerned already at the level of

how the performance presents itself. The only similarity is the star, Josephine Baker.

What can we conclude from this? First of all, that the Viennese production, contrary to first impressions, was a Baker revue after all, but a Baker revue which had been designed in and for Vienna. One could argue that the 'Schubert section' was a result of the Schubert year and was therefore merely a parenthesis informed by opportunistic considerations. I would like to put forward an alternative explanation.

In a Viennese context, even a Negerrevue, which had been planned around the international Parisian star Josephine Baker still remained a Viennese revue, or rather, it was made into such. It was made into such because even a modern medium like the revue, which owed so much to film, had to position itself as 'Viennese'. References to a general Viennese 'backwardness' are not enough to explain the situation, long-term urban encoding comes to bear on the differences here.

Let's take a look back at a short feuilleton piece [by Henri Robert Vigny] that appeared in the years before the First World War. Vigny attempted to draw conclusions from a comparison of the different nightlife in the urban centres of Paris, London, Berlin and Vienna. Alongside the repeated emphasis on how safe one is in Vienna at night above all as compared to Paris, it also contains attributions which can be described as classical. In London there is no public nightlife, everything is 'absorbed by members only clubs'. 'In Paris it is above all Montmartre which has experienced a real boom over the last couple of years. Under the Second Empire it was still a infamous district, inhabited at most by the bohème, today it has become a meeting place for all of Parisian high society and foreigners looking for a good time in Paris' (Vigny 1911).⁵

According to this article however, Berlin was the city where the nightlife had taken on dimensions that were incomprehensible for the inhabitants of other urban centres. Nevertheless, Berlin's nightlife lacked light-heartedness and serenity and this could be explained as follows:

In Berlin, where work has to be so dreadfully exact, people are forced to amuse themselves to ease the paralysing effects of the drive to earn. This can be seen from the fact that, in the places where Berlin's jet set meets socially, strong spirits are the preferred alcoholic beverages. Cabarets and more or less American bars are filled to bursting with men in evening dress, but it is immediately apparent that their jollity is unnatural, that their nerves are strained in the continual struggle for survival. (*Kunst und Sport* 1911)

Just to round off this picture: in Vienna, according to this journalist, jollity, waltz, operetta and – the coffee house rule.

Back to the 1920s. If Lionel Richard discerns an Americanisation of the entertainment industry in Europe's cities during this period, although he is thinking first and foremost of Paris and Berlin, one can still apply this to Vienna, even if its

application must be somewhat limited (Richard 1993: 216ff).⁶ The key word here is jazz.⁷

‘The Americanisation which took over Europe’s theatres consists of nudity set to the passionately convulsive rhythms of jazz. Legs were everything, voices didn’t matter anymore’, Richard writes looking back (1993: 219). His historical judgement sounds strangely contemporary. Even in Paris the new forms of entertainment had their critics – I have already mentioned the mixed reviews which greeted the *Revue Nègre* – I am especially interested here however in the particular logic and structure of Vienna’s way of dealing with them. The following two examples, completely different, but from the same period, should serve to help outline how a ‘landscape of taste’ was formed, against the backdrop of which and as symptoms of the same Josephine Baker’s performance – as a scandal – was able to become effective and visible.

Firstly, the guide to Vienna that we have already looked at, by Ludwig Hirschfeld (1927), published in 1927. A liberal, feuilletonistic tone underlies the text, it was aimed at foreign (probably mostly German!) visitors to Vienna, and presents a familiar picture of the city. Even in new contexts (shopping, the football pitch) the ‘Viennese temperament’ is noticeable, even the night clubs and bars would seem to be populated by it, if it weren’t for ‘jazz’. Hirschfeld sees this ‘mechanical noise’ (1927: 153) as a clear sign of modernisation, and writes:

Jazz is music of the night, of the late afternoon, it provides a rhythm for high society, it makes noise for legs which have been enlisted to work in the crazy service of the Charleston, its melody is disquiet, haste, nervousness, big city, it drives people forward, whereas the old Viennese waltz melody put them back into gently reflective moods. (Hirschfeld 1927: 111)

Hirschfeld finds space for both, for waltz and for jazz. After all, as the author himself informs us, a metropolis needs ‘the Other’ if it is to be understood as such (and sold as such to tourists). In the end, tradition dominates anyway. After the nightclubs and bars, the reader (female as well as male; Hirschfeld addresses himself alternately to the ‘dear lady’ and – with a wink – to her ‘esteemed husband’, presenting the various amusements on offer as gender specific) is introduced to the ‘real Heuriger’. [the genuine Viennese wine watering hole].

The tone which characterises Felix Dörmann’s melodramatic colportage novel *Jazz* published in 1925 is quite different (Dörmann 1925). The title, *Jazz. Wiener Roman*, is programmatic, the story is one of love, passion, cocaine, war profiteers, gamblers, black marketeers and high-minded (but weak) aristocratic losers, the style is rhythmic, quick, even hectic in parts.

Vienna’s (and Austria’s) economic crisis at its most critical point forms the backdrop of the novel, and Dörmann makes its effects culturally visible.

The shrieking of women could be heard from bars hung with heavy curtains with bars on the doors and windows, accompanied by the jerky melodies of the alien music which dictates the rhythm of Vienna, to which Vienna staggers and babbles – the lost city (Dörmann 1925: 210).

Hirschfeld and Dörmann's tone may be very different, but they are singing the same song.

'The mechanical noise of jazz', the 'jerky melodies of the alien music', both of these threaten Viennese sensibilities. The city's encoding since Henri Robert Vigny's [who??] feuilleton (and surely also for a long time before this as well) had remained more or less the same in its essentials, all that had happened was that it is being insisted on with seemingly increased vehemence. The threat had also increased of course, in the 1920s the 'cartography of taste' was changing (not least because of increased technologisation and the spread of the emerging entertainment industry associated with this – the gramophone, radio, cinema, etc). Josephine Baker's performance in Vienna makes this visible. In a paradoxical turn, she is taken to represent 'jazz' and 'Americanisation', and is rejected on the one hand as alien whilst being appropriated in a Viennese fashion on the other. The latter is addressed explicitly by the author of a short gloss in the *Österreichischen Reklame*, who stresses the calming effect of the posters advertising both revue and film. These are not in the least 'nigger-like', can by no means be described as 'indecent' and thus, he writes, summing up the matter: 'Baker has, as it were, been re-modelled as Viennese' (*A,a,a – die Baker, die ist da!* 1928: 32).

The persistent presence of Vienna's particular version of the 'popular' is the key element of this two-prong impulse. Its forms and modes of representation change, but it itself is seen as 'timeless' Around this impulse the various discourses which I have tried to illustrate in this paper flow, from de-sexualisation to worries about the decline of Western culture, from (an early version of) the staging of popular culture to openly racist rejection.

Another aspect of the larger picture comes from the debates of 19th century natural science, the (supposedly biological) view according to which 'Jews... were black' (Gilmann 1992: 244), a view that was widely held in Freud's Vienna and which I have already mentioned. The 'Other' does not come from distant continents, it comes from Vienna's second district, where Jews traditionally lived. The threat does not come from overseas, rather it is a threat from within. It is not surprising that psychoanalysis was first developed in Vienna. Baker can also be decoded as 'Jewish' as a representative of that 'Other' which threatened a timelessly valid representation of what it meant to be Viennese.

The dilemmas presented by this debate were not essentially any different for those involved in what is commonly termed 'Viennese Modernism' with all the traditional and aesthetic limits which that implies. Their attitude to Vienna (as a city and as a particular sensibility) and to the threat of Americanisation is in no way uniform. On the one hand, Adolf Loos, who had spent some time in the USA, always – despite his customary severity – showed a barely disguised interest in phenomena of popular culture, in 1928 he planned a house for Josephine Baker in the 16th district of Paris (See Gronendijk et al. 1985).⁸ On the other hand, Stefan Zweig lamented Europe's loss of power and the dictatorship of American uni-

formity (Zweig 1988). In 1925 he claimed that a ‘wave of sameness’ was washing over from America to Europe.

This strand of discourse was silenced soon afterwards, as so many of those who participated in it became victims of another, genuinely deadly uniformity, which caused the exile Zweig to take his own life.

After the War and the period of fascist terror, the debates on mass culture, the cultural industry, Americanisation – on both sides of the Atlantic – were revived with new strength. Although contextualised anew, the perceived threats remained more or less the same. Stefan Zweig cited as examples of Americanisation radio, dance, fashion and the cinema (Zweig 1988: 8), the first slowly receded into the background and was replaced by television, the others remained. Around Rock ‘n Roll (understood as a cultural formation) (Grossberg 1997) worries about the future of ‘European culture’ crystallised once again from the fifties onwards, and once again, specific targets can be divined. ‘Youth’ is the first victim of Americanisation.

Vienna was different even then though. In two key films – *Ober, zahlen* and *Hallo Taxi* – Coffee house fights (against juke box and espresso) as does fiaker (Vienna’s horse-drawn taxis – against motorisation) for the survival of ‘Vienna’. The moderniser (Paul Hörbiger) and the traditionalist (Hans Moser) basically are concerned to do the same thing in the process however, to preserve ‘Viennese sensibility’ as timeless and they are both successful in this. Towards the end of the first film, espresso becomes coffee house and at the end of the second the taxi becomes fiaker. The ‘new’ is merely the ‘old’ in a different form. Vienna remains Vienna.

Roman Horak is professor and Head of the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. From October 1988 to March 1989 he was Honorary Visiting Fellow at the Department of Sociology, University of Leicester. He is currently on the editorial committee of ‘Culture Unbound’ and the ‘European Journal for Cultural Studies’ and a board member of the ‘Association for Cultural Studies’(ACS). His research focuses on the politics of the popular. He has published 16 books and over 100 articles in academic journals and books. His latest international publication is *About Raymond Williams* (ed. with L. Grossberg & M. Seidl), Routledge 2010. E-mail: roman.horak@uni-ak.ac.at

Notes

- ¹ See (Gregor 1973: 46); in Germany, for example, American products held 40 % of the market in the mid-twenties. See (Korte 1980: 85).
- ² The Christian Socials employed their most characteristic weapon. In the middle of the month a penitential mass was held in the Paulanerkerche, not far from the Johann Strauß Theatre,

- which at least resulted in the revue having better audiences at this time than on other days. (See *Arbeiterzeitung* 1928; *Neues Wiener Journal* 1928)
- 3 Ernst Günther (1978: 10) writes of the ‘mass audience’ which variety had attracted and which it targeted.
- 4 At the beginning of the periodical’s new year 1929, Theodor W. Adorno had joined the editorial staff, on Adorno’s plans for *Anbruch* and their realisation, see (Steinert 1989: 133ff).
- 5 Arnold Hauser describes Paris under the Second Empire as ‘entertainment metropolis’ (Hauser 1983: 759), see also (Karcauer 1980).
- 6 In the subtitle of the French original, *Origines et décadence*, the author’s disapproval of ‘Americanisation’ is apparent.
- 7 It is unfortunately not possible here to go further into the debate on the production and reception mechanisms of ‘jazz’. Light is shed on the relationship of jazz and revue in Ochaim & Balk 1998: 106ff. Jazz as modern, American, urban phenomenon is discussed by Collier 1993. E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Jazz Scene*, London 1959/1989, interprets (early) jazz – politically – as ‘common people’s music’.
- 8 The house was never built, sketches and plans have survived. Writing of the plans, Beatriz Colomina points out that: ‘The inhabitant, Josephine Baker, is now the primary object, and the visitor, the guest, is the looking subject’. (Colomina 1994: 260).

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‘Walking With’: A Rhythmanalysis of London’s East End

By Yi Chen

Abstract

In this paper, I will be looking at the practice of walking through the lens of rhythmanalysis. The method is brought to attention by Lefebvre’s last book *Rhythmanalysis* (2004) in which he suggests a way of interrelating space and time; a phenomenological inquiry hinged on the concrete experience of lived life. My interest in the nuance of walking was initially evoked by the structural film *Fergus Walking* which was made by the film maker William Raban in 1978. I will explore the potential of using structural films in sensitising us to the temporal-spatial relationship of things. The main body of the paper centres around two themes: Firstly I address the primacy of movement as a mode of engaging with the world. It is through ‘muscular consciousness’ (Bachelard 1964: 11) that walking becomes a form of experiential knowing, feeling, connecting and protesting. Secondly, I examine the practices of walking in relation to the radical transformations of the Docklands’ landscape since the beginning of the 1980s. I propose that the contesting interests of different groups can be explored by analysing the rhythmic interactions of their activities. The transition and recomposition of an economy from locally based industrial activities to globalised financial services were manifested in the syncopation of regeneration rhythms to the living rhythms of the Docklands. The fast changing urban landscapes were negotiated through alternative ways of navigating the streets, hence engendering a different set of rhythms.

Keywords: Walking, roads, rhythmanalysis, structural film, Docklands.

Walking as Inhabiting

Henri Lefebvre's sustained interest in the Capitalist system and the organisation of daily lives culminates in his last book *Rhythmanalysis* (2004). The emphasis of rhythmanalysis is placed on its mode of analysis rather than a scientific analysis of rhythms. In other words, it is foremost a method and a way of attending to cultural phenomena. An understanding of the concept can only be arrived at by looking at the enactment of rhythms, that is through the analysis of the temporal-spatial relationships of entities. The first focus is on the ontological state of being - what and how things happen at the experiential level. The second focus is on the interactions of being and the way things relate through rhythmic orderings. Several sites of rhythms are distinguished by Lefebvre - that of the biological, social, intellectual and so on. In particular, the philosopher emphasised that the rhythmanalytical project has never lost sight of the body (Lefebvre 2004). Bodily rhythms are points of contacts of the social and biological rhythms. How our bodies function and attune to other social entities can be used as the initial point of investigation and the aim of which is to unravel a multiplicity of rhythms at work which infiltrate the various sites of rhythmic productions. In the subsequent section of the paper, I shall focus on the practice of walking as an example of illustrating the method of rhythmanalysis.

The bipedality of the ambulatory movement engenders a rhythm of essentially two alternating beats. One foot may support more weight than the other and the extreme case of which is found in a limping gait. With a stride that presses the ground with more force than the other, an accent forms to punctuate the walking rhythm. With one leg swung into the air, our bodily tension accumulates as the upright body is on the verge of falling. To maintain the momentum, the foot needs to touch the ground and let the other leg stride forward. The coordination of body parts are crucial (for instance, the eyes intermittently check the ground and the immediate horizon). There are bundles of rhythms at work - heartbeat, breathing, swinging arms and the less visible operations of muscles, joints and blood flow. The accumulation and relaxation of bodily tension generates a rhythmic flow with which not much consciousness is required to perform such mundane operation. Toddlers who learn to balance bodily weight or adults who walk in unfamiliar environment are less fluent at doing so. The singularity of a person's ambulatory rhythm is subjected to reformulation and negotiation with the surrounding material agents. Lefebvre and Régulier (1999) point out the centrifugal actions that are taking place on the various dimensions of rhythmic interaction:

this human body is the locus and center of interaction between the biological, the physiological (nature), and the social (or what is often called the 'cultural'), with each of these levels or dimensions having its own specificity and therefore its own time and space or, if you will, its own rhythm (1999: 11).

Our limbs reach out to the world and the potential differences of their haptic experience are being reminded of by Ingold:

how does the feel of a surface differ, depending on whether the organ of touch is brought down at successive spots, as in plantigrade walking, or allowed to wrap around or slide over it, as can be done with the fingers and palm of the hand? (2011: 45)

The sensual aspects of walking may shape one's rhythms of wayfaring. In the case of treading through the industrial ruins, Edensor illustrates that it is likely to 'take on a stop-go character, a staccato rhythm rather than a repetitive pulse' (2008: 127). Contingent bodily adaptations are required to 'tackle the risks of slippery timber, loose floorboards, protruding nails, trap doors, rickety stairs' (ibid.: 129). The case of walking through the ruins also alerts us to the fact that moving in space by foot is not to be confounded with travelling in vehicles since the embodied knowledge of environmental perceptions can not be substituted by the enclosed interiority that constrains somatic experiences.

The movement of the body is in constant negotiation to the material affects of the surroundings, prompting a range of bodily gestures that mutate and reinvent the rhythmic formations of walking. The rhythms of a pedestrian are never metronomic nor monotonous. Slow paced strides may be altered immediately by an unpredicted downpour as one scuttles off looking for shelter. A pavement cluttered with street furniture or ongoing construction work may impede the freedom of movement. One's gestural rhythms invariably changes so as to navigate one's way through. From the asphalt pavement to the cobblestone lanes to the pebbled beach, the ease of trudging through varies hence the transformation of walking gait and rhythms. By following the routine trails in the humdrum of daily commute, the more or less repetitive encountering of paths, stairs, subways enables one to slumber into bodily rhythms which may not be consciously reflected. The term 'muscular consciousness' invented by the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1964:11) was later unpacked by Ingold (2011: 47) as he noted that 'as people, in the course of their everyday lives, make their way by foot around a similar terrain, so its paths, textures and contours, variable through the seasons, are incorporated into their own embodied capacities of movement, awareness and response'. It is a way of experiencing temporality whereby sensual impressions are deposited in the anticipation of being retrieved upon in the future; thus proposing a bodily consciousness that is submerged in lived time. Whether it is switching on the bathroom light at night, walking up the stairs of the front door or formulating a pace that is sufficient till the traffic light changes, our everyday life is replete with experiences of rhythmic attunements. The term 'causal efficacy' (Manning 2009: 54) suggests the activation of movements through a bodily memory - 'the stage of perception that refers to the immanent relationality of all experience' (ibid). Without the capacity of 'causal efficacy', the overwhelming sensual information presented at each moment becomes the

'infinities of nuance' (ibid.: 57) which makes the body immobilised. She argues that,

Through causal efficacy, we immediately feel our connectedness to the world in its present appearance. This explains why for most of us, taking the next step is not an issue. We know the ground is there: we trust our capacity to gauge space. We walk easily with the implicit knowledge of the intrinsic relation between body, ground and space time...we intuitively know how to field space-time because space-time appears to us as a fold of relation. (Manning 2009: 54-55)

Carter (2009) emphasised the rhythmic property of muscular consciousness in his writings. He argues that 'rhythm is the formalisation of the eido-kinetic intuition, organising the chance marks we make on the world into a memorable pattern' (Carter 2009: 272). The term 'Eido-kinetic intuition' is explained as 'the inherent sense mobile subjects have of their relationship with their surroundings [...] it is the capacity to intuit directly the nearness of things and to have measure of them. It seems to stem from our capacity to see the components of our world under the aegis of movement' (ibid.: 268). Notions of 'muscular consciousness', 'causal efficacy' and 'eido-kinetic intuition' underlined the intertwined nature of bodily cognition and the social world one inhabits. A temporal awareness in the study of movements is inherent in such notions. Moments of twitching, elevating, stillness are not to be perceived in isolation but they presume a spatial-temporal relationships that are rhythmic. The peripatetic being can no longer be considered as a solitary walking figure enclosed in private thoughts. A whole world of historical thing-relations participates in the making of one's walking rhythms. The person on the move is intimately making contact with the rich fabric of social formations which are sedimented in the street corner, a road junction or a deserted lane. His or her walking movement activates these relations so that they become alive and revealing.

A rhythm analytical study of walking does not preclude human agents from other animate and inanimate things. The constituted action of the alliance of agents (pedestrian, vehicles, wind, rubbish bins, ticketing machine, traffic island, stairs and so on) continually weave street rhythms. Rhythm analysis calls for an attention to the study of things in their alliance formation. The enactment of rhythms is always initiated by material agents which according to their ways of interrelating, marking out 'a localised time, or if one prefers, a temporalised space' (2004: 89). Paul Carter noted that 'things arranged spatially as possessing a rhythm, as spatio-temporal relations' (2009: 274). The transitory and precariousness of material agents in their relational mode of being prompts timing and spacing practices from which rhythms are enacted. Muscular consciousness is rhythmic as it is formed through interacting with the material affects of things which is then translated to intervals of motion and repose. Traffic lights, yellow lines, parking meters, road signs and zebra crossings are interspersed in the cityscape and they are the rhythmic agents of the metropolis. As the ownership of

cars quadrupled between 1950s and 1970s, the presence of street furniture took on the role of regulating movements between pedestrians and motor vehicles. For instance, ‘bollard’ is a generic name given to a variety of posts erected on the ground. The distance between the bollards demarcates an area designated for certain use. A pedestrian area is enclosed and marked off from the flow of traffic so that strollers feel secure to roam around with fluid paces, forming a contrast to those controlled rhythms of walking across the traffic lights. By exploring the rhythms of the urban pedestrian, we would invariably take into account of the entangled interrelations of entities which conduces a localised attention to the study of walking. The practice of walking is essentially a way of interrelating material entities. Ingold uses the metaphor ‘meshwork’ to capture such a mode of perceiving the world (Ingold 2011: 71).¹ The ‘meshwork’ is materialised in the concatenation of rhythms which inter-penetrate and configure each other. The transmission, interaction and exchange of rhythms on the street comprises the dynamic of the meshwork.

Fergus Walking

My interest in the mundane practice of walking was evoked by the structural film *Fergus Walking*. The film is part of the trilogy *Autumn Scenes* (1978) which was made by the film maker William Raban. It was not only an experiment on the materiality of the film medium, but also of the perceptual relationship between the viewer and the moving images. Firstly, I shall carefully describe the scenes of Fergus walking down Bromley Street in the East End of London. Secondly, I aim to analyse the major tenets of the structural film movement and suggest the potential of using moving images in the heightening of rhythm analytical perceptions. In comparison to the mainstream commercial productions, I argue that structural films comment and contribute to the exploration of cultural history in its own ways. The film shows images of a deserted street with derelict houses and they may invite the viewer to extract the implied socio-political connotations. However, it is worth pointing out that the film does not set out to conduct a socio-historical study of the East End of London. What it really does to the viewer is to sensitise them to a different angle of perceiving such a mundane practice. Pedestrians do not glide over the surface of the street but they walk *with* the material surroundings. The body walks but does not solely form the centre of actions. Raban remarks on the central tenets of his film making:

The time element of film, and its relationship to the actual time of filming, has been a central concern in my work. More recently, I have been finding ways to incorporate the space that is filmed too; space perception and time perception being shown to be absolutely related in film. (Raban 1976 : 130)

I took the length of the street... their length was related to the standard roll of film stock you’ve got, so I knew I wanted Fergus Walking to be 100 feet of film,

because that's the standard roll size. 100 feet of film is 2mins 45secs and so I drove down that street at walking pace. (Interview with William Raban)

It is a grey autumn day as we first notice the raindrops on the window of a moving vehicle through which Fergus is observed. In and out of the frame, there is a man who walks. His movement carries a constant rhythm; the swinging of the arms and the stride he made are steady; for what is more unusual of an urban pedestrian, the eyes do not wander in search of excitement or danger. Indifferent to his surroundings, Fergus marches along in a mechanistic manner as if his body is a metronomic device that marks the passage of time. One may be reminded of the minimal settings in the motion studies of Muybridge, yet the street scene is far from a monolithic background. There is not much associative meaning that can be derived from Fergus' walking practice. It is not long before we notice something baffling is going on. The film enacts a temporal consciousness in tension with our habitual perceptions. In order to decipher the relations of movement that render a skewed sense of time-space, one has to pause, rewind and fast forward the lingering images deposited in the memory. Our eyes dart back and forth between Fergus and his surroundings. Although the strides he made render an illusion of progression and normality, other perceptual data gleaned by the viewer quickly inflicts a contradictory experience of observing people walk. Fergus walks in relation to a number of things: a window, a black car, a door, etc. Instead of 'leaving them behind' as he marches on, they reappear ahead of Fergus. He walks past the street sign 'Bromley Street' and in the next few scenes, the sign is seen to 'jump' in front of him. Is he walking backward in space when the body propels itself forward? What estranges us from our habitual perception is not Fergus' movement but the shifting order of perceptual relationships. So we would wonder at the repeated appearances of the same brick daubed walls, street signs, cars passing, house doors and so on. A clashing sense of progression and regression resonates in the vicarious experience of the viewer. The edge of the car window frame is shown (as the shot of the interior of the car eclipses parts of the street scenes) so that the viewer is reminded of his or her vantage point - one that is mobile. The orchestration of rhythms on the streets are interposed with that of the moving vehicle. As we see him going in and out of the frame (sometimes he is in the centre of the frame whereas other times he is abruptly positioned right at the edge of the car window), the viewer is again puzzled by the vehicle's positioning in relation to Fergus. Could it be that the car is driven at an erratic speed and if so how do we reconcile the spatial-temporal relationships of not only Fergus and the car but also the domain of objects that shape the dynamism of the streets?

There is no recourse to audio information. The viewer can not hear the rhythms of the clattering footsteps nor the traffic noise that reverberated on Bromley Street. The effort in making sense of the rhythmic interplay in the film relies on our memory, anticipation and imagination. One is provoked to question how relations of movements are conceived in time-space. Left foot, right foot; the

consistent beats of the steps evoke a kinetic rhythm which intoxicates the viewer. The rhythmic interchange of images aligns itself to the pace of Fergus' movement. The pulsation of the graffiti on the brick wall, 'Homes not Hotels', 'Stuff the Queen' and '25 Yrs of Poverty', becomes a visual poem as the words dance and beckon for attention. One is appropriated to the cadence of Fergus' footsteps thus participating actively in the construction of an experiential temporality.

William Raban is one of the leading figures in the London Film-Makers Co-operative (LFMC). Formed by a group of film makers who pioneered the production and ethics of structural films, they radically rejected the mainstream commercial and documentary film making practices.² Collective ownership of equipment, production and distribution meant that there were cross-pollinations of ideas which shaped the ethics of the group.³ One of the distinct features of these films is the deliberate abolishment of narratives. Schneider (2011) argues that structural films are about what they *do* to the viewer as opposed to a mimesis of a life world which designates the representational functions of the medium. For instance, he points out that structural film makers produced flicker films which are reflexive of the very process of visual perception in the construction of moving images (the exploration of the 'afterimage' that persists on the retina). Whereas with narrative films, the progression of a storyline is often held together by images and words which elicit the viewers' identification with the protagonist. Every single shot is instrumental in the construction of a sequence of shots in the transmission of meaning and emotions. Lucien Sève (1947) offers an interesting account of the contrasting approaches adopted by narrative films and its counterpart. The focus on the single shot (or at least the non-connection of them) favoured by anti-narrative films 'tends to isolate itself and attract an attention of the inquiring variety', whereas the adoption of narration presupposes a 'sequence which creates a definite unity of meaning between the shots and arouses in the spectator an intense desire for continuation' (Sève 1947, cited in Kracauer 1960: 176). The priority of decoding and identification with the moving image inculcate a habit of film viewing comparable to that of novel reading – 'a quest for intentions rather than shapes, an intense desire for drama, not gestures' (ibid.: 177). Devoid of narrative contents, structuralist film making refuses to present a constructed world of emotions and connotations. The kind of viewing experience activated by structural film also defines its ethical tenet. Instead of being absorbed in the film's plot, the viewer becomes attentive to the unfolding of a phenomenon as he or she makes sense of his or her own sensual-cognitive development in the duration of viewing. The discontinuity of the moving images as shown in the case of *Fergus Walking*, thrusts our order of visual experience (which comes from memory and does not solely rely on the eye but also on the other sensibilities). The very habit of distinguishing a foreground figure from its backdrop is challenged by the film. To make sense of the temporal-spatial structures in *Fergus Walking*, the viewer heeds to the details of things in order to map out the

interrelations of them. Kracauer notes on the peculiarity of the film medium in exposing the physical minutiae of an object. He suggests that ‘the motion picture camera has a way of disintegrating familiar objects and bringing to the fore – often in just moving about – previously invisible interrelationships between parts of them’ (Kracauer 1997: 54). One’s reflexive awareness of the daily experience, the triviality of how one moment is lived to the next, is brought to the fore by the sequence of images resembling a montage. Raban’s cutting strategy enabled the viewer to reflect upon the possibilities of the film medium in unveiling the spatial-temporal dimensions of experience. His practice is firmly rooted in the belief that ‘making films is about showing people things, not telling them how to interpret the world’ (Lux Online Archive). How structural films function in the exploration of cultural phenomena adheres to Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) conception of film as not to be thought but to be perceived. The philosopher refutes the tale-telling function of the film medium, those that signifies or exposes ideas. Instead, the joy of all art forms including film ‘lies in its showing how something takes on meaning – not by referring to already established and acquired ideas but by the temporal or spatial arrangement of elements’ (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 58). The experience of watching *Fergus Walking* heightens our attention to the interrelationships of things in their temporal-spatial unfolding. I argue that structural films discern and articulate daily experiences through the manipulation of the film medium. This kind of film making, privileging the concrete phenomenon and its unfolding in timespace is a form of phenomenological study (of the film material and the experience of viewing) or even a modality of rhythmanalysis. It is a cultural practice that exemplifies phenomenology as a method of investigating lived life.

Fergus did not walk in a vacuum but in the unfolding of temporal-spatial relations circumscribed by material agents. Walls, house doors, street signs, cars parked on the side of the road configure a mundane street scene, yet the estrangement of their relations to the pedestrian (due to the cutting strategy employed) sensitise the viewer to the dormant functions these objects operate in our day-to-day experience. The inanimate objects that jerk about with the moving body and the striking perceptual effects make the viewer look afresh at the seemingly separated existence of the animate and the inanimate. The graffiti, the pavement and other material affinities beckon our attention as they constitute the rhythmic bundle of walking. Are the rhythms of bodily movement conjoined by other things on the street worthy of attention for cultural-historical research? Or is it just a trivial pursuit on the periphery of the big political issues such as class, race and equality? Indeed, these are the questions that can be tangentially addressed by *Fergus Walking*, a film that challenges our perceptual architecture. The art form of the film and the effects it conveys are akin to what cultural theorist Ben Highmore argues as ‘the metapolitical pedagogy’, by which he means how cinema, photography and other visual art forms are also the ‘training ground,

sensitising us to the textures and tempos of the daily' (2011: 51). Thus the value of artworks does not reside in their representational role in relation to the everyday, but in 'the aesthetic regime of artworks on our senses, on the sensate world we perceive and experience, and in doing so gives new significance to the ordinary, as well as transforming our experience of the ordinary' (ibid.).

The attention to the ordinary practice of walking and a re-perceptualisation of the interrelationships of things unravels a concatenation of rhythmic relations. In the following section of the paper, I pursue a rhythmanalysis of walking in the Wapping area by the late 1970s and early 1980s. A series of campaigns were organised by the locals who used temporal-spatial tactics to combat the problems of mobility. The particular case I will be looking at is the East-West Road Campaign. It was initiated and participated by the local residents who were in opposition to a proposal for a trunk road that would cut through the centre of Wapping (which would effectively disintegrate the close-knit community). The provision of pedestrian pavement, children's play areas and parks were in a state of contestation with that of the motorways and flyovers. I shall tentatively map out how walking practices punctuate the daily lives of the residents which endow the community with a distinct set of rhythmic assemblage (for instance women walked to get their shopping due to the lack of public transport, children had to walk a long way to go to school and the inhibition to get close to The Highway where accidents happened frequently). Community here is referred to as 'a process of human action in time' (Farrar 2002: 90). Therefore the empirical dimension of community formation is given primary attention rather than the imaginary conception of it. By exploring the walking rhythms enacted by pedestrians (and other material agents) which were nevertheless imbricated in the rhythms of transportation and the pace of corporation development for instance, I am hoping to concretise the dialectical effect of urban gentrification (in this case the Docklands) and the spatial-temporal make up of a community. A rhythmanalysis of walking weaves a complex tapestry of social experience not only circumscribed in the area of Wapping but also of those other associated rhythmic assemblages. Lefebvre seeks to disentangle the rhythmic relations to unveil the enigma of social life:

How does *each party* (individual-group-family, etc.) manage to insert its own rhythms amongst those (different) others, including the rhythms imposed by authority? In this insertion of rhythms 'of the self' into rhythms 'of the other', what is the role of radical separation and compromises, of tolerance and violence (Lefebvre 2004: 99)?

The East-West Road Campaign

In East London, broken-backed dockers of a certain age possess that distinctive hunch which, when they walk, makes them roll from side to side, like the ships they once serviced; these days they can be observed sitting in fold-up chairs on

little squares of grass, gently nodding to the rhythmic thud of pile-drivers
(Schwarz 1991: 83).

The physical landscape of London's Docklands went through a vast transformation by the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. Activities of the local manufacturing industry had already declined and the dereliction site awaited private investment. With every effort composed to efface its history of the docks and of the dockers, private enterprises projected a future plan for the Docklands as a place of leisure and hedonistic consumption. The St Katharine and London Docks closed in 1968 and as the dock activities moved downstream, the local economic plight turned Wapping into a series of derelict industrial sites surrounding a population of some four thousand people. The young and economically active Wappingites were moving out of the area to find new jobs, leaving behind those who were unable to find suitable employment. The low level of public services in the region was partly attributed to the decline of the working population. The area of Wapping was 'one of the very few in Docklands (Surrey Docks is another) in which land for large-scale renewal is immediately available' (A Local Plan for Wapping 1976: 1). What should happen to the renewal of what became known as the Docklands (which included Wapping but extended for miles downriver on both sides of the Thames), was at the heart of strategic concerns of five local authorities, the Greater London Council (GLC), and central government. More significantly was the question of who should have the determining role in shaping the future for places like Wapping. In whose interest was Wapping to be transformed, and whose needs would be met in the process? The rights of its inhabitants were felt to be neglected and constant battles took place with authorities who ignored the voice of those who lived there. A sense of struggle was clearly conveyed in the commentary from the Wapping Parents Action Group (WPAG) – 'Plans for the future of Wapping have been floating down river from Westminster, Chelsea and the Home Counties for thirteen years.

The latest to be washed ashore comes from the Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC)' (WPAG Questionnaire 1983). In 1981, the London Docklands Development Corporation was created by the government as an organisation that oversaw the regeneration of the Docklands area. It had a clear vision of the pace and type of development that was required by market forces. London's Docklands became a testing ground for the Conservative government's urban policies envisaged by Margaret Thatcher. Designed to activate interest and investment from commercial private enterprise, the LDDC was set out to transfer planning controls from the five elected Docklands local authorities to an appointed private sector body. A widely held view shared by local authorities, residents and local trades unionists was that 'the Government is seeking to solve the wrong problem by setting up the LDDC' (Joint Docklands Action Group 1981). The LDDC embodied the Thatcherite's vision of gentrification through privatising public resources. One of the consequences of selling off publicly

owned land (most of the industrial sites were owned by the Port of London Authority) to the hands of entrepreneurial developers was the creation of segregated population. The wealthy lived in close proximity but they were separated from the recently rehoused poor and a rooted community. The recomposition of an economy from locally based industrial activities to globalised financial services was manifested in the syncopation of regeneration rhythms and those of the Dockland's old community. Schwarz (1991: 85) describes the pace of change bearing a week-to-week physical transformation of the landscape as 'inducing in some of us who have witnessed it a queasy vertigo'. The pedestrian had to adjust their walking practices in negotiation with a different set of entity relations, and this in turn generated new rhythmic characters to the area's social interactions. With newly built roads and the provision of public facilities, the old Wapping residents may bear the hope of relief. However, Schwarz emphasised the parallel existence of the new rich to the dispossessed onlookers in the Docklands – 'the old dock walls may have been demolished but at every turn one discovers that "the edge situation" has diligently been privatised, allowing only the most limited public access...the alarms and electronic surveillance, the dogs and private guards' (ibid.: 89).

The geographical and social isolation of Wapping from the rest of the borough meant that its inhabitants organised their daily routines which were distinct to their way of living. Wapping was a small place with its amenities and neighbourhoods in close proximity. One side of Wapping was bounded by the river Thames and the other by the St Katharine and London Docks. A chain of deep water enclosures was formed which separated it from the 'mainland'. Passage to 'the other side', as it was commonly referred to, was via bridges which opened to allow ships into, across and out of the water basins. The Highway, then as now an inner city motorway (along with the commercial development and empty docks) marked the northern boundary of Wapping, forming as much of a barrier between Wapping and the rest of Tower Hamlets as the docks themselves. A strong white working class community had grown up within this isolated area and they lived in a mix of local council, Greater London Council (GLC) and private rented accommodation. The closure of the Docks brought an influx of working class tenants onto the GLC estates from other parts of London. The close-knit community in Wapping was delineated not only by its geographical position but also by the high degrees of social interaction, networks of relationships, shared sentiments and attachment. The necessity to travel out of Wapping in order to get anything beyond daily essentials, and the frustration and fatigue of walking long distances was integral to the experience of its residents. When the docks closed there were two church primary schools but other essential facilities such as supermarkets, secondary schools, a doctor's surgery, and a pharmacy were non-existent in Wapping. To the elderly people who could not walk a long way to get out of the area, Wapping had the air of a prison.⁴ Once

children reached secondary school, they needed to cross The Highway to get to school everyday – either elsewhere in the borough, or for those going to grammar or Catholic secondary schools, to the other side of London. With no traffic lights, only one zebra crossing and no pelican crossing this was a dangerous daily exercise. Women mostly walked to the local shops and only a bus ride could get them to the nearest shopping centres and supermarkets in the Borough of Hackney. There was no service to Watney Street market which was the most used shopping centre (A Local Plan for Wapping 1976: 14). The inconvenience of getting to places outside of Wapping was exacerbated by the lack of public transportation and the very low level of car ownership. There was only one bus No. 67 operating in the area which passed through Wapping on a circular route from Stamford Hill. It did not run on Sundays which meant that old people who relied on bus service to go to one of the markets or to visit younger friends or relatives living outside the area were confined by the lack of convenient transport. Walking is the mode of movement that connected people and places in Wapping, creating a pace of life peculiar to the community. Based on experience and necessity, their scheduling of the day may be configured or confined by the temporal-spatial network that structured their modes of mobility which overtime may form a persistent cadence that interconnects the activity of the community. Compared to travelling on the bus to reach a single destiny, the reliance on walking to get to places initiate a different kind of rhythm. It is more likely that the woman who walks to do local shopping would also drop by her neighbours for a chat or have other things planned on the route. Few walks in Wapping would be uninterrupted, as people would invariably meet, greet and conduct conversations.

Walking as a mode of mobility created a symbiotic relationship of a range of social encounters. Bodily adaptations to the specificity of material agents (both the facilitators and hindrance of walking), such as the cobbled streets, the high prison-like walls that delineated the docks, the basins, warehouses, bridges and bollards, steps and so on, structured preferred routes, sensual anticipations and sequence of movements; enacting a rhythmic assemblage that marked out a Wapping community. The objects on the street which appeared to be a random collection of things to the outsider were rhythmic wayfinders to the children who went a long way to attend and return from schools. They would have to gauge the time sufficient to cross The Highway by learning to listen to the traffic, a skill if failed to grasp could lead to fatal accidents. The final local plan drafted by the Borough's council indicated that pedestrian routes were virtually non-existent. The Highway, with its swiftly flowing traffic caused numerous road casualties, flagging the need of any plan for Wapping to improve footpaths throughout the area and to provide access to open space along the river banks which had been denied for generations.(A Local Plan for Wapping 1976: 15).

The discontent with both the local and central government's negligence over the community's need spawned numerous local action groups throughout the

1970s and 1980s. They included the Wapping Parents Action Group (WPAG), the Isle of Dogs Action Group (IDAG) and later the East End Dockland Action Group (EEDAG), the Limehouse Action Group, the Spitalfield Action Group. These formations were part of a long established local campaigning tradition. Angered by the LDDC's apparent ignorance and contempt to the needs of ordinary working people, they provided a focus for resisting to the policies and practices of LDDC (Foster 1999). In a letter addressing to all Tower Hamlets councillors, the Joint Docklands Action Group urged a rejection of the LDDC's document 'The Future for Wapping'. The plan received strong opposition since it pre-empted the authority for the Tower Hamlets Council and it undermined the democratic rights of the residents to be involved in devising and implementing local plans. Furthermore, it did not meet the needs or reflect the views of Tower Hamlets residents. A letter was sent to all the Tower Hamlets councillors in 1983 which clearly stated the Joint Docklands Action Group's attitudes toward rejecting the LDDC's document 'The Future for Wapping'. There was a demand to have control over the planning of Wapping in the hands of its inhabitants – 'another way of looking at the future of Wapping through the eyes of those who already live here' (WPAG's commentary in response to LDDC's Future Plan for Wapping). When big ideas were conceived by the LDDC to gentrify the area, there was scant regard to the trickle-down effect on how the local community would operate. Protests had already begun to hit the headlines when the new Docklands Partnership Scheme declared that new roads could attract industry back to East London. The shape of things to come was that 'if there are to be bigger and better roads to keep traffic flowing across and around London, the latest proposals suggest that TH [Tower Hamlets] will have to bear the brunt of them' (Jempson's article A-E shape of things to come 6th Jan 1978).

The Wapping Parents Action Group (WPAG) pinpointed what had been left out in the grand vision envisaged by LDDC – the daily conduct of an ordinary Wapping resident,

We need safer zebra or pelican crossings. There should be traffic lights at every junction with roads into Wapping. Speed restrictions and double-parking bans must be enforced...In other parts of London which have been 'gentrified', complex traffic restrictions have been introduced, from 'sleeping police-men' to road closures and one-way systems, and bollards. While time and money are always spent on protecting and assisting the motorists almost nothing is done for pedestrians. An urgent study is needed to make sure that Wapping will become a safe place for those without car.

On public transport the LDDC has little to say, on the horrors of the Highway there is nothing, but plenty of thought has been given to the parking problems of the future (WPAG questionnaire commentary).

The women of Wapping had always been at the forefront of battling against adverse changes to the area. Prior to the East-West Road Campaign, waves of protests organised by the parents in Wapping were triggered by the accidents of

two nine-year-old girls run over by police cars. Young women and mothers organised a sit-down protest which diverted traffic from Wapping Lane to draw attention to the issue. The strategy of road blockade was later appropriated in several campaigns that advocated pedestrian security and access to walking space (Interview with Mike Jempson). For instance, on 13th June 1978, traffic halted for the pram-pushing and banner-waving mums (one of the banners says 'we want traffic lights') whose presence formed a blockade on the Highway and brought rush-hour traffic to a standstill. The first reaction against the proposal of East-West road was led by WPAG in 1981.⁵

The East-West Road Campaign was a protest against re-routing a road that would have sliced the community in half. It was designed to cut through Wapping from East to West and to provide two-way bus services, access for private cars and for industrial and tourist traffic. A report (Mike Jempson, undated) on the meeting with Tower Hamlets Director of Development and architects revealed the incentive to have some form of East-West road connection cutting across Wapping. The requirement of an East-West access to Wapping was aimed for commercial and industrial development. Cutting through the heart of Wapping's communities, the impact of building the East-West Road was to be felt by the majority of the residents. According to an unpublished record, the proposed effects of the road being built was that

the road runs between both parks in Wapping (the widening of the road Green Bank will require a loss of a strip of park to accommodate a new pavement), between all the schools, and alongside numerous listed buildings, as well as through the middle of two major existing housing areas, beside St. Patrick's Church and right through the existing site of Norfolk Newlay Eggs (Wapping Plan, undated).

According to the results of a questionnaire that consulted Wappingites for their opinions on the potential changes to the area, including the proposed East-West Road, remarks by a few residents showed their disbelief in any benefits coming from new roads such as the East-West Road. Given the route of the planned East-West Road, the alignment of corners and junctions would involve the road coming very close to existing houses, shops and amenities (Mike Jempson, undated report). As one resident expressed in the questionnaire – 'roads are my main concern. The Highway must be the worst road in the East End. The new road will come right past my door' (Wapping Items 1983). Major objections to the proposal included noise and pollution that may disturb existing residential areas and the fact that the East-West Road would run alongside two school playgrounds which may endanger the safety of children crossing roads (Wapping Items 1983). In the letter written by members of the 'No East-West Road Group' (a broader coalition set up by WPAG) to the Environment Minister Peter Shore, they pointed out that the route of the road involves a costly alteration to a new all-weather football pitch and adversely affect the surrounding buildings (East London Advertiser, 6th

Jan 1978).

The WPAG further uncovered the hidden incentives of LDDC. Its transport planning was to carve Wapping up into a series of valuable and less valuable land. The report produced by LDDC showed that the traditional North-South Routes into Wapping would largely give way to the new East-West Road with feeder-roads branching off it (LDDC 1983). At the time of the proposal, Wapping High Street was the only East-West connection road at the time. It was then a cobbled road parallel with the river, with no shops, houses or workplaces. The use of the new road would spare the Wapping High Street for exclusive riverside development. The result of having a motorway driving through the centre of the council estate while pedestrianising Wapping High Street was that all the land to the south of the new road will be immensely valuable; making it an attractive site for offices and expensive riverside homes. A public consultation was unlikely to be conducted as the Council was granting itself permission. Such was the cause which precipitated the East-West Road campaign. 'All that will stop it is to create sufficient public outcry to embarrass the Council into changes or get the Minister to "call it in" and make the decision himself' (Wapping Plan, undated). In 1981, a series of campaigns (the first one started in May) were organised by the Association of Wapping Residents – a loosely knit group fronted by 'old Wappingites' (some of whom appeared less concerned about the interests of the relative newcomers). They followed the tactics originally used by the WPAG who also backed the campaign. On several occasions they blocked The Highway at inconvenient times (including rush hours) so that traffic was redirected down the planned route of East-West Road. The disrupted traffic flow demonstrated the opposition to the plan by simulating and magnifying the effects of having busy traffic in the heart of Wapping's estates.

Early one morning, led by many of Wapping's elderly residents, people marched in an unending stream across a pedestrian crossing on the Highway, the main through-way for heavy vehicles north of the Thames to the east of Tower Bridge. Highly organised and using walkie-talkies to co-ordinate events, demonstrators successfully blocked the road for several hours, forcing heavy traffic down through streets along the designated path of the new trunk road. Traffic soon came to a halt, and was held there long enough to give the press the opportunity to document events and the community to tell their side of the story, which had hitherto failed to be taken into account (cSpace, accessed 10th March 2012).

The East-West road proposal was abandoned as a result of the campaign which only marked the beginning of a whole series of protests in the Docklands over the next ten years. The East-West Road campaign took place in a social climate of radical transformations of the Docklands. Organised by the Wapping residents who were in defence of their common interests and shared experience, some concerted resistance were undertaken to combat the profit-orientated proposals put forward by governmental bodies and private enterprise. They relied primarily on walking as the mode of mobility to conduct their daily routines hence they

were acutely aware of the potential rhythmic fragmentation of their community if the inner city motorway was to be built. The tactic of using bodily presence to disrupt the traffic rhythms was effectively undertaken because the residents were most familiar with the temporal-spatial organisation of the area. The intricacy of social relationships were orchestrated in the choreography of bodily movement which would be drastically affected in the face of a ruthless surgery to the make-up of the community. With the decline of the local industry in the docks and global money moving in, the Conservative flagship project pioneered by LDDC foresaw a 'systematic centralisation of power and erosion of local autonomy' (Bianchini & Schwengel 1991: 224). The rhythms of macro-strategic capital mobilisation overshadowed that of the local as it was caught in the gap of regional decline and selective regeneration, favouring those with consuming power. By reactivating the pedestrian experience in Wapping in the prism of rhythmanalysis, it is plausible to draw out relations of forces which shows 'how national and global rhythms increasingly pulse through place' (Edensor 2010: 3). The method of rhythmanalysis eschews the compartmentalised and static view of social transformation. The assemblage of rhythms, those of bodily rhythms and institutional rhythms and their ongoing negotiation propose a way of cultural analysis that looks at the concrete lived experience.

Conclusion

Walking is an intermittent movement as bodily rhythms are enacted to connect the singular body to the world. With the alternating foot pressing the ground, his or her bodily rhythms attune to the world as one latches onto the environment. A pedestrian is woven to the urban landscape through visual, auditory perception, olfactory and haptic engagement as well as other nuanced sensations such as speed, warmth, humidity (and other nameless sensory faculty) which constitute a rhythm of walking that may be beyond conscious reflection. The attempt to conduct a rhythmanalysis of a singular body in motion does not preclude the concatenation of rhythms which compose and are composed by a particular bodily rhythm. Instead, an osmotic relationship that characterised the temporal-spatial unfoldings is proposed here. The generative capacity of material affordances is integral to the formation of walking rhythms. Pavements, road crossing, traffic lights, stations and motorways are no longer stationary backdrop of a place but they actively structure one's preference of routeways and other habitual patterns of engaging with the surroundings.

My interest in a rhythmanalysis of walking is evoked by the film *Fergus Walking*. The film belongs to the 1970s structural film tradition which fundamentally reflects on the material conditions of film practices and the relationship between viewers, the film apparatus and the world of things. There is no plot or narrative to *Fergus Walking*. The duration of the film is the equivalent

to that of the shooting practice. As a viewer, we are denied any identification with Fergus. The street he walked down (Bromley Street) took on a life of its own with the ‘inanimate’ things coming to the foreground clamouring for attention. The editing technique used by the film maker William Raban presents us a complex rhythmic relations between things – street signs, house doors and windows, cars passing by and so on. Raban did not set out to conduct a historical study of the East End of London (although it is tempting to infer from the images of impoverished urban landscape). However, what the film does to the viewer is to sensitise them to a phenomenological understanding of walking, of uncovering the interrelationships amongst people and things by de-familiarising us to the process of watching someone (from a fixed stand point) walking past. The ‘redeeming power’ of the film medium lies in its capturing and restoring of what was neglected and unwilled. The viewer is left in a state of puzzlement that can not be resolved without actively questioning how the uncanny effects of disjointed temporal-spatial relations come into being. The once inanimate objects (walls, street signs, house doors) are foregrounded and they become rhythmic clues to our perception of Fergus’ walking experience. With a keen interest in the materiality of film, a notion Gidal refers to as ‘not to a purely physical, mechanical, or substantive concept, but to an effect of spatial and temporal ordering’ (Rodowick 1988: 131). The asceticism of structural film making, its refusal to use films as tools of representing reality, and its preference for showing the world as it is, render such form of artistic practice an apposite means of conducting a phenomenological inquiry and rhythmanalysis. It is rather the means of sensitising the viewer to the temporal-spatial relationships of Fergus’ movement and the world of things he was walking with. From the bodily rhythms to those that incessantly interact with them, the centrifugal attention of viewers (to which the film activates) is apt for a political examination of walking practices.

The struggle of the Wapping community was caused by the lack of transport infrastructure which restricted the mobility of the residents. The reliance on walking to get to places were also teemed with inconvenience and safety problems. The rhythms of walking bleed into those of the other daily activities conducted by the local residents. Decisions about the time and place to do one’s shopping or meeting relatives for instance were delimited by the poor facilities and transport networks in Wapping; setting up a pattern of social interaction and rhythmicity inherent to the community of Wapping. Their trajectories of intersection and separation generate meeting points in places. Edensor elucidated a phenomenological approach to the understanding of social rhythms when he noted that ‘shops, bars, cafes, garages and so forth are meeting points at which individual path congregate, providing geographies of communality and continuity within which social activities are co-ordinated and synchronised’ (Edensor 2010: 8). Problems arise when the flow of rhythmic interrelations were broken down and being replaced by those fragmented, syncopated and even inhibited rhythms.

The East-West Road campaign took place in a climate of radical transformation of the Docklands' physical landscape. I argue that the Conservatism flagship project pioneered by LDDC can be seen as a series of rhythmic interventions in the community of Wapping. Rhythmanalysis channels our attention to bodily movements such as walking and the method raised the question of how the re-negotiations of the interrelationships of pedestrians and the surrounding material agents signified a volatile period of historical change. By exploring the mundane practice of walking, one inevitably shifts back and forth between bundles of rhythms which infiltrate and resist each other. The rhythmanalytic attention to the interaction and orchestration of the array of temporal-spatial relationships portrays social transformation on the level of lived experience.

Yi Chen is in her final year of completing a PhD on Cultural Studies at the University of Sussex, England. Her thesis explores the method of rhythmanalysis and the ways in which the nature of historic change can be approached by looking at various rhythmic shifts and interactions (in particular in relation to contemporary British history). Her broad interest includes experimental modes of cultural analysis and how they may be applied to the study of urban life, ordinary culture and other cross-disciplinary areas of research. E-mail: yc98@sussex.ac.uk

Notes

- ¹ Ingold distinguishes being as 'occupying' the world and 'inhabiting' the world. By 'inhabiting', he emphasised the embeddedness of being in the world; its ever evolving coexistence. He negates the view of seeing the world as a stage, a 'surface' to which the actors perform against.
- ² Apart from the London Film Makers' Cooperative, there were parallel movements of structural film making in New York and in other European centres.
- ³ For further information on the LFMC's social relations of production, the ethics of their work and reception, see Gidal 1980: 151-71.
- ⁴ A pensioner recorded his experience of living in Wapping in the 1970s in the form of a diary.
- ⁵ Formed in 1972, the local group was established as a united reaction against the running down of a 'West Indian' child by a speeding police car in Wapping Lane. Led by mostly women who were active in organising weekly meetings to initiate improvements of local facilities and qualities of life in Wapping (WPAG background info see single sheet). It was also about defending the rights of its residents in the face of unjust decisions. The Wapping Parents Action Group was later transformed to the History of Wapping Trust.

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Online Resources

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- Lux: [http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/william_raban/essay\(1\).html](http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/william_raban/essay(1).html) (accessed 19th January 2012)

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Taking a Hike and Hucking the Stout: The Troublesome Legacy of the Sublime in Outdoor Recreation

By Georg Drennig

Abstract

As Henry Thoreau noted in the 1850s, the simple act of walking can be loaded with political and spiritual meaning. Today, taking a hike as an act of engaging in outdoor recreation is equally non-trivial, and therefore subject of the following analysis. As this paper argues, outdoors recreation is still influenced by the legacy of the Sublime and its construction of wilderness. This troublesome legacy means that the cultural self-representation of outdoor sports – and the practice itself – lays claim to the environment in ways that are socially and sometimes even ethnically exclusive.

This essay uses William Cronon's critique of the cultural constructedness of wilderness as a point of departure to see how Western notions of sublime nature have an impact on spatial practice. The elevation of specific parts of the environment into the category of wilderness prescribes certain uses and meanings as nature is made into an antidote against the ills of industrial civilization, and a place where the alienated individual can return to a more authentic self. This view then has become a troublesome legacy, informing the cultural self-representation of those uses of "wilderness" that are known as outdoor recreation.

In its cultural production, outdoors recreation constructs "healthy" and "athletic" bodies exercising in natural settings and finding refuge from the everyday alienation of postmodern society. Yet these bodies are conspicuously white, and the obligatory equipment and fashion expensive. Outdoor recreation is a privileged assertion of leisure, often denoting an urban, affluent, and white, background of the practitioner. These practitioners then lay exclusive claim on the landscapes they use.

As trivial as taking a hike or any other form of outdoors recreation may thus seem, they put a cultural legacy into practice that is anything but trivial.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, sublime, William Cronon, wilderness, outdoor recreation.

Introduction

A man gazes from an elevated vantage point over the landscape, is then shown hiking through several spectacular natural settings such as along a cliff face, on a mountain heath, in a sudden blizzard, and encountering a reindeer in an alpine valley, and then leaves the image's frame on a mountain plateau. Meanwhile, a voice addresses the audience:

To all high potentials and key performers, global players and opinion leaders, all deep divers and innovation drivers, to all indoor steppers and power nappers, all urban gardeners and facebook farmers, all treadmill runners and protein-drink drinkers, all insiders and upgraders, to all you miles millionaires: go on without me (Schöffel 2012).¹

Taglined "Ich bin raus," which can be loosely translated as "I'm off" or "I'm out," this TV spot and the ensuing ad campaign commissioned by German outdoor manufacturer Schöffel uses a simple dichotomy, with terms of contemporary global business and high technology juxtaposed against images of nature, a wanderer above the clouds, and his gear. Nature, which in the advertisement shows no signs of recent human activity or habitation, is thus set up as the place to get away from the signifiers of postmodern globalized society that the commercial's voice-over mentions. As I will argue in this essay, this dichotomy of nature versus society not only predates modernity, but is a cultural legacy that can be traced back to the framing of nature through the aesthetic of the sublime, which set up specific ways of seeing and dealing with the environment. These are still at work, having not only inscribed themselves into the representation of landscapes but also in way that outdoor recreation prescribes specific ways of using these landscapes, whether it be in hiking or kayaking.

This essay also argues that the sublime's legacy in outdoor recreation manifests itself in ways that may seem far-fetched at first. In a photo series that, among other pictures, features herself hiking in England's Lake District, Black British artist Ingrid Pollard has explored the way that the landscapes of hiking are still landscapes of exclusion. Pollard experiences gazing over the hills and resting on a small stone wall in a way radically different from the anonymous man in the Schöffel commercial: In her photography project *Pastoral Interlude*, she hikes in the Lake District, "where [she] wandered lonely as a Black face in a sea of white." (Pollard 1988). In her attempt to deconstruct landscapes of British identity, she observes in the text under her photograph that as a black woman "a visit to the countryside is always accompanied by a feeling of unease, dread" (Pollard 1988). Though her work does not provide definitive answers, her landscape photographs deconstruct iconic natural landscapes in Great Britain as places that are inscribed with racial histories and assigned spaces for different ethnicities; her art thus begs the question if nature is still being constructed as a refuge for 'whiteness' (cf. Young 1995, Mitchell 2000: 259-61).

Pollard's playful inversion of the English Romantic poet William Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" explicitly points to one of the sources of such inscriptions and their effects. Her work *Wordsworth's Heritage*, in which she created a postcard that shows black hikers in the Lake District, then further questions Romantic landscape constructions and their implicit exclusion of groups of people. What this work also does, however, is point out that the practice of outdoor recreation and its representation are strongly intertwined, and cannot be cleanly separated. Ingrid Pollard's art thus implicitly shares an assumption that is at the very basis of this essay: cultural representations of nature are "key engines" of very concrete ways of being in the outdoors (cf. Cronon 1996b: 48-49).

It may still seem rather far-fetched to claim that a similar cultural legacy is at work in a German outdoor manufacturer's advertisement and in a British photographer's exploration of landscapes of national and ethnic identity. Yet this is precisely the aim of this paper: to claim that German manufacturer Schöffel's *Ich bin raus* campaign, Ingrid Pollard's art, and several examples that will follow draw or comment on a cultural legacy that goes back to the Enlightenment and Romanticism. As I will argue below, the sublime and its construction of nature still reverberate through representations of landscape that in turn are key engines of spatial practice and implicit exclusions in the field of outdoor recreation. The wanderer above the clouds advertising gear – Schöffel is one of many manufacturers using this visual strategy – and the black women experiencing unease in the Lake District are not directly connected to each other; they both, however, deal with the way that outdoor recreation and its spaces are constructed through a gaze and a spatial logic that is a result of the Enlightenment's conceptualization of the sublime.

The following paper will thus – using William Cronon's seminal essay on "The Trouble with Wilderness" as a point of departure – first outline the sublime's spatial logic and its construction of nature as wilderness.² After giving a brief historical sketch of the representation of early outdoor recreation, and of the development of a culture of the outdoors, the discussion will then turn to the contemporary spatial logic of outdoor or wilderness recreation, and its paradox of the commodification of the escape from consumer society. A closer look at the spatial logic of whitewater kayaking will then provide a specific example that shows the salient features of the legacy of the sublime at work, from kayaking's representational aesthetics to its spatial claims and the question of the sport's 'whiteness.' This will not – nor could it – be the single answer to explain the phenomena outlined above, but, hopefully, add to an understanding of the cultural factors that inform practices as seemingly trivial as walking through the woods or putting a boat onto whitewater.

Sublime Wilderness

The sublime's conceptualization as both an aesthetic and epistemological category was the work of Enlightenment philosophers Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant. Though their development of the category goes far beyond the scope of this paper, one key aspect of their work was to conceive of nature as the site where the individual could experience an overwhelming sense of transcendence. It is through this understanding that they contributed to a gaze at nature that in Romanticism and then the early conservation and later environmental protection movement would set up still effective categories of nature and codes of experiencing it. As William Cronon has argued, these categories create troublesome ways of thinking about, and dealing with, nature. Several of the salient features of Burke and Kant's notions about the individual in nature thus have become problematic features of landscaping processes.

One way of framing the sublime is to think of it as the "moment when the ability to apprehend, to know, and to express a thought or sensation is defeated" (Shaw 2006: 3). In this sense, it is an epistemological category that speaks to the impossibility of representation, and is thus a rather popular concept in postmodern theory (cf. Shaw 2006: 5-7, Economides 2005). More important for the purpose of this paper, however, is Immanuel Kant's notion of where to encounter the sensation that Burke had described as that of the absolutely overwhelmed individual (cf. Ferguson 1992: 8-9) that experiences a "delightful horror," as Burke wrote in *A Philosophical Inquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Burke 1756: 148). This "realm of estrangement, of power seen as greater than our own" (Ferguson 1992: 44), could, according to Kant, be best encountered in natural spaces that were awe-inspiring and even threatening to the extent of confronting the self with a sense of its own mortality (cf. Kant 1790: §28, Ferguson 1992: 23, Hitt 1999: 605-607, Shaw 2006: 10). The sublime is, however, not only an experience in nature, but also a way of experiencing nature. To put it in other words, the sublime framed by both Burke and Kant as an absolutely individual experience (cf. Ferguson 1992: 3) can structure the way those looking for it will experience the natural environment. The sublime is therefore also a gaze, a way the individual seeking an experience of transcendence may transform a 'merely' beautiful sight into something of a different register, attaining a "visionary grasp of infinity" (Byerly 1996: 53). Since the sublime is a way of seeing, and not a quality necessarily inherent in the object of the gaze (cf. Ferguson 1992: 39) the visitor to a spectacular natural setting may thus put the site of the visit into a fundamentally different category than its everyday inhabitant. The quotidian can at best be beautiful, and a sublime experience is thus the privilege of the outsider (cf. Ferguson 1992: 45-47).

Given these salient features, a wanderer's search for the sublime already creates a set of spatial demands following a logic of how this space is ideally set up,

what it contains, and what should be absent for the ideal experience to take place. Not only is the ideal visitor alone, but also not forced to acknowledge that the mountain or waterfall – to use prototypical sites of the sublime gaze as examples (cf. Cronon 1996a: 10, Hitt 1999: 605-607, Sayre 2001: 142-143) – may be part of somebody else’s everyday landscape of living in a place. By categorical necessity new or unusual, such a site can only be encountered while wandering or traveling, thus being, by definition, a space of leisure. Additionally, the Kantian notion of the existential threat that the sublime signifies allows the recurring visitor to find that experience time and again by changing his or her own approach to the site. In a sense, Immanuel Kant thus already prefigured the contemporary extreme outdoors athletes who continuously seek new ways of increasing the difficulty, and thus, risk, of engaging with the natural features that their sports use.

The sublime and its expression in Romanticism by writers such as Wordsworth in Britain and later Henry David Thoreau in the U.S. then became one of the key engines in Western societies’ remaking of the idea of wilderness. As William Cronon argued in his 1996 essay on “The Trouble with Wilderness,” it was the sublime and – in the case of the U.S., the frontier – through which Westerners in the 19th and 20th century constructed “wilderness in their own image freighted with moral values and cultural symbols that it carries to this day” (Cronon 1996a: 10).³ Cronon’s thesis is that following the Enlightenment and industrialization, and during the second half of the twentieth century, a cultural reframing of nature initiated new ways of dealing with it. Wilderness, newly imbued with the value of being sublime, was thus made subject to spatial claims by privileged urbanites who remade it into a refuge from what they constructed as the ills of modern civilization.

This change hinged on new concepts, provided by the sublime and Romanticism, and a new spatial reality, as created through industrialization. As Cronon argues, and numerous ecocritics and environmental historians have shown in case studies, the nineteenth century marked a convergence of a reframing of wilderness from wasteland to something sacred, and of urbanites’ desire to find or create spaces uncontaminated by the effects of early modernity (cf. Byerly 1996, Spence 1996, Kerbs & Reulecke 1998, DeLuca & Demo 2001, Sayre 2001, Merchant 2003, Coates 2005, West & Igoe & Brockington 2006, and Young 2010). Yet in contrast to the pastoral longings of elites in earlier centuries, and clearly influenced by the sublime’s privileging of an individual experience of awe, these spaces were now ideally ‘clean’ in the sense of being ‘untouched,’ that is, wild. Thus, spaces defined as sublime were among the first to be legally protected as national parks in the U.S., and quickly became elite tourist destinations reserved for leisure and exempt from all other uses (cf. Cronon 1996a: 14-15).

The utter and complete constructedness of wilderness is evident, as pristine nature created by human fiat is in itself a contradiction, especially since the creation of protected wilderness often resulted in the dislocation of its former inhabitants

(cf. Spence 1996, West & Igoe & Brockington 2006). In the increased access to this form of nature, the sublime purity of the experience became weakened, with the awe-ful in nature giving way to a somewhat more benevolent sense of sacrality as the cultural frame for wilderness spaces (cf. Cronon 1996a: 12). Still, the legacy of the sublime gaze that structures expectations and representations had become entrenched not only in the cultural view on wilderness, but in physical reality. National parks and other areas labeled as wilderness gave material form to an Enlightenment idea, and allowed for the emergence of a form of leisure that became today's wilderness- or outdoor recreation with its attendant spatial logic.⁴

For the following discussion of outdoor recreation, several salient features of this spatial logic bear repeating. Nature – reframed as wilderness – becomes by definition a sphere apart from the individual's daily existence. It is the destination of a flight from the quotidian, and carries the promise of a more authentic experience in contrast to the alienation effected by contemporary civilization. As it claims to offer the chance of leaving the modern world behind, it therefore by necessity excludes those things it considers modernity's symptoms, as evidenced in Schöfel's *Ich bin raus* campaign. In this promise, however, it is a highly privileged activity, and begs the question asked by Cronon: “[W]hy [...] is the ‘wilderness experience’ so often conceived as a form of recreation best enjoyed by those whose class privileges give them the time and resources to leave their jobs behind and ‘get away from it all’?” (1996a: 21). Finally, a sense of risk or danger is welcome, even if the search for the sublime has been diluted in its intensity. The outdoor recreation that is heir to the sublime and the redefinition of wilderness is not by necessity – though examples abound – an exercise in search of reminders of one's mortality, but links bodily risk, or at least, exertion, to authenticity as an antidote against the modern or postmodern condition.

As repeatedly mentioned above, these desires are projected onto a space that itself is a construction. The transformative power of the sublime gaze is such that it can and will ignore the absolute unnaturalness of the nature it terms wilderness. It is a perfect example of what Don Mitchell defines as landscape, which for him

is best seen as both a work (it is the product of human labor and thus encapsulates the dreams, desires, and all the injustices of the people and social systems that make it) and as something that does work (it acts as a social agent in the further development of a place)” (Mitchell 2000: 94).

A key aspect of this understanding of landscape is that it is constantly naturalized, made to seem, at best, like an accidental accretion of traces of its history and human activity. The history of changes of, and conflicts over, its meaning, is, at worst, erased. Even if one accepts the existence of such a thing as an ontological wilderness, it matters little for the issue at hand, as any natural setting that is either spectacular or seemingly wild enough can be subject to the sublime gaze. Any reminder of sublime wilderness' constructedness challenges the authenticity

sought by the outdoor recreationist, and therefore either is ignored or erased and forgotten, or seen as a threat to the purity of the environment.

As discussions within ecocriticism, and especially the reactions to Cronon's essay have shown, it seems necessary at this point to add a disclaimer. It is not the aim of this essay to dispute that certain experiences can be made in nature that are difficult to find elsewhere, nor do I aim to question the existence of a quality of these experiences that goes beyond beauty and includes an element of being awestruck.⁵ The question of how much wilderness can be a useful category is more difficult to answer, as not all natural spaces are equally remote or subject to human influence. Yet it seems overly strained to uphold the notion of utterly untouched and pristine nature in a time when anthropogenic climate change impacts every spot on the planet, and satellite communications have, with a small number of exceptions, made isolation and remoteness matters of financial and technological means. Accordingly, in the usage that follows wilderness always refers to the cultural construct, no matter how much 'wildness' may be a useful category for looking at nature. This is not to say that environmental protection or conservation are pointless acts, but that the categories environmentalism works with are still in need of constructive criticism and deconstruction, even in 2013 (cf. Cronon 1996b; Proctor 1998).

Taking a Hike: Paradoxical Practice

Over the course of the twentieth century, outdoors recreation came in a multitude of forms. Their approaches to regaining a lost authenticity, to criticizing contemporary civilization, and to encountering the sublime in nature sometimes radically differed, but maintained a construction of nature and wilderness that never shed its indebtedness to the Enlightenment. This essay will not be able to address them in their full variety ranging from woodcraft (cf. Turner 2002), or nudism (cf. Shaffer 2008), to the reform movements of Wilhemine Germany, which featured similar approaches to escaping what they perceived as the ills of industrial society (cf. Kerbs & Reulecke 1998).⁶ What all those practices shared was a spatial logic that saw nature as fundamentally apart from modern civilization and as an antidote to the ills of modernity; in other words, they put the human body in nature because they saw a need to regain a state of authenticity and purity they felt had been lost in urban industrial civilization, and in doing so, created ideas of nature than they then imposed on the real environment.

Ultimately, however, it was hiking, the mode of outdoor recreation already advocated by Wordsworth and Thoreau, which would become the most influential way through which urbanites sought to escape from the alienation of modern life and experience the sublime. Yet hiking would soon create a paradoxical quality of its own, as the spatial demands of the sublime clashed with the popularity of trying to have that experience. Additionally, the logic of exclusion already seen in

Wordsworth remained, and has, at least in the experience of some, remained a troublesome legacy of the sublime in outdoor recreation. The following section will thus briefly sketch aspects of the historical development of hiking and its practice, and give an example of the culture's own diagnosis of its paradoxes, before it addresses the issue raised by Ingrid Pollard's art.

With Romanticism, and in the U.S. in the decades after the Civil War, Western culture began to embrace the outdoors as a space of recreation and escape from the cities and the ills – including ethnically and socially others – associated with them (cf. Spence 1990; Boyer et al. 1996: 724-26; Kay & Whyte 2000; Young 2010: 122). Technological advances that made getting to the sites of outdoor recreation easier brought more mass appeal to such activities before and especially after World War One, and with it, more spatial conflicts (cf. Klinge 2007: 161-170), which increased with rising living standards and new modes of experiencing nature through hiking (cf. Mittlefehldt 2010). Especially in North America, the clash between the reality of hiking's mass popularity and the supposedly pristine character of outdoor spaces necessitated new modes of engaging in outdoor recreation. The solution that first emerged there was – given the spatial logic of the sublime and its privileging of solitude, surprisingly – not a system of privilege that allowed some hikers in on basis of merit or knowledge, but the ethic of 'Leave No Trace' (cf. Turner 2002: 469-73). Commonly abbreviated as LNT, it aims to change the environment as little as possible, and instead requires the hiker to bring the requisite gear that allows them to prepare food or have shelter. LNT has since become the predominant ethic of most kinds of outdoor recreation worldwide, and a method that allows a relatively higher number of visitors to have smaller environmental impact. It also, significantly, allows maintaining illusions of solitude and purity in nature, thus defusing the paradoxical situation created by the popularity of outdoor recreation. At the same time, however, it creates yet another challenge to the idea of escaping from modernity, as the increased need for gear has brought the consumer culture that nature is supposed to be a refuge from back into the sanctuary (cf. Young 2010).

With the feeling of authenticity so desired by outdoor recreationists under assault from so many sides, codes of behavior and possessing the right gear have become a way to assert wilderness as indeed wild and uncontaminated. As Samantha Senda-Cook's study of the rhetoric of outdoors practice shows, "specific outdoor recreation practices perpetuate the construction of authentic outdoor recreation experiences for park visitors. And when people or situations violate such practices, park visitors understand that as experiential degradation" (Senda-Cook 2012: 130). Given the high expectations visitors bring to bear onto those sites, they thus bring notions of appropriate behavior – staying on trails, leaving no trace, displaying sufficient reverence –and outfitting. The right shoes thus mark the insider who has acquired the necessary knowledge and material to behave correctly and show the necessary respect in the face of potentially dangerous nature.

Other visitors not following these rules serve as a reminder that wilderness might not be that wild and that the gear that marks the insider is not needed, for the trails on which insider and outsider meet are not a sanctuary, but an extension of the very civilization they claim to be an escape from (cf. Senda-Cook 2012: 140-42, 145-46).

Jon Krakauer, the most prominent contemporary writer of the outdoors, in 1999 wrote an article for *Time Magazine* in which he showed an awareness of this paradoxical character of outdoor recreation. Though having an image of wilderness that resides fully within the sublime tradition, he clearly sees how nature can hardly remain untouched, refuge for solitude seekers, and wild all at the same time. When Krakauer writes about wilderness and the value of seeking out the most remote places, the voices of his literary predecessors are strongly present, as for example in this excerpt from his introductory paragraphs, in which he starts by describing a mountaineering expedition in Antarctica: “My back hurt, and I had lost all feeling in my toes. But as my eyes wandered across the frozen vastness of Queen Maud Land, a sense of profound contentment radiated from somewhere beneath my solar plexus” (Krakauer 1999). The rhetoric of the sublime, laced with its critique of civilization is also on full display in his closing remarks, which seem both aware of the constructedness of wilderness, yet also essentializing the value he sees in it:

Empty places have long served as a repository for a host of complicated yearnings and desires. As an antidote to the alienation and pervasive softness that plague modern society, there is no substitute for a trip to an untrammled patch of backcountry, with its attendant wonders, privation and physical trials. (Krakauer 1999)

Yet, in Krakauer’s view, this antidote has become commodified, and the large numbers of recreationists mobilized by the outdoors industry – of which Krakauer himself has become part through his books – are threatening the very spaces they would seek to protect. Any limitations imposed on access to wilderness, however, would mean management, which goes against the idea of wildness, resulting in what Krakauer calls “a toothless simulacrum” of wilderness.

While Krakauer, as someone who has ascended Mount Everest and more technically challenging peaks, speaks from a position at the extreme end of outdoor culture, his sentiments are mirrored by casual recreationist James Somers. Writing for *Outside Magazine*, the publication that first ran the Jon Krakauer article that would become *Into the Wild*, Somers represents the broad mass of solitude seekers who encounter wilderness with expectations determined by cultural representations of it. And indeed, Somers intersperses his musings on the “Paradox of Going Outside” with Thoreau quotes, and speaks of the need to at least sometimes escape his postmodern urban existence as a web developer. Yet the gear fetishism of outdoors culture comes “at the worst possible moment: right when you’ve become sufficiently fed up with the local civilizing forces to grope for wildness, there you are at a store again, playing customer again” (Somers 2012). Even when

he finds himself in Glacier National Park, Somers is confronted with the nigh impossibility of finding the authenticity and sublime experience that he has come to expect. Though perceiving the setting he hikes in as stunningly beautiful, he ends up disappointed at the lack of a transcendental experience that he had been culturally primed for. For Somers, the commodification of the sublime has indeed wrecked the promise, making him state:

That's the paradox. In a culture pervaded by artifice, by self-awareness and advertising, the grand gesture away from it all – “Fuck it, I'm going into the wild” – is just another trope. We've seen that movie. In fact it was called *Into the Wild* and for the parties involved it was sort of a pathetic catastrophe. (Somers 2012)

The condition both Somers and Krakauer write about thus reflects the increasing effort needed to not see the constructedness of sublime wilderness. They do not call it the legacy of the sublime, but their analyses as outdoor recreationists speak to the same desires that were first expressed by Enlightenment philosophy, popularized by poets and writers, and made mainstream in the twentieth century. Yet these desires threaten to undo the very image of nature at their core, forcing practitioners of outdoor recreation to constantly negotiate between wilderness as sublime refuge and nature as a playground of commodified leisure culture.

The valuing of wilderness as a space of escape also is where the troublesome legacy that Ingrid Pollard pointed out in her art comes to the surface. The impulse to leave urban spaces for an ostensibly purer nature, and the logic of exclusion built into the idea of sublime experience, both of which can already be found in Wordsworth's poetry, were a major force in the hiking culture that emerged in the late 19th century and reverberate to this day. Ethnic exclusion was an implicit desire of those urbanites seeking solace in nature, and factual part of the establishment of protected wilderness. Though the ills of modernity as diagnosed by contemporary culture may have changed from ethnically different masses in the cities to the alienation of the postmodern economy, the examples below show that the effects still reverberate through hiking culture.⁷

Hucking Some Stout: The Case of Whitewater Kayaking

The paradox of mass culture and commodification in the sacred space of nature is of course not limited to hiking, but has its repercussions in any form of outdoor recreation that seeks to offer an intense experience of nature. The analysis will therefore now turn to one further specific outdoor sport, whitewater kayaking, which so far has not been as exhaustively discussed in scholarly literature as hiking has.⁸ Though the sublime's aim of individually experiencing danger in nature is easily achieved in an unstable one-person craft on whitewater, kayakers have to deal with spatial paradoxes and problematic cultural legacies that are very similar to those of hikers. Whitewater kayaking is thus instructive as it shows that the cultural legacies discussed above reverberate even in activities that Burke and

Kant, or Wordsworth and Thoreau could barely have conceived of. In the following discussion of kayaking's self-representation, its sacralization of nature, its spatial logic, and the question of ethnicity, the reach of the sublime's cultural legacy shows clearly; the impact of ideas on the spatial practice of recreationists thus can be argued to be at work in any form of recreation that draws on a conceptualization of nature debated by Burke and Kant more than two centuries ago.

A brief look at whitewater kayaking's representation in writing indeed shows that the sport holds up the same image of wilderness and notions of purity that have been discussed above. *The Last River: The Tragic Race for Shangri-la* – an account of a fatal whitewater expedition to the Yarlung Tsangpo, once thought to be the mythical Shangri-la valley, and at the time one of the last major rivers unexplored by Westerners – is a clear example of writing sublime wilderness. In the book, author Todd Balf repeatedly employs the rhetoric and logic of the sublime, seeing in nature the antidote to the ills of modern civilization, and bemoaning the fact that commercial interests have entered outdoor sports. Describing the recent divorce and business problems of one of the expedition's participants, Balf writes: "If there ever was a good time for a wilderness experience, as Tom euphemistically termed his death-cheating epics, now seemed the time" (Balf 2000: 20). This notion of escaping the mundane and experiencing transcendence in nature pervades the book, with the author writing about "the questing soul [that] needs nourishment in places where the human feels speck-sized" (150). Yet Balf sees the purity of the endeavor threatened by the commercial aspects of an expedition that, sponsored by National Geographic, competes with others for being the first to successfully navigate or otherwise explore the Yarlung Tsangpo Gorge. For Balf, even Shangri-la does not offer sanctuary anymore, as sponsor money and the commercialization of sports in general undermine the "idealistic, vigorously anti-commercial ethic" (61) he sees as central to whitewater kayaking's spiritual value.

Today's self-representation of kayaking, however, would not be possible without advanced technology, and sponsorships play an important role in the ongoing professionalization of kayakers' self-produced videos. The increased affordability of small waterproof cameras has made online videos a highly popular way through which kayakers promote their sports and compete for online audiences and potential sponsors. In fact, filming and editing one's activities – that is, producing cultural representations – has become an integral part of the sport. This form of self-representation has also created global codes and signs within the culture, so that German paddlers on Slovenian rivers will 'throw the brown claw,' a hand sign popularized by a North American group of whitewater kayakers. How much this culture of online videos has in fact changed the behavior and expectations of younger kayakers is a matter of debate in online forums and discussions between paddlers; the rhetoric and spatial logic of these videos is, however, a direct successor of earlier articulations of the sublime.

Rush Sturges' 2010 video of Tyler Bradt's world record in kayaking down Palouse Falls in the U.S. state of Washington, for example, employs a sublime gaze: it emphasizes the sheer size of the waterfall using slow motion, panoramic shots, and a bombastic score. Indeed, 'hucking the stout' – kayaking down waterfalls – has, together with representations of 'carnage' – paddlers in potentially or actually dangerous situations – become the most popular subject of kayaking videos. The falls are often filmed from several angles, including the helmet-camera perspective of kayakers and that of cameras mounted to the stern of the boat. Increasing effort is made by the producers of those videos to show waterfalls from a perspective that emphasizes their sheer size and the force of the water. Other central aspects of the sport are given much less emphasis, and though paddlers often find it necessary to portage their boats around natural obstacles or un-runnable waterfalls, this process is fully absent from online videos, even in the case of a film specifically concerned with safety on a multi-day whitewater trip (cf. 7 Finger Media 2012). Even those videos not focusing on the force of nature and the visual qualities of falling water construct nature as a transcendent experience, depicting it as a sanctuary from the cares of modern civilization (cf. The Banks Mag 2010).

The notion of whitewater rivers as sanctuary and cathedrals of nature is also featured in a video by kayak film producers Bomb Flow TV. With videos that feature extreme kayaking on rivers worldwide, Bomb Flow's visual aesthetics focus on the individual paddlers and their adrenaline-fueled experience of jumping waterfalls. At first sight, their videos lack the aspect of reverent fear in the face of the sublime that other kayaking videos try to elicit. *Bomb Flow TV Episode 9 "Go to CHURCH"*, however, starts with the following narration: "A wise man once said, 'not all churches have roofs.' In this episode, watch as the Bomb Flow crew finds their own meaning of 'church' amidst huge waterfalls and flooded rivers in the mighty Pacific Northwest" (Bomb Flow TV 2012), and follows with the spiritual song *Down in the River to Pray* as soundtrack. Though the episode then treats the theme of nature as church as a humorous framing device, it expresses a spiritual undercurrent and the pervasive sacralization of nature in whitewater kayaking culture. As religion studies scholar and kayaker Whitney Sanford has found, language borrowed from religion is widespread in whitewater literature and terminology – since Sanford's essay has been published, boat manufacturer Jackson Kayaks has produced whitewater boats named "Zen" and "Karma" – speaking to the value the sport puts on a "nexus of interconnected themes, including intimate connections with immensity or perceiving something greater than the self, mindfulness, and finally, risk and fear" (Sanford 2007: 881). While Sanford attributes the way paddlers use a spiritual framework to qualities inherent in the sport's demands on mind and body, the relevance for this paper lies in the cultural tradition that shares the same notion of the sacrality of nature. Sanford's statement that "[t]he river and its consequences embody the terrifying aspects of the divine" (884) is thus not only a theological insight, but a clear expression of

the sublime as an interpretive template for experiencing nature. Also, in keeping with a cultural dynamic that has been repeatedly observed above, this sacralization of nature results in a strong ethic of wilderness conservation (cf. Sanford 2007: 878).

Similar to hikers, whitewater boaters have a strong interest in maintaining the ostensible ‘wildness’ – and water quality – of the rivers and creeks they use. Kayaking video makers Five2Nine, for example, have created a series of videos “which uses white water kayaking as a means to educate a broader audience about the risks threatening the world’s rivers and to help highlight the intrinsic value of preserving rivers in their natural state” (Five2Nine 2011). As much as their video about Québec rivers threatened by dam-building makes a substantial part of its argument for environmentalist reasons, the video’s showcasing of the province’s waterfalls, rapids, and massive standing river waves, and the interviews with representatives of paddling associations betray a spatial logic of privileged use.⁹ However sacred, wilderness also is made into a leisure space through outdoor recreation, to the detriment of other potential uses. Also, kayaking, even when adhering to the principles of Leave No Trace, does have an environmental impact – the need for motor vehicles in shuttling boats and their riders has given rise to the joking remark that whitewater paddling is half a motorsport – especially if the sport becomes increasingly popular.

Indeed, the paradox bemoaned by Jon Krakauer – too many recreationists endangering the very thing they seek – can be seen at work on rivers, too. In an essay titled “Style,” kayaker Louis Geltman ponders the case of a YouTube video that engendered long and vicious discussions on one of the eastern U.S.’ most important whitewater discussion boards. The problem identified by Geltman – boaters entering stretches of water that they are not skilled enough to safely run – is on one hand perceived as a safety issue, as whitewater culture requires paddlers to rescue each other when problems occur. Yet on the other hand, Geltman also sees the problem of increased numbers of boaters in general, and considers hypothetical solutions to the question of access, ultimately calling for more attention to matters of ‘style’ on the river, that is boaters’ ability to run clean lines across and down rivers and thus proving their skills. Matters of safety on whitewater notwithstanding, the discussion brings to mind the challenge to authenticity that outdoor recreationists perceive when encountering those they consider insufficiently skilled or equipped, and thus wrongly sharing or even taking away their space (cf. Senda-Cook 2012). It speaks to the importance of sublime wilderness and its associated value of encountering risk and a more authentic experience that the comparatively safer option of boating on artificial whitewater courses is at best considered a matter of pragmatism, if not frowned upon for being inauthentic and against what most paddlers consider the value of engaging in outdoors recreation (cf. Igleman 2008: 30).

Interestingly, artificial whitewater courses are suggested as a solution to a different issue that is discussed in outdoor recreation. In “The Color of Whitewater,” Jack Igleman, conflating skin-color and geographical location, thus argues that the underrepresentation of African Americans may be due to the spatial separation of wild rivers and the inner cities of North America. This argument is problematic in itself, as several U.S. metropolitan areas – Californian cities and Washington D.C come to mind – have comparatively close access to whitewater. The paddlers and outdoor program leaders Igleman interviews in search for more answers ultimately all fall back to cultural explanations as to why urban minorities may be so underrepresented on whitewater. As African American kayaker Lamar Sims states “‘A city kid may look at paddling and say, ‘This is not my world.’ There is safety staying in your comfort zone [...] That’s a universal truth’” (quoted In Igleman 2008: 30). As this essay would argue, this understanding of an ethnically connoted comfort zone is less of a universal truth, but instead yet another instance of a cultural legacy dating back to a philosophical conceptualization of nature from the Enlightenment.

Conclusion

As this essay has shown, this observation by an African American kayaker, similarly to artist Ingrid Pollard’ experiences can be read as a statement about minorities in outdoor recreation. And though there may be many reasons for this, my analysis suggests that the troublesome cultural legacy of the sublime plays a role. While this essay’s investigation of exclusions in outdoor recreation has been confined to examples of black hikers and kayakers, similar arguments could have been made on the basis of class or body image. The salient point is that exclusive spatial claims still divide those natural spaces explicitly constructed by those seeking them out as outside of, and unmarred by, society. William Wordsworth’s escape from the cities and the people in them created a conception of experiencing wilderness that still gives some groups a feeling of being excluded from this experience.

Clearly, today’s stereotypical wanderer above the clouds, as he can be seen in the Schöffel commercial, seeks solace not from the ethnically- and socially-other urban masses, but from digital culture and global business. Paradoxically, however, both hikers and kayakers mark the return of culture to precisely those spaces where they hope to leave culture behind, as their expectations themselves are culturally determined. It will be the rare casual hiker or riverrunner who explicitly sets out to encounter the sublime, as motivations to engage in outdoor recreation are manifold, and since there is not one fixed and unambiguous definition of the sublime in any case. The way hikers, kayakers, and the businesses catering to them represent these activities, and what they expect from the wilderness they make their playground, however, speaks to the lasting power of a conception of

nature that back to Burke and Kant. The reasons why outdoor recreationists seek solace in nature may have changed, as has their notion of authenticity. The basic conception of what wilderness offers, however, has not. Neither has the rhetoric employed in its cultural representation, which still employs a vocabulary of sacrality and transcendence. The sublime's legacy still reverberates, whether recreationists take a hike or huck the stout.

Georg Drennig is a PhD candidate in the ARUS doctoral program at the University of Duisburg-Essen. A graduate of the Department of English and American Studies of the University of Vienna, his main interests are in Ecocriticism, spatial perspectives in Cultural Studies, and interdisciplinary approaches to Urban Studies. E-mail: georg@drennig.com

Notes

- ¹ This is my translation of the German original: "An alle High Potentials und Key Performer, Global Player und Opinion Leader, alle Deep Diver und Innovation Driver, an alle Indoor Stepper und Power Napper, alle Urban Gardener und Facebook Farmer, an alle Laufband Läufer und Protein Drink Trinker, alle Insider und Upgrader, an alle euch Meilen Millionäre; macht erst mal ohne mich weiter." While it could be argued that the massive use of English terms sets a nationalist tone, I would rather argue that the main connotation used here is that of the modern or postmodern workplace and its jargon.
- ² Cronon's essay sparked a vociferous debate, and he had to defend his thesis from the outset (cf. Cronon 1996b). An early collection of arguments, edited by J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, was published as *The Great New Wilderness Debate* in 1998. The gap between constructivists – among whom Cronon is, at most, a moderate – and self-described realists is still at work in ecocriticism, and may color what Serpil Oppermann described as a "phobic relations" of some ecocritics with theory (cf. Oppermann 2010). Also see Leo Marx's 2008 essay on "The Idea of Nature in America," in which he covers the larger intellectual debate. This essay sides with James Proctor's 1998 approach of "[c]ritical realism [which] is a sort of acknowledgment that direct access to a preordered reality is impossible and that knowledge is always fallible and incomplete, coupled with an optimism that this admission need pose no fatal blow to the project of finding better explanations for reality" (Proctor 1998: 361). This essay does not, however, see the necessity to engage in an overly theory-bound approach to the issue of the sublime and its use as a category for looking at nature (cf. Economides 2005 for an example of such an approach).
- ³ Also see Byerly 1996, Proctor 1998, McQuillan 2000, DeLuca and Demo 2001, Sayre 2001, and Coates 2005 for similar arguments about the aesthetic construction and corresponding consumption of nature, and the spatial practices that have resulted from cultural representations following the tradition of the sublime.
- ⁴ Though arguing that "wilderness" and "nature" are primarily cultural constructs, this essay takes physical space as such as a given. Philosophy and cultural representations then create coherent systems of conceptualizing space, i.e. a spatial logic, or sets of expectations, i.e. spatial demands, that then may find their way into legal demarcations of space. Yet spatial practice remains a physical reality, and thus in this essay refers to how it is dealt with materially.

- ⁵ As somebody who has worked in outdoor pedagogy and shares the enthusiasm of many ecocritics for hiking (and in my case, the adrenaline rush of kayaking) it would be disingenuous to claim otherwise. It would, however, be equally problematic for me to claim that my own experiences in hiking have not also been influenced and structured by reading mountaineering literature from an early age, and being constantly exposed to romanticizations of nature in the Boy Scouts.
- ⁶ Though this essay primarily uses examples from the U.S., a look at the meanings given to wilderness in both Europe and Canada reveals the same underlying dynamic. In continental Europe, partisan politics may have played a bigger role in dividing up natural spaces, yet, regardless of ideology, “nature” was still seen as the site for escape, and the location of “authenticity,” even if the precise meaning of that concept was struggled over. See Thomas Lekan’s 1999 essay on “Regionalism and the Politics of Landscape Preservation in the Third Reich” for an example of competing notions of “natural” and the resulting different approaches in dealing with nature. For specifically Canadian discussions about wilderness see Francis 1997, pp. 146-147, and Sandlos 2001, pp. 8-14.
- ⁷ See DeLuca & Demo 2001, Merchant 2004, and Worster 2005 for analyses of the ethnicized view of wilderness as a white leisure space in the 19th and early 20th century, and Spence 1996, Sandlos 2001, and West, Igoe & Brockington 2006 for more detailed studies of how non-whites were forcibly excluded from newly established national parks in the U.S. and Canada. For explorations of the ongoing ‘coloring’ of nature at work in hiking culture, see Farrell 2000 for an interview with a black hiker who is identified by *Backpacker Magazine* as extraordinary based on the combination of the color of his skin and his track record as a hiker, and who recounts experiences of being made to feel out of place on hiking trails. Similarly, see Underwood 2011 for a comedic exploration of the potential reactions of white hikers encountering an African American in a wilderness recreation area.
- ⁸ One reason for choosing whitewater kayaking as an example was that I, myself, occasionally engage in it and know some of the sport’s codes of behavior and its spatial logic. See Samantha Senda-Cook’s essay (2012) for a discussion of the role of a scholar’s own experience and the analytical benefits and possible problems.
- ⁹ For a study that details the conflicts between different groups of wilderness seekers and their claim to experiencing ostensibly unpeopled nature, see Michael J. Yochim’s 2005 essay “Kayaking Playground or Nature Preserve? Whitewater Boating Conflicts in Yellowstone.”

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A Stitch in Time: Changing Cultural Constructions of Craft and Mending

By Anna König

Abstract

Over the course of the twentieth century, the availability of cheap, mass-produced fashion has contributed to a decline in everyday domestic mending skills. Indeed, as mass-manufactured goods have become cheaper for the global population it has become normative consumer behaviour to dispose of any item that is less than perfect, even when the damage is entirely superficial, leading Clark to claim that: ‘mending has died out’ (2008: 435).

However, in recent years there has been an apparent revival in domestic mending, aided and evidenced by the emergence of sewing and mending groups in the UK, mainland Europe and North America. This has coincided with a growing interest in more sustainable material goods (McDonough & Braungart 2002; Fletcher 2008), and a small body of academic work around the notion of craftsmanship (e.g. Sennett 2008; Crawford 2009). Of particular interest here is the history of mending of clothing and household goods, as well as recent incarnations of mending as both an individual and group activity. In the past year, researchers from diverse theoretical backgrounds have also highlighted the role of mending in everyday material goods providing further insights into the subject (Laitala & Boks 2012; Middleton 2012; Portwood-Stacer 2012).

An examination of mending reveals a complex picture in which gender, class, aesthetics and social motivations interweave with the imperatives of consumer culture. Whilst historically it is generally constructed as a feminine activity, and carried connotations of material deprivation, contemporary mending is often motivated by environmental concerns and a desire to reduce consumption. Ultimately, mending is demonstrated to be an under-researched subject loaded with cultural meaning, and ultimately, is shown to be anything but a trivial activity.

Keywords: Mending, domestic work, gender, sustainability, labour, leisure, skills.

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, few activities might be classified as quite so trivial as those concerned with the repair of domestic household goods. With its archaic associations, the very concept of mending evokes homespun wisdom and a cautious, thrifty attitude to living that seems to run counter to the established values of a capitalist consumer society. This conclusion is reflected in the assertion made just a few years ago by Hazel Clark, in the context of a discussion about sustainable fashion, that ‘mending has died out’ (2008: 435). As cheap, mass-manufactured goods are now available to the majority of the global population, it has become normative consumer behaviour to dispose of any item that is less than perfect, even if the damage is superficial or remediable. In short, as people become wealthier, the imperative to mend commodities for oneself diminishes, and the knowledge and skills that enable this to happen subsequently fade away through lack of application.

However, in recent years there have been signs of a revival in interest in the repair of domestic goods, aided and evidenced most significantly by the emergence of mending groups in the UK, Europe and North America. How, then, does this apparent revival sit in relation to contemporary ideals of perfect, box-fresh commodities, excessive material consumption, and a society in which we are encouraged to prize our leisure far more highly than our labour? This resurgence of mending provides a timely opportunity to revisit a subject area that is as neglected by cultural historians as it has been by consumers.

In a very straightforward sense, this apparently humble subject area is profoundly important in the context of environmental sustainability. As a growing body of work recognises, it is essential that commodities have long and purposeful lives if global rates of consumption are to be reduced (see McDonough & Braungart 2002; Fletcher 2008). However, slower cycles of consumption are also dependent upon the attitudes and behaviours of consumers. It may be desirable for commodities to be designed in such a way that they can be mended, but consumers need to have the capacity and desire to repair and maintain these goods once they are in circulation. An investigation of mending therefore has literal, practical applications that can make a contribution to the sustainability agenda. After all, understanding consumer behaviours is an essential component of changing them.

But a study of mending reaches far beyond concerns with environmental sustainability: it provides the opportunity to consider how mending activities have been conceptualized and practised from pre-industrial times to the present day. As this paper demonstrates, an examination of mending reveals a complex picture in which gender, class and aesthetics interweave with the imperatives of consumer culture. Here it is demonstrated that far from being a trivial pursuit, mending is in fact an activity that is loaded with cultural significance. Of specific interest is the mending of household items such as clothing, bedlinen, furnishings, as well as

small electrical or mechanical items and furniture. Whilst there is some overlap with theoretical work on craft and making more generally, the focus here is specifically on mending, fixing and repairing household commodities, not least because they are subjects that so rarely garner any academic attention.

Consideration is given to existing literature on the subject before briefly outlining the scope of mending within a historical context. Having done so, some contemporary manifestations of mending are presented in the form of details taken from websites and blogs associated with specific mending groups or individuals who specialize in mending skills. Having thus introduced the material, it becomes possible to explore it thematically, addressing the subject from a variety of perspectives. Particular attention is given to: the gendered nature of mending; mending as a way of understanding relationships with commodities; knowledge, skills and labour; the social and interactive dimensions of mending; and mending as a lifestyle choice. Appropriately, this paper aims to fix the hole in existing work on the subject, drawing together a variety of theoretical perspectives and diverse bodies of research as a means of making sense of mending in both a historical and contemporary context.

Invisible Mending?

Historically, fixing has inhabited the interstices of domestic life, so mundane, so commonplace as to be rendered invisible. Moreover, it might even be regarded as a slightly grubby subject, associated with poverty, material want and low socio-economic status. In terms of academic literature, the scarceness of material suggests that it is a subject that has never really been of interest to anyone. Curiously, a search for the term 'mending' in scholarly work reveals that it is more likely to appear as a metaphor in psychoanalytical or medical studies than in de facto investigations of mending, whether in a historical or contemporary context. This suggests that there is an issue of low status at play here, one which sweeps the practices of mending from cultural visibility. One of the aims of this paper, therefore, is to explore why this might be.

Some cultural references to mending can be found in art and literature, especially in that which is concerned with depicting household scenes, or the private sphere of women. Indeed, one might say that the feminine ideal in the nineteenth century, as represented in visual and literary forms, was that of an industrious, domestic woman, her head bowed over her pile of mending. Furthermore, Burman writes that such work was emphatically feminine and collective in nature:

Tasks using the needle were shown as moments when women could talk together. Their sewing was depicted as soothing in times of crisis and as an occupation combining thrift, domesticity and sociability. (1999: 40)

These attributes of mending – the social, bonding elements, combined with the virtues and skills of good housekeeping – are themes that will be revisited later in this paper.

So where, then, does the subject of mending make an appearance in academic work? It is primarily found in historical studies relating to clothing and textiles. For instance, Gordon (1992) looks at the writings of New England women in the nineteenth century and finds the practices of sewing and mending to be a prominent subject whilst Campbell and Brandt (1994) look at clothing consumption on the American frontier during the same period. Work by Barker and Hamlett, meanwhile, touches on mending within the context of living arrangements and familial relations in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (2010). What they note is that during that period it was seen as an incredibly private practice, requiring the same kind of segregation of the sexes within the home as washing. Thus it might be concluded that in theoretical terms, mending – in so far as it does manifest – tends to be contextualized and discussed within a female, domestic and resolutely historical domain. It should also be noted, however, that in each of these studies, the subject is never more than a minor detail, mentioned only in passing: mending appears never to be the central focus of research.

Recent literature on the subject, however, offers alternative contexts in which to consider the practice. Jonnet Middleton (2012) talks about mending in relation to studying the lifespan of vintage clothing, a technologically oriented project with a decidedly subjective narrative, located within the United Kingdom. For Portwood-Stacer (2012), mending is identified as belonging to a range of anti-consumption practices with specific political and socio-cultural motivations. Her work is concerned with subjects in the United States. Laitala and Boks (2012), meanwhile, examine motivations behind the disposal of clothing, and their paper includes a small section on empirical data gathered that relates to actual mending activities carried out by the participants of their Norwegian study.

It is interesting that these three recent studies have emerged simultaneously from researchers based in disparate geographical locations. This may be regarded as evidence of the transglobal presence of a heightened interest in mending in contemporary life. Moreover, the contextual repositioning of the subject of repair in the 2012 papers helps illustrate growing recognition of mending as a complex and culturally relevant phenomenon that can be understood in a variety of ways.

A Brief History of Mending

In the pre-industrial era, knowledge of fabrics and textiles was regarded as a valuable component of the domestic economy, and was invariably the cultural property of women (Lemire 2005). Writing with reference to the second hand clothes trade between 1600 and 1850, she notes that: ‘a basic knowledge of textiles and their qualities was commonplace within the wider public, especially among wom-

en who took care of these items in the home,' (2005: 34). She goes on to say that for hundreds of years, the items most frequently taken to pawnbrokers were garments or household linens, and that the transactions that took place functioned as an 'alternative currency system' (2005: 35). Clothing and household textiles at this time were evidently seen as durable items that were, because of their potential exchange value, worth caring for and maintaining.

As the nineteenth century progressed, processes of industrialisation facilitated the emergence of mass-produced goods, but concurrent with the burgeoning variety of new products were industries based around the repair and maintenance of them. Whilst clothing and textile items would most likely have been mended within the domestic setting, in a city such as London, a whole network of enterprises existed solely to deal the repair of a range of items of apparel from boots to umbrellas. Thus, there was still an expectation that all goods would be mended: the poor would do this themselves whilst the wealthy would pay for someone else to do it. Either way, items were not regarded as disposable: they were constructed using materials and methods that made their repair viable. Even as factory-made clothing became cheaper and more widely available household goods would be mended rather than simply replaced and people continued to be employed in such trades.

Evidence of this can be found in my own family history: my great-grandfather's listed occupation on my grandmother's birth certificate is that of 'boot repairer' whilst my grandmother herself found work in the 1930s as a ladies sewing maid. Though domestic service was in decline during this period, London was home – then as now – to very wealthy families who could afford extensive teams of domestic staff. What is of note is that my grandmother was not employed as a dressmaker – that work would have been undertaken by a specialist outside of her employer's home. Rather, her duties were solely concerned with ensuring that items of clothing and household linens were kept in good repair, a task deemed important enough to justify this being a live-in position. Though she had little formal education, her knowledge of mending gave her a route out of an economically impoverished life in London's East End, reinforcing the idea that skills of this type were simultaneously commonplace and very much of the people. I recount these biographical details not because my grandmother's work was remarkable, but because she was in many ways a very typical working class woman of her time. Moreover, this kind of work tends not to be formally documented, so family histories – admittedly, with their subjectivity which can be problematic in scholarly terms – are where details are most likely to be found.

The 1940s was the time at which mending attained a very particular cultural prominence in the UK. This was due to extreme shortages of raw materials as all available resources were channelled into supplying the military campaigns of WWII. Detailed advice in the form of Government-produced publications was given on how to refashion garments so that fabric could be used effectively, as

well as instructions on how to carry out repairs. Not only was mending and imaginative re-use of materials seen as practical and economically essential during wartime and in the subsequent years of rationing that followed the end of the war, but to do so was effectively a display of patriotism. The ‘Make do and Mend’ campaigns of the British Board of Trade entered the popular imagination and are now regarded as the benchmark of a ‘waste not, want not’ culture in the UK. It is interesting that the aesthetics of these campaigns are often evoked in contemporary discussions of mending, despite the reality that it was a time of severe deprivation and economic hardship for most people. Rather than being seen as a symbol of historical national crisis, the cheery but utilitarian imagery through which the values of mending were communicated continue to resonate, albeit in a peculiarly British way.

As postwar austerity gave way to economic regeneration across Europe in the 1950s, mending came to be seen as both old-fashioned and unnecessary. Industrial production evolved so as to render the imperative to mend redundant. Specifically, it was the availability of cheap mass-produced goods – whether clothing or household items – that signalled the decline of mending as a widespread domestic practice. Crawford writes about the loss of these skills in relation to the increased availability of new goods: ‘what ordinary people once made, they buy; and what they once fixed for themselves, they replace entirely or hire an expert to repair.’ (2009: 2). It is easy, therefore, to see how and why mending fell away as an activity for all but the very poorest of people. Even now, there is no expectation that goods are made to last or that we would want to mend them, much less that we have the skills to do so.

Moreover, as significant populations – such as those in China, India, Brazil and Russia – are only just starting to develop their consumer markets, it seems unlikely that these countries will limit their opportunities for economic growth by turning away from the undeniable appeal of ‘the new’. In this context, mending might even be regarded as the very antithesis of progress, economic development and consumer capitalism. Indeed, Portwood-Stacer (2012) identifies it as one of the practices that is undertaken by self-identified anarchist activists in a deliberate attempt to counter mainstream consumption activities, and this idea of mending as a political act or lifestyle choice is one that is revisited towards the end of the paper.

It might be argued, then, that mending is re-emerging as a consumer practice as a response to straightened economic circumstances, and certainly Laitala and Boks find in their study of contemporary repair practices that ‘more mending occurs in lower income families’ (2012:132). However, Gibson and Stanes point out that ‘practices of mending clothes (and thus extending their lifecycles) vary enormously through time, from place to place, and among demographic groups.’ (2011: 175). This paper similarly argues that the emergence of repair cultures in

contemporary life cannot be read in one straightforward way: there are varied motivations for mending and numerous ways of understanding these practices.

Manifestations of Mending in Contemporary Culture

Each of the five examples of mending introduced here has a slightly different identity, reflecting the diverse values that might be attached to repair cultures.

www.scrapiana.com is the internet home of a UK mending enthusiast who lives in the city of Bath. On this website, she describes her subject matter as being that of ‘scraps: mostly how to recycle textile scraps and the alchemy of making lovely new things from old.’ She also clearly identifies herself as being concerned with environmental sustainability: ‘We Brits still bin a worryingly vast (and growing) quantity of textiles. My latest quest is to get the nation mending, darning and patching again.’ Through the site, the free monthly mending group, ‘The Big Mend’, is publicized as well as details of mending and darning classes that participants pay for. The tone of the site is that of the up-beat enthusiast, and written blog posts are interspersed with carefully selected visuals, often depicting vintage sewing materials.

By contrast, www.therestartproject.org, is decidedly utilitarian in terms of both purpose and representation. Presented as a collective, the website says: ‘Repair and reuse of small electrical and electronics have been neglected for a long time, replaced by a throw-away culture and often wasteful recycling. In just over a year, with almost no funding and no paid staff members, we have demonstrated that a different approach is not only possible, but it is necessary and a lot of fun too.’ This suggests that the primary motivation is a concern with environmental sustainability, although the site is free from any clichéd ‘green’ imagery. The tone used on the site is neither formal nor is it subjective or indicative of the views, tastes or aims of any one specific individual. Information is presented in a very functional form with few images and a monochrome colour palette, reinforcing a stereotypically masculine visual identity.

One blog that is emphatically personal and biographical is www.mymakedoandmendyear.wordpress.com. The project is intended as a year-long experiment in not buying first-cycle (i.e. new) goods. Whilst mending forms only one part of this challenge, the frequency with which the blogger posts updates (also dispersed via social media) makes it a useful case-study for looking at not just the frequency of mending activity, but also the motivations for doing so, as well as any material difficulties encountered in the process. The blogger also organised a mending group in her local area in 2013, and posts many links to other mending-themed sites and organisations.

The website www.tomofholland.com – though the work of an individual – is primarily focussed on the actual techniques of mending rather than the narratives of the mender per se. The images and detailed descriptions of materials used re-

flect specialist expert knowledge – especially of wool, knitting and crocheting – rather than that of an interested amateur. The blogger describes the intention of his work thus: ‘By writing this blog, running darning workshops and taking repair work commissions I provide mending inspiration, skills and services to people and hopefully persuade them that shop-bought clothes deserve care and attention too, just like a precious hand-knit.’ His work and website are particularly interesting given how few men seem to be involved with – or indeed interested in – the mending of clothing and textiles.

In the Netherlands, meanwhile, a number of ‘Repair Cafés’ have been established which bring together people who have mending skills with those who wish to learn them (Sharpe 2012). These Dutch groups tackle all forms of mending, including clothing and electrical goods, and appear to aim for a balanced gender mix. According to Sharpe (2012), ‘Almost 40 groups across the Netherlands have started their own Repair Cafés to date, and the Repair Café Foundation has brought in over \$500,000 from the Dutch government and other sources to support its operations.’ The www.repaircafe.nl site has links to sister organisations in Germany, France, Belgium, the UK and North America. The European sites in particular suggest that repair cafés take place regularly and frequently.

Gendered Mending

Scarce though it may be, literature on the subject shows that domestic mending is positioned, almost by definition, as a female activity. Yet this notion of mending as an exclusively female concern is a misplaced one. Archive images from the early twentieth century indicate that the mending of clothing was an activity that was taught to boys in schools, often out of material necessity. Yet writings on men and mending are even more scarce than those that focus on women.

It should be noted that running parallel to this cultural imperative for women to mend, there is also a long history of female *resistance* to needlework. The following quote suggests that for some, the domestic work of sewing has been regarded as an actual obstacle to education: ‘Needle-work and intellectual improvement are naturally in a state of warfare,’ writes Mary Lamb (as Sepronia), in *The British Lady’s Magazine* 1815 (cited by Appignanesi 2008: 30). This is an idea later articulated by second wave feminists, not least because it was yet another example of the unpaid labour that has always been expected of women.

The work of mending, implicitly regarded as ‘women’s work’, can also be understood as work that women don’t really want to do anymore. In fact, for recent generations of women there has been a form of pride in being able to say ‘I can’t sew a button on’ in the same way that claiming not to be able to boil an egg is indicative of a rejection of a traditional domestic role. For many, the widespread availability of cheap commodities has offered them the opportunity to reject any obligation to carry out this particular form of unpaid labour whilst simultaneously

disassociating themselves with apparent material want. But this dismissal of skills which are seen as domestic, mundane and low-status becomes a class issue: many middle-class women will happily pay another woman a very low wage to do this work for them. In a broader sense, there has been a tangible shift in what is considered to be ‘useful’ knowledge, with domestic skills generally not seen as relevant in a high-tech age.

In light of this history, what role does gender play in contemporary versions of mending culture and how are lingering negative connotations negotiated? Regardless of the problems of constructing mending as ‘women’s work’, some recent incarnations of mending groups often seem to be geared specifically towards women, implicitly if not explicitly, as reflected in the decorative and arguably feminine aesthetic identity of *scrapiana.com*. By contrast, the more general mending groups such as Repair Cafes and The Restart Project seem to be aesthetically neutral in the case of the former, and masculine and the case of the latter. Whilst none of these groups make any explicit statements about gender, they all reflect gendered values and ideals through the design of their websites.

One might conclude that it is, therefore, not the act of mending that is gendered, but the specific commodities in question that are gendered. Thus clothing, fabrics and furnishings become the ‘natural’ focus of women’s mending groups whereas electrical or mechanical goods are seen as belonging to a masculine culture, a division that is reflected in the divergent identities of the mending groups and blogs. Yet this is an incomplete explanation even on the basis of the examples discussed here, as Tom of Holland deals with a traditionally ‘feminine’ set of commodities but in a palpably different way to that of the female menders associated with other groups or sites.

The worth ascribed to work of this type reflects changing gender roles and notions of valued versus unvalued labour. Historically, mending was typically unpaid, invisible work, usually carried out by women in a domestic setting. But in recent incarnations of mending groups, these negative associations appear to have been shaken off. How might this be explained? Perhaps the very act of carrying out mending in a public space, as a social leisure activity liberates it from negative associations of unpaid domestic labour: work is literally reborn as leisure. A second reading might come from the application of Burman’s ideas when she positions domestic sewing as ‘an act of self-sufficiency and ingenuity’ (1999: 41). In this way, the act of mending becomes a positive, active form of engagement with commodities – an idea that is discussed in the following section – as well as a forum in which knowledge and skills can be exercised.

Transforming Commodities Through Repair

The act of mending can be understood as a transformative interaction with the material world: it is a practice with the potential to change the way that we view

and engage with commodities. This is an idea explored by Middleton when she writes that:

Visible mending reminds us of the materiality and the temporality of the thing. The delicate patchwork of repair is the narrative of its suffering and endurance. Each new darn declares the thing's power; humans think it worth mending, it should not be thrown away. (2012: 15)

The relationship between mender and object shifts from a passive one to an active one. Whilst mending and repair has a role in making commodities more sustainable, this is dependent upon the item being valued enough to justify further investment in its maintenance rather than throwing it away or giving it to a charity shop. It also depends upon there being sufficient people who have the skills to carry out the repairs. Crawford writes that 'the craftsman has an impoverished fantasy life compared to the ideal consumer; he is more utilitarian and less given to soaring hopes. But he is also more independent.' (2009: 18). It is this independence that makes mending so central to sustainability – one quite literally learns to see material goods in a different way, to value them and want to keep them in circulation, an idea also articulated by Gauntlett, when he writes that:

One becomes more aware of the details and decisions which underpin everyday things and experiences, and therefore more able to gain pleasure and inspiration from the appreciation of things. (2011: 60)

For the most part, we purchase mass-produced commodities and these new objects come into our lives replete with the meanings ascribed to them by their producers. Not, it should be added, by those invisible, nameless workers who actually make the goods, but by those who market, advertise and sell the goods. It has been argued that these 'signs' have little to do with the functional use of the objects – they are about what any given item represents (Baudrillard 1970). But when one starts to tinker with any given commodity – as necessitated by the very act of repair – those meanings start to unravel and a transformative process opens up in which the commodity takes on the imprint of the fixer. They might also start to provide a kind of biography in ways that mass-produced shop garments cannot, for as Crawford writes: 'shared memories attach to the material souvenirs of our lives, and producing them is a kind of communion, with others and the future.' (2009: 15)

These conceptual ideas start to become tangible when looking at the 'visible mends' that appear on the websites of Tom of Holland and Scrapiana. There is no attempt made at hiding the work that has taken place – it may even become a design feature of the 'new' garment. By contrast, in their research Laitala and Boks found that 'very few informants used the repair as a decorative element.' (2012: 132). There are, therefore, multiple possibilities for intentions in mending, and in each instance the repairer makes a choice: to return the commodity to its original identity, or to rework it in a way that changes its meaning. This latter option might also be understood as a way of fostering a playful, inventive relationship with

material commodities, one through which the personal identity of the mender might be expressed. A hand-mended object also raises the rather more philosophical question of how to deal with imperfection. Industrial processes have all but eliminated the very concept of imperfection: we rarely accept ‘seconds’ in the world of mass-produced consumer goods. Mended commodities might therefore be seen as a thorn in the side of that contemporary tenet – they puncture illusory perfection and reveal both the labour of the mender and the patina of life.

The Knowledge, Skills and Labour of Mending

The activity of mending can be broken down into the separate but overlapping components of: a body of relevant knowledge about the items and materials involved; a practical skillset appropriate to the task; and the actual labour of carrying out the reparation. An attempt to mend something oneself might also be seen as a reflexive practice as one may become aware of one’s own limitations in any of these areas.

In their study of clothing use, Laitala and Boks found that ‘the decision to repair clothing depends partly on the handiwork and sewing abilities of the respondents,’ (2012: 132), and that the most common repairs to clothing were those such as sewing on a button or repairing a seam. But they go on to say that:

Zipper replacement is more demanding, and most of the informants did not try to do it themselves...In that case the zippers may be taken to professional tailors or family or friends (usually mothers) with more sewing competence. (2012: 132)

This provides a helpful example of exactly what is regarded as easy or difficult by menders, demanding or otherwise in terms of skills. It is also noteworthy that it is most often mothers who are regarded as the repositories of these skills. The nature of such skills is that they take time to acquire, and require practise, yet this in itself may be regarded as part of the intrinsic reward, for as Sennett writes:

Craftsmen take pride most in skills that mature. This is why simple imitation is not a sustaining satisfaction; the skill has to evolve. The slowness of craft time serves as a source of satisfaction; practice beds in, making the skill one’s own. Slow craft time also enables the work of reflection and imagination – which the push for quick results cannot.’ (Sennett 2008: 295)

Contemporary menders negotiate the slowness of results by emphasising instead the value of that labour and by recognising that the requisite skills are no longer common folk-knowledge. The importance of knowledge transfer is evident in this quote from the website of Bath’s ‘Big Mend’ group:

If your problem is trepidation or insufficient skills, we aim to be able to help you with that too; if there isn’t someone there who will know how to fix your beloved vintage dress, we will know where to look to find out.

The Big Mend – Bath, UK)

Likewise, the Dutch Repair Cafés recognizes that attendees may require the help of specialists, that these are not skills that people necessarily already have:

You'll find tools and materials to help you make any repairs you need. You will also find repair specialists such as electricians, seamstresses, carpenters and bicycle mechanics. It's an ongoing learning process.

The Repair Café – Netherlands

The positive feelings generated by learning something new are also evidenced in the website of the Restart Project: 'Everyone attending a Restart Party wants to come back for more, learn additional skills and help others save devices from going to waste.' (www.therestartproject.org).

Whilst specific skills associated with particular materials are a prerequisite for mending, the task also requires the cognitive mindset of being able to assess a problem with the material object, and identify an appropriate remedy. In short, problem-solving is as important a skill in this activity as knowledge of techniques for fixing an item. A pertinent example of this appears on the blog My Make Do and Mend Year. It takes the form of a detailed blog post about the challenges of making a particular repair (in this instance, to a pair of swimming trunks). The wrong turns taken are documented as well as the successful outcome, and one gets a sense of the active problem-solving that has taken place.

I thought that replacing the elastic would be pretty straightforward [sic], and would just be a case of snipping into the waistband, removing the perished elastic, and replacing it. Not so. The elastic is sewn into the waistband rendering it impossible to remove... So I duly dug out some elastic, and measured it around hubby's waist and got sewing. I computed that I needed to use a zig zag stitch for elastic, but I thought it had to be a very tight zig zag, which I did, and hubby then tried them on... They were no better-arrgghhhh! Cue lots of very tedious unpicking... I gave it another go... I used wider elastic, and a very shallow zig zag... I also used the zipper foot to enable me to leave the drawstring unstitched. The hardest thing about sewing with elastic is trying to pull/stretch it while sewing without pulling your actual sewing-any handy tips? But they are done!

(<http://mymakedoandmendyear.wordpress.com/2013/07/28/a-mend/>)

Unless one is very fortunate, the structures of contemporary life provide limited opportunities for pride to be taken in work. In some small way, to mend something is to understand and appreciate the value of work, itself a denigrated term, usually prized only for its exchange value in monetary terms. Specifically, 'there is a pride of accomplishment in the performance of whole tasks that can be held in the mind all at once, and contemplated as whole once finished,' Crawford writes (2009: 156). Likewise, Middleton provides tangible recognition of the labour involved in mending when she writes: 'half an hour of human effort and the socks are roadworthy again for months, if not years, to come' (2012: 15).

One might say that at its best, mending is a meaningful form of work, a subject on which Schumacher writes, citing the Indian philosopher J.C. Kumarappa:

If the nature of the work is properly appreciated and applied, it will stand in the same relation to the higher faculties as food is to the physical body. It nourishes and enlivens the higher man and urges him to produce the best he is capable of. (Kumarappa cited in Schumacher 1993: 40)

Moreover, craft might be useful for countering the feelings of alienation that arise in a capitalist system: ‘for Marx, the defining characteristic of non-alienated activity was human creativity – the artist and craftsman being ideal-typical examples,’ writes Bocock (1995: 51). This is an idea similarly articulated by Portwood-Stacer when she argues that:

The idea behind DIY is that when possible one should put one’s own, unalienated labour toward producing the things one needs, rather than putting money toward practices and industries that exploit workers and natural resources. (2012: 92)

Whilst those who engage with making and mending recognise the diverse range of requirements involved in this labour, it is an inevitability of contemporary socio-economic systems that most people do not. Furthermore, because industrial processes de-skill workers by breaking production processes down into fragmented and disconnected components, the erosion of practical skills is endemic even within populations working in manufacturing industries. Low wages also lead to the erroneous conclusion that this can’t be difficult, skilled work for it brings very limited economic rewards. Therefore the act of mending may even make us think twice about whether we buy the cheap mass-produced goods that are a ubiquitous feature of ‘throwaway’ consumer culture. My point here is not to suggest that the pleasure of mending something in the comfort of one’s own home or at a social evening bears any resemblance to sweatshop labour. Rather, it can serve as a reminder that all forms of labour deserve a fair wage, regardless of whether or not they are prized culturally.

One can also formulate mending as an assertion of individual agency running counter to the prevalent consumer culture, which is the perspective of Portwood-Stacer (2012). The ability to assess value and utilise skills is similarly empowering, and these activities help raise philosophical questions about how we deal with imperfection, not just in our material worlds but also with ourselves.

Social Mending in an Era of Digital Technology

There are two social dimensions to contemporary mending: the face-to-face encounters within mending groups and the virtual, interactive dimension offered by the circulation of information about mending using new media. These two elements interweave successfully, giving menders choice in the way that they can gather information and learn repair skills.

Historically, the social value of such domestic work has been explored by Burman, who writes that:

Time taken for buying cloth and other items, making clothes, dealing with dress-makers, mending, recycling, renovating and laundry were done with the support of mothers or sisters, who brought a wider range of skills and the opportunity to share tasks and resources. (1999: 42)

Thus we see that in the past, sewing has been an activity in which women could share skills and expertise, but also participate in a social experience. Returning to contemporary mending groups, this aspect of each is evident:

Imagine a great big sociable gaggle of people sewing on buttons, darning, nibbling snacks and gossiping (The Big Mend, Bath, UK)

Likewise, the Dutch Repair Cafés are described as:

Free meeting places and they're all about repairing things (together). If you have nothing to repair, you can enjoy a cup of tea or coffee. Or you can lend a hand with someone else's repair job. (The Repair Café, Netherlands)

Quite clearly, the social dimension is central to both the identity and success of these groups. Moreover, there is an overt desire for social inclusivity which is so often lacking in daily encounters, reflected in the following quote from the Restart Project:

We are receiving offers to collaborate from retired engineers and electricians, students, green activists as well as very "normal" people, happy that someone is representing their frustrated voice, and pragmatically creating an alternative'.

(www.therestartproject.org)

As well as providing an opportunity to reconnect with the values that come with mending, these groups open up new spaces and places – including virtual ones – in which intergenerational social interaction may take place, with younger menders learning from older, experienced specialists.

Rather than being retrogressive or anti-technology – which might be an assumption made about menders – contemporary manifestations of mending make very good use of social media. Indeed, the mending groups described here *rely* on internet technology in order to connect with their participants. There are numerous ways in which mending information lends itself to expression through new media.

Firstly, the knowledge base is fragmented and does not lie in one single, consolidated place. Information about the subject is held by individuals in a variety of geographical locations, and may be very specific in nature. Thus new media permits access to this shared knowledge. However, it also intersects with real life meetings and social interactions as mending sites are often there to publicize and support real-world activities. Secondly, the nature of mending lends itself well to the combination of instructions, images and embedded video clips that work so well on blogs and can thus be demonstrated in step-by-step instructions. Thirdly, the interactive nature of new media facilitates the seeking of solutions and crowd-sourcing specialist knowledge. Together, these elements mean that the communication of information about the subject is both accessible, but still specialist, and

the evidence of the sites considered in this study indicates a strong relationship between online and real-life activities.

Mending as a Way of Life

One might conclude that most contemporary menders are doing so as an active and deliberate life choice. This may be partially influenced by economic imperatives, as Laitala and Boks (2012) suggest, but in some instances, participants are paying significant sums of money to learn about mending (e.g. the darning classes offered by Scrapiana), suggesting that it is being pursued for personal interest rather than out of economic necessity. Nevertheless, as Portwood-Stacer argues: 'knowing how to repair things for oneself also keeps one from having either to pay others to do it or to spend money on new things to replace the old.' (2012: 92).

Environmental sustainability appears to be a stronger motivation in most instances, and this is reflected in all of the websites and blogs considered here. Yet none of these activities are aligned to overtly politicized environmentalism. Nor would any of the individuals mentioned in this paper fit into Portwood-Stacer's definition of self-identified anarchists and anti-consumer activists (2012).

Rather, these activities might be more effectively aligned with 'slow' movements, written about extensively by Carl Honoré (2005). Whilst he does not engage specifically with the subject of mending, he very much posits reduced consumption of material goods as a component of wider, slower social and economic system. There are also some parallels with the revival of home-cooking and grow-your-own movements that have emerged as a response to disillusionment with the food industry in recent years. Moreover, the very clear social element identified in mending groups resonates profoundly with ideas about being more engaged in meaningful activities on a local level, a theme that constantly emerges in discussions about living slower, and better, lives. According to Gauntlett, this kind of small-scale, local activity brings multiple benefits to participants:

It is worth noting that in order to feel supported and encouraged in their creative efforts, people do not necessarily need a huge audience or network. The pleasure in connecting with people through creativity, and therefore feeling more connected with the world – becoming heard and recognised, and starting to feel that there may be some point in trying to make a difference – can occur through interactions with small numbers of like-minded people, and so this kind of activity doesn't need to meet a large number of 'eyeballs' to be meaningful. (2011: 232)

Similar ideas are articulated specifically by mending groups, highlighting the social and economic benefits to the local community as well as to individuals:

We envision a world where much less goes to waste, many more people can learn repair and reuse skills, generating local repair jobs and opportunities in their communities. (www.therestartproject.org)

Perhaps, then, mending can best be understood as one of a number of practices taken by people who are concerned with environmental sustainability, but who want to take action on a personal, domestic level.

Reflections on the Meaning of Mending

This exploration of mending reveals a subject of great complexity and demonstrates just how little we know about it. Clearly there is considerable scope for more research into the subject, whether looking at its historical context or current incarnations. In particular, it would be useful to know more about mending in locations other than Europe and North America.

Nevertheless, even within the scope of this study it has been possible to identify a range of possibilities for understanding mending. Certainly, concerns with environmental sustainability seem to be driving interest in the subject at the moment. But as discussed, there are also benefits arising from mending on personal, social and economic levels, too. Above all, mending can be regarded as a transformative process and paradoxically, rather than fixing relationships to cultural artefacts, it opens up a kind of dialogue in which the consumer becomes an active agent in their material lives.

Ultimately, then, mending should not be positioned as a trivial activity at all. It is profoundly important in environmental, social and economic terms, and not just as a metaphor, but as a democratic action that is as materially tangible as it is empowering.

Anna König is a lecturer in Cultural and Historical Studies at the University of Arts, London. She studied psychology at Sussex University followed by a post-graduate degree in fashion history and theory at the London College of Fashion. She has contributed to a number of academic texts on fashion and the fashion media, and has written for several national newspapers and magazines. Current research interests include sustainability, second-cycle garment use and contemporary cultures of making and mending. E-mail: a.konig@fashion.arts.ac.uk

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British Asians, Covert Racism and Exclusion in English Professional Football

By Daniel Kilvington

Abstract

This article examines the exclusion of British Asians from English professional football. At present, there are eight British Asians with professional contracts out of over 4,000 players. This statistic is increasingly noteworthy when we consider that, first, football is extremely popular across British Asian groups and, second, Britain is home to over 4 million British Asians (the UK's largest minority ethnic group). Following a brief introduction as well as a discussion of racisms, the work will provide an overview of the barriers that have excluded British Asian football communities from the professional ranks. In particular, I shall discuss some of the key obstacles including overt racism, 'all-Asian' football structures and cultural differences. However, the focus of this paper is to explore the impact and persisting nature of institutional racism within football. With the aid of oral testimonies, this work shall present British Asian experiences of covert racism in the game. I shall therefore demonstrate that coaches/scouts (as gatekeepers) have a tendency to stereotype and racialize British Asian footballers, thus exacerbating the British Asian football exclusion. Finally, the article will offer policy recommendations for reform. These recommendations, which have come out of primary and secondary research, aspire to challenge institutional racism and combat inequalities within the game.

Keywords: 'Race', racism, British Asian, exclusion, football.

Introduction

This paper will begin by critically examining overt, symbolic, inferential and institutional racisms as these different forms each work to exclude British Asian football communities from the professional game.¹ Secondly, I will provide an overview of the British Asian under-representation in order to establish context.² Thirdly, I shall succinctly outline the methodological processes that were used within my research. Fourth, with the aid of oral testimonies, the research will critically highlight the extent to which covert racism is embedded within English professional football. Finally, I will present recommendations for reform that could be implemented in order to challenge institutional racism in English football.

Despite popular belief, football, and not cricket, is the number one sport for British Asian groups (Burdsey 2007; Saeed & Kilvington 2011; Kilvington & Price 2013). Research collected from Manchester University (1991 in *Asians in Football Forum* 2005: 9) found that British Bangladeshi boys, for instance, played football more frequently than white British boys. Yet, British Asian football communities remain isolated from the mainstream game. Why is this a problem? Why does it matter? Well, if a minority group is excluded from a field, in this case football, it is not possible to label the field egalitarian. Football therefore represents an unequal sphere, contradicting the oft cited 'level playing field' mantra. This paper attempts to raise awareness of the institutional inequalities that British Asians encounter while also offering possible combative solutions. This area of research is vital as football has the ability to 'bring different cultures together' (Fleming & Tomlinson 1995: 2). One could argue that this issue has never been more important as social segregation and exclusion continues to affect certain populations across Britain.

Racism

Racism is one of the most complicated theoretical terms to define, understand and explain due to its changing nature. Nonetheless, Miles (1989: 149) attempts to define racism as

any set of claims or arguments which signify some aspect of the physical features of an individual or group as a sign of permanent distinctiveness and which attribute additional negative characteristics and or consequences to the individual's or group's presence.

The emphasis on physical traits that underpins racist thinking is further elaborated by Cashmore and Troyna (1983: 27), who note that the consequence of this is an 'ordering' of human populations:

Racism is the doctrine that the world's population is divisible into categories based on physical differences which can be transmitted genetically. Invariably, this leads to the conception that the categories are ordered hierarchically so that some elements of the world's population are superior to others.

The authors indicate that 'race' and racism are ideologies that centre on biological difference. However, new forms of racism have emerged within contemporary society (Barker 1981; Gilroy 1992; Mason 1995; 2000). As Goldberg (1990: xiii) postulates, 'the presumption of a single monolithic racism is being displaced by a mapping of the multifarious historical formulations of racisms'.

Racism is not just a passing phenomenon as it constantly mutates. Malcolm X (in Otis 1993: 151) once used an analogy from popular culture to describe its shifting meaning: 'Racism is like a Cadillac. The 1960 Cadillac doesn't look like the 1921 Cadillac, but it is still a Cadillac; it has simply changed form'. This demonstrates that racism has changed meaning within a relatively short period of time. Yet, whatever the detours may be, one constant remains, 'ultimately, the goal of racism is dominance' (Memmi 2009: 131). As Wetherell and Potter (1992: 70, in Hook 2006: 210) note, racism is best defined as 'the effect of establishing, sustaining and reinforcing oppressive power relations between those defined as racially or ethnically different'.

Although the goal remains the same, one must emphasise that we can no longer discuss racism in the singular. Racisms, in the plural, is now more accurate (Barker 1981; Mason 1995; 2000).

Overt Racism

Overt racism, for example, could be applied to extreme right-wing groups who wish to repatriate all Black or Asian communities from Western countries to their country of ancestral origin or individuals and groups who actively seek out and verbally and physically abuse some minority groups. This type of racism is very visible. Conversely, one could suggest that a general sensitivity now surrounds overt racism which has led to its decrease. Yet, Stangor (2009: 5) highlights that there are exceptions as, for instance, we are more likely to 'express those prejudices ... when they can be covered up by other external causes'. As Stephan, Ybarra and Morrison (2009: 44) note, 'Symbolic group threats are threats to a group's religion, values, belief system, ideology, philosophy, morality or worldview'. Under these parameters, one is able to defend or even justify the differential treatment of ethnic minority groups on the proviso that 'Other' groups challenge dominant society's culture or 'way of life'. This is commonly referred to as the intergroup threat theory (Stephan, Ybarra & Morrison 2009).

Symbolic Racism

'Symbolic racism' refers to the ethnic, religious or racial symbols that 'out-groups' display (Gilroy 1987; Van Dijk 1993). Notably, groups that are considered vastly different or 'socially deviant' may elicit greater 'symbolic threats' (Stephan, Ybarra & Morrison 2009: 47). Islamophobia is an example of symbolic racism, a form that affects the homogenised 'Asian' within the British context (Saeed 2003). Muslims have been presented as 'primitive, violent ... and oppressive', whereas the West is traditionally considered 'civilised, reasonable ... and non-sexist' (The Runnymede Trust 1997: 6). Following 9/11, Britain saw community relations worsen as 'anyone who wore a turban, or simply "looked Asian" was at risk of physical assault or verbal abuse' (Ratcliffe 2004: 9). In the Islamophobic era, British Muslims are stereotyped as 'dangerous social problems' (Archer 2006: 55) and stigmatized as 'terrorist warriors' (Salih 2004: 998).

Johnson (2007: 24) argues that without our noticing, Britain is 'becoming a society increasingly divided by race and religion' and as a result, British Muslims in particular are not only becoming isolated, but seen as the 'enemy within' (Allen 2007; Ratcliffe 2004). This general trend suggests that if Islam, which means Asian in the British context (Saeed 2003), continues to be presented as incompatible with the British 'way of life', it may have direct ramifications for British Asian footballers. In short, British Asians appear to be on the receiving end of 'symbolic racism' within contemporary western societies (Gilroy 1987; Van Dijk 1993). Under the guise of symbolic racism, ethnic groups are considered homogenous and incompatible with the host culture.

Inferential Racism

Stereotypical perceptions of 'Others', or inferential racism, is central to this debate. Hall (1990: 13) suggests that covert racism can be classified as inferential racism which, refers to

those apparently naturalised representations of events and situations relating to 'race', whether 'factual' or 'fictional', which have racist premises and propositions inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions. These enable racist statements to be formulated without ever bringing into awareness the racist predicates on which the statements are grounded [...] Inferential racism is more widespread – and in many ways, more insidious (than overt racism), because it is largely invisible even to those who formulate the world in its terms.

In any ways inferential racism is based on 'common-sense' or hegemonic thinking. This type of racism is strongly influenced by stereotypes, which Stangor (2009: 2) describes as 'the traits that come to mind quickly when we think about the groups'. One could argue that inferential racism influences social actions and structures and leads to another type of covert racism, known as institutional racism.

Institutional Racism

Coates (2011a: 1) describes institutional racism as ‘hidden; secret; private; covered; disguised; insidious or concealed’. While this term entered British popular discourse (Cottle 2004) with the publication of the Macpherson Report in 1999, the concept can originally be found in the writings of black activists Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton. Writing in 1967 about the conditions of blacks in America they argued that racism was not just the attitudes of a few white people but was intrinsic to US society. They note that institutional racism is harder to challenge but in many ways is more pervasive than overt racism.

When a black family moves into a house in a white neighbourhood and is stoned, burned or routed out, they are victims of an overt act of individual racism which many people will condemn – at least in words. But it is institutional racism that keeps black people locked in dilapidated slum tenements [...] The society either pretends it does not know of this latter situation (Carmichael & Hamilton 1967: 4).

This indicates that racism, as well as being an individual act, is also a part of the fabric of society and can be seen in various settings. At times this manifestation is overt but more often it is covert and less likely to gain public condemnation or even acknowledgement (Farrington et al. 2012). This suggests that the foundations of contemporary racism are to be found disguised within institutions and organisations. Institutional racism is therefore very hard to identify and challenge (Farrington et al. 2012). As Zarate (2009: 388) notes, it is possible for one to ‘document the underrepresentation of minorities among elected and appointed officials’, but it may be ‘virtually impossible to identify any specific instance of racism’. Put simply, this form of racism ‘operates as a boundary keeping mechanism whose primary purpose is to maintain social distance between racial elite and racial non-elite’ (Coates 2011b: 121).

Although sport is considered equal, Hylton (2009) argues that discrimination is present, just as it is in the educational sector and the health service. That said, it is important to point out that overt racism, for instance, in English professional football has decreased in recent years (Frosdick & Newton 2006). Nevertheless, as this discussion has postulated, racism is a complex concept. As this article argues, covert forms of racism in particular have exacerbated the British Asian exclusion from English professional football.

British Asians, Football and Exclusion

It has been argued that Western imagination understands the British Asian ‘culture’ as being ‘inexorably related to the Indian subcontinent’ and, it is perceived as ‘traditional rather than modern’ (Burdsey 2006: 491). Consequently, if one comprehends the British Asian ‘culture’ or ‘identity’ to be static rather than

changeable, one may subscribe to the notion that football, Britain's national game, is too 'modern' for the South Asian diasporas. That said, football has been a part of the Indian subcontinent for over a century (Dimeo 2001; Dimeo & Mills 2001; Bandyopadhyay 2003).

For Burdsey (2007: 38), 'football is an extremely popular and socially significant activity for increasing numbers of young British Asian men'. But, in order to fully emphasise the passion and enthusiasm that so many British Asians harbour for the game, it is worth quoting Bains and Johal:

The truth is there is mass Asian participation in football on a variety of different levels. From playing the games in their thousands to travelling around the country supporting their favoured teams, from working as executives within professional football clubs to buying them out completely, British-Asians, be they young or old, rich or poor, male or female, have either dipped their toes or fully immersed themselves in the dynamic waters of the modern game (1998: 17).

Yet, this passion is not mirrored with participatory success in the professional sphere. For example, there are only eight players of Asian-heritage within the professional game. Moreover, there were only 13 Asian heritage players, seven of whom are of dual ethnicity, between the ages of 16-18 participating at football league academies in the 2009/10 season. This statistic becomes increasingly noteworthy when one considers the fact that over 1,200 players participate at this level. Those of Asian-heritage are not only under-represented in the professional ranks, but also in the youth system.

It has been agreed that there are multiple barriers that British Asian football players encounter when attempting to gain inclusion within English football (Bains & Patel 1996; McGuire, Monks & Halsall 2001; Burdsey 2007; Saeed & Kilvington 2011). For Burdsey (2004; 2007), Lusted (2009; 2011) and Bradbury (2010; 2011), racisms have exacerbated the British Asian exclusion. Bains and Patel (1996: 26) found that 49 per cent of Asian heritage players, mainly within amateur football, had encountered verbal racism, while a further 48 per cent had faced both verbal and physical abuse. The oral testimony cited below emphasises the commonality of overt racism in semi-professional football:

You hear it at away games ... I know it's a horrible thing to say but I've had it most of the season. I can name the number of games on one hand where I haven't had it and we've played 46 games. (British Indian semi-professional footballer, 4 May 2011)

Burdsey (2004: 298) indicates that 'issues of "race" and racism at amateur level might make a more substantial contribution to the under-representation by restricting the progress of British Asian players into the higher echelons of the game'. McGuire, Monks and Halsall (2001) employ quantitative data to test the idea that racism poses a barrier for British Asian football players. They note that over 90

per cent of Asian heritage players saw ‘racist supporters’ as obstacles for entry into professional football (McGuire, Monks and Halsall 2001: 75).

In short, overt racism is still manifest within the grass-roots and semi-professional spheres (Kilvington & Price 2013). In turn, it is no surprise that British Asian football communities created ‘all-Asian’ football structures.³ These mono-ethnic environments were established as a ‘safe haven’ after British Asian players regularly encountered overt racism in mainstream football leagues. As Johal (2001: 53) explains, ‘South Asians [were] forced into creating their own mono-ethnic football teams in order to protect themselves from racial abuse and still partake of the sport’. As Bains and Patel (1996: 26) note, ‘those who played in Asian teams were significantly less likely to encounter racism than those who played in mixed or predominantly white teams’.

The continuation of ‘all-Asian’ football structures is hardly surprising considering the current climate of racial hostility. For example, Athwal, Bourne and Wood (2010) analysed 660 cases of racial violence across the UK during 2009. They noted that ‘Asians, who are recognisably Muslim and/or working in isolating trades or living in poor communities where they do not enjoy strength of numbers, are at greatest risk. Just over 45 per cent of victims were Asian’ (Athwal, Bourne & Wood, 2010: 10). Thus, one must understand the appeal of ‘all-Asian’ leagues. For Kilvington and Price (2013: 175), ‘mono-ethnic structures ... allow socially alienated communities the opportunity to participate in sport’, while Burdsey (2009: 716) adds that these organisations ‘remain necessary given the continuing presence of racism in amateur football’.

Nevertheless, these ‘all-Asian’ environments are perceived to embody British Asian self-segregation. Hence, ‘communities that are under-represented as players, coaches and managers are blamed for causing their own exclusion, rather than being seen as the recipients of exclusionary attitudes and practices’ (Burdsey 2011: 6). For Lusted (2009: 732), this transferring of blame places the onus onto ethnic minority groups as they are deemed unwilling to ‘conform to hegemonic practice’, or in this context, participate in mainstream football environments. If one adopts this standpoint, they problematically engender a ‘colour blind’ ideology and thus deny the existence of racisms (Long et al. 1997; Long 2000; Gardiner & Welch 2001; Johal 2001; Long & Hylton 2002; Lusted 2009). Put simply, British Asians are blamed for their isolated position due to their perceived insular tendencies.

Religio-cultural differences have also been highlighted by football insiders to explain the British Asian exclusion. In other words, British Asians are excluded because their ‘culture’ is deemed incompatible with English football. This transferring of blame is encapsulated by the following football insider’s comment:

‘You hear about Asian players stopping to say their prayers. They’re different from us, have a different culture’ (*Independent on Sunday* 17 September 1995, in Back, Crabbe & Solomos, 2001: 179).

Moreover, Kilvington (2012) argues that gatekeepers continue to racialize British Asian players. British Asians’ lack of success in football is said to perpetuate the physiological myth that ‘Asians cannot play contact sports’ and, instead, only play stick sports (Sleap 1998: 111, in Collins & Kay 2003: 125). One could argue that South Asians and British Asians are ‘racially framed’ to possess physical characteristics that are deemed incompatible with contact sports (Feagin 2006). For example, Dave Bassett, a former manager of Leicester City FC, commented that ‘the Asian build is not that of a footballer [...] It may well be that Asian ingredients in food, or the nutrition they take, [is] not ideal for building up a physical frame’ (BBC TV 1995, in Fleming 2001: 114). Unfortunately, ‘Bassett’s views on the British Asian exclusion are not alone, as many figures within the game today may still embrace such stereotypes’ (Kilvington 2012: 209). It is important to point out that from a sociological perspective, there is little evidence to suggest that ‘racial’ differences determine success or failure in particular sports (Cashmore 2005; Coyle 2010).

If gatekeepers adhere to the outlined stereotypes, one could argue that institutional figures will not actively scout Asian-heritage players (Bains & Patel 1996; Burdsey 2004; 2007; Randhawa 2011; Kilvington 2012). As a result, this maintains the British Asian exclusion as they are being overlooked by the scouting system on the basis that ‘they’ are not compatible with the physical or cultural requirements that the game entails (Back, Crabbe & Solomos, 2001; Burdsey 2007; Kilvington 2012; Kilvington & Price 2013). It is at this point that inferential and institutional racism comes to the fore. As this paper will argue, these forms of racism are still embedded within talent identification systems (McGuire, Monks & Halsall 2001; Burdsey 2004; 2007; Kilvington 2012). Although British Asians are blamed for causing their own exclusion (Kilvington & Price 2013), I shall suggest that it is in fact the football system that is maintaining and exacerbating the British Asian exclusion, rather than British Asians themselves.

Methodology

As this article includes primary research, it is important to briefly discuss the employed methods. The empirical work the article is grounded upon is part of my wider PhD research which examined the British Asian exclusion from English professional football. The research methodology chosen was that of ‘action research’ as the investigation aims to ‘make improvements to that environment’ (Denscombe 2002: 26). The work includes the thoughts of 58 individual partici-

pants within the field, and using purposive, theoretical and snowball sampling, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two FA members, five football academies, five centres of excellences, two overseas professional British Asian players, nine semi-professional British Asian players, three amateur British Asian players, two professional clubs, nine British Asian founded grassroots level organisations, and three anti-racist organisations.

During the coding process, 38 barriers to participation were highlighted. These barriers include the lack of grassroots teams in predominantly British Asian populated environments, the failures of the scouting system and the lack of role models. That said, there were considerable overlaps between most barriers. For instance, covert racism could be fitted into an overarching racisms category which includes both overt and covert forms. This overarching category then links with 'all-Asian' football environments as racisms, notably overt forms, acted as an 'accelerant' in their formation (Bradbury 2011: 81). Yet, while overt racism led to the creation of such mono-ethnic structures, it is inferential and institutional racism that maintains the exclusion as gatekeepers do not visit such areas. Covert racism therefore acts as a significant barrier in the exclusion of British Asian players, and it is for this reason why this article has decided to focus on this exclusionary force.

British Asians, Institutional Racism and Football

Racism in football operates in increasingly complex, subtle and nuanced ways, to the extent that it often goes unrecognized and subsequently unchallenged, in the game (Burdsey 2007: 40).

Hylton (2009: 41) argues that 'we live in a fundamentally racist and unequal society where processes systematically disenfranchise and limit the potential of black (and white) people. We therefore have a racist society that impinges on all aspects of our lives'. Yet, although discrimination is a constant in our daily life experiences, Long (2000) suggests that there is a 'denial of racism' within sport. These denials permit that

- success is based on 'merit', e.g. 'We scout players ... If there happened to be an Asian player who was outstanding, we'd sign him' (Academy manager, 6 June 2011).
- strength of 'character' is needed, e.g. 'Being called a Paki from your teammates is different, right? You have to get used to that ... It's banter, you take it on the chin and they'll respect you more' (British Pakistani former academy player, 25 May 2011).

- the ‘blame’ is ‘transferred’ onto excluded groups, e.g. ‘Cricket is still number one for Asians’ (Bradford City centre of excellence staff, 9 July 2011).
- ‘societal change’ means society is less racist, e.g. ‘For an Asian player now to make it in the game ... it is definitely easier than it was because society has changed; we’ve become more open minded, more liberal’ (Anglo Bangladeshi semi-professional footballer, 7 April 2011).

An additional tenet of this denial is that of ‘colour blindness’, which effectively refuses to ‘identify “race” as an influencing factor on the playing field’ (Lusted 2009: 730). ‘Just as the law, policing, education, health, housing, social welfare and politics cannot afford to be colour-blind, neither can those in sport as managers, policy makers, the media or academics’ (Hylton 2009: 31). This discussion will therefore aim to centralise minority voices in a bid to highlight examples of covert racism that have been experienced by British Asian football communities within the recruitment process.

For Burdsey (2007: 53-4), there are four fundamental failures of the scouting system. First, gatekeepers are ignorant and believe that the more talented players, whatever colour or ‘creed’, will compete in mainstream leagues. Second, many recruiters do not venture to ‘all-Asian’ or ‘specialist’ leagues as they are considered not to be of a sufficient overall standard. Third, the smaller clubs may not have the time, money or resources to send out employees to observe ‘specialist’ leagues. Fourth, most ‘all-Asian’ structures are believed to be adult-dominated and these players are past the ‘golden age’ of learning. Williams (1994: 160, in Lusted 2009: 725) points out that scouts and coaches tend to follow tradition when it comes to player recruitment:

Knowledge of local male networks and of the interface between local, non-league and professional football is a significant currency inside the male communities which manage, play and support the game at the local level. The ‘scouts’ of professional clubs have a special, near-mystical status in this culture as they trawl the top local leagues in search of young men who have the elusive and indefinable ‘right stuff’.

While these institutional figures peruse the top leagues they are routinely bypassing British Asian football environments. This led one participant to argue: ‘There needs to be a revamp of the system because they [the scouts] only go to places that they know’ (British Bangladeshi semi-professional footballer and youth development officer, 5 April 2011).

Back, Crabbe and Solomos (2001) promote a framework of policy interventions that aspire to combat the racialisation and exclusion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) footballers. They note that within the occupational (recruitment) arena, BAME players are racialised in terms of their ‘attributes, sporting capacity and professional competence’ (Back, Crabbe & Solomos 2001: 214).

Therefore, the football recruitment process, and sport in general, is not egalitarian because recruiters are likely to perceive British Asians as inferior to their white and black counterparts (Bains & Patel 1996; Kilvington 2012). Back, Crabbe and Solomos (2001: 214) continue by suggesting that policy responses should aim to raise ‘awareness’ of ‘racial stereotyping’ within the game, thus challenging scouts’ preconceived ideas.

Problematically then, because racial myths persist, gatekeepers avoid ‘parallel’ British Asian football environments and continue to use their ‘networks of “white knowledge”’ (Back, Crabbe & Solomos 2001: 37). As a result, it has been suggested that ‘most British Asian players do not play in an environment where they are likely to be spotted by professional clubs’ (Burdsey 2006: 776), and, in turn, British Asian football communities remain a ‘reservoir of untapped talent’ (Bains & Johal 1996: 265). This gatekeeper avoidance is emphasised in the oral testimony below:

We haven’t looked [for British Asian players] to be honest with you but there’s none in the leagues that we follow. You’ve got to bear in mind that although we do as much as we can, and we probably do more than most for the community, we’re not here primarily for the community, we’re here to find the next Messi and that’s what we get our wages paid for. (Scout co-ordinator, 2 June 2011)

Although professional clubs, including Chelsea FC, West Ham United and Queens Park Rangers, have attempted to engage with British Asian communities, the overwhelming majority have ignored this exclusion. In short, there is a non-recognition of the British Asian exclusion. When one ignores this exclusion, one is effectively dismissing structural racism and ‘transferring’ the ‘blame’ (Long 2000). Interestingly, McGuire, Monks and Halsall (2001: 75) note that only 26 per cent of youth development officers acknowledged that institutional racism ‘was operating as a barrier’. In contrast, they add that 90 per cent of British Asian respondents argued that institutional racism excludes players.

While black people are excluded from the football boardrooms, British Asians are excluded from the playing fields. Therefore, some researchers have suggested that British Asians suffer from a decreased level of opportunity (Bains & Patel 1996; Burdsey 2004, 2007; Kilvington 2012; Kilvington & Price 2013). Significantly though, when the opportunity does arise and British Asians secure a trial, these players commonly face ability-related stereotypes, which hinders progress. This is observed in the interviews below:

I spent some time at [two professional clubs] and I was excelling, I was definitely one of the better players there but I never got pushed forward to go to the next level by the coaches. It became disheartening, you know, because what am I supposed to do? I’m better than all these players but I’m not progressing ... All coaches will have a certain perception about something and that will always stick in their mind. (British Indian semi-professional footballer, 19 May 2011)

Playing in the playground I was always one of the best players in comparison to the other lads whether they'd be white, black or whatever. So, I always knew I was better than the others but it was about somebody putting that faith in me ... I've never got the breakthrough that I felt I deserved. I always felt like I had to be twenty times better than the white kid standing next to me to be in the starting eleven. If I had one or two things better than him that wasn't good enough, I had to be, like, superior. (British Pakistani professional overseas footballer, 20 May 2011)

These oral testimonies emphasise the struggles British Asian players face in the youth system. 'Asians have argued that scouts and coaches have certain preconceived ideas about Asian footballers, and that these preconceptions adversely affect the way they look at certain groups of players' (Bains & Johal 1998: 263). In short, inferential racism (Asians *lack* interest or ability) leads to institutional racism (avoidance of 'all-Asian' football communities). In order to achieve professional contracts, or even gain a trial, British Asian footballers feel that they have to be 'superior' in order to be taken seriously.

Bains and Patel (1996: 57) note that professional clubs perceive the Asian exclusion to be the result of a lack of 'interest' while the Asian physique does 'not conform' to the physical requirements of professional footballers in England. Although there is little evidence in support of the 'physique' barrier, the following two participants emphasise that perceptions of this ideology may have contributed to their lack of football success:

If an Asian player and a white player were playing at the same level and of the same ability, I think they would pick the white guy more. I don't want to come across saying that's the case every time but I have actually experienced it ... When I was at [an academy], and without sounding big headed, I thought I was about two or three times better than anybody else but they said to me I was too small. I'm average height, I'm five foot eleven and they chose someone about six foot one. The players I was playing with said to me after that the decision was ridiculous. (British Pakistani semi-professional footballer, 28 April 2011)

I'm not the biggest, I'm 5 foot 8, 5 foot 9, and I'm a centre half. A centre half naturally is supposed to be a six foot five skinhead and built like a brick house. Some of the guys I've played with are playing in the Premiership at the moment. Me and Danny Shittu, we played football together, cricket together, badminton together and volleyball together. We played them sports at county level so we could've gone on and progressed in any one of them sports. Now, he chose football. I chose football. He made it and I didn't but that's just how it is. The funny thing is, the game he got scouted and got his first pro contract, we were playing in the same team together. That game I was playing centre half, I played well, no, in fact, I played outstanding, but then I turned round and saw Danny getting scouted. I'm happy for him because he is a good friend of mine but he's six foot five and built like a brick house and there you go. (British Bangladeshi semi-professional footballer and youth development officer, 5 April 2011)

These accounts highlight that inferential and institutional racisms are arguably at play within the selection process. Bourdieu (1984: 217-18) posits that a sport is more likely to be embraced by 'a social class if it does not contradict that class's relation to the body'. This hypothesis can also be linked with the process of racial-

isation as the Occident's notion of the British Asian body is one that denies the necessary qualities needed to succeed in contact sports (Said 1985; Farrington et al. 2012; Kilvington 2012). Hence, the British Asian 'identity' becomes racialised as characteristics are unfairly ascribed to them (Back et al. 2001). While whites remain 'unraced', non-white 'Others' are marked by their raced bodies (Dyer 1997; Hylton 2009). If gatekeepers adhere to such timeworn notions of the physically inferior South Asian, they may not take the 'gamble' in recruiting 'weak' British Asian footballers (Dimeo 2001; Kilvington 2012). British Asians are therefore unfairly stereotyped by some institutional figures. The following comment is a case in point:

They don't like physical contact; I think that's their problem. Why are they good at cricket? Why are they absolutely exceptional at squash? Why do they not participate in any other sports where there is physical contact? Rugby? Football? They do participate but they don't participate to the highest level ... it's just talent wise, physical contact and an understanding of the game. (Scout co-ordinator, 2 June 2011)

One could argue that this comment would not look out of place in a 1970s investigation of racism in football. This scout has biologically and culturally homogenised British/South Asian communities by suggesting 'they don't like physical contact' on the basis that very few have reached elite level in contact sports while they are 'absolutely exceptional' in stick sports, due to successes. This is a simplistic and essentialist viewpoint that embraces a nature over nurture standpoint. In short, 'this scout may refrain from targeting predominantly British Asian locations for players' (Kilvington 2012: 210). Burdsey (2007: 106) adds that 'physical stereotypes strongly influence beliefs about footballing competences and, consequently, impact on issues of inclusion/exclusion'.

Bains and Patel (1996: 5) highlighted that 69 per cent of professional clubs subscribed to the stereotype that British Asians were physically inferior to players from other ethnic groups. Yet, McGuire, Monks and Halsall (2001: 74) uncovered that 40 per cent of professional clubs strongly disagreed with the notion that a 'lack of powerful physique' acts as a barrier. Hence, there seems to be a shifting attitude regarding biological discourses of 'race'.

As part of my PhD research, I conducted interviews with 18 gatekeepers (coaches/scouts working with professional clubs): seven were white British and 11 were British Asian. Although these quantitative findings struggle to be representative of gatekeeper's ideologies due to the paucity of responses, they do mirror the results of McGuire, Monks and Halsall (2001) as three white British scouts/coaches agreed that physicality is a barrier while four others disagreed. Yet, for one British Indian academy coach and County Football Association (CFA) member, offering Asian-heritage players a professional contract is still considered a 'gamble':

It comes down to the decision making of the coaches and them taking a bit of a gamble. I think the fear's still there with coaches at the moment. Coaches think: 'Because there's not many of them, do I take that gamble'? ... They're still not willing to take that brave risk. I think it's still there and I've seen it myself. I think: 'Go on, take a gamble, give him a pro contract. Take the gamble'. If he doesn't make it then fair enough but listen, there's a lot of worse players I've seen get one year contracts. (31 April 2011)

This failure to 'gamble' can be witnessed in the oral testimonies below:

When I was playing at county level, every single player that I was playing with was at a pro club, except for me. I was playing with about three Chelsea players, two Arsenal players and one of those now plays for Leeds. So, you can see that if I were ever gonna get scouted it would have been at these matches, but it never happened. You can't get scouted from a better place than playing county with ten other pro players, you know. That's when I started thinking: 'This is a joke!' (British Indian semi-professional footballer, 19 May 2011)

One of the guys we've got up front used to play in the professional game; he's gone for a trial at [a League One club]. He scored 20 goals this season; I scored 25 and I'm still here. I'm not going on trial anywhere. How can you get 25 goals and have nobody be even looking at you? (British Indian semi-professional footballer, 6 May 2011)

These participants' experiences again suggest that there is a 'glass ceiling' which prevents British Asian inclusion at elite level. In other words, these players can only progress so far but when it comes to decision time, institutional figures arguably assume that British Asians cannot succeed at the highest level. Black players have managed to gradually erode the racialised perceptions through high levels of participation within the game (Back, Crabbe & Solomos 2001). Yet, British Asians 'have been less successful in combating dominant imagery' (Burdsey 2007: 26). Thus, increased 'participation may actually enable them to resist and challenge wider social [cultural and 'racial'] stereotypes' (Burdsey 2006: 479). The various ideas raised in this discussion can be observed in the following oral testimony:

Are scouts going to the right places? Are scouts only looking for the exceptional Asian players? If you look at the vast majority of the scouts in the UK, they are English. Maybe they have inbuilt stereotype? They might think that if they took an Asian lad on his parents would say no. All these things need to be taken into account. (British Indian grass-roots coach and founder of anti-racist organisation, 6 April 2011)

Indeed, all these facets need to be taken into account, addressed and challenged. To combat this issue, talent identification programmes should be scrutinised and structural changes must follow.

Hitherto, I have examined covert racism in football. It has been suggested that British Asian football communities are by-passed as talent identification systems continue to draw on networks of 'white knowledge' (Back, Crabbe & Solomos 2001: 37). My wider research attempted to challenge this claim and it uncovered

that the 17 British Asian footballers included in this study, all of whom have played at academy level, were not recruited from ‘all-Asian’ environments. Moreover, not one of these players was offered a professional contract meaning that recruiters refrained from taking the ‘gamble’. One could argue that essentialist thinking among gatekeepers has contributed towards this exclusion. In order to challenge this issue, key stakeholders must begin to acknowledge the problem and accept, rather than deny, the existence of racism. It is vital that action must be taken.

Recommendations for Reform

This section promotes recommendations for reform that, if implemented, would be likely to encourage British Asian inclusion within the professional game. Yet, it must be noted that there is no perfect solution or quick fix to solve this issue.

First of all, it is essential that the current crop of gatekeepers must be educated on the British Asian exclusion. In other words, the ‘denial of racism’ must be challenged (Long & Hylton 2002; Hylton 2009; Lusted 2009; 2011). Academy personnel must be enlightened to the perpetual struggle BAME communities, and particularly British Asian footballers, face within football. Football’s governing body, the FA, should therefore fund and facilitate a biennial workshop which brings together all relevant academy personnel and key figures within the Football in the Community programmes of all 92 professional clubs. Of course, British Asians must also be encouraged to attend this platform as it provides a space for them to network and share their football experiences. The event would aim to emphasise, for example, stereotypes, myths and the institutional barriers that exist within the recruitment process as

the main barrier facing young Asian kids right now is the lack of education among the coaches ... A lot of coaches out there still think: ‘Oh yeah, they love their education’. Or: ‘Sport is not important’. (British Pakistani former academy player and CEO of anti-racist organisation, 25 May 2011)

clubs aren’t selecting enough Asian youngsters because they think they haven’t got the ability that’s required. (FA Spokesperson, 15 March 2011)

Yet, there are some considerable problems with this rather ambitious policy recommendation. First, clubs in exclusively white environments may view such an event as unnecessary. Ergo, if the workshop tackled wider discriminatory issues such as Islamophobia, homophobia and the exclusion of black managers, it would not only expand its objectives, it would widen its appeal. Unfortunately, this may dilute the ‘Asians in football’ content. Second, an event of this nature, which aims to bring together key figures from 92 professional clubs as well as BAME communities, is perhaps unrealistic. To overcome this obstacle, it might be possible to

stage biennial regional workshops at local CFAs, thus bringing local football communities together.

Coach education must be reviewed if institutional barriers are to be overcome. Randhawa (2011: 245) notes that 'race equality education' is one of the many ways in which to achieve 'sustainable change'. This recommendation aims to raise awareness of the barriers British Asians face, it will educate gatekeepers and also provide a platform in which two polarized football communities can construct links.

The second recommendation refers to the construction and development of links between professional clubs and 'all-Asian' football structures. Hitherto, the majority of professional clubs have failed to acknowledge the issue and have therefore overlooked British Asian footballers within the recruitment system (Bains & Patel 1996; McGuire, Monks & Halsall 2001; Burdsey 2004; 2007; Randhawa 2011; Saeed & Kilvington 2011). It has been argued that key stakeholders do not understand British Asian communities (Taylor 2004; Randhawa 2011), and, as a result, this maintains the divide. This lack of understanding is demonstrated by the following oral testimony:

I'm a Sikh, right. We had a meeting with [a community representative at a football club] and the first thing he said was: 'Oh, do you lot need prayer mats and prayer rooms'? I wasn't upset with him but he'd already painted a picture before he'd, kind of, worked with us. What they were thinking automatically was: 'Do we need to build a prayer room at our club'? [Laughter]. (British Indian Sikh coach and founder of 'all-Asian' league, 3 June 2011)

Without interaction, it is likely that stereotypical notions of 'Asianness' may deter clubs from forming partnerships with British Asian groups. The British/South Asian 'community' is perceived as alien, 'Other' and homogenous (Said 1985). With the construction of links though, these barriers will be slowly eroded, as an understanding between parties should blossom. Trust must be built between key stakeholders and British Asian football communities. This view is presented by the oral testimonies below:

The clubs have got to link with grass-roots football a bit better. We don't trust each other. (Youth development officer at 'all-Asian' club, 10 August 2011)

You can't just produce literature and programmes and hope people will engage with you, you do have to go out and connect. I think some organisations, not just football clubs but others, all need to get their head round that. (QPR Trust spokesperson, 3 May 2011)

Professional clubs in particular must attempt to reach out to their local British Asian communities. Links must be primarily forged with local schools and grass-roots clubs. In time, these links can snowball and 'Asian' leagues or 'Asian' tournaments may be acknowledged and attended by recruiters. One could suggest that the most appropriate way to establish dialogue would be for academy personnel to

meet with prominent figures within the local ‘Asians in football’ scene. These individuals would be able to advise clubs on how to engage with British Asian communities while also offering relevant contacts within the locale. Therefore, academies must play a key role in overcoming the British Asian exclusion (Burdsey 2007).

Conclusions

Although English professional football is perceived to have set the benchmark on anti-racism (Burdsey 2011), this article has suggested that covert racisms are ingrained within the domestic game. ‘All-Asian’ football structures, which were formed against the backdrop of overt racism (Bradbury 2010; 2011), have maintained the British Asian exclusion, as empirical work shows that talent identification systems continually overlook these environments. Not only does this segregation result in the reification of stereotypes, i.e. biological difference and religious-cultural incompatibility, it also shifts the blame onto the excluded group and this upholds the denial of racism. For professional clubs, then, the outcome is one of non-response and, in consequence, generations of British Asian talent have been bypassed by the scouting ‘networks of “white knowledge”’ (Back, Crabbe & Solomos 2001: 37). In order to challenge this problem, it is essential that structural changes must be implemented. My wider research has offered ten recommendations for reform, but, within the context of institutional racism, it is important that coach education is scrutinised while links are constructed, maintained and further developed. Until action is enforced, British Asians will unfortunately remain on the sidelines of the professional game.

Dr. Daniel Kilvington lectures in Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Sunderland. He was awarded his PhD in January 2013 following three years of research into the exclusion of British Asians from English professional football. Daniel has delivered conference papers worldwide at Universities such as Melbourne and Vienna as well as Cambridge. He is co-author of ‘Race’, *Racism and Sports Journalism*, published by Routledge, while his new co-authored book, *Sport, Racism and Social Media*, is set for publication in 2014. His research interests include ‘race’, racism, exclusion, sport and social media. E-mail: daniel.kilvington-1@sunderland.ac.uk

Notes

- ¹ Although commonly critiqued, the term British Asian will be employed throughout. As Far-
rington et al. (2012: 111) state, it refers to an individual that is born in the UK and has ‘two
parents who are of South Asian descent’. However, when I present oral testimonies, I will re-
fer to the participant’s ethnic/national origin, i.e. Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, or Sri
Lankan as this helps to de-homogenise player experiences.
- ² It must be noted that the term exclusion is strongly favoured over under-representation. Un-
der-representation is de-prioritised as the research is not suggesting that the Asians in football
debate should end when British Asian professional footballers become representative, i.e.
match their population levels. I am not arguing that because Asian-heritage peoples represent
over four per cent of the total population, British Asian footballers must make up over four
per cent of the professional cohort. Rather than creating a debate that focuses on under and
over-representation, the discussion will instead examine issues of inclusion and exclusion.
- ³ The term ‘all-Asian’ has been allocated to football structures that are essentially British Asian
dominated. The Asian Premier League (APL) of London is referred to as an ‘all-Asian’
league, while teams that are predominantly British Asian are described as ‘all-Asian’ teams.
Yet, please note that this term has been placed in quotation marks as, for instance, many ‘all-
Asian’ structures are now likely to include players, coaches, volunteers, etc from other ethnic
backgrounds (Burdsey 2009; Bradbury 2010). Ergo, it would be unfair to label these organi-
sations as simply, all Asian or Asian only.

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From Losing to Loss: Exploring the Expressive Capacities of Videogames Beyond Death as Failure

By Sabine Harrer

Abstract

In games, loss is as ubiquitous as it is trivial. One reason for this has been found in the established convention of on-screen character death as a signifier for failure (Klastrup 2006; Grant 2011; Johnson 2011). If that's all that games have to offer in terms of addressing an existential trope of human experience, the worried protectionist concludes, shouldn't we dismiss this intrinsically flat medium as inferior to more established media forms such as film or literature? (Ebert 2010). Contrary to this view, this paper discusses gameplay examples that shed light on how this medium might leverage its expressive resources to arrive at rich representations of loss.

First, the notion of loss implied in Sigmund Freud's work "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) will be discussed in relation to losing in games. Looking at procedurality, fictional alignment and experiential metaphor as three expressive gameplay devices identified by Doris Rusch (2009) will help explain the expressive shortcoming of losing and lay out what is at stake with profound gameplay expression. Moreover, it will serve as the keywords structuring the following analysis of three videogames, *Final Fantasy VII* (1997), *Ico* (2001) and *Passage* (2007), and their design decisions fostering deep representations of loss. Keeping the Freudian notion of loss in mind, we can trace its repercussions on the three expressive dimensions respectively. Following a separate analysis of each gameplay example, the last section will discuss some commonalities and differences and arrive at the identification of desired object, permanent disruption and linearity as design aspects modeling loss in more compelling ways than losing.

Keywords: Loss, human experience, game design, procedural expression, fiction, metaphor, cultural studies.

Introduction

If games are playgrounds for thought, they may be the perfect venue for testing our reactions to this unknowable thing. And because we use games to process experiences in a safe space, we can use them to confront in play what we never want to have to confront in reality. We can rehearse what we'll do when death leaves us lost. Because it will. (Grant 2011)

Contrary to being dismissed as trivial tools of temporary distraction (Ebert 2010), digital games are now increasingly explored in their capacity to engage players in profound ways. Efforts “to make the medium deeply important to people” (Blow 2010), have spurred design approaches to “critical play” (Flanagan 2009), non-profit initiatives like “games4change”¹ and research on “the human condition in videogames” (Rusch 2009), investing in the development and investigation of a rich, sophisticated game culture. They mirror a concern for games as significant cultural artifacts, seeking to question and expand the notion of games constantly. This brings about the need to understand the representational affordances of the medium, calling for the critical exploration of game design conventions and ways to use them for rich forms of expression.

Discussing loss and mourning as a trope in videogames, this essay responds to this need by drawing together psychoanalysis, design theory and cultural analysis to understand the expressive mechanisms of games in relation to emotional states. First, I will introduce the Freudian concept of loss, arguing that games have been blamed for its trivialization due to their central losing component. The distinction between loss and losing is a helpful starting point to the question how we arrive at profound and compelling representations of loss, and to counter the limitation of games' emotional bandwidth. This question will be pursued by adopting a game design lens based on Doris Rusch's (2009) identification of three expressive devices in games; procedurality, fictional alignment and experiential metaphor. These key concepts, which according to Rusch foster a purposeful design of human experience in videogames, will be used to structure the following analysis of three gameplay moments from *Final Fantasy VII* (1997), *Ico* (2001), and *Passage* (2007). In spite of the different cultural, economic and artistic contexts these games work in, they arguably offer some strong structural commonalities in how they deal with loss beyond losing. The core interest of this analysis is to systematically trace these common features and explore the way they resonate with a Freudian concept of loss.

Loss Versus Losing

In his study on “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917) Sigmund Freud explores loss as a universal emotional state in human life. Analyzing “profound mourning, as the reaction to the loss of someone who is loved” (1917: 244) he talks about the culturally contingent reaction to a universal human experience. Describing how his patients experience loss as a state in which the world “has become poor and empty” (246) he proposes a therapeutic paradigm that contrasts mourning as a fruitful reaction against melancholia as a pathological reaction to loss. While deeply rooted in his practice of individual therapeutic treatment, Freud himself and interpreters of his work alike regarded his findings as metaphorical extensions of a larger cultural condition, and as help to the meaningful interpretation thereof.² Following Freud, each kind of cultural production can be read as a sublimating act compensating for the ubiquity of loss experienced by a “shared” psychic condition (Freud 1929/1961). While videogames in general can be seen in that light, this essay is more specifically interested in the way videogames can resonate with Freud’s own interest by modeling what “the real loss of a loved object” (Freud 1917: 250) feels like. From a game design stance interested in the meaning potential of games, this question needs to be tackled in awareness of its contingency on the player. We thus have to ask, how do certain gameplay characteristics afford loss? This question implies a different view than a determinist stance claiming a cause-effect relation between form (i.e. gameplay) and meaning (i.e. loss). To a certain extent, affordances guide and structure the production of meaning (Van Leeuwen 2005; Kress 2010). Losing can be seen as one such an affordance that according to authors like Johnson (2011) and Grant (2011) cannot per se tie in with a wider experience of human emotion. Johnson writes,

Winning and losing are only defined in their relation to us. Their meaning does not come from an abstract ideal that is buried in the rules of the game, but from our experiences in life, such as witnessing a war... or having once won the emotionally fractured heart of the blonde from class, only to have it crumble in my hands. (Johnson 2011)

This quote raises the main problem at stake: while games offer new modalities to represent human experiences and desires, designers have yet to explore the ways games’ structural affordances can be meaningfully exploited to come up with representations beyond a mechanistic paradigm. Trying to model loss through losing is to fall into this mechanistic trap, because losing is not a structural affordance of loss; it is an affordance of game progression. At their core videogames are procedural representations which means that they draw their expressive potential from rules of computational execution (Bogost 2007: 5, Rusch 2009). Such rules determine the possibilities and constraints of player interaction with a system, including conditions of winning and losing. Procedurality uses losing as a central

tool of signification as it makes certain possibilities tangible to players. This does not mean that losing is necessarily suited to signify loss. Quite contrary, as the death of the main character in most platformer games since *Super Mario Bros.* in 1985 suggests, losing has mostly been used to represent temporary failure on the way to eventual mastery –potentially hindering but never entirely threatening the player. Game over is yet another moment in an infinite circuit of trial and error, subverting the meaning of death as end of life by using it as a sanctioning mechanism for ill-performed player interaction. As a corollary, watching their digital superhero fall into bottomless pitches, die from enemy grenades, or be devoured by zombies under the condition of such a “quantum immortality” (Grant 2011) is hardly suited to affect players emotionally. As Grant concludes, “games have trained us to view death as a triviality” (Grant 2011).

This look at platformer games demonstrates that procedurality affords meaning making through the question how does it work? rather than what is displayed?. So is what we see, when we see our game characters die, completely irrelevant to the meaning of the game?

Hardly. From a cultural studies perspective, the meaning of gameplay performance is necessarily caught up in cultural reference, which means that throughout a play experience players establish meaningful links between the medium, their cultural memory, and the real world.³ This requires us to look at procedurality in relation to fictional alignment and experiential metaphor, which according to Doris Rusch are the core ingredients of gameplay expression. In her essay *Mechanisms of the Soul: Tackling the Human Condition in Videogames* (2009) she explicitly introduces these three concepts as devices for the purposeful design of human emotional states and complex experiential processes in games.

While procedurality is the language by which gameplay becomes structured, fictional alignment refers to its meaningful contextualization in a fictional setting (Rusch & König 2007; Rusch 2009). According to the author, “the game-part brings in the affective strength of the real-world activity and the fiction contextualizes those game emotions and enables players to attribute them to the events in the gameworld” (Rusch 2009:3). Fictional alignment, then, is where the link to our cultural memory is established. What conventions have we, as players, come to internalize by our cultural contexts? Based on this question, we can find out what fictional alignment resonates with the procedural meaning of loss as the permanent separation from a loved object. While fictional alignment draws a connection between a game and players’ shared set of fictional conventions, the term experiential metaphor introduces personal experience as an important factor to activate such conventions. Experiential metaphor is premised on an understanding of gameplay “as a physical visualisation of abstract ideas such as emotional processes or mental states. What the game feels like can provide an additional interpretative cue that helps game comprehension along” (Rusch 2009: 5). Experiential metaphor shifts the focus from the technical to the emotional dimension of mean-

ing making. To describe what a game feels like is to establish a link between a subjective experience and the community of values in which we have learned to talk about this experience. Experiential metaphor helps us distinguish between physical visualizations of emotional states, creating a contingent knowledge of loss. The Freudian notion of loss, for instance, is not metaphorically captured by a repetitive fall in a bottomless abyss that can eventually be overcome. We would rather have to look for representations that make the inevitable and permanent nature of losing something loved tangible. It calls on games to refrain from the dying convention and introduces the need to look for the procedural, fictional and metaphorical equivalents of real life experience.

While Rusch has implied the three devices for practical game design work, they are equally well suited as analytical tools to trace expressive features of loss in videogames. This particularly applies to approaches interested in the question how games afford meaningful links to human experience. In combination, the three key concepts offer a compelling game-specific angle reminiscent of Kress's (2010) social semiotic approach. According to the latter, mode (procedurality), discourse (fictional alignment) and genre (experiential metaphor) count as the three semiotic resources creating the affordances of a text. What we find in the concept of procedurality is the capacity of games to make use of time and space. While this urges the analysis to zoom in on the smallest composites of gameplay structure, it arguably misses out on accounting for the cultural dimension, the meaning of gameplay experiences (Sicart 2011). In combination with fictional alignment and experiential metaphor, however, it works to explain the means of meaning making afforded by the discursive and generic aspects of the games. As a corollary, this framework is suited to explore the structural potentials and constraints of design choices, i.e. the way a game makes use of space and time to create affordances of meaning for the player. It is not to determine the way players actually identify with the result, but to gain a critical understanding of the design choices regarding the way they imply loss as an experiential option. The framework will carry the analysis of three games that propose representations resonating with a Freudian concept of loss in different ways.

Final Fantasy VII

Final Fantasy VII is the most dated as well as the most complex and long-winding game in discussion. Published by Japanese Square in the 1990s for the PlayStation worldwide, it features a well-known death scene that has held many players in shock and is cherished as a sad and unforgettable moment in game history.

Procedurality

As a typical role-playing adventure, FFVII's mechanics range from exploring the planet, fighting enemies, leveling up playable characters and solving riddles around the intricate political and personal stories carrying gameplay. Apart from Cloud Strife, the main character we control throughout the game, we meet characters that join our party and thereby become partly playable characters. Each of them brings a characteristic ability or skill that is revealed particularly during battle. Aeris, a team member introduced in the first hours of gameplay, brings inherent healing powers that make the consumption of healing potions during battle redundant. During the hours after Aeris has joined the team, the players get a fair amount of time to internalize what Aeris stands for procedurally. Repeating the pattern of a free healing option during battle, the players are likely to identify Aeris's essential function for the team. She is fundamentally integrated in gameplay by contributing a unique skill that cannot be restored after her sudden and unexpected death. The moment of Aeris being killed by Cloud's alter ego Sephiroth is introduced by a cinematic cut scene and immediately followed by an interactive emotionally charged dialogue in which Cloud's shock is externalized, offering the player room for identification. The previous establishment of Aeris as a playable character is one of the reasons why losing her is a memorable experience for the player. On the gameplay level, her permanent absence is manifested in the need to look for alternatives to her healing skills. Procedurally speaking, losing Aeris is tantamount to losing a comforting gameplay pattern. In FVII, death appears in two different gameplay versions. We can see how death as a fail state, creating tension during fights, has a clearly different function than permanent death, which always becomes tangible through the disruption of previously established gameplay patterns.

Fictional Alignment

On the fictional level, Aeris's stylization as an allegory for virtue renders the message of her futile and unfair death evermore urgent. The alignment of fiction and gameplay characterizes her as a strong and unconditionally caring figure devoting her powers to healing and reconciliation. Her musical theme, a contemplative triad, is played whenever another branch of her intricate story is in the focus of attention. Preceding her membership in the party she is introduced as a flower vendor in the slums of the industrial city Midgar and from then on constantly surrounded by symbols of spirituality and peace, growing flowers in a church or praying in an ancient temple prior to her death. As discussed above, her caring shamanic characteristics are integrated within gameplay to suggest her importance to the party. Moreover, the emergence of a shy love interest between Aeris and the main character Cloud offers some room to her identification as a loved object. The way ambitions and motivations of neither Cloud nor Aeris are fully revealed di-

rects some player curiosity towards whether they might be a happy couple in the future. Taken together, these fictional aspects render Aeris's death by Cloud's antagonist even more dramatic. Neither the gameplay nor the fictional level have prepared players for this radical turn of events. While it lasts, we once more listen to the now well-established piano triad which, according to Schreier, is "the real reason Aeris's death made you cry" (Schreier 2012). Cloud's response to Aeris's death further reifies its inevitable and most of all irreversible nature. "This can't be real", he says, holding Aeris in his arms. "Aeris will no longer talk, no longer laugh, cry... or get angry. What about us? What are WE supposed to do?"⁵ We, the players of FFVII, then have 60 gameplay hours left to look for answers to this question. Since Aeris's ideas how to save the planet have remained undisclosed until her sudden death, we are kept in the dark about another possible turn of events that resurrects Aeris. This, however, is not going to happen. Aeris's greyed-out portrait on the team member list gives a subtle hint that her absence from gameplay is permanent.

Experiential Metaphor

The profound quality of Aeris's loss is made physically tangible by making her abilities and character irreplaceable on various, quite literal, levels. First, we have seen her skill's contribution for gameplay and the way her integration as a team member has created a pattern that players could rely on for various hours. On the experiential level, this represents Aeris as a great help out of our current difficulties. Furthermore, she is constructed as a romantic love interest of Cloud Strife, whose complex array of fears, wishes, and desires suits itself as a metaphor for players' own psyche. For players who identify with Cloud Strife, the questions and concerns he raises in the light of Aeris's death address themselves in a way that can be deeply engaging. Countless fan sites engage in mourning work by retelling the love story of Aeris and Cloud⁶ or opening the floor to personal confessions: "When [Aeris] died", writes Aprillis on a virtual fan community board "I... stopped playing FFVII for a week because I was so upset. So I'm glad that a lot of people felt the same way about her death as I did."⁷

Ico

Like Final Fantasy VII, Ico is a Japanese production, launched first by Team Ico for the PlayStation 2. Other than the fictionally dense and quite literal representation of loss discussed in the previous section, we now deal with a more cryptical, nonetheless compelling take on loss, this time taking center stage as a subject we explore throughout the whole game.

Procedurality

Ico is a third person 3D action-adventure game whose core mechanics consist of navigating Ico through a mysterious castle that he seeks to escape with Yorda while fighting the black shadows continuously threatening Yorda's life. Throughout the first five or so hours of the game players learn to internalize a basic pattern that establishes Yorda as an object of our concern. In case Yorda is abducted by the shadows and successfully pulled into one of their black holes, the game sanctions the player's failure by freezing the screen into a game over scenario, leaving the player to start again from the last save point. This renders Yorda deeply important on the level of procedurality, since killing all the black shadows threatening her is a condition of game progression. The player can reduce the frequency of shadows by reducing the space between Ico and Yorda. This can be controlled by the R1 button, which makes Ico call out for Yorda or hold her hand while walking. Introducing intricate climbing and puzzle passages, the gameplay sometimes affords their separation, adding a time challenge to the puzzle. One can never know when and where the next group of shadows spawns to attack a now completely exposed Yorda. Apart from Yorda's dependence on player choice, her status as an object of importance for gameplay is constructed by her magic ability to open spellbound doors, which she will often do by default whenever close to one. Halfway through the game, Ico's tragical loss happens when Yorda is inevitably captured by a mother-like shadow abducting her child on the way to freedom. Like in FFVII, this event is introduced by a cut scene that this time, however, ends up in an altered procedural environment: now bereft of Yorda's presence, the R1 and the fight button have become obsolete, reducing Ico's possible agency spectrum to walking, jumping and climbing.

Fictional Alignment

What is suggested on the gameplay level as a symbiotic relationship between Ico and Yorda comes to be fictionally aligned to the classical hero/damsel in distress dichotomy. Yorda's tall, fragile, elf-like and unarmed body is starkly contrasted against the solid appearance of Ico. His mission as a boy in charge of Yorda's well-being not only reverberates on the level of his looks but the narrative situation the couple finds itself in. Yorda first appears when Ico releases her from a cage, establishing her helplessness from the beginning of the game onwards. The castle's somewhat friendly solitude created by austere decoration, bright sunlight and a murmuring wind noise creates a context of intimacy. In contrast to Aeris, who needs a dramatic personality to stand out against other characters in the game, Yorda is Ico's only possible love object within the deserted, somewhat temple-like building. Ico's fundamental loss is, again, inflicted by a malign instance, rendering his attempts to lead Yorda over the bridge to freedom fruitless. Debilitated by an unknown power, Yorda collapses while the bridge disintegrates,

causing Ico to fall. When Ico wakes up alone after this dramatic cut scene, we notice the altered conditions that reflect Ico's deterioration. The weather has turned wild, raining down on Ico as the player has to find a new reason to go on playing the game. Up to this moment, all gameplay decisions have revolved around the questions how to defend Yorda most effectively in order to save her. Due to its prominent role within gameplay culture, this damsel in distress scheme takes little time to be naturalized by the player. It is all the more shattering to have it taken away all of a sudden. What appears to be the single unimportant button of R1 on the procedural level has a highly tangible function on the level of fiction: it represents Ico's ability to make a difference in Yorda's life. Halfway through playing time this ability is taken away from him for the rest of the game.

Experiential Metaphor

Ico deploys a number of metaphorical devices that make the experiential quality of loss feasible to players. On both procedural and fictional level Yorda's status as Ico's object of love is reminiscent of a parent-child relationship. Like a parent cheering up a child afraid of ghosts at night, Ico engages in the killing of black shadows. Through experiential metaphor this gameplay strategy can be accessed as an imperative to protect and care for Yorda. Her fragility manifesting in her every move frames this as a heroic duty. This "attachment mechanic" is established long enough to naturalize it as the gameplay's central goal (which other than in FFVII is never literally addressed). When Yorda is lost, we might feel like a bereft parent discovering that our ability to care is no longer needed. This establishes a smooth resonance with the challenge of mourning to withdraw one's libido from a lost object of love (Freud 1917: 244). Ico's level design fully matches this conflict by deploying orientational metaphors aligned to Ico's emotional state: While the castle is situated on top of an erect rock, Ico's fall from the bridge is followed by a sequence on the bottom of it. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 14) Ico's fall and his struggle back up evokes a metaphorical link deeply engrained in our cultural vocabulary: "being subject to control or force is down" while "having control or force is up" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 15). Ico's loss of agency represented by the obsolete R1 function is in perfect alignment with the changed weather conditions that make inner sadness in the light of a lost "care function" tangible. The game thus models a symbolic landscape representing the emotional inner life of the main character. This is a strategy we find again in *Passage* as well.

Passage

Passage is a five-minute-long PC game released by independent game designer Jason Rohrer in 2007, and has found wide acclaim for its minimal gameplay mechanics representing a complex philosophy of life.⁸

Procedurality

In Passage, players control a character on a 100x16 pixel field from a bird's-eye perspective, navigating him through mazes and walking over treasure chests by pressing the arrow keys. The long screen as well as the score that raises when we move Eastwards indicate that this is the way to go. Navigating up or down will allow players to choose a more maze-ridden or monotonous route that he can either walk on his own or together with a non-player character to be found at the beginning. Running into her triggers an animated heart that represents their falling in love. The player now controls a "twin" character taking double the space and effort to navigate. However, walking as a couple significantly raises the player's score indicated in the upper right corner. Since all of the remaining gameplay is about the couple's monotonous walk, supported by an equally monotonous looping 4bit soundtrack, the player is given enough time to internalize this stroll as the "way to go". The transformation of the spouse's body into an immovable gravestone and the slowed-down pace of the main character procedurally introduce the break with this pattern. The remaining seconds of gameplay can be spent by exploring more of the now austere environment accompanied by the same monotonous tune before the main character turns into a gravestone as well and the game ends.

Fictional Alignment

Since a creator's statement is available we know that Rohrer intended to make Passage about the meaning and transitoriness of life in general and his life in particular. The digital main character is identified as a representation of Rohrer himself and the pixelated girl picked up on the way is his spouse (Rohrer 2007). But even without knowing this autobiographical context we can immediately recognize the damsel in distress pattern at the core of Passage. In contrast to Yorda and Aeris, who make a difference to the procedural system by having their own skills contributing to player agency, the spouse is merely important on the spatial level. As a matter of fact, most of the time she is represented as an obstacle when we navigate through the mazes. This might be identified as a hindering factor establishing her as an object of love. However, by making the player used to their spatial proximity, the spouse literally becomes a part of the main character that is hard to lose in the end.

Experiential Metaphor

One would assume the simple gameplay mechanic of walking to have only little experiential range. However, the limitation on one action enables the game to establish expression via the metaphorical weight of game object relations. When we meet our spouse, we literally have to run into her in order to take her on a journey. Being together is rewarding (higher score), while we sometimes get stuck in a blind alley (the maze), forced to change our way. Sometimes, however, we are surprised by reaching an unexpected lottery win (a treasure chest hiding in the blurry pixels in front of us). Most literally, we go through all of these things while we see our characters' bodies age in a constantly transforming environment. There are allusions to changes in fashion, spaces of interest and physical states, establishing a time-lapsed biography whose end is clearly predictable. That way, *Passage* achieves a metaphor of transitoriness, reminding the players that the

character's inevitable death is in sight. As opposed to the sudden deaths of Aeris and Yorda, it does not come as a surprise in *Passage* but is softly introduced by the representation of age. The sudden transformation of the spouse into an immovable gravestone still comes at a shock. "Here one minute, gone the next, as they say", comments Rohrer (2007) on this moment. As one walks off, the feeling of being alone is conveyed on the spatial level; the character is literally half of what he used to be. Also, his pace is slower, reminding us of the emotional quality of mourning and grief. Do we want to continue, or would we rather do what a player suddenly decided as I watched him play *Passage*: Take the hands off the keyboard and make the husband await his own death next to the gravestone?

Discussion

There are some significant structural commonalities in how the examples discussed above afford loss that are worthwhile looking for at least two reasons. First, they give some practical guidance for game designers interested in tackling loss, and secondly they can help expand our theoretical understanding of gameplay as expressive artifacts beyond winning and losing.

First, the games share a compelling establishment of a desired object on all three dimensions of gameplay expression. On the level of procedurality, we find gameplay patterns that introduce a main hero in partial dependence on a non-player character who is usually introduced as a girl on the fictional level.⁹ More specifically, the design choices to relate Aeris to healing power, Yorda to opening doors, and the spouse to a higher score count is to make them relevant for the player because their influence represents an integral part of the gameplay. When this part then breaks away the player necessarily has to look for alternatives or compensation, which in all three examples are less attractive than previous gameplay options.

Secondly, all three games feature a moment of permanent disruption that is introduced on all three levels of representation and followed by a slight change of gameplay patterns. Even if *Ico* and *FFVII* use cinematic cut scenes to make this moment tangible, *Passage* shows that this can also be achieved via a minimal effect like turning a previously moving spouse into a pixelated gravestone. Disruption introduces a turning point to gameplay: We no longer have access to Aeris's valuable healing powers, the R1 function of protecting Yorda and the spouse's presence. The moment of disruption is only experienced as such by virtue of happening late in the game, when the player has had enough time to learn and internalize the symbiotic love mechanics discussed above. By then, the function of Aeris, Yorda and spouse have come to be part of one's own world, as part of one's goals. Buying potions instead of having Aeris' healing powers available constantly reminds the player of her priceless contribution to the party. The broken R1 button, which in the prelapsarian scenario signified the imperative to protect Yorda, now stands for Ico's inability to reach her. Instead, he is expected to climb up ghastly contraptions in pouring rain, an equally dim scenario that Rohrer paints when he makes his alter ego walk away from his spouse's gravestone in an excruciatingly slow pace. Additionally, *Passage* and *FFVII* make use of spatial metaphors to make the absence of the character tangible: in *Passage*, it is the sudden disappearance of the spouse's body, disrupting the previously established feeling of the walking pair; in *FFVII*, it is Aeris's greyed-out portrait on the party member list that is no longer selectable.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the games share a strong sense of linearity which makes them what Juul (2005: 67) has generically defined as games of progression. Other than games of emergence like chess or *Starcraft*, whose procedural structures translate into a variety of equally feasible strategies, *FFVII*, *Ico* and *Passage* all establish a clear temporal order. There is a phase where gameplay patterns are established and internalized, a cut or animation scene which breaks up the pattern, and a phase where players have to learn the new pattern of a slightly more limited agency range.

The neat structural link between these phases and loss as a process seems too obvious, but as the different gameplay scenarios show, what happens within these phases needs to be crafted carefully. Is there enough time for the players to identify with the object of love? What procedural, fictional and metaphorical shape do I choose to represent this love? How much impact should a non-player character exert on the player's agency space? What game designers can take away from this discussion is the observation that no matter how harsh or shattering loss feels in real life, gameplay can only compellingly tackle it by maintaining an extent of player agency. All three examples establish a painful difference between gameplay patterns we come to like and gameplay patterns which point to what we liked and we no longer have. But most crucially, the latter can still be played. Playabil-

ity is thus a game's key affordance of profound loss: the pain is not that you lose, the pain is that you must continue.

Sabine Harrer studied English and Media Studies at the University of Vienna. She has worked as tutor, student assistant and free lecturer in cultural and media studies. She currently works as research assistant at the IT University Copenhagen, where she writes on her dissertation about loss in videogames funded by a DOC fellowship from the Austrian Academy of Sciences. She is deeply indebted to Doris C. Rusch for her unconditional inspiration and support making much of her current work, as well as this essay, possible. E-mail: shar@itu.dk

Notes

- ¹ Find further information about this initiative on: <http://www.gamesforchange.org>
- ² This is particularly the case in his late essay "Civilization and its Discontents" (1929) where Freud explores the psycho-social conflicts of the self in a greater context of culture.
- ³ Stuart Hall's model of two systems of representation, which explains meaning making processes as a connection between our mental conceptual maps, signs and the world (Hall 1997: 17) can be usefully applied here.
- ⁴ One among countless voices laying claim to this can be found in the archive of the "Play Station Universe" forum and belongs to SolidSnakeUS: "I would probably say that the saddest game moments I have ever seen is probably when Aeris died in Final Fantasy VII, that was extremely emotional for those who played and love the game and her as well. So sad." <http://www.psu.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-11173.html>.
- ⁵ Aeris's death scene accessible online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wx3duFYCcho>, quote at 03:49
- ⁶ The following FVII fan website commemorates the "soulmate" relationship of Cloud and Aeris by arranging select screenshots from the game into montages, thereby offering a solid interpretation of what the game only subtly affords: http://liz-jen.com/soulmates/cloud_aeris/pics1.html
- ⁷ Find the whole discussion on: http://s8.zetaboards.com/Cloud_x_Aeris/topic/8332103/1
- ⁸ Reviewers' comments ranges from "the greatest five-minute-long game ever made" (<http://www.destructoid.com/-i-passage-i-the-greatest-five-minute-long-game-ever-made-58961.phtml>) to "A game that made me almost cry" (<http://playthisthing.com/passage>)
- ⁹ There is too little space to accurately address the problematic intended male subject position (Yee 2008: 93) afforded by this design choice. This promises to be an interesting field of enquiry for future work.

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Narrated Political Theory: Theorizing Pop Culture in Dietmar Dath's Novel *Für immer in Honig*

By Georg Spitaler

Abstract

In recent decades, debates on the relationship between pop culture and the political have transgressed academia and have even been prominent in pop (media) discourses and texts, including pop literature. Amongst the contributions at the intersection of art, theory and entertainment are the novels and essays by the German author Dietmar Dath. Taking the example of his novel *Für immer in Honig* (Berlin 2005/2008), it will be discussed how the book reloads and theorizes pop culture, and how a common cultural-theoretical narrative of de-politicized pop is challenged by the imaginative narratives of the novel.

It will be argued that Dath's references to affective 'mattering maps' of pop culture, that on the one hand tend to fall into the pitfalls of exclusive 'pop sophistication', nevertheless play a key role for his aesthetical/theoretical project of political emancipation, and that these references can be viewed as examples of why popular passions matter for the formation of political identities/subjectivities as well as for the production and reading of political theory.

Keywords: Dietmar Dath, *Für immer in Honig*, pop, political theory, narratives.

‘The real must be fictionalized in order to be thought’

Jacques Rancière

‘Screw theory, let’s rock’

Robert Rolf

Introduction: Dietmar Dath’s Novels as Pop Literature

Within German literary studies, the term *pop literature* is used to describe literary texts that, since the 1960s, are characterized by a blurring of high- and low culture, thus ‘incorporating themes, styles, modes of writing and living of mass- and everyday culture into literature’ (Ernst 2001: 9),¹ ranging from popular fiction to avant-garde writing.² In this respect, *Für immer in Honig*, an epic novel of more than 1,000 pages by the German author Dietmar Dath, first published in 2005, was described as one of the ‘most consequent pop novels’ (Zurschmitten 2008), incorporating objects of *the mundane/profane* into the cultural archive (Baßler 2002: 21).

Especially in the 1990s the label *pop literature* (Büsser 1999; Ullmaier 2001; Baßler 2002; Arnold 2003) was popularized through the market success of several German ‘pop authors’, but it has also been criticized, since it groups together texts that seem to differ in many ways (Seiler 2006: 16), pointing to the question of whether or not the texts fit into a literary line of tradition that takes as a subject the ‘intensity of the lived moment, [...] music, [...] an emphatic sense of existence – but also the mediated nature of this moment’ (Helmut Böttiger, quoted in Seiler 2006: 276f) – as, for example, Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, Hubert Fichte, Reinald Goetz and Thomas Meinecke have done (Schumacher 2003; Hägele 2010).

From a political science perspective, it is also possible to categorize pop literature according to their conception of the political:³ Do the texts inquire into the political aspects of pop culture or not? Are concepts of ‘subversive writing’ pursued, or rather, is an affirmation of media culture being made without a ‘subversive’ agenda (Ernst 2001: 74)? With regard to these questions, Dietmar Dath’s texts can be located both within an explicit claim to ‘subversive writing’ as well as within a literary tradition of avowed pop sensibility.⁴

However, his writings can also be linked to a third feature of pop literature: In her recent feminist critique of German-speaking pop discourse, Nadja Geer (2012) has discussed the pitfalls of *sophistication* as the dominant ‘style of thinking’ in current pop theory and pop literature. According to Geer, many of these texts are defined by an ‘aesthetic tactic’ which encompasses the display of one’s own knowledge as a *pose* (ibid.: 13), as a male-coded expertise (ibid.: 25), that creates

exclusionary and therefore undemocratic distinctions and thus subverts the authors' own 'subversive' political claims.

Für immer in Honig could well be read in that vein. It combines highly sophisticated theoretical concepts such as mathematic *category theory* and a Marxist critique of deconstructivism with a mix of high and low culture and various references to pop culture.

Although I share Geer's concern about potential de-politicizing effects of current pop literature, I want to argue in the following that *Für immer in Honig* nevertheless pursues a project of political emancipation and that it can be interpreted as a piece of political theory in the context of an 'ethics of action' (Whitebrook 1996). The article starts with some brief notes on the possible insights gained from reading fictional texts for political theorizing. I will then explain the specific 'problem horizon' of pop culture, political agency and the 'aporia of subversion' before I discuss the novel along this theoretical research interest.

Fictional Narratives and Political Theory

By asking what novels have to offer to political theory, the political theorist Maureen Whitebrook (1996) highlights 'the implications and consequences of choices' that novels present: Following Martha Nussbaum and the 'narrative turn' in Anglo-Saxon moral philosophy, she argues that imaginative literature can assist political theory in an 'ethics of action'. For her, the novel 'depicts the individual in relationship with others, and in their social setting, and thus extends interest in individual selves to a potentially political context' (ibid.: 33, also 43-44, 46, 48). According to Whitebrook, the theorizing of political choices cannot be confined to conventional modes of political theory, since these often fail to account for the emotional or affective elements in the formation of political identities. In this way, it can be argued that fictional literature can provide a more substantial description of the 'mattering maps'⁵ that form a basis for political identities and attitudes. As scholars of Cultural Studies have highlighted, mattering maps are to a large degree constructed through affective engagements in popular culture (Grossberg 1992: 63; 1992a: 80-87). This can be related to Chantal Mouffe's (2000) thoughts on political subjectivisation and democratic passions: She argues that democratic consciousness is not solely realisable through (liberal) rational argument, but also via sensible and emotional experiences. With the current dominance of the liberal elements of the 'democratic paradox' (ibid.: 3-4), the democratic semantics of popular culture (Stäheli 2003) take on an important role in processes of political subjectivisation.

As a political scientist I am interested in the possible insights that can be gained reading fictional texts for political theory, by asking how political narratives are adopted and transformed in literary texts, and in what ways alternative political narratives are generated in literature (see i.a. Löffler 2010; Zelger 2011).⁶

Here, Jacques Rancière's (2004, 2011) thoughts on the political practice of literature (disrupting the 'distribution of the sensible') can serve as a starting point for investigating whether and how principles of social division are developed in literary narratives that allow alternative viewpoints and the opening of spaces of thought and action, which might otherwise be hidden. Even political theories make use of narratives and narrations, and they can be read as stories analogous to literary narratives (Bevir 2006; Schaal 2009). But literature, in contrast to academic writing, must 'not hide its fictional core behind rules of discipline' as Torsten Hahn (2003: 20) observed.

In this way, it can be productive to engage in a parallel reading or 'textual co-operation' of political theory and fictional literature with regard to a specific political 'problem horizon' (Löffler 2012). The problem horizon that interests me here is the inconsistent relationship between *pop culture*, *emancipatory politics* and *political action* in post-democratic times.⁷

Problem Horizon: Pop Culture and Political Agency

If questions concerning the political are raised in pop theory today, such questions are dominated by complaints over *the loss* of (pop) political agency, as well as the affirmative character and the diminishing political relevance of global pop culture.⁸ Previously, emancipatory politics and (youth) rebellion lifestyles seemed to be clearly intertwined within a dominant narrative of pop culture theories. But the classic concepts of *counterculture* or *subculture*, formulated within Cultural Studies and pop journalism (such as the German pop culture magazine *Spex*), which positioned *underground* pop culture in opposition to parent, high and/or mainstream cultures, have been increasingly called into question since the 1990s. According to this new critical narrative, with the emerging 'new spirit' of cultural capitalism (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005), the mainstream has become 'a mainstream of minorities' (Holert & Terkessidis 1996: 6). In post-Fordism, pop-cultural tactics of agency such as coolness and deviant individualism, which once challenged parent cultures and political authorities, lost their alleged *subversive* qualities, and turned into empty and sometimes affirmative pose of *sophistication* (Geer 2012). In Rancière's terms, they do not disrupt the distribution of the sensible, but reinforce 'la police'.

These 'aporia of subversion' (*Aporien der Subversion*), as Thomas Ernst (2008) calls them, are also reflected in pop literature. Novels such as *Für immer in Honig* can be seen as 'archives' of subversive discourse, but, as a part of (avant-garde) pop culture, they also refresh, discuss or challenge these concepts (Ernst 2008: 112). According to Ernst, there are at least three ways in which literary texts can be potentially connected to the 'subversive':

- by inscribing a 'sub-cultural discourse of the subversive' or revolutionary political concepts on the plot level;

- through (post) avant-garde techniques of ‘montage, collage and cut-up’;
- through the deconstruction of identities, hybrid characters or forms of writing (such as the mix of academic language and fiction), as well as inter-textuality (Ernst 2010: 147-8).

In what follows, I will therefore discuss Dietmar Dath’s novel along the described problem horizon, how it reloads and theorizes relationships between pop culture and emancipatory politics. Methodologically, this is based on three related dimensions of analysis: (1) a contextualising of the novel and its political and theoretical conjunctions in pop cultural and alternative left-wing media reviews. This helps to trace the specific aesthetics of reception (Iser 1980) and the ‘triggering effects’ of pop-cultural experiences and identifications that are offered by the text. (2) I will present a number of examples of the novel’s inter-textual playing with pop-cultural metaphors and the references to pop sensibilities. Both serve, as I will argue, because of their sensual appeal, as triggers of the readers’ pop experience/receptions and, as a result, for political identities and attitudes (similar to evoking ‘geographical and cultural background knowledge’ through using real places in literary topography, see Martínez & Scheffel 1999, 151-52). They also stand for the ‘creative power’ of metaphors through the ‘poetic qualities of language’ (Viehöver 2012: 103ff).⁹ (3) Since Dath consciously uses fictional narratives to pursue his political and theoretical agendas, I will also focus on his various statements on writing techniques and aesthetic strategies, which in my opinion provide some insights into relations of fictional writing and political theorizing.

Narrating Theory in *Für immer in Honig*

Für immer in Honig can be interpreted as a literary contribution to the debate on current ‘aporia’ of pop and the political, addressed at a pop political cultural scene that is engaged with this question. And in fact, it was received in this vein by this very scene: Thus, with regard to the problem horizon of pop culture and political agency, *Für immer in Honig* was interpreted by the German *tageszeitung* (*taz*) as an attempt to settle scores with the ‘Poplinke’ – a milieu that Dath himself still remains a part of, and that, according to the reviewer, engaged with theories ‘from Adorno to Foucault, Deleuze, Hall and Butler to Negri/Hardt [...] has forgotten the most rational thing, that is the revolution’ (Rapp 2005). The German left-wing alternative weekly newspaper *Jungle World* characterised the book as a ‘playing through of the potentials of revolutionary practice in a postmodern world of hyper-reality and de-centred subjects’, based on a Marxist-Leninist philosophy of praxis and, surprisingly, on the category theory of modern mathematics, which deals with ‘the dialectic transfer of mathematic things/“objects” into mathematic practice, that is the mathematic method for substituting equations and thereby identities [...] with transformations’ (Janz 2005).

In fact, the book connects mathematical metaphors and ways of thinking with the justification for the need for socialism, enlightenment and social progress, an approach that can also be found in many of Dath's other texts, including *Maschinenwinter* and *Der Implex*: A key sentence of *Für immer in Honig* proclaims: 'People are composed of other people, not just of themselves. If we know that. Then we will become' ('*Menschen sind aus anderen Menschen zusammengesetzt, nicht bloß aus sich selber. Wenn wir das wissen. Dann werden wir.*') (*FiiH*: 260).

On plot level, *Für immer in Honig* deals with the theme of a confused left-wing pop intelligentsia coping with their personal and political crises through the character of the journalist Robert Rolf, Dietmar Dath's alter ego, who is struggling with the antinomies of the radical poststructuralist theories and views (which are held without consequences) and the bohemian-bourgeois lifestyles of his peers. He is unhappy with his role as an 'instant intellectual' who interprets the world without the will to change it (*FiiH*: 139), serving as a 'halftime clown of the crisis' (*ibid.*: 215) (*Pausenclown*, a term that Dath used recently to describe his own work for the *FAZ*). In a self-destructive attempt to provoke an older colleague, Rolf decides to start a (fake) sexual relationship with a fifteen-year-old girl, thus testing the attitudes of his friends and colleagues.¹⁰ This 'experiment' sets the events of the novel in motion.

Arguments and Narrations

Dath is known as an expert of the 'drastic' and 'fantastic', of science fiction literature, heavy metal and of soft-horror TV series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.¹¹ In many of his books, he tries, as he says, to adapt and re-invent 'Anglo-American genres such as horror, science fiction and fantasy' for the German literary scene (Hatzius 2011: 136). *Für immer in Honig* thus is a textual hybrid, combining a number of 'drastic'¹² and fantastic genres with a personal and political agenda.

Describing his approach to fictional writing, Dath says:

I am expanding the genres of the fantastic with my experiences and those of the people who I think might read the results. And I try to put [...] myself or people from my auto-biographic history into new constellations of contingency (*Möglichkeitsräume*). [...] You take a form of a genre and put characters into the constellations of contingency that are provided by this genre. (*ibid.*: 141)

Für immer in Honig can also be viewed as a textual hybrid in another respect: It combines the *narrative* with the *argument* in a productive way. A story about zombies, Armageddon and hedonistic heroes with super powers who fight undead Nazis and global capitalism is juxtaposed with essay-like theory sections.¹³ With regard to his literary strategies, Dath highlights this distinction between two modes of writing – (1) arguments (*argumentieren*) and (2) narration (*erzählen*) – which he frequently combines in his texts (Dath 2007: 15; Bomski 2010: 321, Hatzius 2011: 158). *Für immer in Honig* includes both perspectives:

a raging engagement with a specific intellectual milieu that, for a journalist of Spex, was located somewhere between the Frankfurt School and Post-Structuralism’ as well as ‘a narration of the relationships between [...] persons/characters that I see as desirable. The way the heroes and heroines act towards each other is a glimpse of what I envision. (Hatzius 2011: 165)

Most of the novel’s chapters are set into a narrative frame, but there are also essay-like passages cast as letters or diaries, analysing global capitalism after 1989 and a recognizable but partly fictional dystopian present time and near future.¹⁴ In the book, the *undead* have returned, and earth is populated by zombies, ‘Zombotics’ and the ‘W’ – transforming hybrid creatures with super powers. A Leninist manifesto of the 21st century (*FiiH*: 501ff)¹⁵ written by one of the characters titled ‘Book A’ (chapter 30, 39) explains how progress failed to succeed, analyses the crises of a defeated left after 1989 and argues for a politics of action that will bring revolution. According to Book A, society was re-mythologized and humans became ‘enchanted’ or ‘bewitched’,¹⁶ which is quite reasonable since it is beyond comprehension that money – something dead – and not the people has become the subject of history.

In *Für immer in Honig*, the metaphors of the capitalist enchantment of things and the ‘specters of Marx’ (Derrida) are thus taken literally.¹⁷

There are dozens of other explicit references to political theory in the 62 chapters and three appendices of the book, ranging from post-structuralism to variations of Marxism to the sciences (especially mathematics).¹⁸

Presenting Attitudes that Matter, Fantastic Daydreams

Interestingly, even if he starts from a differing political standpoint, Dath’s aesthetic agenda resembles in some ways Maureen Whitebrook’s (1996) moral philosophical arguments: He sees the potential of art in the sensual experience of speculating thoughts (Hatzius 2011: 131) – ‘to see how it could be, should be, or the opposite’ (ibid.: 153). With reference to the late East German writer Peter Hacks, Dath claims that art, and especially fictional literature, should offer or illustrate attitudes (*Haltungen*) towards the world (Dath 2010: 1255; Hatzius 2011: 114). According to Dath, ‘[t]he attitude that I want to convey is this: We can comprehend the world. There is right and wrong. And if someone has figured something out, he or she is obligated to act accordingly’ (Lakeberg 2006: 34). In *Für immer in Honig* this idea is present in the heroes’ and heroines’ struggle to find out who they are (they have forgotten their ‘W’ powers), to remember their friends and the oath they once swore to each other as high school kids to end capitalism. ‘The story of how three friends, two men and a woman, tried to never betray each other, no matter what the world does to them, would outlive these three friends [...]’ (*FiiH*, 872).

With regard to the key role of popular culture’s mattering maps for the formation of political identities and attitudes, Dath claims in the afterword that the

book ‘contains everything that had to be said to all the things *that matter to me* in retrospect to all my work since 1994’ (*FiiH*: 1031, emphasis added). He refers to music that inspired some of the chapters and writes that ‘the television was on many times’ – and that the book includes various references to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Roswell*, *Dawson’s Creek* and the *X Files*.

For Dath, the genres of the fantastic – fantasy, science fiction, horror and pornography – ‘represent the world more realistically than realism itself’ because ‘in reality, fantasies play an important role in how we live as humans’ (Kasper 2007: 459-60). For example, in his epistolary novel *Die salzweißen Augen. Vierzehn Briefe über Drastik und Deutlichkeit* (2005), there are numerous passages in which the connection between the drastic and the enlightenment – as an ‘aesthetic remnant of the enlightenment following its political defeat’ (*ibid.*: 162) – are discussed. The drastic is described as the cultural-industrial form ‘that the desired self-image (*Selbstwunschbild*) and anxiety image (*Angstbild*) of modern people adopts when the social promise of modernity cannot be redeemed’ (*ibid.*: 167).

In an interview with the magazine *de:bug* Dath also talks about his preference for *science fiction* instead of *utopia*, because the former offers a way ‘from wishing to willing’ (*‘vom Wünschen zum Wollen’*), ‘connecting the conjunctive and indicative mode more closely’ (Lakeberg 2006: 34). For Dath, the artist’s work starts with this wishing/desire and ends with an aesthetic representation of the world (Hatzius 2011: 115). This might explain why *Für immer in Honig* begins with a dialogue about the *Monkees*’ pop song ‘Daydream Believer’ (*FiiH*: prologue). And a central wish/desire that might be identified in the book can be found in a sentence that is repeated several times throughout the novel: After reading a book by the fictional Vietnamese mathematician Eugen Leviné, named after an actual German-Russian communist who was murdered in 1919, the three main characters of the book Robert, Jennifer and Philip are banded together by a daydream: ‘When will we be free?’ (*‘Danach verband die drei ein Wachtraum: Man kann die Welt verstehen. Wann werden wir frei sein?’*, *FiiH*: 60).¹⁹

Für immer in Honig includes dozens of references to genres of the fantastic and other elements of popular culture, and it can be argued that the sensations provided by these genres (the book, for instance, includes some quite pornographic chapters) offer a reading experience that transgresses ‘proper’ political theory.

Pop culture, according to *Die salzweißen Augen*, promises ‘the valid [...] the supra-individual’ because it, ‘like socialist politics and mathematics, promises salvation from a solitary existence’ (*SwA*: 145). Pop, according to Dath & Kirchner in *Implex* (2012), contains ‘the prospects of a collective of people who are just not held together by fear, by violence and the threat thereof, or by persecution and conformity, but by the socially organized promise of happiness’ (*ibid.*: 783).

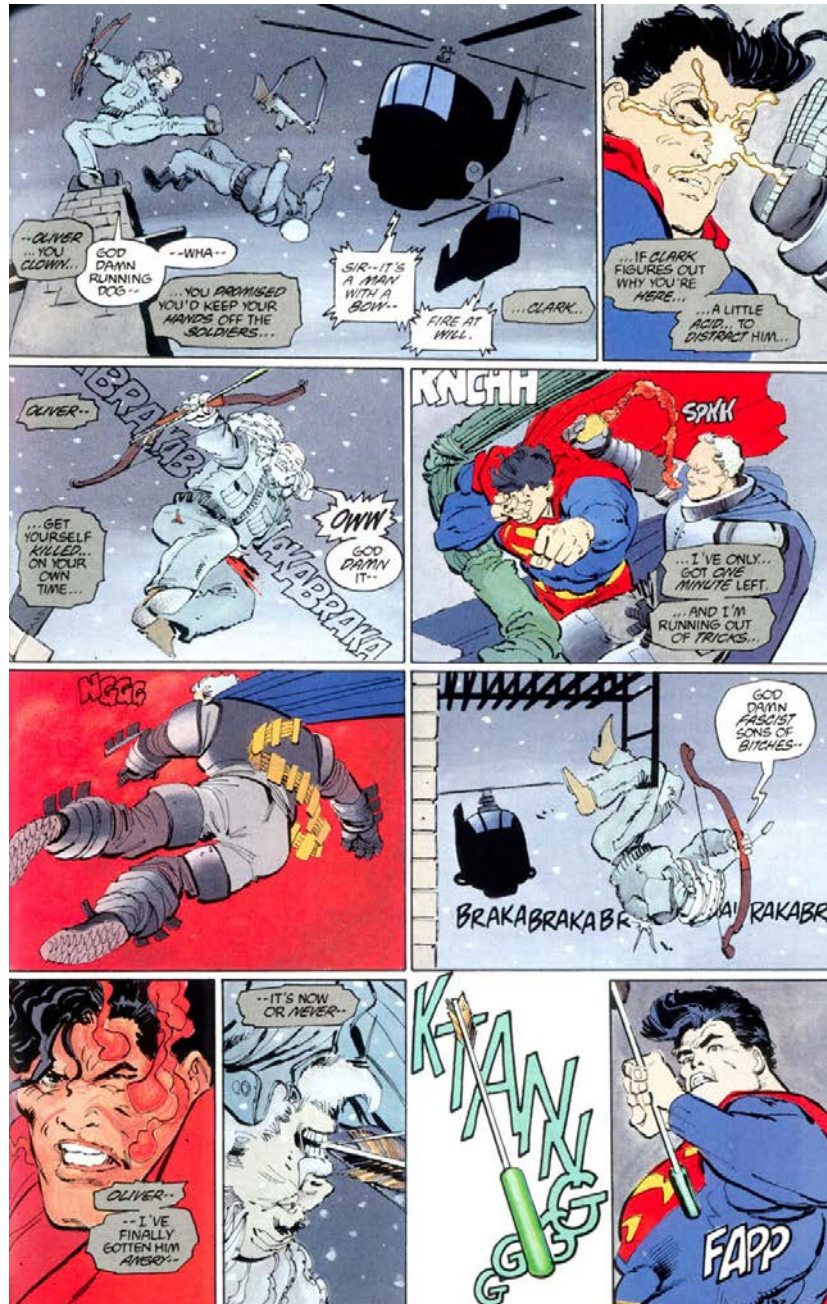
Pop Metaphors as Sensual Triggers

As argued above, the inter-textual playing with pop-cultural metaphors and pop sensibilities in *Für immer in Honig* also offers specific ‘triggering effects’ – a potential that can be actualised through the reading process (the concept of ‘implied reader’, Iser 1978: xii), and that, as I will show in the following with reference to reactions of pop cultural reviewers, were actually taken up by readers who shared the repertoire of pop cultural materials that are presented in the novel.

(1) In *Für immer in Honig*, references to pop songs describe and evoke certain *moods* of scenes or characters. As Dath wrote in an appendix to the book, the darkly mysterious song ‘Echo’s Answer’ by the British electro-pop band *Broadcast* could have served as the book’s ‘theme song’ (*FiiH*: 1032). Inter-textual lines from the song are interspersed in one chapter, with two characters commenting: ‘Holy crap ... this is totally weird. [...] And beautiful’ (*FiiH*: 252, ‘*Meine Fresse... das ist ja total unheimlich. [...] Und wunderschön*’). With regard to Dath’s ‘drastic’ proclivities, it is not surprising that heavy metal also plays an important role in the book. Lines from songs by *Savatage* and *Metallica*, for example, serve to establish the mood of chapters (*FiiH*: 151-2). In addition, on plot level, several male protagonists are characterized as (former) heavy metal fans and are defined by this passion. This applies to the (self-) stylisation of a young minor character, who, out of unrequited love, musters the courage to wage his solitary campaign against the heroes and heroines from the sounds of *Slayer* and *Voivod*. Heavy metal is also linked to the question of *memory* – specifically to the (day-) dreams of youth. A rummage through Philip’s old metal record collection is described as a ‘booster shot’ (*Nachimpfung*), as a ‘dose’ of the ‘noise traces that shaped you, on which you depend, that you inhabited libidinous’ (*FiiH*: 328, ‘*Lärmspuren, die einen geprägt haben, an denen man hängt, die man libidinös besetzt hat*’). Here the youthful music experience is compared to a ‘language of yesterday,’ as a ‘dialect of the newly grown-up,’ as ‘first contact with the violence and the ur-evil,’ as something with which you can ‘say lifelong truths, so you have to be careful that you haven’t forgotten how to make sentences with it’ (*FiiH*: 329). In accordance with Dath’s pronounced interpretation of the connection between enlightenment and the drastic, metal guitar riffs are described as the ‘blows’ and the ‘kick’ with which ‘a new way of thinking’ could be ‘rung in’ (*einbimmeln*) like bell strikes ‘with all their might’ (*FiiH*: 46-7).

(2) With regard to experiences of pop reception that are offered in the text it is not surprising that a number of pop media reviews responded to these references and point to the affective potentials of the book: ‘Great teenage fantasies of “it can be done” are formed in the reader’s head’; ‘you should become hero-like through reading, like in the book’ (Sdun 2005). A good example of what reviewers might have had in mind is a dialogue in the book between ‘J’ (Jennifer) and ‘F’ (Freddy) about the attitude towards life and politics that ‘J’ and her friends shared in their

high school years – ‘Us against the world’ (*Wir gegen alle*) – and that ‘J’ compares to a picture in Frank Miller’s graphic novel *The Dark Knight Returns*, where, as she remembers, the injured Green Arrow takes on a whole fleet of helicopters, with his last words ‘God damn fascist sons of bitches!’ – ‘a battle cry that could have been ours’ (*FiiH*: 767). ‘We were happy. Of course we never realised, like all young geniuses. We were much in love [...] in such a strange pathos, the whole time’ (*ibid.*).



Frank Miller: *The Dark Knight Returns*

(3) A *Jungle World* review mentions the ‘gravity attraction’ that the novel creates in paragraphs like the one where ‘F’ asks his friend ‘J’ about her favourite song (‘Oh Year’ by *Roxy Music*), and where ‘J’ explains how for her the chorus of this song connects to the moment of revolution, forcing the reviewer to put the book aside and listen to *Roxy Music* (Janz 2005).

J: How the chorus suddenly breaks out of Ferry’s elegiac crooning, some... somewhere, this huge signal, curtain up, the glittering rain, the headlights, this becoming, lifted up by warm winds ... This is how I imagined it, the moment when the upside-down world comes crashing down. At the moment of the revolution, when history becomes true again, instead of just real. When the false vacuum collapses. (*FiiH*: 390)

In another review, a metaphor of music experience/reception is used to describe how Dath manages to present new perspectives on the theories that are debated in the book.

This creates a similar effect to the one with all the cited pop songs: You suddenly realise that the whole time you’ve been singing along with a line in a wrong way, and this experience clears the head and the ears for new, more conclusive interpretations of what one has heard. (Schmidt 2006)

Gunther Nickel (2011: 64) interprets Dath’s references from the drastic arts accordingly as an attempt to ‘share and come to terms [with] experiences that are not yet fully understood, but accompany the perception of the world in a diffuse way. The unreal arts do not capture them reflectively, but give them an expression.’ This would be connected to the attempt to create a ‘form of reception’ that ‘models the emotions and perceptions in a way that for Dath constitutes a critical, reality-altering potential’ (ibid.: 64).

Such a view could also be linked to practices of *sensual or mimetic reading*: Following Adorno’s (1965/2007) considerations of the inspired idea (*Einfall*) as a ‘crystallisation of unconscious knowledge’ and his definition of the idea of philosophy as ‘the effort to go beyond the concept, by means of the concept’ (ibid.: 140), it can be argued that for reaching conscious thought, ‘the I must dilute itself in a double sense; it must make permeable the seal against that which is not part of itself – the unconscious and the exterior – without being inundated so that it drowns’ (Babenhäuserheide 2010: 272).

Following Nadja Geer’s (2012) arguments on *sophistication* and pop literature, criticism could also be applied. Texts, which are situated ‘in the grey area between understanding and identification’, can directly hinder the formation of collective political subjects if they do not ‘step out from the grey zone of habitualised normalcy (*Selbstverständlichkeit*)’ and attain ‘a special visibility through consolidation, explication and stylisation’ (ibid.: 233-34). This danger exists in current pop theory and pop literature, not least because these are, according to Geer and as stated above, characterised by *sophistication* as a pose, by the ‘presentation of edge’ (*Inszenierung des Vorsprungs*) through exclusive pop-cultural references, instead of disclosing the sources and cross-references of this ‘world knowledge’

(ibid.: 25). Those who have not read *The Dark Knight Returns* or who do not have the *Roxy Music* song in their ears, in contrast to those pop-culturally versed critics, will be excluded from the aforementioned political subjectivisation. This is also true for a book like *Für immer in Honig*, even if the educational canon laid out here – with its celebration of the grungy and drastic genres such as heavy metal – does not necessarily lie in the alternative mainstream of pop sophistication.

It is obvious that Dath's books have little to do with popularizing. The author himself writes that his texts are primarily addressed to intellectuals ('Not many read it, because not many live as the characters live, that I know of', Hatzius 2011: 198). So it is also no coincidence that the theme of the avant-garde is always present in Dath's texts. Even the references to Lenin's writings in *Für immer in Honig* can be read as such an engagement with questions of the (revolutionary) avant-garde. And Dath emphasises in interviews the necessity of an avant-garde – understood as 'people who start sometime. [...] Somebody must get started' (Hatzius 2011: 227).

Conclusion

In a review of Dietmar Dath's and Barbara Kirchner's book *Der Implex*, the novelist and political theorist Raul Zelik (2012) criticises the political basis of the book from a rivalling Marxist perspective, but concedes that the language of the text 'mushrooms in so many directions that it aesthetically prevents the proclamation of truth'. Now *Der Implex* is not an obviously fictional text, even if the authors describe the book as 'a kind of novel of concepts' (*Implex*: 15).²⁰ But as a fictional narrative, *Für immer in Honig* is even farther removed from the codes of academic writing and stringent argumentation than *Der Implex*. The meanings mushroom, to continue Zelik's image, in this novel much more fully than in *Implex*.²¹

In fictional writing, the actions of characters do not have to be consistent and can change over time. But if Dath says that 'the way [his] heroes and heroines act towards each other is a glimpse' of what he envisions, then this gets tricky in the case of his characters in *Für immer in Honig*, who, in accordance with his reading of category theory, are constantly *transforming* (this, for instance, can be seen in the characterisation of 'Cordula Späth', a character who features in many of Dath's books, and whose actions are depicted in a very ambivalent way, leaving it to the reader to fill these gaps.).

It is not surprising that reviewers have pointed to the contradiction between Dath's critique of poststructuralist theories as it is played out in *Für immer in Honig* and the structure of the text that (through its intertextuality, shifting points of view and fluid characters) itself can be labelled as 'postmodern' (Nickel 2009, 2011: 62).

How is this then related to questions of pop culture and the political? According to Thomas Ernst, most of the current literary texts dealing with the subversive 'have given up the claim to a direct, committed and lasting intervention into society' and confine themselves to 'the role of archiving and reflecting subversive concepts and aesthetic strategies, challenging at the same time any pretension for a new Utopia or truth' (Ernst 2008: 125). *Für Immer in Honig*, however, keeps up a 'strange pathos' of truth, subjectivity and action/agency through a detour into genres of the fantastic, into fictional fantasies and dreams, in addition to the aesthetically deconstructive structure of the novel. The text therefore pursues a modernist project (progress, truth, emancipation, revolution) with the aesthetic strategies of post-modernism and drastic pop culture.

With regard to the problem horizon of the political potentials of pop, *Für immer in Honig*, despite all obstacles, updates the political promise of happiness once again – by affective means of popular culture. The daydream: *When will we be free?* recalls Helmut Salzinger's classic essay from 1972, *Rock Power oder Wie musikalisch ist die Revolution?* [*Rock Power or How Musical is the Revolution?*], which ended with Eric Burdon's song 'New York 1963 – America 1968,' where it says: 'Want to be free [...] You are not alone.'

Considering the potentials of a parallel reading of political theory and fictional literature, it can be argued that, in contrast to Dath's essays *Maschinenwinter* or *Der Implex*, *Für immer in Honig* provides a more sensually accessible and thus more complete picture of his political theories and attitudes. Moreover, despite its 'aesthetic of sophistication', the book's attractive play with pop-cultural metaphors and modes of pop reception makes clear the important role mattering maps and the, at least potentially, 'de-differentiated' and 'universal' semantics of popular culture (compared to the post-democratic, differentiated political system) can have for processes of political subjectivisation today (Stäheli 2003). These insights can be linked to political theories that highlight the importance of sensible and emotional experiences for the articulation of political passions, as a basis for democratic societies.

In this way, *Für immer in Honig* can be read as an independent theoretical counter narrative, challenging current pop theories that downplay political potentials of pop. The book (re)articulates narratives of radical political agency ('revolution') with political subjectivisation and affective mattering maps, thus noisily disrupting the 'distribution of the sensible' of post-democratic politics, where tunes of democratic emancipation are often turned into a mute mode.

Dr. Georg Spitaler is a post-doc university assistant at the Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna, Austria. His research interests include political theory, cultural studies, popular culture and sports history. E-mail: Georg.Spitaler@univie.ac.at

Notes

- ¹ All direct German quotes have been translated into English.
- ² I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers of *Culture Unbound* and to Marion Löffler und Sabine Zelger for their very helpful comments on earlier version of this paper.
- ³ In my use of ‘the political’ I am following authors who emphasise a difference between *politics* – a concept then associated with post-democratic governance or administration of society – and *the political*, as ‘something that always escapes the efforts of political or social domestication’ (Marchart 2007: 6). This split is also present in Jacques Rancière’s distinction of ‘le politique’ into ‘la police’ and ‘la politique’ (the political) (Rancière 2004a), with the latter manifesting the *demos* by disrupting the ‘distribution of the sensible’.
- ⁴ If pop is understood as an ‘attitude’, a sensibility and a ‘mode of reception’ that can best be grasped and described ‘from within’, as Baßler says, then Dietmar Dath seems to be well suited for this mission (Baßler 2006: 422). Born in 1970, he is a highly prolific author. From 1998 until 2000 he worked as a chief editor for the German pop-culture magazine *Spex*; then from 2001 to 2007 he served as an editor for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)*. Since the mid 1990s, he has written around 20 novels and a number of plays and essays, among them the novels *Dirac* (2006), *Die Abschaffung der Arten* (2008) and the book-length essays *Maschinenwinter* (2008) and *Der Implex* (with Barbara Kirchner, 2012).
- ⁵ According to Lawrence Grossberg (1992a: 80-82), mattering maps organise ‘the affective plane’ and ‘direct people’s investments into the world. [...] They tell people where, how and with what intensities they can become absorbed - into the world and their lives’.
- ⁶ I would follow a definition of political theory in the narrow sense that includes all attempts to understand, interpret or systematize politics and the political via terms, concepts and categories and that – in contrast to some conceptions of political philosophy – should be compatible with the analysis of concrete political practices.
- ⁷ In Rancière’s conception, ‘post-democracy’ describes a state of democracy when ‘le politique’ is reduced to ‘la police’ – ‘the government practice and conceptual legitimization of a democracy *after* the *demos*’ –, to ‘the consensual practice of effacing the forms of democratic action’ (‘la politique’), thus ‘making the subject and democracy’s own specific action disappear’ (Rancière 2004a: 101-2).
- ⁸ Here the term ‘pop’ includes music, parts of film and television culture, fashion, lifestyle magazines, art and literature; see Weinzierl 2000: 15.
- ⁹ Regarding Dath’s use of Donald Davidson’s metaphor theory, see passages in Dath’s book *Sie ist wach* (2003: 137) or *Der Implex* (2012: 398).
- ¹⁰ This motif can also be found in Joachim Lottmann’s novel *Mai, Juni, Juli* (1987: 138ff), which is also partly set in the milieu of the *Spex* editorial team.
- ¹¹ On *Buffy*, Dath wrote the book *Sie ist wach. Über ein Mädchen, das hilft, schützt und rettet* (2003). In 2012 he published a text on the TV series *Lost*.
- ¹² The ‘drastic’ is defined in Dath’s writings as the grungy, trashy parts of popular culture, its ‘chewing, sucking, disgust, rigor, lust’, and the ‘anti-bourgeois literalness’ of showing everything (‘*antibürgerliche Buchstäblichkeit*’) (Dath 2005: 17-19).
- ¹³ The somewhat cryptic title of the novel refers to a passage in the book about ‘eyes in honey’ as a symbol for ‘cruel beauty, art, contemplation and philosophy’ (*FiiH*: 622).
- ¹⁴ There are also three epilogues/afterwords, and the book includes transcripts of articles that Dath had published in the *FAZ*. In addition, there are drawings of formulas or *morphisms* of category theory in several chapters.
- ¹⁵ Dath has dealt with Lenin in other texts, including his 2012 introduction to *Staat und Revolution* (2012a).
- ¹⁶ The re-enchantment of the world can also be found in Dath’s novel *Phonon oder Staat ohne Namen* (2001), a story of the chief editor of the pop magazine ‘phonon’, which is set in a fairy-tale Germany ruled by the ‘owl princess’ and full of supernatural phenomena.

- ¹⁷ Gunter Nickel (2011: 63f) has convincingly interpreted the fantastic plot of the novel and the ‘zombie conditions’ described therein as a literal retranslation of a metaphor used by Marx in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), in which Marx observes: ‘The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just when they seem to be occupied with revolutionising themselves and things, with creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the ghosts of the past to their service, borrowing their names, battle cries and costumes in order to enact a new scene in world history in this time-honoured disguise and with this borrowed language.’
- ¹⁸ Dath introduces characters such as ‘Jürgen’ [Habermas] and ‘Jacques’ [Derrida] – whose fictional normative philosophical debates on the ‘posthuman’ society after the return of the undead are portrayed in an ironic way (chapter 42; the neo-Marxist thinker Wolfgang Pohrt appears as their more rational opponent) – or the resurrected German-Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig (chapter 37, 40).
- ¹⁹ For a discussion of daydreaming, wish fulfilment and science fiction see Jameson 2005: 45ff. Dath’s novel *Sie schläft* starts with a quote from Heiner Müller that deals with dreaming as an ideal art: ‘Fear is worked off through dreaming it. It is indeed the problem of the writer and the artist in general during his whole working life trying to reach the poetic level of his dreams’ (Bomski 2010: 339-440). *Der Implex* (2012: 357) also includes a discussion of ‘true and waking dreams’, with reference to Ernst Bloch.
- ²⁰ ‘Hero of the book’ is the concept of the ‘implex’ (ibid.): ‘the belief that certain degrees of freedom are inherent to a particular moment of productive force (*Produktivkraftbestand*) that can stimulate the human potential and lift it up into realisation’ (ibid.: 316).
- ²¹ Dath’s strategy of fictionalisation has also been interpreted as a way to bring the ‘state of being right in the middle’ (*Mittendrinsein*) of pop reception – as well as political unambiguity – to a more distanced position via the installing of ‘a narrative agent between author and text’, granting the ‘political author-person a free space: exactly the distance that the old model of a left-wing intellectual demands’ (Boatin 2011: 21).

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“Fashion's Final Frontier”: The Correlation of Gender Roles and Fashion in *Star Trek*

By Katharina Andres

Abstract

Since its creation in 1966, *Star Trek* has been a dominant part of popular culture and as thus served as the source for many cultural references. *Star Trek*'s creator Gene Roddenberry wanted to realize his vision of a utopia but at the same time, he used the futuristic setting of the show to comment on the present time, on actual social and political circumstances. This means that each series can be regarded as a mirror image of the time in which it was created. The clothing of the characters in the different series is one part of that image. The uniforms of *The Original Series* show influences of the 1960s pop art movement as well as the mini-skirt trend that experienced its peak in that decade. In the course of almost 40 years, however, many things changed. In the 1990s, in *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager*, a unisex uniform replaced the mini-dresses, with few exceptions; the colorful shirts gave way to ones that were mostly black. This trend continues into the new century. This essay interprets the evolution of the female officers' uniforms from feminized dresses to androgynous clothing over the development of the series as a reflection of the change of gender roles in contemporary American society. The general functions of the female characters' uniforms are the central object of its analysis while the few, but noteworthy exceptions to this pattern are given specific attention. Finally, one of the most intriguing lines of enquiry is, how the prequel series *Enterprise*, supposed to be set before *The Original Series*, but produced and aired from 2001 to 2005, fits in the picture.

Keywords: Star Trek, women, fashion, science fiction, 1960s, backlash.

Introduction

I mean, man to man is one thing, but, er, man and woman, er, it's, er, it's, er.
Well it's, er, another thing. Do you understand?
(Captain Kirk in "Charlie X")

James T. Kirk, the most famous Captain of the *USS Enterprise*, already failed to explain the difference between men and women, or more precisely, what makes a woman a woman. His words prove that the question of gender equality has not been solved in the fictional future world of *Star Trek* and that women still need to overcome the role that society has placed upon them. Yet, since the creation of the first *Star Trek* episode in 1966, the roles of women in society have changed significantly and over the course of 40 years, *Star Trek* itself has undergone many changes as well.

Nothing portrays these changes and the difference of men and women as obviously as the choice of clothing or, more generally, fashion. Costumes can be used in movies and TV series in order to show power relationships as well as relationships between genders in general or characters in particular. While in a world where sex and gender do – supposedly – play absolutely no important part anymore and where men and women are entirely equal, one would expect a dress code that emphasizes this notion. Uniform clothes and hairdos, for example, would be one sign that everyone is regarded completely equal.

The following paper will take a look at the fashion in *Star Trek* and how it portrayed a future without gender differences or paralleled the position of women in the time of its creation. The overall question is, whether the female characters are as progressive as *Star Trek* claims to be. As the final series, *Star Trek: Enterprise*, broadcasted between 2001 and 2005, is a prequel to *The Original Series*, created in the 1960s, which means it is set to take place before Captain Kirk is even born, a special focus will lie on the question whether the producers of *Star Trek: Enterprise* have stuck to modern images of women or have adapted the characters to fit into the timeline of the *Star Trek* universe.

Of course, fashion is only one facet of expressing gender and it is necessary to have a look at other aspects, for example behavior or the general chain of command, to create a complete impression of gender representation. This paper should therefore be regarded as only one part of a more comprehensive work on the images of women in *Star Trek*.¹

Star Trek

Star Trek is an American science fiction series that was created by Gene Roddenberry in 1964. Up to today the first series that was shown on TV from 1966-69 has been followed by five TV series and eleven motion pictures as well as countless books, games, and fan-created materials. Originally, Gene Roddenberry referred to *Star Trek* as a "Wagon Train to the Stars" (Nichols 1994: 129). His idea

was to create a TV show that would enable him to express his opinion on present political, social, and moral issues:

[By creating] a new world with new rules, I could make statements about sex, religion, Vietnam, politics, and intercontinental missiles. Indeed, we did make them on *Star Trek*: we were sending messages and fortunately they all got by the network. (Roddenberry quoted in Johnson-Smith 2005: 59)

Thus, the *Star Trek* series constantly portrayed conflicts of the decade in which they were created. Of course, the world of *Star Trek* had to remain somewhat comparable for the audience to understand the underlying critique and comments. Yet, the futuristic setting of the show allowed criticism that would otherwise have been rejected by the production network. As a work of science fiction, *Star Trek* is thus a prime example with its featuring of alien races, which are mostly humanoid, starships, space travel, advanced technology, as well as utopian ideal.

Part of this utopia was the creation of a multicultural crew, who worked harmonically together and exemplified the principle of equality. In the 1960s series, this multicultural crew included the half Vulcan-half human Mr. Spock, the Bantu woman Uhura, the Japanese Mr. Sulu, and from the second season on also the Russian Mr. Chekov. Although the crew formation tries to set a good example, critics have often argued that after all, the future pictured in *Star Trek* is based on a “white” society and as such racist in itself. His production company also set limits to Roddenberry’s vision. The first pilot episode “The Cage” featured a very different cast. Here, Captain Pike was in command of the Enterprise. However, instead of Mr. Spock as second-in-command, “The Cage” offered Number One, a “cool and efficient woman” (Johnson-Smith 2005: 80) played by Majel Barrett. The episode was rejected by both, network and test audience, for being “too original, too cerebral, and decidedly lacking in ‘action’ (i.e., violence)” (Nichols 1994: 140). The idea of having a woman in such a high position of authority on a spaceship was too revolutionary for the time, which is why Roddenberry eventually eliminated that role in favor of Mr. Spock and gave Barrett the part of Nurse Chapel. Thus, the principle of complete equality already faced struggles before the series was officially accepted.

Uhura and the Fashion of the 1960s

In the 1960s, these struggles are especially visible in terms of fashion. The show, which is set in the 23rd century and features equality and tolerance as key issues in the plot of many episodes, also features a dress code which clearly differentiates the female crewmembers from their male counterparts. Mainly, the male characters such as Kirk or Spock wear long sleeved shirts that show their rank, black pants, and black boots. Uhura, like all female crewmembers, generally wears miniskirts, or rather mini-dresses, with an asymmetrical plunging neckline and go-go boots, an “apparel less than fully practical for space exploration” (Ferguson 1997:

216). There are several factors, which could be named as reasons for this distinction.

The first is the fact that in the 1960s clothing for women in the military usually consisted out of dresses similar to the one Uhura is wearing. Since Starfleet is a military organization, the costumes of the actors have been modeled after what was common in the military of the time. In the US Army, women wore these dresses as a uniform, which made them visible as members of the Army but the short dresses also marked them as women and thus reinforced gender roles. This is similar in *Star Trek*. Uhura and the other women in the crew are obviously Starfleet officers; yet, the nature of their uniforms makes it just as obvious that they are women. Although *Star Trek* is meant to show the equality of men and women, the clothes and style of the characters expresses the contrary. The women's dresses are "less" functional uniforms than the shirt and pants of the men, which implies that women are "less" functional as well.

Another reason are the general fashion trends of the 1960s. The bright colors of the ship and the uniforms mirror the ones Andy Warhol and other pop artists used and greatly contrasted the black and white shows, which were still common even though color television had just become standard. The clothing and style of the characters goes in line with the decade's fashion. The women's uniforms are short dresses with long sleeves, a round neck that shows a little cleavage, and high boots; their hairdos are modeled after the "Jackie Look", named for the fashion style of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, wife of President John F. Kennedy. In general, voluminous hairstyles and the miniskirts were made popular. Uhura's outfit mirrors these trends exactly. Her hair is just as voluminous as was fashionable and usually pinned up. Her uniform is a red dress, even though in some episodes she wears a yellow dress. The colors of her uniforms are as bright as the pop art movement dictates. Even her boots were fashionable for girls during the '60s. Just taking into account her appearance, Uhura could be interpreted as a perfectly stylish woman. Yet, the sexual revolution and the changing lifestyles of the decade had also arrived, but in the form of the often "alien" women, who are presented in excessively little clothing, some wearing no more than bathing suits or bikinis, while at the same time representing the ideal of youth and beauty. The newfound openness in clothing reflected the openness in behavior. This became especially evident in the number of women who fall in love with Captain Kirk throughout the series.

"Mudd's Women," for example, is an episode, which shows all of this. Harry Mudd, a smuggler, who travels with three beautiful women, whom he wants to marry off to miners on an alien planet. The women are drugged in order to preserve their looks and are all wearing dresses that accentuate their figures and draw the attention to them by their shiny colors. One of the women falls in love with Kirk, while Mudd actually sells the women to the miners for lithium crystals.

Kirk, in the end, takes the lithium crystals, which he needs for his ship and files charges against Mudd, while the women marry the miners.

While “Mudd’s Women” may have intended to show the importance of believing in oneself and that beauty is more than skin deep, it actually portrays 1960s stereotypes of women. The miners marry the women even though they discover the fraud regarding the drug use. They marry them, however, not because they believe in their beauty even when it’s not obvious, but because they think that the women make good cooks and homemakers and that is more important than sex. The women don’t seem to mind this as finding a man seems to be their only goal and other options don’t even occur to them even during their stay on the *Enterprise*, where women serve alongside men. So, the image of the women moves from one extreme, the sex object, to another, the traditional angel of the house. The position of Kirk and Spock, even though they are Starfleet officers, does not counter the advertisement of these images. Instead of pointing out the women’s alternatives to marriage, such as a career or an education, they fall back into the stereotypical image of men who are unable to think clearly as soon as a beautiful woman is nearby. The reason for this could be the traditional idea of what a woman is and what a man is. Women are often objectified and shown only from a stereotypically male point of view.

The number of exceptions to the everyday uniforms that occur regularly in various episodes is just another piece of evidence to prove that point: While Uhura, just like the other female crewmembers has no official clothing except for her uniform; the male crewmembers are seen to wear a variety of different shirts. They have dress uniforms, which they wear for formal occasions, a short-sleeved top, which Dr. McCoy often wears, as well as a wrap-around shirt that shows part of the chest and is very popular with Captain Kirk. Kirk is also the one character that is most often seen with a naked chest, sometimes without apparent reason, sometimes when he is exercising as in “Charlie X.” This episode also shows the different training outfits: while the men only wear long, tight pants and socks, the women wear skintight jumpsuits. This disparity can only be explained through the need to establish or rather stress the manliness of the male characters, in this case of Captain Kirk, by showing their naked chests, as there is no reason why the men would not be able to wear the same jumpsuits the women use for exercising. Similar to Kirk’s chest portrayal, Uhura can also be seen in outfits that are even shorter than her usual uniform. “Plato’s Stepchildren” and “Mirror Mirror” are two examples for this.

In “Plato’s Stepchildren,” Uhura wears a long dress that shows her shoulders and has a plunging neckline that reveals her chest with her long hair hanging loosely about her shoulders. In the parallel universe of “Mirror Mirror,” her uniform consists of a crop top that does not have sleeves and a short skirt.

While her regular uniform is already accentuating her body and female physique and thus connects her gender role to her character, no matter how equal she

is supposed to be, the exceptional outfits of Uhura offer even less room for her position as a crewmember equal to the men but rather force her into the image of the role that society has made up for women. In the case of “Mirror Mirror,” her destined role seems to be the one of the femme fatale, the monster, who is ready to seduce the men; her long, flowing dress of “Plato’s Stepchildren” presents her as an ancient beauty, an object that men crave to possess. (The portrayal as one of these stereotypes is, of course, not an innovation, but has been done in literature in the preceding centuries already, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have shown in their work *The Madwoman in the Attic*.)

On the other hand, her character shows traits that are stereotypical for women. She feels the need to have a conversation with her colleagues and often needs to be reassured by Captain Kirk, especially when she is in a potentially dangerous situation. She is aware of her body and the effect she can have on men, which she uses to seduce Sulu in “Mirror Mirror.” At the same time she is also a strong woman, loyal to Starfleet and the *Enterprise*, and willing to defend her point of view. Moreover, she sees herself as equal to the male members of the crew and her presence on the bridge emphasizes this. For an African American woman, this was extraordinary in the ‘60s, as generally, they were constricted to playing maids or nannies. Nichols’ role as “[a] linguistics scholar and a top graduate of Starfleet Academy” (Nichols 1994: 145) was a revolutionary step. Being the chief communications officer, she sits on the bridge next to Kirk and Spock where she is not hidden from the camera’s view. While Uhura is often belittled as being no more than an intergalactic telephone operator, she actually “command[s] a corps of largely unseen communications technicians, linguists, and other specialists who work in the bowels of the *Enterprise*, in the ‘comm-center’” (Nichols 1994: 144). Throughout the series and then the motion pictures that follow, Uhura is increasingly seen to take charge and until the final movie she had been promoted from Lieutenant to the rank of a full Commander. For a series with a rather trivial nature like *Star Trek*, small details like this take on a bigger meaning.

Exceptions on the Way to Today

In the decades that followed the sixties, the lives of women and their position in society have changed significantly. The dominance of the mother and housewife image was pushed into the background by women who were career-oriented and self-reliant. Fashion designers and trends picked up on that and casual, as well as formal fashion has developed to offer women a choice of dresses, skirts, and pants for any occasion. Yet, while women increasingly favored pants over skirts and thus moved closer to equality in appearance, there was no similar trend for men. Even nowadays, the number of men in western society who regularly wears skirts or dresses is close to zero.

It is interesting to note that in the 1980s show *The Next Generation*, there were experiments with dresses for men, even though they are shown in very few episodes. For male crewmembers, costume designers created a one-piece skirt, which could be worn with or without the standard black pants. During formal events, Captain Jean Luc Picard is seen to wear a dress uniform that consists of a long tunic top and a pair of tights. Both forms of the male dresses, however, either disappear after a short time or, in case of the dress uniforms, are replaced by a less dress-like uniform consisting of a long jacket and black pants.

It seems that in style, women emancipate themselves by turning somewhat into men. In the series that follow *The Original Series*, this pattern remains intact. The uniforms of Starfleet officers are literally uniform, the same style for men and women. They develop from jumpsuits at the beginning of the 1980s series *The Next Generation* to shirts and pants in the 1990s series' *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager*, while women have become equal crewmembers, a fact, which is emphasized by Kathryn Janeway, who is the first female Captain in a leading role in *Voyager*. The pop art colors of the sixties have been replaced by uniforms that feature black as their dominant color, with only colored shoulders to indicate the officer's position aboard the ship. Yet, in every series, there is at least one exception to this rule.

This exception always comes in the shape of a woman who wears a tight jumpsuit that emphasizes her body instead of the more androgynous uniform. In *The Next Generation*, this exception is Deanna Troi, who does not start to wear a regular uniform until the fifth season. Until then she wears a skintight jumpsuit with a deep asymmetrical plunging neckline. In the plot of the series, the lack of uniform parallels the lack of promotion or other forms of respect for Troi as she does not take up commanding responsibilities or seeks to advance to a higher rank until after she traded in her jumpsuit and starts following the official dress code. In *Deep Space Nine*, the nature of the series (being set on a space station as opposed to a space ship) allows it that several characters exist who are not wearing the official Starfleet uniform. However, Kira Nerys stands out because she not only does she wear a tight jumpsuit, but by the fourth season, her behavior changes, too: "Instead of the [humorless] Kira from the first season, she is now sexy and approachable" (McLaughlin 1996: 56). *Voyager*, the ex-Borg Seven of Nine continues this tradition. While Seven displays similar character traits as *Star Trek: Enterprise's* Vulcan T'Pol, she is not Vulcan but ex-Borg, a race that procreates by assimilating other races into their machinelike collective. For the main part, Seven wears a tight fitting silver jumpsuit, which almost makes her seem mechanical. Later, as she distances herself from the collective and discovers her human nature and eventually even joins Starfleet, she wears a tight fitting jumpsuit. All of these women wear their clothes not because their character or race demands it, but because the shows' targeted viewers, as most science fiction audiences, were

men and the producers wanted their audience to like what they saw, in other words, they wanted *Star Trek* “to sell.”

The Final Series – *Star Trek: Enterprise*

The setting of the final series, *Star Trek: Enterprise*, as a prequel to *The Original Series* makes it especially interesting to compare these two series. The clothing of the characters in *Star Trek: Enterprise* differs decisively from that of the 1960s, but it follows the rules of its predecessors in many ways. Considering that *Star Trek* in the 1960s mirrored the fashion of the day because “the clothes had to be connected to current fashions so viewers could relate” (McLaughlin 1996: 54), it can be assumed that it still did this during *Enterprise*. In the ‘60s, half-naked women in short dresses or bikinis were still daring and new, nowadays, “if you saw a navel or the breast was covered but all of the sudden the back was bare and there was just a small patch of fabric, that was fairly revolutionary” (McLaughlin 1996: 55). The changes that have taken place, have driven designers to create uniforms for women that were politically more correct. The uniforms that women, including Hoshi Sato, generally wear in *Enterprise* look exactly like the men’s; the only difference is that they are fitted for the women’s waists.

The clothing of modern astronauts at the NASA today inspired these uniforms. They are functional and elevate women to equal crewmembers rather than marking them as women. At the same time they look like boiler suits and thus emphasize the work that is connected to space travel, which was just beginning in *Enterprise*.

The exception to these uniforms is T’Pol. Unlike the rest of the crewmembers who, including the second female crewmember, Hoshi Sato, wear the blue suits, T’Pol wears a tight fitting jumpsuit, which emphasizes her curves. At the show’s beginning, this can be explained by the fact that T’Pol is not yet a full officer of Starfleet but rather an observer aboard the ship, yet, even after she joins Starfleet and become a Commander, she does not convert to wearing the official uniform but keeps wearing a jumpsuit, which in the end even changes from a turtleneck to a plunging neckline.

The contrast in uniform mirrors the contrasting characters of Hoshi Sato and T’Pol. Hoshi Sato, as a human woman, displays many character traits, which especially in the first season for the series mark her as stereotypically female. She is portrayed as emotional, emphatic, often vulnerable and afraid. T’Pol on the other hand, is Vulcan and as such, she is logical and does not show any emotions, character traits, which are stereotypically male. Her character thus stands in opposition to her outfit. Moreover, Vulcans – male and female Vulcans alike – traditionally wear wide robes at all times, even aboard their own spaceships. T’Pol breaks with this tradition but as she is loyal to the Vulcan High Command at the beginning and later to Starfleet, there does not seem to be a valid reason, which would ex-

plain this refusal to submit to the official clothing. Her attire can only be explained by the factors that have already applied to the exceptional clothing of characters like Deanna Troi, Kira Nerys, and Seven of Nine, namely that the series had to keep their target audiences interested. Costume designer Robert Blackman explains the idea behind the jumpsuits: “Each person has to represent something that one viewer wants to see. It’s usually about keeping the 18-to-34 males interested, I’m sad to say, but it’s true. That’s what controls to some degree the look of those [...] women” (McLaughlin 1996: 56). These factors are obviously still valid today and T’Pol’s attire is a perfect example for this. So while the costumes generally have evolved from sexist mini-dresses to androgynous uniforms, there still is a need for exception, especially if the woman in question has few traditionally feminine character traits but instead acts rather masculine. T’Pol’s femininity is, unlike Hoshi’s, thus proved by her clothes, rather than her behavior.

It seems that *Star Trek: Enterprise* turned back to accepted traditional stereotypes instead of creating strong and modern female characters. One explanation for this action would be the general sense of nostalgia or turning back to the “good old days,” because the past is something unchangeable and known while the present is hard to comprehend and uncertain. Susan Faludi describes this phenomenon as backlash. Faludi argues that currently, many women feel that they have reached equality, that they can be anything they want. At the same time, this also puts pressure on them, because women are expected to be all at once; they have to be career-orientated and at the same time take care of their families and never neglect their children. The image of the “true” woman is still the cliché of Gilbert and Gubar’s “angel.” Therefore modern women are often faced with the message that even though they can now have everything they want to have, this does not make them happy and therefore they should rather go back to traditional roles.

In Hoshi and T’Pol, there are traits of this backlash. As a series, *Star Trek: Enterprise* is still dominated by men. The number of male characters exceeds the number of female characters by far and the captain is often displayed as the hero who reassures Hoshi, saves the crew, and even humanity. The portrayal of the two only female main characters underlines this. While Hoshi wears the same uniform as her male colleagues, T’Pol wears a tight jumpsuit. There appears to be no other reason for T’Pol’s attire than the fact that the series’ target audience is mostly male and the producers want the show to sell. In the beginning, Hoshi and T’Pol both represent the stereotypes that Gilbert and Gubar have defined. Hoshi is the “angel” who is scared of everything and very dependent on Archer’s reassurance and the help of others. T’Pol, on the other hand” is independent, powerful, and especially to the male members of the crew she appears to be a threat. The use of the stereotypes could be a sign of adaptation to the 1960s series.

Conclusion

Since its creation in 1964, *Star Trek* has always presented itself to portray a utopian future as well as being a commentary on present-day issues and problems. Part of this utopian claim was a multicultural crew, who exemplified the principle of equality, which was one of the key elements in the series. The function as a mirror image of its time is especially obvious in the dress code of the characters. However, the fashion of the characters does not mirror the principle of equality. While in a universe, where gender does not play any role of importance, one would expect men and women to wear clothes fitted for their jobs and not marking their gender in any way, the uniforms in the world of *Star Trek* function in a different way. In the 1960s, Uhura, unlike her male colleagues who wear pants and shirts, wears a short dress and high boots as a uniform; her hair is styled in the fashion of the day, which means that, according to her attire, she fits perfectly into the decade in which she was created. Yet, Uhura sees herself as equal to the male members of the crew, her presence on the bridge emphasizes this, and does not fear to defend her point of view. Especially for an African American woman, this was uncommon. Uhura can therefore be considered as a progressive female character that, although displaying many clichés, functions as a part of a future where racism and inequality belong to the past.

In the years that passed until the creation of *The Next Generation* in the 1980s, and especially until the creation of *Voyager* in the 1990s, the feminist movements had transformed society and the images of women. Yet, in all of the following series, *Star Trek* creators held on to female characters who portrayed the look a stereotypical male viewer wanted to see. Deanna Troi, Kira Nerys, and Seven of Nine all stand out because of their skintight jumpsuits, which they wear opposed to the official uniform.

Star Trek: Enterprise continues this tradition. While the official uniform is a blue boiler suit similar to the practical clothing of contemporary astronauts, T'Pol is another example in the line of exceptions as she is again wearing a tight jumpsuit. Neither her logical Vulcan nature, nor her Starfleet membership justify this outfit – the contrary is the case. The sole purpose for the attire seems to be *Star Trek*'s continuing effort to please a stereotypical male audience, proving that in the end, gender equality has not been achieved, not even in the utopian future that *Star Trek* wants to present.

Katharina Andres has an MA in American Studies and works as a lecturer at the University of Wuerzburg. Her research interests include Women's and Gender Studies, focusing on the portrayal and construction of women and gender images in Euro-American pop culture, as well as Age Studies, especially the workings of power relationships in the depiction of aging couples. E-mail: katharina.andres@uni-wuerzburg.de

Notes

- ¹ This paper is only a small part out of a more comprehensive work on the images of women in *Star Trek*, especially the changes of these images from the 1960s until today. Therefore the images of the 1960s seem to fit into existing stereotypes, which seems to apply to the images of men as well. However, the interest was focused on women because the difference of social expectation, stereotype, and their portrayal appears to be greater than that of men. It is therefore necessary to mention that the images of men were not included in the study as taking all existing stereotypes into account would have gone beyond the constraints of the work and will have to be analyzed in a separate study.

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Playing with Personal Media: On an Epistemology of Ignorance

By Timo Kaerlein

Abstract

Mobile devices are ubiquitous and increasingly an integral part of everyday media usage. One remarkable development in the field of personal media (smartphones, tablet computers, etc.) is the trivialization of their interfaces and appearance, especially when compared to the complexity of the underlying software and hardware. The iPhone and its successors trump with usability, they offer simple and seemingly direct access to many functions. Software can be handled with basic hand gestures or voice control, no expert knowledge is required to use the devices. Rather, current apps and operating systems are designed for a playful approach that favours unbiased exploration.

The article investigates forms of the trivial in both device materiality and interface design from a media studies perspective. Pertinent philosophical positions on human-technology relationships by Günther Anders and Hans Blumenberg are discussed to explore the ramifications of a highly productive epistemology of ignorance. A focus is placed upon the process of blackboxing, a technique of invisibilization common to media technologies wherein the social and material prerequisites of a given artefact are hidden from users. The black box also serves as a model of thought to offer a way of analysing unknown complex systems as proposed in cybernetics, and it has more recently been picked up and refashioned in significant ways in actor-network theory.

Playing with personal media is situated between the poles of user infantilization and the freedom of exploring new practices. Triviality in interface design is ambiguous in that it denies insight into more fundamental processes but at the same time creates a space for playful variation not requiring professional knowledge. The article aims to negotiate between positions of elitist criticism and affirmative technophilia, which are widespread in the discourse on mobile devices.

Keywords: Mobile media, epistemology of ignorance, Apple, Friedrich Kittler, Günther Anders, black box, cybernetics, interface theory.

Introduction

Friedrich Kittler was a passionate proponent of the command-line interface. In his opinion, user-friendly operating systems such as graphical user interfaces with their desktop metaphors (and even software in general) are patronizing insofar as they deny access to fundamental processes taking place on the hardware level. Kittler's essays "Protected mode" (1991) and "Es gibt keine Software" ('There is no software', 1993) contain a formidable rant about the monopolistic software tycoons of the 1980s and 90s, Microsoft foremost among them. As Geoffrey Winthrop-Young has pointed out, Kittler's critique can be read as the expression of a Protestant fixation on the written word, i.e. on machine-readable code, a *sola scriptura* of the electronic age (cf. Winthrop-Young 2005: 146).

Kittler's arguments are mirrored in the contemporary critique of the interfaces of personal media devices like smartphones and similar Internet-capable, mobile computing technologies.¹ Apple – not Microsoft – is one of the main players in this field today, following a somewhat Catholic approach in creating handheld auratic idols to be caressed continuously and involving more senses than just the visual. The religious analogies contrasting the supposed focus of Catholicism on appearances, rich sensuality, and fetishistic adoration to the Protestant retreat towards spiritual essence and plain text may serve as an introduction to the problem treated in this article. They will not be pursued further as such. The question rather is about how to approach everyday technological objects like personal media, objects that are not sufficiently described by referring exclusively to their local materiality, but instead are part of an infrastructure. As the 'Internet in your pocket' – Apple's advertising slogan for the first generation of iPhones – personal media are representing a network of invisible forces or power relations, *pars pro toto*. This standing in of a local object for a complex web of relations has been identified as the fundamental structure of fetishism (cf. Böhme 2006: 190 and Morley 2007: 293-309 for a description of personal media as "magical technologies" (ibid.: 293) or the "totems of today's 'technotribes'" (ibid.: 297)).

This article will investigate seemingly trivial technological objects that due to their ubiquity are mostly taken for granted. Personal media – in the sense explicated above – are increasingly becoming an integral part of everyday media usage. Whereas their interfaces are undergoing a process of trivialization with colorful icons, touchscreens and simplified apps instead of fully customizable programs, concerns are raised about production circumstances, tracking capabilities, the walled garden business models employed to run third-party software on the devices, and so on. Layers of complexity are attached to personal media that are not readily represented in their appearance. This becomes all the more a pressing issue as contrary to many domestic technologies, personal media are intimately connected to the human body and usually taken everywhere, worn constantly and always-on. The trivial poses a problem here as phenomena that are seemingly

self-explanatory don't call for explanation and thus obscure the nested levels of blackboxing – technical, economic, environmental, political – that are necessary for their constitution. Thus they lend themselves to cultural critique from various angles. At the same time, triviality is defined by affordances: Trivial technologies are inclusive and open for all precisely because they don't raise barriers of cognition, skill or involvement.

Personal media are widely seen as stripped-down versions of general-purpose computers that prevent the user not only from accessing core functions, but even from independently installing software and manipulating general settings. Consequentially they are marketed to a general audience, often without prior experience in computing. They feature so-called *Natural User Interfaces* (NUI) that supposedly don't need any initial learning phase (cf. Wigdor & Wixon 2011). Cory Doctorow, blogger and copyright activist, writes about the iPad under the heading "Infantalizing hardware":

Then there's the device itself: clearly there's a lot of thoughtfulness and smarts that went into the design. But there's also a palpable contempt for the owner. I believe — really believe — in the stirring words of the Maker Manifesto: if you can't open it, you don't own it (Doctorow 2010).²

Doctorow bemoans the experience of having to deal with a technology that comes in the shape of a hermetic black box. In his view, personal media offer a nondescript surface which grants superficial operativity but simultaneously hides its inner workings and its history, i.e. the values, norms and prescriptions that have been involved in the product design and development and become a fixture evading critique. The artifact doesn't tell anything about itself and incapacitates the user because it doesn't allow any invasive interference.

In the following, Kittler's and Doctorow's view will first be enhanced by referring to a pessimistic position expressed in the philosophy of technology – formulated by Günther Anders, who is hereby proposed to be read as an interface theorist (cf. Kaerlein 2012). The argument will then be relativized by referring to Hans Blumenberg's position that science and technology in general call for a conscious waiver of sense (*Sinnverzicht*). Next, the cybernetic epistemology of the black box will be revisited, which has been taken up and modified in actor-network theory. This will not solve the controversy but instead historicize it. It will be argued that playing with personal media as a dominant form of interaction builds on a productive epistemology of ignorance that simultaneously limits critical discourse as well as opens up spaces of play, contingency and potentiality.³ Several examples will be provided to demonstrate both the invisible entanglements of personal media in material networks and infrastructures as well as the emergence of mobile playscapes, i.e. practices of creative exploration that build on a position of ignorance on the part of the user. The approach taken here is more systematic than empirical, more epistemological than ethnographic, hazarding the consequences

of theoretical reduction in favor of clearly outlining a particular discourse on human-technology relationships.

Vilém Flusser's thoughts on a philosophy of photography (Flusser 1983/1994) include several arguments that anticipate the discussion traced here. In fact, Flusser's description of the camera apparatus as a symbol-processing machine can still contribute to the understanding of today's portable computers such as personal media. The camera is more toy than tool as it contains a set of rules that the photographer either actualizes or controverts by engaging in experimental behavior (cf. *ibid.*: 25). In both cases, it remains a black box that contains far more possibilities than any photographer could ever make use of (cf. *ibid.*: 26), so that he or she usually focuses on inputs and outputs exclusively without worrying about the operation in detail. "It is a complex plaything, so complex that those who play with it cannot see through it" (*ibid.*: 29, translation by the author). The notion of play in Flusser's account is characteristically ambivalent – it is both an expression of the human condition vis-à-vis the apparatus (more *homo ludens* than *homo faber*), but also a possible way to undermine programmed intentions and the comprehensive automation that Flusser sees working as a general principle of post-industrial society. Insofar as Flusser himself has hypothesized that the "universe of photography" can serve as a model case for "post-industrial life per se" (*ibid.*: 68, translation by the author), his writing can be seen as an early attempt at describing a cybernetic epistemology of ignorance and finding means to criticize it – which is the goal of this contribution as well.

The Outdatedness of Appearance

Regarding the present generation of personal media, it can be observed that the reproach of trivialization certainly contains some truth. The iPhone was released in 2007 and is still the most iconic smartphone in public awareness – leading even respected scholars to somewhat exaggerated endeavors like calling for an "iPhone theory of mobile communication" (Goggin 2012: 17). It prominently features a flat, black touchscreen display and one main button below it. That is essentially the full physical interface if we omit for a moment some further controls hidden on the top and spines of the device. This minimalism is continued in the design of the operating system with its touchable icons and the app infrastructure, which is basically a closed system of accredited programs that often claim not to require any initial expertise on the part of the user.

Matthias Müller-Prove has offered an entertaining, but also thought-provoking account of the history of computer interfaces (cf. Müller-Prove 2011). He contrasts the transition from command-line over graphical to the present 'natural' or tangible user interfaces with the developmental stages of a child's mental capacities, following the combined models of Jean Piaget and Jerome S. Bruner. While a child increasingly develops an iconic and a symbolic mentality, learning to differ-

entiate and to operate visual and formal cues, user interfaces seem to follow an opposite trajectory. The command line is a highly formalized environment, demanding analytic skills and relying heavily on users' active knowledge. The graphical user interface with its windows, icons, menus, and desktop metaphor simplifies this setting, but at the same time restricts access to more fundamental levels of a system architecture. The current 'natural' user interfaces add a whole array of physical dimensions like multi-touch capabilities, accelerometers, gesture and voice control and different sensors to the devices. In that way, they are designed for seamlessness, often following a paradigm of reality-based interaction (cf. Jacob et al. 2008). As the various advertising narratives never fail to emphasize, every child can use such an interface, which is basically reactive to various kinds of input that can be combined without having to translate them first to a formal machine language. It has to be noted that this trivialization of human-computer interaction from a user's perspective does not imply a trivialization on the level of hardware and software architecture. On the contrary, e.g. a voice interface based on natural language processing (Apple's Siri is the most prominent example), poses a highly complex challenge in implementation. What seems trivial on the outside requires refined engineering knowledge.

The radical German technology critic Günther Anders developed a philosophy of discrepancy in his 1956 book *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* ('The outdatedness of man', cf. Liessmann 2002: 54). He speaks of a Promethean gap ('Prometheisches Gefälle') between humans and the technological objects they themselves have set in the world. It signifies the historical moment where humans are no longer able to understand what they can produce as a collective. As "inverted utopians" (Anders 1981/2003: 96), our capacities of production surpass our capacities of understanding, let alone emotionally comprehending the world of technology. This defect in human capabilities is complemented by an according defect on the side of the apparatuses. Anders calls it the outdatedness of appearance and describes it as follows:

If we, incapable of imagination, are blind, then *the apparatuses are mute*: this means that their *appearance doesn't reveal anything about their character*. [...] They feign an appearance that has nothing in common with their essence, they seem to be less than they are. [...] This '*negative swank*', this "*being more than it seems*", has never before occurred in history (Anders 1980/2002: 34f., translation by the author).

What Anders had in mind, were first and foremost the innocent-looking cans of cyclone-b gas that were used in the death-camp of Auschwitz and – of course – the atomic bomb and nuclear reactors whose appearances don't relate remotely to their potential effects (cf. Anders 1980/2002: 34f.). But it can be argued that his diagnosis equally applies to the computer and even more so, to miniaturized personal devices like smartphones. The computer is hypothetically such a powerful machine, that it can simulate any other conceivable discrete-state machine (as per Turing's definition). Any interface, in allowing the user to operate a computer,

therefore systematically understates what the machine is capable of doing.⁴ Additionally, it is part of a history of rationalization, centralized bureaucracy, and military uses in simulation and calculation that make it a central element of what has been conceived of as an intimidating technocratic apparatus at least since the 1960s. The critical discourse includes titles such as Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society* (1954/1964), Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) and Lewis Mumford's *The Myth of the Machine* (1967), among others.

Traditional tools – from the flintstone to apparatuses based on mechanical principles – have usually been designed to incorporate in their appearance their context and instructions for use. In the course of industrialization, machines have become the dominant technological form. With them comes the tendency to encase working parts inside nonspecific covers and blinds, withdrawing them from direct supervision. The outer look of contemporary computer hardware is almost meaningless, even if the casing is removed, because processing and storage take place on a different scale than human perception. Software does not readily reveal the limitless possibilities of a computer, but channels it according to users' needs and cognitive capabilities. Computers can thus be seen as the most elusive machines to date, dealing in the realm of the symbolic and not in observable mechanics.

In the case of the smartphone, the computer is hidden in a small and plain device that has so much become a part of everyday life that it fades from view and evades critical contemplation. Technology often takes on such an agreeable and personalized form today (cf. Liessmann 2002: 191f.) that its users don't bother about any invisible layers of processing, much less about the interconnectedness of devices and sensors that form a complex ecology behind their backs.⁵ Instead, people tend to nurture their personal companions, adorn them with all sorts of accessories and increasingly integrate their presence into the body image. The familiar, the trivial, the everyday is often exempt from critical investigation. We often choose not to care about the dubious policies of apps that constantly analyze data traces without our explicit consent for purposes of targeted advertising or surveillance. We welcome the comfort of cloud data storage services while cognitively failing to imagine the sheer scope of the network and losing control of our personal data. Our devices seem harmless because they do not readily reveal their agenda, their scripts, the social and material prerequisites of their production. As they do not allow us to peek inside and restrict our actions to the surface of a mundane interface, they enforce the Promethean gap while at the same time pretending to bridge it due to their handiness.⁶

Waiver of Sense, Not Loss of Insight

Anders' position surely is an extreme one. He revolts against the politics of artifacts, as Langdon Winner would put it (cf. Winner 1980), and demands to "torture

the things until they confess” (Anders 1980/2002: 428, translation by the author) their secret agenda. But it resonates in many of the views articulated by today’s critics of technology like Doctorow who does not accept a device that he cannot control completely.

Freedom in the future will require us to have the capacity to monitor our devices and set meaningful policy on them, to examine and terminate the processes that run on them, to maintain them as honest servants to our will, and not as traitors and spies working for criminals, thugs, and control freaks (Doctorow 2011).

The philosopher Hans Blumenberg observed in 1963 that technologization unavoidably leads to the construction of devices that an observer is simply not able to perceive in all aspects because its mechanisms are hidden in a casing and/or are too complex to comprehend (cf. Blumenberg 1963/2009: 35f.). He argues that this is indeed a necessary condition of any increase in knowledge because human lives are limited – the capacity of their being (‘Dasein’) is constant, not dynamic (cf. *ibid.*: 51) – while the theoretical tasks are infinite (cf. *ibid.*: 41). Therefore, historically achieved successes are being formalized, i.e. reduced to methods that can be applied blindly without having to prove every single statement again. The same applies to technology, which is the material offspring of the process of formalization, and accordingly the empirical test of the validity of scientific claims. While Edmund Husserl maintained that the history of the sciences has led to a gradual deprivation of insight and therefore the loss of an original sense (‘Urstiftungssinn’), Blumenberg recognizes the necessity of this process.⁷ “The *loss* of sense that Husserl talked about is really a *waiver* of sense that is self-inflicted in the consequence of theoretical claims” (*ibid.*: 43, translation by the author). In other words, one cannot start from scratch in each attempt to solve a new problem, but a set of functionalized repositories of knowledge practices is inherited that can be put to use without questioning.

Indeed, one could argue that with the emergence of non-trivial machines, knowledge comes to be seen from the viewpoint of practicability in the light of indeterminacies and the incompleteness of observation (cf. Hörl 2010: 54). This means that we can build more than we can understand and epistemic self-restriction is actually a productive paradigm, as is evident in the technoscientific practices of tinkering (cf. Weber 2011). The specific rationality of technoscience embraces contingency, combinatorics, trial and error, self-organization and evolution (cf. *ibid.*: 94). It is argued that unpredictable outcomes require a loss of control to some extent. Interestingly, in information technology, a component is considered to be *transparent* if it is easy to understand its function without having to bother with its structure in detail (cf. Hilgers 2010). Following this diction, the less it is necessary to cognitively grasp a mechanism, the more transparent it becomes.

I want to argue that a similar logic is working in the trivialization of personal media devices and interfaces. It has been noted that smartphones offer a range of

interaction variants that – as trivial as they may seem – spur creative uses and invite a playful approach. Some examples will be given below. This is made possible precisely because the devices are so secretive when it comes to telling anything about themselves. They do not allow the end user to peek inside – or beyond, i.e. into the further scales of material entanglements that they are part of –, but they do not require it either. Such a playful engagement with personal media and its consequences are made possible by a process of blackboxing that shall be investigated in some more detail next. The blackbox model represents a specific epistemo-politics that is inherited from cybernetics, but is still prevalent in marketing discourses, branding strategies and indeed practices of contemporary personal media.

The Cybernetic Blackbox – A Productive Epistemology of Ignorance

Bruno Latour and others in actor-network theory have used the model of the black box to describe temporary stabilizations in fluid networks. Under the term blackboxing, Latour understands

the way scientific and technical work is made invisible by its own success. When a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled, one need focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity. Thus, paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become (Latour 1999: 304).

A black box hides its constitution and character as a network and allows other actors to interact with it in a setting of reduced complexity. Personal media can be described as black boxes in several ways. Not only does the term quite accurately represent their literal appearance but it also captures their efficient bundling together of various interests, services and action programs. Blackboxing as a process implies a successful stabilizing effort that on the one hand leads to trivial reproducibility and reliability, while on the other hand allows for even more complexity, as Blumenberg's notion of a gainful waiver of sense suggests. The main function of technology in the black box model is to relieve the user (and, to an extent, also the designer or engineer) from the cognitive burden of having to understand all its internal or external relations. This in turn is a prerequisite for specific non-technical practices and non-instrumental object relationships, which are especially relevant in everyday use, i.e. outside of expert contexts.

If one follows the genealogy of the black box further to its roots in the discourse on cybernetics, an interesting perspective arises. The black box is the central element of an epistemology strongly influenced by behaviorism and its theory is “practically coextensive with that of everyday life” (Ashby 1956: 110), as neuropsychiatrist Ross Ashby argues.

Thus, a black box gives us a concept that allows us to handle what is, in effect, an unknown world: It is the statement of ignorance, of our ability to overcome and cope with ignorance, and thus is a primitive of learning and, hence, of science (Glanville 1982: 1).

Ashby used a prototypical black box – the so-called “Ashby Box” – as a didactic tool to introduce his students at the Biological Computer Laboratory to the intricacies of cybernetic complexity during the 1960s (cf. Müggenburg & Pias 2013: 60f.). Although this device only provided two switches and two lamps – both of which could be in one of two states – the task to analyze the relations between input and output parameters was unsolvable in principle. Because the machine changed its inner state after each switching operation depending on the entire history of its operation, it gained some emergent qualities – its results were absolutely deterministic, but unpredictable (cf. Hörl 2010: 53f.). Ashby himself was obsessed with a similar, more complex device (the so-called Grandfather’s Clock, cf. Müggenburg & Pias 2013: 61) that he used as an “inspirational device” (ibid.) because it created ever-changing color patterns. His engagement with this apparatus appears as a precursor to what Karin Knorr Cetina has labeled “object-centered sociality” (Knorr Cetina 1997: 1), understood as an increasingly intimate and comprehensive embedding in object worlds that “constitutes something like the reverse side of the coin of the contemporary experience of individualization” (ibid.). Drawing on Rheinberger’s notion of epistemic things and extending the term to encompass computers and other dynamic technological objects, Knorr Cetina argues that such objects are characterized by a temporal logic of unfolding, of revealing ever new qualities that perpetuate an ongoing interest in them (cf. ibid.: 13).⁸ Rooted in expert contexts (the libidinal surplus of scientists’ engagement with their objects of study), similar processes can be observed in non-expert cultures, specifically “an increased orientation towards objects as sources of the self, of relational intimacy, of shared subjectivity and social integration” (ibid.: 23).

What do these examples from the history of cybernetics show? As the observer initially does not possess any knowledge about the functionality of a black box, he or she is forced to randomly modify the input to see how it affects the output. In other words, he or she is invited to *play around*, to engage in an exploratory behavior, as no method whatsoever will lead to faster results if one assumes the absolute opacity of the black box. The epistemology of the black box and that of play and random experimentation in affective object relationships are intricately connected. Ashby presents the scenario of a black box “which might be something, say, that has just fallen from a Flying Saucer“ (Ashby 1956: 87). An experimenter treats it with several different inputs and protocols the observed outputs. Following the description of this procedure, Ashby feels it necessary to include a paragraph addressed to the reader missing a methodical approach:

It will be noticed that nothing has been said about the skill of the experimenter in manipulating the input. The omission was deliberate, for no skill is called for! We are assuming, remember, that nothing is known about the Box, and when this is so the method of making merely random variations (e.g. guided by throws of a die) on the input-switches is as defensible as any other method, for no facts yet exist that could be appealed to as justification for preferring any particular method (ibid.: 89).

The Dutch anthropologist, biologist and psychologist Frederik J. J. Buytendijk – who counts as one of the main protagonists of cybernetic anthropology (cf. Rieger 2003: 189) – has stated as early as 1933 that play is essentially a dynamic reciprocating motion: “Every act of play starts with a movement whose consequences are not entirely predictable, which carries in it a surprising element.” (Buytendijk 1933: 116, translation by the author). This means for the “object of play”: “[It] does not have the character of an intellectually defined object, it is not a What, but a How, that is constituted in the circular process of allurements and its answer, of moving and being moved, be it that the player does not know of this becoming” (ibid.: 132, translation by the author). Buytendijk’s modeling anticipates the cybernetic principles of feedback loops and control systems that equally require an input that is subsequently modified in reaction to the observable state of the system. Ignorance is the reverse side of the coin of this epistemology as nothing is nor needs to be known about the content of the black box or play-other.

What Ashby and Buytendijk before him are describing is essentially the situation that many so-called end-users, and to a lesser extent even software designers and hardware engineers, are initially confronted with when dealing with personal media and their applications. The artifact appears as a plain, black surface with no discernible features, apps are just an icon on the screen that launch a separate interface. The first contact will usually be one of random experimentation, i.e. touching the device, shaking it, using more than one finger at the same time, pinching, wiping, tapping, etc. The marketing of personal media and their NUI draws heavily on the image of the innocent and naïve user who intuitively learns to handle a device without prior knowledge – just as a child would explore an unknown environment.⁹ When an interaction is supposed to be ‘natural’ and thus self-explanatory, it is designed to fit in with users’ everyday environments and (mostly learned) routines of behavior. This attitude is profoundly anti-hermeneutic as it simply doesn’t seem important to understand what lies behind or under the observed phenomena – what counts is what you can do with it. Recent interface innovations in the areas of touchscreen displays, voice control and gesture recognition thus actually increase the distance between human and computer on the level of logical operations while simultaneously presenting a new experiential ‘immediacy’ of interaction.

The liberation from cognitive ballast apparent in current human-computer interfaces, specifically in the area of personal media, yields highly productive outcomes. Reduced to a position of ignorance, the user is denied any systematic or analytic possibility of understanding (there is no easy way to access a command

line on an iPhone, let alone to trace the production path of the device itself). The user's position indeed resembles a child-like impartiality with all its drawbacks, but it would be a fallacy to ignore the creative potentials this specific stance entails. The act of blackboxing, i.e. of withdrawing insight, paradoxically animates users to experiment freely and explore aesthetic or playful practices. A becoming-child of the user can reasonably be condemned as infantilization, but it might also indicate an epistemology of ignorance and thus a generative mechanism.¹⁰ The black box does not so much interest as a *cipher* to be decoded, but rather as a *function* which is defined by its inputs and outputs alone (cf. Galloway 2011: 273). Kittler himself has admitted that desirable – at least to him – “*synergies between man and machine*” do not necessarily entail the opening of casings but definitely a “playing with all buttons” (Kittler 1989: 111f., translation by the author). In Hartmut Winkler's reading, this points to a changing and still somewhat diffuse standpoint of critical theory: “not to take an outside perspective towards the machines, but instead to think with the hands and to fathom the black boxes in practical manipulation” (Winkler 2003: 223, translation by the author).¹¹

The concept of epistemologies of ignorance can be helpful to understand the way in which the systematic invisibilization and/or trivialization of certain components and features of personal media acts both as an enabler of practices as well as a precaution against undesirable interventions. While an epistemology of ignorance might in fact be the working principle of consumerist capitalism in general, in the area of interfaces it seems to apply especially well.¹² An integrated system of practices, beliefs and technologies depends for its stability on widespread, and at times self-inflicted, ignorance concerning some of its qualities; in fact, it can only function according to the extent that ignorance is sufficiently embodied in its participants. In the context of the media literacy debate, for example, the argument is common that children and teenagers are much more skilled inhabitants of the contemporary media ecology (so-called ‘digital natives’), so that the older generations may learn from them how to handle interfaces and to be productive with digital media. This is only true to the extent that a significant degree of ignorance is taken into account regarding the ways media are embedded in wider social and ecological frames and technical infrastructures. In this respect, theoretical work is sought for that is able to nurture the potentials of a hands-on, practical – but, to an extent, ignorant – approach towards digital technology, but on the other hand can resume the work of deconstruction by pointing to the sites where problematic processes of blackboxing continue to occur.

Invisible Media Ecologies and Mobile Playscapes – Examples

In this section, several phenomena are discussed that make evident how both Anders' analysis (antiquatedness of appearance) and Blumenberg's (gainful waiver of sense) can be applied to the description of personal media, i.e. Internet-capable,

digital communication technologies. Of course, both authors drew on different technological objects to make their observations, but the connected portable microcomputer is suited especially well to this kind of analysis. Personal media are

1) marked by a deep discrepancy between appearance and capacities – the perceptible form and apparently trivial interfaces do not allow any conclusions about programming, production circumstances, conflicting agencies bundled into the device, etc.;

2) very easy to use because many layers of complexity have been removed from the interface, which makes them relevant in everyday use and allows people without expert knowledge to achieve considerable successes.

Two examples shall be provided for the systematic divergence between the general capacities of material production and the cognitive and emotional comprehension of the artifacts resulting from it. Issues of e-waste – most notably due to planned obsolescence, which, for Anders, is an indication of “ruthlessness” (Anders 1980/2002: 40) towards the serial product that is “born to die” (ibid.: 38, both translations T. K.) as the industry demands a minimization of the intervals of consumption – and precarious labor conditions (cf. Taffel 2012) systematically evade attention insofar as they form the backbone of the personal media infrastructure without having a proper representation inside the system. Instead, the discourse of virtuality and immaterialization surrounding the early explorations of cyberspace and virtual reality in the 1990s is carried on today in pieces of hardware that seem to work “as if by magic” (Cannon & Barker 2012: 73). The suggestive immediacy and weightlessness of accessing content by the touch of a fingertip finds its cruel counterpart in an economy of exploitation that leads to Foxconn workers in Shenzhen to literally lose their fingertips in the process of electronics manufacturing (cf. Qiu 2012). As Christian Dries has pointed out, “our mobile companions are not only made of metal and plastic, but also of blood and turn out to be monsters in a moral sense” (Dries 2009: 96, translation by the author). This invisibilization of infrastructures of production and disposal certainly is not specific to personal media but it contrasts rather sharply with their suggestive handiness and trivial appearance.

On another level, the seemingly trivial everyday devices are more than they seem to be, when one takes into account their incorporation into a technical network infrastructure. Every smartphone is a potential tracker, a circumstance which has initiated some debate about a renaming of the devices to raise awareness for this fact (cf. Maass & Rajagopalan 2012). Data traffic with cloud services, and even mundane mobile gaming offers opportunities for location-specific targeted advertising and corporate or state surveillance via GPS. Long-term self-experiments have pointed to the ubiquity of profiling and the emergence of a “data self” (Loebel 2013: 159) that consists of everyday routines and habits that are typically not readily available to an individual consciousness – but can be made visible by automatic tracking and analysis. Again, a wide gulf seems to separate

device appearance and behind-the-scenes processuality. A trivial ontological attitude – which would attempt to describe the world as it is given to an independent outside observer (cf. Hörl 2010: 59f.) – ironically finds its limits facing seemingly trivial objects of observation.

On the other hand, we can find many examples for an unfolding of mobile playscapes with personal media, i.e. practices of play and exploration that are dependent on blackboxing complexity. These practices rely on an intentional superficiality of engagement and to an extent on a deliberate not-wanting-to-know about technical specifics, to a much greater degree than even in the case of the graphical user interface. The *Instagram* photo editing app for example allows users to simply add filter effects to pictures taken with the cameras of their devices. It is essentially a stripped-down *Photoshop* with pre-selected options and an easy-to-use interface. Professional photographers are horrified by its banality (cf. Bevan 2012, who calls Instagram filters the “antithesis of creativity”), while amateurs like it for basically the same reason. The arguments here often center on the traditional craftsmanship of good photography, on the authenticity of ‘real’ vintage photos against stylized nostalgia filters, and the value of photography as an art form. In the meantime, millions of amateur photographers are experimenting with new ways to aestheticize their everyday experience by finding unusual angles, editing shots and sharing them on the Internet. *Wired* editor Clive Thompson calls it “The Instagram Effect” (Thompson 2011). He summarizes: “I find it a lovely moment. Today’s tech is often blamed for producing a generation of people who stare at screens. But sometimes it opens up a new window on the world” (ibid.).¹³

Additionally and again on a very different level, the possibility to play around, the “production of a cellular playscape”, as Michal Daliot-Bul puts it in her case study of “Japan’s mobile technoculture” (Daliot-Bul 2007), is marking a “cultural shift” (ibid.: 968) towards a consumption-oriented, hedonistic and aestheticized lifestyle. “In the keitai [Japanese term for mobile phone] cultural environment, playfulness has come to be the civilizing matrix of multimedia consumption that develops in play-form” (ibid.: 966).¹⁴ A specific trajectory of this shift lies in a construction of personal media as intimate companions and playmates in everyday life (cf. ibid.: 955). This is evident in the various appropriative strategies applied mainly but not exclusively in youth cultures:

With a variety of hand straps; cute, attachable mini-dolls and cartoon characters; funny, illuminating antennae; carrying bags; 3D stickers to cover up the mouthpiece; full-body stickers; screen holograms; and handmade painting on customer demand, mobile phones became a fashion item of complex and excessive signs play (ibid.: 957).

By playing with personal media, an altered human-technology relation ensues: The devices and their affordances are interpreted more in categories of sociality and affectivity and less in functional terms (i.e. as tools for specific purposes). The *transparency* (in the sense introduced above) of the technical components

increases this effect, as it raises cognitive barriers that stimulate alternative schemata of interpretation.¹⁵ Again, practices of appropriation are not exclusive to personal media – the example from Japan uses regular mobile phones. However, miniaturized computers in their character as black boxes both offer themselves to creative domestications as well as resist them to some extent. They are open to various uses, not restricted to a single function, which also means that the range of possible uses always transcends an individual user's scope.

That personal media in the sense used here have to be understood in the genealogy of personal computers provides a further explanation for their increasing integration into practices of play and lifestyle. John M. Roberts and Brian Sutton-Smith have argued that the dominant technologies of a given historical epoch are regularly taken up in its preferred play-forms (cf. Roberts & Sutton-Smith 1962). Especially technical solutions that have been developed out of a calculus of labor efficiency are often simultaneously used as toys. Roberts and Sutton-Smith call their approach *conflict enculturation theory* and state that during play symbolic solutions are sought for socially relevant conflicts. For example, in times of automation, gambling machines begin to get very popular among the working class. Similarly, computers are reappropriated as personal affective technologies for leisure activities by today's office workers and the so-called 'Creative Class' (cf. Florida 2002). The fact that computers came to be seen as *personal* technologies at all can in fact be traced back to countercultural efforts in the 1960s and 70s that formed precisely as a protest against the military-industrial complex and the supposedly dehumanizing effects of anonymous computing machines. Decisive in this respect were the non-hierarchic networking and collaborative practices around the *Whole Earth Catalog* that, as Fred Turner has shown, have paved the way for the Internet, virtual communities, social networks and – somewhat ironically – neoliberal ideals of self-management and flexible labor (cf. Turner 2006).

Conclusion

This contribution has aimed at outlining the contours and genealogy of a debate around contemporary personal media that is often ideologically entrenched. On the one hand, the position of elitist critique is not primarily concerned with practical uses and gratifications, but operates according to an imperative of remorseless debunking.¹⁶ On the other hand, discourses of affirmative technophilia (as stereotypically represented in the writings of *Wired* magazine) are not interested in the actual and potential ramifications of personal media practices and materialities but prefer to stress their accessibility along with their economic promise. It was proposed to understand personal media as part of a productive epistemology of ignorance, i.e. to acknowledge that they draw much of their appeal from what one does *not* know about them. This is not to say that to avoid potential complicities, one should refrain from using such devices altogether as radical abstainers or lud-

dites might demand. Rather, the foremost task in theoretically describing personal media and their impact not only on users' lives but also on the whole system of exchanges and interactions in which they are embedded can only be to acknowledge their potentials while pointing to their entanglements at various sites of agency.

Established research like the digital materialism approach (cf. Manovich 2001) and software studies (cf. Fuller 2008) offer building blocks to a critical theory that does not eschew the confrontation with devices in everyday – trivial – contexts of use. More recently, investigations into a general ecology of media and technology have pointed to the necessity of a radically environmental thinking to understand the current technological condition (cf. Hörl 2011). Jussi Parikka, for example, has contributed to the debates around new materialism by extending the scope of media materiality to include rocks, chemicals and the like (cf. Parikka 2012): “Indeed, materiality is not just machines; nor is it just solids, and things, or even objects. Materiality leaks in many directions, as electronic waste demonstrates, or the effects of electromagnetic pollution. It is transformational, ecological, and multiscalar” (ibid.: 86). As artifacts, personal media are part of several frames of reference, some of which are obvious to human observers, some not, but all are part of the same (material) reality. Thus, the study of digital media might profit from taking into account the existence of an epistemology of ignorance at work at the heart of its subject matter that privileges certain forms of materiality and excludes others as irrelevant. By referring to Anders' radically interpretative approach, I want to suggest that a “hermeneutics of technology” (Winkler 2003: 224, translation by the author) becomes a complementary – if somewhat defiant – option to study digital media. Such an approach would have to systematically transcend perceptual evidences – not by theoretical speculation but by acknowledging the existence of agencies outside the human frame of reference. The question remains where the critique is headed. Whereas Flusser was still optimistic about the possibilities of illuminating the black box (cf. Flusser 1983/1994: 15), from today's perspective on “scalar entanglement” (Taffel 2013), it is very likely that we're dealing with black boxes all the way down – so that opening one will always lead to multiple others.

Timo Kaerlein is a doctoral researcher in the DFG-funded Research Training Group ‘Automatisms’ at the University of Paderborn (Germany). His research interests include media theory, digital culture, personal/mobile media, cultural theory of play, science and technology studies. The current work focuses on automatisms in interface design and practices of appropriation of personal media. E-mail: t.kaerlein@gmx.de.

Notes

- ¹ Personal media are here understood as Internet-capable, portable microcomputers in various shapes (often attuned to their wearers' bodies) that currently happen to converge with mobile telephones – leading to the development of so-called 'smart' phones. There is no indication that this encounter of computing and personal telecommunications technologies is the last step of an ongoing development. Projects undertaken in wearable computing (Google Glass, Smartwatch, etc.) seem to point to a future of an ever closer integration of human body and computing devices.
- ² The so-called maker's bill of rights can be found at <http://makezine.com/04/ownyourown/> [Accessed 19 February 2013] (originally published in Make Magazine in 2006). The regressive potential of the current generation of personal media has repeatedly been described in expert and press discourses on media interfaces, particularly "Apple's most recent interfaces and ad campaigns have cultivated an attitude of childlike wonder on the part of its consumer base, in part by shrewdly maintaining an atmosphere of mystery and magic surrounding the product and its inner workings" (Cannon & Barker 2012: 73).
- ³ The term "epistemology of ignorance" is also used in critical race studies, but adapted here for the context of media technologies, as will be made clear later. Charles Mills, who coined the term in 1997, summarizes it as such: "Thus in effect, on matters related to race, the Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made" (Mills 1997: 18).
- ⁴ *Interface* does not only denote the "symbolic handles, which [...] make software accessible to users" but also the points of juncture between software, data and hardware and even between different hardware components of a system or network. Thus, "[c]omputer programs can be seen as tactical constraints of the total possible uses of hardware" (Cramer & Fuller 2008: 149).
- ⁵ The term (media) ecology is used here in the sense introduced by Matthew Fuller and Jussi Parikka, among others. "Ecology comprises the study of patterns of interconnection, interaction, and transferences of energy between agents involved in complex networks featuring living and non-living nodes, exploring how different parts of the global household relate to one another" (Taffel 2013). Usage of the term is thus not limited to living ecosystems, but it comprises multiple entangled scales of materiality, stretching across content, software, and hardware in the case of media ecologies.
- ⁶ The term 'handiness' or 'readiness-to-hand' is used by Martin Heidegger to denote the way in which objects that belong to the human lifeworld are usually approached – with a view to their use and effectiveness and without much thinking about the object in its quality of being a thing in its own. Incidentally, the word 'Handy' is used in the German language as a colloquial term for mobile phones.
- ⁷ Husserl's example is geometry, which stems from an idealization of bodily measures, but consequentially becomes a pure method, "a purely technical handling of the inherited tool" (Blumenberg 1963/2009: 31, translation by the author).
- ⁸ Knorr Cetina explicitly differentiates objects of knowledge from the closed boxes of ready-to-hand tools and consumer products (cf. Knorr Cetina 1997: 12). In my view, the distinction is not so sharp as blackboxing is often the prerequisite of new potentialities that arise out of a reduction of complexity of constituent parts.
- ⁹ This imagery has forerunners in graphical user interfaces for the personal computer. One major selling point of these metaphorical environments was their inclusion of audiences lacking technical knowledge about computers. Personal media ubiquitize this tendency and enhance it by new interaction modalities.

- ¹⁰ Furthermore, especially the mobile (smart) phone as the prime example of personal media has been described as a transitional object in the terms of Winnicott's psychoanalytic object relations theory (cf. Winnicott 1971 and Ribak 2009). This more or less metaphorical adoption points to the possible function of personal media in parent-teen interrelationships, but also to their connection with creativity, play and the creation of protected spaces of experimentation. Whereas transitional objects thus play an important role in socialization, the reference also underlines their immense regressive potential.
- ¹¹ Winkler's reflection resonates with Galloway's question about which allegory of critique might be adequate if opening or decoding the black box does not seem to be a viable option anymore (cf. Galloway 2011: 274). Galloway does not arrive at a convincing answer, but speculates that it might be about (re-)programming the black boxes, i.e. taking them as a given and manipulating them on the surface.
- ¹² Here, one can begin to speculate if the formal properties of a blackboxed commodity in general equally invite a process of mystification as well as an urge to unmask and profane the object. (At least) two stances seem systematically possible, sometimes even simultaneously: 1. the construction of symbolic meanings complementing its trivial appearance – Marx famously calls this the “[f]etishism of commodities” (Marx 1867/1887: 46), and 2. the desire to radically deconstruct those phantasms and reduce the object to its undisputed materiality. I thank Dominik Maeder for the suggestion. It has to be noted though that Marx' approach is somewhat at odds with Anders' position, when the former suggests that some symbolic idealization is inevitably attached to the products of human labor and thus makes them seem more than they are as judged from their use value. They attain the hybrid character of “social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses” (ibid.: 47). When Anders argues that the technical apparatuses “seem to be less than they are” (Anders 1980/2002: 34f.), he is thus focusing on the insufficient perceptibility of societal value relations. The process of fetishistic elevation and the outdatedness of appearance can be read as two sides of the same story (which can be exemplified in the Apple kind of techno-fetishism where a rather minimalist design is combined with cultic idealization).
- ¹³ His impartiality is somewhat compromised by the special feature on iPhone lenses a few pages later that are praised as a “must-have for Instagram addicts” (ibid.).
- ¹⁴ The argument here goes back to Huizinga's classic, if idealized account of play as a vector of cultural developments (cf. Huizinga 1938).
- ¹⁵ This is especially evident in the interaction with robotic toys and similar “relational artifacts” where, as Sherry Turkle has argued, virtual companionship offers the rewards of an intimate relationship without the demands of actual friendship. Cf. Turkle 2011.
- ¹⁶ Winthrop-Young attests Kittler an attitude of debunking, i.e. of relentlessly reducing philosophical debate to the factual matter of technology (cf. Winthrop-Young 2005: 68-70).

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Becoming Trivial: The Book Trailer

By Kati Voigt

Abstract

Despite the introduction of audiobooks and e-books, printed stories still are in high demand. However, in a globalized world which is more and more ruled by mass media and technology, it is increasingly difficult for writers and publishers to promote their books. The solution is almost ironic: popular media, which is assumed to decrease readership, is turned into a tool to increase the number of readers. In 2002 the book trailer emerged as a new web-based marketing strategy for the launch of new books. Since then the appearance of the book trailer has changed considerably. The article examines specific examples and highlights methods that establish the relationship between the content of the book and its representation in the book trailer. Although guidelines apply for the production of book trailers, such as constraints relating to time and content, there are no limitations for the imagination of the producers. A book trailer may be simple, supported only by music and pictures, but they may also be as complex as short films. Additionally, book trailers are not limited to the promotion of one specific genre or age group. Depending on the viral potential of social networks such as YouTube, Facebook, and Tumblr book trailers reach a global audience and, therefore, open up new markets. It can be argued, while book trailers have not yet reached the realm of the everyday, they will gradually come to the attention of academics and this article wants to present a starting point for this development.

Keywords: Book trailer, marketing, social media, film studies, adaptation studies.

The days of judging a book by its cover are drawing to a close. Publishers have finally tapped into the MTV generation, and now it is possible to make your literary choices in advance online by watching a sequence of rapid-fire images accompanied by a thumping score, big flashing words and, if you're lucky, a deep-voiced American talking about 'one man' and 'his quest to find meaning in a world gone mad'. Yes: there are now trailers for books and soon, according to Steve Osgoode, director of online marketing at HarperCollins Canada, they will be everywhere

(Fox 2006)

Introduction

As early as 2008, Jesse Baker stated in an online article that 'book trailers are now standard operating procedure in the world of publishing' (Baker 2008). Although Baker illustrates that publishing houses as well as independent authors increasingly employ book trailers to promote their books, this comparatively new type of advertising has still not been approached from an academic point of view. Whereas trailers for movies are frequently investigated,¹ book trailers have attracted very little academic attention even though they provide material for a multitude of research areas. Reasons for that are manifold, although it can be argued that three points are especially relevant. First, the genre still lacks a consistent definition or clear-cut categorizations. Second, it has not yet been proven to be an efficient marketing tool. Third, it can be viewed as an emerging art form independent from its original source text. In addition, a complete analyses of book trailers faces the same difficulties and challenges that Vinzenz Hediger encountered while studying the American movie trailer: there is only little literature available, the object of study is difficult to narrow down, and there is a huge quantity of material. Hediger proposes some questions for the investigation which could also be applied to book trailers: should the advertising material itself be investigated, the budget or the marketing itself, is a case study needed and if so how to choose in order to be representative. These considerations also apply to the book trailer, but with one difference: Hediger uses the movie trailer as the basis for the history of cinema advertising and shows which stylistic changes may be observed in the course of history from 1912 to 1998 (Hediger 2001: 16). Such an approach would surely be interesting for book trailers, however, Hediger investigates eighty-six years whereas the book trailer only emerged about ten years ago and has not yet reached wide recognition. Therefore, this article attempts to lay a foundation for an academic discourse about the book trailer. It will define and categorize the genre, discuss its relevance as a marketing strategy and illustrate key artistic qualities. It is the hope of the author that this rather horizontal approach in contrast to a vertical approach will trigger other scholars to engage with book trailers in their various fields of expertise.

Origins

According to the United States Patent and Trademark Office, the term ‘book trailer’ was first filed as a service mark on 28 October 2002 by Sheila Clover English and amended on 22 December 2003 (United States Patent and Trademark Office 2002). It denotes the ‘promotion of the goods of others by preparing and creating advertisements for books in the form of videos’ and was first used on 27 August 2002 before it was applied within a commercial context on 27 October 2002 (United States Patent and Trademark Office 2002). The idea for the production of a book trailer was formed when Clover English herself wanted to publish a book and sought a way ‘to do something special to make [her] book stand out’ (Clover English 2008: 11). Realizing that movie trailers encouraged people to go to the cinema and watch the promoted film, she invented the book trailer ‘to inspire someone to want a book’ (Underwood 2010). As a consequence, Clover English founded Circle of Seven Productions and created the first book trailer in 2002, thus becoming a pioneer in new forms of marketing for books (Circle of Seven Productions 2002-2011). At the time, many marketing experts believed ‘video promos to become mandatory launch elements’ (Sweeney 2011). However, it took six years for a book trailer to have a significant influence on book sales with the video for Kelly Corrigan’s *Middle Place* (2008) being acknowledged as ‘the first book to gain real traction through its trailer’ (Paul 2010). In the same year, Circle of Seven Productions produced a total of 140 video projects, which proves a significant increase when compared to the only twelve productions in 2006. Both, the increase in *Middle Place*’s sales numbers and Circle of Seven Production’s enhanced video production, do not only indicate the ‘advent of YouTube and MySpace’, but also the growing interest of mainstream publishers in new forms of marketing (Sullivan 2009). It had taken four years since the invention of the book trailer until big publishing houses joined the enterprise themselves, when in 2006, HarperCollins commissioned their first book trailer for Gregoire Bouillier’s *The Mystery Guest* (Jaszi 2009). At that time, book trailers were still a rarity among publishers; by now, however, Harper Collins orders trailers for 25 to 50 percent of their titles (Jaszi 2009).

Formats

Despite the great numeric increase of book trailers, Kathleen Sweeney still observes that ‘multimedia roll-outs remain ad hoc and inconsistent’ (Sweeney 2011) and Robin Sloan feels that people ‘are still pointing you to [book trailers] as oddities – “Hey, look at this weird thing”’ (Metz 2012). This sense of confusion about the existence and form of this new way of advertising books indicates that the book trailer has not yet achieved broad public awareness. When people are asked about book trailers, many are surprised about their existence or mystified as to

their form and function. The very few who do have a concept in mind think of what Sweeney describes as ‘the current mixed bag of clips swing[ing] from big budget pseudo movie trailers, to mundane talking head author interviews, to clever indie animations and experimental visuals’ (Sweeney 2011). To make it even more confusing, Circle of Seven Productions themselves distinguish on their official webpage between seven different types of book videos, ranging from various ‘teasers’ to ‘publisher advantage’, from ‘author interviews’ to the actual ‘book trailer’ (Circle of Seven Productions 2002-2011). For an outsider, boundaries between these individual types of video production are rather blurry and the descriptions are at first sight not very informative. Therefore, it can only be speculated that those categorizations are mainly done for the calculation of production costs.

The shortest explanation for the *book trailer*, as of yet, may have been provided by Matt Goodlett: ‘Consider it a marriage between the book jacket blurb and video’ (Goodlett 2009). In general, however, the question of definition is not as easy as it appears at first sight. The official definition of a book trailer, as provided by Sheila Clover English, states the following:

Technically, a book trailer® is an acted-out dramatization of a book synopsis. [...] Book trailers® use scenes from the book with live actors. These are primarily professionally made, and involve full production crews. (Clover English 2008: 15)

In addition, a good book trailer ‘is a visual synopsis that leaves people wanting more’ (Underwood 2010), as the following examples will show. The book trailer for Quirk Classics’ *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* was written and directed by Ransom Riggs in 2009 (Irreference 2009). This production received recognition by the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Onion AV Club* and was named ‘book trailer of the year 2009’ by Amazon and the *Huffington Post* (Riggs n.y.). It opens with Marianne Dashwood and Mr. Willoughby approaching a lake where Willoughby is about to declare his love to Marianne. However, this seemingly perfect adaptation of Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* in the style of British heritage cinema ends as a B-movie horror scenario with Willoughby being taken into the lake by a huge sea monster. This twist of the story, in addition to the satirized Regency dialogue, reveals the comical mood of the book. Seth Grahame-Smith’s *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* presents another highly praised book trailer (HachetteBookGroup 2010). Similar to the style of *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters*, this video opens with a feeling of historical authenticity, with the stereotypically austere looking Abraham Lincoln as he writes his memoirs at his desk and culminates with him killing a vampire. The trailer suggests that this is what he has apparently done all his life. A third example is provided by the rather unknown trailer for *The Turncoat* by Donna Thorland. At first sight, the video appears to be the trailer for an upcoming heritage movie, albeit with a limited budget, with real actors, on original locations and elaborate costumes until it is revealed at the very last second that it is indeed a book and not a film that is promoted here (Penguin NAL). All three examples

adequately illustrate that professionally produced book trailers ‘complete with actors, arty cinematography and a nourish voice-over, [are] the closest the book industry has come to a movie-style preview for a new title’ (Berton 2006).

Clover English indicates that the term ‘book trailer’ is often wrongly used for other forms of video promotion for books and that the term, as with many other product names, ‘has been so widely used by the public that its original definition is sometimes lost’ (Clover English 2008: 15). In her view, book trailers are often confused with *book videos* which is ‘the most generic term for a book shown in a visual manner, whether it is digital or film’ (ibid.). Accordingly, the term ‘book video’ should be used as an umbrella term for any kind of videos intended for the promotion of books. Besides book trailers, Clover English mentions the *author interview* as the easiest and most direct way for authors to connect with their readers and tell them behind-the-scenes stories of their book. The author interview may be executed in different ways; either by having the author simply talk about the book or featuring an actual interview (Clover English 2008: 16). An example for this type of video marketing is the author interview for Rick Riordan’s *The Last Olympian* (2009), the fifth instalment in the series *Percy Jackson & the Olympian*. Riordan talks about the origin of the series and a brief synopsis of the featured book (DisneyLiving 2009). His explanations are at times accentuated by drawings of characters, displays of the covers of previous books in the series and real life footage from the promotion of the fourth book. Brian Selznick, the Caldecott winning author of *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, also introduces his new book *Wonderstruck* (2011) through the means of an author interview. Similar to Riordan, Selznick talks about his latest novel while the visual impressions alternate between Selznick himself and drawings that are related to the content of the book (Selznick 2011). In contrast, Stephen King takes the spotlight in the video for his most recent publication *11/22/63* (2011). Only sporadically punctuated with authentic footage of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the book video focuses on King himself without any additional visual effects (SimonSchusterVideos 2011).

In her typology of book videos, Clover English further lists book commercials or ads and viral videos and lays out a number of production features for those forms. However, she fails to explain how to stylistically distinguish them from the book trailer or the author interview (Clover English 2008: 15-16). For future discussions of the book video in general, further distinctions have to be made and new terms have to be coined. Owing to the lack of applicable terminology so far, the following two additions are suggested to engage with the medium in an academic context: ‘book teaser’ and ‘book animation’.

Terms ‘trailer’ and ‘teaser’ are often used synonymously. Therefore, this article understands the *book teaser* as a simpler and more rudimentary type of the book video. The book teaser uses images, music and some form of spoken narration, although the latter is not a necessary given. While sometimes also displaying

video footage of persons or locations, the book teaser lacks a story line and most commonly uses voice-overs that describe the story rather than having the actors talk themselves. In short, book teasers cannot be mistaken for movie trailers. The book teaser for John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) uses split screen video sequences, textual graphics with phrases presumably taken from the book and blends the visuals with indie-folk music to raise the target audience's attention (PenguinYoungReaders 2012). The book teaser for Andrew Pyper's *The Demonologist* (2013) employs title cards similar to those found in silent films to create suspense and anticipation (SimonSchusterVideos 2013). Similar to the examples for the various forms for author interviews, the teaser for Charles Brodaw's *The Lucifer Code* (2010) is again entirely different (COS Productions 2010). This video provides a voice-over summary of the book and is accompanied by pictures and film sequences that underpin the narration. Like the book trailer, the book teaser creates an audio-visual atmosphere which presents the viewer with the general mood of the book and raises expectations for the story development.

In contrast to the teaser, *book animations* are as elaborated as book trailers because they employ pictures, graphics and other art forms in combination with a voice-over summary of the book. Audrey Harris, senior publicist of HarperCollins, calls these animated trailers 'the newest wrinkle' (Jaszi 2009). John Lanchester's latest novel *Capital* (2012), for example, is entirely free from any form of narration, be it a voice-over or textual graphics, (faberandfaber) and employs spin-offs from Tom Berry's cover illustrations from this book. The combination of paper cut-outs, shadows and music create a unique experience for the viewer and

suggest both the parallel social universes inhabited by Lanchester's characters on a single London street just ahead of the 2008 crash, and the way in which, as the author puts it, properties had become 'like people, and rich people at that, imperious, with needs that they were not shy about having serviced' (Irvine 2012)

In another example for the book animation, Neil Gaiman narrates a brief summary of *The Graveyard Book* (2008) while Dave McKean's paper cut-outs from the adult edition of the novel are artfully woven together for audio-visual support (HarperKids 2008). The same strategy applies to Scott Westerfeld's *Leviathan* (2009) in which the story is told using the book's illustrations by Keith Thompson (SimonSchusterVideos 2009). However, in this instance, the illustrations are animated and visual effects are used in order to create movement and depth in an otherwise two dimensional setting. In a way, the animation for Jacqueline West's *The Shadows* (2010) combines both techniques (PenguinYoungReaders 2010). This video uses illustrations from the book in a straightforward way in the fashion of *The Graveyard Book*. However, it adds new levels to the drawings by including movements and additional material in the style of *Leviathan* to make the animation appear three-dimensional. A much simpler, yet artistic and effective book animation is offered in Stefan Merrill Block's *The Story of Forgetting* (2009). The

video shows only seemingly disconnected pencil drawings and accompanies them with a voiceover to reflect the narrator's childhood (RandomHouseInc 2009).

As is the case with any other categorization, it goes without saying that the boundaries between the different forms of book video which are offered in this article are very often blurred and it is often rather difficult to place a book video into one or the other category. The video for Ransom Riggs's *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (2011), for example, uses actors and a storyline to frame the core narrative and additionally employs pictures from the book and a voice-over (Irreferance & Riggs 2011). Thus, it is a blend between book trailer and book teaser and, depending on the focus of the academic, can be categorized as either one. Interestingly, Riggs produced an additional 'directors cut' for his own book which is about a minute longer than the book video used for the official marketing campaign (Irreferance & Riggs 2011). This already suggests that book videos are not only marketing elements but that they are in fact an emerging new art form very similar to movies or adaptations. Another book video that does not fit neatly into any category is Lane Smith's *It's a Book* (2010) (MacmillanChildrens 2010). At first glance it clearly belongs to book animation because the images for this clip are directly taken from the picture book. However, two problems arise with this particular book animation. First, although it is animated, the video resembles very much a book trailer. It has characters similar to actors, it follows a story line and it can be watched as a self-contained movie. This already leads to the second problematic point: it is a short film. Therefore, it is not inconclusive whether this video is meant to promote the book or whether it already constitutes a film adaptation because it contains almost the entire text of the printed book. Still other versions of promotional videos for a book that defy classification according to any of the above mentioned categories are John Wray's *Lowboy* (2009) (MacmillanUSA 2009) and Suzanne Guillette's *Much to Your Chagrin: A Memoir of Embarrassment* (2009) (Peyrano 2009). Both cases of video depend on and play with the public's reaction to the actual printed book. The setting for Wray's book video mirrors the book itself as well as the author's writing progress. The clip for *Lowboy* takes place on the subway and, according to Sabrina Jaszi, large portions of this book were written in transit (Jaszi 2009). The book video relies on the participation of commuters on a Brooklyn L train as they read out excerpts of *Lowboy* (MacmillanUSA 2009). Thus, the video contains something of the quality of a documentary film or a making-off feature. *Much to Your Chagrin*, on the other hand, is based on the public's answer to the question 'Have you been embarrassed or do you have an embarrassing story to tell?' Consequently, the clip does not use the label 'book video' or 'book trailer' but rather calls itself 'a short film inspired by a book' (Peyrano 2009).

Problems of categorization might be approached by film studies. Introducing a broader definition of book videos as 'a short video that promotes a book', various sub-genres rather than different definitions could be established. As a result, ex-

amples of book videos could be analysed and categorized, depending on the purpose of the subsequent study, in regard to their stylistic devices, common tropes or their content.

Characteristics

Ideally, book videos should be as short as possible in order to keep the viewer's interest for the duration of the whole clip. Most book videos have a length between one and three minutes (Booth 2006) which keeps them from being either too long or too short, as Rye Barcott explains (Barcott 2011). David Teague, a filmmaker from Brooklyn, says that it is a challenge to condense books into short clips, but that it is a necessity because 'people would want to e-mail their friends' about their interesting finds on the web (Berton 2006). He goes on to explain that 'just as thick books can intimidate customers in a bookstore, a video clip that runs more than three minutes can go overlooked on the increasingly crammed Internet', especially since the online medium depends on brevity (Berton 2006). However, the average length for book videos is certainly not only dependent on the viewer's alleged preference of brevity, but is also constrained by the file size as well as the production costs. In addition to its length, the presentation style of the content itself is essential in order to 'catch [the viewer's] eye in the hope that [they]'ll remember the author's name – or at least the title of the book (Baker 2008). In general, two stylistic choices have to be made. Firstly, depending on the kind of video created for the book, 'they can be anything from the author reading a passage from the book, to an elaborate mini-movie' (Booth 2006), as already discussed above. Nevertheless, even after categorizing the book video, major differences between individual productions cannot be ruled out since the categories themselves are not uniform. After extensive comparisons between a number of online book trailers, Barcott concludes: 'Some looked like Hollywood productions (*Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*). A few were beautifully simple (Kelly Corrigan's *The Middle Place*)' (Barcott 2011). Secondly, since the function and form of book trailers are very similar to those of movie trailers, the same characteristics apply for their production. Depending on the genre, the mood and the narrative structure of the book, music, atmosphere and cuts are chosen in accordance with raising the expectations of viewers in the hope that they will eventually become readers. *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters*, for example, clearly employs common tropes of the heritage film. According to Belen Vidal, the heritage film

has become associated with a powerful undercurrent of nostalgia for the past conveyed by historical dramas, romantic costume films and literary adaptations. These films often flaunt their connections with classical works of the literary canon, lavish production values and star performances. (Vidal 2012: 1)

All this is certainly true for the beginning of *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* until the hero hears a noise nearby. At this point of the book trailer, it be-

comes rather obvious that it is not the usual heritage film which is promoted, but a horror B-movie with a strong comic undercurrent. The dialogue and acting is over-exaggerated and the scene culminates with the short appearance of a sea monster which pulls the male protagonist – rather than the female protagonist – into the lake. Using a typical device for horror movies, most of what happens is left to the viewer's imagination as only Willoughby's arm is left floating in the water at the end. Hence, the book trailer for *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* uses features of heritage film, comedy and horror movies which mirrors the style and content of the promoted book itself – a Jane Austen novel paired with the horrors of sea monsters, and written in a comical way.

Challenges

Although book videos have the potential to catch the future readers' eyes and intrigue them enough to buy the book eventually, not all book videos are a success and most are viewed with suspicion. Christopher Shea remarks on a supposed absurdity of the genre and asks whether there is 'anything that more pungently demonstrates the desperation and confusion within the publishing industry than book trailers' (Shea 2011). In his opinion, book videos will not last for long after the 'publishing revolution' has ended and will be seen as 'a relic of our nervous transitional era' (Shea 2011). While Rye Barcott reveals that 'most of the authors [he] know[s] detest the very idea of them' (Barcott 2011), Pamela Paul sarcastically remarks that with the invention of book videos 'those who once worried about no one reading their books can worry about no one watching their trailers' (Paul 2010), and Tim Kreider comically describes the relation between publisher, author and book video as it happened to himself:

The sudden, insane hula hoop-like popularity of social media and mass dinosaurian die-off of print has publishers panicked and willing to try anything, and so writers, typically reclusive types who are used to being able to do their jobs without putting on pants, now find themselves shoved on camera and hawking their books like mattresses on Presidents' Day. (Kreider 2012)

These doubts are probably supported by the huge number of low quality videos, as Nina Metz observes (Metz 2012), and the unease of publishers as 'few want to be caught trying too hard' (Shea 2011). It could be argued that as long as a book video is well made it will be remembered and shared, and it will inspire viewers to look out for the book. Some book videos may even trigger the search for more videos. Unfortunately, professionalism does not necessarily equate to quality and Lindesay Irvine rightfully criticizes that 'most of the time they are a little on the perfunctory side: Camcorder pointed at author, author fielding questions or (oh, the visual riches) looking down and reading from the book they're promoting' (Irvine 2012). As a consequence, badly executed examples discourage authors to

use book videos for their marketing campaigns, repel viewers from actually buying the book and ridicule the whole industry of book video producers.

Nonetheless, even book videos of high quality are faced with many challenges. First of all, they are ‘hidden away in random nooks and corners on the Web’ (Metz 2012) and, unlike film trailers, ‘have no natural home besides YouTube’ (Walker 2012). Nina Metz lists three more possible sources for the problems that book trailers have to face:

Amazon would be a logical place to start, but the retailer pushes book trailers so far down on the page (on tiny media players) that they are easy to miss. Unless you’re searching a specific author or book title, Google isn’t much help, either. The handful of book trailer sites that do exist are clunky and half-hearted, with a limited (frequently obscure) selection.² (Metz 2012)

She continues to lament that there is no ‘centralized clearinghouse for these videos – the kind of savvily designed website that could transform the tedious act of sifting through content into an experience of discovery’ (Metz 2012). As a consequence, publishers and authors have difficulties to place their book videos on the internet for many to see because, although they can use a multitude of websites, it is not always the case that viewers actually access the clip. In addition, the production of book videos itself is often difficult and challenging. First, brief content summaries have to catch the reader’s attention without spoiling the whole story and, second, provide certain catch phrases in order to make the reader buy the book. As mentioned above, book videos either use voice-overs similar to the function of the blurb on the book jacket to provide auditory input or they feature passages from the book in the form of textual graphics in the video. In order for viewers to read these texts, they have to be relatively short and clear and they should not disappear too quickly. Adding to these technicalities, images, sound and timing have to be taken into consideration. Barcott sums it up rather adequately: ‘Capturing a 120,000-word book in a hundred words is hard enough without thinking through images, sound, and timing. I didn’t know where to start’ (Barcott 2011). Moreover, one reason why (movie) trailer making is ‘a little explore[d] art form’, is given by Finola Kerrigan: ‘It is this tension between giving the consumer enough information to persuade them to choose a film, while avoiding the repeated accusation that film trailers give away all the funny bits or give away the story’ (Kerrigan 2009: 141). Book trailers are even more affected by this because, even though they are similar to movie trailers, they lack the visual images with which movie trailers work (Booth 2006). The book video completely depends on the director and/or producer in regards to the visuals:

The trick is to convey a sense of what the book is about without giving anything away – and without really clearly defining what the characters look like, as most readers prefer to visualize what they are reading about as they imagine it themselves (Booth 2006).

This is especially true for book trailers since they feature actors performing as the characters who, understandably, have a huge visual impact on the viewer.

Marketing

Although book videos as supplements to print campaigns are not yet well known, movie trailers are part of everyday life. Their purpose is to ‘provide the potential consumer with a taste of the film’ and to ‘persuade the consumer to watch a particular film in the not too distant future’ (Kerrigan 2009: 140, 142). In a similar way, a book video is ‘designed to build interest in an upcoming or current novel and to encourage people to buy the book that they are based on’ (Booth 2006). Especially in a time where book publishers are confronted with the challenge of ‘how to compete for attention in an ever-growing entertainment market that includes TV, cable, online social networks, downloadable music and video, podcasts and video games’ (Chmielewski 2006) and where people are ‘developing the practice of consuming short media clips on a range of media devices’ (Kerrigan 2009: 142), the book industry has to adapt to and look out for new promotional tools. In order to stand out, publishers are desperately looking for new forms of advertising. Emily Romero, vice president of marketing for Penguin Young Readers Group, states:

We wanted to create something that was more meaningful for our audience. Sure, a print ad, a banner ad campaign, a TV spot, those are pretty traditional ways to market a book, but we just wanted to try something completely different. We wanted something that spanned multiple platforms since that is how this target audience consumes their media. (Donnelly 2010)

That book videos should not and cannot be the only way of promoting a book is a simple matter of fact. Carolyn K. Reidy, president and CEO of Simon & Schuster, herself admits that ‘in some cases, we don’t even expect it to increase sales at all [...] It’s almost a gift to the audience, and hopefully it makes them buy the next book’ (Mechling 2008). The publishers hope for their videos to ‘become viral and generate buzz about books’ (Baker) and there are, according to Reidy, ‘a few cases where the gamble has paid off’ (Mechling 2008). However, whether book videos or, in fact, any kind of marketing are successful or whether they are not, is often difficult to estimate (Beckwith 2011) and since the internet is flooded with short videos of every kind, it will be difficult to analyse book videos in respect of viewer-response. Whereas, according to Hediger, movie trailers only need about one to 4.5 percent of the advertising budget in order to be accountable for about a quarter to one third of the movie audience (Hediger 2001: 13), there are currently no numbers available to support any statement about the success of book videos. In some cases, a book video was watched by thousands of viewers on YouTube, but it still did not increase sales numbers for the advertised product (Mechling). Nick Davis points out that Mary Roach’s nonfiction work *Packing for Mars: The*

Curious Science of Life in the Void (2010) does not animate readers to buy the book although it has ‘a dandy tongue-in-cheek NASA-themed video that spoofs industrial films of old (with a tally of 32,500 views on YouTube)’ (Metz 2012). On the other hand, social media are ‘a great equalizer: big brands can be outsmarted without making huge investments, and small brands can make big names for themselves’ (Zarella 2009: 7) and sometimes provide the only way to promote books by unknown or independent authors ‘still looking for a following’ (Baker 2008). Especially for those who cannot afford a very expensive campaign, a book video is an innovative form to promote a book as can be seen in the case of the book teaser produced by the independent author Annelie Wendeberg for her second novel *The Fall* (2013) (Wendeberg 2013). In addition, it reaches out to the ‘Internet-savvy reading audience, who might skip the traditional newspaper book review section’ (Berton 2006) and may ‘draw more people to the beauty, substance, and transformative power of books’ (Barcott 2011). After all, it is no coincidence that the book trailers are rapidly increasing in their numbers since the start of YouTube in 2005 because social media now play a huge role in everyday life. Therefore, it would be interesting to conduct a study about the increase and reach of book videos, for example since the launch of YouTube, and to assemble statistics which prove more clearly whether or not book trailers have a significant impact on the numbers of book sales.

Advantages

Especially those book trailers that are very similar to little movies have the most potential to be shared among the internet community. In a globalised world, short clips on the internet can be shared among thousands within only a short time and especially social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, or tumblr provide ideal networks to promote books with the help of videos. Book videos that contain elements which are provoking, funny or, according to filmmaker Nick Davis, provoke remarks like ‘Wow, I’ve never seen that before’ (Metz 2012) are most likely to encourage viewers to share them with friends. Not only does the habit of sharing content between friends provide an instant promoting effect for established authors and publishing houses, but the same may also be achieved for unknown and independent authors. Since book videos do not necessarily depend on a huge budget, but can be easily made with limited costs, they can be produced and used by basically everybody whose computer runs simple video editing programmes. And the internet itself provides several websites on how to make a book video. In addition, the advantage of book trailers lies in their wide and lasting reach of global audiences. Whereas traditional promotion strategies such as print campaigns only last for a limited time and may even be completely overlooked by the target audience, book videos are being circulated among internet users at various times and across all sorts of platforms. This allows the commissioner of a book

video to re-launch it whenever needed. As a result, previously unsuccessful campaigns to sell the book may suddenly develop into an internet phenomenon which then promotes the book anew without adding much further cost. These almost automatic promotion waves are then most likely to result in the purchase of the marketed book.

Although Steve Osgoode, who started HarperCollins's book trailer programme at the beginning of 2006, states that some titles are better suited for book videos than others (Fox), there seems to be no thematic limit to book videos. Not only fictional works are now being promoted in this way, but also non-fictional works are given their own short clips. Three examples for the non-fiction section of the book market for which book trailers have been produced are *The Social Media Marketing Book* (2009) by Dan Zarrella, as the name already implies, a book about marketing campaigns with the help of social media (Zarrella), *Evolution Impossible* (2012) by Dr. John Ashton who questions the theory of evolution (nlpgvideo) and *Tower of Babel: Cultural History of Our Ancestors* (2013) by Bodie Hodge, a book that 'trace[s] your roots back to the Bible' (nlpgvideo 2013). Despite their varied content, all three, however, employ the same stylistic devices. They show short phrases that blend in and fade out, fly across the screen and morph into other words. These textual graphics reflect key statements about the content of the book and, therefore, raise the interest of the viewers and animate the reader to buy the book. The visual input is then supported by music that always catches the mood of the book. *The Social Media Marketing Book* uses a rhythmic, simple and jaunty tune that is easily recognizable, *Evolution Impossible* is characterized by drums and dynamic accents reflecting the Big Bang, and *Tower of Babel* sounds mysterious, ancient and oriental.

Furthermore, book trailers have the great potential to adapt to new technology at regular intervals. Book videos may find their way into cinemas or TV programmes as an integral part of commercials. Whereas filmmakers Scott Thrift and Ari Kuschner humbly suggest to integrate book videos into Amazon's e-reader 'to help convince online window shoppers to make a purchase' (Jaszi 2009), Nick Davis and Peter Mendelsund boldly propose book videos to become the 'visual face of the book' that 'lives online and is also the cover when you download it on your Kindle' (Metz 2012). Lindsay Irvine goes even a step further and wonders why there are no 'novels that work video into the body of the text' (Irvine 2012). As a result, book videos might become an essential component of online marketing in a 'streaming video era, with the publishing industry under relentless threat' (Paul 2010), reach a global audience depending on the viral potential of social networks, and open up new markets.

Art Form

Although the academic world has, until now, almost completely ignored book videos, the internet community has already acknowledged this new approach to book advertisement. Owing to its high quality, the video for *Vampire Hunters* has given a boost to the recognition of the genre of the book trailer more than any of its predecessors. This particular video is frequently shared and discussed on the internet and has logged over two million hits on YouTube. The aforementioned ‘book trailer of the year 2009’, *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters*, provides another example for a high quality book trailer. Both trailers exist in their own right and ‘begin to look like artworks in themselves’ (Irvine 2012). Publishers seem to agree with this sentiment since several awards are now being bestowed to book videos. Random House, for example, held a competition in 2008 that ‘encouraged students at the National Film and Television School to submit trailers for three of its books’ (Baker 2008). Since then, the formerly one-off campaign has developed into an annual book trailer competition (Walker 2012). Since 2010, Melville House Publishing also joined the game and hands out the Moby Award to the best and the worst book trailer each year (Walker 2012). Although being compared to the Oscars by some (Paul 2010), Christopher Shea sees them as having a rather satirical thrust (Shea 2011). In addition, the sole fact that well-known actors and directors participate in the production of book videos shows that the genre is becoming more than a simple marketing strategy. For example, James Franco, among others, guest starred in a trailer for Gary Shteyngart’s new novel, *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010) (rhpubgroup 2010), not only showing that ‘meta spirit was alive’ (Shea 2011) but also helping to ‘goose the number of views for Shteyngart’s sketch comedy video poking fun at the literary world’ (Metz 2012). With almost five minutes in length, this book video is unusually long and pretends to be a documentary about Shteyngart and his book. It received much media attention owing to the performance of the famous actor³. Alfonso Cuarón’s attempt at a book video for Naomi Klein’s book *The Shock Doctrine* (2008) is even longer (Cuarón & Klein 2008). The director of *Children of Men* produced a seven-minute film which was not only shown at the Toronto International Film Festival (Sullivan 2009), but also at the Venice Film Festival in 2007, one of the most important international film festivals (Walker 2012). Although this short film is frequently mentioned as a high quality book video in newspapers articles,⁴ the question in those cases remains whether or not these are still book videos or already short films. Just like Naomi Klein said herself: ‘the film was a thing unto itself; it didn’t feel like an advertisement’ (Sullivan 2009).

Outlook

In 2011, almost ten years after the first book trailer had been produced, Rye Barcott recognizes book trailers as ‘relatively recent additions to the literary world’ (Barcott 2011). Statements such as this clearly show the prevailing lack of information about book trailers which only supports the claim that it is about time the academic world stopped ignoring the existence of book videos and instead started investigating this new genre. Perhaps Nick Davis is right that

[o]ne of the huge reasons [book videos are] so bad is because they’re called book trailers [...] No one has said, ‘Wait a minute, this is its own thing.’ How can we take advantage of what it can offer that a movie trailer can’t? How can we get inside the reading experience in a visual way? In order to do that, there needs to be a new word. [...] Maybe bideo? (Metz 2012)

It is questionable whether coining a new term will help the book video to become more accepted among scholars or if it may even be counter-productive since an excess of newly coined terms might lead to even more confusion. However, to see the book video as ‘its own thing’ is definitely the right direction, and maybe even the only one. They should be considered an art form rather than (only) a marketing tool because until it is proven that any form of book video does indeed enhance book sales, they will probably be ignored by marketing experts. As an art form, however, the book video can provide various points of discussion. Costas Constandinides nicely sums up Cartmell and Whelehan’s *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, which is ‘one of the most significant works in adaptation studies’ (Constandinides 2010: 10), saying that film is as complex as literary fiction and a serious art form despite its restriction by the consumer culture (Constandinides 2010: 11). The same holds for book trailers with only one difference: their length. The book video may also be seen as completely detached from its original textual source and should be analysed in an aesthetic way with regards to choice of colours, camera angles, construction of dialogues, common tropes, etc. As a result, the engagement with book videos will contribute to the study of social media and reveal attributes of ‘contemporary’ society just like film theory ‘can illuminate cinema’s role within history and culture’ and ‘lay bare cinema’s significance for our own cultural lives, as well as for other cultures and historical epochs’ (Rushton 2010: 2). Therefore, as soon as consistent definition or categorization are established, this new genre might not only become a ‘standard operating procedure in the world of publishing’ (Baker 2008) but also, and more importantly, an art form in its own rights which would eventually introduce book videos as an academic discourse into already existing fields of study and might even open up a new area of research.

Kati Voigt is a PhD student of English Literature and British Cultural Studies. She currently works as a Lecturer for English Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Leipzig. Her special interest lies with the fourth dimension (time and space), mathematics in literature and children's fiction. The working title of her PhD thesis is 'The Science in Time Fantasies for Children and Young Adults.' E-mail: kati.voigt@uni-leipzig.de

Notes

- ¹ See, for example, Hediger (2001); Kernan (2004); Marich (2005); Böringer (2005); Johnston (2008) and Kerrigan (2009).
- ² See, for example, Book & Trailer Showcase, Book Trailers for All, Book Trailers, BookCaster.com and Harderode.
- ³ See, for example, Fischer (2010); Ferguson (2010) and Vu (2010).
- ⁴ See also Baker (2008), Shea (2011) and Metz (2012).

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