Questions of Popular Cult(ure)

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

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Leanne McRae
Abstract

*Questions of Popular Cult(ure)* works in the uncomfortable and unclear spaces of popular culture. This thesis demonstrates how cult cauterizes ambiguity and functions as a framing agent for unpopular politics in popular culture. In tracking the flows and hesitations in the postwar period through the rise of the New Right and identity politics, this thesis shows how cult contains moving and malleable meanings that maneuver through everyday life. It is a slippery and slight subject that denies coherent categorization in definitional frames. This thesis negotiates this liminality by tracking broad social shifts in race, class and gender through textualised traces. The complicated concept of cult is activated within a series of case studies. These chapters are linked together to demonstrate the volatile variance of the cult category.

Section one contextualises the terrain of the intellectual work in this thesis. It paints broad brush-strokes of the postwar period, through an animated intersection of politics and popular culture. The first chapter defines the currency of cult in contemporary times. It is devoted to investigating the relationships between colonisation and popular culture. By pondering postcolonialism, this chapter prises open thirdspace to consider how writing and madness performs proximity in the pre and post-colonial world. The ‘maddening’ of cargo cults by colonisers in Melanesia operates as a metonym for the regulation of marginal modalities of resistance. In popular culture, this trajectory of insane otherness has corroded, with the subversion of cult being appropriated by fan discourses, as worship has become ‘accountable’ for the mainstream market.

Chapter two unpacks *The X-Files* as a text tracking the broad changes in politics through popular culture. This innovative text has moved from marginality into the
mainstream, mapping meanings through the social landscape. Consciousness and
reflexivity in the popular embeds this text in a cult framework, as it demonstrates the
movement in meanings and the hegemonic hesitations of the dominant in colonising
(and rewriting) the interests of the subordinate as their own.

Section two creates a dialogue between gendered politics and contemporary popular
culture. The changes to the consciousness in masculinity and femininity are captured
by *Tank Girl, Tomb Raider*, Henry Rollins and Spike (from *Buffy: The Vampire
Slayer*). These texts perform the wavering popularity of feminism and the ascent of
men’s studies in intellectual inquiry. *Tank Girl* articulates unpopular feminist politics
through the popular mode of film. The movement to more mainstream feminism is
threaded through the third wave embraced by *Tomb Raider* that reinscribes the
popular paradigms of femininity, via colonisation. The computer game discourse
permits a pedagogy of power to punctuate Lara Croft’s virtual surfaces and shimmer
through the past into the present.

Tracking this historical movement, two chapters on masculinity brew the boom in
men’s studies’ questioning of manhood. Henry Rollins is a metonym for an excessive
and visible masculinity, in an era where men have remained an unmarked centre of
society. His place within peripheral punk performance settles his inversionary
identity. Spike from *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* demonstrates the contradictions in
manhood by moving through the masculine hierarchy to deprioritise men in the public
sphere. This is a mobile masculinity in a time where changeability has caused a
‘crisis’ for men. Both these men embody a challenging and confrontational gender
politics. Cult contains these characters within different spaces, at varying times and through contradictory politics.

Section three ponders the place and role of politics at its most persistent and relevant. It demonstrates the consequences for social justice in an era of New Right ideologies. The chapter on *South Park* mobilises Leftist concerns within an overtly Rightist context, and *Trainspotting* moves through youth politics and acceleration to articulate movement in resistive meanings. These case studies contemplate the journey of popular culture in the postwar period by returning to the present and to the dominant culture. The colonisation of identity politics by the New Right makes the place of cultural studies – as a pedagogic formation - powerfully important. Colonisation of geographical peripheries is brought home to England as the colonisation of the Celtic fringe is interpreted through writing and resistance.

This thesis tracks (and connects) two broad movements - the shifting of political formations and the commodification of popular culture. The disconnecting dialogue between these two streams opens the terrain for cult. In the hesitations that delay their connection, cult is activated to cauterize this disjuncture.
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Introduction: Unpopular politics in popular culture

The future is the becoming of possibilities. The present is the moment in which what has been and is disappearing crosses swords with what is on the brink of becoming.1

The present is a compact and convoluted space where confluences of time converge. Sean Cubitt captures the sense of ambivalence embedded in the now, where what is passing has not yet faded, and what is coming remains just out of grasp. Movement of meaning through time and space is rarely linear. Histories, artefacts, ideas, memories, experiences and identities linger, recycle and reconfirm their place in contemporary consciousness. Making sense of these patterns and matrices of meaning requires logical and linear grammatical and linguistic structures to order thinking, writing and being. In the moments of ‘crossing’, much is lost. Ordering masks the moments of instability – where contexts change and meanings shift. Nevertheless, a range of objects and subjects exist uncomfortably within - and without - conventional ordering structures. These items and identities are not denied: they are cauterized. They are captured and contained. Their mobility is controlled through time and space.

*Questions of Popular Cult(ure)* works in these spaces of ‘crossing’. It generates a model for making sense of ordering and containment within culture, by interpreting the use of cult categories. Difficult and unstable identities offer a conundrum for dominant ideologies within our society. Rather than occupying an oppositional and then consensual relationship to authority frameworks, this thesis suggests that identities and artefacts mobilising problematic politics are contained until - or as - meanings in the mainstream move to adjust to shifts in popular consciousness. The

case-studies in this dissertation demonstrate how cult is a controlling framework that grasps cultural artefacts as they negotiate space on the fringes and in the centers of social power. This term is summoned to explain the resonance of texts that explore fringe issues, which then creep toward the popular realms of consumption that disable the negotiated balance of hegemony. Cult monitors the disruptive and uncomfortable meanings that are mobilised in popular texts. A cult text cannot be made. The term is applied to secure unstable meaning and movement in the social landscape. As a consequence, it can be claimed by both resistive and coercive modalities.

The resistive framework conserves cult on the edges of culture, where marginal groups claim an authentic readership strategy through textual material. This context is mobilised strongly in J.P. Telotte’s key text *The cult film experience: Beyond all reason*. In this book, a resistive discourse for cult films is claimed via an audience whose interests include “drugs, rock music, sexual experience, alienation from their parents and established society”\(^2\) seeking an ‘outside’ textual trace of their rebellion. Audiences embracing *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, for example, are demonstrated as claiming the term for themselves, being both authentically resistive and indulging in a celebration of queerness. The *dominant* discourse imposes the cult label on difficult texts and identities to limit and monitor their movement. A text is called cult when there remains insecurity of its status as a popular text. *The Matrix* for example, was initially ‘cultified’ until it settled into a major film success. Steve Irwin, the multi-million dollar environmentalist celebrity known as ‘the crocodile hunter’, has been called a cult success to explain his ‘uncivilised’ and excessive embodiment of Australianness that has made him simultaneously ‘outside’ and extremely popular.

Crucially, both resistive and dominant identities mobilise the same meanings in the cult label, though for different interests. This dissertation seeks to expand the scope for comment on the cult label by activating a more nuanced interpretation of liminality. I argue that cult is a mobile phenomenon that frames the movement of unpopular politics in popular culture. This thesis sifts through methodologies and meanings to connect time, space and politics through the popular.

A series of case-studies are employed to demonstrate the relationship between movement, meaning and resistance. These are connected via vox-pop political inserts and interventions, where disparate contexts are connected to perform the cauterizing function of the cult label. Movement through the past and present is permitted by the use of these inserts. They perform a pause in the prose that is not present in positioning of the cult categories. Hesitations in hegemony hail the liminal moments of memory and meaning masked by cult.

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Figure 1 “Steve Irwin: Bigger than 10 bears, mate.”

Three broad sections shape this thesis. In the first, an attention to time positions an overarching context for the frame and function of cult, via colonisation and popular culture. Interpreting postcolonialism, thirdspace, madness and cargo-cults, chapter one affirms a history for cult epistemology and politics. Chapter two situates cult through popular culture by taking *The X-Files* as a case-study of movement in meaning through the postwar period. This text encases shifts in society, identity and politics that monitor the moments of crossing to and from margins and centres of meaning in culture.

Section two investigates the place of space in contemporary cult containment. It maps the movement of gender politics through popular culture. Chapter three interprets the film *Tank Girl* in its rendering of functional feminism. Situated on the fringes of society, this text demonstrates the purgatory of unpopular politics in popular culture. The interrogation of women continues with *Tomb Raider* in chapter four, where a friendlier femininity is framed by draconian ideologies of empire and ‘the east’. In these two chapters, a comparison of movement through time and space demonstrates how cult contains and controls difficult identities.

In chapter five, masculinity is mapped onto the surfaces of Henry Rollins. His performance of punk resistance ensures his rendering of marginality and cult currency within popular culture. Spike from *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, is the subject of chapter six, where men’s studies is utilized to demonstrate the movement of meaning around masculinity in the contemporary period. Public power, violence and sexuality are interpreted to inject the meanings of masculinity with mobility. Spike’s movement within the hierarchy of masculinity demonstrates an unstable and insecure
subjectivity, questioning a mythologised, yet strong and powerful dominant masculine identity. Both Rollins and Spike must be contained, as they disrupt social stability.

Section three pummels through the politics. The thesis folds back on itself, as it returns to the terrain of empire and pedagogy to interpret the peril of proximity. Chapter seven saunters through *South Park* and ponders the role of identity politics in New Right ideologies. When cult cauterizes meanings, the function of a cultural studies intervention becomes diffused. This chapter investigates the positioning of popular culture in identity politics. Chapter eight takes *Trainspotting* as its focus and moves through writing, dancing and drugs to monitor (post)colonisation at the Celtic fringe. The trope of acceleration is activated to rethink the nature of resistance in contemporary cult(ure).

Cult is a categorising tool to contain and control social disruption. Its operational axis is found along many tangents through time, space and politics, where cult meanings fluctuate through distance and proximity, speed and lethargy. This thesis demonstrates the movement in meanings over time, and across space. The place of politics in popular culture is tracked through the cult label. Differences are traced, in the service of maintaining hegemony.

**Movement and meaning**

The movement of meanings through time reveals a problem for social stability. Ordering structures, knowledges and institutions maintain authority by mobilising and controlling new experiences and consciousness. Social, educational, legal, and governmental institutions categorise and contain cogency via structures and social
punctuations. Common sense flows through these spaces, and artefacts to easily etch authority over aberrances in meaning. The dictionary is a key item through which “[t]he commonplace acts as a bulwark against all sorts of social change, [and] against a permanent fear of unrest at the margins.” It is not the only, or most reliable, source for framing critical analysis of epistemology. The knowledge it provides may occupy cursory insight, but should not be taken as the last (or even first) word. Traces of the tumultuous history of any term are only hinted in this catalogue. When I look up the word cult in the dictionary I am confronted with curious movement as I scan the listed definitions.

**cult** (kAlt) *n.* 1. a specific system of religious worship. 2. a sect devoted to such a system. 3. a quasi-religious organization using devious psychological techniques to gain and control adherents. 4. intense interest in and devotion to a person, idea, or activity. 5. the person, idea, etc., arousing such devotion. 6. something regarded as fashionable or significant by a particular group; craze. 7. (modifier) of, or relating to, or characteristic of a cult or cults: *a cult figure; a cult show.* [C17: from L *cultus* cultivation, refinement, from *colere* to till.

The key transition is in the shift through religious contexts and into popular culture. The manner in which worship is uncomfortably connected to the popular demonstrates the extent that fandom, and the pleasure in triviality, still occupies a volatile position in our society. It marks a limit. Popular culture is the place where fringe and mainstream identities and knowledges circulate. At the very edges of popularity, meaning is patrolled. Cult controls knowledges, practices and texts that circulate in an awkward relationship with legitimated ideologies and identities. It offers a strategy for ordering volatile variances within mainstreamed knowledges and institutions. Social stability is maintained by summoning the cult label to define and limit social knowledges. This term is deliberately malleable and mobile, to operate abstractly and ambiguously in the service of dominant interests in a society. Like

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Foucault’s rendering of Borges encyclopedia, that offers a framework for interpretation of the animals presented in it, cult constantly expands and contracts to envelop unexpected moments in meaning. Foucault’s example offers a (seemingly) ever expanding social framework.

animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.5

Foucault’s laughter at this absurdly odd categorization is embedded within a westernised system of logic that denies such incongruous classification. The linkages embedded in this progression are embodied in a foreign and unfamiliar hierarchy of value that is defining an alternative system of social relationships. Most crucially, this definitional framework seems to offer no limit to its classification. This contradictory and convoluted structuring modality is problematic in a system that must appear stable, despite its perpetual motion. Instead of an ever-maneuverable system of official, encyclopedic definitions in our society, popular culture functions as the limiting framework, while simultaneously offering spaces of rupture that threaten the stability of overarching social hierarchies. This is the contradictory nature of our social system. It is locked in an un-ending hegemonic dance that flits through time and space, negotiating and redefining ideas, identities and objects.

Handling history

Popular culture became a powerful trope for understanding social relations after World War Two. This war challenged foundational social, economic and cultural systems in western societies. A push toward making the world peaceful, and the

perpetuation of social justice, dominated popular consciousness after this conflict. Most seriously, the fundamental values assigned to such words as democracy, class and culture shifted. The injustices inflicted upon the working class during the years of depression and appeasement, petitioning and reconstruction were increasingly taken seriously beyond the immediate spheres of trade unions and intellectuals. New ways of thinking about class-struggle permeated the postwar world. This fresh interpretation of class was tethered to a new consciousness in culture.

Culture remains ambiguous, yet active in any understandings of power, politics and everyday life. This term has moved through many incarnations. It gained political energy at The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies through a questioning of working class identities and lives. Richard Hoggart for example, sought to privilege the undervalued culture of undervalued people. Raymond Williams radically reconfigured the manner in which we think about culture when he defined it as everyday life. He argued that shifts in the meaning of culture “is a record of a number of important and continuing reactions to … changes in our social, economic and political life.” These moving meanings are memories of a term that refuses to be clearly defined. In this postwar period, the theorists at the Centre engaged a wider definitional framework to govern our social sense-making. They were dissatisfied with overarching social ideals that devalued the working class culture punctuating their own lives. A re-valuing of popular culture as a legitimate node of ordering was connected to economic restructuring and decolonisation. With the decline of empire, the packaging of race and culture was redefined. The imperial

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8 R. Williams, *Culture*, (Glasgow: Fontana, 1981), p. 10
9 Williams, *Culture and society, op cit.*, p. 16
ideologies of ‘cultural backwardness’ in indigenous communities expressed as a result of their ‘under-evolved’ racial genetics, were attacked and resisted. Instead, there was an increasing confluence of ideologies demonstrating that “[r]ace has always been culturally constructed and culture has always been racially constructed.” This nuanced understanding of culture in the postwar period, would have a profound effect on racial reasoning and the decline of empire. It would also radically reinscribe the relationship Britain had with its colonies.

Definitions of culture moved between the higher, sacred endeavors of Arnoldian enlightenment, to the mundane production and practices which anthropologists observed in so-called ‘primitive’ societies. The racialisation of culture worked in tandem with class questions to maintain a hierarchy of power.

‘Culture’ was typically used to refer to the characteristics and products of a human society from the most primitive to the most civilised: if civilisation was both the process and the result of the history of such societies, each one had achieved its own cultural level within that framework. This hierarchical cultural construction, served to divide civilised nations from the ‘uncivilised’. Culture was now synonymous with material objects, signifying the social, racial, spiritual, emotional and intellectual development of a people. Its definitional framework molds to dominant ideologies, while a contradictory nexus of meaning settles around and through this term. Robert Young claims that culture, “is a word strictly improper, divided against itself,” recognising that culture cannot always be controlled or regulated effectively.

11 M. Arnold, Culture and anarchy: An essay in political and social criticism, (London: Smith Elder, 1875)
12 ibid., p. 43
13 ibid., p. 53
In the postwar context, pondering this “improper” word came to dominate intellectual activity. The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and other centres for cultural critique, specifically questioned class-based exclusionary ideologies of culture. Raymond Williams criticised T. S. Eliot’s approach to culture directly, when he stated that Eliot’s choice of activities to make up his cultural ‘way of life’, were inherently related to, “sport, food and a little art - a characteristic observation of English leisure.” The culture of work, or attention to the ways of life that involve industrialisation or mechanization, were for Williams, problematically absent from Eliot’s trope. Rather than trying to separate culture from education and politics, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies conflated them. Among their most crucial work was suggesting that culture did not simply include the objects of production and consumption in an industrialised society, nor the conscious moments of reflection or creation in the name of ‘art’, but was instead of a “way of life” - everyday life.

Theorists at the Centre were monitoring how the capitalist power bloc masked political consciousness. Through their attention to working class culture, they were successful in demonstrating that people find a way to claim and embody a consciousness through spaces not necessarily legitimised by the dominant interests. A core thread through the early work at the BCCCS was devoted to interpreting the products and social environment of the capitalist industrial system that comprised the everyday life of the working class. At the Birmingham Center ‘the popular’ – as a phrase, trope and ideology - was circulated as a direct resistance to ‘high culture’.

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15 Williams, *Culture and society*, op cit., p. 230
16 Eliot, *op cit.*, p. 31
Rather than conceiving of culture as something above, separate or special to enrich the soul, theorists at the Centre suggested that culture was embedded in everyday practices. These beginnings spawned a diverse and varied interpretation of cultural studies that formulated the inter/anti-disciplinarity that still characterises the paradigm.

The birth of cultural studies articulated the shifts in social concern, with culture forming the primary methodology for an interpretation of power within society. Privileging the popular marked a mobility in meaning, whereby the structured system revealed spaces of difference. Privileging the popular provided a legitimacy and autonomy to working class identity and politics. Cultural studies has done its job well. Popular culture is now embedded as a key framework in our social sense making. It has extended beyond its working class allegiances to encase the entirety of social relationships that were once marketed as middle class. Popular culture is now “that which can be marketed as entertainment”\textsuperscript{17} and is embedded within the capitalist marketing machine that seeks to regulate identities for the purposes of profit. Understanding culture as ‘everyday life’, functions to blur the divisions between classes. The by-product of this redefinition has been the dominant meanings of the market overwhelming the autonomy of the working class. Consciousness has been redirected by capitalism. Popular culture is not now, nor was it ever, the radically resistive formation Birmingham activated in 1964. Lawrence Grossberg demonstrates the anxiety activated in accessing popular culture as a coherent anchorage for identity. He suggests that everyday life is complicated, and popular culture is not distinct from

\textsuperscript{17} A. Cranny-Francis, \textit{Popular culture}, (Geelong: Deakin University Press, 1994), p. 7
the unclean and unclear negotiations that take place in that space. It is defined by
mobility and insecurity, which makes it a volatile terrain for identity. This is,

\[\text{not the popular as a fixed set of texts or practices, not as a coherent ideology,}\]
\[\text{nor even as some necessarily celebratory and subversive structure (the}\]
\[\text{carnivalesque). It is the complex and contradictory terrain, the}\]
\[\text{multidimensional context, within which people live out their everyday lives.}\]

Grossberg understands that popular culture is a nexus of practices and artefacts that
resists linear and logical categorization. It is embedded within individual’s lives in
complex and contradictory ways that defies easy articulation. Popular culture is
irrational. It is not coherent, nor necessarily tangible. It is a complex series of
activities and relationships that are consistently mobile. Adrian Martin astutely
explains that “[p]opular culture is a phantom site around which things happen.” It is
embedded within a series of diverse yet serious social structures. It moves between
the personal and the political, linking the two in an intimate dance with power. It is
through the popular that identities and meanings are regulated. In the space of
everyday life, people make sense of their world. The struggle over meaning is
negotiated and tracked as the social system is tested daily via the hegemonic dance
floor. In the postwar context, popular culture was a crucial method of capturing
problematic politics amid cold-war binaries. Through the rise of the New Right,
popular culture became a more determinately conservative formation.

**New Right woman**

The New Right is a phrase used to describe a series of political, social and economic
changes coinciding with the election of conservative political leaders - Margaret

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Through the postwar period, the memories of empire were resisted, as colonies occupied by Allied and Axis powers asserted their authority over their own territory. Those that did not obtain their autonomy after the defeat of German, Japanese and Italian forces began their own struggle against the oppressive yoke of Britishness. India embodied the key moment of decline for the empire, as the long struggle for freedom culminated in its independence in 1949. The loss of this rich and diverse territory demonstrated the extent to which England was in crisis and unable to maintain its imperial ideology. In the homeland, the political, social and economic spheres were in turmoil with Leftist politics unable to consolidate the mandate they were handed in the intense optimism following World War Two. Containing this crisis resulted in the Right managing to recover and gain national consensus. The rise of conservative politics and the accompanying boom in economics through the 1950s redefined the social landscape. The major industrial reconfiguration in this postwar period was shaped by the emergence of a postfordist economy and a focus on consumption over production. Niche marketing, demographic research and synergetic manufacturing all contributed to a sense of empowered consumption and pleasure in purchasing over politics. These changes reached their peak in the late 1970s and 1980s, where Margaret Thatcher systematically restructured the entire British economy - wiping out manufacturing regions and whole industries. Her effectiveness in reframing the social structure was based on the ability to redefine the terms of political, social and economic debate. She changed the terrain of hegemonic negotiation. She framed the nation, rather than class, as the social identification tool for identity politics. This process was so effective that among Margaret Thatcher’s most insistent supporters were those people whose interests she was working against -
the working class. The construction of a national popular has been successful. So widespread - even popular- were these shifts that the Left has struggled to provide an alternative voice to ultra-conservatism that now shapes our lives. These forces gained wide support resulting from the increasing fears in the postwar period of transgression, otherness and threat that accompanied globalisation, decolonisation and rising visibility of fragmented identity politics. The postwar years have “forg[ed] new discursive articulations between the liberal discourses of the ‘free market’ and economic man and the organic conservative themes of tradition, family and nation, respectability, patriarchalism and order.” The New Right demonstrated a powerful ability to speak to a diversity of ‘class’ interests.

Social divisions along classed, raced and gendered trajectories were redefined by the New Right. The interests of the nation, “inasmuch as it is based on common appeal, at least within the confines of a single state” is now the primary trope for identity politics by citizenry. The Right’s ability to mask class-based allegiance and move across a series of social identities to gather support made it a potent force for social reorganisation. Crucially, it was able to redefine common sense.

Thatcherism’s search for ‘the enemies within’; its operations across the different lines of division and identification in social life; its construction of the respectable, patriarchal, entrepreneurial subject with ‘his’ orthodox tastes, inclinations, preferences, opinions and prejudices as the stable subjective bedrock and guarantee of its purchase on our subjective worlds; its rooting of itself inside a particularly narrow, ethnocentric and exclusivist conception of ‘national identity’; and its constant attempts to expel symbolically one sector of society after another from the imaginary community of the nation - these are as central to Thatcherism’s hegemonic project as the privatization programme or the assault on local democracy.

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22 Hall, op cit., p. 8
The New Right reaffirmed conservative, masculinist and national ideologies that deprioritised identity politics and narrowed the sense of social justice. It was based intimately on fear and conservative common sense that privileged stable, sensible and serious solutions to economic, political and social problems. The ease with which these ways of thinking wormed their way into the consciousness of the population was as much to do with the inability of the Left to provide an alternative, than it was with the subtlety of the hegemonic positioning of the Right.

Leftist politics has struggled to move beyond the revolutionary Marxist ideologies that have shaped its intentions. The collective alliances against oppression that have been the bedrock of Leftist politics and cultural studies were no longer assured in the 1980s. The revolution never came. Stuart Hall explicitly explains that “[t]he labour movement failed to move as society had developed … Thatcherism rose to power on the back of the exhaustion of the postwar social-democratic project.”23 The rise of identity politics displaced the centrality of the working class to models of resistance. The Left failed to renegotiate an effective politics in light of this ‘decline’ of working class visibility. Rather, they hopped onto the coat tails (or shoulder-pads) of the New Right and tried - feebly - to paperclip welfare politics to economic rationalism.

In Australia, this was captured by the Labor, supposedly Leftist, Hawke/Keating governments who,

[p]resided over a substantial restructuring of the Australian economy toward deregulation and privatization, and of the Australian state toward a peculiar combination of nationalistic republicanism and the articulation into the political system of new social movement interests such as feminism, environmentalism, gay rights and multiculturalism.24

23 Hall, *op cit.*, p. 31
Andrew Milner notes that this project was very successful, to the extent that the incumbent conservative Howard government was initially “obliged to govern within this new hegemony.” However, since the publication of Milner’s 1997 article, the Howard government has radically reshaped the hegemonic project. The mobilisation of racist discourse in the immigration debate has embraced the core Rightist agenda. The fear of migrants and ‘foreigners’ dovetailed through the 2001 election campaign with Howard declaring, in true dehumanising fashion, “we decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.” Leftist voices have been complicit in this rhetoric by failing to coherently contradict this position. Simon Crean, the leader of the Labor opposition, addressed the current concern over asylum seekers in a radio interview for ABC radio in which he demonstrated the fence-sitting framework of Leftist politics. When questioned on the issue he responded, “I’m convinced … that we can get a policy that is tough on border protection, but compassionate to the refugees at the same time.” The ambiguity is audible. Leftist concerns have become fragmented and are struggling to negotiate their way out the encompassing postfordist consumption mentality that now dominates political debate.

The middle class has appropriated the popular for their own interests. The New Right smoothes out and diffuses any resistance, disallowing visible ruptures to the social landscape. Hegemony - as a process of incorporation - always makes spaces for disenfranchised voices in our society, though only in the interests of the dominant maintaining its position. It operates through the national popular in the articulation of

25 ibid., p. 149
a shared consciousness. Lawrence Grossberg has demonstrated how hegemony and the national popular are intimately woven into a complex power structure.\(^{28}\) Through a national consciousness, the myriad of individual and class-based differences are masked, and a coherent, mythical national identity is summoned. This identity is consensual and internalised by the citizens. The moments of national articulation in sporting events, national holidays and war, require a dominant rendering of, and subordinate consent to, a national imagining based on the “continuity of a [national] subject.”\(^{29}\) The meanings that create this popular imagining in Australia are embedded within popular culture and colonisation. In the postcolonial context, national imaginings connect with imperial pasts and neo-colonial truths. This consciousness finds visibility and visualisation in cultural artefacts and meanings. It flows particularly potently through national cinema. Films from *The Man from Snowy River*, to *They’re a Weird Mob* through to *Romper Stomper, Strictly Ballroom, The Wog Boy, and Looking for Alibrandi*, negotiate and reify a national identity. The colonial pioneering myth, through to contemporary renderings of multiculturalism in postcolonialism, are played out on the big screen.\(^{30}\) These texts create a “shared social and cultural landscape.”\(^{31}\) While these imaginings validate a social hierarchy of identity, this system must also negotiate the myriad of unofficial alliances and imaginings that circulate through the fringes, and less socially valid meanings. The dominant will always take what it needs from the fringes to make its own meanings seem richer and more vibrant - and to maintain the stability of the dominant hierarchy.

\(^{28}\) Grossberg, *op cit.*, pp. 23 - 34  
\(^{30}\) Tom O’Regan works through this argument very convincingly in *Australian national cinema*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 27 where he suggests that, “Australian cinema poses the relation, or otherwise, between the local cinema and nation, between state and society as a category of knowledge.”  
\(^{31}\) Grossberg, *op cit.*, p. 24
Irvine Welsh explicitly critiques the relationships between working class and middle class culture when he states,

   The middle class always takes anything good away from the working classes. Football, music and all that sort of stuff - they always find a way of colonizing it, and commercializing it, and selling it back to the working class.32

These identities, objects and artefacts are stripped of their original context and rewritten into the language of the dominant hierarchy, where they can be bought and sold as part of an economic and political system designed to limit, mask and restrict disruptive or alternative meanings. The appropriation of otherness becomes brazen as the politics of consumption demands new markets, demographics and products.

Popular culture defines and maintains social stability. Cult dances on the outline of this ordering. It picks at the scab of the New Right to expose the jagged edges of identities, memories and meanings. The changes to identity politics since World War Two are mirrored in popular culture. As culture has accelerated, shifted and maneuvered, new ways of thinking and knowing have punctured experience.

This thesis resonates within politics, time, space and popular culture. The series of case-studies that punctuate my work flow through class, race and gender to reinscribe resistance in the postwar period. It travels across the globe to contextualise cult through colonisation, writing, memory and modality. It is not concerned with exclusively marginal texts like Eraserhead, Pink Flamingoes, or Mutant Enemy.

Limiting cult to ‘outside’ moments and memories restricts its understanding within the binarised structure of western logic. Its strength is its liminality - its ability to move and melt between different meanings, contexts and currencies. The diversity of

textual traces in this thesis is testament to the nuanced narrative cult maps through the social landscape. *Questions of Popular Cult(ure)* queries cult’s role in containing and cauterizing difference in a primarily postcolonial context.
Section One: Time
Chapter One

Mad Dogs and Englishmen: Colonial Madness and Resistance

On February 28 1993, the Department of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms attempted to enter a Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas to carry out a search and seizure of suspected illegal firearms being stored at the facility. This suspicion was supported by an ongoing investigation into child abuse allegations filed by the local department of child services. The religious community refused ATF entry and repelled them with extreme measures. Four ATF agents were killed, and sixteen were injured. It sparked a three-month siege that only ended on Monday the 19th of April, when fire destroyed the compound and killed most of the blockaded sect members. The tragedy at Waco was depicted in news coverage as the inevitable outcome of the dangerously charismatic leadership of the sect autocrat - David Koresh, and the blind faith placed in him by the deluded and disillusioned followers. The capacity for individuals to give up their own sense autonomy to follow, obey and even worship an individual was constructed as misguided, deluded, and ultimately tragic.

Religious cults create crisis, particularly when their consequences are as extreme as embodied in the Waco example. This is one recent manifestation of a long established practice of constructing fear, alienation and hopelessness within the cult discourse. Cult sects have been most effectively and extremely regulated through these practices. Derived from the Latin ‘cultus’ which means to worship,¹ the meaning of cult has been amplified through its alliance with marginal or fringe religious behaviour,

¹ For a comprehensive etymology of the word cult see J. Telotte, (ed.), Beyond all reason: the cult film experience, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991)
outside of conventional religious dogma or mainstream worship. A cult is often framed as an unorthodox religion that embraces rituals and devotion to a particular person, object or idea. It is characterised as “a group or movement that … exhibits great or excessive devotion or dedication to some idea or thing.”² Many of the themes resonating through the language used to describe cults, focus on identity, ritual, myth, false Gods, manipulation and blind obedience.³ The inflammatory nature of this debate results in reactionary regulation and representation within the popular media where the dangerousness of such worship is depicted in images from Jonestown,⁴ Waco⁵ and Heaven’s Gate⁶. These groups operate outside of sanctioned religious structures. They do not wish to be incorporated within dominant religious paradigms. Many of these cults frame themselves as purveyors of ‘the truth’. They believe that they possess the correct beliefs that will ensure eternal life in paradise. Their marginalisation only makes their struggle all the more valid and righteous. It confirms that “[t]he cult is right, [and] the world is wrong … [for] most apocalyptic cults

² R. Aron, Cults: Too good to be true, (Sydney: Harper Collins, 1999), p. 15
³ David Koresh believed he was the reincarnation of Jesus Christ.
⁴ In the late 1970s the People’s Temple, a religious group based in California USA moved to Guyana to create a utopian community. The group believed in racial integration and was lead by the charismatic Jim Jones. Settled on the outskirts of Georgetown, the predominantly agricultural community came to be known as “Jonestown”. In November 1978, the community was visited by a critic of the cult, Senator Leo Ryan who was gunned down at the Guyanese airport on his way home. On November 18, 913 cult members, including children, committed mass suicide by drinking potassium cyanide mixed into a vat of punch with tranquilizers. For further information on Jonestown see http://www.jonestown.org/
⁵ From February 28 1993 to April 19 1993, the ATF and FBI were engaged in a long standing siege at Waco in Texas with Branch Davidian sect members who refused to allow the ATF to execute a search of their premises. David Koresh was vilified in the media as a deviant, child molester who had massacred the ATF as they attempted to enter the building. On Monday the 19th of April, the siege ended when the Davidians (allegedly) set fire to the building and it burnt to the ground, killing most of the sect members. Recently, evidence has come to light suggesting that the ATF and FBI caused the fire, and created circumstances by their negligent actions, that lead to the cult deaths. See Waco: The Rules of Engagement, directed by William Gazecki, written by, William Gazecki, Dan Clifford and Michael McNulty, (Fifth Estate Productions, 1997) or “Waco: The inside story” at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/waco/
⁶ On March 26 1997, 39 members of the Heaven’s Gate community committed suicide by ingesting Phenobarbital and vodka at Rancho Santa Fe near San Diego. Lead by Marshall Herff Applewhite, who was hailed as Jesus reincarnate, this cult community believed that the coming Hale-Bopp comet would take them to paradise. When the bodies were found they were neatly laid out, covered with purple shrouds and wearing Nike sneakers. For more discussion on Heaven’s gate see http://www.cnn.com/US/9803/25/heavens.gate/
spread the message that you are either a member of the group - and will survive, or you are not - and won’t survive.” The quarantining of the cult is conducive to its conduct. Its embellishment in an ‘outside’ status means that the boundaries of the cult discourse can be effectively policed, not only by cult members, but also by wider social structures. Cults are framed on the fringes of hegemony, and are an uncomfortable presence for the stability of a dominant system. If they cannot be languaged into a consensual framework, then they are silenced and spoken for. Meanings are made for them to deny their currency and autonomy. Their consent is not needed for social stability. Media coverage depicts these religious sects as dangerous and deviant. It is a way to ensure they are effectively contained on the fringes of dominant religious and social structures. Cult functions in a very narrow sense to ensure these definitional frameworks remain intact and to restrict the movement of these sects within society. This method is mobilised within popular culture when cult is applied to texts. It monitors movement and controls meaning while culture adjusts and settles in response to shifts, changes and adjustments in the hegemonic landscape. Cult operates as an electric fence, containing and restricting movement until the dominant has adjusted enough to incorporate a rupture or disjuncture in the social terrain. It slows down social movement, placing it in a stasis until the dominant can move and manipulate meanings into the favour of the overarching hierarchy.

The cargo cults of South-East Asia provide an effective archaeology for this process. This chapter uses cargo cults as a springboard to demonstrate the process of social regulation in the face of covert and reinscriptive resistances to a dominant hierarchy.

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7 Aron, *op cit*, p. 16
By providing a coherent model of colonisation, this chapter aims to unpack the spaces of rupture embedded within practices of oppression. It uses Homi Bhabha’s concept of ‘thirdspace’ to demonstrate the insecurity of meaning at the edges of empire. It is at these limits that identities must be monitored and measured most strongly. By moving through colonisation, cargo cults, madness and postcolonial writing, this chapter will link practices of social regulation in colonies, to the regulation of textual artefacts through popular culture.

Framing fandom

Cult is contextually defined and textually fluid. It is activated in the moment of crisis when the struggle over meaning is unstable. Cult is an expression of that moment when the dominant has not quite reconciled subordinate concerns. It is in the schism where hegemonic forces must adjust and cannot compose a coherent stability. The meanings around this term come under increased control when reinscribed from religion and applied in popular culture. It is used primarily to describe strange films that generated a large but peculiar audience. Films such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show, Eraserhead, Casablanca, Mad Max, The Gods must be Crazy* and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* embrace off-beat ideologies and engage audience behaviour. These texts are interrogated, repeatedly viewed and embedded within the lives of those audiences that love them. They dress up in costumes, learn the dialogue and sing along. Umberto Eco defines cult criteria explicitly in *Travels in Hyperreality*.

What are the requirements for transforming a book or a movie into a cult object? The work must be loved, obviously, but this is not enough. It must provide a completely furnished world so that its fans can quote characters and

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8 Each of these films are referred to as cult in B. Kawin, ““After midnight,’’” in Telotte, (ed.), *The cult film experience : Beyond all reason*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), p. 19
9 See Telotte, “Beyond all reason,” *op cit.*, p. 13 for a more detailed examination of cult audience behaviour with specific reference to *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. 
episodes as if they were aspects of the fan’s private sectarian world, a world about which one can make up quizzes and play trivia games so that the adepts of the sect recognize through each other a shared expertise.10

The community-building enterprise encased within this activity blur the boundaries between cult and fan categories. Cultural critics, popular media commentators and intellectuals have pondered this obscure behaviour and attempted to make sense of it. It is seen as so odd that it has sparked a series of complicated textual analyses designed to uncover what lurks within these texts to inspire people in this way.11

Andrew Sarris provided the key interpretive framework in *Confessions of a Cultist* where he suggested that a cult film was a text loved by its audience, “beyond all reason.”12 He openly hails “the quasi-religious connotation of the term.”13 These origins are clearly mobilised through an embedded sense of blind worship and devotion to a text. Sarris’s trope provided that springboard for the series of essays edited by J. P. Telotte entitled, *The Cult Film Experience: Beyond All Reason*. In each of these essays, defining the characteristics of cult films remains notoriously ambiguous. It is problematised in Barry Grant’s essay, “Science Fiction Double Feature: Ideology in the Cult Film” where he suggests, “cult tends to be used rather loosely, to describe a variety of films, old and new, that are extremely popular or have a particularly devoted audience.”14 Grant demonstrates the difficulty associated with using and applying a ‘cult’ framework. To have a devoted audience is positioned as antithetical to popularity. Popular culture is frivolous, dependent on the transitory nature of products and pleasure. Devotion implies interrogation, engagement and a deeper interpretation of the text beyond surface pleasures. This contradictory

11 The collection of essays in Telotte, (ed.), *op cit.*, focus on unearthing the meanings that audiences are accessing in ‘cult’ behaviour and worship.
13 *ibid.*
disjuncture is actualized by Henry Jenkins’ writing. He demonstrates that the key problematic for media fans is their level of attention to the trivial – devotion that should be reserved for high art and aesthetic taste. They “treat … popular texts as if they merited the same degree of attention and appreciation as canonical texts.” His interpretation of worship in the fan context is aimed at de-emphasizing the deviancy attached to this category of audience behaviour. Barry Grant’s approach assumes a linear relationship between the text and its viewers - they internalise a particular ideological stance taken by a text, and then perform it in unreflexive ways. The manner in which pleasure activates deeper investigations of texts and identities is not addressed. Matt Hills sheds light on this absence by explaining the resistance to (the religiosity of) cult categories by contemporary cultural theorists who fear “pathologised representations” of fan communities. The thin thread between fandom and worship is carefully balanced in much of this writing. Nevertheless, the question remains: How much worship makes a cult text? Cult dances between the disjuncture in dominant expectations of popular ephemera, and the reality by which texts often become embedded in an individual’s or collective’s social sense-making. Henry Jenkins’ workable paradigm for audience studies and fandom provides the tools to unpick the application of cult categories.

Jenkins draws on contemporary audience studies that inscribe a complicated dialogue between texts and audiences. Amplifying Morley, Fiske and Ang he effectively...
demonstrates how audiences read rather than watch. Jenkins has made worship legitimate in popular culture. He provided a framework for articulating spaces for resistance and reinscription in dominantly-framed modalities. Popular culture is not resistive. It is part of a corporate industrial complex devoted to producing consumerable goods for pleasure. The extent to which audiences activate negotiated and oppositional reading strategies is enfolded within this system as an expandable market. Fandom is characterised by an intense devotion to a popular text - a devotion unsettling to those who exist outside of fandom. This worship has been appropriated by market forces, and encouraged in the explosion of ephemera. A range of products now accompany blockbuster film events. From dolls and action figures, to stationary, lunch boxes and t-shirts, all are designed to extend the profit accumulated from film screenings. The writing of this thesis has been punctuated by the release of two new Star Wars films, Harry Potter, Spiderman and Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring all of which were accompanied by books, t-shirts, action figures (the Darth Maul doll is my personal favourite) and even ‘pez’ dispensers. Jenkins shows us how fans struggle to create their own meanings within a hegemonic hierarchy that seeks to limit textual negotiation. For, “[p]opular culture reflects and molds beliefs and values that are so deeply embedded that their truth is assumed rather than proven.” Through textual poaching, Jenkins has also demonstrated that audiences often refuse to swallow the pill of mainstream acceptability. In taking Star Trek as his case study, he articulates how fans can love their text, yet remain dissatisfied with it. The

adopt regardless of race, class or gender. Fiske hails Hall’s dominant, negotiated and oppositional reading strategies.

19 I. Ang, Watching Dallas: Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination, (London: Routledge, 1985), dealt with the fan negotiations of Dallas and sought to understand an interactive paradigm in which to negotiate televisual texts.

contradictory nature of fandom is not a symptom of a defective mentality. It manifests out of a desire to activate alternative identities within an empowered space. Textual poachers reinscribe the relationship between the text and viewer. These overtly active readers of texts rework narratives, characters and themes in order to create a collectivity of interest. For “they constitute a particularly active and vocal community of consumers whose activities direct attention onto th[e] process of cultural appropriation.” This community does not simply adopt a socially sanctioned celebration. The ‘active audience’ layers meanings into their own lives, weaving the meanings they find in the text creating a complex nexus of dominant, resistive and negotiated reading strategies. In extending the text beyond the television (or cinema) screen, they dialogue through alternative readings and identities that cannot be easily controlled in hegemony. The increasing regulation of fandom results is shifts in social meanings, as more marginal activities, ideas and identities seek spaces of autonomy. Cult is activated as these new arenas are mapped out and struggled over. The movement to and from the fringes is policed by both dominant and subordinate identities via this term. The complex relationships between culture, politics and identities are tracked, as they navigate through social spaces. Cult is more than just deviant or resistive audience behaviour. It problematises and reconciles fractures in hegemony. Cult is positioned by dominant groups and claimed by resistive ones. Tracking this movement across spaces and through the gaps left unfilled by hegemony, is embodied and critiqued most effectively via cargo cults.

21 For more on the deviant nature of fandom see L. Lewis, (ed.), The adoring audience, (London: Routledge, 1992), and Jenkins, op cit., p. 13
22 Textual poachers are fans who rework the meanings of texts and leave traces of that activity in fanzines, on the web and at conventions. See Jenkins, ibid., p. 23
23 ibid., p. 27
24 Dorothy Hobson examines the manner in which television shows, soaps in particular, can move beyond their televisual world into people’s lives in Crossroads: The drama of a soap opera, (London: Methuen, 1992)
Colonising cargo

Cargo cults emerged in South-East Asia after colonisation. The most potent versions of these social groupings were found in Melanesia, now known as Papua New Guinea. They were characterised by extreme hysteria or violence by local indigenes. This behaviour was distinguished by colonisers as a symptom of the backward madness of primitive people. A deeper interpretation reveals the intensely complicated resistive mechanisms the indigenes were activating. These episodes were a response to the processes of colonisation, and were often a direct resistance to the oppression embedded in imperial ideologies.

For at least three centuries, colonisation has provided the key frame of reference for national identity, across the continents. The most staggering shifts in politics, geography and society have sprouted from the seed of imperialism. Edward Said provides startling statistics of the scale of ‘Western’ colonisation.

In 1800 Western powers claimed 55 percent but actually held approximately 35 percent of the earth’s surface … by 1878 the proportion was 67 percent, a rate of increase of 83,000 square miles per year. By 1914, the annual rate had risen to an astonishing 240,000 square miles and Europe held a grand total of roughly 85 percent of the earth as colonies, protectorates, dependencies, dominions and commonwealths.25

The power of imperialists to stamp their ideologies on those outside of their immediate geographical and political sphere resonates through the colonial paradigm. British colonisation was perhaps among the most visible and powerful of colonising frameworks. Conquest and occupation of a foreign land is complicated. It involves not only armed invasion and oppression, but also hegemonic systems of indoctrination.

The authority of colonisers must be obtained, and then maintained. The securing of power via force is relatively easy with superior firepower. The maintenance of that power is much more complicated and involves “a series of projects that incorporate representations, narratives and practical efforts.” These are connected across primarily race, and then class, and gender discursive frameworks. The key is to extend the colonial imagining into the consciousness of the colonised. Accepting the superiority of colonisers is at the core of meanings mobilised in an occupied territory. Activating ideologies of Social Darwinism and evolutionary backwardness not only justifies colonisation, but provides an oppressive frame by which indigenes see themselves as inferior. The colonised are constructed as simple, archaic and primitive, valued only for their quaint hand-woven baskets, pottery and the labour they provide. A gamut of colonial documents describes indigenous populations across the empire as unequivocally backward, superstitious and non-threatening. Metaphors of gentleness, childlikeness and devotion are common. They are rendered harmless. For the colonisers, their safety and superiority is assured in that “the Javanese peasant is one of the simplest human beings and credulous to an extreme degree.” And,

[The average African is incorrigibly cheerful. What to Europeans would be disasters … rarely breaks his peace. If he gets worried he lies down and sleeps … another common quality is indifference, insouciance, childlike ingratitude, light hearted failure to keep his word, letting you down.]

Indigenous customs, rituals and practices are framed as superstitions, resulting from misguided primitive knowledges. This creates security in the nobility of the coloniser who brings civilisation to ‘backward’ indigenes. Race, culture and class converge to limit the colonised within a concrete representational structure. The racialisation of

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culture clarifies the blurring boundaries of colonisation. The further from the empire’s core, the more malevolent these meanings become.

Homi Bhabha etches the edges of empire to demonstrate how they shape the dominant discourse. He argues that it is not the centers of power that determine and dictate representational structures, but the nodes of difference that demand reconfigurations of power. Most crucially, he shows that it is “in the colonial margin that the culture of the west reveals its differance, its limit text, as its practice of authority displays an ambivalence.” The more ambivalent the west’s power becomes, the more extreme its modes of subjugation. According to Bhabha, we can see this in the power of the stereotype which “must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed.” The excessiveness of the colonial stereotype - of backwardness and simplicity - reveals more about the insecurity and ambivalence of the coloniser than the actual conditions of the colonised. The extent to which colonial meanings create a matrix through race, gender and class demonstrates the level to which colonisers must seek to control ideas and identities, as well as territory. Simon Gikandi positions this process precisely as the “incomplete project of colonialism.” Its ambivalence means that it must constantly seek to contain and redefine meanings. Colonisation is never complete: it must always claim and reclaim its authority.

Once a nation and a people have been taken over by force, there must be a re-languaging process that is connected to a re-imagining of identity and nation.

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30 ibid.
To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture to support the weight of a civilisation.32

Colonisers mobilise a myriad of institutional knowledges and structures like language, religion, government, law and sport to facilitate this process. The violence and brutality of invasion serves as an always present, but obscured backdrop to this subtle meaning system. The legitimacy and authority of the ruling voice must be established for these meanings to be summoned. A history in beliefs, values and practices cannot be wiped out through subtle means. The connections between overt violence and linguistic nuance, demonstrates the complicated contradictions of colonisation. It was always incomplete, due to the complexities in the re-languaging of memories and identities. Distinct categories function on a level of security, of knowingness that assures identities of the tangibility and legitimacy of social positioning. We live in a social system where “there are only differences.”33 The binaries that hail these oppositions balance ways of knowing and being. Derrida demonstrates that the presence of pure, stable categories within a culture is a result of murky and imperfect ruptures that perpetually destabilise these knowledges. He explains,

what philosophy excludes - errancy, contamination, metaphoricity, excess - is in fact not only what cannot be excluded but also what enables philosophy, both potentialising and limiting, the production of all-or-nothing concepts.34

As the crisp categories of colonisation are applied, they begin to corrode. Enfolded within them are the traces of ambivalence and insecurity. Homi Bhabha posits this process in ‘thirdspace’.

### Between binaries

Liminality is the paradox of colonisation. Philosophically there is no space for hybridity in the startling clarity of imperialism. However, hybridity pours through the cracks of ideological and sexual practices. Miscegenation makes murky meanings with the moist meeting of mobile bodies. Mulattos, half-castes and mongrels connect conception with perception in coherently categorising corrupt corporeality. This in-between-ness socially, ideologically, and physically, marks the incompleteness of colonisation and highlights the ambivalence with which it perpetuates its authority. This deconstruction of colonial autonomy is ‘corrected’ by creating a third point between coloniser and colonised, where ‘half-castes’ can exist in a state of perpetual impotence. Hybridity is positioned as a middle point where non-threatening, sterile identities cannot destabilise the authority of the linear model of power. Despite the relanguaging of difference through miscegenation, the hybrid moment encases a serious moment of disruption. It is here that disparate elements can be connected haphazardly and without official sanction. Colonisers are contaminated and connected to the colonised. Hybridity unlocks a space where contradictory elements merge and pervert their separation. It functions as a pseudo-heterotopia - a space that disallows separation between clean and clear concepts. They tangle together and reorder perception.

Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy ‘syntax’ in advance, and not only the syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite to one another) to ‘hold together’.35

Keith Hetherington is clear when he identifies the heterotopia as “a place of Otherness, that expresse[s] an alternative ordering of society through its contact with

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the society that it despise[s].”\textsuperscript{36} Heterotopias provide a new platform on which to reorder our social relations. This Foucauldian ‘table’ is where we discover the umbrella and the sewing machine.\textsuperscript{37} It is an ‘operating’ table on which all meaning must be set and contextualised. It redefines the common ground on which all meaning passes within a society, and organises binarial structures. Heterotopias articulate and embody a hybrid moment that makes it possible to see alternative ways of ordering knowledge, concepts, objects and ideas. Hybridity sketches a new way of ordering colonial society. It corrupts the careful distinctions defined by colonial authority and reaffirmed hegemonically. The carnival moment similarly, threatens to deconstruct clear systems of domination and subordination.\textsuperscript{38} As a moment of celebration, carnival enabled marginalised groups to claim a space on their own terms. The official order was abandoned in favour of festivities, laughter and the grotesque, that permitted a rupture in the social fabric of life. However, this rupture was always sewn back together. Bhabha proposes a moment of in-between-ness that is not a coherent middle point, nor a temporary disruption of the status quo, but one that is a constantly threatening to social stability. Thirdspace is where colonisers lose control over meanings. Here they become dislodged from their original contexts and appropriated by marginal, subordinated or othered criteria.

Thirdspace is the terrain for Bhabha’s concept of hybridity and ‘double-voicedness’. Hybridity is not a stable or coherent middle point of inversion. It is unstable and unpredictable. Hybrid moments erupt and disturb discourses. The potential for

\textsuperscript{36} K. Hetherington, \textit{The Badlands of modernity: Heterotopia and social ordering}, (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 6
\textsuperscript{37} Foucault, \textit{op cit.}, p. xvi
\textsuperscript{38} For a more detailed and contextualised account of the role of carnival in medieval culture please see, M. Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelias and his world}, (translated by Helene Iswolsky), (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 9
disruption is embodied in every utterance of oppression, because language, in its very structure, contains a thirdspace, a place in-between where meanings become unhinged from their original context and may be rewritten anew. While hegemony attempts to control this process, it is ultimately futile because the thirdspace possesses no allegiances. It cannot be controlled. It is activated through the grammar of oppression where “the political process becomes double-edged” and it is revealed “as double-voiced.” The ghost of otherness remains attached to the legitimating discourses of the empowered. Every utterance of oppression retains the traces of those oppressed. This trace can be reinscribed and re-claimed as the meanings dislodge from the framing grammar of marginalisation. The ambivalence in this space “is a sign that history is happening” and is contrary to the stabalising synthesis of the hegemonic homeostasis. This moment is devastating to colonisation, which operates through the appearance of unquestionable legitimacy and logically defined meanings. Authoritative discourse “must always be singular … it cannot enter into hybrid constructions or if it does its single-voiced authority will immediately be undermined.” Imperialist discourses are constantly struggling against this deception. The illusion of complete power over bodies, languages and ideas are driven to cover this potentially disruptive process. In thirdspace, the authority of colonial discourse can be deconstructed. It also has the dual function of challenging the coloniser’s own claim to authenticity. As the shadow of the other is revealed, discourses fold back on themselves and unveil the ambiguity of stable binarised knowledges used to maintain authority.

39 H. Bhabha, Location of culture, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 26
40 Young, op cit., p. 23
41 Bhabha, Location of culture, op cit., p. 25
42 Young, op cit., p. 22
[Thirdspace] constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of a culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised and read anew.43

Colonisation’s crisis is embedded within the very language it uses to subjugate the colonised. Difference is consistently present, always bubbling just below the surface of hegemonic ideology. Meanings are not fixed - though nor are they freely circulating. They can only be reworked, reinscribed, and redefined within the fragmentary freedom of this space. Imperialism maintains the cogency of empowered identities. When this ideology is articulated and placed into a language and grammatical structure - colonisation - the meanings are unsettled. In Derridean terms, imperialism made the fatal mistake of moving from speech to writing. A system of interconnecting modes of knowledge and power, such as colonisation, must be maintained through coherent and stable structures - of which writing is a metaphor. Writing creates distance and authority. The reader cannot question the author or demand clarification. The ideas can only be understood as signs from which the creator is now removed. It is “always the sign of something else - the conscious intentions of an original presence.”44 Imperialists can maintain their distance from their subjects, by removing themselves from the imperial machine. Whereas speech, is what Barthes referred to as a ‘hot’ source.

A whole disorder flows through speech and gives it this self-devouring momentum which keeps it is a perpetually suspended state. Conversely, writing is a hardened language … it is meant to impose … the image of speech … [it is] nothing but a flow of empty signs.45

Speech maintains fluidity - a close engagement with discourse. It is moving and adjusting to redefinitions, debates, challenges and reinscriptions. These distinctions

43 Bhabha, Location of culture, op cit., p. 37
44 ibid.
serve as a metaphor for the process of implementing imperialist ideology in the practices and processes of colonisation. The rigidity of the paradigm undermined its authority. Its shortsightedness ideologically and logistically, perpetuated its draconian, oppressive, and violently distasteful implementation. In many circumstances, after the treaty (between colonisers and colonised) was signed, consent of the indigenes was hardly sought. In New Zealand/Aotearoa this was inscribed in the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi.

The Treaty between Pakeha (white colonisers) and Maori was signed in 1840. It contains three broad clauses. In the first, the tribal Chiefs consented to divert the power of governance to the Crown. This served to limit the behaviour and movement of the colonisers and unite the warring Maori iwi. The second clause enabled the Maori to maintain autonomy and right to “the full exclusive and undisturbed possession of their Lands and Estates Forests Fisheries and other properties.”46 In the third, the Maori were allocated the rights and privileges afforded to a British citizen under the Crown. The Pakeha ignored the second clause of the treaty. This resulted in (at least) five colonial wars fought between 1845 and 1876. It was not until 1975, with the formation of the Waitangi Tribunal, that the Treaty of Waitangi was ratified. The grievances and breeches identified were upheld by the High Court. Though, it was not until the mid 1980s, that the Treaty was granted legal centrality in government policy.47 Such breeches of agreements between coloniser and colonised were

47 For a more detailed interpretation of the impact of colonisation on Maori identity and culture that is beyond the scope of this thesis, please see D. McCan “The making of the Pakeha: Cultural imperialism and its logic,” in M. Goldsmith and K. Barber, (eds.), Other sites: Social anthropology and the politics of interpretation, (selected papers from the New Zealand Association of Social Anthropology
common. In the case of Australia, there was and continues to be, no formal or informal agreement between invaders and their subjects. The extent to which colonisers denied the subjectivity and autonomy of the colonised made their claim to power problematic. This inflexible and arrogant system was sustained because the extent of colonial power was so impressive, and because the colonised did create spaces for their own identity. In the further reaches of the empire, these reinscriptions were often overt. Simon Gikandi provides the example of cricket to demonstrate how distance from the Motherland resulted in some radical rewriting of the colonised and the colonisers.

Sport is a hegemonic institution through which colonisers pedagogically impose their ways, meanings, beliefs and practices on the colonised. By converting indigenes to Christianity, making them speak the English language and *play their sport*, colonisers enforce arbitrary knowledges that serve to consolidate their ruling position through everyday practices. However, this imposition also activates a rebirth - a reordering of *dominant* meanings. Cricket embraces the entirety of valued Englishness and civilisation. It is a middle-class white man’s leisure interest. In the colonies, cricket was played to demonstrate the superiority of the English in their dignified game. However, it was also played by the colonised, who when not strictly regulated by power structures, rewrote the rules. It is not simply about beating the English at their own game, but reinscribing the meanings of the sport.

Cricket was no longer thought of as the game that signified the core values of Englishness; it was viewed as the mode of play and ritual that has been

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redefined by Indian and West Indian players well beyond its original configuration.48

India, The West Indies and Australia are among the powerhouses of contemporary cricket. Rowdy crowds punctuate Indian and Pakistani matches. Australia invented a whole new form of the game in one-day cricket, rather than the traditional tests that are played over five days. In the gaps afforded by distance, it becomes clear that not only can the ruling hierarchy not impose itself wholly on the subordinate, but this very hierarchy, begins to display signs of corruption. Cricket emerges as a mutation of imperial ideals when the colonised ‘pervert’ its meanings. The struggle that ensues in this hybrid crisis means that both cultures are infiltrated. This is not to suggest that this is a balanced or equal process, quite clearly the colonisers have the advantage. Nevertheless, “[t]he practice of colonialism produced ways of thinking, saying and doing that permeate back [my emphasis] into the cultures and discourses of the colonial nations.”49 Colonisation requires negotiating difference in ways that spotlights the anchorage of otherness through the discourses, practices and behaviours of colonisers. This shift contains moments of insecurity in which colonisers recognise their own diversity. There are, as a result, constant reorderings where ruptures must be sewn back together. This has profound implications for colonisers as well as the colonised. A more complex rendering of difference and diversity must be activated. Otherness becomes more difficult to mask when it is in one’s midst rather than on a distant dark continent. This duality of close and distant difference creates a crisis where the borders between the empire and the commonwealth simultaneously blur and redefine. In the far reaches of Melanesia, the crisis of corrupting colonial categories was tightly monitored through the discourse of madness.

48 Gikandi, op cit., p. 11
Mobilising madness

Francis Edgar Williams was an anthropologist studying the cultural practices of Melanesians in the early twentieth century when he encountered the “Vailala Madness.”

Originating in the neighborhood of Vailala … this movement involved, on the one hand, a set of preposterous beliefs among its victims - in particular the expectation of an early visit from their deceased relatives - and on the other hand, collective nervous symptoms of a sometimes grotesque and idiotic nature.50

What Williams was experiencing was a spontaneous outburst of what he thought was madness among the villagers of Vailala. He attributed it to their ‘backward’ ways and evolutionary ‘weakness’. However, a deeper interpretation offers a more complicated insight into this odd behaviour. Jeffrey Clark suggests that this behaviour has clear and coherent motivations among those who practice it. Cargo-cults are a distinct feature of distant colonised peoples. While practices vary, it is commonly believed that they were seeking favour from deceased ancestors who might deliver to them, the white man’s ‘cargo’ which signifies a coming age of abundance and equality, and the ability to turn colonisers away. Christian instruction was often a conduit for cult behaviour as it confirmed a need to “escape from the black self … [and] become transformed into white skins through adopting Christianity and through miming white customs and gestures.”51 In adopting white ways, they were seeking to capture the mystical power of their God and create an empowered position to remove the colonisers. The use of religion in the colonies was a key way of indoctrinating local populations into the superiority and civilisation of colonisers. Converting the religious

and spiritual views of the colonised is not simply related to showing the benefits of a ‘superior’ God or religion. It actively encouraged the colonised to reject their own beliefs and “to reflect on their previous lifestyles and to reject them as sinful and as a prerequisite to accepting a new order.” It is only by abandoning or modifying ‘old’ meanings that new ones can be imposed. In Melanesia, these new meanings were mobilised as intensely as possible to magnify the power of the new God. This power was expressed in ‘revivals’ whereby the indigenous people were encouraged to accept the ‘Holy Ghost’ into their body. It was through this technique that the colonised were to, “let the Holy Ghost enter them, to possess them and exorcise their wildness and the past.” Within these ‘revivals’ various forms of hysteria and trance-like states were encouraged with the sanction of church leaders. This performance was read by colonisers as an acceptance of white superiority and an internalisation of colonial rule with its meanings. These moments of madness were not confined to the church. They spilled out of these houses of worship among the community in ways not sanctioned or predicted by either colonial or church authorities. Groups of young men took to fits of madness that resulted in terrifying destruction of bodies and spaces.

[Many young Wiru men of southern Pangia district went ‘mad’. They experienced a wind which closed their ears, after which they carefully decorated themselves as warriors. The afflicted individual often ran from settlement to settlement stealing food, threatening physical violence to the men and children he encountered, and sexual violence to the women. The madness was contagious, and sometimes gangs of young madmen would gather together and aggressively wander around, destroying gardens and property … They broke into houses and defecated on the floor, the hearth and sleeping areas … After weeks or months, the madness burnt itself out like a flame; the wind died away and the madmen returned to normalcy; their ears unfolded and no longer covered their faces.]

53 ibid., p. 22
54 ibid., p. 15
The dominant colonising paradigm spiraled out of control. The meanings of the revival were reinscribed into dangerous and destructive physical violence. The wind that ‘closed their ears,’ signified a desire to be rendered ‘deaf’ to the ideologies and impositions of colonisers. The religious meanings in these church “revivals were initiated by promises of a restoration of autonomy through access to the white man’s cult, his source of power and knowledge, through possession by his (Holy) spirit.”

By using the meanings imposed on them, these cargo-cults were reinscribing imperial power in complex ways. They were not only problematising the coherence of colonial rule, but the coherence of colonial identity. In separating signifiers from signifieds, they were opening and celebrating the terrain of thirdspace, where they are able to unmask colonial authority and redefine it.

Cargo cults … attempt[ed] to reveal and appropriate colonial relations of power-knowledge … the young madmen were perhaps not putting themselves ‘out of control’ but displaying the nature of this control to themselves and others.

These cults embraced resistance using the tools of the oppressors. They used madness as a way of circumventing these dominant knowledge systems and to claim a space for their own empowerment. The function of constructing cargo cults as a form of madness is a symptom of stretching imperialism across the globe. At the limit of this power, any reinscriptions are met with rigorous and visible social control. The most extreme measure for ensuring containment is through the discourse of madness. Williams cites a series of examples where he constructs the Melanesians as mad when they are responding to signs of colonisation.

55 ibid., p. 23
56 Lattas, op cit., p. 70
Williams’ remarks on a peculiar use of English, that is clearly not English in ‘mad’ rituals. In his journal he wrote of one such experience where “[h]e spoke at the top of his voice, and very rapidly: the language, I am told, was English, and was not understood by the people present.” Williams does not recognise that this use of gibberish is important. It functions to signify the linguistic imposition of a colonising force. These ‘mad ramblings’ are a reinscription of colonial power and a reaffirmation of indigenous identity. Similarly, Williams cites the ‘mass outbreak’ of spontaneous madness at the sight of an aeroplane.

It is said that the appearance of Mr. Hurley’s plane caused in some places a fresh accession of madness … such excitement must have been very short lived, for three months after the aeroplane passed, hardly any reference was made to it.

This spontaneous outbreak and ceasing of madness is firmly encircling the presence of an object signifying colonial power. The attempt to ‘capture’ this power manifests in embodied resistance that cannot be effectively regulated. It is misread, poorly interpreted and grossly underestimated. Rendering it mad is a way to control or contain the meanings in this moment. It operates, to deny negotiation. The border between rationality and irrationality is strictly regulated by authority.

The limits are patrolled by a close knit between madness and dangerousness within psychiatric and popular discourses. Defining madness as commensurate with dangerousness is a relatively recent development with the invention of psychiatry through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Williams and Arrigo argue that this blend of madness and menace came at a time where new meanings were needed to explain deviant behaviour.

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57 Williams, *op cit.*, p. 335
58 *ibid.*, p. 338
A series of motiveless, heinous offences in the 18th and 19th centuries begged for an alternative explanation for these crimes … the question was why someone would engage in such horrid acts and inflict such deplorable suffering upon society without any manifest logic … the answer was insanity.\textsuperscript{59}

Foucault suggests that at one time, madness though undesirable, was celebratory. It was undefined, peculiar and problematic, but natural. While leprosy, which was the most widely quarantined and stigmatised affliction of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, could be cured, and eventually was in many parts of the world, madness could not. It was the prerogative of God to inflict and to cure mad men and women.\textsuperscript{60}

While those who suffered from madness were excluded, they were not necessarily considered threatening or dangerous. Madness, as a contemporary disease, had to be invented.

The constitution of madness as a mental illness at the end of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, affords the evidence of a broken dialogue, posits the separation as already affected, and thrusts into oblivion all those stammered, imperfect words without fixed syntax in which the exchange between madness and reason was made.\textsuperscript{61}

The invention of psychiatry aligned with madness as a disease, articulates a desire for social control - a solid rendering of normality and difference. Dangerousness forms the core of clinical psychiatric discourse. Definitions of dangerousness can authorise the unproblematic confinement of an individual regardless of whether they have committed any crime. Reason is “used as a weapon in the construction of social normativity and the development of social conformity to the dominant social


\textsuperscript{60} M. Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A history of insanity in the age of reason, (translated by Richard Howard), (London: Routledge, 1965), p. 23

\textsuperscript{61} ibid., p. xii
power.”62 Neuroses must be curbed in order to reify a consensus of ‘normality’. The “involuntary confinement of the mentally ill”63 is crucial to maintaining a safe distance between the rational and the irrational. Incarceration functions to “productively and inventively advance … the State’s regime of power in the name of privileged scientific truth.”64 This ideology is magnified when we consider the psychiatric profession’s lack of consensus, and the profoundly flawed processes involved in defining mental illness and what constitutes dangerousness.65 Madness defies easy confinement because it spills out over and beyond the categories imposed on it by those in power. It results in a scramble to mark off boundaries and limits between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ subjectivities.

We choose to conjure up this disease in order to evade a certain moment of our own existence - the moment of disturbance, of penetrating vision into the depths of ourselves, that we prefer to externalise into Others.66 Characterising cargo-cults as mad moments activates and amplifies the othering process. The irrationality of colonisation is displaced onto the behaviour of the other. Madness is a way to deny autonomy and a place within hegemony. It banishes the individuals, their practices and beliefs to the very fringes of hegemony. As a consequence, their consent is not needed for the maintenance of the system. This effectively eliminates them from negotiation and speaks for the subaltern. Gayatri Spivak activates this process by investigating British legislation of sati in India during the nineteenth century.

63 ibid.
64 ibid.
65 ibid.
Sati, (reinscribed by the British colonials as suttee – silencing Indian language and grammar) is the practice involving the self-immolation of widows upon the death of the husband. Practiced in Hindu families regardless of caste or class, it was considered a sacred rite demonstrating devotion to the husband and purity in the soul. However, this practice moved through a series of imperial inscriptions that resulted in its outlaw in 1829. Spivak demonstrates how British interference created the subaltern - women devoid of a class consciousness who accept their fate upon the pyre uncritically. These women, as Bhabha would say, are “at least twice inscribed.” Initially by meanings within their own culture that sanction widow burning, and by the colonising discourses that seek to “save brown women from brown men.” While many voices speak on their behalf, they have no dialect they can speak themselves. Spivak interrogates the manner in which both Indian and British knowledge systems function to silence these women. The role of colonisers in layering a silent inscription on these women traces the movement from irrationality to dangerousness when sati is outlawed in India.

In November 1829, Lord William Bentink wrote; “[i]n venturing to be the first to deviate from this practice [sati] it becomes me to show that nothing has been yielded to feeling, but that reason and reason alone, has governed the decision.” The clear demarcation of reason from feeling here privileges a hierarchy of knowledge that clearly distinguishes the colonisers from the colonised. The reasonable colonisers must guide the irrational and ‘feeling’ colonised to a more serious and legitimate path.

68 Bhabha, “The other question,” op cit., p. 73
69 Spivak, op cit., p. 297
By suggesting that the practice of sati is irrational, the colonised become dangerous. They therefore need to be more tightly and strictly controlled. Madness limits the discursive authority of Indian identity - most specifically Indian women. When consciousness is denied, the consequences for resistance are amplified. New ways of speaking must be created, which finds articulation in often destructive ways.71 Resistance is found in places that cannot be tracked or invaded by the colonisers. They can only be found now, distanced from the peak periods of colonisation, and in the unpacking of meaning in the postcolonial era. As new forms of colonisation are found in contemporary purchasing practices, spaces emerge in the meaning systems of old where the thirdspace is the perpetual grit in the oyster that reveals contradictions no longer covered by the immediate presence of imperialism. As the colonial binaries breakdown, all that is left is the ambivalence of thirdspace. This is a space that finds its most acute articulation through postcolonialism.

**Pondering the postcolonial**

The inability of formalised governmental and economic institutions to deal with the complex deconstruction of colonisation has lead to Literature making sense of a decaying empire and colonial subjects in crisis. Postcolonial writing, originated in University English Literature departments under the title ‘Commonwealth Literature.’72 It marked the decline of the British Empire and decolonisation. Britain had colonised much of Southeast Asia for over a hundred years.73 Now it was in disarray, with colonies claiming their autonomy in the aftermath of World War Two.

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71 Palestinian resistance is the clearest demonstration of the consequences of imposed silence. Suicide bombings tragically articulate their pain.


The home land was in no position to deny them. Decolonisation activated “the surrender of political sovereignty over the peoples of Africa and Asia and the emergence of independent nation-states where once European administrators and settlers had ruled supreme.” This process remains unclear. The impact of colonisation lingers. It is not so simple to remove foreign rule and reveal the downtrodden colonised. Frantz Fanon recognises the need for a strong, decisive break with colonisers in order to mark the moment of liberation. He suggests that in order to re-empower the colonised, decolonisation should be marked by revolution.

In decolonisation, there is therefore the need of a complete calling in question of the colonial situation … The naked truth of decolonisation evokes for us the searching bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it … This will only come to pass after a murderous a decisive struggle between the two protagonists.

This imagery of violent eruption can be easily justified as an attempt to reclaim a virile indigenous identity and exact revenge on white oppressors. While reclaiming identity and sovereignty is undoubtably crucial, the moment of decolonisation may be clear, but is not always bloody. We saw this most recently in the spectacle (carnival?) that marked the ‘hand-over’ of Hong Kong from British rule to mainland China in 1997. While governing bodies can change, social structures are much more difficult to shift. The dramatic revolution suggested by Fanon may come to pass and the struggle may liberate, but the meanings linger. Simply because colonialism is incomplete, does not mean its culture does not become deeply imbedded in the colony. Coloniser and colonised are weaved together in a much more ephemeral and immoral hybridity. Through postcolonialism, it becomes clear how pervasive this relationship is and how crucial thirdspace is to unpicking the graft between them.

74 J. Darwin, Britain and decolonisation: The retreat from empire in the postwar world, (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1988), p. 6
75 F. Fanon, The wretched of the earth, (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 28
Leela Gandhi suggests that postcolonialism, “remains a diffuse and nebulous term.” Postcolonialism can be defined through the process of decolonisation. It can be clearly mobilised to understand the contemporary political and economic situation in decolonised nations. This concept of postcolonialism tethers itself to a specific moment in history and to a particular kind of otherness. However Hodge and Mishra suggest, that to conceive of postcoloniality as a moment of inversion, is to conceive of otherness “contained within a single pattern.” Decolonisation is a significant moment in the narrative of a colonised nation, but it does not necessarily posit any excessive upheaval that instantly transforms the national consciousness. This is why Gandhi maintains that postcolonialism “lack[s] an originary moment or coherent methodology.” Alan Lawson, Leigh Dale, Helen Tiffin and Shane Rowlands go further to suggest a much more complicated process defining the postcolonial moment.

We use the term ‘post-colonial’ … to cover the processes of British (and European) territorial conquests; the various institutions of British and European colonialisms; and most importantly, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre - and post - independence nations.

Postcolonialism does not occupy a formal structure, practice or moment. It is formed in the process of renegotiating the relationship between coloniser and colonised, before, during and after colonisation. Postcolonialism is a continuing, constant project of negotiation between colonising and colonised identities. It embodies thirspace and the ambiguities activated in this nebulous node. These amorphous mediations are

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77 Mishra and Hodge, *op cit.*, p. 32
78 Gandhi, *op cit.*, p. viv
always present, but masked in colonisation. Postcolonialism is activated acutely in University English Literature departments, where ‘Commonwealth Literature’ enables intellectuals to trace the negotiation of identity and resistance through colonisation and after decolonisation.

Writing women

Postcolonial Studies takes English language-based literature as its central trope for critiquing identity politics.

This politico-cultural resisting of European texts in postcolonial literatures has had profound implications ... As the Indian critic Gayatri Spivak, has demonstrated in her analysis of Jane Eyre, and Edward Said in his comments on Mansfield Park and Heart of Darkness, it should not be possible to read an ‘enlightened’ English novel without seeing categories of imperial discourse.80

This “bizarre postmodern fiction”81 occupies the thirdspace, simultaneously reinscribing and revealing the power of colonisers. The writings of imperialists reveal the processes of power inscribing otherness. The consequences of leaving the traces of the other in their language resonate across the (decaying) empire. In his introduction to Culture and Imperialism, Edward Said refers to Charles Dickens’ Great Expectations and Joseph Conrad’s Nostromo as two key literary texts that deconstruct colonialism, Englishness and the other. He goes onto refer to Daniel Defoe,82 E.M. Forster83 and Jane Austin84 in his analysis. These English writers are attempting to come to terms with the impact of otherness on Britishness. Embedded at the centre of these interrogations is the presence of otherness, shaping and defining a new English identity. New ways of making sense of a colonised self are emerging in

81 Mishra and Hodge, op cit., p. 31
82 Said, op cit., p. 75
83 ibid., p. 77
84 ibid., p. 78
the colonies from underneath imperialism. They are embracing thirddspace to articulate unspoken resistances to colonisation and to reclaim a speaking position in postcolonialism. Two key texts articulating this space are the controversial: *Satanic Verses*\(^85\) and a text that deals with imperialist oppression outside of a direct British discourse - *Beloved*.\(^86\)

Both of these texts deal with mad women as metonyms for a dispossessed and doubly silenced space of selfhood. Their experience of oppression remains invisible, internal and ill-defined as they circulate through subaltern silence and psychiatric exile. Homi Bhabha,\(^87\) Edward Said\(^88\) and Simon Gikandi\(^89\) all use these texts to articulate a reclaiming of resistance in postcolonialism. The defining grammar of colonisation restricted the language of expression for the colonisers as well as the colonised. Even Rosa, as a white woman, cannot speak outside of legitimated colonial discourse. She must speak through the dialect imposed by masculinised, imperialist discourses. This crisis in expression manifests in the madness of the women in these texts, where the collapse of binaries problematises the terrain on which order is guaranteed. This hysterical moment is layered onto the embodiment of both colonising and colonised women who articulate the irreconcilable disturbances in thirddspace. Rosa Diamond (*The Satanic Verses*) and Sethe (*Beloved*) are mad women. Their embodiment of hysteria performs the confluence of the cult category through dominant and subordinate discourses. They are subaltern - unable to claim a consciousness or a speaking position. Nevertheless, they speak in a dialect not sanctioned by the

\(^{87}\) Bhabha, *Location of culture*, *op cit.*, p. 6  
\(^{88}\) Said, *op cit.*, p. 18  
\(^{89}\) Gikandi, *op cit.*, p. 27
hegemonic process. Their madness marginalises them, but simultaneously they exceed applications of power, and are able to articulate concerns subdued within colonial hegemony. Rosa and Sethe activate otherness and the incompleteness of colonisation. They sit uneasily within thirdspace, negotiating, collapsing and reconstructing binaries. These women have no tools for direct, overt resistance, so they turn inwards to reject the logic and language of oppression. They revel in thirdspace where meanings dislodge from their context, and where they may rewrite them on their own terms.

Simon Gikandi and Homi Bhabha use Rosa Diamond to suggest that she embodies the empire and its decay. Gikandi suggests that for any ‘real’ progress to be made in the rearticulation of indigenous identity and, in the healing process through postcolonialism and after decolonisation, one must question the constructions and deconstructions taking place in the centers of power as well as those in the colony. He suggests that “the imperial mythology has to be confronted on its home ground.” As a metonym for the empire and for colonialism, Rosa signifies the incompleteness of colonisation through decay and withered wonderings. She speaks with a double voice, simultaneously reflecting the imperial greatness of a once powerful nation, and the self-deluding notions of righteousness and imperial integrity that ultimately render the colonial project incomplete. Her consciousness hails an othered indigenous identity and the profound contradictions in Englishness pre and post - colonial. Bhabha articulates the liminal nature of Rosa by placing her in thirdspace. This enables her to simultaneously reveal and conceal the myths of Englishness.

The pageant of 900 year old history passes through her frail translucent body and inscribes itself, in a strange splitting of her language, ‘the well worn

90 *ibid.*, p. 27
phrases, unfinished business, grandstand view, made her feel solid, unchanging, sempiternal, instead of the creature of cracks and absences she knew herself to be.\textsuperscript{91}

Rosa is beyond binaries and embedded within thirdspace both revealing and concealing in its nature. She can inhabit this space by being ‘beyond’ reason. In this context, “[b]eing in the ‘beyond’ then is to inhabit an intervening space.”\textsuperscript{92} She is outside conventional power structures. Mad men and women are ambiguous. This is why Rosa is so dangerous. The mad man or woman is no longer embedded in structures of reason - there is no consciousness of commonsense. Power can no longer function effectively on and through the subject. They reveal powerful processes - they disembowel and disarm them. Mad men and women are excessive to hegemony. They are dangerously disruptive because “when the madman laughs, he already laughs with the laugh of death: the lunatic, anticipating the macabre, has disarmed it.”\textsuperscript{93} Rosa disarms the coherence of colonial ideology - Sethe disarms the power embedded within the articulation of that ideology.

Sethe energises the movement between madness and dangerousness. She embodies reason in committing an irrational act. Sethe activates an alternative, or outside, meaning system in which to make sense of her world - one that is not sanctioned within dominant discourses. In the face of insurmountable violence and oppression, Sethe commits an act of ‘madness’ by murdering her child (Beloved). This deed cannot be so easily dismissed as insane, psychotic or even unreasonable. Morrison constructs this moment as one of profound clarity. It is only the aftermath that demonstrates the descent into madness.

\textsuperscript{91} Bhabha, \textit{Location of culture, op cit.}, p. 167
\textsuperscript{92} \textit{ibid.}, p. 7
\textsuperscript{93} Foucault, \textit{Madness and civilization, op cit.}, p. 16
That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn’t like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn’t think it up. And though she and others had lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own. The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty her all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing – the part of her that was clean. No undreamable dreams about whether the headless, feetless torso hanging in the tree with a sign on it was her husband or Paul A; whether the bubbling-hot girls in the colored-school fire set by patriots included her daughter; whether a gang of whites invaded her daughter’s private parts, soiled her daughter’s thighs and threw her daughter out of the wagon. She might have to work the slaughterhouse yard, but not her daughter.94

The tragic and ardent act of murdering her own child is an attempt to reclaim the self and resist the meanings imposed on her by slavery. In Beloved “we see how this most tragic and intimate act of violence is performed in a struggle to push back the boundaries of the slave world.”95 Sethe’s silence and subjugation reaches a threshold moment where her only space for articulation is in madness. It is the only logical step for her to take. She enters into the ‘beyond’ space of mad meaning, only to be pulled back from that space by being inscribed as deviant in the criminalisation of infanticide. Bhabha uses Elizabeth Fox-Genovese to demonstrate the extent to which infanticide was considered a crime against the property of the slave owner.96 Sethe is resisting this ownership and reclaiming her child’s identity. While infanticide is indeed a dreadful undertaking, Morrison uses it in Beloved to locate the tragic extremes of resistance when articulation and autonomy is denied through a matrix of meaning. In choosing not to subject her child to life as a slave, Sethe makes the only choice she can in such an intensely regulated system and moves beyond hegemonic control. In order to reconcile this rupture she is criminalised and silenced again through madness. She is infused with dangerousness to strip her actions of its resistive

94 Morrison, op cit., p. 251
95 Bhabha, Location of culture, op cit., p. 17
96 ibid.
potential and to reorder her meanings within psychiatric and criminal discourse. Her solitary life at 124 Bluestone Road quarantines her resistance within a controllable paradigm. Both Rosa and Sethe embody moments of rupture in imperialist meanings where dominant and subordinate are unmasked and redefined. Their disruptive corruption of commonsense renders a crisis within hegemony where the scramble to reconcile these aberrant reorderings reveals the ambiguity and spaces between negotiation and consent.

Through written fiction, the unspoken thirdspace in colonisation is poured onto the page. This space can only be effectively configured through metaphors of madness to demonstrate the extent of imperialism as a shaping grammar for colonised and colonising societies, and the consequences for resistance within such a modality. The further out into empire the meanings must stretch, the more insistent the maintenance of imperial civility and rationality. For the cargo-cults in Melanesia, their movement through culture and society was carefully monitored via madness. Their behaviour could be explained, reconciled and patrolled through this inscription. However, they also embraced mad moments as a mobilisation of resistive meanings. Postcolonial writing creates a space for this madness and the memories of marginalisation that do not circulate as part of legitimate social knowledges. Postcolonialism is a thirdspace that activates meanings only effectively dealt with in space where fluidity and imagining can merge through fiction. Internal spaces of popular and unpopular memories can access a language of expression - where madness finds a coherency denied in social frameworks. In contemporary popular culture, moments of temporary madness are permitted in the service of a consuming economy. Fandom is encouraged through the worship of popular icons and artefacts. However, worship of the popular
that takes place outside of legitimating fan discourses must be monitored and
controlled. Cult is attached to such artefacts. It controls and contains the movement of
social and cultural objects - seeking to impose a social grammar on its reading so it
does not disrupt meaning before it can be inscribed coherently in the service of a
dominant hierarchy.
Hierarchies maintain their authority by tracking and monitoring social movement. Constant surveillance allows ruptures to be identified so dominant designs can dictate the terms of acquiescence and agreement. Characterising resistance in colonisation as madness is a precursor to the labeling of cult artefacts within popular culture. Mobilising madness insulates any potential reordering of social meaning contrary to the interests of the empowered. Similarly, cult controls cultural artefacts in popular culture by suspending or slowing their movement until the terms of resistance are redefined. Ultimately, this movement cannot be controlled or predicted. Meanings and artefacts generate their own energy.

Popular culture operates alongside the maneuvering of meaning, both feeding and being fed by changes to the social landscape. Cult polices the ambivalences and disjunctures between dominant ideologies, social changes and reading strategies. An effective archaeology is activated in *The X-Files*. This text marks a moment in popular and official memory where social, political and economic ideologies shifted. Its radical reworking of gender politics, truth, science, technology and institutional frameworks were a culmination of the changes in the postwar years that saw the breakdown of traditional binary structures, the digital revolution, and postmodernity punctuate politics. When it was first screened in 1993, it was allocated a late-Friday-night timeslot and marketed as a ‘cult’ text. A programme that dealt with aliens, UFOs and monsters was neatly framed as science fiction frivolity - an extension of oddly incoherent shows like *Outer Limits* or *The Twilight Zone*. During its first season, the production qualities,
soundtrack and narrative structure sparked comparisons with *Twin Peaks*, further confirming its cult status.

By season three in 1995, *The X-Files* had become extraordinarily popular. The season began and finished with the show securing around fifteen million viewers per week, confirming its popularity after winning a Golden Globe for best television drama in 1994.\(^1\) This was a text that captured imaginations. It embraced the shifts in society, politics and economics that had redefined culture in the 1990s. It overtly challenged institutions - primarily governmental, religious and scientific - mirroring a diminished faith in authority after Nixon and Watergate, rising spiritualism and alternative therapies. It corrupted the coherence of corporeality by transgressing bodily limits and challenging the core values we accept in selfhood and identity. *The X-Files* disordered the gender hierarchy and problematised gender/knowledge distinctions articulating changes to the workplace, feminism and masculinity. It even challenged the entire gendered continuum by disbanding coherent gender constructs, as in episode 1.14 entitled “Gender Bender”.\(^2\) This text was claimed by the mainstream. However, in 2002, in its ninth season, *The X-Files*, promoted and commodified, has been axed. Its demise marked only by a small, almost insignificant snippet in *The West Australian* newspaper.

\(^2\) “Gender Bender,” *The X-Files*, written by Larry Barber and Paul Barber, directed by Rob Bowman, original air-date, 21\(^{st}\) January 1994, episode 1.14
This once popular show has moved back to the margins - its currency no longer punctuating the popular consciousness. The program that captured people's attention for its innovative and radical reinterpretation of the social terrain is no longer on the cutting edge of consciousness. It was entwined with the shifts in social meanings that have moved cultural capital forward. Now, it is no longer doing anything new. The following chapter marks out the trajectory of *The X-Files* and the knowledges it activated as part of its radical reworking of society and popular culture. It aims to trace the movement of *The X-Files* from the margins to the centre of pop culture and back again, via its innovative and reflexive approach to viewing.

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Chapter Two

Handling the Truth: The X-Files

Whatever happened to playing a hunch Scully? The element of surprise; random acts of unpredictability? If we fail to anticipate the unforeseen or expect the unexpected in a universe of infinite possibilities, we may find ourselves at the mercy of anyone or anything that cannot be programmed, categorised or easily referenced.¹

Fox Mulder, The X-Files: Fight the Future.

There are a series of truths about The X-Files. It is characterised by an attention to narratives that deal with transgressions, from bodily, to national and even metaphysical boundaries. This is aided by multigeneric and hybrid narrative structures that refuse coherent and closed resolutions to plot and story. The two main characters, Fox Mulder and Dana Scully, amplify these transgressions through an inversion of traditional gender/knowledge alliances that sees masculinity framed by instinct, belief and feelings, and femininity funneled through rational, scientific truths. Concurrently, traces of the simultaneous rise of an X-Philes fan base on the Internet capture the unprecedented popularity of a media text and a new technology harnessed by its audience. These truths pepper intellectual inquiry into The X-Files. Understanding this text as a critical social paradigm requires a concern with official and unofficial memories, meanings and movement. The X-Files has broken new ground. It treads on terrain that is controversial and subversive. However, it is not easy to align and categorise The X-Files with previously ‘ground-breaking’ television like Twin Peaks.²

¹ The X-Files: Fight the Future, written by Chris Carter, directed by Rob Bowman, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1998)
Nor is it similarly easy to pair it with the fan-base framework of Star Trek.\(^3\) This methodology has resulted in confused attempts at explaining The X-Files’ cult currency in popularity.

What distinguishes cult shows from typical fare is that a relatively high percentage of the viewers are avid fans and that these fans have a relatively high visibility compared to the avid fans of other shows. Still, although the proportion of avid fans in the audience of a show like The X-Files is much higher than for a mass hit like Friends, avid fans alone would represent a relatively small audience. Somewhere around 15 million households watch The X-Files every week; clearly nowhere near this many people are engaging in active fandom.\(^4\)

Unraveling the meanings in and around The X-Files requires a wider social, political and economic network beyond understandings of audience activity. Roswell,

Watergate, Twin Peaks and Star Trek are just a few of the textual traces weaved into this program. They form the core of its interrogation into social reality and popular memory. The X-Files defies easy characterisation because it challenges social orderings of the past, and frames a diversity of contradictory meanings in the present.

While both Twin Peaks and Star Trek are important in establishing a semi-historical context for the emergence of The X-Files, we cannot simply squeeze or force a template on top of a culturally and historically specific media text. The X-Files does not fit easily into already established popular methodology. While it dances and ‘morphs’ into many things at once, it cannot be limited to definitive paradigms which ignore its contradictory applications of reality, popular culture, history and memory.

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how The X-Files signals social movement. This text meanders through recent history to question and qualify some of the key changes in the postwar period. A key trope in this chapter is the application of

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\(^3\) ibid.

\(^4\) J. Reeves, M. Rodgers and M. Epstein, “Rewriting popularity: The cult files,” in Lavery, Hague and Cartwright, (eds.), Deny all knowledge, p. 27
popular memory to access experiences outside of socially sanctioned hierarchies. *The X-Files*’ use of the popular made it mobile, and as it moved, the cult label has wavered alongside its trajectory.

David Lavery, Angela Hague and Marla Cartwright identify the importance of treating *The X-Files* as a manifestation of its *time*. In their introductory chapter to *Deny all Knowledge: Reading The X-Files*, “Generation X - *The X-Files* and The Cultural Moment”, they claim that, “*The X-Files* is a product of its time not because it holds a mirror to reality but because it reflects the mindset of its era.”

Television texts can never directly reflect reality. Nevertheless, programs are always enfolded within the social and political circumstances of an era. They always activate a diversity of reading strategies that hail the different interests and identities in the viewing public. This ‘bardic function’ of television demonstrates its ability to articulate and comment on, through narrative, characterization and representation, the concerns and issues within a culture.

Television is a crucible - a bubbling cauldron of conflicting ideas that mobilise a series of struggles over meaning. *The X-Files* is reflexive of its function in time, and the extent to which it comments on the ideologies of a culture. When questioned on the success of *The X-Files*, David Duchovny (Fox Mulder) has hailed the program’s sense of contemporaneity.

I think *The X-Files* is very nineties, because everything is left in doubt. There’s no closure, no answers … Obviously, it’s tapping in to something the nation wants. I think it has to do with religious stirrings – a sort of New Age yearning for an alternate reality and the search for some kind of extrasensory god. Couple that with a cynical, jaded, dispossessed feeling of having been lied to by the government, and you’ve got a pretty powerful combination for a

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5 Lavery, Hague and Cartwright, *op cit.*, p. 2
TV show. Either that, or the Fox network has an *amazing* marketing department.\(^7\)

*The X-Files* is conscious of its place as a popular culture artefact within a social and cultural hierarchy. It is aware of its origins and specificity within the U.S. *The X-Files* speaks to this U.S. consciousness. Its overt references to moments that have shaped that country, over the last fifty years and beyond\(^8\), are traced through Roswell, Watergate, and Waco. *The X-Files* plays out the contradictions of a country founded on the most idealistic ground, but which has consistently failed to live up to those standards. Nevertheless, *The X-Files* has enjoyed extraordinary overseas success. No doubt it has much to do with the United States’ extraordinary ability to market its culture, though this is inadequate to account for its entry into the popular consciousness of countries removed from the specific U.S. experience.

[*The X-Files has*] extended beyond the United States’ borders, becoming the first U.S. - originated television program in years to achieve prime-time success in Japan, having already established itself as one of the most popular exports in countries like England and Australia.\(^9\)

This prosperity is because *The X-Files* articulates wide changes in consciousness through the postwar period that is not just applicable to the United States, but to an increasingly technologically literate and consumption based, westernised world. *The X-Files* is not merely an updated *Outer Limits* of monsters and aliens. It is a program that interrogates and problematises ‘reality’ along with social knowledges and power structures that comprise it. Its narrative is grounded in critique of common sense, popular culture and power. Its reflexivity is engaged through pop culture references as it acknowledges the role of popular culture in social sense-making. *The X-Files*

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\(^8\) “*The Field Where I Died,*” *The X-Files*, written by Glen Morgan and James Wong, directed by Rob Bowman, original air-date, 3\(^{rd}\) November 1996, episode 4.05, is an episode that deals with the U.S. war of independence.

challenges and problematises the sweeping changes that have shaped the world in contemporary times.

*The X-Files* reframes meaning through mobility and memory, rather than official, stable and institutional visualisations of authority, truth and history. The truth is always ‘out there’, never locked in an official vault or footnoted in institutional records. It is fluid, negotiated and contextual. Our reality and sense of transcendent truth breaks down in *The X-Files*, not in favour of a new ‘alien’ alternative, but debate and contraction in the everyday. A persistent questioning frames *The X-Files’ ideology. It is a questioning of authority, history and the real. A culture of inquiry is privileged through an era of New Times and increasing conservatism seeking to close down social alternatives in politics and social justice.10 *The X-Files* understands that everyday life is fraught with fragmentation.

[D]ensely lived culture of everyday life is a contradictory mixture of creativity and constraint. There is a way of embodying and living the contradictory relations between the dominant social order and the variety of subaltern formations within it.11

The relationships we have with each other, with institutions and popular culture are threaded through an inquiry into life, death, technology, faith, truth and identity. *The X-Files* aims to challenge a linear, determinist history. It fragments, recycles, repeats and disjoins time and space. While it appears to seek ‘the truth’, it uncovers the mechanisms through which social institutions, meanings and culture intersect and diverge to construct our reality. *The X-Files* embodies this process. It slows and detaches social meanings from their structures and casts them into a new spotlight.

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Time circulates, slows, repeats and accelerates in this program to question and reframe dominant memories of the past and present. Popular memory provides the central trope for *The X-Files* diegesis.\textsuperscript{12}

Institutional frameworks are supported by matrices of cultural, ideological, economic and political meanings that intersect in the maintenance of power within our society. The knowledges we employ everyday in a sense-making capacity are tethered to this network.

There is neither a reality that stands on its own, nor is there an ‘act of production’ without a socially determined *perspective* within which ‘reality’ [is] … conceivable as *something* in the first place.\textsuperscript{13}

These knowledges function as an ordering context for the generation of meaning. They do not reflect an external real that stands alone. Our society is produced as we negotiate our way through it. Common-sense gains currency when this ordering structure is concealed and the origins of social truths are masked. The ‘real’ that we take for granted, is a product of social legitimacies and hierarchies that punctuate the practice of everyday life.

[These knowledges] should be understood less as a disclosure of truth than as an act of power, the capacity of a social group to impose its will on others by freezing linguistic and cultural meanings.\textsuperscript{14}

Our dominant perceptions of time, space, pleasure and power all flow through ideological matrices that limit movement in social meanings and cultural practices. A hierarchy of value regulates what we find tasteful or trashy. Our cultural capital is constructed at the very core of social values and the making of meaning. This results

\textsuperscript{12} Popular memory was theorised in cultural studies by the Popular Memory Group and was centered around the publication of R. Johnson, G. McLennan, B. Schwartz and D. Sutton, (eds.), *Making histories*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982)


\textsuperscript{14} S. Seidman, *Contested knowledge: Social theory in the postmodern era*, (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), p. 201
in middle class masculinised, white identity filling out the ideological legitimacy of our culture. Roland Barthes refers to this as ‘myth’. He argues that this extraordinary capacity of the bourgeois to have their truths taken up as valued knowledge is “an unceasing hemorrhage: meaning flows out of them until their very name becomes unnecessary.” At the core of society lies this ideological kernel that spawns the entire system of structures, meanings and truths designed to nourish that seed. This distortion of cultural truths limits social signification and configures a hierarchy in which, “everything that human beings experience is selected, arranged and ‘priced’ by the intellectual and moral judgements and linguistic practices of a social world.” The regulation of these meanings patrols the limits of valued knowledge. Historians are key figures who help perpetuate a hierarchy of judgement through social institutions and everyday practices.

**History and hegemony**

I would never lie; I willfully participate in a campaign of misinformation.17

Mulder, “Shadows”.

The function of historical inquiry is to map and maintain the social processes that shape a society.

[Historians] uncover deeper principles which explain the relationships between the different phenomena of the past and … develop … a science which might provide deep truths about the organisation and development of society.18

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17 Fox Mulder, played by David Duchovny, “Shadows,” *The X-Files*, written by Glen Morgan and James Wong, directed by Michael Klette, original air-date, 23rd October 1993, episode 1.06
Historical sources that frame the truths of our reality are most often interpreted through official discourses, and by the empowered groups that benefit from their currency. These official truths circulate with a deep resonance due to their entrenchment within dominant visualisations of the past supported by the ‘science’ of history. A method of selection punctuates historical method whereby historical artefacts are ranked in order of truthfulness. Government documents, official archives and supported articles are mobilised as authentic access to the past. Arthur Marwick provides a list of hierarchically valued sources that he categorises in order of importance and legitimacy. Embedded within this list is the recognition that history can only be accessed through the sources and artefacts left behind via “different media, for example in books, articles, [and] documentaries.” Marwick demonstrates very strict criteria through which the validity of that media is determined, and the truthfulness of the source valued. It is the job of the historian to examine these artefacts and decide which of them provide a ‘truthful’ account of the past.

1. **Documents of record**
   - **Central government sources:** government edicts, laws, charters, records of exchequer, chancery and other government departments. Records of parliaments, estates or other representative institutions.
   - **Council and cabinet records:** Records of central law courts, central police records.
   - **Local records:** manorial records, local legal cases and reports, parish registers, local police reports, parish poor relief records, local government records, local electoral records (e.g. poll books).
   - **International records:** treaties, protocols, charters (e.g. of the United Nations, etc.); ambassadors’ reports, diplomatic dispatches.
   - **Other formal records:** records of the Papacy, of other religious bodies, reports of the Inquisition; university records, records of societies, records of political parties, trade union minutes and reports.
   - **Private business records:** estate records, rent-rolls, wage returns, contracts, prospectuses, minutes of board meetings and so on.

2. **Surveys and reports**
   - **Centrally organised:** Reports of royal commissions and parliamentary committees of inquiry; reports from localities commissioned centrally, tax inspections, Domesday Book, etc.
   - **Private and individual surveys:** studies of folklore and customs; investigations by writers and social critics; reports by private bodies, directories and handbooks; (for the very modern period) opinion surveys and polls.

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19 This list is incomplete, Marwick *ibid.*, p. 210 continues with, Guides and works of reference, Archaeological, industrial archaeology, history-on-the-ground, and physical artefacts, Literary and artistic sources, Sources that are techniques as much as sources, ‘Oral history’ and oral traditions, Observed behaviour, in descending order of significance for historians.

Marwick suggests that the historian must endeavor to provide “an interpretation of the past, one in which serious effort has been made to filter out myth and fable.” This attention to truth and seriousness masks the intensely interpretive nature of historical inquiry. Keith Jenkins challenges Marwick and suggests that historians often uncritically subvert the flow of time. They impose their own chronologies to support the version of events visibly validated. History is a narrative that must be edited and controlled for a coherent picture to be constructed. This process can eliminate rich sources of unofficial history that circulate on the fringes of legitimate historiography. Individuals are sewn into history in bizarre and diverse ways. Official records of human life often fail to take into account the enthusiasm, joy and heartache of their reality.

The deep focus on objective analysis in historical scholarship is due to the perceived profound impact the recording of past events has on contemporary reality. What we remember of the past serves to shape present values and judgements in distinct and

21 Marwick, op cit., p. 209
22 ibid., p 3
23 Keith Jenkins, On what is history?: From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White, (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 16-17, questions the role of historians in accessing and evaluating historical events. He suggests that all historiography is by its nature problematic precisely because it is always inherently interpretative, “For historians, of course, never access the past as such, so that the problems formulated along the traditional lines of, ‘how can historians truly/accurately know the past?’; or, ‘if historians cannot access the “real past”, then how can we have checks on historians’ accounts that are “real” checks as opposed to being “just interpretations”?’, are beside the point. For what is at issue in historiography - and indeed what can only ever be at issue - is what can be derived and constructed from historicised record or archive.”
deeply resonate ways. It creates an anchor through which to interpret everyday events and identities. Indeed, “as memory is to the individual, so history is to the community or society.”24 These memories are tethered to official histories and are usually of legitimate, valued identities. What is forgotten, remains in the ‘dustbin of history’25 to be swept away as if other people, events and consciousness never existed. Official history is the luxury of the empowered. The official records and biographies that pepper national, governmental and economic archives are the traces of valued knowledges and peoples. It is a culture locked up in records and writing.

Disempowered communities leave traces in more ephemeral, less visible ways, as “the poor do not leave much in the way of primary sources.”26 These identities are not allocated the same resources for archiving and recording, and “[t]he more personal, local, and unofficial a document, the less likely it [is] to survive.”27 The primacy of written records limits the credibility of alternative experiences not registered in official discourses. The past is presented in logical and linear narratives rather than as a site of struggle. The knowledges taken up in social sense-making are threaded through history as a ‘scientific’ epistemology articulated through technologies of writing. The written word activates a series of social hierarchies which distances individuals from knowledge and funnels truth through artifice of ink, paper and quill.

The power writing exercises over our consciousness is embodied in the extent to which “hundreds of languages in active use are never written at all.”28 Writing requires “[an] interior transformation … of consciousness.”29 Its effect is to restrict and limit conceptual abstractions. A framing grammar contextualises the written

24 Marwick, op cit., p. 14
26 ibid., p. 44
29 ibid., p. 82
Writing is tethered to a series of powerfully predetermined axiological concepts embedded in the act of placing pen to page. These meanings form the basic structures to not just writing, but to thought, speech and representation. This process is activated in the standardisation of Latin writing during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This language became the basis for all formal educational institutions and is the key to the status of writing in our contemporary culture.

Having been the root to a myriad of emerging languages across Europe, (spoken) Latin became fragmented and hybridised.\(^3^0\) The scope of languages and grammars having to be translated required one common written language for trans-communal communication. As a result, ‘learned Latin’ became dominant in “schooling, and with it most official discourse[s] of the Church or state.”\(^3^1\) As formal education was mainly undertaken by “clergy, lawyers, physicians, diplomats, and other public servants”\(^3^2\) Latin, writing, class and masculinity were entwined tightly and exclusively. This ethic filtered down into the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when “cathedral schools became leading educational centers”\(^3^3\) and writing was only learnt by the (upper-class) men (usually aspiring priests) who attended. Writing serves to radically redefine the time, space and consciousness in history. It creates distance between the word and experience. The paradox being that this distance encourages critical contemplation but also stable and inflexible hierarchies.

Writing establishes what has been called ‘context-free’ language or ‘autonomous’ discourse which cannot be directly questioned or contested as

\(^{30}\) Ong, \textit{ibid.}, p. 112 argues that “between about AD550 and 700 the Latin spoken as vernacular in various parts of Europe had evolved into various early forms of Italian, Spanish, Catalan, French … languages.”

\(^{31}\) \textit{ibid}.

\(^{32}\) \textit{ibid}.

oral speech can be because written discourse has been detached from its author.\textsuperscript{34}

The distance between the reader and writer means that ideas and knowledges become timeless – they cannot be directly and immediately challenged and ‘corrected’ or written anew. This means that writing has an authority in its capacity to occupy time and space, and is fundamentally tethered to wider social concepts of temporal and spatial consciousness. Encasing history in writing means that alternative ways of knowing, being and experiencing the world are excluded from contemporary consciousness. These marginalised memories can find space through the popular memories that struggle through the fringes of popular culture.

Popular culture is the reservoir of popular memory. The textualised experiences of this space often become collective memories. Popular culture constructs a collectivity of images whereby memories and meanings of the past circulate visibly through the present. There are historic moments in our culture that are visualised via hyperreal recollections of collective experience. The assassination of JFK, the Berlin Wall, Tiananmen Square, the Gulf War and The World Trade Centre terrorism shape the popular memory of the recent past in official and unofficial frameworks. Popular culture is unstable terrain. It is simultaneously a force for unity and disruption. It is the crucible for the hegemonic mix. This system makes spaces for alternative imaginings and identities. Bakhtin in particular, demonstrates how unofficial experiences were once allocated a stable, visibly legitimised space in which to circulate.

\textsuperscript{34} Ong, \textit{op cit.}, p. 78
The carnivalesque, for Bakhtin offers a legitimate, state sanctioned space for otherness - of “world upside-down”\textsuperscript{35} in which the rules of social life are broken, alternative truths are visualised and difference is embraced. Alternative histories and experiences occupied a central role in carnival ceremonies. Carnival was “a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man and of human relations.”\textsuperscript{36} It provided a moment removed from the maintenance of the official hierarchy via legitimate histories in order to hail the truths and identities embedded in the popular. The spectacular ridicule of officialdom served to deconstruct the claim to authority by the empowered. The laughter at carnival was collective, bound together by common experience and communal identity. Those external or marginalised within the community (freaks, giants, dwarfs) were privileged and valued as a site of collective allegiance. They were centralised as visible sites of transgression and inversion. The grotesque was most highly valued. The world was turned upside-down as women became men, the poor became rich and authority was scoffed at. The richness of the carnival lay in its capacity to not simply operate as a pressure valve for the disempowered, but that it regenerated the community and embraced a sense of “relativity [in] prevailing truths and authorities.”\textsuperscript{37} John Docker unpacks Bakhtin’s mapping of significant changes to the meanings of the carnivalesque grotesque from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance in which Others appeared as “comic monsters.”\textsuperscript{38} By the Romantic period they were “nocturnal, sinister, ghostly, [and] ghastly.”\textsuperscript{39} The disruptive potential of the carnival faded in light of more subtle hegemonic negotiations whereby the hierarchy of a


\textsuperscript{36} M. Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais and his world}, (translated by Helene Iswolsky), (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 6

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{ibid.}, p. 11

\textsuperscript{38} Docker, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 182

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{ibid.}
society was more insistently maintained through the uses of writing and the visualising frameworks of science. Otherness declined in its visibility and the grotesque was placed behind the mask, rather than celebrated in front of it. New social frameworks shifted the place of oral traditions and folkloric practices in legitimate public life to the background. Carnivalesque practices were marginalised in fringe collectivities. The grotesque circulated marginally as a site of voyeuristic pleasure, rather than collective celebration. These memories are dominantly visualised via the 1950s American horror and science fiction films whereby a series of monsters terrorise small towns with their hideous deformities and murderous intentions. In such films as *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), *Frankenstein* (1931), *The Fly* (1958), *The Mummy* (1959), *King Kong* (1933), *The Thing* (1951), *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953) and *Godzilla* (1955) the monster, or freak, or mutant threatens the stability of the community. This community must come together to defeat the monster and restore order. Otherness was framed as dangerous. The monster’s role was not to challenge or disrupt the dominant hierarchy, but to restore it and stabilise the authority of the empowered. The collective identity animated around this figure was focused on the maintenance, rather than the deconstruction, of the official order. Vivian Sobchack explains that “[t]he Creature films of the fifties (and the early sixties as well) are less about horror and science fiction than they are about the preservation of social order.” The monster was most commonly a threat to community identity rather than a signifier of collective marginal experience and memories of carnival mayhem. The threatened community, must come together in order to defeat disruptions of deviance for “[t]here is no salvation for the disorganised mob, running amok under the creature’s feat. What is called for is teamwork, cooperation, and

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above all, organisation."\textsuperscript{41} Fencing in the creature condenses community collectivity. Dominant values are maintained at the expense of difference. Order must always be restored to everyday life and the stability of the official order reinstated. Indeed, in Bakhtin’s (or Rabelais’) world, the rules are always restored. Otherness was a source of jubilation, not deviance at carnival. For a precious moment of social life, difference and diversity was special and crucial to community formation, embedded in celebration, rather than in fear. The memories and experiences activated via the carnivalesque were those of the people rather than authority.

The moment of Bakhtin’s carnival has left us. Contemporary popular culture offers us snippets of carnival activity. We occasionally encounter it in fragments in Sydney’s Gay and Lesbian Mardis Gras and in the popular media - on the Wrestling, \textit{South Park} (and the range of contemporary cartoons from \textit{The Simpsons} to \textit{Ren and Stimpy}) and on \textit{Jerry Springer}. Carnivalesque categories have been appropriated by authority to quell the playfulness of inversionary politics. The struggle between official and unofficial memories of otherness may not resonate in official spaces of celebration, but are visible within some popular media artefacts. In \textit{The X-Files}, a collective outside belonging is activated through popular sites. Identities on the fringes mobilise a collective experience circling “official limits of belonging”\textsuperscript{42} and embrace reflexive interrogations of the self, the past and popular memory. Communities are activated through fringe experiences and memories of legitimate and illegitimate historical knowledges embedded within popular interpretations of the past. In mobilising alternative trajectories for the past and the present, these collectives reify

\textsuperscript{41} ibid.

\textsuperscript{42} E. Probyn, \textit{Outside belongings}, (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 8
contradictory identities that access devalued knowledges. *The X-Files* is populated with these subversive identities, outside belongings and unofficial memories.

**Proselytising the postmodern**

All I know is that television does not make a previously sane man go out and kill five people thinking they’re all the same guy. Not even must-see TV can do that to you.43

Mulder, “Wetwired.”

The tension between official and unofficial memories shapes the discursive debate in *The X-Files*. The untidy and unpredictable ways popular culture activates and obstructs popular memories flows through metaphors of time. Popular memory unpicks the fabric between sanctioned history and personal experiences of the past. In *The X-Files*, a visualisation of unauthorised, popularly articulated pasts is possible. This program has amplified the resonance of popular memory and alternative past trajectories. It is not just myths, folktales and urban legends that occupy visible status in *The X-Files* diegesis, but also contemporary, popular, mediated and digitised knowledges. References to contemporary cultural artefacts pepper the program. As early as episode two in the first season, official knowledges mingle with unofficial ones through references to Watergate and ‘Deep Throat’, the mysterious and perhaps mythical identity who leaked information. At the end of this episode, Mulder receives a visit from his very own ‘Deep Throat’44 who provides him with secret intelligence. More obvious examples of this bleeding occur in “Humbug” featuring Jim Rose’s circus. “War of the Coprophages” is a spoof on *War of the Worlds*, with an invasion of cockroaches instead of aliens, and “Jose Chung’s From Outer Space” traces the

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43 Fox Mulder, played by David Duchovny, “Wetwired,” *The X-Files*, written by Mat Beck, directed by Rob Bowman, original air-date, 10th May 1996, episode 3.23

44 Played by Jerry Hardin, this character was killed off at the end of season one in “The Erlenmeyer Flask,” *The X-Files*, written by Chris Carter, directed by R. W. Goodwin, original air-date, 13th May 1994, episode 1.24
fictionalising of a fiction as Jose Chung\textsuperscript{45} writes a book based on \textit{The X-Files}.

“Wetwired” overtly interrogates the role and function of television in society when transmissions through the tube make ordinary people into murderers. “Chinga” and “Kill Switch” written by Stephen King and William Gibson respectively, hail auteur themes, and rely on audience knowledge of their place in popular culture. “Bad Blood” takes viewers through the separate experiences of Mulder and Scully as they investigate vampires in a small mid-western town. Perhaps one of the funniest episodes, it parodies the truth seeking practices of both Mulder and Scully. It features an exhausted Scully slopping autopsy parts into weight scales, and a trapped Mulder facing down villagers edging towards him with eerie glowing eyes and exclaiming, “Damn!” in an odd reference to \textit{Village of the Damned}. “The Unusual Suspects” parodies the film \textit{The Usual Suspects}, with The Lone Gunmen - Frohike, Langley and Byers all being interrogated by Detective Munch\textsuperscript{46} from Boston homicide in an intertextual reference to \textit{Homicide: Life on the Street}. “The Unnatural” reworks the Robert Redford film \textit{The Natural} to have the talented baseball player as an alien playing in the black league during the 1950s. “Hollywood AD” has a scriptwriter tailing Mulder and Scully as they investigate an X-File, to make their work into a film that features Tea Leonie (David Duchovny’s wife) playing Scully (played by Gillian Anderson) in the film version. In the eighth season, the addition of Robert Patrick to the cast enabled an overt reference to the liquid metal man (T-1000) he played in \textit{Terminator Two} as Doggett (Patrick) and Scully investigate the existence of a man made out of metal. The layering of popular culture in \textit{The X-Files} creates an undertow of unofficial morsels of meaning. The literacies activated underneath the narrative arc

\textsuperscript{45} Played by Charles Nelson Reilly.
\textsuperscript{46} Richard Belzer who plays Detective Munch is the only actor to play the same character across five different television shows – \textit{The Beat}, \textit{Homicide: Life on the Street}, \textit{The X-Files}, \textit{Law and Order}, and now \textit{Law and Order: Special Victims Unit}. 

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punctuate reading strategies. They add an enigma(tic) code cryptically circumventing the narrative.

The popular media offers a dynamic and rich site for the re-telling of narratives not validated in official versions of the past. Film, television or comics can not open our eyes to the truth of the past. All historical interpretation takes place within and through an agenda. However, *The X-Files* is a text that offers identities and experiences via unofficial and popular memories of the culture and society. It is a text that deliberately embraces the myths and fables Marwick warns against.

Activating and embracing mythology forms a key directive of *The X-Files* diegesis. In this program, a diversity of mythological knowledge is validated. It aims to present a series of belief structures that operate outside of, and contrary to, authoritative, scientific discourses. There are contradictory definitions that map mythology along distinct tangents, of which to address here is to slip into the terrain of anthropologists, theologians and other social scientists debating definitional protocols. While there are many subtle differences between the categories of myth, folklore and fairytale, they are beyond the scope of this thesis and argument. The mythology or “mytharc” of the series involves the rituals, practices, monsters, beasts and ‘beings’ that populate the ‘stand-alone’ episodes of *The X-Files* parallel to the conspiracy threads dealing with aliens and abduction. Despite the contradictory definitions of mythology - whether it is intimately linked to rituals and Gods or folklore, it does possess a

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47 Lowry, *op cit.*, p. xi
crucial etymology. Plato was the first known user of the term *mythologia* that was derived from the Greek word *muthos*. This word meant, “a tale or something uttered.”50 The oral traditions embedded within its practice hail a fluid, mobile method of expression. The diverse knowledges found in myths, legends and folklore are devalued within a culture of writing. In *The X-Files*, there is a direct binary between mythologies embedded in orality, and reasoned science located in writing.

**Rational writers**

Mulder: He psyched the guy out. He put the whammy on him.  
Scully: Please explain to me the scientific nature of ‘the whammy’.51  

“How.”

As an extension of writing, science “inspired radical changes in thought.”52 The grammar required in writing flowed through to representations of the external world. The distance between science and the consequences of its moral and ethical dilemmas, deliberately constructed it as knowledge in ‘neutral technology’.53 Science could not be responsible for any uncomfortable or unscrupulous social judgements resulting from its work. Its attachment to external grammars of objective reality meant that, “reason could not be blamed for any subsequent irrationalities that stemmed from other-than-rational capacities of human beings.”54 Science, as a methodology, denies the unclear, complicated conundrums of life. It becomes knowledge untainted by...

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50 Kirk, *op cit.*, p. 8  
51 Fox Mulder and Dana Scully, played by David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson, “Pusher,” *The X-Files*, written by Vince Gilligan, directed by Rob Bowman, original air-date, 23rd February 1996, episode 3.17  
53 *ibid.*  
54 *ibid.*, p. 73
values and opinions, because it is formed within the rigorous grammatical structures of writing. Barthes is clear in connecting power, authority and writing.

This is why power, or the shadow cast by power, always ends in creating an axiological writing, in which the distance which usually separates fact from value disappears within the very space of the world which is given at once as description and judgement.55

Science manifests a society that relies on, privileges, and values, writing and print over orality and speech. Science is at the apex of knowledge via its capacity to devalue other ways of knowing. They are irrational and irresponsible. Mythology is the most unreasonable of all - embedded in hysterical superstitions and unreal metaphysical modalities. This hierarchy of knowledge is the strategy employed by dominant memory frameworks. They devalue other knowledges that may not directly contradict science but nevertheless, provide distraction to its validity.

Despite these monopolist ambitions, it [science] has to recognise, however reluctantly, that other knowledges exist and contradict it, so part of its strategy of control is to define the realities known by those other knowledges as ‘unreal’ and therefore not worth knowing.56

Science and the groups maintained by its ‘objectivity’ are reluctant to engage any experience that cannot be rationalised within its knowledge system, recorded in writing and circulated as truth. In The X-Files, scientific truth must negotiate contradictory evidence, extraordinary phenomenon and analytical agendas. It cannot operate autonomously within this world. It must develop strategies to reconcile and engage with unnatural and unclear circumstances and artefacts. In this program, science must access mythologised knowledge to distill answers it cannot cultivate.

Myths come in diverse and contradictory forms. They take us into the realm of possibility and the ‘unknown’. They demonstrate that “much of the experiential world

55 Barthes, *op cit.*, p. 39
of the people lies outside the explanatory reach of science and abstract reason.”

Myths allow us an indulgence in what is beyond science. They encourage us to reflexively recall the tenuous grasp we have on reality and to recognise that “our truth of the moment is often only a myth that does not know it is one.” Myths have existed in problematic relationships with accepted truths. They are primarily used as “allegories revealing naturalistic and moralistic truths.”

Myths deal with complexities and conundrums and attempt to provide solutions to difficult and morally challenging questions in culture. Religious institutions tolerate myths for as long as they regulate the moral integrity of devotees. A hierarchy of myth even exists here, with Catholic interpretations of Holy Scripture, valued over Jewish.

Myths create space where science fails to. Claude Levi-Strauss suggests that myths are ways of resolving tensions between binaries. He argues that myth often defines diametrically opposed positions that are in crisis because they cannot make up a whole. These two arcs are broken down into an infinite number of subsequent opposing positions. He characterises these categories as the difference between the raw and the cooked.

Levi-Strauss argues that myths have many similarities across cultures. Key narratives and themes are negotiated through mythology across many different contexts. In *The X-Files*, these themes are represented through a diversity of cultural/mythological modalities. We can trace knowledges from Native American Indian practices, Jewish, Pagan and Christian religious practices,

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57 ibid.
59 ibid., p. 3
60 ibid., p. 4
62 See “Shapes,” written by Marilyn Osborn, directed by David Nutter, original air-date, 1st April 1994, episode 1.19, “Anasazi,” written by David Duchovny and Chris Carter, directed by R. W. Goodwin,
traditions,\textsuperscript{64} and Asian legends\textsuperscript{65} as well as a range of knowledges devalued within contemporary ‘western’ society under such categories as the occult, spiritual and even ‘new-age’.\textsuperscript{66} These knowledges are located on the perimeter of accepted truths. Many of these episodes deal with events that occur on the very limits of dominant knowledge. There is a dialogue between science and myth, with neither one providing complete answers. Operating in tandem, they circulate through legitimate and illegitimate ways of knowing and experiencing the world. The mobilisation of anecdotes, legends, urban myths and rituals conjure references to folklore that appear through fringe cultural practices and the popular media. While science is permanently perforated by the insecurities and anomalies offered in a world of contradictions.

Science only answers a fragment of the questions asked in \textit{The X-Files}. This program uses myth and popular memory concurrently to deal with the textual and emotional

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See “The Calusari” written by Sara B. Charno, directed by Michael Vejar, original air-date, 14\textsuperscript{th} April 1995, episode 2.21 for pagan practices, “Kaddish” written by Howard Gordon, directed by Kim Manners, original air-date, 16\textsuperscript{th} April 1997, episode 4.12 for Jewish rites, “All Souls” written by Frank Spotnitz, John Shiban, Billy Brown and Dan Angel, directed by Allen Coulter, original air-date, 26\textsuperscript{th} April 1998, episode 5.17 for Christian knowledges and “All Things” written and directed by Gillian Anderson, original air-date, 9\textsuperscript{th} April 2000, episode 7.17 for Buddhist rituals.
\item See “Excelsis Dei,” written by Paul Brown, directed by Stephen Surjik, original air-date, 16\textsuperscript{th} December 1994, episode 2.11, “Nisei,” written by Chris Carter, Howard Gordon, and Frank Spotnitz, directed by David Nutter, original air-date, 24\textsuperscript{th} November 1995, episode 3.09, “Hell Money,” written by Jeffrey Vlaming, directed by Tucker Gates, original air-date, 29\textsuperscript{th} March 1996, episode 3.19 and “Unrequited” written by Howard Gordon and Chris Carter, directed by Michael Lange, original air-date, 23\textsuperscript{rd} February 1997, episode 4.16 to examine Asian originated myths.
\end{enumerate}
changes to society - not just the political and economic ruptures that can be closed via science and dominant memory. The program’s reflexivity of its role through popular culture creates a crucible of cultural knowledges that renegotiate complicated contemporary times. The complexity of this program cannot be underestimated. Intermittently it engages in a witty and knowing repartee with its audience that offers a radically resistive mobilisation of memory in celebration of the unwritten records of life.

In *The X-Files*, a variety of sources are used to access ‘the real’. It seeks to problematise and displace official sources of historical truths in order to activate marginalised memories and experiences. *The X-Files* is a reservoir of popular memory. It pools together many of the devalued knowledges and experiences of past events that pepper popular culture. From the conspiracies surrounding the assassination of John F. Kennedy, to the UFO sightings in Roswell through *Star Wars*, *Twin Peaks*, and *Elvis*, *The X-Files* mobilises a collective experience in the popular to activate, “a repository of collective memory that places immediate experience in the context of change over time.”  

It composes the historical value of culture as everyday life by using popular knowledges and artefacts as legitimate historical sources. It uses film imagery, icons and characters, for example, to hail the consciousness of the contemporary world. *The X-Files* reshapes these knowledges in reference to the contextual movement of social reality. This program is less interested in the linear narrative of history, than the way in which popular culture has enriched memories of the past via interpretation, embellishment and enthusiastic speculation. *The X-Files* does not take for granted the impartiality of the historian, and recognises

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that contextualising past events is always a multifarious activity. It mobilises a range of interpretive practices to create a patchwork of multiple truths and memories.

*The X-Files* generates a series of competing collective memories around convoluted accounts of the past. It provides a unique blend of official truths and popular memories through a postmodern pastiche of contradictory historical sources. A viewing highlight in the fifth season of *The X-Files* is an episode entitled, “The Postmodern Prometheus”.68 *The X-Files* writers and producers often indulge the show’s postmodern inflection of pastiche, overtly interrogating knowledge, truth and reality within and through the textual form of the show. The peculiar and humorous nature of “The Postmodern Prometheus” is based on a celebration of popular memory and a self-reflexive critique of *The X-Files’* role as a popular culture artifact. This episode is a direct rewriting of *Frankenstein*.69 This reinscription is hailed through fragmented signifiers that resonate through time, in which literary (writing) and filmic (oral) imagery combine. “The Postmodern Prometheus” offers a series of contradictory memories activated through the popular media to create a perverted allegiance of postmodern signification that recontextualises literary history within contemporary televisual discourse. It is an episode that moves through scientific truth, horror movies, and Jerry Springer.

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**Scully:** I think that what we’re seeing here is an example of a culture for whom daytime talk-shows and tabloid headlines have become a reality against which they measure their lives. A culture so obsessed by the media and a chance for self-dramatisation that they’ll do anything in order to gain a spotlight.

**Mulder:** I am alarmed that you would reduce these people to a cultural stereotype. Not everybody’s dream is to get on Jerry Springer.

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68 “The Postmodern Prometheus,” *The X-Files*, written and directed by Chris Carter, original air-date, 30th November 1997, episode 5.06
69 M. Shelly, *Frankenstein*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1816)
Scully: Psychologists often speak of the denial of an unthinkable evil, of a misplacement of shared fears. Anxieties taking the form of a hideous monster for whom the most horrific human attributes can be ascribed. What we can’t possibly imagine ourselves capable of we can blame on the ogre, on the hunchback, on the lowly half-breed…Common sense alone will tell you that these legends, these unverified rumours are ridiculous.

Mulder: But nonetheless unverifiable and therefore true in the sense that they’re believed to be true.\(^{70}\)

“The Postmodern Prometheus” layers spectacle, popular stories, scientific inquiry and film history in a bizarre blend of legitimate and illegitimate truths. It reworks literary fiction through B-grade horror film conventions to collapse dominant and popular memories. Contemporary mediated knowledges are perverted, and combined with official discourses in a humorous parody of official history and popular culture. It frames the contextual movement of our social reality out of World War Two and into a fragmented and digitised social sphere that Baudrillard effectively characterises.

The Faustian, Promethean (perhaps Oedipal) period of production and consumption gives way to the proteincic era of networks, to the narcissistic and protean era of connections, contact, contiguity, feedback and generalized interface that goes with the universe of communication.\(^{71}\)

It is a world struggling to come to terms in “The Postmodern Prometheus” where old and new ways of thinking, experiencing and being are unraveling in postmodernity.

Mulder: When Victor Frankenstein asks himself “Whence did the principle of life proceed?” and then as the gratifying summit to his toils creates a hideous phantasm of a man, he prefigures the postmodern prometheus - the genetic engineer. Whose power to reanimate matter - genes, into life - us, is only as limited as his imagination is.

Scully: Mulder, I’m alarmed that you would reduce this man to a literary stereotype … a mad scientist.\(^{72}\)

The X-Files performs a radical reinterpretation of history, as memories of the past are moved through time with the use of signifiers that have become dislodged from their

\(^{70}\) “The Postmodern Prometheus,” \textit{The X-Files}, episode 5.06


\(^{72}\) “The Postmodern Prometheus,” \textit{The X-Files}, episode 5.06
original codes. The mobilisation of B-grade horror movies in this episode of *The X-Files* functions as a marker of the manner in which the popular memory persists and mutates into new forms.

“The Postmodern Prometheus” is the story of ‘The Great Mutato’, a monster ‘terrorizing’ a small town. The theatrical theme of this episode hails the grotesquely carnivalesque sideshow. From its commencement, “The Postmodern Prometheus” is framed within popular narrative as the camera introduces us to The Great Mutato through the opening of a storybook that contains his story. It begins with single mother Shaineh Berkowitz and her son Izzy, in small-town Bloomington in semi-rural Indiana. Overweight and working class, Izzy finds escape in comic books depicting the grotesque and macabre. As he heads off with his friends to a comic book convention in a nearby town, his mother finds her own escape in the day-time talk shows of *Jerry Springer* and the side-show of freaks and misfits that parade across the screen. She does not notice her windows being covered by a large tent. A noxious gas renders her unconscious and she awakens a few days later to discover that she is pregnant. Mulder and Scully enter the narrative when she writes to them explaining the bizarre circumstances of conception. Her letter strongly asserts that she saw a monster, and heard Cher singing. When the local scientist’s wife is impregnated in the same manner, and an old man is murdered, the townsfolk turn into an angry mob, complete with pitchforks and torches of fire, eager to hunt down and kill the monster.

The episode overtly hails past memories of childhood carnival, the celebratory grotesque and collective moments of resistance activated through the carnivalesque. Shot entirely in black and white, punctuated by a sideshow soundtrack and a large
circus-like tent, the use of distinctly nostalgic techniques mobilises the popular memories of otherness that are activated through B-grade horror films. *The X-Files* creates a chimeric reality whereby past, present and future trajectories collide in a postmodern suspension of official history in which competing truths occupy simultaneous spaces. These events are revealed in a space where the contemporary media offers a radical interpretation of the real. Scientific rationalism, horror movies, carnival, music and popular media combine in a bizarre suspension of linear history. Contradictory discourses are visible simultaneously in “The Postmodern Prometheus” and they exist out of time. A series of powerful, but diverse signifiers are used to conjure up a collection of popular memories that resonate within the popular media and its discourses in order to create a pastiche of collective experiences (of the circus, horror movies and comic books) that are removed from their original context. The black and white film stock, semi-rural setting, circus tent, and horror film lighting all combine in a postmodern allegiance of perverted signification. As these signs travel through time, they carry with them a series of official and unofficial histories - all given currency within “The Postmodern Prometheus”. These connections critique the narrative of official history and the collective consciousness that is embraced as a result of those truths. *The X-Files* creates a movement in which it reworks the carnivalesque into new collective experiences.

In “The Postmodern Prometheus”, the carnival is simultaneously hailed in its original inversionary form via references to the circus sideshow that celebrated differences, demonised within B-grade horror films that depicted the monstrous as a threat, and reanimated as a collective celebration within contemporary daytime talk-shows. It mobilises carnivalesque imagery from excessive embodiment, procreation,
reproduction, feasting and food, to laughter and parody. In this episode, “the pious and the carnivalesque grotesque exit … side by side.” Contrary to Docker’s observation of Bakhtin that they “never merged”, in “The Postmodern Prometheus” they are connected and melded deeply. Every member of the Bloomington community embodies a transgressive corporeality, as they have been the unwitting counterparts in scientific experimentation for many years. The Great Mutato functions metonymically for the intense reproduction and regenerative qualities of this community. His own excessive consumption of peanut butter hails the carnivalesque feasting metaphors for procreation and fertility. The eagerness for the members of the Bloomington community to believe in the presence of a hideous and disruptive monster exists beside their fascination with the spectacular and the stranger than fiction identities they witness via Jerry Springer. Their desire for otherness masks their own silenced transgressions. With a monster in their midst they must face their own difference – bodily, emotionally and ethically. The proximity of mutation, memories and movies bleed and blend to activate alternate trajectories and choices in time. Their collectivity is hailed by embracing the grotesque that is consolidated via fandom and popular celebration of otherness. The cold distance of authoritative structures sublimates in “The Postmodern Prometheus” and difference is intimately entwined through spaces of the carnivalesque, and traced through the popular media and its fan building practices. Community building and collectivity are mobilised around and through the popular memories of movies and music.

**Masked memories**

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73 Docker, *op. cit.*, p. 174
74 *ibid.*
The Great Mutato is a fan of Cher. His identity is tethered to filmic representations - most specifically - Cher’s role in the film *Mask*. In this film, Cher plays Rusty Dennis, the mother of a child (Rocky) who, like The Great Mutato, is deformed with a severe cranio-facial disease. Hailed by the marginalised identity he witnesses in Rocky Dennis, The Great Mutato embraces the film as a primary historical sense-making source. He wishes to blend the joy he experiences in viewing, with the void in isolation he encounters in the everyday. He thereby goes in search of that reality by trying to create a mate for himself that will accept and embrace him as Cher does Rocky in *Mask*. Popular memories are framed in “The Postmodern Prometheus” as more powerful collective conjuring of truth and connectivity to the real than history. The Great Mutato embodies the masked identity of the carnival and the postmodern masking of identity that is mobilised via *The X-Files*’ interrogation of multiple truths. In carnival, like *The X-Files*, masks were employed to embrace different identities. They were crucial to the celebration of difference, as individuals were able to embody otherness. The mask “permits diversity and differentiation, a play with identities.”

The Great Mutato articulates the necessity and reality of difference within a community. He strips away the mask of everyday ideologies and disrupts the silence of ‘normality’. It is through the popular culture that he can create connections with the wider Bloomington community through a common literacy in Cher. Where carnival can no longer activate collective experience via state sanctioned celebrations of otherness, popular artefacts articulated by and through “The Postmodern Prometheus”, provide space for the allegiance of individuals who experience alternative truths within a culture. Within this episode, popular memories and

75 *Mask*, written by Peter Bogdanovich and Martin Starger, directed by Peter Bogdanovich, (United Artists, 1985)

76 Docker, *op. cit.*, p. 180
experiences hold contemporary truths and generate community building more potently than official ones. In the end, The Great Mutato discovers belonging through fandom. The official discourse of history does not provide a space for his difference, nor his memories. This connection only exists through film and music. The visibility of the marginalised now finds a space through fandom and collective experience in outside belonging that is articulated through popular culture sites. The carnivalesque is reinscribed through the popular media in ways that render alternative histories new visibility. Popular culture provides the site of identification that is not allocated in the official order. Fans provide unofficial sources of collective behaviour, community building and belonging. For they “enthusiastically embrace favored texts and attempt to integrate media representations into their own experience.” Fans do not obey official viewing and reading practices. They disrupt the social order by interpreting and embracing texts beyond the standards of taste that dictate the selection of valuable media artefacts. The Great Mutato can only find belonging and shared memories among a community of Cher fans. It is only at the end, when the official discourse has exhausted its limits and is unable to adjust to account for such diversified identities that the popular memory persists and alternative histories claim space. In the end, The X-Files moves well beyond the official versions of history into the convoluted and contradictory truths of the popular. These are less certain, but more vibrant in their renderings of collective experience, memory and belonging.

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Scully: We should go Mulder. The prisoner’s in the car.
Mulder: This is all wrong Scully. This is not how the story’s supposed to end.
Scully: What do you mean?
Mulder: Dr Frankenstein pays for his evil ambitions, yes, but the monster’s supposed to escape to go search for his bride.
Scully: There’s not going to be any bride Mulder, not in this story.

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In the end, Shaineh ends up on *Jerry Springer* with her deformed child. The community of Bloomington, Indiana including The Great Mutato, creates a sense of belonging in their collective fandom of Cher. In mobilising this history, *The X-Files* activates alternative historical truths that operate parallel to legitimate discourses. This episode blends individual histories with official frameworks in a complex layering of contradictory historical sources.

The carnivalesque moves across the screen and through the narrative in a pastiche of signifiers that hails an era of nostalgia in a simulacra of PT Barnum theatrics and festive medieval inversion. The monster is limited to this space. Nevertheless, the consequences of his difference spill beyond the tent and into the wider community. Radical difference and inversive practice can no longer be isolated within a specific carnival moment. It permeates entire communities where collective experience exists in fragmented and incomplete ways. The fan experience shapes this collectivity in radically subversive ways. It effectively creates a sense of belonging that relies on illegitimate pasts and experiences that the historian often chooses to ignore. Memory is volatile. It cannot be easily contained. The alternative memories activated in *The X-Files* hail the slippery and fragmented identity politics of the postmodern postwar world. It slides through time in circular, looping patterns of juxtapositions and simulation. As a result, it defies easy categorisation. This text redefined television viewing and presented contradictory interpretations of authoritative discourses. Its difficult and unpredictable movement in and out of popularity meant that cult was

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78 “The Postmodern Prometheus,” *The X-Files*, episode 5.06
used to reconcile the meanings it mobilised at the beginning and end of its nine years on our screens.
Section Two: Space
Working women and mad men

My mother is not a feminist. She was not part of, nor caught up in, the 1970s movement that was able to transform so many women’s lives, in so many different ways. No doubt she benefited from those changes, and even perhaps identified with it through the television or newspaper and snippets of information that reached her. Yet to ask my mother is she was a feminist would probably result in instant dismissal and possibly insult. What my mother was though, among many things, was a farmer’s wife. This meant that my mum literally did everything. It was my mum who did the morning dishes before helping dad pull a calf from an exhausted pregnant cow. It was mum, who after getting the sheep in the shearing-shed, made lunch for us. It was mum who sewed buttons, mended holes in clothing, cleaned the house, did the washing, helped with homework while seemingly simultaneously driving tractors, digging holes, fending off snakes, penning sheep, raking hay, checking water levels and herding cattle. I can still remember a time when the dishwasher went on the blink. Even though dad was only a few meters away in the shed, it was mum out on the back lawn with a screwdriver fixing the problem. I grew up in a house where there were things girls were supposed to do, and ways in which girls were supposed to behave. Simultaneously though, girls could and indeed were expected, to do anything and everything. The expectations of farm life were such that to survive, everyone contributed.¹ These spaces, outside of the urban, middle class context of gendered politics are the unspoken margins of female experience. Our mothers

¹ While my mum performed a diverse role, my dad not only enjoyed working with my mother, he encouraged us kids into the sheepyards as well. He taught me to drive a tractor and is also known to bake a mean loaf of bread.
and grandmothers often embodied feminist politics without the movement to support their autonomy. The experiences of women between waves, in class and race-based contexts are the forgotten and frozen frameworks of feminist theory.

In the personal spaces of gender politics, mobility in meaning has characterised the failure of feminism and the rise of men’s studies in the postwar period. The X-Files filled the gap in representation when changes in social attitudes required visibility. It was successful because it articulated a radical reinterpretation of the relationships between the public and the personal, history and memory, truth and myth, objective and subjective knowledges. Not least of its radical redefinitions was that of gender roles. Mulder and Scully demonstrated de-centred gender politics. They inverted the binary by having Mulder concerned with instinctive, reactionary investigative techniques while Scully mobilised medicine and the microscope. These characters embodied the shifts in gender roles animated since the close of World War Two. Mulder problematised masculinity by being intellectual, weak and neurotic. Scully was stoic, professional and precise, articulating feminist politics in the public sphere without the accompanying crisis in confidence.

The next section of this thesis interprets the movement of meaning in gender and popular culture. Beginning with a study of Tank Girl, it ponders the function of feminism in film. Four female characters will form the trajectory of this chapter. Each embraces and mobilises a node of feminist concern. This chapter assesses the effectivity of this film in providing a functional model for feminism in a time when this movement is becoming less visible as a coherent politics for change. The feminist politics activated in Tank Girl demonstrates how femininity
challenged patriarchal power structures in the postwar period. This film rewrites feminism for popular culture and problematises a stable and silent system of gendered inequality.
Chapter Three

Search and Destroy: Four Feminists and a Tank

Yesterday’s visionaries are today’s scapegoats, when not newly tamed and domesticated.¹

Lynne Segal.

Feminist politics have punctured the postwar period. Its intervention into the cultural studies paradigm marked serious shifts in the economy and society. The second wavers marching in the 1970s, paved the way for workplace reform, domestic reorganisation, and child care. The upheaval of feminism in the explosion of identity politics was strongly characterised by cultural studies critic, and former director of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Stuart Hall who said “[a]s a thief in the night, it broke in; interrupted, made an unseemly noise, seized the time, [and] crapped on the table of cultural studies.”² The startling interjection of feminist politics into the social sphere hailed a political and economic framework for the social justice and autonomy of women.

Not all women embraced the movement. Many regarded it with skepticism and cynicism because it did not speak to their life concerns. Today, many young women reject an overt feminist politics. It is a problematic paradigm. The move to ponder the place of popular culture in feminist consciousness has focused concern on representation rather than workplace, social and economic reform. The movement of the modality from revolution to representation has stifled its ability to speak for women’s concerns. As the spaces for coherent feminist consciousness have declined,

popular culture remains one of the few remaining sites for contemplation of feminist politics in the public sphere.

This chapter demonstrates the extent to which *Tank Girl* mobilises a resistive, overtly contrary politics for feminine empowerment. Its feminist ethic is problematic in a hegemonic system that seeks to capture consent and covertly concede. *Tank Girl* and its furious feminisms does not allow power to flow uninterrupted. Cult frames the *Tank Girl* discourse in a conservative hegemonic landscape. This film uses four feminists and their literacies in patriarchy to challenge male power. It is unpopular politics, enfolded into a popular medium. As a result, it sits uncomfortably in this realm. Categorising it as a cult text, refers not only to its marginal market status, but most insistently to its mobilisation of an effective model for feminist politics and consciousness. This chapter uses the four women in *Tank Girl* to trace a tumultuous framework through transgressive times. It begins in the belly of feminist failure. The unpopular politics of this paradigm sits uncomfortably with conservative and filtered frameworks of femininity. Sincerely scandalous subjectivities are found in trivial artefacts that circulate under the radar of conventional culture. Via the comic strip, *Tank Girl*’s counter culture conversation with mainstream femininity is articulated amongst the diversity of odd, autistic, pathological and deviant characters that populate the page. This dialogue is developed in the film through the modalities of madness, promiscuity, work, and weaponry. In this chapter, the four characters in *Tank Girl* provide the framework through which to interrogate feminist politics and femininity in the contemporary period.

**Beware the angry woman within**
My mum is my greatest feminist role model, despite the fact that the ‘F’ word was never uttered in our household. Like many young women, I have benefited from my mother’s tenacity and resourcefulness, and I came to feminism with little detailed knowledge of the second wave movement. Strangely enough, my first sojourn into feminism was by way of men, specifically, through manifestations of masculine rage. I was like many young women who “are not generally encouraged to make a lot of noise.”3 However, very late in my teens I discovered, quite to my surprise, that I was very angry. Indeed, I was positively seething. Feminism seemed an inadequate model for this rage and I dismissed it as whining women who wanted more childcare and free tampons, rather than to surmount life and its problems. What I did discover … was *The Rollins Band*. Henry Rollins was not singing about sexual harassment in the workplace, or how Barbie is a damaging role model to young girls. He did not identify the sexually exploitative images of women in media advertising - but he was singing (or screaming) about disaffiliation, and most importantly, they were songs you could break stuff to. I found an outlet for my feminine rage through an overtly masculine forum. I had discovered my own voice in this oddly anti-feminist manner. For many women, feminism can not offer an effective model for the personal or political.

While women have begun to infiltrate the popular media where we are increasingly seeing vocal women articulating themselves on their own terms, feminism remains unpopular. Paula Kamen laments the reluctance of many young women to claim the feminist title. She argues that the “feminist image, while indeed rooted in both distortions and reality, is also a stereotype - a solid, rigid and often impenetrable

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one.” It is understandable that young women do not wish to be affiliated with its negative connotations.

Bra-burning, hairy legged, amazon, castrating, millitant-almost-antifeminine, communist, Marxist, separatist, female skinheads, female supremacists, he-woman types, bunch-a-lesbians, you-know-dykes, man-haters, man-bashers, wanting-men’s-jobs, want-to-dominate-men, want-to-be-men, wear-short-hair-to-look-unattractive, bizarre-chicks-running-around-doing-kooky-things, I-am woman-hear-me-roar, uptight, angry, white-middle-class radicals. Feminism is not a popular paradigm. Steve Redhead demonstrates how the categories of “[‘p]opular’ and ‘unpopular’ are fast replacing ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’, ‘normal’ and ‘pathological’, ‘straight’ and ‘deviant’.” Pathologising the unpopular makes feminist consciousness unattractive in the least, feared at the worst. In the postwar context, feminism has moved through popular and unpopular, straight and deviant manifestations. It is now often inscribed as pathological and problematic. Most obviously, it is at odds with established hierarchies and ideologies. The vehemence injected in such violent imaginings highlight the extent to which feminist frameworks have failed. Part of this is of feminist’s making, with academics and journalist often turning against each other in political cat-fights and authenticity struggles. The now famous fax-war between Julie Burchill and Camile Paglia is a key example of the consequences of a poisoned pen. While the dialogue was punctured with “fierce and ugly” phrases, the wider consequences of their exchange get lost when the media turns these two women into seething sirens with shrill sensibilities. The fear of ‘amazoned’ autocrats is amplified when the myths of feminist fisticuffs are confirmed in a public ‘punch-up’. Feminism has lost its currency. Lynne Segal argues that

5 ibid.
6 S. Redhead, Unpopular cultures, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 100
8 ibid., p. 99
“[f]eminism grew too big for its marching boots in the closing years of the 1970s.”

Its initial rupture and success became tainted with exclusionary politics and border policing. The voices of women were lost in the midst of authenticity arguments and ideological impasses. Coupled with a media ‘backlash’ that functioned to “neutralize and commercialized feminism at the same time,” feminists found it increasingly hard to speak effectively to and for, the changing conditions of women in contemporary society. Within popular culture, feminist politics occupies an uncomfortable position. An unpopular politics does not fit famously with popular modalities. Catherine Lumby argues that one of the most effective interventions of television in women’s lives has been “blur[ring] the boundaries between the public and private spheres.”

No doubt it has corroded the construction of two separate spheres of work. However, it has not resulted in programming that “[speaks] across the traditional boundaries of class, race and gender.” Television has only filtered feminism via unpleasant politics. For example, while Roseanne percolated the conditions of womanhood and feminist politics through a class-based critique, more recently (the dreadful) Ally McBeal shadows a (third wave) feminist politics through pseudo-psychoanalytical discourses. While it does claim to present the conundrums of balancing workplace and interpersonal relationships against the backdrop emotional insecurity (I have been assured), to claim Ally McBeal’s feminist credentials via the length of her skirt is deeply problematic. Popular culture is frequently unfriendly to feminism.

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9 Segal, *op cit.*, p. 1
12 *ibid.*, p. 173
The Spice Girls (pre-Geri’s departure), Missy Elliott, Courtney Love (post Kurt Cobain), Ani de Franco, Sinead O’Connor, Buffy, Xena, and Max (from Dark Angel) are women who are bravely boisterous. These women rub against the mainstreaming of femininity and feminist politics. They activate spaces for an affirmative and active feminism. Though, with the exception of Buffy and (maybe) Xena, their interventions are intermittent and sometimes isolated. A sustained feminist paradigm seems lacking. 

Tank Girl is a text that has not penetrated popular success. It is fringe fodder for feminists. It did momentarily puncture the popular with the release the film in 1995. The film did not receive wide success, but did serve to amplify the status of the comic. This text is stabalised on the fringes of culture. Unlike The X-Files, it has not moved across the landscape violently and visibly. Tank Girl features radically resistive and deviant practices. The comic embraces some overtly subversive sexual politics. The guerrilla-like (first through third wave) feminist ethic of shock and disruption punctuate the pages. While the film is a significantly toned-down version of the comic, much of the politics it mobilises remains a problem for hegemonic stability. This is mainly because it offers a workable rendering of feminist politics and an operational model for consciousness. The transmission of the comic-book ideas into popular actualisation requires movement in social ideas and cultural literacy. Unpopular feminist politics operates through popular culture via cult positioning.

**Ink and ideology**

Comics remain controversial culture in our era. They are often subversive, anti-establishment and dystopian. Comics such as Spawn, Swamp Thing, Industrial Gothic, The Crow, and The Invisibles offer bleak, devastating visions of reality. Even the more mainstream comics like Batman, Spiderman, and The X-Men all tend to circulate
characters through terrifying or corrupt worlds with lonely souls in depressing circumstances. *Tank Girl* is a radical interpretation of a post-apocalyptic landscape. Rebecca (a.k.a. Tank Girl) lives with her mutant half man, half Kangaroo boyfriend in the outback of Australia. A range of vibrant characters populate this landscape. It is bleak and barren. Scattered through this terrain are a series of social misfits, deviants and psychotics all of whom circulate through Tank Girl’s drinking, sleeping, sexual intercourse, or tank-related activities. The revelry presented in these comics is permitted because this form remains low, trivial and unimportant. Disempowered sites activate and articulate disempowered identities.\(^{13}\) Mainstream aesthetic values run contrary to the comic context. They often embrace the bizarre, the horrific and unspeakable spaces of life. In the *Tank Girl* edition “Apocalypse”, Rebecca is impregnated by Booga, her half man, half Kangaroo boyfriend. On the cover, she is depicted with a swelling belly and a rocket launcher, smoking a cigar. Inside, she accepts the news of impending Motherhood ambivalently.

\(^{13}\) For a more complete rendering of this concept please see T. Brabazon, *Ladies who lunge: Celebrating difficult women*, (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2000)
Comics remain uncomfortably accepted within our culture. They are often maligned for their ‘influence’ on young minds. Fredric Wertham wrote a comprehensive manifesto denouncing comic books in the mid 1950s, and it was not only Mad magazine\(^{15}\) that sparked the social concerns within his book, *The Seduction of the Innocent*. He saw the very form of the comic as trivial, and therefore socially damaging. Curiously, *Superman* is highlighted as a major source for a dangerous ‘seduction of the innocent’.

*Actually, Superman (with the big S on his uniform - we should, I suppose, be thankful that it is not an S.S.) needs an endless stream of ever new submen, criminals and ‘foreign looking’ people not only to justify his existence but even to make it possible. It is this feature that engenders in children either one or the other of two attitudes: either they fantasy themselves as supermen, with the attendant prejudices against the submen, or it makes them submissive and receptive to the blandishments of strong men who will solve all their social problems for them - by force. Superman not only defies the laws of gravity, which his great strength makes conceivable; in addition he gives children a completely wrong idea of other basic physical laws. Not even Superman, for example, should be able to lift up a building while not standing on the ground, or to stop an airplane in mid-air while flying himself.*\(^{16}\)


\(^{15}\) M. Langer locates *Mad* magazine as a publication that was specifically attacked for its “bad taste and … inappropriateness for a juvenile audience,” in “Animatophilia, cultural production and corporate interest,” J. Pilling, (ed.), *A reader in animation studies*, (London: Libbey, 1997), p. 147

He may have missed the point. Nevertheless, Wertham does not stop with Superman.

He has approaches girl heroes with similar ignorance. Not only does he dramatically misread the role of popular culture within the social sphere and in children’s lives, but he displays (even for a psychologist in the 1950s), a remarkable lack of consciousness in gender (not to mention class and racial) politics.\(^\text{17}\)

*Edith was a delinquent girl of fourteen. Over the years the family had had contact with some twenty-five social agencies. It was a history of illness, vocational dislocation, disruption and financial difficulties. The girl, good-looking and anxious to get help, had serious aspirations to make something of her life. Surely in such a case one cannot disregard the social conditions, nor can one ascribe delinquency directly to them. One must search for the particular in the general, the individual in the social and vice versa. There is no such thing as abstract frustration leading to abstract aggression. What goes on in the mind of such a girl? Where does the rationalization come from that permits her to act against her better impulses? Her ideal was Wonder Woman. Here was a morbid model in action. For years her reading had consisted of comic books. There was no question but that this girl lived under difficult social circumstances. But she was prevented from rising above them by comic-book seduction. The woman in her had succumbed to Wonder Woman.\(^\text{18}\)*

Grossly misinterpreted by authority, comics remain on the fringes of popular culture circulating unauthorised, unpopular ideas, politics and subjects. It is highly significant that a space for feminist politics is allocated within this comical fringe. Moving the text into the more mainstream movie genre requires rewriting. The director of *Tank Girl*, Rachel Talalay explained that the studio bosses were ‘uneasy’ about the heroes being ‘mutant kangaroos’.\(^\text{19}\) Much of the overtly offensive material was monitored

\(^{17}\) Wertham was attacked by many of his contemporary counterparts for his uncritical approach to comic-book research. John Springhall suggests in *Youth, popular culture and moral panics: Penny gaffs to gangsta-rap 1830 - 1996*, (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 125 – 126, that “Dr Wertham’s tendentious book tackled an emotive issue but was considered by most reviewers to be mediocre in execution … He had used inadequate sampling and the book lacked a proper control group, consisting mostly of random, undocumented and unverifiable case histories.” Nevertheless “Wertham’s book was more responsible than any other critique of the medium for forcing self-censorship upon the American comic-book industry and thus substantially altering ‘product’ content.”

\(^{18}\) Wertham, *op cit*, pp. 166 - 167

\(^{19}\) For a more complete insight please see M. Manners and R. L. Rutsky, “Posthuman romances, parody and pastiche in *Making Mr. Right* and *Tank Girl,*” *Discourse*, vol. 21, no. 2, Spring 1999, pp. 115 - 138
and masked in the film. However, its strength is in presenting an effective and functional feminist consciousness.

**Grrrl power**

*Tank Girl* pays as serious attention to style, fashion and language as it does to explosions, chase sequences and special effects. The role of the action hero is reworked in this film with a woman using the tools of male power - a tank - to reinscribe her world from a distinctly feminine, punk and resistive viewpoint. *Tank Girl* offers a commentary on the role of women within film, as well as their place and politics within larger society. It is one of the few films to offer a diversity of female roles that function simultaneously in a direct dialogue and contradiction with contemporary feminism. This film’s irreverent use of style easily allows the label ‘postmodern’ to be applied. Its attention to surface, play and bricolage construct a thematic template through which a fragmented feminist framework defines identity.

There are four dominant female roles within this film. The Rain Lady, The Madam, Jet Girl and Tank Girl (Rebecca). Each of these women performs a different node of feminist concern - the hysterical mad woman, the prostitute, the sexually harassed woman in the workplace and the mother/warrior. These women take second wave concerns and rework them into a contemporary (even third wave) context. They mobilise a sense of simulation and parody to infiltrate the masculine landscape of 2033 and take control over the public and private spheres. They are contradictory and difficult. Most of all, they are disordered.\(^2^0\)

\(^2^0\) Carole Pateman in *The disorder of women: Democracy, feminism and political theory*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p. 18 challenges the notion that “women, it is held, are a source of disorder because
Women exist in many irreconcilable places at once, and never autonomously. Women’s lives, experiences and modes of being remain elusive. They primarily embody desire, otherness and aestheticisation in that; “whenever aesthetic representation has aimed to express what cannot be expressed … these ideas are often conveyed, in the history of art, via the representation of women.” Whatever cannot be spoken, is grafted onto women. The chameleonic nature of the transgressive female form enables systems of power to impose standards, expectations and constantly changing meaning systems, on the multi-coloured surface of female subjectivity. The meanings that smooth the skin of women’s bodies serve to displace her self, her sexuality and her desire. She becomes an absent body. This “body without organs is a dead body - [and] has lead to the notion of the absence of women in history.”

Women’s bodies are emptied of their coherence and co-opted by phallocentrism to mask their memories, meanings and experiences as subjects in time and space. Women’s existence is appropriated and reinscribed beyond their corporeal control. Their bodies must be inscribed by power because through their lack, their absence as a coherent organism - made by leftovers - they are nomadic and always shifting. Rather than existing as coherent organisms, women’s bodies are emptied of their own currency and filled up with patriarchy’s. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari explain that an “organism is not at all the body.” An organism is comprised in the coherent organisation of organs. This ordering functions “to extract useful labour from the BwO [body without organs], it imposes upon it, forms, functions, bonds, dominant

their being or their nature, is such that it necessarily leads them to exert a disruptive influence in social and political life.”

21 A. Rauch, “The traverspeil of the prostituted body, or woman as allegory of modernity,” Cultural Critique, Fall 1988, p. 77
22 ibid., p. 79
23 G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia, (translation and foreword by Brian Massumi), (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 159
and hierarchical organisations, organised transcendences.\textsuperscript{24} For women, this is defined through childbirth, mothering and private sphere expertise. Women’s bodies are surfaces or entities that must be organised, by external hierarchies and values. They are contradictory because they must be strictly controlled, but can never be organised on their own terms. It is the constant process of trying to move from a body without organs to an organism that women are caught within. This is precisely where power lies in \textit{Tank Girl} - in the intransient ambiguous (thirdspace) moment. In being able to fold and move this body without organs women can subvert systems of power because “a BwO is made in such a way that it can be occupied only by intensities.”\textsuperscript{25} So while it can be colonised by coherent and deliberate modes of oppression, it can also be appropriated by discourses of subversion. As a result, women become shapeshifters and are able to consciously exist within and without their femininity. Their ability to expertly perform multiple roles becomes the benchmark against which their worthiness as ‘good women’ is measured.\textsuperscript{26} Despite the inscription of femininity by external, predominantly patriarchal institutions onto the female body, the category of Woman is not static. It must - and does - constantly change depending on time and place. Women are not only acted upon by the world but do exist within and impact upon it.\textsuperscript{27} Being a ‘good woman’ means different things in varied contexts. Though, this ideal is ultimately unattainable.

\textbf{[T]here is no specific behaviour which in itself will fulfill the ideals of femininity. The ideals are static, representing a state of being. But a woman is always in a process of becoming, of making herself.}\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{ibid.}, p. 153
\textsuperscript{26} J. J. Matthews, \textit{Good and mad women: The construction of femininity in twentieth century Australia}, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984), p. 4
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{ibid.}, p. 5
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{ibid.}, p. 6
Women live in a state of disorder and contradiction. They are therefore positioned within the framing power of a patriarchal system to order them. Women’s bodies are unruly. They leak, grow, and are penetrable. This body without organs is “now nothing more than a set of valves, locks, floodgates, bowls or communicating vessels.”29 Women’s bodies are malleable, leaky and excessive. Defined against the male ideal of impenetrable hardness, women’s embodiment is problematic. Women are the locus of a dangerously potent transgression.

In menstruation, women bleed but do not die; in intercourse, women’s bodily boundaries are crossed, ‘violated’ though pleasure results; in pregnancy another human lives inside a woman’s body; in nursing, another human eats from a woman’s body.30 Such excessive embodiment serves to bring about a consciousness of corporeality in which the Cartesian distinction is called into question. Relying on this model to describe and account for rational thought, results in an easy alignment of women with madness. When the body is defined deviantly, diseases of the mind are displaced onto corporeal corruption.

Mad men were defined through the body. It was only in the mid-nineteenth century in England and France that madness was constructed a ‘female’ problem more insistently than it was a male one.31 The overarching figure of masculine madness relied on violence, animality and physical agitation.32 These were men who could not be confined by their skin, so their bodies would be confined for them in mental institutes.

29 Deleuze and Guattari, *op cit.*, p. 150
30 Matthews, *op cit.*, p. 6
32 *ibid.*
[M]adness borrowed its face from the mask of the beast. Those chained to the cell walls were no longer men whose minds had wandered, but beasts preyed upon by mental frenzy.33

These madmen experienced a madness of aggression played out in the images of chains, violence and animality. Insanity was constructed as a disease or flaw in genetic makeup. The changes to these representations came at a crucial moment in which madness increasingly came to be understood as a problem of unreason. This irrationality aligned with the imperialist ethic of ‘irrationalising’ and ‘feminising’ indigenes in colonies to reconcile their resistance to this invasion. Representations of madness moved from the masculine to the feminine, where understandings of unreason were aligned with emotion, feelings and hysteria. Women’s unruly bodies become the perfect vehicle - a disordered embodiment creates a disordered rationality.

The stereotype of a muscular, seminude, raving male lunatic retained a central position among masculine stereotypes of mental disorder until the early eighteenth century, when it was supplanted by the Augustan preference for defining madness as a defect in reasoning.34

Irrational feminine subjectivities replaced the animality of male madness. Women’s out of control corporeality corrupted their ‘meager’ minds. The absence of reason became popularly represented in the melancholic, lovelorn women of Jane Austen, Emily and Charlotte Bronte novels.35 These irrational women become central to the constructions of femininity. Confined by the corsetry of courteous behaviour, while simultaneously embodying a desiring subject, reduce these women to crumbling emotionality. The contradictions in feminine subjectivity, subverts the coherency of ‘good womanhood’. This is “because femininity is an idealised and illusionary

34 Kromm, op cit., [full text]
quality, and because it is composed of inconsistent and contradictory parts, [and] its pursuit is doomed to failure." Matthews, op cit., p. 8

The chameleonic corporeality women must conform to, denies the coherency of a feminine subject. In **Tank Girl**, the Rain Lady embraces the contradictions of the performance of a good woman. She embodies disorder through her performance of madness as she rants and raves to the ‘Sky – Gods’ in a hysterical performance of the discrepancies in femininity. The potential for failure is denied. The problematic ‘open’ embodiment (as opposed to male hardness and closure) of femininity is celebrated by the Rain Lady. She parodies the politics perpetuated by patriarchy and “tea-bag weak liberal feminism” Tara Brabazon, **Ladies who lunge, op cit.**, p. 83, expresses her disdain at the dismissal of the important film roles played by such women as Bette Davis, Katharine Hepburn and Sharon Stone as “teabag-weak liberal feminism.” She suggests these roles were radically important for the feminist movement and deserve more critical attention than they currently receive within the accepted second and third wave paradigms of feminism.

Scene from **Tank Girl**, written by Tedi Sarafian, directed by Rachel Talalay, (United Artists: MGM, 1995)
about one of her items recognized by Tank Girl, she wavers between truth and tenacity, remaining ambiguous until she chooses to render a straight answer. In recognising resistance, her tone of voice changes in pitch and her body posture shifts from wide-eyed twitching, to a relaxed and resigned poise.

| RL: | But I always speak the truth. |
| RL: | “LIAR” |
| RL: | Alright … I ah, I ah … caught it in my fish pond, on a stick. |
| RL: | “LIAR” |
| RL: | Alright, alright, alright, alright … They were selling a girl’s stuff after they’d taken her prisoner. I bought it. It was sad really. |
| Tank Girl: | What’d they do with the girl? |
| RL: | First tell me what Water and Power want with her? |
| Tank Girl: | We’re not Water and Power, we’re escaped prisoners. |
| RL: | Oh in that case. Oh it was terrible, they put her to work in town at Liquid Silver. |

The Rain Lady moves in and out of different subjectivities through smooth, seamless transitions. Within a series of discursive movements, she performs multiple and contradictory roles of the ‘good woman’. She is concurrently, emotional and unreasonable and rational and coherent. The contradictions of femininity are central to her engagement with those around her, and by empowering these contradictions, she subverts the problematics failure. She is not a ‘good woman’, though she is literate in that role - as she is in the role of madness, mothering, resistance and capitalism. In choosing to embrace madness, she exists beyond systems of power and is able to infiltrate the masculine knowledges inside and outside dominant discourses. The Rain Lady is not, and cannot be defined in simple terms. Her performance is too contradictory for her madness to be simply the hysterical nature of a problematic embodiment. The feminine body remains the site upon which meanings are imposed and circulate through gender and sexuality. Women are chaste through expectations of

39 *ibid.*
appropriate, moral, middle class behaviour, simultaneously concealing and revealing bodies. Now it appears that everything is on display, no, must be on display.

Selling sex

The spectacle of bodies on show provides a series of complexities for women. Indeed, “women are ‘the sex’.” However this concept gathers together a series of competing discourses designed to retain women in a holding pattern, never able to satisfy the expectations of good womanhood. Women must not want, invite or enjoy sex, but they are inherently sexually potent femme fatales that must be careful to conceal their sex in case it attracts, or is responsible for, the unwanted attention from the overly sexed male. In sexual ideological shifts from reproduction to pleasure, women’s bodies have become both objects for consumption as well as production. For women, sex is “entirely limited to the function of reproduction.” She does not have any sexual feelings. She does not have sexual desire or enjoyment. To stumble into this terrain, results in either hysteria or whoring - both the antithesis of the good woman. Women’s bodies are also the fodder of and for men. Women do not have sexual identity separate from men. Heterosexuality bundles women into stable subjugated subjectivities through their purpose in satisfying male pleasure and submitting to the order of society through reproducing, not only biologically, but social systems of power represented in the family, marriage and community. This not only disenfranchises homosexual and bisexual choices, but celibate and single subjects. Steven Heath suggests that women are “sexually … man’s object and falls

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41 Don Macmillan suggests in *Sex-Life: A critical commentary on the history of sexuality*, (London: Pluto Press, 1993), that there has been an increasing shift in sexual ideologies in our society from reproduction, to the search for bigger and better orgasms.
42 Heath, *op cit.*, p. 18
43 *ibid.*, p. 12
under his order and authority.” Contemporary texts like *Sex and the City* depict sexually soaked singles seeking heterosexual happiness. These fabulously funny women are young, successful, fashionable and assertive. However, their bed-hopping habits both celebrate and problematise the sex-life of singles. Contradictions about being a good woman are inherently and completely about contradictions in sex. The relationships between women’s bodies, sex and power are complex at best. The sexually powerful woman is vilified as “the dark shadow of the bestial whore.” Women must not ‘do it’, and if they do, they must not enjoy it. Women problematise sexuality because they must simultaneously be sex, have reproductive sex and not want sex. This activates a crisis, because sexuality is stably defined, flowing along the sex-gender-sexuality continuum where genital organs determine desire. For women to exist in such contradictory and complex circumstances, means that sexuality, “is always political.” Sexuality is a series of choices, framed by dominant visualisations of effective, productive sex. Gayle Rubin explains that “desires are not preexisting biological entities … they are constituted in the course of historically specific social practices.” Where women and sex converge produces multiple and contradictory range of meanings that intersect and diverge through women’s bodies. They are not fixed. They shift in unpredictable ways. Men’s status opposite women is tethered to this ambiguous and androgynous corporeality. Patriarchy loses control over its own meanings. Women really can corrupt men.

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44 *ibid.*, p. 25  
45 *ibid.*, p. 17  
46 One contemporary text to deal with feminine sexual pleasure was *Cruel Intentions*, written and directed by Roger Kumble, (Columbia Pictures, 1999)  
48 *ibid.*, p. 10
The intimate relationship between men and women in framing and fixing sexuality resonates. Women must be defined as different, as excessive and problematic, “man’s identity depends on it, he needs the opposite sex as a guarantee of his.”49 When control over women’s meanings is lost, so is the control over men’s. This is unacceptable. As sexual identities become increasingly contingent, the notion of sex unlocking or being aligned with some deep essence of the self becomes problematic. Sexuality is not “experienced as a pretty much fixed, natural expression of our biology.”50 A politics of sexuality can expose the gendered frameworks that legitimise mainstream sexual practices. Sex does not reveal the true self or access enlightened ‘oblivion’. Sex is about consumption. The product of purchase is the orgasm.

Orgasms are the core to mainstream sexual practices (read heterosexual sex).51 If one is not climaxing, then there is something wrong.

Once admitted to the Order, the hold on sex-life must be maintained at all costs because loss of sex-life will result in nasty suspicions, suspicions that concern your capacity for oblivion, and consequently, your fitness for life. So, come alone, come together, come apart. Do whatever you like, but do come.52

Don Macmillan spotlights the power the orgasm holds over sexual partners and practices. Stephen Heath suggests this value is contingent only on climaxing within the context of ‘healthy’ heterosexual sex. The decision to refrain from sexual intercourse remains a determination of ridicule and fascination in which celibates are stared at incredulously for their abstinence and asked about ‘how they manage’.53 Celibacy is not just a rejection of sex, but a rejection of the patriarchal power inscribed within the dominant heterosexuality. The politics of sex are spotlighted

49 Heath, op cit., p. 27
50 Macmillan, op cit., p. 12
51 Heath, op cit., p. 61
52 Macmillan, op cit., p. 1
within the celibacy discourse. For women, it is not simply a case of rejecting the penis for lesbian sex, but the rejection of the power and problems that circulate through sexual choices. Good women must desire the penis and therefore empower the system of social relations that extend from this organ. By choosing to not have sex, it is also a desire to subvert a dominant patriarchal and capitalist system.

This is a consumer society. An assumption built into it is that we should all be eager consumers of sexual activity. Women in particular should consume and accept sexual congress along with beauty products, diet regimes, low wages and violent inflections, as part of a contemporary cultural system which aims to checkmate power in aspiring women’s lives.

The celibate woman is not consuming, and therefore is not participating in, her own oppression. Sex is about exchange, not just of bodily fluids, but of power. However, this exchange is unequal. Heterosexual sex dominantly demonstrates the power of penetration and the series of social inequalities activated ideologically in this moment. The vagina in this equation is frequently framed as a danger. Its power lies on the level of exchange. It reworks power when it becomes a commodity. Prostitution is a contradiction precisely because it frames women as commodities. That a woman may be so dispossessed that she must sell her body is a serious and significant problem. That women can also use systems of oppression to survive creates space for a reworking of prostitution politics. Prostitution is not resistance - it is compliance. For women to activate a conscious reinscription of this system, they must mask oppressive pimping of female bodies, in favour of marketing desire and sexuality as a consumable product. Prostitution’s status amongst “the most despised sexual castes

54 For more on this debate see Charlotte Bunch, “Not for lesbians only,” in S. Gunew, (ed.), A reader in feminist knowledge, (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 319 - 325
55 Cline, op cit., p. 1
56 Barbara Creed, The monstrous feminine: Film feminism, psychoanalysis, (London: Routledge, 1993), most effectively demonstrates how women’s sexuality is framed as dangerous in popular horror and slasher films. A key example from popular culture is the character of Xenia Onatopp in James Bond: Goldeneye, written by Jeffrey Caine and Bruce Feirstein, directed by Martin Campbell, (United Artists: MGM, 1995), who killed men by squeezing them to death between her legs while having sex.
 currently include[ing] … sex workers such as prostitutes and porn models”\textsuperscript{57} signifies how women’s bodies are encased by commodification and deviance.

Commodifying sex works contrary to women’s status as simultaneously sexually subdued and seductive sirens. It empties women’s bodies of their schizophrenic potency, but regulates them through consumption. In an oddly perverse manner, women enter into the public sphere of production, consumption and transaction. Sex workers form a threat because they offer the potential for economic autonomy and disrupt the flow of power between men and women. By turning sex and sexuality into a transaction, women negotiate for power. Women have always negotiated in this manner in the bedroom. When this transaction takes place in the public sphere, sex becomes problematic. It transgresses acceptable, public values of sexuality. As a result, “the legal persecution of both populations [gay men and prostitutes] is justified by an elaborate ideology which classifies them as dangerous and inferior undesirables.”\textsuperscript{58} With sex in the public sphere, the patriarchal system attempts to re-exert its power by legislating against, not only prostitution, but also so-called deviant sex acts such as sodomy, oral sex, S&M and underage sex.\textsuperscript{59}

In the futuristic world of \textit{Tank Girl}, sex is visibly in the public sphere. Liquid Silver is a sanctioned place of business in 2033. This brothel is run by a wealthy, exotic woman known only as The Madam and caters primarily (in the film) to male heterosexual desire. The politics of sex become visible in this space where The Madam engages the capitalist system of consumption and exchange to thrive in an

\textsuperscript{57} Rubin, \textit{op cit.}, p. 12 \hfill \textsuperscript{58} \textit{ibid.}, p. 18 \hfill \textsuperscript{59} \textit{ibid.}, p. 19
oppressive patriarchal landscape. Like the Rain Lady, she both confirms and subverts the place of female sexuality in society. She is participating in oppressive practices however, in prising open a space between compliance and resistance, she is reworking power. She reinforces sexual hierarchies and reconfirms the role and place of women’s bodies in these meanings. Male heterosexual desires are catered for, and women’s are bodies on display. However, in catering to this system she reinscribes the exchange process. As a female running a business, she is able to dictate the terms on which the exchange takes place. To be an effective business woman she must perform and reinforce dominant expectations of patriarchy. Her consciousness in this process articulates a reflexive interrogation of sexual power and politics. She is framed within this discourse as simultaneously ruthlessly astute, and intelligently resilient. While her working women are surrounding and clothed in the very best attire and furnishings, she does send an 11 year old girl off with a pathetic paedophile. The Madam does problematise the prevailing perceptions that women simply cannot manage in the business world. She is an unscrupulous, morally questionable matriarch. She is not a nasty or overbearing boss. A man able to make astute business decisions is powerful - a woman is a bitch.

The Madam challenges male heterosexual power, by validating it and simultaneously subverting it. That a woman may only have economic expertise in sex remains a site of contention. She opens a space in which female sexuality is detached from bodies. Their bodies occupy time and space as self-reflexive constructions that reworks meanings into the control of women. As women reinterpret sexuality, male sexuality becomes unstuck from power and compromised. Male desire becomes absurd in Tank Girl. Ruled by their desires, they become easily lead and manipulated by women. The
only ‘men’ in this text whose sexuality is not threatened or threatening are the ‘Rippers’, half human, half Kangaroo warriors. Their liminal position allows them to exist between binarial definitions of gender and sex. These ‘creatures’ still objectify women in half hearted, futile ways, however, they too are marginalised within the patriarchal system to pose a significant threat. They are not power brokers within this environment. Although they can mobilise the meanings of masculinity, their performance is always obviously flawed. Their access to male heterosexual power is tempered. The Rippers lack the currency to impose dominant meanings on women. They also occupy a peculiar position in the dominant hierarchy. They hold contradiction in common with women. Their overt deconstruction of capitalist, patriarchal systems is embodied in their rejection of traditional power structures. Their community is based on consent. Spiritual life - articulated through beatnik poetry - occupies a centralised core to their lives. They are warriors but reject the corruption of weapons in battle. The Rippers hold onto some sense authentic masculinity outside of oppression. They do not reproduce the power of the patriarchal system. They are therefore not threatened by the presence of otherness or of the political currency of femininity. This is why they are the heroes in this film. They are able to negotiate and embrace feminist politics without activating a crisis. *Tank Girl* offers a threat to these established patriarchal knowledges.

The Madam is a threat to patriarchal power because she is not concerned by that power, except in the manner in which it can benefit her. The biggest threat to her comes in the form of other women who do not exert ideological power over her, but are aware of how she engages performance to empower herself. Her attention to surface, style, make-up and fashion serve as a façade through which she presents
herself to the patriarchal world as a non-threat. She abides by the rules of femininity in making herself attractive. She plays the game of the good woman. It is when other women threaten to remove that façade, to reveal the empowered women beneath, that she is threatened. The layers of meaning made up on The Madam, is intimidated by Rebecca (Tank Girl), when she threatens to scrape off all her makeup and ‘give her a nice new hairstyle’. It is only then that The Madam is forced to cooperate. Her attention to beauty functions politically. It is the surface, the mask behind which she is able to hide her subversion.

Women do have ability to mobilise such masking devices. Their ability to function within a patriarchal world both as subversive women and respectable ladies lies in their ability to camouflage themselves. “Beauty is many things”\(^{60}\) however, attaining and maintaining beauty is an integral part of many women’s identities. Moreover, the measure of a good woman is often akin to attractiveness.\(^{61}\) The more beautiful a woman, the more virtuous, happy and successful she is. This is to the extent that, “beauty correlates positively with their [women’s] degree of happiness and self-esteem.”\(^{62}\) However, beauty embeds deep contradictions in women with what it means to be feminine. A woman who is too beautiful, too adorned with beautiful accoutrements, too conscious of her beauty, is a dangerous woman. She is the femme fatale, the destroyer of men.\(^{63}\) Or she is the Medusa who was so beautiful that when

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\(^{61}\) *ibid.*, p. 6

\(^{62}\) *ibid.*, p. 10

men looked at her they became captivated, paralysed and then turned to stone.\textsuperscript{64} Similarly, the beauty of the Siren’s sweet song was enough to drive men to insanity.

**Being Beautiful**

There is a wavering boundary between the Goddess and the prostitute. In many contexts, women inhabit both these positions simultaneously because “as a symbol of seduction and sin, the woman was redeemed in chastity and pardoned in modesty.”\textsuperscript{65} It is important to be beautiful, but not too beautiful. The ambivalence of this position has produced great anxiety for many women who struggle to mould their bodies into such a precarious position. To be both beautiful and non-threatening means that “being overtly sexual is wrong [but] so is a total desexualised message.”\textsuperscript{66} Women must be beautiful to the extent that they can be objectified. If a woman is not ‘naturally’ beautiful (or indeed even if she is) she must go to great lengths to acquire beauty or to maintain it. A good woman pursues, maintains and embraces beauty and the sense of self that exudes from its acquisition. A woman who does not engage in contemporary expectations of femininity is deemed transgressive and deviant. The slightest hint of unsightly hair is enough to incite accusations from Butch to Bitch. Women must maintain rigorous attention to their appearance if they wish to remain ‘women’. She must have “a permanent awareness of her appearance and the impact of her appearance on others.”\textsuperscript{67} Women embody not only desire, but spectacle. A woman’s body is permanently and visibly marked at all times. Lipstick, rouged cheeks, painted nails, and eyeshadow signify a performance of femininity. So

\textsuperscript{65} *ibid.*, p. 12
\textsuperscript{66} *ibid.*, p. 31
\textsuperscript{67} *ibid.*, p. 13
“women normalise themselves by signaling their abnormality.”68 Women are expected to participate in their own marginalisation. They are required to call attention to their difference from men. Women are othered and objectified. Naomi Wolf and Rita Freedman critique the role of beauty in women’s lives. Naomi Wolf wrote *The Beauty Myth* in the late 1980s to demonstrate the extent to which beauty is used to regulate women and to trivialise them. She explains that “we are in the midst of a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women’s advancement: The beauty myth.”69 Wolf argues that as women began to break through many of the barriers that prevented them from entering into a legitimate debate within patriarchy, the images and knowledges used against women changed. Beauty increasingly became the commodity through which women’s roles in the public sphere were subverted. It resulted in “the gaunt youthful model supplant[ing] the happy housewife as the arbiter of successful womanhood.”70 Beauty and a new emphasis on beauty products, was the new way in which women were not only tied to the domestic sphere (literally in the bathroom or bedroom in front of the mirror), but marked as the other. Many feminists, particularly second wavers, advocated a vehement rejection of feminine beauty. Before Wolf and *The Beauty Myth*, feminists protested beauty pageants for their validation of an ideal feminine beauty and the objectification of women. These pageants were seen to reaffirm the idea that women’s bodies and sense of self are tied together in an unbreakable bond. The moment that has most obviously and publicly marked the second wave feminist movement, for better or worse, was the protest outside the Miss

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68 Freedman, *op cit.*, p. 30
70 *ibid.*, p. 11
America Pageant in 1968, at which women disposed of dominant signifiers of their oppression and the myth of the bra burners was born.

In *Tank Girl*, the role of Jet girl embodies this conundrum. Jet is shy, quiet and efficient. She is a technically competent female who desperately hopes that her performance on the job will outshine any marginalisation based on her gender. Jet ‘tears down’ engines efficiently, and in order to be taken seriously her beauty too, is stripped down. The consummate professional, she rebuffs the unwanted sexual harassment of Sergeant Small by appearing ‘unattractive’. She does not embrace beauty rituals of dominant femininity. She remains concise, efficient and competent at her job and hopes to be taken seriously. This does not work, and it is only through mock involvement in a lesbian relationship - the most offensive slap-in-the-face to the sleazy Sergeant - that she is able to rebuff him. This of course, results in her most severe punishment: denial of her role in the workplace. As an ‘object’, Jet must always be available for male consumption. Her attempts to be defined separately from this category, is futile. Simultaneously, the relationship between beauty and embodiment is strong in Jet. Her sense of self-worth is still tied to her body, of which she is uncomfortable. While giggling at Rebecca’s subversive sense of humour, Jet lowers her head and turns inwards on herself. Rebecca asks her; “Why do you cover your mouth like that when you laugh? Do you have really bad teeth or something?” Thereby demonstrating the extent to which women are taught to confine, repress and subvert themselves. Jet is so hyper-conscious of her femininity it is encoded as a physical disability. Rebecca activates a shift in the knowledges around beauty and femininity and deconstructs prevailing perceptions that “preoccupation with
appearance is considered both normal and healthy in women.” Women need not reject beauty in order to be taken seriously. Indeed their beauty is so inherent in the construction of the self that in rejecting it denies a fundamental building block in feminine empowerment. Beauty is a commodity that can be easily constructed through masking devices. Rebecca encourages Jet to embrace the spectacle. If women are indeed objects regardless, then what it means to be an object is the terrain upon which women can claim some control. As the film progresses, confidence and cosmetics are uniquely entwined through Jet’s body. As she becomes more assertive, she also becomes more attractive. She discovers power on the surfaces of herself. She claims her body, while concurrently refusing to be defined solely by it. This reaches its zenith towards the end of the film where Sergeant Small, upon being confronted with an assertive and attractive Jet at Water and Power headquarters exclaims; “Fuck me!” In true self-reflexive and empowered style, Jet reworks her objectification as the object of male sexual desire, and claims the empowering space of the femme fatale by responding; “How many times do I have to tell you? I don’t want to.” She then dispatches him with one shot, blowing on the barrel like Dirty Harry. Jet reinscribes beauty and herself. She demonstrates feminine flexibility by using the tools assigned to her in oppression to embrace the contradictions on femininity. She is beautiful and she is resourceful, but she is also tough, because she is concealed - she has her armour on. Most crucially, she does not have to adopt masculine notions of machismo in order to be tough and assertive - she can be beautiful.

From Bitch to Buffy

Freedman, op cit., p. 31
Tough women are often too easily vilified as bitches. Women have a hard time being tough. Sherri Inness’s book: *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture*\(^2\) ponders popular pictures of assertive women. One of her key arguments circles around *The Avenger’s* Emma Peel as a ‘tough girl’. She states that though there is an increase in the representation of tough women in the popular media, this iconography is usually tempered. Costuming, make-up and narrative action in which these women need to be rescued by male leads, functions to make them less threatening. Inness cites many examples where the strong, resourceful, tough woman is subverted by her emotional and physical weakness, sexuality or fashion sense, or indeed her more competent male companion. Women now have less need to be rescued. Xena, Scully, Janeway and Buffy out-think and out-class their colleagues and opponents. These tough women occupy an important position within the representational field, because they open spaces for more diverse women within the realm of popular culture and the public sphere. There is still stigma attached to these scandalously tough women on our screens. Feminism has furthered the representational practices in the media, but difficult women remain a conundrum. In *Tank Girl*, Rebecca articulates a toughness and resilience in a variety of ways. For Rebecca, the category of woman and its accompanying masquerade of sex, make-up, fashion and beauty, activates her performance. Using make-up like war paint, fashion like camouflage and sex as a commodity she trammels across the landscape in loud, undignified defiance. Her singular tough ‘atti-tood’ enables her to physically and emotionally look after herself *because* she is a woman, not in spite of it. Rebecca is tough because she is able to embrace the contradictions in femininity. Her reflexivity frees her from the expectations of others and the patriarchal system. Rebecca uses

compliance as resistance. The consequences she and the other female roles activate in this film, is that they project an operational feminist politics that works within a patriarchal system simultaneously articulating a feminist consciousness.

Rebecca is sexualised as a desirable woman, she uses fashion to objectify herself, even offering sexual favours so that she can reinscribe the flow of power. Her chameleonic consciousness is the key to activating feminism. It is on the terrain of phallocentric, patriarchal, hegemonic marginalisation, where Rebecca employs a resonance of rupture. This comes in the sense of play she embraces, where meanings are not timeless nor static, but rather irreverent and open to interrogation. This carnivalesque revelry is not a simple inversion where hierarchies are inverted. It is a moment where Rebecca plays on the terrain of the masculine, embracing and subverting her role as a woman. Under the ‘masque of femininity’ and its performance through fashion and beauty, Rebecca is political and powerful. Her punk style resonates through her self, her fashion and her decisions, to dramatically transgress the perceptions of traditional femininity. It is through this punk aesthetic that Rebecca inscribes her toughness.

The punk movement was characterised by, “musicians who realise[d] that politics [was] … inseparable from life.”73 Of course The Sex Pistols were and continue to be the band to capture the punk moment of, “fucking up the record industry and creating a new, disobedient cultural consumer.”74 This ideology extended beyond the record

73 J. Burchill and T. Parsons, The boy looked at Johnny: The obituary of rock and roll, (introduction by Lenny Kaye), (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987), p. 77
companies to wider society. Punks inverted and rewrote the meanings of everyday life via bricolage. It was a style, but it was also a resistance. In contemporary times, these ‘disobedient cultural consumers’ are women, known via third wave feminism as Riot Grrrls. Garrison has identified Riot Grrrls as, “a recent young feminist (sub)cultural movement that combines feminist consciousness and punk aesthetics, politics and style.”75 The 1970s punk movement was a rebellion against hegemonic processes. It recognised and detested the manner in which “the counterculture was being swallowed up by consumer society.”76 Punk was deliberately offensive, provocative, violent and distasteful. It reveled in a sense of play, and most importantly, it took dominant culture and inverted it. Its sense of bricolage reworked everyday objects into something new. As a result, “punk clothes were ripped, pierced with safety pins, and decorated with swastikas, pornographic images, lavatory chains and tampons.”77 Punk was a deliberate re-framing of dominant discourses using dominant cultural artefacts. It relied on a sense of excess, of breaking boundaries and embracing taboos. It treaded on the silenced unpopular portions of politics and reflexively marked that terrain. It used, “cheap trashy fabrics (PVC, plastic, Lurex, etc) in vulgar designs and ‘nasty’ colours … which offered self-conscious commentaries on the notions of modernity and taste.”78 The punks were, above all, self-reflexive and they relied on their sense of style to create this distancing effect. The spectacular play of style, featured in the punk aesthetic, drew links with the excess of 1930s cabaret. The film Cabaret was released in 1972 and, “made the look of 1930s style ‘decadence’ available to a wider

77 ibid., p. 287
audience.”79 The excess and play that can be found in this film was picked up by the punks who embraced the, “cabaret freaks and perverse sex.”80 This style of performance relies on fluidity, transgression and moral ambiguity. Cabaret “promise[s] to contribute further to … liberating instability.”81 This ethic was summoned by punks who wished to pervert, offend and transgress as many moral, social and political boundaries (especially around sex) as they could. The Riot Grrrls sought their own place within the self-consciousness of style, by appropriating the masculine signifiers of punk aesthetic that made their lifestyle a commodity.

In the 1990s, feminism blended effectively with these politics. Riot Grrrls use punk style to embrace excessiveness in everyday life consumption and to rework the politics intersecting through men, women, sex, youth, class and consumption. Riot Grrrls generate self-reflexivity about their roles as women. The excessiveness of their performance calls attention to the constructions of the feminine representation. Rebecca, in Tank Girl, performs femininity to excess. She embraces her feminine role as a sexual object for the pleasure of men. However she changes her appearance constantly (every scene) in a parody of the function of femininity. She is surface, always moving, shifting and changing. She is Janus-faced. Her overt attention to appearance is excessive and reveals the masking device of good womanhood. The Riot Grrrl movement is based on this capacity to ‘exist’ in two places at once. That being a woman and even embracing the performance of femininity is not something that must be or needs to be transcended ignored or inverted. In this film, feminism is

79 Steel, op cit., p. 291
80 ibid.
simultaneously consumed and performed. It seeks to reinscribe the category of woman within consumption to layer toughness through a political and social consciousness. Riot Grrrls effectively inscribe this space.

[A]n alternative subculture built around opposition to presuppositions that young (usually white) … girls and woman are too preoccupied with themselves and boys to be interested in being political, creative and loud.\(^8^2\)

The hard edge of feminism manifests and moves through these women who claim voices and violence to articulate consciousness. It dialogues with the third wave ethic where women’s consumption activities appear to reduce radical revelry. In *Tank Girl*, Rebecca is preoccupied with surface, style, sex, boys, tanks and beer, but she is also loud, obnoxious and even annoying. Her shaved head provokes punk excessiveness that contradicts a fashion sense that focuses on fragmenting and sexualising her body through a mish-mash of bricolage and punk style. She combines a multitude of contradictory signifiers to call attention to femininity, empowerment, sex and dominant knowledge systems. This radical appropriation of style is made clear in a scene where Rebecca and Jet Girl infiltrate the Liquid Silver Brothel. Rebecca encounters a room designed to school prostitutes in assembling the correct image and sense of fashion for their occupation. In attempting to follow the instructions of the holographic model, Rebecca subverts the pedagogical systems represented and assembles an outfit that combines a punk aesthetic of fishnet stockings and big boots, with excessive feminine style of feather boas and cigarette holders. She tries to follow the rules and embraces conventional consumption-based femininity. However, she also rewrites the rules and combines meanings in all the wrong ways. Not only is this evident through her mobilisation of punk, but most particularly through her rejection of conventional femininity and mainstream consumer feminism. Her use of the

\(^8^2\) Garrison, *op cit.*, [full text]
masculinist rhetoric of war appropriates the tools of the masculine world she lives in. Rebecca’s appropriation of the tank metaphorically acquires masculinity as a cargo. Her literacy in technology and violence weaves masculine modalities into her feminine façade.

**Accessorising Big Willie**

Masculine power is reworked by Rebecca. She takes their symbolic systems and redefines them. This is the radical rupturing potential of feminism. In *Tank Girl*, there are no exclusively masculine and feminine spheres. In this world, men can no longer be secure in the stability of their masculine inscriptions of power: like the Tank. It can no longer easily signify masculine power resonating through an industrial military complex. The tank is not sexy. It is cumbersome. However, the tank has come to resonate in our imaginings of modern day warfare. The ‘success’ of the tank in the 1991 Gulf War etched the armored vehicle into our minds. Tanks were the ‘face’ of this conflict as they streamed across the Saudi/Iraqi desert annihilating more than 1400 Iraqi tanks with their controversial DU (Depleted Uranium) armor-piercing bullets.\(^83\) The tank has not always occupied such a high profile position. In fact, “no weapon had a harder time working its way into the world’s arsenal than the tank.”\(^84\) It has always been a weapon of ‘the future’. The first tanks, or rather, armored vehicles, made their debut in France on September 15, 1915, where they provided support for the trenched soldiers. These first fighters were known as ‘Little Willie’. As a result of

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\(^83\) These new weapons were very controversial as it is suggested by Gary Cohen in his article, “Radioactive ammo lays them to waste” *Multinational Monitor*, vol. 17, no. 1-2, January-February 1996, Accessed online, 11\(^{th}\) October 2000, Expanded Academic Index Database, A18160262, [full text]. He affirms that it was reported soon after the Gulf War that these weapons contaminated soldiers with radiation. He further suggests that US soldiers were not warned of the dangers in handling these weapons and the only memo released by the Pentagon addressing these concerns was released some eight days after the fighting had ceased.

\(^84\) Jim Wilson, “A century of warfare” *Popular Mechanics*, vol. 177, i. 1, January 2000, Accessed online, 11\(^{th}\) October 2000, Expanded Academic Index Database, A58616742, [full text]
some problems with ‘Little Willie’, ‘Big Willie’ was born and soon redefined land warfare.\textsuperscript{85} Size it seemed, did matter, as ‘Big Willie’ found it easier to cross wider trenches, making ‘Little Willie’ inadequate to the task.\textsuperscript{86} No better weapon signifies the masculine battlefield than the tank. It literally is a giant phallus penetrating enemy landscape. No better symbol of the masculine terrain of war exists. War is overtly and insistently inscribed as an exclusively male, heterosexual realm. Men comprise the bulk of the standing armies in our world and “as well as being the main actors of war, men have also been the main victims.”\textsuperscript{87} Men are routinely sent into battle for the state and the family. Accompanying the canon-fodder, the lasting effects of battle-fatigue, emotional trauma and depression resulting from battlefield engagements are silent psychoses.

Rebecca rewrites the rhetoric of war by appropriating masculine technology for her resistive raid on dominant ideologies. She deconstructs and appropriates phallic power. Rebecca is immediately taken with the real, mythological and magical power possessed by her tank. She falls in love with it. Its symbolic power is a desirable currency for women. She reinscribes its phallocentrism through fashion. Rebecca redecorates her tank with an armchair, sunshade, barbecue and an assortment of accessories to feminize her tank, and rework phallic power. She demonstrates distance between men and their power - the penis and the phallus. Rebecca uses the tools of patriarchal empowerment in a perversion of its intention. Uttering, “oh my God! … the sheer size of it!” in surprise, Rebecca reveals and parodies the processes of phallic

\textsuperscript{85} ibid.


power, and claims it for women. Her radical revelry in appropriation mobilises a more extreme feminist politics than any formalised structure. This film’s deprioritising of masculine, patriarchal ideologies punctuates its plot. The appropriation of masculinity, to support and define femininity, functions to invert gender hierarchies. Rebecca’s commandeering of the masculine tools enables a raid of the patriarchal meanings systems. She rewrites the relationships between women, war and weaponry.

Women’s roles in armies have been consistently supportive roles. They are nurses, secretaries and administrative personnel. The increasing role of women in supportive combat roles (mechanics, logistics, heavy artillery, and air support) has coincided with the increasing technologisation of war and the development of, “long-distance weapons that eliminate ‘the front’. ”88 Women’s roles in the military have become visible in a time when images of war are becoming increasingly distant from its real effects.89 Women’s visibility in the public sphere has also meant it has become increasingly difficult to exclude them from the defense of the state. However, they still maintain only a secondary role compared to that of men. In the future, - the Tank Girl future - the ‘front line’ soldier has all but disappeared. They have been replaced by mid-ranked service personnel such as Sergeant Small, and decision making personnel like Kesslee. The soldier role has been converted to that of a brutal police force. It forms a liminal position, and draws on some of the familiar hegemonic mechanisms of violent heterosexual masculinity that pepper the military institution, and places it within a civilian context. Ideologies of state sanctioned violence do not

88 ibid., p. 9
89 War has become increasingly sanitised and efficient. Smart bombs, heavy artillery, long-distance warfare and new forms of technology have made the necessity of hand to hand combat increasingly redundant. This is epitomised in the Gulf War which was watched on CNN and featured efficient bombing of enemy ‘targets’. 
occur within only one context, but spread out to infiltrate everyday civilian codes. Through the police force, “the state … become[s] the vehicle of calculated violence based on and using hegemonic masculinity.”

Rebecca’s mobilisation of military hardware in the defense of feminine autonomy deconstructs the resonance of masculine hegemony. In *Tank Girl*, Water and Power are a future rendering of a state controlled by private interests and private police forces. Kesslee is an entrepreneur, not an elected official. He does not sit in government, he acquires power and markets. The currency of this power is water. As the head of Water and Power, Kesslee commands a force of men who acquire and control the water for him. However, they are largely incompetent men. Early in the film, a soldier who captures Rebecca and then ‘accepts’ a sexual favour from his captive, meets his death between her legs as she snaps his neck. This moronic masculinity is embodied by Sergeant Small who insists on harassing Jet Girl. The violence of these men is not only physical, but emotional. The constant attention of Sergeant Small is exhausting. The soldier’s embrace of a violent heterosexual subjectivity is ultimately his undoing. Even despite the warning he receives from his colleague that she will ‘bite it off’, he must maintain his control and access to phallocentric power. In snapping his neck, Rebecca performs an overtly violent ‘masculine’ act. She appropriates the ideologies masculinity to articulate a feminist consciousness in marginalisation and mainstream power. In 2033, when the army exists as an ultra violent police force, the ideology of the military is appropriated by a woman who not only reinserts her own role as a combative soldier (not a member of the support staff), but also the role of men embodying violent heterosexuality. These men are inscribed as thugs. They are unable to move

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90 Connell, *op cit.*, p. 8
beyond the meanings they are inscribed within. They are inflexible and confined by the knowledges that empower them.

_Tank Girl_ is one of the few films circulating within the public sphere that articulates the capacity for women to reinscribe patriarchal meanings through a plurality of otherness. The four women within this film all perform roles that embody key tropes of the feminist movement. _Tank Girl_ is speaking to many different women and a diversity of their concerns. Its model for resistive and radical feminism makes it a problematic popular cultural text. Its cult status is framed in the functional feminism it presents. _Tank Girl_ creates a resistive framework. The contradictory and confluent renderings of ‘good femininity’, access the unclear spaces of gendered politics. These women can camouflage their consciousness. Ambiguity offers women a space for revelry and reflexivity closed to power processes. The liminality of their levity simultaneously structures and critiques the position of women in public and personal spaces. The consciousness activated in _Tank Girl_ presents feminism in its strengths - as radical, resistive and reflexive. The women in this film generate differing strategies to deal with, and visualise, operational power. It activates a feminist framework that critiques the consequences of patriarchy. It is in this mobilisation of unpopular politics through a popular culture artefact that _Tank Girl_ gains its cult status.
Virtual Voyeurism

The femininities functioning in *Tank Girl* offer a feminist framework of difference and diversity. Each female character performs a practical and probing perspective on femininity in the public and private spheres. The unpopular politics rendered, ratifies marginal identity and frictional femininity operating contrary to patriarchy. The boisterous women in this film critique comfortable ideologies of womanhood. Popular culture agitates at the accession of disruptive abstractions against the interests of social stability. A more congenial feminism finds visibility in contemporary culture. Feminists texts are afforded a more productive and prevalent place within popular culture when the women in them promote patriarchy.

*Tomb Raider* has become a remarkable success story in the computer gaming world. Its popularity resulted in a feature film being released in 2001. This text also engages a feminist politics. Lara Croft runs, shoots, and swims her way through the virtual terrain. She is encircled within an active and assertive discourse of survival and combat training that frames her as tough, resilient and aggressive. This text activates third wave feminism that punctuates its politics with purchases. It values fluid and flexible femininity defined through surfaces and sex appeal.
This chapter argues that *Tomb Raider*’s success is (partly) a result of its friendlier version of feminism in an era where feminist politics is unpopular. The third wave ethic is colonised by phallocentrism to rewrite the surfaces of women’s bodies in the service of mainstream maintenance of meanings.

The virtual surfaces of Lara’s silicone permits political and geographical colonisation. Her power is problematised as she plunders the past for relics, treasures and artefacts buried in the eccentric ‘east’. The tomb space renders the Orientalist ideology of empire which Lara colonises on behalf of phallocentrism.

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Chapter Four

“Brawn, Breasts and a Brain”\textsuperscript{1}: Lara Croft, Raiding the Cultural Landscape

The most remarkable quality of video and computer games [is] the way they seem to restructure perception, so that even after you’ve stopped playing, you continue to look at the world a little differently.\textsuperscript{2}

T. Freidman

I do not own a Playstation. Banned from the dangerous, liminal spaces of game arcades by well-meaning parents, I never developed an affinity for digital pleasures. In our home, the Commodore 64 sat as a dinosaur, and was off limits to the indelicate fumblings of children. My memories of this time consist of peering over my Dad’s shoulder as he twisted and poked the joystick playing “Who Dares Wins”, a rudimentary shoot-em-up action game based on World War Two battle. The games industry has traveled a long distance from these basic beginnings. By 2002, at the time of writing this chapter, in the USA the computer games industry makes almost as much money from gross domestic income as Hollywood.\textsuperscript{3} Now, nifty hand-held keypads replace cumbersome switches to produce a gamut of complex movement displayed promptly with the correct thumb and finger combinations. 3-D graphics and Dolby Digital surround sound make the gaming experience increasingly pleasurable, along with faster micro-processing and enhanced memory cards. The next generation consoles such as the Playstation 2, Microsoft Xbox and the Nintendo Gamecube are

\textsuperscript{1} C. Davies, “Cyberbabes kick ass into our lives,” \textit{New Statesman}, vol. 129, i. 4484, May 2001, Accessed online, 20\textsuperscript{th} August 2001, Expanded Academic Index Database, A62894093, [full text]

\textsuperscript{2} T. Friedman, “Civilization and its discontents: Simulation, subjectivity and space,” Accessed online, 20\textsuperscript{th} August 2000, \texttt{www.duke.edu/~tlove/civ.htm}

\textsuperscript{3} H. Jenkins, “Art for the digital age,” \textit{Technology Review}, vol. 103, i. 5, 2000, Accessed online, 3\textsuperscript{rd} August 2001, Expanded Academic Database, A65103623, [full text]
laying the foundations for the incorporation of artificial intelligence. Computer and video games are not child’s-play. They are at the centre of a multi-million dollar industry and cultural phenomena that is pushing the boundaries of conventional popular media forms.

This chapter is a journey through a digital landscape. It seeks to unsettle many of the grand gestures of cyber-oriented theory - namely that cyberspace and accompanying digital technologies offer global citizens an egalitarian sphere for freedom and enlightenment beyond corporeal limitations. Via virtual identities that compose much of the video-gaming experience, this chapter builds on the previous by spotlighting key relationships between desire, women, bodies and technology that remain unspoken in much proselytising about the liberation of computer mediated communication. Fragmented third-wave feminism has made feminist politics palatable. The game discourse creates a functional femininity that is controllable and comfortable. In taking Lara Croft and Tomb Raider as the central concerns, the technological buzzwords of our generation - like ‘convergence’ and ‘interactivity’ are taken to task. Cult is activated when the masculinised discourse of computer gaming breaches the bytes to feature a female lead in one of the most successful games in the industry. This unexpected intervention and innovation on the cutting-edge of digital technology creates a contextualising ‘catch-phrase’ to anchor creativity to

5 The distinction between computer and video games is outlined by J. Cassell in “Chess for girls?: Feminism and computer games,” in J. Cassell and H. Jenkins, (eds.), From Barbie to Mortal Combat: Gender and computer games, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), p. 3. She suggests that computer games “are loaded into personal computers and started up like any other software,” While video games refer to the series of games and games consoles that “are played on a television set with a converter box” such as that found with Nintendo, Sega and Playstation. These terms will be interchanged throughout this chapter in reference to the sheer diversity of games that operate across all different formats and to popularity of conflating these terms.
consumption. Cult functions in a two-fold context through Tomb Raider. It slows the acceleration of the games discourse to allow the market to catch up, and it simultaneously explains the interjection of a female action hero into a masculinised discourse. This controlling frame ventures into unknown territory by linking times, spaces and bodies in an effort to ask some serious questions about gaming, technology and pleasure.

Emerging from the shadow of a plethora of new ideas, terms and concepts to emanate out of the gaming industry are some very old ideas about audiences and readership strategies. Many games simply repackage standard social ideologies within the wrapping of a game console. As a consequence, the debate within and around the games industry, tends to be peppered with conventional rhetoric that is characteristic of older media forms like television and film. The surprise that is often exclaimed at the popularity of a game with a female lead - Lara Croft in Tomb Raider - speaks to this reductive ethic that persists. There is a desire to anchor and reframe the innovative new terrain of computer games back to televisual contexts, reading strategies and intellectual theory in order to explain the surprising success of a virtual vixen.

Lara Croft has become the quintessential postmodern pin-up girl. She is the “silicone chick”⁶ that has made Tomb Raider the biggest selling game in the last five years grossing one billion dollars in retail sales.⁷ She has become a public figure of considerable demand. In 1997 she appeared on the cover of The Face magazine - the

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first time the magazine featured a virtual identity on its cover. This was followed on the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek*. *Gucci* paid her $30,000 to model virtual versions of real clothes and she toured with *U2* on their interactive Popmart or Zoo TV tour.\(^8\)

In 2001, the first *Tomb Raider* feature film was released starring Angelina Jolie as the ‘cyerbabe’. She now has presence beyond the digital confines of the tomb.

Her movement into and through the spaces of popular culture make her an ambivalent identity. She has edged her way into the mainstream while remaining a liminal figure. The cult label contains the meanings she mobilises within a holding pattern that allows her saunter into the spaces of social legitimacy. The contradictions of her immense success within a fragmented discourse of computer gaming and feminism means a momentary maneuvering must maintain Lara Croft so she frames the interests of the mainstream.

**Digital darkness**

My first experience of playing *Tomb Raider* was while I was house/cat sitting for a friend on holiday. Armed with very rudimentary dexterity in maneuvering Lara Croft, I ventured off into the cavern. For five nights I sat in the upstairs bedroom, away from the comfort of the lounge-room heater, wrapped in a blanket, running, shooting, jumping and swimming further into the maze. As I toggled the keypad into the early hours of the morning, my sense of time and space became disjointed. I was absorbed in the digital adventure. Sleep seemed irrelevant to mastering the secrets of the labyrinth. I played on.

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This is not intended as a cautionary tale. It is not designed to spread alarm about the physiological and psychological effects of game playing. Rather, this story is intended to frame the intense joy and pleasure gained from our cultural artefacts. These experiences would not be foreign to any Playstation or Nintendo owner. *Tomb Raider* reorganised my life momentarily, and opened me to a whole new set of skills, imaginings, terrains and experiences. In the space between the text and the viewer, something magical happens whereby identity is hailed, suspended or reinscribed in dynamic and unpredictable ways. My experience of *Tomb Raider* was one of simultaneous fascination, frustration, enthusiasm and anxiety. It thrust me into an alien discourse.

Computer and video games have reorganised our lives, and our concepts of time and space. The virtual realm provides new terrain through which to kill, conquer, organise, master and redefine our relationships with each other, and our world. Most games are based on linear journeys through time and space that make way for “atmospheres rather than story lines.” They require us to negotiate physical landscapes within both limited and extended time playing periods. The very first computer game launched us into (outer) space and into the future.

In 1962, Slug (Steve Russell) actually programmed the game known as *Spacewar* on the PDP-1 mainframe computer at MIT. In *Spacewar*, two ‘B’ movie-style rocket ships (one shaped like a fat cigar and the other looking like a long slender tube) battled in computer generated space. Players would flick toggle switches to make the ships change direction, and the ships would respond much like the Zero-G Asteroids ship of coin-op and Atari 2600 fame in a later era. Each ship could fire up to 31 torpedoes that would, in turn appear as little dots traveling in the direction of the other ship. If the dot actually managed to hit the other ship, it ‘exploded’ and the ship disappeared. There were no particle effects and no stereo sound effects to mark the

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explosion, the other ship simply disappeared and was replaced by a mad scramble of dots to represent the debris.

Tomb Raider - differently to Spacewar - is a journey into the past. The deeper Lara ventures into the tomb, the further back in time she travels until she unearths the Lost City of Atlantis or a Tyrannosaurus Rex. The player is embedded in this time warp for, “as players successfully advance Lara through one of the games levels, they are rewarded with a mini-movie where she reveals more about her past.” The most recent Tomb Raider adventure to date, results in Lara’s disappearance/death to make way for a series of games documenting her youth. The feature film even figures a clock that runs backwards as the central plot motif. Tomb Raider consists of a complicated rendering of colonisation, gender and history, with accompanying contradictory grasps of time and space in order to negotiate the digital world. Gamers are employing a diversity of meanings within the game space in order to advance to the next level. These are able to exist relatively easily concurrently in this space as a result of a series of effects in our simultaneously fragmented and homogenous, social, political and economic system that we have labeled globalisation. This catch-phrase for colonisation has reaffirmed the consciousness of white, western, masculine modes of thinking by figuring a flexible framework for difference while actually masking that diversity.

Going Global

Globalisation is a cliché of the era. It is used to describe a series of changes in our lives specifically surrounding the intensified compression of time and space, exchange

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11 Gwin, op cit., [full text]
of goods and services in post-fordism, and transgression of national boundaries. It “is about growing mobility across frontiers - mobility of goods and commodities, mobility of information and communication, products and services, and mobility of people.”\textsuperscript{12} The acceleration of our social and economic lives is motivated by the development of computer mediated communication systems found through such artefacts as mobile phones, the World Wide Web and telecommunications networks. Computers have reorganised our lives to the extent that, “[t]echnology is beginning to mediate our social relationships, our self identities and our wider sense of social life to an extent we are only just beginning to grasp.”\textsuperscript{13} Our workday, leisure time and interpersonal relationships have been reframed and redefined via the widespread integration of digital technologies within so called ‘developed’ or ‘western’ countries.\textsuperscript{14} Computer games are an important digital trace of this shift within popular culture. They require fresh contemplation of the relationships between individuals and texts - a society and its cultural artefacts. Lara Croft, \textit{Tomb Raider} and the assorted computer and video games that have peppered the market over the last twenty years, function metonymically to stand for a series of larger social and political changes generated out of the radical reinscription of the world during the postwar period. These games not only signify the changing nature of a postfordist economy as it has moved from production to consumption. They also spotlight radical reinscriptions of identity, new relationships to the machines within our culture as well as the powerful


\textsuperscript{14} Those of us who are privileged in this world tend to forget that others do not have what we consider basic or normal access to infrastructure, technology and artefacts. Access to a phone-line let alone computers, mobile phones and internet remains a critical issue for remote and ‘non-westernised’ regions and nations. People with the benefits of technology (information rich) are concentrated in ‘western’ countries - Europe, USA, Australia and New Zealand.
hegemonic masking mechanisms that have come into play in recent years with the
decline of the Left in contemporary politics.15

The postwar period has been marked by continuing and radical reinterpretations of
power. Feminist movements, decolonisation, Cultural Studies, AIDS, Black Studies
and Queer Theory have all contributed to a wider social commentary on identity
politics, marginalised and disempowered groups. These shifts have also resulted in
profound economic rationalism, postmodernity, and globalisation. The resonance of
these concepts serves to counterbalance much of the political ground gained by Leftist
interests over this time. Postmodernity offers a celebration of similarity through
difference and liberal ideologies of same/other relationships. It simultaneously masks
the political consequences of otherness that persist, despite the rhetoric of radical
diversity. Similarly, the globalisation concept offers the quaint view of a ‘global
village’, while remaining predominantly a western phenomenon based on a series of
economic and cultural relationships that promote free market ideologies while
masking the profound inequalities on which it trades. This world is characterised by
intense commodification and a focus on consumption in place of political debate.
Feminist theory has also tracked these changes with the emergence of third-wave
feminism in the 1980s. This movement is characterised by an intense focus on
consumption. The simulations and surfaces of femininity marked the terrain of
articulation for third-wave women.

p. 192, frames the rise of Thatcherism and argues, “Now the astonishing political fact that the people
can be colonized by the right has in part to do with the fact that there is no alternative vision of what or
who the people are. On the left and in the labour movement, we have lost our sense of history.”
Third wave women recognise that femininity is “a representation of - the unrepresentable”\textsuperscript{16} that can never entertain the coherence required to effectively challenge masculine domination. By constantly being defined through masculinised knowledges, women have been decentered from the public space. They do not exist in this sphere, except as phantoms - ghost-like manifestations of their selves. Men occupy the position of ‘the subject’. They form a key part in the unspoken centre from which sense is made.

[Women are] excluded from representation by its very structure … This prohibition bears primarily on woman as the subject, and rarely as the object of representation, for there is certainly no shortage of images of women.\textsuperscript{17} While women are represented by patriarchy, they are not represented within patriarchy. Women signify the intangible – the dark continent – the unconscious and the spiritual. Representational frameworks are inherently problematic because they are simulations – hyperreal renderings that “overtake and finally ‘devour’ representation.”\textsuperscript{18} Third wave feminism strikes on this battlefield. Through simulacra and commodification, fashion and surfaces, they articulate feminine autonomy. They take representations of gender - of both genders - namely, lipstick, language, T-shirts, punk rock, short skirts, high heels and kung fu - and boldly step out onto the public sphere to rearticulate the rendering of women. Third wave feminists enter onto the terrain of patriarchal power through capitalism. They embrace the masquerade and simulations of femininity by performing their politics through their purchases. Through accessories, fashion, red lipstick and “chest graffiti”\textsuperscript{19} these woman use the tools of patriarchal power to reinscribe their representation. Lisbeth Gorr (a.k.a. Elle

\textsuperscript{17} ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} D. Kellner, Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to postmodernism and beyond, (Cambridge: Polity press, 1989), p. 79
McFeast) captures this moment best in hailing the benefits of ‘frock power’ in the
creation of Elle.

If these guys wanted to underestimate the power of a camera or a microphone
merely because it was in the control of a woman wearing a ball gown, they did
so at their own peril. For beneath the frock, Elle wore her Docs. Yes the ol’
Doc Martens boots - good for kicking down doors and traversing any terrain,
and they look particularly funky with red lipstick.20

These third wave women, signified by Elle McFeast, laugh, parody and scream at and
through patriarchy. They unhinge meanings from their original context and hail an
alternative literacy. The use of language and ‘grrrl’ literacies enables third wavers
relanguage their oppression. Garrison explains that “‘Grrrl’, a word coined by Bikini
Kill singer and activist Kathleen Hanna, is a spontaneous young feminist reclamation
of the word ‘girl’”.21 It is a word that articulates feminist anger at a patriarchal
language system where the word ‘girl’ is used to trivialise women into asexual, silly
children. Third wavers recognise that gender is a simulation, that it “is a kind of
imitation for which there is no original.”22 The third wave therefore seeks to access a
diversity of identities within femininity.

[G]ender like the real, is not only the effect of representation but also its
excesses, what remains outside discourse as a potential trauma which can
rupture or destabalise, if not contained.23

Third wavers rely on the destabalising potential of excessive femininity in their
reaffirmation of embodied control and surface signification. They play with the
performances and punctuation of femininity, to move beyond conventional renderings
of ‘good’ gender politics. Attention to surfaces, and simulations means that women

20 L. Gorr, “Frock power: The rise and rise of Elle McFeast,” in K. Bail, (ed.), DIY feminism, (St
Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1996), p. 27
21 E.K. Garrison, “U.S. feminism - Grrrl style!: Youth (sub)cultures and the technologies of the third
Index Database, A63295343, [full text]
1991), p. 21
23 T. de Lauretis, Technologies of gender: Essays on theory, film and fiction, (Bloomington: Indiana
University Press, 1987), p. 3
speak through the dialect of consumption, rather than socio-political concerns. They also speak in a language embedded in the interests of western capital, and wider concerns remain attached to masculine subjectivity. Women’s bodies are inscribed and written over by the capitalist patriarchal system and “[r]ather than a homogenous group or a unified collective subject, the feminist public sphere is composed of loose, contingent and often fragmented coalitions of diverse groups.”

The third wave of feminism mobilises a plurality of voices. The intervention into race has provided a space for the voices of black, Asian, immigrant and diasporic experiences to claim currency. These are the voices of women who feel the need to address the different social, political and economic circumstances of contemporary feminist struggle. The appropriation of capitalism does little to shift or critique wide bases of power and subjugation in our society. The agents of patriarchy and phallocentrism that are imposed upon and within women subjectively, sexually and publicly to maintain relationships between individuals, institutions and discourses, do not change because we can buy a t-shirt that affirmatively claims ‘sex-kitten’ status. Women’s bodies remain too volatile to focus affirmative gender politics on its surface. Third wave feminism is popular but only insofar as it has been emptied it of its political punch. It has compounded the manner in which feminine subjectivities can only speak in masculine voices. Patriarchal knowledges still fill in the spaces behind and through the simulations on women’s bodies. Most potently through third wave feminism “in order to speak, to represent herself, a woman assumes a masculine position; [and] perhaps this is why femininity is frequently associated with masquerade, with false representation, with simulation and seduction.”

It is then a fait accompli that the

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24 R. Felski, “Feminism, postmodernism and the critique of modernity,” Cultural Critique, Fall/Winter, 1989 – 90, p. 45
25 Owens, op cit., p. 59
third wave is reinscribed by patriarchy through the simulations of computer game discourse in *Tomb Raider*.

Computer games emerged and became popular during the acceleration and integration of communications technologies in our lives during the late 1980s and through the 1990s. The invention and promotion of the Playstation game console in particular, made convergent commodities a reality, and along with the Internet, brought technology into the private sphere of home entertainment. This industry has moved into the forefront of technological integration and development. It has been argued that “[one] in [four] households in the US has a playstation”26 and that “in terms of gross revenue the computer game industry is bigger than the movie industry.”27 Game consoles such as the Playstation, Nintendo and Sega are the quintessential products of a ‘global’ market. As a consequence, they are also crucial nodes for the articulation and spread of ‘global’ ideologies. The shifts in social meanings are embedded in the interfaces of these games and games products.

**Weapons and pleasure**

The computer games industry has marginal and fragmented origins in the after-hours of science labs, think tanks and graduate lounges of academic institutions. Programming computers was/is serious business and its applications to the military industrial complex ensured that the leisure possibilities pursued by Steve Russell and

26 Laird and van Lent, *op cit.*, [full text]
27 N. Croal, “The art of the game: The power of the playstation is challenging designers to match its capabilities - and forcing Sony’s competitors to rethink their strategies,” in *Newsweek*, March 6, 2000, vol. 135, i. 10, Accessed online, 3rd August 2001, Expanded Academic Index Database, A59651752, [full text]
his friends, was strictly censored.\textsuperscript{28} The early computer industry was populated predominantly by young academics and scientists eager to explore the possibilities of these super-charged ‘analytical machines’.\textsuperscript{29} While their legitimacy was supported by the financial investment of university institutions and the military, the unauthorized game programming operated outside of the legitimate parameters of computer use.

Working on \textit{Spacewar} on study breaks, [Steve] Russell and his friends polished up and completed the game in the spring of 1962. He remembers wondering whether maybe there might be some way to commercialize this thing and make some money. After thinking hard for about a week, he concluded that no one would pay for it. So he left the program on all the nearby computers so that anyone could play or copy it. A few people did. And if anyone asked, Russell and his friends gave out the source code.\textsuperscript{30}

These underground origins of the computer games industry characterised the time in which these knowledges were not harnessed for their ‘mainstream’ market potential but rather, the extent to which they could benefit state sanctioned policy - towards Russia, Cuba and the space program. The binarial relationship between east and west was consolidated by Mutual Assured Destruction and thereby stabalised the relationships between individuals and public policy. The Vietnam War is perhaps the most crucial event on the world stage that signaled a dramatic shift in hegemony. The ideological war fought by the Americans, was dramatically out of step with the sweeping changes in the post – World War Two period. Ironically, the fragmented, decontextualised approach to the social and political order was best adopted by ‘the enemy’ – the Vietcong – in their search and destroy guerilla warfare. The neglect of the leisure/gaming potential of computer programming was a result of the computer

\textsuperscript{28} Ironically military researchers now consult and employ game programmers for input into simulator programs and weapons training. See Laird and van Lent, \textit{op cit.}, [full text]

\textsuperscript{29} The ‘analytical machine’ was the name given to the first machine capable of a series of complicated mathematical functions invented by Charles Babbage in the late 1830s and perhaps best understood and developed by Ada Lovelace. See S. Plant, “The future looms: Weaving women and cybernetics,” in M. Featherstone and R. Burrows, (eds.), \textit{Cyberspace, cyberbodies, cyberpunk: Cultures of technological embodiment}, (London: Sage, 1995), pp. 15 - 64

industry “ha[ving] the … disadvantage of being populated by largely young people, who make ephemeral products from assets that are largely intangible and intellectual.” These products did not sit well with the prevailing and lingering ideologies of modernity and real-time assets. They were on the cusp of the wide sweeping changes. Computer games helped to bring computer-based technologies into the popular. They epitomised the movement from production to consumption, and they helped to reshape contemporary ethics of leisure and play. Most significantly they were at the forefront of the new ‘interactivity’ that was to liberate the ‘duped masses’ into freethinking, active participants in popular culture. The ‘interactivity’ prompted by the programming was said to move the individual from viewer to player - from observation to interaction. Consequently, computer literacy was framed as crucial and credible, as opposed to the frivolity and irreverence of popular film and television.

Problematic participants

The relationships between place, space, operator, character and narrative radically impact on the so-called ‘interactive’ nature of gaming. It offers dynamic new ways in which to explore the relationship between audiences and texts. The reinscription of meaning that is enacted through computer culture has been well touted with widespread suggestions of radically new reading techniques, story structures and audience behaviour activated by the pseudo-simultaneous multiperspective interaction of hypermedia forms. According to this way of thinking, the ‘revolution’ of computer mediated artefacts is that they offer a dynamic new landscape of freedom, possibilities

and new meanings that will redefine our cultural, social and political lives. The simultaneity of experience offered by this new media will liberate us from boredom and confinement. For, “[t]hrough interactivity, once dull, passive experiences will be transformed into something infinitely richer and more compelling.”

Within this rhetoric is the assumption that ‘old’ models of media were/are linear, banal and restrictive. It fails to take into account the inherent activity and joy of television viewers and other consumers of popular culture. It does not hail the activity that often occurs outside of dominantly sanctioned readership strategies such as that involved in textual poaching. The ‘wow’ factor of new technology masks the meaning systems that are embedded in the bytes. Even with the reinscription offered via new technology, old practices are still locked within these structures.

In light of this rhetoric hailing the interactive capabilities of computer-mediated communication and games, we are still plagued by the same knowledges about violence and influence that has peppered the debate about television effects. What behaviours children and adults consider appropriate comes, in part, from lessons we learn from television and the movies. There are good reasons to expect that violent video games will have similar and possibly larger effects on aggression.

In the same article, Anderson expresses the concern that of the thirty-three Sega and Nintendo games sampled, 80% of the games were violent and 21% depicted violence against women. Indeed the role of women, both inside and outside video games, has

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33 Henry Jenkins in, *Textual poachers: Television fans and participatory culture*, (London: Routledge, 1992), has demonstrated how resistive and alternative readership strategies operate to open space for disempowered groups within a culture. Digital technologies offer new space for these groups to flourish. They rework the characters, themes and narratives to extend the meaning of the text and leave traces of this activity on the World Wide Web.
been the cause of significant debate. The prevailing concerns surround how to encourage more numbers of female players to the console. Indeed, “males in their teens and early twenties [are] the biggest game playing demographic.” It seems many of the back-room and board-room meetings on this subject, is framed by discourses of violence and how to make games more girl-friendly, as if these two subjects were mutually exclusive for female players. Justine Cassell argues that game developers have made this fundamental mistake and have provided insipid products like “Barbie Fashion Designer” to appeal to a female audience. Consequently, Melissa Farmer has argued for more innovative thinking from game designers and developers.

The road to the discount software bin is often paved with the good intentions of game developers and publishers seeking to portray females in a positive light. Instead of a fun, engaging game experience, we get self-esteem in a box - uplifting messages of self-empowerment telling us that girls can do anything, be anything and go anywhere.36

There is indeed some cause for concern. Justine Cassell cites a 1991 study of one hundred arcade games in which 92% contained no female roles whatsoever, 6% had females as damsels in distress, and the remainder had females in action roles.37 Meanwhile, Melissa Farmer reports that “50.4% of online [my emphasis] game players are women, while the Interactive Digital Software Association recently reported that females comprise 43% of game players overall.”38 So it seems that girls are playing games despite the absence of a dedicated marketing product. What has taken game developers and publishers some time to realise, is that females are embedded within similar discursive structures as males. Women internalise the heroic logic of popular culture quite easily. A woman can gain as much pleasure from an

35 Gwin, op cit., [full text]
37 Cassell, op cit., p. 5
38 Farmer, op cit., [full text]
action film as a man. They simply adopt negotiated reading strategies. This can be easily traced through the range of recent television and film heroes such as *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Sydney Bristow from Alias*, *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, *Charlie’s Angels*, *Thelma and Louise*, *Ellen Ripley*, and *Dark Angel* who embrace distinctly violent means as implicit narrative mechanisms. Cassell also suggests that “violent imagery is compatible with not only feminist taste, but feminist politics”\(^\text{39}\) and,

> [w]hat is needed to breach the gender gap are not new game genres designed specifically for girls but the successful development of traditional boys games with stronger female characters.\(^\text{40}\)

The pleasure gained from violent and action based games are often the same for women as men. The structures in our society that train us for our gender roles also train our viewing habits and representational interpretations. It is not uncommon, nor unthinkable to suggest that women often identify with action-based plots.

Despite the perceived capacity for interactivity to open up new freedoms and interpretations, the computer games industry, (and those who theorise it) remain steadfastly locked into the ideologies of our time. The relationships between women, technology, bodies and violence are reduced to redundant demographics and inadequate social/psychological categories. Interactivity does not offer unlimited scope for interpretation. It even fails to deliver the interaction that is supposed to liberate us. ‘Interactivity’ is still regulated “by the computer software providing the interactivity.”\(^\text{41}\) Allucquere Roseanne Stone explains that “interactivity implies two conscious agencies in conversation, playfully and spontaneously developing a mutual

\(^\text{39}\) Cassell, *op cit.*, p. 22

\(^\text{40}\) *ibid.*

\(^\text{41}\) *ibid.* p. 14
discourse, taking cues and suggestions from each other as they proceed.”

This concept invites an imagining of attentive, thinking operators who engage with virtual identities in an inscriptive and tumultuous manner. I have no doubt that many players engage in an active and imaginative way with game characters. The interactivity of these games is deceptive. It is not mutual. The conversation is not between game player and character, but game player and game programmer. The player must operate within the parameters set by the programmer and has limited ability to ‘interrupt’ this discourse. The language of the conversation, between player and programmer, is located in the actions of the virtual identity that forms an interface between the player and the game world. This process requires immersion in the conversational grammar set by the game programmer. While the player undoubtedly has ‘direct’ input into the movement within the game space, no matter which way the player chooses to go, or which path to take, they must end up where the binary code dictates. Ultimately, in light of the radical new rhetoric of interactive engagement, audience activity and liberation, offered by digital interaction found in computer and video games, old practices of appropriation and reinscription are still occupying the same space. Players of computer games have consistently modified games to suit their own needs. Charlie Cleveland affirms that “since the dawn of PC games, players have always hacked on them.” This manipulation and appropriation of games has sparked and entire industry based on “knowledge about warp zones, passwords and other game secrets.” These even going so far as to provide “hint books, 1-900 numbers and

44 Fuller and Jenkins, *op cit.*, p. 67
bulletin boards to help players stuck halfway through their adventures.”45 Some players have taken this to the extreme.

Doom … players figured out how to create their own levels, then distributed them to extend the game’s multiplayer lifespan. When ID saw how much players modified Doom they intentionally built their next game, Quake, to be user-modifiable.46

These hacking practices are analogous to the poaching of television texts. In spite of the ‘new’ user potential offered by computer mediated communication and interactive games, it does not seem to be enough. Like the audience engagement with television texts, alternative spaces of interpretation and empowerment are opened around video and computer games.

Of course, the handful of people that copied Spacewar off MIT’s PDP-1 gave it to their colleagues, who shared it with their students, who spread it among their fellow programmers, until, by the mid-sixties, there was a copy of Spacewar on every research computer in America, as well as hundreds of personal variations of the source code and millions of dollars of lost-time cost to academia and the military industrial complex.47

Even within Tomb Raider “some hormone-crazed hackers have circulated an unauthorized software program that alters the game’s computer code to remove Lara’s clothes.”48 It is referred to as ‘Nude Raider’. The liberating discourses of computer games need to get beyond the hormones of their pre-pubescent players. Many games on the market are embedded within ingrained hierarchical knowledges around class, race and gender. While many do offer humorous and subversive interpretations of marginalisation, such as that found in Super-Mario Brothers which features two working class New York plumbers as heroes, we are also faced with the predictable

46 Cleveland, op cit., [full text]
47 Hertz, op cit., [full text]
48 Gwin, op cit., [full text]
but excessive hypermasculinity of *Duke Nukem*. The technology may be new, but the ideologies tend to be quite old. Even Lara Croft, with all her action adventure capabilities is still inscribed through her body and mobilised as a sex object. Nevertheless, *Tomb Raider* has reinscribed the adventure/puzzle-solving genre. The action-based male oriented plot has been feminised via Lara Croft. Past and present occupy the same space in *Tomb Raider* and Lara activates historic spaces with new meanings. These new meanings have provided the cover under which dominant meaning systems have attached themselves in order to maintain their power. It is on the virtual surfaces of Lara Croft’s ‘body’ that the ideologies of a masculine, capitalist, patriarchal system have attached themselves. The intangibility of a virtual identity with an absent body is fundamental to the ambiguity needed for patriarchy to rewrite itself in the game discourse. The tendency to separate the body from identity, in digital spaces, performs a damaging and revisionist ideology in hegemonic politics. It returns to the problematic of the body as a corruption for the mind. It reaffirms Woman as a problem, with her compulsory corporeality and hysteric sensibility.

**Cyborg consciousness**

Computer games have provided a crucial site for interrogating the role of the body in politics and culture. The liberation of the body from identity offers a freedom from power that has been championed by many theorists. In this work, the role of the body in the construction of identity and, what it means to construct that ‘I’ at the keyboard, have been unpacked and scrutinized. In computer games, the relationship between game operator and character is of particular curiosity. In *Tomb Raider*, Lara Croft overtly shapes players expectations and has stepped through the screen to occupy

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space in the real world. How we make sense of Lara’s intersections with the real world is critical to our understanding of digital readerships. Donna Haraway is most obviously the mother of techno-utopian tradition. Her seminal paper ‘A Cyborg Manifesto’ laid the groundwork for a utopian future of radical difference embodied by cyborgian women.

[C]yborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine. There are the couplings which make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire, the force imagined to generate language and gender, and so subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of ‘Western’ identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind.\(^{50}\)

The possibilities for blending hybridities via cyborg tendencies within a techno-fetishistic culture, offers us a way to transcend corporeal limitations. The genesis of all computer mediated communications theory - *Neuromancer* - divorced the body from the self and William Gibson’s\(^ {51}\) ‘jacked in’ corporeality constructed the body as a key site for the integration and liberation of technology in our lives. The possibilities of generating and transporting the consciousness beyond its corporeal prison, has sparked excited debate around such terms as ‘posthuman’, ‘avatar’ and ‘artificial intelligence’.

If the development of technology has entailed a process of the extension of the body and bodily functions to enable us to control the environment more efficiently, it offers the ultimate possibility of the displacement of the material body from the confines of its immediate lived space.\(^ {52}\)

The desire to transgress the body is marked as the ultimate liberation. However, there is also deep concern about the desire expressed by various virtual community and cyberculture theorists to escape embodied confines for the abstract and aesthetic

pleasures of a disembodied cyberspace. The egalitarian ethic of computer mediated communications masks more serious implications - philosophically and politically. This desire to move beyond the body - the meat space of existence, reaffirms the mind/body dualism we have challenged for so long. Denying corporeality supports the inherently gendered, raced and classed divisions that have been layered onto this binarial relationship. No doubt there is merit to the suggestions that eliminating the body as a site of visible difference can serve to liberate marked identities. However, is the elimination or reduction of difference is a viable, appropriate or socially just way of dealing with identity in a society? I do not believe that our corporeal conduits are the authentic and righteous mode for experience. However, to remove the body does not necessarily result in liberation. Rather, power mutates and melds within new contexts.

The body remains a critical site through which legitimacy and autonomy are measured and visualised within our culture. To deny the capacity for disempowered groups to occupy (physically and metaphorically) a space from which to articulate their concerns simply reifies the legitimacy of the empowered to unproblematically, and silently embody ‘normality’. We have seen through chat-rooms in particular, the manner in which the body has been particularly hard to shake.\footnote{In creating a chat room ‘handle’ or identity, new users are asked to construct a profile. It usually consists of embodied metaphors - age, location and gender at the very minimum.} Embodied metaphors are still ingrained in the World Wide Web. Identities are anchored to them. How we understand virtual identities is similar to our understandings in the off-line world. Computer and video games are restructuring the political consequences of the relationships between power and the body. While presenting the gender politics of Lara Croft as an irreverent, sexually assertive femininity, the capacity for raced and
classed-based meanings to be pasted easily on top of her ‘absent’ body revisits the ultimate ambiguity of the feminine ‘subject’ within our culture. She is the litmus test by which we can gauge the effect of denying the coherence of the body within politics.

**Retrofitting Pac-man**

The characteristic of many video games (except such games as *Tetris*) is that they require a virtual identity to maneuver around a digital landscape that frames the terrain of action.

Many of the early games featured objects or digital creatures like those found in *Pac-man* and *Space Invaders*. More recent games such as *Crash Bandicoot, Donkey Kong, Myst* and *Oddworld* feature animals, mystical creatures, or aliens as primary narrative agents. As the technology is developing, more sophisticated human characters are found, such as those in *Doom, Quake, Final Fantasy, Tekken, Street Fighter* and *Tomb Raider* not to mention the plethora of games based on live action films and characters such as *James Bond, Star Wars* and *Harry Potter*. These human-based characters carry specific representational knowledges that emanate loudly and resonate clearly with everyday politics. Because these characters are virtual, the meanings they ‘embody’ can be quite volatile. The virtual terrain they tread, and the entertainment discourse that encircles them, masks the political consequences of this volatility. The lack of tangible corporeality means that the consequences for the actions of a virtual identity are unclear, for their “bodies are not jeopardized by the virtual weapons we wield.”54 A player’s relationship to the virtual character they maneuver in the game is extraordinarily complicated. It is inscribed in multiple and

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54 Fuller and Jenkins, *op cit.*, p. 59
contradictory meanings embracing embodiment, desire, and gender politics. Lara’s role within *Tomb Raider* is not only to provide the interface for the player to negotiate the game space. Her role is to be ambiguous. Femaleness provides the quintessential interface for the inscription of the dominant into the spaces of the other.

Femininity has always occupied a contradictory and unclear position within gender politics. *Tomb Raider* relies on very conventional modeling of women’s bodies in its configuration of Lara Croft. I am not only referring to the size of her bust-line, but the manner in which she is used as an empty signifier for otherness. Feminist theory has traditionally attempted to deconstruct an understanding of femininity as a ‘natural’ embodied process. Part of this deconstruction has been to theorize gender as a performance, and the meanings attached to bodies, as embedded within the social hierarchy of a culture. Third wave feminism attempts to mobilise these debates. Unfortunately, it often reaffirms women as objectified and absent in society.

Women’s bodies have been unproblematically assigned as the ‘other’ in the binarial relationship between mind and body. The ease with which women’s bodies - and consequently their selves - have been rendered deviant within our culture has been a source of concern within feminist theory. This is not a simple problem that is rectified by the ‘equality’ of women within our society. For part of the deeply ingrained gendered divisions we embrace is the notion that women *do not* exist in a binary with men. Judith Butler demonstrates the relationship between men and women in clear terms. She interrogates the nexus of meanings generated by the meeting of such terms/concepts as sex, gender, sexuality, bodies and desire. Using Beauvoir, Irigaray, Wittig and Foucault, she queries the similarities and differences between approaches to gender. At the core of her extrapolation is a questioning and reification of gender as
a social construction. She argues that the binarised organisation of our knowledge reveals contradictory conceptualisations of femininity. Men are consistently adopted as the universal position or identity within a culture. Within this paradigm women are displaced.

If women are positioned opposite men in a binary, they are still defined as an absence.

For femininity, as argued by Irigaray, is never opposite (which implies equal to, or at least on the same axis as) masculinity. The consequences for women are damaging for “the assumption of its [the category of woman] essential incompleteness permits that category to serve as a permanently available site of contested meanings.”55 For women, gender is a volatile ontology. It is a site that is constantly shaping and being reshaped. When women are denied a coherent and stable subjectivity, they function as a conduit through which dominant meanings can assert their authority, largely unproblematised.

[W]omen and femininity are problematized as knowing philosophical subjects and as knowable epistemic objects. Women (upper case and in the singular) remains philosophy’s eternal enigma, its mysterious and inscrutable object - this may be a product of the rather mysterious and highly restrained and contained status of the body in general, and of women’s bodies in particular.56

Women occupy contested space. They can never attain autonomy - they regulate the limits in the values and meanings of a phallogocentric system. The surfaces of femininity are flexible and penetrable “for gender is always a doing, though not by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed.” Gender does not exist outside of our capacity to label identities within language. Gender is composed by its performance and it does not exist beyond or behind the articulation of that identity. For women,

55 J. Butler, Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity, (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 15
56 E. Grosz, Volatile bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1994), pp. 4 - 5
this is a double-edged sword. It does imply a capacity to remold and play with the performance, and thereby construct an empowered space of otherness. Without a coherent anchored subjectivity, femininity can be rewritten by the meanings of a time. It can either offer a radical reinscription of femininity as a dynamic, powerful and playful category, or it can be hijacked by phallogocentric society in the service of maintaining rather than changing the status quo. Lara Croft’s absent body means that her virtual identity carries an assortment of meanings inscribed, and supported by, a dominant hierarchy. As a result, she embodies a comfortable and compliant feminism with a ‘funky’ third wave ethic of ‘ass-kicking’ super-babe. Clearly the consequences of denying coherent corporeality, is a crucial space for the dominant to overwrite the subordinate. Lara Croft is a simulation. She has no referent. Or perhaps more properly, her referent has come after her, with the various models used to promote the game, and ultimately in Angelina Jolie in the *Tomb Raider* film, who paradoxically is a representation of a simulation. Lara ‘embodies’ the claim that “persons cannot be signified within language without the mark of gender.”57 Her body is tangible only as it is signified as feminine. The mask of gender comprises her virtual self – she is the quintessence of the absent feminine subject. The excessiveness of her bust-line stands for the simulation of femininity in absence. Her “hypercorporeal simulacrum … transcends memory both in so far as it is a simulacrum of memory and in so far as it creates an excess of memory.”58 Lara Croft encases the imagining of femininity – she reaches beyond the real into the hyperreality that is femininity. Our textualisations of the body are mediated by such virtual figures. We cannot move through virtual worlds without some kind of corporeality. Maneuvering a person through such a space means

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57 Butler, *op cit.*, p. 21
that they are always implicitly gendered. Lara Croft removes biology from this performance and thereby empties the relationship between the signifier (sex) and the signified (gender). The consequences for the operator of *Tomb Raider* is an empty signifier that is understood and activated only by the extent to which the operator is able to internalise the meanings composed on the hypercorporeal surface simulation of femininity. The player’s capacity to identify and embrace these meanings increases the pleasure of the gaming experience.

**Digital perception**

Computer and video games require a reorganisation of consciousness in order to be an operator, and to identify with the character being played within a game. Jesper Jul characterises it as “a twilight zone where he/she is both an empirical subject outside the game and undertakes a role inside the game.”  

This split consciousness requires a reorganisation of the self to both act autonomously, and to internalise the meanings of the game space. This is not a dislocation. The relationship between the player and the game is smoothly mediated through the keypad. The game requires a conceptual shift that has become almost ‘normal’ in a hypermedia literate world in that, “the player forms a circuit with the computer, a version of the cyborgian consciousness.”  

The game becomes a temporary extension of the self. Part of this process is the reinscription of space, where the player becomes temporarily disjointed from his/her surroundings and embedded in the game space. In order to negotiate this space, the

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60 Friedman, “Making sense of software,” *op cit.*, p. 83
player must create a virtual map to learn new codes for maneuvering in this environment, and internalise them as temporarily ‘real’.

Playing a simulation means becoming engrossed in a systemic logic that connects a myriad array of causes and effects. The simulation acts as a kind of map-in-time, visually and viscerally … demonstrating the repercussions and interrelatedness of many different social decisions.61

In order to effectively play the game, the rules and the ideologies of the game space must be embraced by the operator. The nature of ‘interactive’ games is to blur the distinction between the player and the text to the extent that it becomes “impossible to distinguish precisely where one begins and the other ends.”62 Shannon McRae describes this process more precisely as “phasing between the virtual and the actual”.63 The player is required to become invisible to effectively maneuver a virtual identity, and gain pleasure within the very specific conversational grammar of the game space. Stone argues that games regulate our sense of ‘presence’, which she defines as, “the sense that we are direct witnesses to something or that we ourselves are being directly apprehended.”64 ‘Presence’ here is not tethered to the body or physicality, but a variable process whereby the intensity of this ‘sense’ fluctuates and changes. In the gaming experience, this sense of presence or awareness – of our selves – adjusts depending on the ebb and flow of the ‘conversation’ between the player and the programmer (the game space). Computer and video games extend our sense of experience rather than contain or reflect them. Stone affirms that this ‘phasing’ is a commonplace process that occurs everyday. Games have functioned to highlight this experience. The opening page of her book *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* begins with a moment of startled contemplation as she

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61 ibid., p. 86
62 ibid., p. 73
64 Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 17
recounts her own “sudden thrill of terror” at recognising her boots as she looks down at her feet. She goes on to suggest that the very unremarkability of her boots, mark the processes whereby we become transparent to ourselves. She explains that, “the I that I customarily express and reflexively defines me through my chosen personal style had become part of the wallpaper.” Similarly, the virtual identity in a computer game becomes the wallpaper behind which the operator exists. The key for a cult interpretation of Tomb Raider is the interactivity is theorised as an inversion.

While women frequently adopt a negotiated reading strategy to gain pleasure from action films with male heroes, in Tomb Raider a predominantly male audience, must adopt an intimate inversionary interactivity to gain pleasure from a female hero. For men to move ‘downwards’ to form an alliance with a disempowered ‘subjectivity’ is disruptive. These moments of absentee-ism in selfhood where we align ourselves with the characters in a game, occur when we are most comfortable in our skin, or when we have mastered the controls of the game – when they become second nature to us.

![It makes sense that the interface between player and virtual body in Tomb Raider is trickier than the point-and-shoot simplicity of Doom. Lara can climb hand-over-hand, crawl, backflip, tuck and roll, and lower herself down steep drops. The player must learn how to “do” these things, and if Lara never returns the ever-present look, she demonstrates her awareness of the player in other ways: her only spoken word is a terse, slightly impatient “no” if you try to make her perform a move that isn’t possible. To the novice player at an impasse, there seems to be a frustrated potentiality in the way she stands and breathes, the user’s ineptitude holding all her agility and lethality at bay. In her poised impatience, she teaches. Eventually when the cntl, alt, ins, and end keys become second nature, this impatience vanishes. There are no more impasses, only a fluid, reflex connection, a virtuosity that seems to put Lara and the player both in the same body, do that it’s no longer clear which is the origin of her performances.]

65 ibid., p. 1
66 ibid.
The game discourse is not spontaneous. It requires a slow process of immersion and “as users become more savy, relying automatically on a whole series of semiotic technologies,” the operator takes on cues laid out in the grammar of the game space to produce an ‘interactive’ experience. The virtual identity must be granted a version of autonomy or characterisation if a player is to be successful, and this requires embracing the programming parameters of this ‘individual’ in which the player’s sense of self is deprioritised. The internalisation of the game space - its rules and codes - is the key to sense making. The reliance on the spaces of computer games is necessary as the lack of formal narrative structure, means that the action in many games is premised on the negotiation and mastery of spaces. In many games “[t]he player is limited to a certain space, can only carry out certain actions and shares the space with only a limited number of other actors.” These spaces form a substitute for the narrative. This does not mean that games suffer from a kind of ‘lack’ when it comes to generating story flow and pleasure. Rather, the use of metaphoric spaces provides powerful atmospheres that direct action. Instead of following an explicit narrative structure, the operator must negotiate the space and divine appropriate action from the surroundings. This creates an illusion of interactivity where the operator engages with the pre-programmed story-world.

[T]he game playing experience essentially [becomes] an interrogative process with the aim of the game being for the player to divine the correct commands to extract the programmer’s prewritten narrative.

The essence of game programming is to create “visually remarkable spaces” which provide “imaginary spaces for our intellectual exploration.” Mastering the digital

70 ibid.
71 Fuller and Jenkins, op cit., p. 61
logic is only one half of the gaming process. The player must also be literate in
popular renderings of everyday spaces. For Tomb Raider, this means internalising a
dominant imagining of ‘eastern’ or exotic locations, such as Egypt, Tibet and Nepal,
complete with mysterious artefacts and ancient puzzles or traps. Mastering and
conquering the space of the game is the key to ascending to the next level. Literacy in
spatial manipulation - negotiating mazes, solving spatial puzzles – is integral to this
process. Spatial metaphors generate movement within a geographical unity that
creates spaces of meaning. Michel de Certeau argues that “[e]very story is … a spatial
practice.”73 Our understanding of narrative is intimately mapped through spaces and
behaviours within specific locations. Each story is produced by movements through
places that reinscribe the geography as a space with meanings, hierarchies and
behaviours. Game design inherently relies on the narrative possibilities of spaces and
the meanings engaged in the process of writing a place into a space. For “[p]lace
becomes space as unfamiliar geography is conquered through exploration and
development.”74 Spaces are powerful metaphors that operate on the senses to
encourage an internalization of ideologies circulating through behaviours within a
habitat. Meanings are mobilised within a video game when an operator maneuvers a
virtual identity through the landscape. The set of movements the virtual identity can
undertake creates the space. It is the use of the past in Tomb Raider that enables this
translation. Through the activation of spatial metaphors, the past can be rewritten by
the present. Lara Croft is the absent body through which this rewriting process takes
place. Consequently, our movement through this terrain is controlled, much like a
tourist in a foreign country on a Contiki tour.

72 ibid., p. 64
74 Friedman, “Civilization and its discontents,” op cit., online
Passing through the past

The key to the relationship between people and a place is to understand that “space is fundamental in any exercise of power.” It is through our interpretation and negotiation of spaces that power differentials in a society are enacted. The relationship between history and space has always been complicated. This conflict has been predicated on the assumption that time/history is vibrant and energetic and that spaces are characterised “as fixed, dead, undialectical.” Spaces are productive. They are intimately entwined with power and the production of meaning within a culture. The manner in which the past and the production of space are connected, can be seen most colourfully within the tourist discourse that brings together histories and spaces through heritage buildings and museums. Tourism “entwines the making of history with the social production of space.” Controlled spaces are crucial for controlling history. It is only through these spaces that the meanings of the past can be tied to the present in tangible ways. The tourist discourse fuses the player into the Tomb Raider game space. Lara Croft is the tour guide directing the player to points of the past encased in numbing nostalgia for a fetishised otherness.

The tourist experience offers a unique interpretation of space. Its ideologies are located in movement - through space and through time. Not only does it require the physical movement of human beings to a new location, but a psychological movement - to a place of comfort and familiarity. The vacation is taken not only from work, but

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76 E. Soja, “History, geography, modernity,” in During, (ed.), The cultural studies reader, p. 115
77 ibid.
also from the anxiety of the present and an uncertain future. A tourist goes in search of the past and the knowledges that validate, assure, and secure his/her identity.

Nostalgia can “shore up self esteem, reminding us that however sad our present lot we were once happy and worthwhile.”\textsuperscript{78} This selective memory washes over the unpleasant experiences in the past, and we are left with a carefully controlled version of events. This process is amplified, in state sanctioned houses of nostalgia such as museums, where particular versions of history are displayed while others remain locked away. The stories and narratives that are activated through these spaces are intimately linked to the empowered and the maintenance of their position within a society. The inscription on, and through space, indoctrinates the tourist in the ideology of the state. Through this process “new experiences of new places are aligned with past experiences and old, known verities”\textsuperscript{79} and these “sites become associated with particular values, historical events and feelings.”\textsuperscript{80} Controlling the past is a powerful way to control the future. Empowered and disempowered groups struggle for supremacy in the past and for recognition in the present. By dictating movement through these spaces, meanings are activated and internalised by the tourist. A similar process of mobilisation is embodied and translated through the keypad by the player of \textit{Tomb Raider}. The negotiation of the tomb space relies on the player being able to access, and versed in understanding a series of broad signifiers on the landscape.

Through these sites, meanings are activated that dictate the movement through the space. The tomb operates as,

\textit{[a] means to express ideas - an intellectual short hand whereby spatial metaphors and place images can convey a complex set of associations without

\textsuperscript{78} D. Lowenthal, \textit{The past is a foreign country}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 8
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{ibid.}, p. 29
the programmer] having to think deeply and to specify exactly which associations or images he or she intends.\textsuperscript{81}

It is this compressed negotiation of the game space that enables the player to activate a rudimentary narrative based partly on historical knowledges, as well as collective memory in popular culture - most obviously \textit{Indiana Jones}\textsuperscript{82} here – and play out a series of actions that will conquer the landscape. This is akin to the tourist’s movement through museum spaces whereby they “seek to identify with a place on a temporary basis, without ownership, and are constrained in both knowledge and time.”\textsuperscript{83} They therefore require a condensed version of the past that invariably silences some voices. Similarly, video games, like \textit{Tomb Raider} “allows people to enact through play an older narrative.”\textsuperscript{84} One that is, generally unproblematic, linear and comfortable. It is through these means that time-old ideologies are conjured up onto new icons such as Lara Croft. \textit{Tomb Raider} offers “the return to nearby exoticism by way of a detour through distant places and the ‘discovery’ of relics and legends.”\textsuperscript{85}

The movement through the tomb re-presents the movement of colonisation. In this space, an imagining of the exotic is conjured. The player’s success in maneuvering Lara is based on their tacit understanding of colonial knowledges regarding possession of the land, and the orient as a discursive practice.

\textit{[A] constant struggle for possession of desirable spaces, the ever shifting and unstable frontier between controlled and uncontrolled space, the need to venture onto unmapped terrain and to confront its primitive inhabitants.}\textsuperscript{86}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{81} \textit{ibid.}, p. 46
\item \textit{Indiana Jones} refers to the series of three films directed and produced by Steven Spielberg and starring Harrison Ford. It features an archaeology professor in the late 1930s who spends his free time embarking on a series of adventures to retrieve, uncover or steal various precious and mysterious or magical artefacts.
\item \textsuperscript{83} Fuller and Jenkins, \textit{op cit.}, p. 70
\item \textsuperscript{84} Fuller and Jenkins, \textit{op cit.}, p. 70
\item \textsuperscript{86} Fuller and Jenkins, \textit{op cit.}, p. 70
\end{itemize}
These meanings are normalised in *Tomb Raider*, and require the player to not only internalise colonial meanings, but to layer them in new ways in virtual spaces. It makes us “virtual colonists”\(^{87}\) and clearly maps out the manner in which “[b]eneath these new structures of interaction [are] very old presumptions about how the world works.”\(^{88}\) Within the virtual terrain of the tomb, the meanings activated require a normalisation of the ‘mysterious east’, and the privilege of the empowered to raid the spaces of the other to take what they desire. In *Tomb Raider*, the meanings mobilised in the negotiation of the tomb are not only about mapping the terrain, they are about layering a series of knowledges to create an entertaining narrative. To effectively move through the tomb, the player must perform a complicated interaction between past and present, colonisation and femininity that mobilises cultural knowledges in new ways, thereby diffusing the potentially distasteful aspects of colonisation. *Tomb Raid(ing)* requires that “geography must not be understood simply as a knowledge about a ‘natural’ referent, but is inextricably linked with cultural signification.”\(^{89}\) The mobilisation of an unknowable, infinitely exotic ‘east’ in *Tomb Raider* conjures up the feminine other. Lara Croft provides the nexus within *Tomb Raider* for the simultaneous activation of feminism and Orientalism. The absence of flesh in the tomb space enables the meanings of colonisation to be mortared onto femininity. The white woman becomes an accomplice. She colonises on behalf of the colonisers. Lara diffuses the masculine meanings of colonisation. Her presence in the tomb is not so volatile. Her status as a wealthy, white woman within the space of the other is a safer rendering of white power in an imperial context. These meanings access the

\(^{87}\) *ibid.*, p. 71  
\(^{88}\) Friedman, “Civilization and its discontents,” *op cit.*, online  
world of “fantasy and desire [which] play a fundamental role in the colonial relation that is established with the colonized.”\textsuperscript{90} The Oriental identity is an object of desire that is molded and fetishised by the white, male gaze. The external threat embodied by the empty and unknowable Oriental can be diverted by “representations of the orient [that] are interwoven by sexual imageries, desires, fears and dreams.”\textsuperscript{91} This simultaneous fascination and revulsion drives “the utilization of images of women and images of sexuality in orientalist discourse.”\textsuperscript{92} The fetishization of difference drives western understandings of this other. The Oriental is synonymous with femininity. This space is signified through imagery involving desire, sexuality and fantasy. The connections between spaces of the ‘east’ and feminine subjectivity fuse as narratives of otherness are visualised via desire. Geographies of belonging and being render otherness coherently through territories inscribed by Orientalism.

Such cohesion through space implies in connection with social practice and relating of individuals to that space, a certain level of spatial ‘competence’ and a distinct type of ‘spatial performance’ by individuals.\textsuperscript{93}

The performance of an exotic femininity is the logic of the Oriental space for the Occident. It confirms prevailing ideologies and placates western fear. The paradox for the mystified and unknown Oriental woman for the western paradigm, is the impossibility of access to these women and their intimate spaces. The veil renders the Oriental woman ultimately unavailable to the white male. The desire to penetrate these spaces can be solved, according to Medya Yegenoglu, by a reliance on western women - the only foreigners allowed into Oriental female spaces - to report on what occurred behind the closed door.

\textsuperscript{90} ibid., p. 2
\textsuperscript{91} ibid., p. 26
\textsuperscript{92} ibid., p. 25
\textsuperscript{93} Shields, \textit{op cit.}, p. 52
It is thus only through the assistance of the western woman … that the mysteries of this inaccessible ‘inner space’ and the ‘essence’ of the orient secluded in it could be unconcealed.94

Men’s inability to move in the private realm, make women their conspirators in reporting on other women. Western women were compliant in the Othering and fetishization of Oriental women. They carried the ideologies of the Occident into these spaces, and their own otherness was used to silence Oriental women and deny their identities. They performed the role of ideological informants. Their knowledges and experiences were appropriated to serve the purposes of maintaining a hierarchy. This is not to say that these women did not embrace the prevailing ideologies of the time about the Orient, but they were often denied their own voices and interpretations of this space. They were made silently complicit in the marginalisation of other women. This “manipulation of female agency”95 denies the consciousness of not only white women, but creates a double displacement of white, male power onto Oriental women. It is a case of “white men [by way of white women] saving brown women from brown men.”96 The meanings of the white, western patriarchy are mediated through, and onto the bodies of white western women, often without their consent, and without a space for the articulation of their concerns. Tara Brabazon in her study of The Body Shop, makes clear the processes whereby women’s bodies are used to mediate the meanings of colonisation. She argues that women are used as conduits for the normalisation of neo-colonial meanings via ‘the market’.

That the masculine act of colonization survives through the feminine practices of cleansing, toning, exfoliating and moisturizing demonstrate how past truths are rubbed into the skin of contemporary culture.97

94 Yegenoglu, *op cit.*, p. 14
96 *ibid.*, p. 296
She is suggesting that The Body Shop makes women complicit in neo-colonization. They internalise colonial rhetoric through popular discourses of ‘natural’ skin care. She argues that the voices of indigenous women are masked by The Body Shop’s appropriation of their knowledges and skills, which are then sold to western women under the rubric of environmentally and socially conscious entrepreneurialism. This ‘colonization by other means’ is activated in the *Tomb Raider* discourse whereby the meanings embedded in colonisation have been programmed into Lara Croft. Lara’s virtual tourism embraces powerful colonial metaphors. This mobilisation of a virtual identity within a virtual world “opens new spaces for exploration, colonization and exploitation.”

The meanings required to move Lara Croft through the tomb activates the colonial past within third wave feminism. She dilutes the overt colonial meanings implied within the space by mobilising a marginalized consciousness of feminine dispossession. Her funky and forward feminism masks the wider and more powerful colonial ideologies of invasion, possession, and fetishization. The overt British discourse mobilised by Lara performs a yearning for the great British Empire. She performs a neo-colonial perversion whereby white women’s concerns are reinscribed to colonise on behalf of white men. The mediation of third wave feminism within the game discourse means that colonisation becomes commodified, and even entertaining. Fuller and Jenkins affirm that, “[t]he tamed frontier of the virtual new world has … been sold to us as … a site of tourism and recreation rather than labour and production.”

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98 Fuller and Jenkins, *op cit.*, p. 58
99 Core Design is a British company and Lara is constructed as a member of the British aristocracy. She is also one of the most successful money earners for the British economy. “Lara Croft earned more overseas for the UK than the Spice Girls, who in turned earned more in their peak year than some manufacturing industries” Leadbeater and Oakley, *op cit.*, [full text]
100 Fuller and Jenkins, *op cit.*, p. 65
century collectors of otherness, as we plunder the treasures of the ‘east’. It is her presence that simultaneously maintains and skews the Orientalist discourse.

The appropriation of the ‘east’ as a site for femininity, consumption and fetishization is ‘embodied’ by Lara Croft. Her journey back in time is facilitated by her journey through the space. By moving her into a previous time and space it becomes easier to map colonial meanings onto her ‘body’. Her presence deep in the earth, within the mysterious and unmapped terrain of the tomb creates a bizarre nexus of meanings whereby Lara metaphorically consumes and appropriates her self. Lara’s third wave role as an action hero is tempered by her position, literally in the ground. Feminine empowerment operates in a sinister way in the tomb whereby the spaces in which she is able to embody a contradictory subjectivity ‘outside’ of traditional models of femininity are located in the earth, in dark mysterious place where exotic and mystical desires are present. She is a ‘womb raider’ appropriating, fragmenting and raping her own embodied metaphors - emptying her virtual self of coherency. Placing her within the tomb enables time to be turned back to reclaim the height of British colonization and to rework contemporary femininity within this time. The digital discourse of the computer game is what enables the appropriation of white women in order to configure the Orient as “an object of knowledge and an object of desire”101 within our living rooms. The woman is the empty signifier. The binary code and spatial metaphors of computer games enable that emptiness to be filled in a variety of simultaneously coherent and contradictory ways. Sadie Plant suggests that “the computer, like the woman, is both the appearance and the possibility of

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101 Yegenoglu,, op cit., p. 23
simulation.”102 Tomb Raider reaffirms a series of knowledges about colonization by transporting those knowledges into the virtual realm and onto a virtual identity that signifies and mobilises a third wave feminist, white, western femininity.

*Tomb Raider* is a cult text because contradictory meanings are activated within its diegesis. It is on the edge of social and technological developments in our society. Our digital knowledges have not yet settled within a social hierarchy. Therefore contradictory ideologies are present within this text. Its new modality of simultaneity and convergence requires an anchorage in conventional meaning systems that can stabilise these new experiences in an everyday context. The success of Lara Croft has been surprising because the simultaneity of experience within the game world requires a predominantly male audience to closely, and intimately align themselves with female subjectivity. This process is tempered two-fold. The engagement of a third-wave feminist framework for Lara Croft trivialises the significance of her extraordinary capabilities. It also layers a simulated subjectivity over hypercorporeality that facilitates the inscription of patriarchal meanings into the game, and onto the surfaces of her body. Most significantly she reanimates colonisation by raiding the terrain of otherness. In *Tomb Raider*, a white woman is colonising for white men. The exotic, the mysterious and the deviant flow across and through Lara’s virtual surfaces anchoring meanings within common-sense frameworks and stabalising a potentially volatile hegemony.

102 Plant, *op cit.*, p. 58
Metaphors of Manhood

Feminism has provided a visibility and visualisation for gender politics in the postwar period. It has intervened into the economic, social and political position of women. The first wave of feminism gave women the vote and marked their entrance into public debate. The second wave articulated women's concerns in the workplace and deconstructed the division between the public and private spheres. This movement made women more visible than at any other time in history. Claims of ‘bra-burning’ and ‘man-hating’ punctuated the feminist backlash that resulted from the push to gain equality for women in the workplace and in the home. The great strides forward made by the feminist intervention were peeled back as the resonance of the movement faded. It was not popular. It was a white, middle class crusade that masked the experiences of black, indigenous, Asian, working class, and Arabic women. These silences and absences in feminism resulted in a critique that spawned the third wave. These young women mobilised a politics of consumption that made feminism more desirable to a corporate economy and industrial infrastructure based on consumerable goods. Emptied of its volatility and vitality, the third wave made feminism popular.

Meanwhile, the trajectory of men in the postwar period took a radically different shape. Women found it difficult to generate lasting change. Their strides for independence and autonomy were cut short by social and cultural movement over time that stifled the rupturing potential of the modality. Men’s studies has become the boom area in cultural studies publishing, punctuating patriarchal
politics in a more mobile and maneuverable manner. Men have activated an increasing flexible and fluid articulation of masculine identity, making manhood more mobile. Men are breaking out of their roles, while women are being squeezed back into them. What was once difficult and confrontational masculine identity is now a constructive reframing of power and politics. Henry Rollins' status on the punk scene demonstrates a powerfully controlled and hardened masculinity that simultaneously re-languages male knowledge and politics. He reifies and problematises the meanings on an embodied surface through reflexive grammar. Where men seek to remain silently unmarked in society, Rollins speaks to their position. This unpopular politics finds space in the unpopular culture of punk music, and on the fringes of the spoken-word circuit. Calling attention to male power in a performance of excessive masculine corporeality stabilises Rollins on the edges of entertainment. He is contained and controlled through a discourse of punk marginality, youth politics and angry emotion. His cult status frames him in this space cauterizing his movement.
Chapter Five

Rollins, Representation and Reality: Lifting the Weight of Masculinity

If I go crazy, will you still call me superman?¹

“Kryptonite,” Three Doors Down.

The music video that accompanies the 3 Doors Down song, “Kryptonite,” features a small, white haired old man, living alone trying to recapture the youthful intensity of masculinity, by becoming a superhero. He roams the streets in his green and silver cape, taking on injustice wherever he encounters it. He is laughed at and dismissed. He is not Superman anymore. His decaying body is not even half of the bulging, excessive musculature of superheroes like Batman, Captain America, He-man, Conan, Hercules and Superman.

Another rendering of the Superman figure occurs in the Rollins Band music video, “Liar”. This clip features lead man Henry Rollins dressed in the tights and cape of Superman, but with a large ‘R’ in place of the ‘S’ on his chest. Unlike the old man in “Kryptonite”, Rollins comes frighteningly close to replicating the superhero embodiment. However, this ‘Rollinsman’ is also defunct. He is not the wise, calm and patient masculinity that is embodied by Superman. He is belligerent, slightly neurotic and decidedly paranoid. In this clip, Rollins engages in a complex layering of masculinity. He shifts and shimmers between Clark Kent and Superman in a Nietzschean rendering of strength, manhood and power. The masculinity tethered to

this fluid space deconstructs hierarchised versions of gendered reality. It challenges the hierarchy of masculinity and negotiates the different masks men wear to simulate male power.

This chapter punches its way through various versions of masculinity to unpack the bulky discourses of manhood in our culture. Henry Rollins embodies an excessively contradictory masculinity that simultaneously performs and deconstructs dominant masculinity. The cult terrain he traverses is that of being powerfully framed within forceful, dominantly inscribed masculine knowledges and practices, while also problematising them. The dominant masculine paradigm is built up on the surfaces of Rollins’ body and torn down in the rhetoric of his spoken work performances. This chapter interrogates the currency of embodied hardness for men. It provides a trajectory for the building and deconstructing of male power through their bodies. Ducking and weaving its way through two world wars, industrialism and heroism, it aims to demonstrate how the meanings of masculinity moving through time require stabalisation.

![Figure 5 ‘Rollinsman’](http://fade.to/rollins/)
Between bodies

Men’s bodies have changed. While they have been the ‘normal’ against which women’s bodies have been defined, this sense of ‘normality’ has altered over time.3 Foucault demonstrates how the meanings on and around bodies, alter as they are inscribed through cultural constructions and discourses that determine the shape and nature of embodied realities. He articulates the ambiguities in “the space in which bodies and eyes meet.”4 Ideologies fill up this space, where meanings are controlled and read within defined frameworks of race, class and gender. In The Birth of the Clinic, he explains how medicalised knowledges inscribe bodies within powerful political structures. Even though men are often centralised in these knowledge systems, it does not mean they are immune to their influence. The changes in and through men’s bodies have received less attention. The binary between the mind and the body has secured a manhood mobilised through metaphors of the mind. Phallic power ensures that the myth matters more than the member - thereby masking the physical realities of shape, function and flaccidity. The mind/body binary remains firm, despite persistent attempts to dissolve it.

During the Enlightenment and the thrust to scientific rationalism, the proper man was refined, thinking and controlled. He did not exert himself. He spent his time purifying his soul and using his body “as a spiritual vessel, a Christian container of morality and purity.”5 Bodies were shells that required discipline so they did not lead the mind astray. The ethic of discipline came to fruition most visibly in the Industrial

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Revolution. This time of great and significant changes economically, socially and politically revealed a new ethic of embodied discipline through the factory. In the radical reinscription of the physical and social landscape, men’s bodies reworked corporeality in the relationship between labour and capital. Class division was inscribed through embodied activity. The processes that divided the middle from the working classes were performed most insistently through the body. If we take on E. P. Thompson’s astute observation that “class is a relationship and not a thing” the differences and similarities between classes can be mapped out on embodied surfaces and on social organizing tools. Men’s and most significantly, women’s bodies map the mobility of class culture. Class is articulated via relationships between production and consumption. Working class bodies are simultaneously in and out of control. The rampant sexuality that is often inscribed on these bodies is contrasted with the constrained and controlled disposition of the middle class. This sexualising of the working class is akin to Monty Python’s Meaning of Life, where the “Every Sperm is Sacred” scene signals a breeding mentality in working class values that embodies an excessive (hetero)sexuality. This methodology marked out the maintenance of social and cultural authority. Not only is “the (female) body … the primary marker of class” through sexualised discourses, but working class men are inscribed with embodied hardness which serves to “establish the dominance and priority of middle-class men” as thinking and refined individuals. Working class men (and women) were expected to spend long hours in the factory, standing in front of a machine, engaging in disciplined, repetitive behaviour. Indeed, “bodily, working class males were men,

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7 Monty Python, The meaning of life, directed by Terry Jones, written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (Universal, 1983)
8 For more on the relationship between bodies and class see Cranny-Francis, op cit.
9 ibid., p. 74
10 ibid.
but politically and socially they were denied the kudos associated with masculinity.\textsuperscript{11}

The discipline required to work controlled the bodies of working class men economically. Socially, their bodies were out of control, thereby layering the mind and body, middle class and working class dualities. This nexus of contradictions settles over and through class processes that determine embodied behaviour. In the factory and in the home, men’s bodies were inscribed through definitions of discipline.

The paradigm of embodied control gained wider currency through the extension of machines within culture and the accompanying modernity that crept across the landscape. The industrialism that radically reshaped our world is a product of the mentalities of modernity. The belief in a linear history, human evolution, progress, science, truth and reality coincided in this modern manifestation. It was a project that “intertwined [the] emergence of capitalism, the bureaucratic nation-states and industrialism … [and] also entailed extraordinary transformations of space and time.”\textsuperscript{12} These redefinitions and the human relationships to these abstracts served to rework, extend and centralise white, middle class, male power. The perpetual momentum of ideologies locked in human improvement and progress inscribed the ethic of control over lives, landscapes and language. The possibilities and benefits of the machine served to create a sense of optimism in the future, and the capacity for men to give birth to that future themselves. The currency of male power increases during this period with the social and economic division between public and private

\textsuperscript{11} ibid.

spheres, and the increasing bureaucratisation of the workplace. The control of the middle class man over his environment, his life and his future is articulated through the control of the mind and a disembodied subjectivity. World War One radically reinscribed modernity.

Battered Bodies

The first widespread conflict to use guns, shells and tanks produced the first evidence of neurasthenia, or shell shock. The damaged men who returned from this conflict disrupted the great modernity machine. The human form had been ravaged by technology. The faith in evolution and human improvement was shaken to its core with the appearance of physically and emotionally broken masculinity. Men’s bodies were dismembered and disabled - their minds tortured. War was not the battleground on which men proved themselves as ‘real’ men, rather it was the ground on which the machine devoured the human form.

The first world war significantly undermined confidence in the male instinct, by demonstrating that the primitive energies of the male body (virility, physical strength and aggression) were no match for modern technological warfare.

Following this conflict, a process of healing was needed to rebuild and restore a masculinity of control and strength, not only in returned service-men, but wider social actors. Faith in progress needed to be renegotiated, and the damaged minds and bodies of men mended. The link between the degenerate body and the degenerate mind was re-enacted, and the body reaffirmed under the control of the mind. The damaged men

13 ibid., p. 9
14 Carden-Coyne, op cit., [full text]
15 Klaus Theweleit, Male Fantasies, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987) maps most precisely the break down of order and the intensification of border policing (mainly via the rape and torture of women) during war that serves to delay the corrosion of manhood.
16 ibid.
of World War One, needed to restore their power by regaining control over their broken bodies. Bodybuilding was seen as the most complete demonstration of embodied control. Bodybuilding, as “the toning and accentuating of muscles by the repeated action of flexing and releasing … particularly through the use of weights”\textsuperscript{17} required discipline and strength and therefore, required the mind to order the body. It was embraced after World War One to repair the fissures in war-ravaged masculinity. It was, in effect, a way to reclaim mythical phallic power stripped away and replaced by the machines of war. For, “[i]n response to the physical and cultural trauma of war, bodybuilding sought to heal the pain of the immediate past through the creation of a new civilised future.”\textsuperscript{18} Reclaiming autonomy was funneled through the body, and the capacity for men to push themselves outward into the world and the future. The impotence created by war limited men’s capacity to carry real and symbolic power in the social world. The loss of limbs, and the accompanying control over the body, was deemed to demonstrate their moral, emotional and social weakness. This problematising of phallic power is tethered to the capacity to occupy the space of symbolic power effectively - to be embodied in competent masculinity.\textsuperscript{19}

The capacity for the body to control, mold and shape the world through the mind is the crux of a masculine hierarchy that not only privileges men over women, but some men over others. To the extent that, “[t]here are different masculinities with differential access to power, practices of power and differential effects of power.”\textsuperscript{20}

Men define themselves most insistently against other men. The rituals that frame

\textsuperscript{17} ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} For more on the relationship between the penis and the phallus see D. Buchbinder, \textit{Performance anxieties}, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1998)
masculinity, and the rights of passage, are enacted with and for other men. Young and old men have differential access to male power. With age comes the space to exist within stable masculine modalities. Older men evoke a sense of control over phallic power, and over public spaces. Younger men are not allocated much room to articulate manhood. Their performance and adherence to dominant masculinity is tightly monitored.  

Gay, black and colonised men embody a much more volatile masculinity than white, heterosexual men. All men exist within a “rigidified” masculine hierarchy. The empowered men within this gradient have a mastery over themselves, their environment and other people. They occupy and control space effectively. Bodybuilding enabled the damaged man, to reclaim his space within the hierarchy, and to claim the competency required to carry symbolic power. For men lower down the hierarchy it demonstrates a capacity to carry power on embodied surfaces and fills out a space for them to occupy their masculinity.

Being a ‘man’ means having formidable presence in the world, one that conveys in an instant notions of power, control and invulnerability, not to mention the capacity to exercise violence, when required.

After World War One, men worked on repositioning this presence in light of the weakening workings of war and moderating modernity that was fragmenting and destroying the male body. Bodybuilding served, “to shape corporeal borders …

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22 D. Robinson, No less a man: Masculinist art in a feminist age, (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University, 1994), p. 76

against the sense of decay and uncertainty that permeated the ‘air’ of modernity.”

The surfaces of the body resist challenges to the autonomy of men and a weakening of masculinity. These exteriors rendered a strong, invulnerable man who was in control of himself and the world around him. A strong mind connected bodybuilding to images of heroes. War heroes could be more easily framed in musculature. In popular culture, heroes shifted from aristocratic figures such as the Scarlet Pimpernel, to everyday figures of masculinity. By 1938, the emergence of Superman comics positioned the ordinary man as superhero. The egalitarian ethic of bodybuilding cut across classes and encouraged all men to subvert “the laws of inheritance” that determined their destiny to make their own future through their own bodies. The hard body had the capacity to make the ordinary man exceptional.

**Heroic hardness**

Superman’s alter-ego - the mild-mannered Clark Kent - hid a powerful body behind his glasses, the signifier of a thoughtful man. Clark Kent was ordinary and unremarkable. Superman was intelligent and impressive. His powerful physique “represents in vividly graphic detail the masculinity, the confidence, the power that personifies the ideal of phallic masculinity.” Superman is clearly framed within the mind/body binary. The control he exercises over his body reifies his calm and disciplined mind. His command extends across his self and out into the world where

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24 Carden-Coyne, *op cit*, [full text]
26 Carden-Coyne, *op cit*, [full text]
he is able to “transform in a moment of crisis into … superman.” This depicts a completely resilient, autonomously dominating masculinity. The superheroes of the twentieth century like Tarzan, Conan, and James Bond all depict this resilience and complete competence over all aspects of their lives. Embodied strength has increased in Superman, and other superheroes, to mirror the changes in ‘real’ men and their everyday lives. The assault on men’s bodies continued through World War Two, which required, once again, the rebuilding of a resiliently controlled masculine embodiment. Superman changed to compensate for a newly ravaged masculinity, and to carry forth a new version of man into the postwar period.

World War Two once again tore apart men’s bodies. In this war, the machine was reinscribed as saving rather than taking lives on the battlefield. It was preceded by a consciousness in which “everyone hoped, and many believed, that the war would be fast moving, mechanized, remote controlled and perhaps even rather easy.” The development of the atomic bomb was attributed to, and celebrated as, man’s ability to create and conquer anything. Brian Easlea argues that,

> those scientists employed on the Manhattan Project also knew and relished the fact that making the bomb would be a fantastic challenge to their scientific and technological expertise and they also knew and relished the fact that they would be making history.

Man’s capacity to control destiny is redefined in the Manhattan Project. The effects of this weapon were not seen in the West. The decaying bodies in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were masked behind the rhetoric of technological achievement and the lives it could save. By 1950, Superman comics depicted the man of steel withstanding a

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28 ibid.
nuclear blast thereby validating the resilience of white, western masculinity and embodied hardness over the weak others.\textsuperscript{31} The bulging musculature of the superhero was depicted as an impenetrable surface that no external force could infiltrate. A heroic man (a good man) was hard, tough and impenetrable at increasing intensities. Men’s bodies were increasingly impervious to outside attack. Nevertheless, World War Two chewed through men’s bodies and an imperceptible rate. Despite the rhetoric of heroism and technological superiority, the reality of everyday battle was broken bodies. These men were dismembered and tortured.

For the ground troops, artillery and mortar fire were the most terrifying, partly because their noise was so deafening and unignorable, partly because the damaged they caused the body - sometimes total disappearance or atomization into tiny red bits - was worse than most damage by bullets.\textsuperscript{32}

The horror of witnessing the dismemberment of the human body at the mercy of the war-machine deconstructed the autonomy of the male body and the masculine power to control the self. The ideology of the superhero served to mask the realities of this war. Images of heroic soldiers peppered the war and postwar literature. The male body remained intact in these images. Bodybuilding was replaced by the discipline of work where productivity became the signifier of good masculinity in the postwar economic boom.

The period immediately following World War Two was characterised by recovery and reanimation of the world’s economy. The devastation of the Nazi blitzkrieg left deep scars across Europe and Britain. The burden for production was displaced to the United States, Asia and Australia where manufacturing accelerated. It was a period of

\textsuperscript{31} Birdwell, \textit{op cit}, p. 10
\textsuperscript{32} Fussell, \textit{op cit}, p. 278
“soaring expectations”\textsuperscript{33} that resulted in the ‘baby boom’ and suburban sedation. A new optimism critiqued old ideologies, and looked to new ways of knowing and being in a far better future. Most critically, there was a desire to refresh social justice and community caretaking practices through The United Nations. The rise of social justice demonstrated this desire for a connected community producing worthwhile welfare.

The United States came out of World War Two infrastructurally intact. Pearl Harbor was the only real taste of invasion they were unlucky enough to experience. They had won the war and “came out of World War Two with a sense of itself as a masculine nation.”\textsuperscript{34} The competency in winning the war built the U.S. into a powerful force in the western world. They asserted their aesthetics and autonomy affluently. The sense of ‘greatness’ felt in the U.S. was reflected in the economic boom that immediately followed the war. The desire for conquering frontiers and defending national (masculine) territories pushed the space program forward. Technology not only won the war but it would also “win the peace.”\textsuperscript{35}

This was to be the era of manhood after victory, when the pilgrimage to masculinity would be guided not by the god of war Mars, but by the dream of a pioneering trip to the planet Mars.\textsuperscript{36}

The community building ethics were fed into the modern infrastructures of production and consumption that provided new space for men to demonstrate their embodied control, and mastery through the workplace. It was to be this increasing reliance on technology that was to erode the privilege and benefit of a competently embodied man with a disciplined mind. The control that men needed to demonstrate their competence

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{ibid.}, p. 16
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{ibid.}, p. 27
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{ibid.}, p. 5
was being, “transferred upwards to a new class of managers and supervisors.”37 Since the Industrial Revolution this shift had been creeping across the economic estates. However, in the increasing postfordist, fragmented production and niche markets that began to emerge in the late 1960s, this movement reshaped the role of men in the workplace. For working class men,

> [h]owever little control old-fashioned factory workers had over company policy, they at least knew that their work was tangible, their skill connected to the company’s fortunes. In the cold-war world … that connection was often severed.38

The working men, who needed the work environment to demonstrate their competence, were losing this space. This trend continued into the 1980s when the managers who demonstrated their mastery in their capacity to control these workers, were failing to maintain their currency. This postwar period can be characterised by a deepening sense of emasculation as the foundations that propped up the performances of masculinity were no longer solid. This wavering framework is problematising the masculine hierarchy in which both middle and working class men are now negotiating an uneasy subjectivity. In the changing shape of the workplace, both managers and workers were and are finding themselves in the midst of massive corporate downsizing. These men struggle to demonstrate their currency within a framework that can now only give them limited access to the symbolic power. Divergent masculinities, with different access to power, must renegotiate their competency within the new industrial framework. For middle class men, who had no outlet for performances of embodied discipline, their connection to the power they exercised over other men held no real currency on the factory floor. Outside of the corridors of the corporate world, their symbolic power was transferred into symbols of wealth -

38 Faludi, *op cit*, p. 79
material goods. Without employment these goods became increasingly hard to hold onto. Men whose power rested on the ability to control the activity of other men could not replicate that symbolic power without bodies to discipline. With no other men (workers) to control, their symbolic power became meaningless. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult for men to define themselves through participation in the capitalist structure.

As unemployment increases, there has been an equally increasing interrogation of gender roles in the workplace. Feminism has shone a spotlight on patriarchy and not allowed it to quietly maintain its power. The mechanisms men have used to define themselves have been eroded to the extent that there is the claim that masculinity is in crisis. The rising empowerment of women, gay, and black men, have problematised the centrality of white, heterosexual men in a culture. They are no longer easily able to occupy a stable, silent centre in our society. The attempt to reclaim the body and the competency that serves to define legitimate masculinity sits uncomfortably with the silent status of male power. Contradictory ideologies of manhood punctuate the personal and the public. The corporate structure has softened the male instinct and his capacity for virility and physical aggression. The rising interest in men’s health and physical fitness on the whole, has lead to a reanimation of the superman figure. John Bly encouraged men to reclaim their primitive selves. William Pollack suggests that we need to look at educational systems that are not nurturing our boys enough. Even Susan Faludi hails a long lost integration of the father-figure in the workplace to

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39 ibid.
41 W. Pollack, Real boys, (Melbourne: Scribe publications, 1999)
mentor younger men in the acquisition of discipline and mastery of skill. A good man is hard to find in contemporary times. He must be perfectly balanced, mind and body. He must be a superman – simultaneously powerful and ambiguous. Not only able to withstand any crisis, like the comic book hero, but able to lead and mentor other men. A good man nowhardens his body to the external influences that erode male power. The epitome of that control has gained currency in the melding of the body with technology and the production of Super-men.

**Gods and Machines**

The cybernetic organism occupies an insecure position in contemporary culture. While popular culture presents the fearsome problems of breaking the boundaries between man and machine in such characters as the Terminator, the Borg and the Lawnmower Man, it has also more recently begun to argue the possible benefits to damaged masculinity of the invulnerable perfection of the machine. The cybernetic organism has no physical weakness. It offers infallible loyalty and dependability. A key scene in *Terminator Two* is when Sarah Connor looks across at her son playing with the Terminator and realises that it is a better father than any human.

The Terminator would never stop. It would never leave him and it would never hurt him. Never shout at him or get drunk and hit him, or say it was too busy to spend time with him. It would always be there and it would die to protect him.43

This perfect man is embodied in a machine that is invulnerable to harm. It is a superman, free from the imperfections of corporeal obscurity and emotional ambivalence. ‘He’ has no flaws. Men must increasingly reach to irrational heights of perfection to be rendered good men within a society that simultaneously allows many men to abuse

42 Faludi, *op cit.*, p. 79
43 Sarah Connor played by Linda Hamilton in *Terminator Two*, written and directed by James Cameron, (Columbia Tristar, 1991)
power (like domestic violence), but also severely punishes men for flawed performances of masculinity. The strength of character and spirit that is embedded in everyday performances of masculinity is a myth that can only be replicated in fictitious renderings of artificial intelligence and science fiction fantasy. Men must maintain the ambivalences of being silently yet potently powerful. Many men are held by a Nietzschean embrace of the will to transcend the difficulties of everyday realities and that tether masculinity to unreal and irrational expectations of solidarity, control and freedom. Ironically, Nietzsche saw the development of technology as contradictory to the possibility of freeing the human minds from the constructs of reality. He did see the body as a crucial element in attaining freedom.

Nietzsche believed that God was dead. He claimed a shifting spiritual focus from a linear life progression onto an afterlife, to focusing on the perpetuation of the present, and man’s role in creating his own reality. Nietzsche was unreflexively masculinist and notoriously bad in dealing with women’s roles in this reality.44 His work has overtly influenced contemporary renderings of good masculinity and has also been responsible for generating and connecting the controlled body to improving the human condition. When Nietzsche argued that God was dead, he shifted the focus to ‘man’. This claim however, was not an abandonment of God or religion. It was a reaffirment of Christianity in everyday life. Instead of performing good acts for God to seal a place in heaven, Nietzsche believed in performing these acts to make reality and humanity better on earth. He affirmed, “[t]he fact that god became man merely teaches us that man must not look for his happiness in infinity, but should build his

heaven on earth.”45 The denial of an everlasting God was integrated in his work on the ‘will’. Nietzsche believed that when we cling to an external truth (as in God), we become locked into cycles of deception and falsehood, that are embedded within the everyday languages and performances we use to express ourselves. He claimed that, “[t]ruth is that explanation of things which causes us the smallest amount of mental exertion.”46 We are constantly engaged in simulation - locked into roles that are restricted by our own flawed being. Rather than to let the world make us, Nietzsche claims that we must make the world. Through the will to power, we must impose ourselves on the world, and go beyond the everyday to make it a better place. This journey is full of conflict and discomfort, but the reality we make comfortably for ourselves is deceptive, and will make us slaves. As Zarathustra claims, “‘we have invented happiness’, say the last men, and they blink.”47 These last men are the men who embrace their reality comfortably - who do not seek to go beyond themselves. The last man is the lowest of all for Nietzsche. He is obedient to consciousness rather than to instinct. He embraces the ties that bind him to his servitude, and he has lost the will to power. Nietzsche believes that man must “escape ‘conformity’ in order to become a creator.”48 Man has a duty to make way for the superman. This superman is liberated from consciousness bound by perceptions of reality. He has the ability to exist outside the knowledges that tie men to their beliefs and their bondage. To move beyond these (un)realities is to be free - to be a superman or Ubermensch. Nietzsche never gave a clear theoretical outline for the superman and what he would be - only

that he would be a master of his desires, not a slave to them. The superman would be
virtuous, and recognise the corruption in everyday life by which “he is obliged to
conceive another life.”49 This new life would be free from the confines of a reality
bound by knowledges created to make existence comfortable, and ultimately false.
For the superman, “life itself is the will to power.”50 Every man is obliged to embrace
this ethic. These are the conditions required for the ultimate birth of the superman.

This model, according to Nietzsche, is the hero. For it is him that is,

[s]toic and hard, unmoved by pity, never deluded by appearances nor
succumbing to the temptation of a peaceful life in the midst of the flock, the
hero tries to reach his extreme limit … to wage war everywhere so that
through him will be born the once before whom nature was retreated: the
superman.51

The hero is a transition man. He abandons the comforts of truth and reality to embrace
the contradictions of life and God, to exert the will to power, and to realise the
irrationality of his existence. In the search for a new existence, the superman will be
born. The hero must toil and men must push themselves to become heroes. For, “[t]he
time has come for man to set himself a goal. The time has come for man to plant the
seed of his highest hope.”52 The road to the superman must pass through the body.
Nietzsche locates corporeality as the bearer of all instinct - that must be harnessed for
the superman to manifest. This instinct, for Nietzsche is truth. However, this truth is
not final, nor is it necessarily coherent. It is made coherent by consciousness that is
created by a complacent, comfortable reality. Therefore there needs to be an
integration of conscious and unconscious thought. The hero must be aware of this
process and embrace it, for this enables a true generation of the will to power. The
hero affirms that, “[b]ehind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, there stands a

49 Nietzsche, *The complete works of Friedrich Nietzsche, op cit.*, p. 286
50 *ibid.*, p. 57
51 Chaix-Ruy, *op cit.*., p. 32
52 Nietzsche, *Thus spoke zarathustra, op cit.*, p. 17
mightier ruler, and unknown sage - whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body."\textsuperscript{53} The link between embodied control through and involving the mind is articulated in the will to power. Nietzsche sees the body as an integral part in moving beyond the structures of reality. This is superimposed onto the comic book Superman, whose body shapes the world and performs the will. Valued masculinity embraces a superhero mentality whereby men must strive toward perfection, and toward the hero that will improve humanity. The contradictions of a masculinity that must be physically and emotionally heroic, is performed by Henry Rollins.

\textbf{Search and Destroy}

Henry Rollins was born Henry Garfield in February 1961. He was raised predominantly by his mother who divorced his father when Rollins was three. After joining seminal punk band \textit{Black Flag} in 1981, Rollins claimed a place in the U.S. punk scene. When \textit{Black Flag} disbanded in 1986, he formed \textit{The Rollins Band}, which has continued to occupy a respected place in the alternative punk rock scene.\textsuperscript{54} In 1984, Rollins formed 2.13.61 Publications\textsuperscript{55} which publishes not only the plethora of his own work, but authors like Hubert Selby Junior, Nick Cave and David Lee Roth. Apart from his work in \textit{The Rollins Band}, Henry also extensively tours with his one-man spoken word shows and takes on small film roles.\textsuperscript{56}

Rollins embodies a contradictory masculinity. He negotiates the schizophrenic crises of masculine power by quietly occupying centrality while pumping up male bodies to

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{ibid.}, p. 34
\textsuperscript{54} For a full exploration of Rollins history see, J. Parker, \textit{Turned on: A biography of Henry Rollins}, (London: Phoenix, 1998)
\textsuperscript{55} The numbers stand for Rollins’ birthday.
\textsuperscript{56} He can be seen in \textit{Lost Highway}, \textit{Johnny Neumonic}, and \textit{Heat}. 
occupy social space. He embraces a Nietzschean ethic of will and exerting himself on the world. Much of his work is empowering and belligerent. Rollins believes in extending himself to the limits - to live on the edge and experience the pain and contradictions in life. He hails masculinity – its performance and problems. Rollins overtly mobilises this Nietzschean ethic in his music, writing and spoken word.

How are you today? Are you climbing that ladder? They told you all about that ladder. Climb that ladder and find that salvation. Sure is hard to climb I bet. Arms getting tired? Sure is a long ladder. Faith, is that the word they used? Hope? I’ve been watching you from a long ways off. You’re not climbing on any ladder. You’re running on a treadmill.57

Rollins’ contempt for the last man is audible. Simultaneously, he reaffirms a masculine sense of control and competence written on his body. He marks masculinity. Introduced to weight-lifting as a teenager by his teacher, Rollins evokes the superman musculature that serves as a barrier to the corruption of the last man. He reworks his muscles to reclaim his sense of self after a disaffiliated, Ritalin-addicted childhood spent bouncing between his mother and father. It is through his body that Rollins most visibly defines manhood and demonstrates the ambiguities of power.

I got home and ran to the bathroom and pulled my shirt off. I could not recognise myself at first. My body had a shape. It was a body, not just this thing that housed a stomach and a heart. I could see the difference big-time. It was the first thing that I remember ever giving me a sense of accomplishment. I felt and looked strong. I had done something. No one could ever take it away. You couldn’t say shit to me.58

The processes of disciplining the body and empowering the self are made clear in his relationship to his body and to the weights. He clearly mobilises a masculinity of embodied competence in his sense of rebuilding through corporeality. This mixture of Nietzschean will and bodybuilding creates a complex rendering of masculinity that transcends many of the common definitional frameworks men use in claiming an

58 Rollins, “The iron”, *ibid.*, p. 255
identity. He does not remain silently stoic. He questions, queries and qualifies male identity.

![Figure 6 Henry Rollins](http://fade.to/rollins/)

Nietzsche rendered the hero as an aristocrat. He believed that they embraced the sense of distance required from the other people around them (the masses) that facilitated interrogation of reality and the birth of the superman. Rollins appropriates this ideology and reworks it into a distinctly working class context. He demonstrates an embodied control that is not regimented in or by the workplace, but through an appropriation of Nietzschean will. The empowerment is animated across his body literally through his muscles and textually in the extensive tattoos he adorns. He embraces an ethic of perfection and resilience through his large sun tattoo on his back, which is accompanied by the words, “search and destroy”. He regularly affirms that he is, “part animal, part machine.” This rhetoric of strength and power serves to reaffirm dominant notions of competent masculinity embodied in impenetrability. His overt activation of masculine ideologies means he is uncomfortably accessed in popular culture. Encased within unpopular punk performance, he is resigned to revelry in a fringe framework.

59 Available at [http://fade.to/rollins/](http://fade.to/rollins/)

Rollins is not simply advocating a reanimation of the rebuilding ethic of bodybuilding, or perfection through the machine. He quite distinctly reconfigures this masculinity while concurrently maintaining it. Rollins is remarkably self-reflexive and performs a public masculinity in his attention to weightlifting, writing and working. He is overtly anti-sexist, anti-homophobic and anti-racist. His spoken word performances are littered with his affirmative action monologues. He collapses the masculine hierarchy and confuses distinctions in masculine performances.

I was told several months ago that I was going to come to Chicago, go on CNN and come out of the closet … A little about me. If I was gay, there’d be no closet. You would never see the closet I came out of. Why? I would’ve burnt it for kindling by the time I was twelve. Coz I know with all certainty in my mind there’s nothin’ wrong with being gay and you know it.61

Rollins engages and confuses the masculine hierarchy in a myriad of ways. He engages a distinctly youthful, anti-authoritarian ethic in his song lyrics and spoken word. He articulates disenfranchisement with society via an urban rebellion soundtrack. However, this rhetoric is not encased exclusively within young hyper-masculine subjectivity. Rollins hails alternative identities along the scope of identity politics. He remains deeply concerned with racism, feminism and sexuality. These issues are punctuated by a strong sense of isolation from individuals and community collectivity. On December 19th 1991 Rollins’ best friend, Joe Cole was murdered outside their home. This event percolates through Rollins’ writing to affirm a mediated masculinity of fragmented and fallible life literacies. While men are not encouraged to interrogate the internal spaces of their lives, Rollins rages through a damaged and dispossessed identity.

I learned about loss by losing: It’s getting close now. In a few days it will be a year since Joe died. I am alone in a room in the middle of Los Angeles. It’s past midnight. I am so ashamed. I don’t know why but I am. I am embarrassed at how at this moment I have things that I want to write but I am too ashamed to. All I know is there are situations where you can lose parts of yourself and the hole the absence creates can never be filled. That’s what we do instinctively. We seek to fill the holes, shove plaster into the cracks. We seek to replace what has been lost with something else. Something that resembles what is gone or replaces the way the departed thing made us feel. You know, like how someone replaces heroin with methadone. It’s one of the ways we resolve the reality of loss. I’ve been trying to replace what cannot be replaced and all my human tendencies are turning on me and tearing me up. Some losses you can’t make up for. You just have to get on with it. I know this. I didn’t before but I learnt it by getting dragged through the last three hundred and sixty some nights. I know I am not capable of telling anyone what I feel and what fury and anguish courses through my veins during almost every waking moment. Sometimes I feel like I am suffocating inside my skin, like I should be ripping out of it. If I ripped out of my skin, where the hell would I go. Right. I know that I just have to keep walking the trail. I hope my fury won’t turn my bones to ash, even if it does, it won’t change a thing.62

Rollins ponders the processes of articulating identity, and relationships to those around him. He visibly renders otherness, marginalisation, dispossession and distance in social structures. He writes a social commentary for negotiating life, lessons and loss. Rollins operates contrary to a dominant masculine subjectivity that (mythically) understands and controls the range of legitimate life challenges from financial support to social disasters. Rollins is unclear and insecure of his position in culture and society – both as a performer and person. He articulates convoluted and contradictory manhood and subverts his own performance of masculinity, by demonstrating the problematics of all such performances. This is pondered most clearly in the “Liar” music video that features Rollins in the Superman role.

In this music video, Rollins interrogates different levels of truth and reality. He mobilises surface renderings of identity, to deconstruct the masculine hierarchy that

privileges white, middle class, heterosexual males. For Rollins, neither Clark Kent nor Superman, are valid models on which to base good performances of masculinity. Neither of these men are heroes – they are simulations. He embraces both of them as a performance that conceals the unconscious, uncomfortable truth of surfacing masculinity through unreal and irrational frameworks. He begins the clip disguised as Clark Kent. Rollins parodies the concerned and caring masculinity, reifying and reacting to dominant versions of manhood. The version of Superman that Rollins then represents is authoritative and totalitarian. He is more like a militant security guard than the invincible, integral and noble character we are familiar with. Rollins depicts Superman as a corrupt masculinity unable to negotiate power effectively. In punk spaces of anti-authoritarianism, this Superman is not a ‘good’ man. He, like Clark Kent, is performing a role. He is the disguise. This performance of Superman deconstructs the myth of the male hero. For Rollins, this hero does not exist - or if he does - he is a “Liar”. Instead, he over-performs dominant masculinity, marking the terrain of empowerment. In between Clark Kent and Superman, masculinity reveals its true colours embodied by a red Rollins. The ‘true’ Nietzschean corruption of everyday life is obscured in the out of focus fuzziness of the red ‘real’ man. This is an ambiguous figure that has limited visibility within contemporary culture. The blurring and bleeding of different masculinities in this film clip constructs a cult criticism of contemporary popular renderings of dominant masculinity. The uncomfortable rendering of masculine power Rollins embodies sits uneasily between dominant and subordinate accounts of masculinity. His musculature hails the embodied competence of men in the public sphere, yet his excessiveness works against mute masculine currency. He generates a speaking position for men within our culture and uses it to problematise social constructions of race, class and gender. Tracing the outline of
manhood, he centralises and confuses men’s issues. Fluctuating on the fringes, Rollins maneuvers through meaning simultaneously actively and ambiguously.

In performing the difficulties of masculinity, Henry Rollins creates a critique of the masculine hierarchy. He calls into question the validity of masculine power, by renegotiating its currency. He embraces and reifies the contradictions in manhood by embodying the superman ethic while concurrently deceiving it. He hails an ultimately resilient and empowered dominant masculinity within a deconstructive rhetoric. He is mobilising a moment within our culture where men must redefine who they are. This redefinition must be less concerned with how men can regain the power they have lost and that they are currently mourning in the ‘crisis of masculinity’. Henry Rollins reveals the mechanisms that serve to confine men, and he reworks them into a self-reflexive negotiation of masculine identity. He is not Superman, and he mediates the self-destruction that is entailed in its performance. Men cannot be Superman, nor can they be Clark Kent. They need to redefine their bodies, their minds and their performances to activate a masculinity that is not invincible, but can still exist coherently within a social system.
Satisfying Spike

The Rollins rendering of masculinity embodies the paradox of male identity. Men seek to remain unproblematised in the midst of contemporary criticism of men’s roles in society. Men’s studies is currently undergoing a boom period within academia. Masculinity is being placed under the microscope in an effort to gain a more complete grasp on the difficulties and disturbances of being a man in contemporary culture. Rollins’ performance of contradictory masculinity resonates through these new paradigms. As a punk figure, the excessive, hyper-masculinity he embodies fills out the meanings of manhood on the surfaces of his body. This stretched limit of embodiment complements the extension of marginalised masculinity through song lyrics. The articulation of male disenfranchisement, within the system that is constructed for their benefit, runs against the stability of the hierarchy. Through his spoken word performances, Rollins reframes the seriousness and currency of masculine legitimacy. He replaces it with reflexive performances of a gendered self. His parody of power, articulates the spaces of otherness that work contrary to the maintenance of masculine power in a society.

As men’s studies has boomed, reflexive interpretations of male power have entered the popular terrain. *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* offers one such radical rendering in the character of Spike. He embodies a confused and conflicted manhood in this series. He is physically, socially, and emotionally mobile, in this program. Masculinity melts on the surfaces of his skin. From season two through six, Spike nose-dives through a series of subjectivities that problematise the hierarchy of masculinity. He is not able to coherently maintain a controlled and
competent corporeality. The movement between Henry Rollins and Spike is played on the surfaces of masculine bodies where violence is articulated, controlled and inscribed.

Spike’s status as a supporting character in an increasingly popular series, demonstrates movement of meanings whereby contradictory manhood, mobilises the ‘crisis’ in reflexive and conscious critiques of volatile and violent masculinity. Manhood is deprioritised in this text, with it circulates on the fringes of the diegesis. Spike’s subjectivity is constantly questioned as he moves through the levels in the hierarchy of masculinity. His competence is called into question and he must reconcile his ‘defeat’ by accessing other literacies outside of masculine knowledges and experiences. The mobile manner in which a dominantly structured identity slips through unstable subjectivities reframes masculinity within intensely contextualised and problematised politics. This slippage is challenging to cultural binaries and boundaries. Spike performs uncomfortable politics. Within *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* female competence is the dominant paradigm. Assertive and active women activate the diegesis. Male incompetence is a feature of the masculinities represented. Spike’s movement and mobility within this world offers an unsettled masculine modality, rather than the stoic, enduring epitome of manhood that dominates the masculine hierarchy.

The terrain Rollins lays out is traversed by Spike in *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, where destructive and problematised masculinity is positioned uncomfortably among dominant and powerful women. Spike’s struggle to articulate a rounded and well-defined masculinity is persistently performed as he moves through many modalities of meaning. In a text that articulates the politics of third wave feminism
and a powerful femininity, masculinity meanders meaningfully alongside rather than over these meanings.
Chapter Six

Big Bad Politics: Polystyrene Masculinities and the Fissures in Manhood

Buffy: Do we really need weapons for this?
Spike: I just like them. They make me feel all manly.¹

“School Hard”

Men are enmeshed in the conundrums of gendered identity. The recent cries of ‘crisis’, have propelled men’s studies into startling visibility. Masculinity is not a stable or unproblematised identity. Performance of a successful manhood is tightly policed and brutally monitored. Sorting out the meanings and methods of maintaining a masculine modality calls for brave practice. Men are not encouraged to look inward. They are defined by their capacity to assert themselves externally onto the landscape and other people. While feminists have always had to engage with wider epistemologies that are inherently advantageous to male subjectivity (and often contrary to feminism), by carrying “images of masculinity … into our most intimate communications”² in order to validate their theory and practice, the same does not apply in reverse. The usefulness of feminist theory in providing the framework for questioning gender has been unclearly figured in much of men’s studies. Indeed “[t]he lack of recognition and citation of feminist work is an issue for radicals, liberals, heterosexuals and gay men who study men.”³ The role of feminism in men’s studies remains ambivalent. However, I began to think about men while watching an overtly

¹ Scene from “School Hard,” Buffy: The Vampire Slayer, written by David Greenwalt and Joss Whedon, directed by John Kretchmer, original air-date, 29th September 1991, episode 2.03
feminist text - *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer.* Buffy’s awesome arse-kicking ability sits comfortably with my aggressive feminist tendencies. I enjoy the representation of feminine empowerment embodied by the women in the ‘Buffyverse’. Nevertheless, I have also found myself delighting in the playful personality embodied by resident evil vampire - Spike.

This character occupies a varied and volatile masculinity that moves through the diegesis uncomfortably and ambivalently. Played by American actor James Marsters, Spike delivers the best lines. His initial arrival in Sunnydale in the second season episode “School Hard” saw him drive his car over the ‘Welcome to Sunnydale’ sign and emerge to a Metallica-like soundtrack punctuating his big-booted, leather-jacketed, blonde-haired frame. I like Spike because he is a conundrum. He is the epitome of white, middle class, heterosexual masculinity. However, he persistently problematises his position in the diegesis. Spike is consistently forced to examine and reformulate his role in Sunnydale. He does not silently and stoically occupy the unmarked centre. He is a character for contemplation. He activates a connective network of meaning circulating through men’s studies and feminism.

This chapter takes Spike seriously. Moving through men’s studies, a cultural studies interpretation of masculinity will flow through an investigation of Spike’s relationship to wider social, economic and political conditions currently in crisis. By activating

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For the uninitiated, *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* is the story of a young girl who is ‘chosen’ and given the strength and skill to fight vampires. Sunnydale is the setting for the drama in this series. Situated on a ‘hellmouth’ it offers up all kinds of demons and creatures for Buffy to fight and destroy.

Men’s studies involves a variety of methodologies that embrace different ideological cores. Men’s studies can refer to tropes furthering non-profeminist manifestos, studies on men written only by men, studies on men written by women. In this thesis I am engaging with a variety of recent studies on men that engage reflexive self-conscious criteria such as that mobilised by Robert Connell and Jeff Hearn that work against non-profeminist literature.
changes in the public sphere, a rendering of violence will help to validate an increasing visibility of mournful men in popular culture. Coupled with cultural studies’ role in demonstrating the increasing popularity of the men’s studies movement, a reconfiguration of masculine literacy will anchor Spike’s confluent and complicated mobility within *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*. His embodiment of contradictory manhood performs the ambivalence of the cult label. The questioning of male power in popular culture remains unresolved. Spike’s journey is long and convoluted through the series. This chapter tracks his progression through violence, disability, and emotional crisis to explore the level of masculine resilience within a hegemonic system that accepts very little weakness from men. Spike is a moving metonym for men’s studies. His trajectory through the diegesis creates space for the articulation of a more fluid and flexible masculine identity that can move beyond the paralyzing problematics of the ‘crisis’.

**Mobilising men**

Masculine crisis has become a catch-phrase. Cynthia Heimel articulates the uncertain understandings of men in her book, *Get Your Tongue Out of My Mouth, I’m Kissing You Goodbye* where she states that men are “bewildered, insecure and terribly nervous.” Uncovering the cause of this insecurity has spawned a plethora of self-help and social psychology books devoted to finding the wild-man within, examining the Boy Code, reworking the corporate industrial complex, and blaming the feminists.

Men are finding it difficult to make sense of themselves in a changing social, political

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6 C. Heimel, *Get your tongue out of my mouth, I’m kissing you goodbye*, (Sydney: Macmillan, 1993)
7 *ibid.*, p. 119
and economic context. However, they are beginning to break out of traditional modes of meaning surrounding their performances of masculinity. This shifting male identity has resulted from wider economic and political changes to our social world. It has been a consistent characteristic of the postwar period to fracture traditional sites for the maintenance of male power. These changes in consciousness are embedded within the rise of feminism validating women’s places in the public sphere, decolonisation deconstructing penetrative, masculine colonising frameworks, a postfordist workplace, and the rise of identity politics. A more convoluted social organisation has activated outside experiences of the working class, female, black and gay identities in the public realm. A masculine hierarchy helps to explain divergent experiences of manhood within this time and space.

Men are not only defined in opposition to women. There are varying and different versions of masculinity that jostle for currency with each other more insistently than with women. While men benefit from their position of power, it is unfair to uncritically align men as individuals with the distinctly faceless patriarchal system. This system relies on participation. Both men and women mobilise meanings to maintain this structure. It results in masculine consciousness penetrating our social sense-making modalities. Masculinity is not a stable social formation. It moves and mutates through time and across bodies, and “[a]symmetries are … produced within the patriarchal structure which favour some men over others, and confer more power upon those men than upon the others.”12 There are multiple masculine identities that exist at different levels of social literacy and power. Not all men possess the same type, or resonance of legitimacy, within our culture. Working class, gay and black

men possess variable levels of social power compared to white, middle class, heterosexual men. These (othered) men have been forced to consistently shift, meld and negotiate their performance of masculinity under the spectre of dominant masculine identity carrying empowerment with ease. It has only been with the decline in the corporate industrial complex, and the displacement of white male power in the workplace, that an interrogation of varying masculine identities has gained visibility. Critique is only activated when men in power are not so easily occupying an ‘untouchable’ position. They are being wounded on the battlefield of capitalism. This system is now less inclined to recognise these men as special or valuable to its function.

Lynne Segal is clear in arguing the link between economic restructuring and the ‘crises’ in gendered identity and politics for men. She suggests,

the greater impoverishment of certain groups of men over the last few decades … [is a result of] the resurgence of [a] more naked form of capitalist restructuring, wherein the shrinking number of economically secure core workers - primarily men - are surrounded by an ever-expanding part-time, peripheral or home-base supply of workers - still primarily women.13

These concerns are at the core of men’s inability to negotiate a more mobile masculinity. Many men have a limited range of skills to deal with the radical shifts in the workplace, and wider culture. Susan Faludi most clearly demonstrates the problems of a shrinking workforce on male identity within western culture in *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the Modern Man*. Men are visible in the public sphere. It is in this space that male power is articulated and traded. The public sphere is where things of value are created, built and exchanged. Jeff Hearn refers to this sphere as the “public

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It is where men must be strong, intelligent, brave, resilient and powerful. They are finding it increasingly hard to fit this straightjacket of legitimate masculine identity. Specifically, they are finding it difficult to be empowered within a hierarchy of masculinity, in which there is an increased consciousness of different versions of manhood, afforded divergent currencies of power. Faludi maps the meanings of work for men, and the consequences of a declining workforce on male identity. Being able to occupy this realm in a secure and tangible manner is intimately tethered to legitimate masculinity. It is here that men are able to demonstrate a mastery of control. The ability to control his environment, his body and his emotions are key ingredients in the successful performance of masculinity. Further, his ability to furnish something functional out of his surroundings is the key to an ideology of ‘usefulness’ for men. This act of creation inscribes the masculine as the public.

As an ideal of manhood, utilitarian masculinity traditionally required that man wrest something out of the raw materials of the physical world ... Another important aspect of such a masculinity was the importance of commanding the inner skills to work with materials.

This capacity to act upon time and space, to shape it and create it in the image he determines, operates centrally in definitions of good manhood. The frontiers-man, the action hero, the father figure, the Romeo or lover, all function to demonstrate a mastery over their world. For Faludi, the men she encounters at McDonnell Douglas and The Long Beach Naval Shipyards embody an authentic and accurately active manhood defined by, and through work. The surfaces of their bodies are maps of manufacturing. She presents a worn and weakening facade of work in her writing.

When I drove through the shipyard gate on an early visit, Ernie McBride, Jr., was waiting for me under a big, years-old banner that read THE SHIP, THE

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15 For a detailed interrogation of the relationship between men and the hero myths of our culture see, Roger Horrocks, *Male myths and icons*, (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1995)
16 Faludi, *op cit*, p. 56
YARD, THE TEAM, and a newer one that said CLOSURE WITH PRIDE. He had a creased face and the most work-worn hands of any public-relations man I’d ever met.17

She presents these men with affection, and a yearning for the physical and emotional integrity of work. These men are metonyms for the fragmented and functional workplace of postfordism. Their expendability marks out the maintenance of middle class meanings in manufacturing. The privatisation of public utilities and the economic rationalism of government have hit these men hard. Faludi presents the US statistics of downsizing at the job cost of “60, 000 at Chrysler, 74, 000 at General Motors, 175, 000 at IBM, 125, 000 at AT&T.”18 Not only are working class men being laid off, but middle class men are also fighting to maintain employment. With male identity so intimately connected to the workplace, the consequences for men are devastating. These statistics are representative of the wider context for economic, political and social restructuring that is reinscribing the role of men in the public sphere. There is a direct correlation between declining employment rates and rising anxiety in masculine subjectivities. This frustration manifests via a displacement of fear onto othered identities. Faludi maps these meanings in her interrogation of McDonnell Douglas employee Don Motta, who she argues,

was unusual for tying his sense of emasculation directly to downsizing. For most of the men, the designated culprit was another sex, another nationality, another race. An anti-immigration referendum, Proposition 187, was on the California ballot that fall of 1994 and the center was full of talk of “illegal aliens who are taking our jobs away,” talk that expanded inevitably into broadsides against job-poaching “minorities” in general.19

This blame is not uncommon, and it is not by any means, limited to men. What Faludi’s case-study demonstrates, is the complicated network between men, work, identity and politics. The key to this deflection of blame onto ‘outsiders’, including

17 ibid., p. 57
18 ibid., p. 61
19 ibid., p. 65
women, black men, and immigrants is a lack of consciousness in male identity. With the diversity of changes in the postwar period, men’s roles have not coherently critiqued or generated a consciousness of how they carry and maintain power. While jobs in manufacturing have declined, viable alternatives have not been created to shift the focus of employment. The rise of digital technologies and knowledge-based industries as growing businesses, do little for working class identities, and only marginally improve access for middle class ones. The increasing casualisation of the workforce has lead to extended working hours, less job security, declining health benefits and rising debt. The contradictory values of a consumption-based economy coupled with declining employment rates results in ambivalent and anxious masculine politics.

The nature of work has changed. It was once defined by control over the environment - forging a living out of harsh surroundings and molding the world to suit your existence. Since the industrial revolution, this definition of work has become less current. Physical action was regimented by the machine, days regulated by the time-clock and a declined ability to control own time and space. The working man became a working class man, who came to stand for “an oppressively crowded, depersonalised, and often emasculated life.” Working class men were forced to reinscribe some sense of control through an ability to master their work, and by articulating their masculinity on the sporting field, where violent embodied control is embedded in the rules of the game, and in crowd participation. In the radical

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21 *ibid*, p. 83
22 See Horrocks, *op cit.*, for an extension of masculinity and sport and the role of working class men on the sporting field and in the crowd.
Restructuring of the postwar period, both working class and middle class men began to lose their jobs. Suddenly the managers and supervisors found their positions in the workplace, and agency in social relationships under threat.

The ability for working class and middle class men to negotiate these challenges is dramatically limited due to the strict protocols and rituals surrounding masculinity, coupled with the impermeability of dominant masculine definitions. The frustration encased in the contradictions of cementing identity in an era of change has created the ‘crisis in masculinity’. Men’s roles in the workplace and in society are being reinscribed. They are no longer secure. The contradictions in manhood are becoming visible, and men are being forced to examine who they are, and how they define themselves. Figures like Henry Rollins, Bill Cosby, and George Lucas have contributed to a questioning of manhood in recent times. Marginalised men have also been forced to negotiate and renegotiate their roles. Now white, middle class, heterosexual men must be self-conscious in how power circulates around and through them. They must dialogue with other identities, and not to simply dismiss or marginalise them, but discover their strategies for reinscription and survival. Men are not in crisis, the currency of their power is largely intact. Different versions of masculinity are occupying new positions and men now have to account for their actions. They must redefine who they are. In the midst of economic, social and political upheaval men have remained silent, and it has profoundly damaged their capacity to negotiate with society. Now that men are in ‘crisis’, men’s studies has sought to interpret a productive masculine identity.

Writing Men
Men’s studies has boomed in publishing. The range and scope of books, of and for men, are increasing at a dramatic rate. Men are turning inward to make sense of emotional, physical and social factors framing male identity. Doug Robinson begins his book, *No Less a Man*, by claiming the need to for an interrogation of manhood.

The book is … thinly disguised autobiography - autobiography writ large, autobiography collectivized through the profeminist men’s movement and various cultural expressions sensitive and sympathetic to that movement, and to men’s need to be transformed. It rides somewhere out on the front lines of men’s experience of the importance and possibility of change, radical change, traumatic change, breakdown and slow rebuilding.23

He is not alone in his desire to interrogate, problematise and heal ‘damaged’ masculinity. David Buchbinder affirms in the opening of his book, *Performance anxieties: Re-producing masculinity* focuses specifically on how men and various masculinities are represented – re-produced – and what those representations have to say about men and masculinity; but also – and importantly – on what such representations try not to say or what they might ignore.24

Both these writers explain the need for a theory of masculinity to investigate the conundrums of manhood. A barrage of books now exists to help men, women and parents make sense of contemporary masculine health, emotional and physical development. The boom of the self-help genre has spawned, James C. Dobson’s book *Bringing Up Boys: Practical Advice and Encouragement for those Shaping the Next Generation of Men*, John Eldridge’s, *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man’s Soul*, Ian Davies’, *My Boys Can Swim!: The Official Guy’s Guide to Pregnancy*, Stephen Arterburn, Fred Stoeker and Mike Yorkey’s *Every Man’s Battle: Winning the War on Sexual Temptation One Victory at a Time*, and Patrick C. Walsh MD and Janet Farrar Worthington’s *Guide to Surviving Prostate Cancer*. Not least

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24 Buchbinder, *op cit.*, p. vii
are the texts helping to nurture and develop young boys, like William Pollack’s *Real Boys* which interrogates educational frameworks that are oppressing young men.

Over the last decade we’ve been forced to confront some staggering statistics. From elementary grades through high school, boys receive lower grades than girls. Eighth-grade boys are held back 50 percent more often than girls. By high school, boys account for two thirds of students in special education classes. Fewer boys than girls now attend and graduate from college. Fifty-nine percent of all master’s degree candidates are now women and the percentage of men in graduate-level professional education is shrinking each year.25 The declining rates of workplace employment are linked to the declining success in education for young men. While a hailing of men’s identity is crucial for a reconfiguration of power and place in society, the rise of men’s issues in the public domain are often neglectful of feminist politics. This means that the interrogation of masculinity is often performed without adequate reflexivity of wider social identities and is only interested in re-performing male power within a new discourse. Statistics like those positioned by Pollack are valuable. They do offer insight into social structures that limit and frame male behaviour. Boys do often present a “false front of machismo”26 and “experience more difficulty adjusting to school.”27 However, this understanding does not activate a wider reflexivity in social meanings. Tara Brabazon demonstrates the tendency for this type of knowledge to silence and mask feminist knowledges and politics. In *Ladies Who Lunge*, she specifically interprets the relationship between gender, school, and the perceived decline in male academic performances that she interprets as a “fabricated fracas.”28 Brabazon demonstrates the incongruities reported in a *West Australian* newspaper article on tertiary entrance results.

25 Pollack, *op cit.*, p. 15  
26 *ibid.*, p. 14  
27 *ibid.*, p. 15  
The article reported that ‘Girls took out most of the academic prizes with 21 of the 40 general exhibitions’ (emphasis added). By my calculation, twenty-one is only 52.5 percent of forty, which is not most … Similarly, the article stated that of the top 1000 students, 477 were male and 523 were female. Again, these statistics demonstrate that 52.3 percent of these high-achieving students were women … Little comment was made on the pattern of the tertiary entrance results, which men have dominated through history. If men had attained twenty-one of the forty prizes, then no comment would have been made.29

When girls start to outperform the boys in school cries of ‘crisis!’ punctuate the public discourse. Men routinely occupying intellectual success warrants no concern. They naturally fill out these positions. Men’s studies must reflexively interpret these absences and silences if it hopes to provide an effective intervention for masculinities in our culture. A reflective politics of masculinity is necessary. It can help to renegotiate relationships among men, and with women. Popular culture has also invested in the changes to male consciousness recently with films like Chasing Amy and Fight Club demonstrating an interpretive masculinity in contemporary times. Fight Club in particular, is a key moment in popular memory that meddles with male power and their literacy in violence. Much of the pivotal publishing in men’s studies and feminism is currently contemplating violence. From domestic abuse to sexual harassment, violent literacy is increasingly visualised and problematised.

Feminist theory has expertise in the negotiation of men and violence. It has often presented violent men as scourges on society, and has only really been interested in its effects on women to the silence of other men.30 Nevertheless, a body of work exists engaging with men, women and violence. Jenna Mead for example, presents a comprehensive interpretation of Helen Garner and sexual harassment in

29 ibid.
30 Some of the feminist work on violence is problematic. Andrea Dworkin, Pornography: men possessing women, (London: Women’s Press, 1981), for example presents all sex with men as violent refusing a feminine consciousness in pleasure.
Bodyjamming. Virginia Trioli interrogates the relationships between sexual harassment and reason in *Generation F* where she injects a violent undercurrent into her interpretation of power in the workplace.

Like many women I speak to about these issues, Rayner has a weary bravado, one that speaks of her unfazed exhaustion at dealing with men. But there is something about this story that has stung her. Pressed to tell more, her worldly demeanour cracks and she is trembling. ‘He raped her, okay? This man raped her and she decided not to take it any further because I couldn’t promise her an outcome.’ Rayner laughs like she is spitting. ‘And besides, she told me she didn’t really want to take it further because he had apologised to her for it – he *apologised*. Now you tell me – how did her youth and her beauty and her personal power protect her from that?’

This example of implied and implicit violence has flowed through much feminist work, where women have attempted to deal with an “underlying threat of the man’s physical violence towards the woman.” This work has dealt with overt and covert manifestations of the physical intimidation. Katha Pollitt dialogues with Kate Roiphe through a rape discourse in *Reasonable Creatures* where she demonstrates the consciousness in violence women often possess are confirmed in “veiled parental warnings.” bell hooks renders her interpretation of violence within a feminist inflected race framework in her article on the film “Kids” by explaining that “[v]iolence toward aggressive black male strangers is acceptable to moviegoing audiences in a society that … see[s] blackness as a sign of a threat.”

Lynne Segal ponders the connections between a feminist politics and an interpretation of masculinity in *Slow Motion* where she positions violence within a social nexus of meanings encasing men and women. Economic, social and political causes for domestic violence are mapped.

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[C]ontemporary and historical studies indicate that family violence is affected by material deprivation, interacting with women’s dependence and powerlessness and men’s assumption of their right to control women.35

While this body of work exists, men’s studies is often reluctant to engage with it. While much of it does work against men’s interests, reflexivity in intellectual inquiry is needed to create a comprehensive discipline. Jeff Hearn demonstrates the consequences of a feminist inflection of men’s studies that is resisted by both men’s studies theorists and feminists.

[W]e cannot simply announce our alliance with feminism and feminists, as if that is proof of our good intentions. Words, and writing, are themselves not enough. Our relationship with feminism will always be problematic.36

Feminists often reject the intervention to men into their paradigm. Policing the boundaries of their knowledge is a way to create a space for feminine expertise and empowerment. Reconciling the relationship between men, women and violence is not so simple as adopting a feminist intervention. The growth of men’s studies has encouraged men to interpret themselves and their practices between each other.

Extending this interpretation out into a wider context has most crucially taken place at a public service level.

The contemplation and concern with domestic violence has lead to government programmes and public advertising directed at curbing brutal behaviour. Focus groups and discussion collectives have sprung up to deal with men and violence. Andy Moore and Tom Weld track one such group in Victor Seidler’s edited book, *Men, Sex and Relationships*. A group of men probe and ponder their violent tendencies, specifically in relation to women. The identity of ‘Mike’ in this group offers a startling insight into the capacity of men to assert themselves onto the world, and the

35 Segal, *op cit.*, p. 256
36 Hearn, *op cit.*, p. 5
rendering of violence that reconfirms their presence. In one session, he refers to his relationship with his partner ‘Ruth’, with whom he has only “ever been and am continually really, really, angry. I can scream with my entire lungs at her.”\textsuperscript{37} This forceful imposition of self out into the world demonstrates a political role for violence in hailing masculine identity. Physical violence is articulated not only through fists and on the battlefield, but through voice and presence, in the desire to control the self, other people (men and women), as well as spaces and meanings. Violence can be enacted on the environment, in the home and onto other men. Most importantly, “more than 90% of convicted acts of violence are carried out by men, and more than 70% of the victims of such crimes are men.”\textsuperscript{38} Robert Connell affirms this statistic in \textit{Masculinities} where he states that “[m]ost episodes of major violence (counting military combat, homicide and armed assault) are transactions among men.”\textsuperscript{39} Violence can take many different forms. Through many different violently tinged means, patriarchy engages a number of layers in processes of “drawing boundaries and making exclusions”\textsuperscript{40} against not only women, but most insistently, against other men. Violence is a border patrol. This sentry is the means by which order is maintained and restored in a phallocentric society. It is an enduring currency of male power that is entrenched within definitions of successful and legitimate masculinity. Violence articulates most insistently the capacity for men to discipline. It focuses control through the self and out onto others. For “[v]iolence is, after all, a time honoured masculine channel of self control.”\textsuperscript{41} It is through the body that an order of masculine empowerment is imposed. Violence reestablishes balance to a body and

\textsuperscript{37} Moyne and Weld, \textit{op cit.}, p. 146
\textsuperscript{39} R. Connell, \textit{Masculinities}, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1995), p. 83
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{41} Robinson, \textit{op cit.}, p. 82
mind out of control. It fulfills a “need to feel your fists slamming into the other guy’s body, to feel the effect of violence, which is to inflict pain on a body that resists your control.”\(^{42}\) A man who is unrestrained can restore his balance through violence. Men must walk a fine line between the wise-man and the warrior “as patriarchy teaches him to hope that violence will bring his inner balance back.”\(^{43}\) Men balancing on a tightrope between control and excess, use violence as a means of maintaining stability, and buttressing destructive and anxious inner turmoil. The capacity for violence to render a feeling of empowerment (control) to a disempowered subjectivity is rendered by those groups who bear its brunt when they claim it for themselves. It becomes a tool for self-empowerment and a performance for masculine crisis.

Working class men over-perform masculine rituals in an attempt to reclaim power much like the pumped-up gay man and the young black gangster.\(^{44}\) These strategies assist in conferring authority onto marginalised bodies. They carry currency because for “men denied the usual confirmations of gender superiority, the only mechanisms of dominance available are frequently the mechanisms of self-destruction - internecine violence, sexual coercion and self-hatred.”\(^{45}\) Violence has political causes and consequences. Men use it to confirm a tenuous empowerment. This is most visibly rendered in New Zealand/Aotearoa film (based on the Alan Duff book) \textit{Once Were Warriors} where Jake Heke, embodying marginalized Maori identity, can only reclaim a sense of self through bar-room brawls and a brutal home life.\(^{46}\) Men are taught to communicate through their fists. Even the hero myths of our culture,

\(^{42}\) \textit{ibid.}  
\(^{43}\) \textit{ibid.}, p. 83  
\(^{44}\) Women too have attempted to claim this power through popular culture. Strong violent female characters have become a current manifestation of this reinscription. \textit{Buffy: The Vampire Slayer, Xena: Warrior Princess, Sarah Connor, Lara Croft, the Halliwell sisters of Charmed}, Sable and Chyna are all women who trade in masculine violence.  
\(^{45}\) Segal, \textit{op cit}, p. 187  
\(^{46}\) Dave Urry works through this idea in his Honours thesis, “What does become of the broken hearted?” (Unpublished Manuscript: Murdoch University, 2001)
validating strong and stoic men, are embedded in violent means of protecting the family and the state. Doug Robinson confirms the prevalence of these ideas and images.

Hegemonic images of (white middle class) men as stoic endurers, unemotional planners, aggressive doers, controllers not only of women, minorities and the young, but all physical and cultural otherness.\(^{47}\)

Dominance and control is seen as the only legitimate masculine subjectivity. The reality is that only a few men are allocated this position. The currency of embodied control to demonstrate autonomy flows through violent literacies among men. Man’s power is articulated on and over the surfaces of his body. What they must perform via embodied strength and control, is the phallus.

**Brawling and Balls**

As bearers of the phallus, men must articulate its power by acting upon the world, by building, occupying, colonising - by making the public sphere theirs. There is considerable angst tied up in this performance, because the phallus signifies an erect penis, and men penises are “flaccid most of the time.”\(^{48}\) Men are constantly enmeshed in tropes of impotency. As a result, the boundaries of valid masculinity are established within a “rigidified set of rituals and norms.”\(^{49}\) These boundaries are most stringently maintained through heterosexuality. The validity of heterosexual penetration articulates men’s capacity to occupy spaces, to act upon the world and other identities, to access phallic power and to resist control by others. Gay men, who both penetrate and are penetrated, cannot exclusively carry this power. Phallocentrism in society hinges on the capacity of men to significantly and clearly define themselves apart

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\(^{47}\) Robinson, *op cit.*, p. 11  
\(^{48}\) Buchbinder, *op cit.*, p. 48  
\(^{49}\) Robinson, *op cit.*, p. 76
from women, and from other ‘defective’ men. This ensures the legitimacy of their embodied performance over others. Hegemony operates to, “privilege … the symbolic and powerful phallus, so that men, as possessors of the penis and hence bearers of the symbolic phallus, are the beneficiaries of that social universe.”\textsuperscript{50} Gay men threaten the status of men within this structure. Heterosexuality dominates successful masculinity because “males consolidate their masculine identities by making alternative/contradictory masculinities problematic.”\textsuperscript{51} Men who perform a problematic embodiment, and are less able to carry and transfer the power of the phallus, occupy a declining position within a phallocentric society. The contradictory corporeality that these men (gay, black, working class) carry means that they are unable to demonstrate ‘correct’ control over themselves and their environment.

Gay masculinity is the most conspicuous, but it is not the only subordinated masculinity. Some heterosexual men and boys too are expelled from the circle of legitimacy.\textsuperscript{52} Black men are often imbued with a potent penis. However, this threat is tempered through definitions ‘uncontrollability’ where their ‘incoherent corporeality’ manifests in the monitoring and regulation of sexual and social practices. White men have power because they embody phallic power not physically, but culturally and socially in their ability to monopolise meanings. Black men (apparently) do not possess the capacity for control and are engulfed by “the attributes of strength, brute power, force, virility.”\textsuperscript{53} Here the contradictions in masculinity are enacted and reconciled through discipline. White men harness their body through their mind and articulate control and competence over their selves. Black men do not have this capacity and therefore

\textsuperscript{50} Buchbinder, \textit{op cit.}, p. 49
\textsuperscript{52} Connell, \textit{op cit.}, p. 79
\textsuperscript{53} Segal, \textit{op cit.}, p. 181
become akin to “the subhuman male animal.” The mind/body distinction is maintained through this relationship. Gay men are aligned with women and animals, in being out of control and undisciplined. Homosexual penetration and its connection to AIDS, enables easy marginalisation of gay subjectivity. Gay men accept the penetration of a penis, and therefore yield to, rather than wield, the power of the phallus. They are then, “perceived as failures in terms of dominant notions of masculinity.” They cannot mobilise phallic power and trade in the currency of successful masculinity. The capacity to perform the phallus is exclusively the terrain of white, heterosexual, men.

Spike’s claim to phallic power is unproblematised when he arrives in Sunnydale. He embodies a competently controlled masculine subjectivity demonstrated via his violent agency. He performs masculinity expertly, and mobilises the phallus on the surfaces of his body. His heterosexuality oozes through these surfaces to blend with violence that dances across his body, and out into the world. The success of his performance through these nodes is so effective that it creates a pathologised masculinity. Spike is consistently on the verge of losing control, so much so that he must constantly regain his balance through violence. His trajectory through Buffy: The Vampire Slayer is tumultuous. He performs and problematises men’s claim to power in the public sphere. Throughout the series, his embodied coherence is corrupted, and his phallic power castrated, demonstrating the real consequences for men working through their reshaping identity. Spike must negotiate his identity through work, violence and a variety of interpersonal relationships to reclaim coherence out of ‘crisis’.

54 ibid.
When Spike arrives in Sunnydale, he is in control. He quickly defines himself through embodied excellence by eliminating a local leader - ‘the anointed one’ - and installing himself as leader of the vampire community. His proficiency in violence is threaded through his heterosexuality. His girlfriend, Drusilla is the source of all his attention and desire. His embodied control is tempered by her insanity. Her madness (and weakness) manifests in his aesthetic of ‘providing’ for his partner, and performing the responsibilities of dominant masculinity. His sense of self-confidence stems from his role in their relationship as provider and protector. Spike expertly manipulates his way into the vampire community by demonstrating violent literacy. He is enlisted on the basis of competency in having killed Slayers in the past. When he is unable to eliminate Buffy, he redirects his violence and claims a position of power. This marks the beginning of Spike’s decline down the masculine hierarchy.

Buffy is colonising the space of masculine power in Sunnydale. In failing to occupy the public sphere coherently and completely, Spike is tossed about in the murky and messy meanings of marginalized masculinity. He finds it increasingly difficult to mobilise and maneuver through dominant meanings, and must renegotiate his identity. By the end of season two, Spike has been seriously wounded by Buffy after a fierce battle in which an entire wall collapses on top of him. To compound his injury, which confines him to a wheelchair, Drusilla has regained her strength and power. Through the remainder of the season, Spike must deal with a crisis in three fold. Not only must he negotiate his disability, but also his declined role in protecting and providing for Drusilla, and finally, threat to Drusilla’s affections from the return of his father.

56 In the diegesis Spike brags at having killed two Slayers in the past. The details of these events is revealed in an episode entitled “Fool for Love”
The narrative negotiates the complex relationship between fathers and sons by comparing and contrasting Spike with Angelis. Most significantly, it demonstrates the difficulty of ‘sons’ in dealing with, and reaffirming their difference from, their father. Robert Connell demonstrates this contradictory coherence by interpreting ‘distancing’ in which son’s judge their father’s performance of hegemonic masculinity. He outlines how crucial modeling masculinity is for young men and boys. Faludi also frames the role of mentoring men in the workplace as critical pedagogy for competent masculinity. Where the fathers in Faludi’s narrative are fondly recalled, in Connell’s they are critically contemplated in a deeper reflexive interpretation of the role and impact of fathering on a boy’s life. For Spike, his relationship with Angelis is complex. He experiences much anxiety at Angel’s sense of morality, and then Angelis’s co-opting of his position. In “School Hard” he demonstrates this frustration by infuriating “You think you can fool me!? You were my sire man, you were my Yoda!” The disappointment in his father figure features foremost in their relationship. Spike’s capacity to embody and display violent literacies more completely and coherently than Angel, affirms his disappointment. However, Angelis demonstrates a vicious violence that Spike is unable to counter in confinement. The criteria by which he measures manhood is lacking in Angel and threatening in Angelis. It forces him into extreme action to reclaim his priority in masculine identity – an alliance with Buffy.

57 In the most complicated plot thread to Buffy: The Vampire Slayer, Angel is Buffy’s boyfriend. He is a vampire who no longer kills humans due to the acquisition of a soul at the turn of the twentieth century. At least 240 years old, Angelis ‘sired’ or created vampire Druscilla, who then ‘turned’ Spike. In an episode entitled “Surprise,” written by Marti Noxon, directed by Michael Lange, original air-date, 19 January 1998, episode 2.13, in one of the most truly dreadful virginity experiences of all time, Buffy sleeps with Angel causing him to lose his soul reanimating his demon-self. Angelis returns to the fold and inflicts mayhem on Sunnydale, much to the displeasure of Spike.

58 See Connell, op cit., p. 124

59 Line from “School Hard”
By the end of the season, Angelis’ pathology has poured out to threaten the existence of Sunnydale and Druscilla’s affection for Spike. A dire plan to suck the earth into hell is put in place, forcing Spike to turn to Buffy for help in reclaiming Druscilla. In the double episode season finale entitled “Becoming” he utters one of the most crucial reflexive monologues on contemporary masculinity within the show.

We like to talk big, vampires do – ‘I’m going to take over the world’. That’s just tough-guy talk. Strut around with your friends over a pint of blood. The truth is - I like this world. You’ve got dog racing, Manchester United … and you’ve got people. Billions of people walking around like Happy Meals with legs. It’s alright here.60

In this monologue, Spike demonstrates critical distance in the performance of masculinity and the literacies that validate legitimate manhood. He hails the performativity of masculinity, and the role of “beer-drinking bravado”61 in maintaining the illusion of stoic and resilient male identity. It marks a crucial moment. He performs and critiques dominant masculinity. He simultaneously reveals his disability deception – he can walk and is only in the wheelchair to bide his time and eliminate Angelis. He can only reclaim his power, and perform this reflexivity when he gains control over his body, and is able to reoccupy the public sphere with legitimate mastery and control. He does so by bludgeoning Angelis with a pipe. Nevertheless, the world is saved, Buffy stabs Angelis and Spike leaves Sunnydale carrying an unconscious Druscilla. He only returns at the end of season three after his relationship with Druscilla has ended.

Love and Violence

60 Spike played by James Marsters in “Becoming part 2” Buffy: The Vampire Slayer, written and directed by Joss Whedon, original air-date, 19th May 1998, episode 2.22
In “Lover’s Walk,” Spike once again arrives in Sunnydale by driving over the ‘Welcome to Sunnydale’ sign, though this time he tumbles out of his car in a drunken stupor. He is out of control. Devastated by Druscilla’s rejection, complaining that, “she didn’t even have the decency to cut my head off,” the lovelorn, melancholic Spike returns to his pathological self through his fists. After a street fight involving Buffy, a restored Angel and former members of Spike’s vampire gang, he finds a renewed sense of hope.

His sense of empowerment is restored only after this violent interlude. Through the street fight, he can control others, and thereby begin to control himself. Guns are of no use in this process because there must be a proximity to, and intimacy with, the other bodies resisting control through which they, and he, can be pummeled into submission.

In all forms of violence you are attempting to bring bodies into conformity within controlled mental images, to impose, paradoxically as this sounds, an intellectual order on what you feel is emotional chaos. But only in hand-to-hand combat do you get the satisfaction of feeling the blows strike home with your body, which is the part of you that needs reassuring, needs confirmation of its self-control.

The street fight reaffirms Spike’s sense of control and authority. Through hand-to-hand combat he regains his sense of self, and an insight into his own psyche. It is the literacy through which he understands himself and social relations. In this episode he re-empowers himself to renegotiate his place within the masculine hierarchy among

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62 Spike played by James Marsters in “Lover’s Walk,” Buffy: The Vampire Slayer, written by Dan Vebber, directed by David Semel, original air-date, 24th November 1998, episode 3.08
63 ibid.
different ‘styles’ of masculinity. However, Buffy’s presence and prowess in combat also means that he remains in a contradictory space. Spike must be remarkably self-reflexive in order to rearticulate his competence, while it is simultaneously challenged. In “Lover’s Walk” Spike embraces a difficult subjectivity that moves beyond conventional masculine ideologies. While he mobilises violence in very predictable ways to reclaim his sense of self, he also acknowledges his vulnerability, by confronting Buffy and Angel with their conflicted relationship claiming, “I may be love’s Bitch, but at least I’m man enough to admit it.”\textsuperscript{65} Demonstrating reflexivity in relationships and reality, Spike is a moving metonym for the masculine hierarchy and its ‘othered’ masculine identities. This process reaches its climax in season four, when he returns again, and his corporeality is significantly and permanently altered by a brain implant that restricts his ability to feed on, or harm human beings. He is literally and metaphorically castrated as he discovers when he attempts to bite Willow.

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Spike}: I don’t understand. This sort of thing has never happened to me before. \\
\textbf{Willow}: Maybe you were just nervous. \\
\textbf{Spike}: I felt alright when we started. Let’s try again … Ow! Arrgh! Damn it! \\
\textbf{Willow}: Maybe you’re trying too hard. Doesn’t this happen to every vampire? \\
\textbf{Spike}: Not to me it doesn’t. \\
\textbf{Willow}: It’s me isn’t it? \\
\textbf{Spike}: What are you talking about? \\
\textbf{Willow}: Well you came looking for Buffy, and settled. You didn’t want to bite me. I just happened to be around. \\
\textbf{Spike}: Piffle. \\
\textbf{Willow}: I know I’m not the kinda girl vamps like to sink their teeth into. It’s always ‘ooo you’re like a sister to me’ or ‘oh you’re such a good friend.’ \\
\textbf{Spike}: Don’t be ridiculous. I’d bite you in a heart-beat. \\
\textbf{Willow}: Really? \\
\textbf{Spike}: I thought about it. \\
\textbf{Willow}: When? \\
\textbf{Spike}: Remember last year? You had on that fuzzy pink number with the lilac underneath? \\
\textbf{Willow}: I never would’ve guessed …You played the blood-lust kinda cool. \\
\textbf{Spike}: I hate being obvious. All fangy and ‘grrr’. It takes the mystery out. \\
\textbf{Willow}: But if you could …?
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{64} Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, \textit{op cit.}, p. 52

\textsuperscript{65} Line from “Lover’s Walk”
Spike’s impotency forces him to reassess his identity. Much of this season is spent yearning for his sense of self. The micro-chip connects politics in phallic power, heterosexuality and violence on the surfaces of his body. He declines into the crisis. Alone and alienated, he stumbles through the streets searching for food, shelter and comfort. He is in physical and emotional turmoil as he looks in on the vampiric community exiling him. Through this phase, he performs marginalized masculinity struggling for legitimacy in a society that “denies to some men any access to” the tools of dominant masculinity. It results in dispossession, disenfranchisement and depression. He is prompted into action after being ejected from his girlfriend’s (Harmony) lair, unable to claim her with heterosexual prowess. He has lost control over himself, and the people around him. Spike takes drastic action, and again turns to Buffy for help. In the episode entitled “Pangs” Spike arrives on Giles’ doorstep as the gang prepare for Thanksgiving dinner. Covered in a large blanket with pale(r) and drawn features, he begs to be let inside. Buffy refuses until he offers information on ‘the initiative’ and their operation. She ties him tightly to a chair while they deal with the rampage of a mystically risen Native American Indian seeking vengeance for colonisation.

The episode ponders and problematises imperialism, as Willow and Giles argue over the righteousness of vengeance by the indigenous Indian. Threaded against the back-

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66 “The Initiative,” Buffy: The Vampire Slayer, written by Douglas Petrie, directed by James A. Contner, original air-date, 16th November 1999, episode 4.07
67 Segal, op cit., p. 256
drop of Thanksgiving celebrations, the debate between past injustice, and the role and responsibility of contemporary culture to address these transgressions, is activated in the dialogue. The tenuous and tumultuous politics embedded in the postcolonial context offer no easy solutions. For an effective postcolonial discourse to function, spaces visualising the past need to activate the consciousness of the colonised. Their history needs to be hailed. Willow insists on a rendering of injustice to ‘redress the wrongs’ of the colonised. Giles suggests that vengeance simply repeats the transgressions of the past and perpetuates anger and hatred. Within their debate, they are both correct. Buffy’s inability to interject and offer solutions demonstrates the resonance of both these threads in a postcolonial context.

| Buffy: So what happened to the Chumash? |
| Willow: How about imprisonment, forced labour, herded like animals into a mission full of bad European diseases. |
| Buffy: Boy, Cultural Partnership Center really didn’t stress any of that stuff. |
| Willow: Not even on “Diorama” – And it gets better. The few Chumash who tried to rebel were hanged. And when a group was accused of stealing cattle, they were killed. Men, women and children. And for proof to bring back to their accusers … |
| Giles: They cut off their ears? |
| Buffy: So Hus wasn’t kidding about the rightful vengeance routine. He’s recreating all the wrongs done to his people. |
| Giles: Then it’s up to us to stop him. |
| Buffy: Yes but after dinner right? |
| Willow: Are you sure we shouldn’t be helping him? |
| Giles: No, I think perhaps we won’t help the angry spirit with his rape and pillage and murder. |
| Willow: Well, OK. No. But we should be helping him redress his wrongs. Bring the atrocities to light. |
| Giles: Well if the history books are full of them, I say they already are. |
| Willow: Or, giving his land back. |
| - Buffy tries to interject, but is cut off – |
| Giles: It’s not exactly ours to give. |
| Willow: You know, I don’t think you wanna help. I think you just wanna slay the demon and then go ‘la la la’. |
| Giles: I think your sympathy for his plight has blinded you to certain urgent facts. We have to stop this thing. |
| Willow: OK, unfeeling guy. |
| Giles: Oh Willow, that’s not fair. |
Throughout the episode, Giles and Willow continue bickering, both of them generating impassioned arguments for helping and hindering the spirit. Buffy, caught in the middle, remains ambivalent, though sympathetic to the rights of vengeance for Hus and the Chumash. Embedded in the diegesis is the undercurrent of violence reaffirming esteem and autonomy. Spike confirms the desire for violent vindication when he intervenes in the argument, offering a masculinist interpretation of authority and power.

Spike: Oh someone put a stake in me. I just can’t stand all this namby pamby, boo-hooing about the bloody Indians. Willow: The preferred term is …
Spike: You won! Alright? You came in and you killed them and you took their land. That’s what conquering nations do. That’s what Caesar did and he’s not going around saying: “I came. I conquered, I feel really bad about it.” The history of the world is not making friends. You had better weapons, and you massacred them. End of story.

Spike’s sense of a dominant colonising masculinity in controlled competence resonates, even though he is no longer in a position to articulate this proficiency through his body. Claiming the masculine discourse of colonisation through this dialogue reaffirms the power and punch of masculine modes of thinking. It offers a sense of security and surety in a time of ambiguity and ambivalence. He performs the benefits of masculine power in crisp, coherent and clear-cut interpretation of the context. Simultaneously, this is the source of all that is deeply problematic in masculine consciousness, and why men are having such a hard time negotiating change. In the postcolonial context, the murky meanings in masculinity ambivalently render the insistence of imperialism. Buffy must access a masculine consciousness in

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68 “Pangs,” *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, written by Jane Espenson, directed by Michael Lange, original air-date, 23rd November 1999, episode 4.08
69 *ibid.*
control to succeed against Hus. The inability of a patriarchal colonist hierarchy to render any restitution to dispossessed identities echoes through this episode. Buffy experiences anxiety at having to operate within this discourse. Spike’s inability to police the public sphere results in disjuncture with his sense of self. He remains troubled and traumatic through the next few episodes. It reaches crisis point in “Doomed” where, stuck with Xander in his basement, dressed in his clothes because he cannot work the washing machine, he attempts to ‘stake’ himself. Fortunately he fails and is dragged off by Willow and Xander as they investigate another threat to Sunnydale’s existence. Spike begins to feel better when he is able to belittle the two friends, exerting a sense of power over their consciousness. His voice substitutes for his fists as he inflicts verbal violence on them. Despite their attempts to make him feel better, their reassurance is no substitute for his own empowering strategy that relies on asserting his authority over theirs.

| Willow: | It’s ookey, we know him, we can’t just let him poof himself. |
| Spike:  | Oh but you can. You know I’d drain you drier than the Sahara if I had half a chance. And besides I’m beyond pathetic. Stuck in this basement washing skivvies for a blighter I wouldn’t have bothered to bite a few months ago. |
| Xander: | Hey! |
| Spike:  | I mean am I even remotely scary anymore? Tell me the truth. |
| Willow: | Well the shirt is kinda – not very threatening … and the short pants – But you know it could also be because I know you can’t bite, which I guess isn’t really what you need to hear right now. |
| Spike:  | Stop. Just clear out. OK. |
| Xander: | Fine, but break anything else while we’re gone and you’ll be sleeping in the garage, buster. |
| Willow: | We can’t leave him here like this. We’ll have to take him with us to the museum. |
| Spike:  | Oh you go on. I won’t do anything. I feel better now. Promise. |
| Xander: | Think of the happy. If we don’t find what we’re looking for we’re facing and apocalypse. |
| Spike:  | Really? You’re not just saying that? |

70 “Doomed,” Buffy: The Vampire Slayer, written by Marti Noxon, David Fury and Jane Espenson, directed by James A. Contner, original air-date, 18th January 2000, episode 4.11
Spike remains distressed at being unable to embody power. He constantly monitors and mediates the boundaries and limitations of his masculinity – something he has never embraced before. He lacks the literacy to move, or negotiate within, varying and variable contexts of manhood. The slippage between his mythologised identity, and the realities of his corrupted corporeality, results in amplified anxiety, manifesting in suicide. Being embedded within phallocentrism makes masculinity simultaneously fervent and fragile. Spike’s negotiation between these extremes, aggravates an excessive autonomy. In his exchange with Willow and Xander, he struggles to reconfirm the currency of his failing fortitude.

Spike: I think you should be glad to greet the end of days. I mean neither one of you is making much of a go at it. You – (pointing to Xander) kids your age are going off to university. You’ve made it as far as the basement. And Red here (Willow), you couldn’t even keep dog-boy happy (Oz). You can take the loser out of high school but …

Willow: I see what you’re trying to do. You’re trying to get us to dust you.
Spike: Am not. I just don’t want pity from geeks more useless than I am.
Willow: We’re not useless, we help people. We fight the forces of evil.
Spike: Buffy fights the forces of evil, you’re her groupies. She’d do just as well without you. Better I’d wager since she wouldn’t have to go about saving your hides all the time.
Xander: That is so not true. We’re part of a team. She needs us.
Spike: Or you’re just the same 10th grade losers you’ve always been and she’s too much of a softie to cut you loose.71

Spike reifies a resilient and resistant independence, while querying his place in the public sphere, and his capacity to be a useful and legitimate man. The consequences for the dispossession of dominant masculinity are reflected in his desire to die. He has limited strategies to deal with his disempowerment. Instead, he reframes power and possession over other identities as he criticises Xander and Willow. Using metaphors of public power, personal success and heterosexuality, he boosts his own sense of self by making others feel bad. He plays on Xander’s failure to claim a coherent and

71 ibid.
competent masculinity. Willow’s personal failures in relationships is mobilised to
critique her performance of successful heterosexuality. For both of them, their lack of
autonomy is played upon as he accuses them of being ‘groupies’ rather than leaders in
their own right. Through these mechanisms, he imposes a dominant masculine value
system upon them and then uses it to problematise their declined position within that
hierarchy. Deflecting attention away from his own subordination, he is able to claim
some control. He maintains this convoluted characterisation through the remainder of
the season. Spike fluctuates in a schizophrenic slippage between an ever denied
coherent and contained corporeality, and generating reflexive literacies to deal with
this movement.

Through season five and six, Spike continues on his volatile trajectory. Reluctantly
falling in love with Buffy, he claims some stability. He is able to embody a
subjectivity that redefines his power. This is an innovative identity that is not
primarily concerned with reclaiming a mythological existence based on idealised
versions of masculinity, but is able to exist along-side conflicting (and conflicted)
identities around him. In the final episode of season five, Spike goes some way to
reconciling his ‘crisis’ in a scene with Buffy where he tells her, “I know you never
loved me, I know I’m a monster. But you treated me like a man.” The renegotiation of
his power, has served to energise a matrix of discursive practice, where his identity
can exist coherently irregardless of whether it fits dominant meaning systems. Spike
moves beyond the conventional and reactive masculine structures, to create a dynamic
identity that negotiates social changes without shifting into crisis mode. In season
five, Spike is a productive character who works through the difficulties of masculinity
and reconciles them within larger social formations. As he moves into season six, he
encounters more difficulty. Buffy’s death at the end of season five manifests through mourning where he maligns his inability to protect her – again reanimating dominant masculine values. This ethic filters through the season. When she returns, he begins a clandestine relationship with her sparked by, and maintained, within violence.

Buffy’s ambivalence in the relationship tortures Spike. Their only connection is through aggression, and Buffy recognises its superficiality. For her, it is a way to feel alive after her experience of the afterlife. For Spike, violence is a legitimate relationship-building device. In the episode “Smashed” their violent sexual interlude makes him feel powerful and legitimate. He is able to exist on equal terms with Buffy. It is the connective tissue he can find with her. Buffy soon realizes the destructive futility of the relationship and ends it. Spike then declines yet again into ‘crisis’ mode. He seeks out validation in other relationships culminating in an evening spent with Anya (Xander’s recently jilted fiancée). He attempts to rebuild his heterosexual potency and sense of legitimacy through sex. When his strategy fails to restore his sense of self, he attempts to renegotiate the relationship with Buffy. This encounter results in an attempted rape. Spike seeks to redefine the limits of corporeal control. Unable to inflict violence through his fists (resulting in pain from the implant), his literacy shifts to sexual power. To be desired and desiring remains his last recourse for empowered agency. Controlling Buffy through sexuality makes his masculinity mean something. When it fails, and he realises the devastation and damage his phallocentrism has caused, Spike is forced to follow another trajectory – one that can reconcile the ruptures in masculine literacy.

Spike soon discovers that as a result of the mystical manner in which Buffy was brought back from the afterlife, his chip is not activated with her.
Buffy: I have feelings for you. I do. But it’s not love. I could never trust you enough for it to be love.
Spike: Trust is for old marieds Buffy. Great love is wild and passionate and dangerous. It burns and consumes.
Buffy: Until there’s nothing left. Love like that doesn’t last.
Spike: I know you feel like I do. You don’t have to hide it any more.
Buffy: Spike, please stop this.
Spike: Let yourself feel it.
Buffy: No.
- she tries to push him away -
Spike: You love me.
Buffy: Urrgh, No. Stop it.
Spike: You *love me*.
Buffy: Spike! Stop!
- they begin to wrestle and Buffy is pushed backward -
Spike: What are you doing!
- she falls to the floor hitting the edge of the bath -
Buffy: Let it go. Let yourself love me.
Spike: Arrghh!
Spike: Buffy, Buffy …
Buffy: Spike, No. I’m hurt!
- he pins her to the floor as she cries out, but he ignores her -
Spike: I know you felt it when I was inside you.
- she tries to crawl away from him, but he drags her back and pins her -
Spike: You’ll feel it again Buffy. I’m gonna make you feel it.
- he tears at her clothing as she screams -
Buffy: Stop!!
- she kicks him across the room and he hits the wall with a thud. She glares at him with venom -
Buffy: Ask me again why I could never love you.
- he begins to realize what he has done -
Spike: Buffy, my God, I didn’t mean …
- she cuts him off -
Buffy: Because I stopped you. Something I should’ve done along time ago.73

Poisoned by a yearning for dominant masculinity, their relationship is encased in violent literacies. Buffy adopts the masculine modality to find the limits of her self.

She distributes as much violence as she receives. Spike’s rendering is far more pathological. He can only negotiate disempowerment by mapping his self onto others.

Violent literacy is his only claim to legitimacy in a relationship, not only physically,

73 “Seeing Red,” Buffy: The Vampire Slayer, written by Steven S. de Knight, directed by Michael Gershman, original air-date, 7th May 2002, episode 6.18
but emotionally. Their connection was flawed and fatal. In stopping him, she
reclaimed respect for herself and denied his criteria for a successful relationship that
was anchored to physical and sexual violence.

Spike’s cult status is contained by being a pathologised and problematised masculinity
that cannot simply reclaim his power through performance. He must negotiate not
only with other disempowered masculine subjectivities, but also within a feminist
context and feminine literacies. He falls and flows through *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*
in contradictory places and positions. In an era where men are increasingly engaging
in a diversity of masculine knowledges hailed by the boom in men’s studies
publishing, Spike is not simply paying lip-service to reflexive manhood. He struggles
to reconcile traditional, violent, sexual, phallic and public renderings of masculinity in
a space where access to these modalities are restricted by Buffy’s literacy in
controlled corporeality. He slips between dominant, competent, corporeal control and
depressively violent suicide and abuse. He cannot unproblematically reclaim power.
Spike must move and meander through experiences and circumstances far beyond his
control, and negotiate his way through life. He consistently fails in his attempts to
reassert a sense of self, and fluctuates through the masculine hierarchy. Spike has
continued to occupy a chimeric position within the diegesis. He is not simply a
pathetic masculinity who cannot work out who he is. He ponders and punctuates the
problems facing contemporary manhood without only reaffirming traditional roles.
The conventional nodes of masculine power offer destructive and dangerous literacy
for the world he lives in. While the workplace has changed and men’s roles are
shifting, Spike does not simply reclaim masculine legitimacy in the public sphere, or
work through the devastation of violence, or the anxiety of phallocentrism. He
negotiates a reflexive hierarchy of masculinity that has the potential to open up a series of strategies for men to reconcile and renegotiate identity without resorting to ‘crisis’ mode.
Section Three: Politics
Pedagogy, politics and popular culture

The percolation of politics through the postwar period has given cultural studies academics much to theorise. Sweeping changes in culture and consciousness have reframed our understanding of resistance and social justice. Through the potential of identity politics, cultural studies intellectuals have watched the rise of the New Right. This political formation has colonised memories to turn callousness into common sense. The place of cultural studies, as an intervention in this context, must be examined. In the classroom it remains at its most vibrant and volatile. However, cultural studies is struggling to dialogue with the New Right. Currently, one of the most effective rendering of Leftist politics in contemporary times can be found on South Park.

This section activates youth politics, pedagogy and popular culture to investigate cult as unpopular politics. Containment and control over consciousness is reanimated in new colonial contexts contrasting distance and proximity through mobility in meaning. In South Park, a colonisation of consciousness is embedded in the New Right discourse. Fear of otherness and reclamation of sovereignty over territory is parodied in its politics. It prises open spaces for difference in a time that denies diversity. The following chapter investigates the purpose of political intervention in pedagogy for cultural studies. It then seeks to ponder the place of popular culture in political action and critiquing the resonance of New Right ideologies across social sense-making.
Chapter Seven

Big Gay Cultural Studies: The pedagogy of South Park

In the face of the developing political and ethical influence of the New Right, cultural studies must be able to rise to the challenge of providing a critique and a basis for intervention.1

Jennifer Daryl Slack and Laurie Anne Whitt.

It’s all just a bunch of tree huggin’ hippie crap!2

Cartman.

I am frequently disheartened as I stand at the front of a lecture theatre and look out at the inquiring faces before me. Cultural studies makes me feel like an inadequate teacher. It promises so much, yet I feel able to deliver so little into the hands of the students. I want to provide them with a way of thinking outside the box. At the very least, I want them to go through life conscious rather than comatose. I want them to question naturalised knowledges. I cling to the hope that they may change their lives for the better. This is what brought me to cultural studies. Teaching in the trenches is the point of no return for the paradigm. It is in the classroom that it reveals its true potential. Cultural studies is not, nor should it be, about dictating a pedagogical politics. I reconcile myself by reaffirming that the best, and perhaps most ideal modality I can offer my students is a ‘toolbox’3 for getting through life - a way to unpick the problems and ponderances of their contemporary experiences. This is

2 Cartman, “Weight Gain 4000,” South Park, written by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, director uncredited, original air-date, 27th August 1997, episode 1.02
3 Tara Brabazon uses the metaphor of a toolbox in describing the ideal circumstances for a functioning feminism in Ladies who lunge: Celebrating difficult women, (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2002), pp. ix-x where she suggests; “Feminism is like a toolbox in the back of the car. When the vehicle is cruising along the freeway, we never need to think about tyres, oil or brakes. But when something goes wrong - a tyre blows out or our radiator cooks - suddenly we need the toolbox, and badly.”
cultural studies at its best. It provides a series of strategic knowledges for negotiating everyday life. Pedagogy and the project of cultural studies are intimately aligned. In the classroom, I remain simultaneously optimistic and anxious at the challenges of melding a cultural studies politics with pedagogical practices.

Every time I step up to deliver a lecture, tutorial or workshop I am overcome with anxiety fueled by a sense that the stakes have been raised. Many of the students I teach are too young to remember the full brunt of Margaret Thatcher, or the swagger of Ronald Reagan. But they are left with their legacies. “Capitalist market solutions” to social problems characterize the central ideologies of our contemporary era. Bill Clinton’s feeble attempts to reanimate a more socially conscious politics ended with the thud of his belt buckle on the oval office floor. This generation’s model of effective politics is shaped, not by lessons of charismatic leadership and social justice, but a probing perspective on cigars. Clinton’s workplace shenanigans and the manner in which it was dealt with publicly, offers a crucial modality of contemporary concerns. The president’s public sexual impropriety spotlights the changing nature of social commentary. Once upon a time, the backroom antics of those in power would have been well shielded from public exposure. Clinton had the misfortune of misjudging the changing nature of public power and contemporary concerns - particularly in the workplace.

Identity politics infiltrates the contemporary political landscape. Sexual politics, race relations, sexual harassment, domestic violence, feminism, are all part of an

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5 The Kennedy’s affiliations with mistresses and the mob is testament to the manner in which their sparkling image remained largely intact.
increasingly fragmented, postmodern rendering (and collapsing) of public and private spaces.

Emphasis [has] shifted from communities positioned against large power blocs and bound together as classes or subcultures to ethnic and women’s groups committed to maintaining and elaborating autonomous values, identities and ethics.\(^6\)

Cultural studies is on the cutting edge of addressing these concerns. There is no other modality better equipped to deal with identity politics in the contemporary era. However, cultural studies (and the Left that it predominantly stands in for), has demonstrated a distinct inadequacy to effectively intervene in wider social consciousness to contradict the unfolding rise of the New Right. While cultural studies does not possess the responsibility for making the world a better place, it does have a responsibility to intervene. The silence of the Left has created a mandate for Rightist concerns. This paper takes issue with this silence. Cultural studies deals with popular culture, but has never been popular. A paradigm devoted to making trouble will never be widely validated. It is time to recognise that the scandal of cultural studies is not that teaching it within an institutional framework might stifle the paradigm. This claim for a reactionary and radical study has been rendered redundant by Carolyn Steedman, who argues that while cultural studies “is extremely nervous … of attempts at institutionalization … within a few paragraphs [cultural studies writers are] well into that most conventional claim for disciplinary orthodoxy - the writing of their own history.”\(^7\) In order to remain a fresh and dynamic mode of inquiry, cultural studies must not only remain on the cutting edge of social and cultural changes but

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also, be able to provide a working paradigm for intervention in wider political concerns.

This chapter works in the spaces between academic inquiry and everyday life. It seeks to link pedagogy, politics and *South Park* in an interpretation of the interventionist role of cultural studies in contemporary society. Currently, *South Park* offers a tighter, more confluent counter-hegemonic politics through everyday life than the cultural studies cannon. When a popular text offers a more visible and complete interpretation of disempowerment than cultural studies, there is a need for debate. It says a great deal about the powers of the Right to stifle debate, and the role of popular culture, in playing with the spaces of this hegemonic masking. By journeying through the rise of the New Right, cultural studies, youth politics and popular culture, this chapter reinterprets resistance. The absence of a wider social debate on the issues that shape and frame our time is damaging.

Cultural studies currently seems inadequate to violate the silence imposed on it from the Right. Its project has been whittled down, by some,

> to know something about the links between social formations and cultural symbols-in-action, and to show how and to what extent textual mediation between the two is both continuous and, to some extent, transforming.\(^8\)

This is a central and critical part of the cultural studies project. It is via these interpretations that it can trace the nuances of identity politics in everyday lives. However, interpretation of the popular should be the beginning rather than the limit of its inquiry. Popular culture offers a rich terrain through which to study life and the meanings that frame it. Popular culture might offer cultural studies academics an

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\(^8\) A, Ross, “Ballots, bullets, or Batmen: Can cultural studies do the right thing?” *Screen*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1990, p. 28
authentic access to the everyday. However, we must resist the urge to simply celebrate the popular, or hail it as an authentic resistance to the dominant hierarchy. The popular is pedagogical - it teaches us about ourselves. It will not change the world. My own joy in cultural studies comes from unpicking the political and social consequences of popular texts. This criticism needs to be fed through a wider debate, on a larger political stage, if cultural studies is to maintain its central purpose of providing an intervention in the dominant ideologies of a time. Popular culture is crucial to this project and should not be abandoned. However, what are the consequences for social justice when the most radical critique of the New Right and the social issues of concern in our era are found on *South Park*? This programme embodies the shifts in social change and identity politics currently struggling for legitimacy inside and outside the cultural studies canon. Contemporary identity politics is not about articulating a revolutionary consciousness of disruption - it is about fitting in.

Men and women look for groups to which they can belong, certainly and forever, in a world in which all else is moving and shifting, in which nothing else is certain.9

Leftist politics needs to reconcile the anxieties of connectivity and collectivity in contemporary culture. The alliances between individuals are frequently generated in belonging rather than overtly oppositional intentions. In shifting times, these allegiances are often ambiguous. *South Park* presents unity through diversity thereby centralising difference as the norm. Cultural studies is unsure in how to effectively reconcile this popular consciousness. There is a sense of ‘selling out’ that accompanies its refusal to address the moderation of this position. Cultural studies

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theorists have always worried over a ‘lack’ of consciousness in ‘the people’.\textsuperscript{10} Now it is framed as a ‘crisis’. The silence of a Leftist inflected politics is problematic in our current social milieu. If cultural studies hopes to address this silence then it must ‘go where ‘the people’ are, not where it wants them to be’.\textsuperscript{11} Popular culture does offer a terrain of interrogation and investigation of the everyday. It energises insight into simultaneously trivial and significant moments and memories.

Learning a trade

The scandal of cultural studies is not that it has been able to embed itself within university institutions, but that it must constantly struggle to be seen as legitimate scholarly work. The calls for an elusive and authentically mobile subject of cultural studies to remain on the (cutting) edge of cultural critique mask the serious consequences of not teaching it within a university context. Cultural studies negotiates everyday life. While university is not the everyday of many people, the educational modality does offer a way for cultural studies to insinuate itself into the public consciousness and offer strategies for everyday negotiations with power. Cultural studies’ difficulty in widening its claim to intellectual authority does not just rest with academics. Its ability to resonate through individual lives falls heavily on its capacity to create a general culture of critique. Creating organic intellectuals\textsuperscript{12} remains unspoken at the core of the cultural studies project. It aims not only to provide a space

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item This statement is paraphrased from Tara Brabazon in \textit{Digital hemlock: Internet education and the poisoning of teaching}, (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2002), p. 130 where she states, “the teaching maxim of my life: talk to students where they are, rather than where I want them to be.”
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for marginalised identities to speak from, but to mobilise the perspective of these
groups in a general critique of the social hierarchy.

There can be little doubt that cultural studies has had an effect on the social agency
and social justice of disempowered groups within our culture. The emerging focus on
cultural specificities has done much to decentre the currency of white, male, middle
class power structures. Many cultural studies academics persistently barricade
themselves in their classrooms, teaching against the assaults, and dodging the
projectiles aimed at them, by university hierarchies. Indeed, the cultural studies
project has always been tethered to wider social literacy projects. Raymond Williams
and Richard Hoggart taught adult education classes. In which they had to struggle to
define the structure and purpose of education for the working class. The lengthy
debates within the Workers Education Association (WEA), about what constituted
appropriate working class adult education, has raged since the 1930s. The perceived
polarities between a pedagogical politics in a working consciousness of class
oppression, and the ‘mass’ interests of a popular education for a wider literacy,
created a messy and complicated birth for cultural studies in the 1960s. At the core of
this disjuncture were almost irreconcilable differences. The struggle was focused
between the study of literature in a Leavisite tradition of uplifting the working class to
an enlightened consciousness and, what

was well understood by adult education tutors that successful teaching began
with the life experiences of their students and not abstract theory or general
attempts at promoting notions of spirituality.13

This polarity generated the interdisciplinarity that shapes cultural studies today.

George Thompson, the WEA Yorkshire (North) District Secretary argued that,

13 T. Steel, The emergence of cultural studies 1945 - 1965: Cultural politics, adult education and the
the student was not merely the victim of commercial exploitation awaiting the 
rescue of the Leavisite knight errant but the political agent of her or his own 
liberation by more directly political means.\textsuperscript{14}

The needs of students were often antithetical to the wider social enlightenment project 
embraced by Eliot and Leavis. In this light, emancipation could be better served. Most 
crucially, “literature could be used as a clue to the functioning of specific historical 
traditions”\textsuperscript{15} that would enable a deeper engagement with over and under - arching 
power structures in a society. Literature could provide the point of reference through 
which to channel a wider understanding of politics and class-based interests. This 
movement marks “a transitional moment in which the study of literature becomes the 
study of ‘culture’.”\textsuperscript{16} The transition from literature to the context of culture is not 
seamless. Culture, was a term that was not widely, or clearly used. It was viewed 
skeptically by hard-line Marxists educators - like George Thompson for whom, 

the arts were the soft subjects of workers education, stigmatised as ‘women’s’ 
subjects, seen at best as mere diversion from class struggle or at worst as the 
vehicles of bourgeois ideology, clothed in the snake’s skin of ‘spiritual 
values’.\textsuperscript{17}

The distinctly masculinist inflection of workers’ education via a political economic 
curriculum ratified a male dominated working class movement. The integration of 
culture into adult educational frameworks was convergent with the postwar economic 
movement from production to consumption, and a marked decline in working class 
visibility, which signified a metaphorical “feminization of the WEA.”\textsuperscript{18} For Raymond 
Williams, this was a welcome change, and though concerned with what could “be lost

\textsuperscript{14} ibid., p. 85 
\textsuperscript{15} ibid. 
\textsuperscript{16} ibid., p. 86 
\textsuperscript{17} ibid., p. 12 
\textsuperscript{18} ibid., p. 19
in jettisoning the class-character of this education,”

he held hopes for the wider interpretation of disempowerment across the social strata. Nevertheless, he was troubled that this shift in adult education would be appropriated by universities and melted into middle-class ideologies. This anxiety was generated out of awareness that “university was a peculiarly middle-class institution and not a popular one.”

Williams’s worries appear to have not been in-vain. His fears have been realised, though not for the reasons he thought. He could not have foreseen the extent to which ‘popular’ is now substituted for ‘middle class’.

University is an inherently ‘popular’ institution. Shifts in educational frameworks and outcomes have changed the shape of university curriculum. The changes in the economy, and the workforce, have redefined the purpose of education. These reinscriptions however, are cause for serious concern among cultural studies academics and students, as they skew the interests of the disempowered and the politics of cultural studies. Henry Giroux distinctly calls for educational reform specifically in light of New Right ideologies. Most crucially he hails the “failure to take seriously the fact that education as a terrain of struggle is central to the reconstruction of public life and, as such, must be understood in vernacular as well as scholarly terms.”

The rigor of social critique must not be the bastion of university scholars or intellectuals. Antonio Gramsci was explicit about the role of multiple and diverse fora of debate within a society. Most significantly, he held journalism to criteria of criticism, to create space for differing positions.

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19 ibid., p. 25
20 ibid.

A periodical, like a newspaper or book or any other mode of didactic expression that is set up with a certain average public in view - readers, listeners, etc. - cannot satisfy everyone to an equal degree, be equally useful to everyone, etc.: the important thing is for it to be a stimulus for everyone, since no publication can replace the individual thinking mind or establish from scratch intellectual and scientific interests where people are only interested in café chit-chat or think that the aim of life is enjoying oneself or having a good time. So there is no need to be worried about the multiplicity of criticisms: indeed the multiplicity of criticisms is proof that one is on the right road. When on the other hand, the tenor of criticisms is uniform, it is something that needs thinking about.22

Educational frameworks enable critical skills to be imparted and disseminated to a greater number of people. This is why many of the current debates surrounding the role and function of universities are so necessary to the current and future cultural studies projects. Education remains one of the most crucial fora for creating social mobility. Access to education is directly related to the well being of a society. It is “connected - fundamentally - to the relations of domination and exploitation (and to the struggles against them) of the larger society.”23 Education can provide the literacy skills to ponder and probe the conditions of economic, political and social contexts of work, knowledge and experience. Education also enables access to the cultural literacies of a dominant hierarchy. It is therefore embedded within the fundamental social justice issues confronting marginalised groups. It is indeed a “double-edged sword”24 that can enlighten disempowered groups. Further, it can create the conditions for a critical literacy “as a radical construct … rooted in a spirit of critique and project of possibility that enable[s] people to participate in the understanding and transformation of their society.”25 It also simultaneously indoctrinates the subordinate

23 M. Apple, Cultural politics and education, (New York: Teacher’s College, 1996), pp. 4-5
25 ibid.
in the dominant ideologies of the state. This requires a devaluation of the range of skills, knowledges and practices embraced by marginalised peoples.

The contemporary notions of the role of education and training, has shifted the social consequences of formalized learning from critical citizenry to employment. In Australia, the investment in education for economic growth gained currency in the 1960s. It was not until the amalgamation of the Departments of Education and Youth Affairs with the Department of Employment and Training in 1987 that solidified the approach to education for economic development. The growing trend to streamlining education for vocational purposes has infiltrated university philosophies of teaching and learning. Universities are less and less taking on the responsibilities for creating critical citizens. In an age of structural unemployment, it is understandable that these concerns are allocated declining importance. The issues that have reshaped the workforce and employment opportunities in recent times, like globalisation and increasing economic rationalism, are masked by a focus on university’s apparent inability to train students in the appropriate skills for a changing workforce. This is one of the great triumphs of the New Right. To alter the hegemonic landscape in such subtle and complete terms has dumbfounded the Left. The capacity for the Left to critique these ideologies has been slowly but surely stifled. Cultural studies’ role inside university institutions is as a critical voice. Its ability to hail an alternative politics, and engage in unconventional learning strategies is the core to its deconstructive project. Its ability to break the rules is what makes it attractive as a cultural critique. It is sexy. Who wants to read Shakespeare when dance music can be studied? It is a paradigm located on the fringes of legitimate scholarly investigation and as such, must resist the urge to be seen as addressing purely fringe issues. It must
make its concerns speak to wider identities, by mobilising a collective sense of subordination. Not to suggest that all subordinate concerns can speak with the same tongue, but to spotlight the broad meaning systems that operate (differently) on all identities to a greater or lesser extent within a hegemonic system. The intervention of identity politics in cultural studies has been the key to its politics.

The fragmentation of the project was incredibly valuable. The affirmation of otherness opened up the terrain for a deeper and more complicated rendering of oppression. I agree with Richard Johnson when he suggests that “[t]hese have deepened and extended the democratic and socialist commitments that were the leading principles of the first new left.”26 However, the failure to adequately position this fragmentation in direct opposition to Rightist economics and politics was a fatal blunder. Instead there was a prevailing persistence that a “new rainbow of ‘alliances’ and cross-identifications could be worked out for particular and provisional social or ‘mirco-political’ ends.”27 Cultural studies theorists have struggled to reconcile its Marxist origins with the widening of identity politics and fragmented interventionist strategies. It has suffered to the extent that popular culture has become the resistive terrain for the discipline. The failure to intervene in revolutionary terms, and the increasing diversification of specific interests, has distilled cultural studies into popular culture studies. Resistive potential has been enveloped in style and reading practices. Class-consciousness has been abandoned for the flexible and funky irreverence of pop, mobilised by youthful exuberance.

27 During, op cit., p. 16
Young and loving it

The politics of youth has activated the resistive politics from the Birmingham Centre in the early 1970s. Revolt into Style, Resistance Through Rituals and Subculture: The Meaning of Style form the core reading to a cultural studies politics of resistance.

These texts were crucial for a number of reasons. They sought out meaning in young people’s collectives rather than demonizing them. The Birmingham Centre situated the behaviours and practices of young people within the social and historical context of their lives, rather than anthropologizing them as deviant and strange. It also furthered the cause for class-consciousness in understanding “youth culture as a plurality of class and cultural-originated subcultures.” Most significantly, it reaffirmed the significance of style to politics. The ‘youth’ category was mobilised as a crucial resistive formation. The mods, rockers, teds and punks were engaging in a radical critique simply by embodying ‘folk devil – ness’, characterised by deviance and behaviour “such as drug-taking or violence” that is used as a marker for “which roles should be avoided.” These youth subcultures were persistently working class.

Jon Stratton applies the British models in his interpretation of Australian subcultural youth groups, such as the bodgies and widgies. In characterizing the violence embraced by these groups, he explicitly expresses the working class concerns mobilised in these collectives.

At its simplest, the bashings of the late-1950s may be viewed as a result of a combination of a decline in working-class youth job opportunities, a tradition or working-class racism and the increased number of Southern European migrants during the min-1950s.

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28 J. Stratton, The young ones, (Perth: Centre for Australian Studies, 1992), p. 21
30 ibid.
31 Stratton, op cit., p. 24
These concerns were crystallized in youth subcultures. The larger concerns of a society percolated through to young working class people, who performed the social inequalities amplified via wider marginalisation practices. The Birmingham Centre recognized the intense fermentation of politics within these groups. In an attempt to de-prioritise racist and violent visibility of resistance, style, fashion and appropriation of cultural artifacts was privileged as the site of youthful rebellion. A politics of style enables cultural artifacts to be reinscribed anew. It works on the premise that objects and articles inscribed by a dominant hierarchy can be “re-order[ed] to communicate new and subversive meaning.” The uses of bricolage and symbolic reinscription opened a space between dominant and resistant meanings that played with, and dislocated meanings from their original context. Style functions so that “the invisible seam between language, experience and reality [can] be located and prised open.” In this contingent space the dominant loses control over the meanings of a cultural artifact, and it can be hijacked by resistant readings. The problem is that this process is easily reversed. The ability of the dominant to impose their meanings means that stylish resistance is often fleeting. Hebdige is careful to note the nature of the symbolic moment “in a gesture of defiance or contempt, in a smile or a sneer” and to suggest that this disruption is important, even if it is transitory.

I would like to think that this Refusal is worth making, that these gestures have a meaning, that the smiles and the sneers have some subversive value, even if, in the final analysis, they are … just the darker side of sets of regulations.

It is indeed a gesture worth making. However, transforming it as a radical and revolutionary moment is overblown. Such stylish refusals have a limited currency. For while they may provide short-term satisfaction, unless the social terrain is able to

32 Cohen, op cit., p. ix
34 ibid., p. 3
35 ibid.
shift, their impact is short-lived and limited in the changes it can actually affect. There is indeed something very empowering about giving an ‘up-yours’ to the establishment, however, this gesture is often ignored, if even seen at all.

Eventually, we all get older. There is nothing more tragic than an aging punk who actually thinks that using a tampon as a fashion accessory is resistive rather than gross. The moment of youthful revolution has passed us by. ‘Youth’ is a marketing category. The problems of using style as a critique have penetrated the resistive terrain. Youth is still marked as a radical category, but its ‘difficult’ status is framed by shifting knowledges. The problems that young people now represent are framed by New Right ideologies. Young people are still being demonized in the media via representational modalities of ‘youth crime’. However, through the problematic of ‘youth unemployment’ the New Right has assigned a fresh role to young people. They mark the limits of our society. The focus on education, training and employment has signified the wider and encompassing shifts towards consumer-based criteria for satisfaction and success. The objects and artifacts young people traditionally embraced that were sometimes embedded in a key resistive or alternative politics - like music and fashion - have become among the biggest industries in the western world. Steve Redhead argues,

[w]hat, in practice, we witnessed in the 1980s was the break-up not simply of former theoretical traditions (or master and meta-narratives) about the emancipatory potential of youth in the West, but the disintegration and restructuring of those formations (rock culture, youth culture) which were produced as their object. 36

Youth culture was always sold back to young people. The appropriation and reinscription of dominant meanings has been emptied of its more serious implications

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to wider social arrangements, and celebrated as an irreverent youthful enthusiasm to consume and gain pleasure from culture. Cultural Studies’ alignment of resistance and consumption via youth subculture has been the cancer plaguing its ability to fully engage with the New Right. The swing between a revolutionary resistance - that is always delayed - and a celebration of quaint otherness has crippled the project. It has done its job too well. The desire to mobilise popular culture as a valuable site for interrogation (and resistance) has stimulated the debate around populism and the fears that “studying popular culture has become a method of uncritical celebration.” 37 The fear is that popular culture is emptied of its capacity to mobilise and collectivize the concerns of the marginalised resistively, and simply becomes an uncritical site of consumption, pleasure and polysemic reading practices. This runs against the objectives of Birmingham that sought to mobilise the popular as a critical site for intervention in the unspoken authority of empowered. Unproblematised celebration of popular culture can block serious contemplation of marginalised concerns. The wider discourses on fandom in the market place encircle this problematic where the celebration of individuals celebrating popular culture, provokes a distinctly uncritical interpretation of the function of popular culture in lives. While cultural studies has struggled to balance the celebratory and critical aspect of the popular, a manual for negotiating this new life arrived on the bookshelves - Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture.

**Suiting up and selling out**

Generation X suffers from a definitional crisis. Douglas Coupland, who popularized the term, was never clear about exactly whom he intended to include in this category. Consequently, journalists, commentators, sociologists and even cultural studies scholars, went into a spin trying to clarify who or what it referred to. There has been serious effort to attach it to a clear generational demarcation, in order to define it in direct reference to the ‘Baby Boomers’. Most fundamentally, it has been defined as the generation born between 1961 and 1981.38 However, what is missed in the rush to lock Generation X into a safe marketing category is that youth politics is no longer necessarily about age. It more insistently refers to a politics of a time, rather than a numerical chronology. What is also overlooked is the politics of Generation X deliberately critiques the career of a label, and problematises the rudimentary categorization of an individual, or a time. Douglas Coupland himself has effectively critiqued the tendency to align Generation X with an age in explaining that, “journalists never understood that X is a term that defines not a chronological age but a way of looking at the world.”39 He clarified what he meant in Details magazine in 1995 - four years after Generation X had been published.

The book’s title came not from Billy Idol’s band, as many supposed, but from the final chapter of a funny sociological book on American class structure titled Class by Paul Fussell. In his final chapter, Fussell named an ‘X’ category of people who wanted to hop off the merry-go-round of status, money and social climbing that so often frames modern existence. The citizens of X had much in common with my own socially disengaged characters; hence the title. The book’s title also allowed Claire, Andy and Dag to remain enigmatic individuals while at the same time making them feel part of the larger whole.40

This book was so successful because it filled a gap in the popular consciousness. It provided an effective critique of the New Right and signified the disenfranchisement

40 ibid.
of young people with a dominant hierarchy that had largely denied them a voice in their own politics. It was a handbook for getting through life, complete with a glossary of terms defining contemporary experiences.

**Bread and Circuits:** The electronic era tendency to view party politics as corny - no longer relevant or meaningful or useful to modern societal issues, and in many cases dangerous.  

**Air Family:** Describes the false sense of community experienced among coworkers in an office environment.

Generation X, (the book and the time it refers to) demonstrates a deep disenfranchisement with conventional meaning systems. It activates a way of thinking that critiques the dominant capitalist knowledges that frame everyday life, and which determine what counts as important in a society. Generation X politics is a distinct rejection of those ideologies. The characters in Coupland’s tale have dropped out of the ‘rat-race’ and consciously defy its infringement upon their minds and lives.

Central to the critique, is the self-reflexive mobilisation of popular culture, and a politics of image and surface or style. What sets Generation X apart from the subcultures of the Birmingham Centre is not only its refusal of class-based politics, but the use of style, not only as self-reflexive irony, but to critique the marketing of self-reflexivity. This generation embraces marketed style, and in the age of the image, uses surfaces and a critique of images to destabilize the hegemonic terrain of the New Right. Generation X was the first generation that “irony which most young people use in order to make ludicrous situations palatable, was for the first time used as a selling tool.”

They reacted by developing a language based heavily in popular culture for making sense of their contemporary experiences acknowledging that “a lot of it is detestable and silly and dumb. But at least it allows [them] to be able to communicate

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42 *ibid.*, p. 127
43 Coupland, “The death of generation x,” *op cit.*, online
with relative ease to someone who grew up thousands of miles away. It’s a common bank of experience. This shift in literacy has much to do with the shifting social concerns, the dominance of the New Right and the failure of the ‘promised’ revolution that was going to redefine the social hierarchy. A language for a new kind of resistance made Generation X threatening to establishment ideologies. They were the first generation to have less disposable income than the previous generation since World War Two, and therefore generated a contrary perspective on the consumption mentality they were expected to embrace, and mark out for enjoyment.

Popular culture is celebrated by Generation X, while critiquing the hyper-consumption it mobilises. This generational politics is highly literate in marketing, media and the corporate products of the contemporary era. The establishment has entered into a problematic and uncomfortable relationship with Generation X because “they naively continue to assume that any generation actively enjoys participating in its own selling out.” Xers refuse to swallow the marketing pill whole. The commodification of their lives plays a contradictory role in their critique. There is simultaneous recognition of the deep resonance products and commodities have in their lives, with a refusal to be sold the ideologies of the state. In this complicated state of affairs Xers “have adopted an ironic distance” in which they refuse old social models of resistance, but embrace the difficulties of identity politics. They create their own space for social critique. The dialogue with the Right takes place in and through the popular media - it is a space in which the Right cannot so easily cohere its hegemony, and the space mobilising the hyperliteracy of Generation X.

45 Coupland, “The death of generation x,” *op cit.*, online
46 C. Hicks, “‘The only things that aren’t fake are you, me and sprite’: Ironies and realities in generation x advertising,” *Metro Magazine*, No. 106, 1996, p. 72
The Right cannot easily dismiss popular culture as simply celebratory - for a
Generation X politics is intimately tethered to literacy in popular forms, and the
manner in which they speak to a time and its injustices. Identity politics and daily
negotiation of difference and diversity is central to the Generation X subjectivity.
Xers see the capitalist system as so overwhelming that the small voices of individuals
have no volume against the corporate megaphone - so everyone is screwed. Perhaps
the quintessential Generation X text that articulates this feeling of smallness is *South Park*.

**Going on down to South Park**

Comics, cartoons and animation have consistently occupied a problematic position
among popular cultural texts. The cartoon genre - print or animated - has inhabited a
deviant position within our social strata. The volatility of *South Park* is an incubator
for the range of ‘media effects’ analysis circulating through our culture as common
sense. Marian Quigley cites the range of schools that have “banned *South Park*
merchandise and talk about the programme.”[^47] The irreverence of contemporary
cartoons has a relatively coherent trajectory. The capacity for animation to break the
rules and challenge authority has been well documented.[^48] The significance of
subversion to the animated cartoon is outlined by Bob Clampett Jnr, son of Warner
Brothers animator Bob Clampett.

My father told me a story one time where they saw a Disney short in front of one of the features, and there was a moment in it where Mickey turned to the audience as said, “Is there a Doctor in the house?”… The shock … that it had on them when they saw ‘wait a second, we can break the fourth wall - we can actually talk directly to the audience’ was something that became a real staple in Warner Brother cartoons after that. And I don’t think that Walt ever really understood the implication of what they created, but what later the Warner Brothers directors really made great use of.49

The capacity for animated cartoons to defy the logic of reality makes them such an attractive medium for subversive content. Warner Brothers cartoons set the standard for muck-raking. They disrupted the status quo and embroidered the absurd onto the fringes of the popular. Bugs Bunny has always been much more interesting than Mickey Mouse. *South Park* continues the Warner Brothers tradition. This tradition is one of dialoguing with the audience. By consistently looking back (at the viewer), *South Park* is making trouble. Viewers are made complicit in the meanings they take to, and from the text. Most significantly, the symbolic and ideological duplicity of the medium, melds seamlessly with Generation X politics. The capacity for the animated form to channel the concerns, issues and disruptions of a time is unlike any other popular culture artifact – primarily because it can get away with it. The irreverence and perversity of the animated spectacle has hijacked the unassuming, friendly and ‘safe’ medium of ‘children’s’ cartoons. Animators have a freedom to play with the rules of social life and to re-write those rules in an unreal world. Cartoons were never intended as an exclusively children’s medium. *South Park* most certainly hails an older audience. *Ren & Stimpy*, a cartoon featuring a deranged Chihuahua and his dimwitted feline friend, rewrote the programming policies of major networks. Its debut season did “double Nickelodeon’s rating among children aged two to eleven.”50 Nickelodeon then approached Viacom – its parent company – to screen some episodes

50 Langer, *op cit.*, p. 155
as part of MTV programming. “The result was a near doubling of viewers to 2.2
millions households with 45 percent of the audience being aged eighteen or over.”

The Disneyfication of cartoons as nice, ideologically sound texts aimed at generating
an ideal world has been replaced by a dystopian, overtly problematic rendering of
social relations. South Park, in reshaping the moral terrain of commentary, has been at
the centre of contemporary social critique.

The politics of South Park embodies a crucial critique of Rightist ideology. It is an
interrogation of hegemony. The possibilities for altering this landscape, is key to
articulating an affirmative Leftist politics for “the only way of genuinely contesting a
hegemonic form of politics is to develop a counter-hegemonic strategy.”

The systems of subordination, resistance and consent circulate through the South Park
universe in an overt dialogue between identity politics and consciousness. It is not
enough for us to simply celebrate the radical potential of South Park. I agree with
Stuart Hall that “[r]itual and celebration are for the religious. They are for keeping the
spirits up; for consolidating and consoling the faithful; and for anathematizing the
heretics.” Celebration denies the deeply subversive ideologies embedded in the text
and its consequences as a popular artifact that has entered into the contemporary
consciousness. Its place in popular culture as an animated text deliberately marketed
to, and capturing, a ‘youth’ market hails a revisionist politics of resistance, but moves
beyond these limiting models into a critique of the whole social sphere.

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51 ibid., p. 156
52 Hall, op cit., p. 11
53 ibid., p. 14
"South Park" embodies the changing nature of identities, resistance and control in our culture. It does much to reconcile the emergence of fragmented identity politics with wider concerns of social and political intervention. "South Park" embraces controversial subjectivities, desires and behaviours. It is not unproblematic in its rendering of otherness. It does offer us a glimpse into an interventionist politics that has moved beyond the Marxist model, but has not sold out to postmodern liberal ideologies that validate selfish interests. This text addresses localised and specific concerns within a wider critique of social structures. Cultural studies’ struggle to find an even balance or “a mid-way position, somewhere between the ‘culturalist’ stress on agency and experience, and the structuralist emphasis on determination and ideology”\(^{54}\) feeds through the "South Park" universe. The characters fluctuate through confused and confusing identity politics. The answers to life’s questions are rarely clear or complete.

"South Park" will not change the way people think. This is not the function of media texts. They are embedded within market forces that are designed to capture and solidify ways of thinking. Individuals are hailed by the ideologies in a text. Audiences generally want to see themselves (their beliefs and ideologies) reflected back to them. "South Park" is part of hegemonic maintenance. This text provides a point of intervention into the politics of the New Right. It energises a corrective in Leftist politics that must begin to “establish itself as a leading cultural force in civil society, popular culture and urban life.”\(^{55}\) "South Park" offers a coherent rendering of collective subordination to a dominant capitalist system that benefits the few. The key sites of critique circulate through masculinity, sexuality, feminism, and physical disability.

\(^{54}\) A. Milner, “Cultural studies and cultural hegemony,” *Arena Journal*, No. 9, 1997, p. 142

\(^{55}\) Hall, *op cit*, p. 9
Through these tropes, *South Park* articulates otherness across and through the social strata. These identities maneuver through hegemonic fields in contradictory collectives of empowerment and disempowerment to struggle for a place within a social system that works against their localised interests.

*South Park* is a crucible for the deviant, dangerous and silenced identities within our culture. It discusses the sensitive issues that no one else is brave enough to broach. Sexual harassment (*Sexual Harassment Panda*), bestiality (*Chickenlover*), birth defects (*Conjoined Fetus Lady*), incest (*World Wide Recorder Contest*), homosexuality (*Big Gay Al’s Big Gay Boatride*), sexually transmitted diseases (*Chicken Pox*), pedophilia (*The Wacky Molestation Adventure*), corporatism (*Gnomes*), terrorism (*Osama Bin Laden Has Farty Pants*), and Heaven and Hell (*Damien, Death*) are just a selection of the concerns articulated via the *South Park* universe. Most critically, the issues encircling men, women, sexuality, and the public sphere form the macro-politics of *South Park*.

The main characters, Kyle, Kenny, Stan and Cartman - young children of approximately nine years of age - are metonyms for empowered and disempowered groups in a society. Kyle is Jewish, and consistently defined via an othered religious identity, paralleled with the centrality of Christianity. Insecure and naïve, Kyle must negotiate attacks on his religious affiliation while struggling to understand his peers, and his role as an older brother to Ike. Kenny is desperately poor. His family literally lives on the wrong side of the tracks. Killed every episode, he stands in for the disposable and faceless ‘masses’, with his subalterned subjectivity. There is always another one to replace him. Silenced by his slicker, we cannot decipher his muffled
comments underneath his oversized jacket. Stan is the most ‘normal’ of the four boys. He is not marked as othered. He is consistently anxious about fitting into his peer group. He does not wish to be passed by in the fickle shifts and swings of popular culture. This anxiety manifests in projectile vomiting. Cartman overtly embodies extreme Right-wing and conservative ideologies. Overweight and belligerent, he parodies the intense fear of otherness that produces the most uncompassionate responses in our contemporary world, and that make rational people have irrational reactions to others.\footnote{Fred Inglis, \textit{op cit.}, p. 76} He is dysfunctional, draconian and dismissive. Ignored, marginalised and silenced, these four boys are driven by localised, individual concerns. Negotiating school and authority, watching their favourite television programme, \textit{Terrence and Philip}, and other forms of leisure dominate their everyday politics. They are only distracted from these activities when external forces conspire to interrupt their everyday lives. In the episode entitled “Towelie”\footnote{“Towelie,” \textit{South Park}, written and directed by Trey Parker, original air-date, 8\textsuperscript{th} August 2001, episode 5.08} the boys embark on a secret government mission after their ‘gamesphere’ is held to ransom. Their interests are unequivocally selfish. They are not motivated by social justice, but by pleasure and popular culture. Their marginal concerns are often ignored by parents, school teachers, and others in authority who, (feebly) dictate the social terrain for their engagement with the world. \textit{South Park} engages in a visible articulation of Leftist politics and rendering of the strategies engaged by disempowered groups to negotiate the dominant hierarchy. Most significantly, it visualises the complicated spaces of
social relationships that are often messy, convoluted and unclear in their place and connection to identity politics. Within an overarching interrogation of the corporate industrial complex, *South Park* positions the tough relationships between men and women, heterosexual and homosexual politics, able-bodied and disabled physicalities, and between blackness and whiteness.

Life is not lived in stable or consistent categories. The turmoil of everyday life involves the negotiation of complicated private and public, personal and impersonal relationships shaped by power, ideologies and interpellative frameworks. Sexual, workplace, familial, peer, and institutional relationships are messy. They require simple and complicated strategies of mediation to effectively navigate the range of social, personal and political meanings of these moments. Lawrence Grossberg suggests that “[i]f the social world is complex, then sometimes the obvious accounts don’t work; sometimes we need complex and nonobvious explanations of what is going on.” 58 Many of us stumble through these moments and their explanations, with a limited consciousness of the wider implications of their impact. In a world where the range of these relationships has amplified, and an increasing sentiment of individualism permeates, reflexivity becomes necessary if we are to successfully maneuver through the everyday. In modern, capitalist societies the shape and nature of everyday life involves dramatic changes to, the place and role of difference and diversity, increased visibility of physically and mentally challenged identities, and reconfiguration of the flow of power between men and women. The reification of individual interests in the fragmented and postmodern ideologies of our time is

58 L. Grossberg, *We gotta get out of this place: Popular conservatism and postmodern culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 31
embedded in the validation of the corporate industrial complex, and postfordist consumption as the marker of success and freedom.

The breaking down of populations into niche markets has characterised the postfordist mentality. Identity politics becomes important in this context, for the extent to which it can be harnessed, and rewritten into a demographic for market research. The place of the popular as scaffolding for this focus on consumer behaviour, locates it as the hegemonic dance floor on which the struggle for concession and consent climaxes. Precisely because “[t]he construction of the popular is always the site of an ongoing struggle,” the New Right has been able to redefine the terms of that struggle. The interests of individuals have shifted to align with purchasing power rather than political problems. Consent is manufactured, literally and metaphorically. These are the overarching terms of everyday life that have been defined by the New Right in the postmodern era. *South Park* intervenes in this unproblematised process by revealing it.

The shape and nature of the corporate industrial complex frames the direction and lives of *South Park* residents in overtly capitalist ways. In the episode entitled “Gnomes”, Kyle, Stan, Kenny and Cartman are assigned a group project by their teacher Mr. Garrison. Also attached to their group is another classmate - Tweek - whose father runs the local coffee shop. One morning Mr. Tweek is approached by representatives of ‘Harbucks’, who wish to buy out his business and set up a franchise in the town. When he refuses, they open a store directly across the street. Meanwhile Kyle, Stan, Kenny, Cartman and Tweek are having trouble coming up with an idea for

\[59 \text{ibid., p. 77}\]
their project. Tweek suggests doing their project on the ‘underpants gnomes’ who steal underpants. Assuming he is ‘wired’ on coffee and hallucinating, the boys dismiss him. Through a tightly woven and complex story line, Mr. Tweek completes the boy’s project on corporate takeovers, while the boys discover the underpants gnomes are real. The crucial moment in the narrative comes when the boys - after impressing the council with their plagiarised project, manage to whip up support for Mr. Tweek’s campaign to undermine ‘Harbucks’. The boys follow the gnomes to their underground factory in order to discover the secret to corporate success. The gnomes repeat their mantra, “phase one - collect underpants”. When Kyle inquires what stage two is, the gnomes become confused.

Kyle: So what are you gonna do with all the underpants that you steal?
Gnome 1: Collecting underpants is just phase one - phase one, collect underpants.
Kyle: So, what’s phase two?
Gnome1 (is silent and then calls to another): Hey, what’s phase two?
Gnome 2: Phase one, we collect underpants …
Gnome 1: Yeah, yeah, yeah, but what about phase two?
Gnome 2 (silent): Well, phase three is profit … get it?
Stan: I don’t get it.
Gnome 2 (moves to a large flow chart that outlines the process only phase two has a large question mark underneath it) You see phase one, collect underpants, phase two …, phase three, profit.
Cartman: Oh I get it.
Stan: No you don’t fat ass.60

In bizarre and acutely ironic tone, South Park queries the corporate mentality. By injecting absurdity into corporate discourse, it deconstructs the Rightist emphasis on economic rationalism. The premise of underpants gnomes is threaded alongside the overarching narrative of corporate takeover by a transnational corporation. To add a final ironic layer to the diegesis, Mr. Tweek discovers that ‘Harbucks’ actually make much better coffee. The paradox of the hegemonic dance is isolated in this moment.

60 “Gnomes,” South Park, written by Pam Brady, Trey Parker and Matt Stone, directed by Trey Parker, original air-date, 16th December 1998, episode 2.17
where the interests of the market are being better served by the dominant, corporate industrial complex. Why not consent to the presence of major multinational corporations when they provide easy, effective and efficient goods and services? This mentality frames the consensual modality of the hegemonic moment. The Right has altered the terms of benefit to the subordinate. Consent is gained through the ‘needs’ of consumption rather than real changes to the social and political landscape. Similarly, in an episode entitled “Chinpokomon” the role of popular culture as a social sedative is interrogated. In this episode, the boys become embedded in the ‘chinpokomon’ craze sweeping South Park. However, the products are mind control devices by the Japanese seeking to take over the United States. The focus on consumption as pleasure problematises the emphasis on postfordism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Television voice over: Hey kids, do you love chinpokomon?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cartman: Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice over: Well now you can buy your very own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jingle: I’ve got to buy chinpokomon. I’ve got to buy it. I’ve got to buy it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice over: Now you can collect them all - Furry Cat - Donkey Trong - Pengan - Shoe - Lamb Tor. Collect them all and you can become Royal Crown Chinpoko-Master.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartman: Royal Crown Chinpoko-Master! Holy Shi#%t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice over: All the chinpokomon are in store now.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mindless enthusiasm of Cartman and his friends parodies the place of popular culture as complicit in the sedation of the citizenry. Embedded in the bowels of corporatism, popular culture can be the tool of conservatism and compliance. When partnered with New Right ideologies of consumption as liberation, it becomes the framework for the rules and pleasures of everyday life. Popular culture should be fun. Pleasure and passion must occupy a privileged position in contemporary lives. However, its service to the dominant bloc can mask the more sinister meanings it mobilises for the maintenance of New Right hegemony.

61 “Chinpokomon,” South Park, written by Trey Parker, directed by Trey Parker and Eric Stough, original air-date, 3rd November 1999, episode 3.10
These issues of consumption and economism are overtly or inadvertently, implied throughout the *South Park* diegesis. They frame interrogations of other complicated issues that have arrived with the changes to the workplace, the home, and to personal and public relationships in the postwar world. Most significantly, *South Park* has sought to problematise the roles of men in our society. Various renderings of men throughout *South Park*, serve to deconstruct the authority of masculinity in the public sphere. Hegemonic masculinity is demonstrated as “always contestable”\(^{62}\) as different men are defined against each other. Men in authority are often depicted as incompetent. For example, Officer Barbrady is a grossly ineffective lawman, who is revealed to be illiterate in “Chickenlover”. This incompetence is extended with Cartman taking Barbrady’s job while he has been suspended. Riding around on his tricycle and dispensing violent justice, Cartman maintains order by belligerently bellowing “respect my authoritae!” Similarly, Mr. Garrison’s ineffective teaching techniques critique public schooling, as well as demonstrating the tenuous authority of male power. He must constantly intimidate his students in the classroom, and is largely ineffective in maintaining order. His authority is weak and signifies the flawed scaffolding of male power in which “[a] thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate.”\(^{63}\) His reliance on Mr. Hat, his puppeted split personality, to say the things he is not brave enough to speak for himself, encases a feeble masculinity in a dysfunctional emotional landscape of men unable to articulate their feelings. These men who “suppress all other emotions and cover up the more gentle, caring, vulnerable sides of themselves”\(^{64}\) are simultaneously unable to uncover the

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\(^{63}\) *ibid.*, p. 84

“wild man”\textsuperscript{65} that will give them access to those emotions via the beating of drums and chests. He is a critique of the contemporary “tendency to pick apart, often in minute detail, all aspects of life using half-understood pop psychology as a tool.”\textsuperscript{66} Mr. Garrison demonstrates the consequences of a denied and oppressed marginal identity. The version of successful masculinity he attempts to emulate is significantly out of step with the maligned homosexuality he suppresses. It results in a split personality. The self-help rhetoric of ‘personal empowerment’ is not nearly adequate to providing a template for dealing with this crisis. Kylie Murphy is clear when she argues, “[s]elf-help which is framed within a disease framework whose aim is the recovery of the ‘ill’ subject, manages to distil the causal agent of both the problem and the solution down to the individual.”\textsuperscript{67} The insecurities and deep anxieties about coming to terms with an othered sexual identity are not so easily resigned. The consequences extend far beyond the individual into the workplace, the family and the community. In \textit{South Park}, Mr. Garrison’s trauma targets the contradictions in masculinity, and in the sexual continuum. The programme provides a deeper frame of reference for masculine identity. It examines the problems and processes of dealing with the anxieties and complications of being different. In privileging gay identities, \textit{South Park} challenges hegemonic masculinity. “Big Gay Al’s Big Gay Boat Ride” features Stan coming to terms with Sparky - his gay dog. Desperately denying his dog’s homosexuality, Stan rejects Sparky and becomes frantic when he runs away. While searching for Sparky, he discovers Big Gay Al’s Big Gay Animal Sanctuary. In an attempt to educate Stan, Big Gay Al takes him on a boat ride through an exhibit of gay history.

\textsuperscript{65} R. Bly, \textit{Iron John}, (Shaftsbury: Element, 1998), p. x
\textsuperscript{66} Coupland, \textit{Generation X}, op cit, p. 97
\textsuperscript{67} K. Murphy, “What does John Gray have to say to feminism?” \textit{Continuum}, vol. 15, no. 2, 2001, p. 162
Big Gay Al: You see gayness has existed since the beginning of time - from the Egyptian Pharaohs to the Shogun’s of Japan. Uh oh! Look out it’s the oppressors - Christians and Republicans and Nazis! Oh my! Oh gosh that was close. OK let’s steer our big gay boat out of here and into a place where gays are allowed to live freely. Musical exhibit in a parody of Disney’s ‘It’s a Small World’: We are gay and it’s ok. Coz gay means happy and happy means gay. We’re not sad anymore coz we’re out the closet door. It’s ok-ay to be gay.

Big Gay Al: So what do you think Stan?
Stan: This kicks ass! I’m sorry I tried to change you Spark, I just didn’t understand.
Big Gay Al: Isn’t this precious.68

South Park provides the history homosexuality and the context of oppression within this short scene. It is an overt challenge to the knowledges that position homosexuality as deviance. Big Gay Al helps Stan to understand the role and consequences of these knowledges, as well as his position in problematising or perpetuating them. In an era where AIDS frames debates about sexuality and homosexuality, this scene in South Park separates sexual preference from a pathologization of desire. Like understanding “masculinity and femininity as historical … is to locate them firmly in the world of social agency”69 recognizing the same of sexuality also “raises a string of questions about [its] historicity.”70 Big Gay Al extends definitions of both masculinity and sexuality. He deconstructs the close linkage between masculinity and heterosexuality by reinterpreting masculine identity within an othered subjectivity. His homosexuality is central to his ability to operate as a coherent and conscious identity. Significantly, he is able to locate it within a history that prises open spaces of otherness within the dominant hierarchy. Masculinity is being performed through an ease with selfhood rather than a public performance of power. Big Gay Al is marking a transition in which “[t]he myths, the ideas, the expectations, [of masculinity] are weightier than the man and … are beginning to

68 “Big Gay Al’s Big Gay Boat Ride,” South Park, written by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, director uncredited, original air-date, 3rd September 1997, episode 1.04
69 Connell, op cit., p. 81
70 ibid., p. 82
seem not worth the burden.” The shedding of this burden requires new paradigms with which to negotiate the self. In *South Park*, these new paradigms are given credence and space for articulation. Hegemonic masculinity is not providing an effective framework for an understanding of masculinity, or the sexuality that is tethered to it. Being a gay man is difficult, and requires a different set of interpretive skills in order to make sense of contemporary life. Big Gay Al is a metonym for a mobile masculinity that is not only useful for negotiating a homosexual identity but also how it intersects with masculine identity. The complicated matrices of gender, sexuality and power form a significant place in the politics of *South Park*. It is one of the few texts to deal with the sticky and shaky terrain of sexual harassment.

Sexual politics punctuate the workplace. The role of women in this space has been the source of much feminist intervention in law. Discrimination, equal pay for equal work, and child care have all been directed at interrogating “how public space is managed, how public debate is conducted, who counts in the public domain.” In Australia, the Equal Opportunity and Sex Discrimination Act, passed by Parliament in 1984, was designed to directly address women’s issues with the workplace. However, while laws can help in redefining acceptable practice in selection criteria and resource management, there are distinct problems with legislating sexual politics. Without a wider interpretation of women’s oppression, these laws - while incredibly important - do little to change the behaviour of men. They are seen as “politically correct” and that “[i]f men could be hit with sexual harassment complaints then …

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73 *ibid.*
74 *ibid.*
the workplace would be changed forever.” Men’s jobs need to be protected. These laws are seen to operate contrary to men’s interests. What needs to be changed is men’s perception of women, feminism and what constitutes appropriate workplace behaviour. Legislation can help. It can set the framework for changes in the thinking of ordinary people. Lynne Segal for example, provides evidence of the improving conditions of women in Scandinavian countries compared to the USA and Britain. Sweden in particular, has made great advancements since the development of “the most expansive social, health and educational welfare system, [in which] male domination, though still a reality, has been the most seriously challenged.” In this tone, sexual harassment legislation is a crucial marker for the deeper respect for women’s identities and bodies that needs to be held in the public sphere. Sexual harassment does happen. However, determining when, how and in what context it occurs is complicated because the criteria varies by the individual. For what one woman sees as sexual harassment another sees as flattery. Women should not have to deal with this behaviour in the workplace in any form. Nevertheless, women have consistently had difficulty having their concerns met (no matter what criteria they apply to sexual harassment), either in legislation or by management. Defining and legislating sexual harassment remains such volatile practice. Virginia Trioli defines sexual harassment as “unwanted or uninvited sexual behaviour that is offensive, embarrassing, intimidating or humiliating.” With such vague and personalised frames of reference, sexual harassment encompasses an imprecise and fuzzy terrain of meanings. Our current understanding of workplace relationships does not offer a

75 ibid., p. 13
77 Comment on the contradictory responses to sexual harassment by different women can be found in E. Berg, “Sisters and solidarity: What is in a grope,” in K. Bail, (ed.), DIY feminism, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1996), pp. 161 - 163
78 V. Trioli, Generation F, (Kew: Minerva, 1996), p. 78
complicated and coherent representation of sexual harassment concerns. It is frequently considered a ‘women’s’, or feminist issue. While this way of thinking persists, men who sexually harass do not have to change their behaviour. Legislation can only go a fragment of the way to help solve an issue that operates outside of clear cut and comprehensive legal parameters. If a deeper rendering of sexual harassment and workplace politics cannot be found then “without … clear and unambiguous recognition of the power relationships that can be abused at work, at school, we are left with messy slippage and foolish confusion.”79 This confusion circulates through the *South Park* episode entitled “Sexual Harassment Panda”.

At the beginning of the episode, South Park Elementary School is visited by the sexual harassment panda. A pedagogical prop to make complicated issues more accessible to children, the condescending clichés of sexual harassment rhetoric he espouses has a lasting affect on the children. When Stan calls Cartman an ‘ass-sucker’, Cartman decides to sue Stan for sexual harassment. Cartman wins the case and the effects of his victory steam-roll, until literally, everyone is suing everyone.

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79 *ibid.*, p. 93
80 “Sexual Harassment Panda,” *South Park*, written by Trey Parker, directed by Eric Stough, original air-date, 7th July 1999, episode 3.06
In this short scene, there is a move away from the legislative regulation of human relationships. In this context, sexual harassment legislation has only made complicated issues almost indecipherable. There is no interrogation of the processes of power and politics that go on in a sexual harassment situation. Instead, *South Park* constructs the incredibly complicated and subtle power relationships that are activated in the public sphere, by articulating the ineffectivity of current legal frameworks. Significantly, the Left is depicted as fundamentally flawed in even trying to attempt to legislate for identity politics. It is reduced to a perverse version of authorial state control that is attempting to regulate what people do, and how they think. This is part of the reason for the validation of the New Right. The Left has framed itself as addressing outside interests that infringe upon individual autonomy. It must be able to move beyond these knowledges to help work through the difficult issues and subjectivities that must be negotiated in everyday life. This is where cultural studies does its best work and where it must continue to contribute to public debate. For what better paradigm to work through the subtleties and nuances of sexual harassment, sexual identity and otherness than a framework for identity politics that can move between knowledges and make connections to them in smooth transitions.

*South Park* offers a crucial intervention into Rightist ideologies by rendering and reifying the skills of negotiation needed to get through contemporary life. The issues it represents are not exceptions - they are everyday. That we can currently only visualize Rightist interpretations of these issues through capitalist solutions and redundant exclusionary politics is problematic for Leftist politics. It is cultural studies that ponders and punctures these concerns in gritty and uncomfortable ways. It must
find a way to operate more effectively pedagogically. Cultural Studies must become the *South Park* of universities and provide a coherent interpretation of collective subordination and political intervention in public debate. It means remaining difficult and disruptive, but not to resign itself to this position. Popular culture should be celebrated, but within a context of critique that can function pedagogically. Identity politics is the common ground that can align a critical engagement with the New Right. Cultural studies must make its project for everyday life, rather than simply about everyday life.

The cult currency of *South Park* is encased in its ambivalent activation of identity politics. This text quivers in the space between Leftist social justice and New Right reification of consumption. In order to demonstrate the difficulties and devastation of these consequences in everyday life, it must speak with a forked tongue. The layers of parody and irony peppering the program soak the social meanings in a fog that masks methodologies and crystalizes marginalised issues. *South Park*’s radical revelry in and critique of dominant meanings, makes it mobile as it slips between Leftist and Rightist ideologies. This text wallows within deviant and dangerous identities, but also offers strategies for negotiating the difficult dances of everyday life.
Speed

Acceleration accentuates our culture. As we move faster toward the future, the past is emptied of moments and memories. *South Park* reclaims the identities of those silenced by the New Right. It creates a space for their articulation in a dialogue with wider social issues and concerns. Colonisation limits these spaces for difference that demonstrate the diversity of our world. This final chapter returns to the empire to reconfirm the role of resistance in mobile meanings.

Through an interrogation of writing, resistance and regulation, this chapter interprets the relationships between colonisation, proximity and power to performing identity politics within a culture. Investigating the prose and poetry of Irvine Welsh and his best-selling book (and film) *Trainspotting*, this chapter will endeavour to generate a connective consciousness in time, space and politics. Moving through the dance floor and onto the page, the acceleration of our culture will be mobilised in an understanding of cult as a cauterizing tool containing and controlling Welsh’s work as it simultaneously tries to out-run, and capture consciousness.
Chapter Eight

Speeding up to slow down: *Trainspotting*

The thing that really kicked *Trainspotting* off for me was definitely guys in jail, guys in prison passing around dog-eared copies. It was the most shoplifted book ever, apparently.¹

Irvine Welsh.

When *Trainspotting* the film came out in February 1996, “within four weeks of its release, [it] … had beaten the British box-office earnings record previously set by *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.”² Within two years Irvine Welsh’s (author of the book upon which it was based) income would exceed “£1 million, making him Scotland’s second highest earning author.”³ The novel had reached sales of 100,000 within the UK by 1995 and after the film released skyrocketed, mirroring the success of the motion picture. Described as “the poet laureate of the chemical generation”⁴ Irvine Welsh’s affinity for the uncomfortable underbelly of life has punctuated his literary (and filmic) success. Welsh’s status as an ‘underground’ writer, has tied a knot of drug culture, dance clubs and youth politics around his public personae. Though, this positioning has more to do with Welsh’s refusal to play the respectable, responsible writer and his tendency for unruly behaviour, than market sales.⁵ The success of *Trainspotting* offers a case study for the place of popular culture in embodying a social consciousness. This site has become key textual material for disenfranchised

³ ibid.
⁴ This statement first appeared in *The Face* magazine but has gone on to feature in numerous press releases and reviews of Welsh’s work. It is most obviously used as a promotional blurb on the cover of Welsh’s 1995 novel *Marabou Stork Nightmares*.
⁵ Irvine Welsh is well known for not only his consumption of various illicit substances but his tendency for soccer hooliganism as highlighted in 1996 when he “was arrested … for being under the influence of alcohol at a Hibernian v Patrick Thistle match, and had to spend a night in jail.” Crumey, *op cit.*, online
identities, struggling to make their way in hypercapitalist and increasingly conservative world.

This book and the film it spawned, captured the lost voices of a culture and articulated the despair of a time in which speed is the primary problem, but also the primary refuge of a generation. This conundrum of acceleration flows through Welsh’s books and our experiences of the contemporary in which “speed pollution … reduces the world to nothing.”6 In ‘A Plea for Time’ Harold Innis foresaw the problems of neglecting a theory of time in outlining the rise of “monopolies of complexities”7 that would result in “the imposition of cultural uniformity”8 and encourage conflict. We are now living through an era of unprecedented acceleration, that has resulted in a number of serious changes to perception and experience mobilised in Welsh’s work. He is part of a current shift in the literary establishment that has seen the increased success of what has been referred to as ‘Brit Lit’, ‘Chemical Generation’ or ‘Repetitive Beat Generation’ writers. This last phrase, taken from the title of Steve Redhead’s book Repetitive Beat Generation, traces the rise of specifically Irish and Scottish authors writing from the fringes of Britishness about dancing, drug taking, violence and football. Irvine Welsh is listed alongside Mike McCormack (Getting it in the Head), Jeff Noon (Vurt, Pollen), Nicholas Blincoe (Acid Casuals) and Duncan McLean (Bunker Man) as key writers in this new ‘genre’ of ‘youth’ writing. What is isolated as unique or special about this wordsmith, is not only its subject matter - drugs, music, crime, sexuality, violence - but most significantly, its style. Written in innovative prose, these authors reveal their imaginary worlds through a variety of

7 H. Innis, The bias of communication, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 75
8 ibid., p. 76
authorial techniques. These range from Welsh’s now famous thick vernacular brogue, to Jeff Noon’s ‘dub’ writing style, where a series of short phrases are separated via a slash (/) to enable a simultaneous flow and bleeding of images with static breaks. This mode of writing has an intimate relationship with contemporary dance music and youth culture. A socio-cultural rhythm is mixing (the inherently slow medium of) literature with a generation embedded in the speeds of computers, emails, text messages and mobile phones.

This chapter interrogates the place of Trainspotting in popular culture as a ‘cult’ text. Moving between the book and the film, drugs, dancing and disempowerment are traced through music, memory and mobility as metaphors for the Repetitive Beat Generation. Weaving its way through Welsh, writing and resistance, the trajectory of the argument in this chapter moves into the past to reinscribe a politics of time in the present. The preliminary prose ponders the place of temporal politics in cultural studies, as a theoretical paradigm. The significance of convoluted consciousness in time is then traced through poetry and prose to demonstrate the rendering of past, future and present in popular culture. A turn toward beats and beyond is hailed through an interpretation of the relationship between contemporary dance music and drug culture. Finally a figuring of the Trainspotting universe through colonisation, class and resistance leads toward a rendering of cult consciousness in fluid formations of time and space. Boarding the time machine, this chapter accelerates from the present to the past and toward future possibilities to reconfigure the relationships between time, youth and popular culture.

Boldly blending the rules
The Repetitive Beat Generation has been a more heavily legislated ‘youth’ based formation than any other. The problem of ‘youth’ has never before received such visibility within the UK, USA and Australia than in the 1980s and 1990s. The passage through time, acceleration and consciousness in this chapter takes place against the backdrop of increasing (British) regulation of pleasure, beginning in 1971 with the Misuse of Drugs Act. This was then followed by comprehensive legislative measures to monitor ‘soccer hooliganism’ within the marketable space of football fandom. The Sports Events (control of alcohol) Act of 1985, The Football Spectators Act of 1989, and the Football Offences Act of 1991 as laws targeting specifically younger football fans and creating fandom as a space for social regulation, were all precursors to the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. This Act attempted to “‘criminalise’ a whole youth culture” by outlawing “music with ‘sounds wholly or predominantly characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats’.” The tone of reactionary debate, and fear of deviance that frames these legislative measures, is critiqued by the writers of the Repetitive Beat Generation and Irvine Welsh specifically.

Born in Leith in 1958, Welsh dropped out of high school at sixteen, to become “an apprentice TV repairman.” Throughout his younger years he took different jobs from road digging to dish washing until he was employed as a training officer for the Edinburgh District Council Housing Department, during which he obtained an MBA. It was also at this time that Welsh wrote Trainspotting, and was still employed there.

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11 ibid.
12 Crumey, op cit., online
through the authorship of his next two books, *The Acid House* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares*. His experimentation with drugs has been a consistent anchor in interviews and reviews of his writing. However, his use of heroin (the main drug of choice in *Trainspotting*) lasted only eighteen months and he has since indicated his displeasure in the addiction.

*Trainspotting* was generated out of a series of journals, and put together on a bus trip across the US. In an interview with Christopher Kemp he claimed he had found his, 1982 diary and that became the basis for *Trainspotting* really. It was all nonsense, it was all fiction. And I took a lot of notes when I was traveling on a Greyhound bus from New York to Los Angeles and that also became *Trainspotting*. So it was a fiction of a fiction really.13

Initially sections of the work were published as short stories. When it was published in full (by the first publisher Welsh sent it to), it was launched with a barrage of publicity at the 1993 Edinburgh Book Festival. It would take a year before it would reach number one on the Scottish bestseller chart.14 Though it would be in 1996 when the film was released, that Irvine Welsh and the novel of *Trainspotting* would enjoy meteoric success. The novel traces the lives of four young men in Edinburgh, through their experience of drug use and abuse. The story feeds primarily through Mark Renton and his struggle with drug addiction, (failed) withdrawal and disenfranchisement with the social system. Spud, Sick Boy and Begbie move through the text as Renton’s friend’s, rivals and enemies as he struggles to come to terms with himself, drug addiction and disempowerment. The movement of meanings between the original release of the book and the first screening of the film articulate an amplification of social concerns. As a film, *Trainspotting* moved through time and

14 For more on the history and chronology of Welsh’s career please see Crumey, *op cit.*, online
space to reconfigure the themes of the novel. The film embodied the reconceptualisations of time (speed and perception) articulated in the writing. The visual and auditory medium of film created “a variety of temporal phenomena that play[ed] with the uniformity and irreversibility of time.”\textsuperscript{15} Metaphors of time are central to a wider understanding of the context in which the novel was written, and its success later as a film.

**Taking Time**

Time, as a cultural variable, has been undertheorised within cultural studies, making this interpretation of *Trainspotting* more difficult. While it has embedded history (often unproblematically) within its metonymic methodology, it has not always paid astute attention to the modality of historiography. Historians have demonstrated a distinct disquiet at cultural studies theorist’s appropriation of its methods and modalities in tracing cultural histories through texts and the ‘lipstick traces’\textsuperscript{16} of a generation, rather than exclusively through the larger institutional contexts that frame a society. Historical facilitations are stolen to service a cultural studies politics. These instruments spark Keith Windschuttle’s anxiety in “new historicists”\textsuperscript{17} who he believes are ‘killing history’. His contention is that cultural studies theorists have perverted the contemplation of the past, in an irreverent mining of tradition, for the purposes of political punch in a postmodern paradigm. Cultural studies does suffer from a tendency to poach perversely for its own purposes. This can lead to an impression of imprecise and impertinent theorising within the paradigm. Its character

\textsuperscript{15} S. Kern *The culture of time and space: 1880 - 1918*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 29
\textsuperscript{17} K. Winschuttle, *The killing of history*, (Paddington: Maclaey Press, 1994), p. 18
of compressing and redefining historical terrain can be construed as colonisation. Theorising through time creates a contemporary consciousness for cultural studies.

Time offers us a difficult model through which to understand social meanings and movements. Slips in dimensions and temporal rifts pepper science fiction. Plays of - and through - time are the staple, from Wells’s *Time Machine* to *Star Trek*’s temporal prime directive. These texts speculate on the possibilities of time-travel, changing the future and seeing into the past. Time is tricky. We can only deal with its complexity from a distance. Science fiction’s status as a forum for possibilities that are frequently distanced from the probable, make tampering with time rich narrative soil. Temporal politics offers a conundrum for present academic inquiry. History seeks out time in order to chronologise, categorise and contain experiences in a linear and logical biography. Its object is to present a plausible chain of events, and to reveal the causes of the present. Similarly, cultural studies has sought out the past, but only to reveal its impact on the contemporary. It rarely investigates the ‘time’ that is embedded within an experiential consciousness. Cultural studies steps outside time metaphors in generating a radical and reinvented politics, and is most interested in the consequences of culture and politics, in the present and future. While it does have a keen sense of its own history and trajectory, it is less concerned with the temporal politics of the present, only in how (now and in the future) we might change a political, social and economic destiny marked out by those in power. It is primarily concerned that “[h]istory is written as we speak, [that] its borders are mapped long before any of us open our mouths.”\(^\text{18}\) Conversely, the strength of historicism is that it “is not just about time, doesn’t just describe time, or take time as its setting; rather, it

embeds time in its narrative structure.”\(^{19}\) Cultural studies has a limited temporal resonance. Surfing on the surface of the present, means that the past becomes a place with a linear trajectory toward the future. It is not just power structures and institutional forces that benefit in the past being used as a manual for the present. Cultural studies has also been guilty of “present[ing] the past as a \textit{fait accompli} rather than as a struggle.”\(^{20}\) Nostalgia for Birmingham often presents the past as a place where everything was fairer, and framed by an optimistic sense of social justice. These origins create anchorage for the deliberately anti and inter-discipline that also fears “codification … halt[ing] its ability to bring about reactions.”\(^{21}\) Time flows through cultural studies, but not \textit{in} cultural studies. The framework relies on being outside time to generate reflexivity in the linear methodologies and modalities of disciplines.

The passage of time, encounters with new historical events, and the very extension of cultural studies into new disciplines and national contexts will inevitably change its meanings and uses. Cultural studies needs to remain open to unexpected, unimagined, even uninvited possibilities. No one can hope to control these developments.\(^{22}\)

A theory and politics of time can assist cultural studies to generate more complicated interpretations of its role in intervention. Cultural studies favours of a politics of space where disempowerment can be visualised on the surfaces of bodies, and in the structures of institutions. A politics of time creates a more nuanced interpretation of cultural studies in interdisciplinarity, that not only engages and interprets a diversity of knowledges and disciplines, but that reframes and reinterprets consciousness. In the present, cultural studies has never been in more need of a politics of time. Our


\(^{22}\) \textit{ibid.}, p. 3
contemporary experiences have been embedded in dramatic reconfigurations of time, space and speed within the recent past that is reflected and reconstructed in Irvine Welsh’s writing, and the success of the film *Trainspotting*.

**Selective Memory**

There’s a whole history being constructed here, but I’m not sure that it’s mine.23

Jon Savage.

Welsh’s work is so innovative because it breaks through social divisions to tell the history of the forgotten voices of our culture. It frames an alternative consciousness in a shifting time. The linearity of literature is speaking in a different grammar under the pressure of Welsh’s pen. He (and many of the other Repetitive Beat Generation writers) is challenging the authenticity and currency of Standard English and its intimate coupling with literature. The place of ‘classic’ literature remains connected with Oxbridge traditions of narrative excellence and quality prose. The divisions between intellectual writers, and the popular pap of journalists and pulp novelists, remain staunchly intact in our society. The greatness of Joseph Conrad, William Shakespeare and Jane Austin are elevated above the sensational emotional rote of Dale Brown, John Grisham and Patricia Cornwell. Within cultural studies, we are able to interrogate the structures of disciplinarity to peal back the meanings in literature that function to validate one kind of cultural practice, knowledge or writing over another. It is easy to demonstrate how popular prose is devalued in the preservation of high cultural aesthetics of great writing for a middle class audience. What is not immediately clear, is the manner in which Welsh is speaking not only for

23 Savage, *op cit.*, p. 2
contemporary youth culture, or Scottish experiences of colonisation but, with and through time. The success of the Repetitive Beat Generation marks a moment where ideas, experiences and perceptions have changed. New identities and communities are being formed. These identities are struggling to simultaneously go faster, and come to terms with a lack of time, and a culture speeding out of control. These experiences flow through the body and into the pen to articulate an alternative speaking position. Writing is embedded within a social consciousness that alters the way time and space are perceived.

Walter Ong suggests a fatal blunder occurs intellectually in thinking of writing “as a kind of complement to oral speech, not as a transformer of verbalization.”24 Writing is not the process of placing speech into symbols. This does not communicate the power that writing exerts over our consciousness nor the extent to which “[m]ore than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness.”25 It requires a reorganisation of thought, and of social meanings. Writing redefines authority, authenticity and communication. The use of Standard English as the template in literature reaffirms the primacy of Britishness as the proper linguistic and subjective identity. Writing is tethered to powerful and ingrained meaning systems, activated in the act of placing pen to page. These meanings form the basic structures to not just writing, but thought, speech and representation. They are the primary means by which an identity matrix is able to maintain its authority over the consciousness of a people. The consequences of a culture of writing extend far beyond the development of human societies in time.

25 ibid., p. 78
Ong argues that writing evolved relatively recently in human history. Our cultures have been dominated by orality. In the western tradition, the origins of Greek orators have heavily influenced the emphasis on rhetoric and public speaking - the basis of academic inquiry. Writing had a serious influence on the place of orality within this culture. Ong is careful to demonstrate the extent to which writing shaped and framed the oral traditions of this period in history.

For its first discoverers or inventors, the Sophists of fifth century Greece, rhetoric was a marvelous thing. It provided a rationale for what was dearest to their hearts, effective and often showy oral performance, something which had been a distinctively human part of human existence for ages but which, before writing, could never have been so reflectively prepared for or accounted for.26

Oral performances only become significant in an age of writing where it is able to – by reconfiguring time and space - focus reflection and attention onto the ‘art’ of articulation. The art of rhetoric was also heavily embedded within literacy in the Latin vernacular. Crucially, Latin became the common written language for governments, churches, universities and other middle class institutions across Europe. Consequently it became the core grammar for the status of writing in our contemporary culture. Writing is enfolded within authoritative imaginings and subjectivities that seek to transcend time. The relationships between time, space, economics and writing are deeply intertwined in a complicated social dance. Welsh’s perversion of Standard English within literature marks a reconfiguration of consciousness in the resonance of writing with power structures. The effects of writing and time need careful consideration. Time has a remarkable influence on consciousness that resonates through cultures in powerful ways. Textual artefacts pick through these changes and trace the shifting social landscape. First, we need to go back in time in order to gain a full grasp on the impact of Irvine Welsh in the present.

26 ibid., p. 110
Time Travel

The bicycle was about four times faster than walking and warnings were issued about getting “bicycle face” by moving against the wind at such speeds.27

Stephen Kern.

The uses of standardised time have only become significant in the modern industrial economy. The implementation of temporal frameworks is entwined with the industrial revolution. While the mechanical clock was invented in the fourteenth century, it was not until the implementation of standard time, at the end of the nineteenth century that it became crucial to our consciousness.28 The importance of establishing a uniform public time was tethered to the functioning economy and “it was the railroad companies and not governments that were the first to institute it.”29 The need for standard railroad timetables facilitated the movement of people and goods, through time and across space. Most significantly, “it was important to be able to determine local times and to know precisely when laws go into effect and insurance policies begin.”30 It was a core necessity for an industrial economy and money driven market to establish a standard public time. The impact of this standardisation was felt throughout society in a fundamental shift in consciousness. The workplace was most significantly altered with new conceptualisations of time. Taylorism meant that human movement was checked and logged in time clocks and mass production lines. Every action was timed, and the worker instructed on the most efficient set of

27 Kern, op cit., p. 111
28 ibid., p. 11
29 ibid., p. 12
30 ibid.
movements to complete a set task.\textsuperscript{31} In this same ethic, “[t]he trait of punctuality came to be associated with achievement and success.”\textsuperscript{32} There was an overwhelming push forward. The future was a welcoming place where the yoke of the past would be shaken free.

The historical past was the source of social forces over which they had little control; it created institutions that had lasted for centuries; and it limited their sense of autonomy.\textsuperscript{33}

The sense of optimism in the future generated a persistent drive forward. The faster it came, the better the present appeared. Speeding toward this future was driven by inventions like the automobile. The cinema too, (moving pictures) enabled different perceptions of time to penetrate the social consciousness. These inventions were part of a larger social push towards a faster society, and a redundant past.

The impact of the automobile and of all the accelerating technology was at least two fold - it speeded up the tempo of current existence and transformed the memory of years past, the stuff of everybody’s identity into something slow.\textsuperscript{34}

Not everyone was caught up in the rush to acceleration. Many were overwhelmed with the pace of change, and in the mid 1910’s there was a sense that “Europe [was] speeding out of control, heading toward war.”\textsuperscript{35} It was a fear that would prove fruitful. Nostalgia grew as “[t]he tension between a speeding reality and a slower past generated sentimental elegies about the good old days before the rush.”\textsuperscript{36} Writers, philosophers and even medical doctors became increasingly concerned with the new emphasis on speed, the future, and rejection of the past. Most significantly, some

\textsuperscript{31} Stephen Kern outlines the manner in which “the assembly [made it] possible to streamline the productive process further by observing every stage, determining the minimum movements necessary to complete all tasks and then instructing the workers to make them.” \textit{ibid.}, p. 92

\textsuperscript{32} R. Levine, \textit{A geography of time: The temporal misadventures of a social psychologist}, (New York: Basic Books, 1997), p. 69

\textsuperscript{33} Kern, \textit{op cit.}, p. 63

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{ibid.}, p. 129

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{ibid.}, p. 127

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{ibid.}, p. 130
writers of this period experimented with altered consciousness and literary juxtapositions. Stephen Kern is thorough in outlining the extent to which writers such as Henri-Martin Barzun, Blaise Cendrars and Guillaume Apollinaire all experimented with different writing techniques in demonstrating changes to consciousness.

Figure 7 From G. Apollinaire, two poems entitled “It’s Raining” and “The Coffin and the Bed.”

Apollinaire has written his poetry to reflect the spaces and shapes of his prose. This graphical manipulation of words into images demonstrates the manner in which poets and writers of this period experimented with writing styles and formats.

The changes in the social, political and economic spheres are the key to this experimentation where serious shifts in time and space were reconfigured by these writers. Stephen Kern traces “the ‘First Simultaneous Book.’ Printed on a sheet two meters long … [that] was meant to be seen all at once so that the spatial limitations of one page after another would not chop up its wholeness” published in 1913 and written by Blaise Cendrars. These experiments demonstrated a wider sense of simultaneity. As the economy and society sped up, the divisions between public and

37 G. Apollinaire, Selected poems, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 74 - 75 While this collection of poems was published in 1965, Apollinaire was born in 1880 and was writing during the early part of the twentieth century.

38 Kern, op cit., p. 72
private, inside and outside, nation and other began to seriously and irreversibly blur. There was both a sense of embracing, and escaping this simultaneity. Philosophers of the period “argued that the possibility of freedom required that there be an unknown future.” But the accelerating technological development “provided a source of power over the environment and suggested ways to control the future.” This conundrum found expression in literature where “literary explorations of private time challenged the authoritarian and overbearing tendencies of world time.” These writers became concerned with individual consciousness - how an individual conceives of the passing of time and of memory.

The past and future were being brought together in non-linear narrative, to redefine temporal experiences and to gain a new sense of time as both an external, public construction and an internal perspective tethered to experience, consciousness and the body. This shift “was part of a broad effort to shake off the burden of history” not simply to look forward, but to grasp an increasingly inaccessible present that was speeding past. Kern makes the crucial point in his exploration of time when he explains,

> [m]ost novels take place in time, but they fail to capture the experience of time passing, the emptiness of time lost, and - the only real pleasure in life - time regained.

This sense of slowing time, of capturing the lost moment, became a defining trope of the literature in this period. The model for capturing simultaneity and also creating
space for forgotten experiences was music. Kern’s use of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* is useful for an explanation of Welsh’s *Trainspotting*. This text provides a model for simultaneous literature in its,

improvised montage techniques to show the simultaneous activity of Dublin as a whole, not a history of the city but a slice of it out of time, spatially extended and embodying its entire past in a vast expanded present.

It also activates a crucial metonym of resistance within the colonial centre. James Joyce writing in and of Ireland, through innovative prose to articulate an altered consciousness parallels Welsh’s writing in Scottish vernacular to express oppression and marginalisation at the core of the commonwealth. Both these writers share a sense of disaffiliation with Britishness and are speaking for the experiences of a marginalised collectivity through narrative expression.

The use of music through Joyce’s prose is key to deciphering the “truncated and augmented words and phrases … [that] interrupt one another and reverse … their direction contrapuntally to suggest the overlapping of musical subjects in a fugue.” Joyce even uses musical keys in his dialogue.

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44 Kern, *ibid.*, p. 75 continues on to argue clearly that “the model for simultaneous art and poetry was music” and the manner in which *Ulysses* demonstrates this trope.

45 *ibid.*, p. 77

46 *ibid.*, p. 77
Figure 8 Use of music in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*\(^{47}\)

This usage is not simply to indicate where characters might be singing or chanting, but to demonstrate the overlapping of times, spaces and consciousness through this novel. While Welsh does not use musical keys, music does have a profoundly important resonance through his prose, and influences his movement through times and spaces.

Figure 9 Welsh’s innovative movement through consciousness in *Marabou Stork Nightmares*,\(^{48}\) and *The Acid House*.\(^{49}\)

Music is a strong theme, structurally and narratively, through Welsh’s work. His dance in and out of varying levels of consciousness have strong consistencies with the transformation of mind and body through affect and *jouissance* identified in Lawrence Grossberg’s interpretation of music and subjectivity. Affect refers to “what we often

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describe as the ‘feeling’ of life.”50 It is an emotional response to the feelings generated by music that frequently defy explanation - hence its association with jouissance - a word describing the experience of orgasm (little death) that does not have a corresponding translation into English. These responses manifest through dancing, mouthing lyrics, playing air guitar and head-banging. Music has such a strong capacity to alter our consciousness. It also frequently operates outside of language, to the extent that “what excites people in pop, and what they manage to articulate of those feelings are generally two very different things.”51 Music moves through meanings our consciousness cannot yet speak of - existing out of time. The resonance of music through Joyce’s work is a mobilisation of musical notation via narrative, to move in and through time.

By identifying characters and themes with short verbal passages and then “sounding” them on the page in quick succession Joyce sough to overcome the necessarily sequential time of literature and achieve an effect similar to the simultaneous sounding of different notes in a musical harmony.52

Similarly, Welsh’s work strongly mobilises dance music and club culture, creating a musical rhythm to his writing. He has stated quite clearly in a series of interviews that it was his intention to create dance music ‘affect’ in his writing.

When I first started to get into writing, it was via music. I’d generate ideas for songs that would turn into stories, then they’d turn into novels … I was getting interested in house music at that time, going to clubs and raves, and I wanted to generate that kind of excitement on the page.53

The excitement Welsh’s writing searches for, was found in, the increasing acceleration of the culture and the emergence of dance music - house, techno, drum ‘n’ bass. This culture and its dance music artefacts are characterised by a serious sense of simultaneity tethered to speed. The development of music making technology -

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51 S. Reynolds, Blissed out, (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1990), p. 9
52 Kern, op cit., p. 77
53 Weich, op cit., online
drum machines, sampling and mixing machines have facilitated a recycling and layering of musical texts and styles. Jon Savage marks the transitional movement of the pop music industry from linear to circular time, as the key circumstances for the emergence and popularity of dance music. He argues that “[t]he basis of pop music is that it provides a refuge from chronology: if only in its concentration of the moment, its insistence on pure pleasure.”54 This capacity to move outside of linearity and structures of meaning is a key feature of the Repetitive Beat Generation, and more largely Generation X. The movement of time, speed and culture is the literacy of this generation, articulated in dance music where “[t]ime-tripping is not a stylistic gambit but an industrial climate; a natural condition for the producers of music, another way of constructing their narrative.”55 These stories are being told through digital technologies, computer sequencers and sampling machines that produce a myriad of effects and affects. The technology enables “the contradiction between rhythmic regularity and precision, anchored by the kick drum, and the aleatory, unpredictable fashion by which the various other elements combine, constantly twisting and altering.”56 This layering of beats, sounds, and textures in dance music creates a blurring of times and spaces in which consciousness is anchored in the present, past and future concurrently. The constant extension and recycling of material creates contradictions that stretch the sense of simultaneity in the dance club. This is maneuvered by the mixer which,

[<i>in contemporary club cultures beat-mixing has been developed to the point that those listening and dancing to house, and in particular techno, may be hearing two (or three of more) records simultaneously for a large majority of a set.</i>57

54 Savage, <i>op cit.</i>, p. 8
55 <i>ibid.</i>, p. 128
57 <i>ibid.</i>, p. 127
Mixing layers songs, beats, times and consciousness to alter the experience of the present for club goers. For their time on the dance floor, they can exist outside of, and within many different times simultaneously. They can maneuver consciousness to exist in-between times, spaces and songs.

Dance culture is not simply a culture of style and sound, but of experience and perception. This mobility and ambivalence is the characteristic of the contemporary generation of club going, cinema viewing, MacDonald-ised young people who embody the extent that “[r]ap, jungle and techno have turned perception into form - a different dimension, where past, present and future are not separated but part of the same continuum.”58 In a world where culture, economy and politics are speeding up, young people are using speed (acceleration) to deny a future controlled by imperialists seeking to colonise markets, identities and subjectivities. Recycling and appropriating the past stalls nostalgic colonisation of the status quo where “the conservatives find comfort in the past - the old house, the portrait gallery provid[ing] meaning and stability in a changing world.”59 The future may form a temporary respite from this hegemonic handholding, for this is the place where the energies of the present are consistently directed in the hope of manufacturing the (affective) moment for the market. However, speed services the industrial economy where the ability to move merchandise off the shelves (and replace it with a brand new product) facilitates faster turnover and fatter profits. This characteristic of the modern marketing economy is summarised by Jon Savage.

58 Savage, op cit., p. 8
59 Kern, op cit., p. 52
The cycles come and go, from motion to entropy, but the impulse to up the ante, to go faster than anyone else, is inherent in the twinning of technology and the adolescent psyche that occurs in Western consumerism.60

Speed is no longer enough to outrun the economy and society. To escape from the perils of a consumption-based economy and an imperialist political system, going faster is no longer adequate to resituate consciousness outside of the hegemonic hailing of the hierarchy. Consciousness requires a more radical reinterpretive framework. A desire to accelerate beyond the control of corporate commodification requires an alternative space for imagining that is searched by those seeking something extra, or outside the structured and straight-forward realities of a time. The primary purpose of consuming drugs is to alter consciousness.

Accelerating to oblivion

If it's proscribed, it can't be any good for you.61

Irvine Welsh.

In contemporary times, a discussion of dance culture is incomplete without an interrogation of drug culture. The acceleration embedded in dance musics was facilitated by a growing drug market, which in the nineties “underwent a process of democratisation that mirrored the evolution of dance culture.”62 The desire to move outside of meaning, and into an affective space in (sub)consciousness, is most effectively completed with the consumption of mind-altering substances. The growth in the consumption of designer drugs - most obviously ecstasy - demonstrated an increasing desire to ‘affect’. The role and function of drugs for altering consciousness

60 Savage, op cit., p. 6
have been well documented. In *Writing on Drugs*, Sadie Plant demonstrates the links between literature and drugs. She tracks the obsessions and opiate induced oratory written by Thomas De Quincey, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Louis Stevenson and “Scott, Shelley, Wordsworth, Southy, Byron, Keats … reams of Gothic fiction and Romantic poetry [that] had taken something of its character from the drug [opium].”63 The power of drugs to access altered states of consciousness, and influence dreams, was in their capacity to alter conscious thought, in order to allow subconscious experiences to redefine the frameworks of meaning in the mind. This meant drugs created a space outside of time. The moment - the present - could be extended, stretched or “thickened”64 to deny any predetermined future trajectory or comfortable past. The consequences of this moment is an ability to be indifferent to the wider social structures that circulate around and through identity, shaping and conforming bodies and consciousness to the maintenance of meanings for the majority. Therefore, combined with the layered, simultaneous structures of dance music, taking drugs onto the dance floor enables affective possibilities to widen. This is articulated in a liberation of movement that performs the freedom of consciousness. The growth of the ecstasy market parallel to dance clubs was a symptom of the reconfiguration of time in a culture of resistance.

It was not the effects of Ecstasy which created contemporary dance culture, but … it was the specific historical context of British and American culture at that time which led people to find a specific set of uses for the drug.65

It was a context within which an accelerated economy and society provided few places of refuge from the barrage of meanings and markets. The sense of disaffiliation with society was amplifying in direct relationship to its speed. The acceleration was/is

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63 S. Plant, *Writing on drugs*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 9
64 Kern, *op cit.*, p. 82
65 Gilbert and Pearson, *op cit.*, p. 139
creating distance between people and their experiences - a space that is becoming more heavily regulated than at any other time in history. As a result, “[p]eople became expert manipulators of mood, choosing exactly what to take in each situation to produce specific psychopharmaceutical responses” on their own terms rather than that of the market. Medicating their memories, individuals numbed themselves to the ever expanding and extending realms in which dominant ideologies asserted their supremacy.

The capitalist, postfordist economy that trades on making people insecure has created a crisis in confidence - a perpetual state of self doubt - in which individuals already insecure of their place within the world and unwilling to embrace the path laid out for them by the previous generation, and are seeking escape by any means necessary. The recognition that it is a temporary solution to a temporal conundrum is articulated in the fleetingly fragmented function of pleasure and popular culture. Films like *Human Traffic* demonstrate the melding of dancing, drugs and denial in the use of the weekend as a temporary respite from the drudgery of conservative capitalist corporate culture. The weekend waste so thoroughly embraced by Jip and his friends - Nina, Koop, Moff and Lulu form the defining framework for their dreary lives.

The weekend has landed. All that exists now is clubs, drugs, pubs and parties. I’ve got 48hrs off from the world, man. I’m gonna blow steam out of my head like a screaming kettle. I’m gonna talk codshit to strangers all night. I’m gonna lose the plot on the dance floor, the free radicals inside me are freaking man! Tonight I’m Jip Travolta, I’m Peter Popper, I’m going to Never Never Land with my chosen family, man. We’re going to get more spaced out than Neil Armstrong ever did. Anything could happen tonight, you know? This could be the best night of my life! I’ve got 73 quid in my back burner, I’m gonna wax the lot man.

The milky bars are on me! Yeah!

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66 Collin, *op cit.*, p. 282
The boredom of wage earning for the predictable consumption cornerstone of contemporary life is shaken off for the impulsive irreverence of forty eight hours outside the corporate world. Corporeality creates a meeting place for drugs and dancing. Shifts in consciousness carry currency on this surface. The capitalist economy thrives on disciplining bodies and co-opting consciousness, while dance music provides a beat to bankrupt and bandage embodiment to cognizance. Minds and bodies must be controlled to service the industrial economy in the workplace, schools, marriage, gender and sexuality. Dance music interrupts this ideological stronghold.

The necessity of emphasizing materiality, and the body, has been written into recorded dance musics, and the means by which they are experienced and reproduced from the outset. Bass-heavy dance music provokes the recognition that we do not just ‘hear’ with our ears, but with our entire body.68

The desire to move the body in different ways – disciplined to rhythm - flows through dance musics such as drum ‘n’ bass and techno, in which the beats per minute activate an ‘unconscious’ frenzy of movement. Even styles such as trance, while slowing down movement stimulate repetitive, hypnotic consciousness that encourage an intense submerging with the sound. The range of subgenres in dance music are generated out of,

[t]he syntactic structure and timbral qualities of contemporary dance records [that] are directly informed by a wider cultural knowledge of their specific chemical destinations - their potential effects on the pharmacologically altered brain and nervous system.69

The bleeding of time with drugs, bodies and dance music create a space on the dance floor where experience, pleasure and collective camaraderie prevail. It provides a refuge from the outside world and the public regulation of time via economic exchange values, nostalgia and imperialism. The ramifications of this desire to shift...

68 Gilbert and Pearson, op cit., p. 134
69 ibid., p. 138
consciousness are serious. While ecstasy is a drug that can be used recreationally with limited harm to the user or the people around him or her, other drugs are not so innocent in their effects on the user and society.\textsuperscript{70} Taking ecstasy on the weekend to provide a brief escape from the trials of everyday life is a ‘friendlier’ image than the more serious one presented in \textit{Trainspotting}, where Renton is a heroin addict within a bleak and unforgiving society. Renton’s drug use and abuse is not only about escapism, but the ultimate futility in life. His habit is defined against social inequality, colonisation, oppression and poverty. Unlike the characters in \textit{Human Traffic}, who begrudgingly take on employment, in Renton’s world, there is no employment.

\textbf{Choosing not to choose}

Choose us. Choose life. Choose mortgage payments; choose washing machines; choose cars; choose sitting oan a couch watching mind-numbing and spirit-crushing game shows, stuffing junk food intae yir mooth. Choose rotting away, pishing and shiteing yersel in a home, a total fuckin embarrassment tae the selfish, fucked-up brats ye’ve produced. Choose life.\textsuperscript{71}

\begin{quote}
Irvine Welsh, \textit{Trainspotting}.
\end{quote}

Iggy Pop - the postmaster of punk, punctuates this monologue in the opening minutes of \textit{Trainspotting} the film. The pulsating beat of his music structures and drives the speech forward, and envelops the viewer into the rhythms of Mark Renton and his friends’ world. The experience of reading this story as a film accelerates the narrative into a speeding contemporary consciousness - a process begun in its literature phase.


It took me two days to read *Trainspotting*. After the initial stop-start of adjustment to the phrase on the page written in the Scottish vernacular, ah git intae the rhythm ay it with oot tae much trouble. Welsh takes the reader on a rich journey through the lives of these four young men, and the people that surround them in 1980s Scotland. It is a depressing world full of unemployment, violence, poverty, disability and death. The pages are turned quickly as the reader becomes engrossed in the fluid yet fragmented approach to narrative and expression. The narrative is presented as a simultaneous and linear movement through time and space, as we glimpse fragments of character’s lives. There is an intense ambivalence felt for the Renton character in the book. Part of the commitment to the prose is that he slips - effortlessly - between decency and outright misogyny. Just when the reader thoroughly embraces Renton, he abruptly embodies all those distasteful elements in Begbie (violence) and Sick Boy (sexual politics) all at once. Nevertheless, his character provides a crucial point of identification. His weakness in addiction is embedded clearly within the range of social, political and economic circumstances of acceleration, that conspire to destroy any potential personal purpose in the stale, impotent capitalist system he is embedded. He directly critiques the regulation of the social hierarchy, and the meanings it imposes upon individuals to conform to dominant expectations.

Society invents a spurious and convoluted logic tae absorb and change people whae’s behaviour is outside its mainstream. Suppose that ah ken aw the pros and cons, know that um gaunnae huv a short life, am ay sound mind etcetera, etcetera, but still want tae use smak? They won’t let ye dae it. They won’t let ye dae it, because it’s seen as a sign ay thir ain failure. The fact that ye jist simply choose tae reject whit they huv tae offer.\(^{72}\)

Renton activates an outside belonging that rejects the injection of dominant ideology into individual lives and decisions. He hails the contradictory social ideologies that

\(^{72}\)*ibid.*
frame these choices – that privileges freedom while simultaneously denying it. For Renton, none of the myriad of options offered to him by society are particularly appealing. The freedom of choice is hollow in a society that dictates the terms of selection. *Trainspotting* exposes the contradictions we all live our lives by so clearly. While it does not present the drug culture in a favourable light, as Renton and his friends slowly decline into the seedy underbelly of addiction, Welsh slaps us in the face with the contradictory ideologies we embrace as a normal part of our everyday. The ambiguities of moving between dominant and subordinate social positionings, inside and outside acceptable behaviours and ideologies are anchored to a larger history of colonisation and marginal politics in British colonisation of the Celtic fringe.

The English and the Scottish have a convoluted relationship of conceded and co-opted colonisation. Throughout history Scotland has resisted and consented to rule by the English. The key event that ultimately lead to the union of Scotland under the rule of England was the death of Queen Elizabeth I. As she died without an heir, the crown passed “to her cousin, King James VI of Scotland, who thereby became James I of England as well.”73 From this moment, there was an active push to incorporate the two sovereignties under one government. King James reigned over both of these territories, but they retained separate governance. Cromwell’s incursions into Scotland effectively occupied the nation in the 1650s, and by 1657 the Scottish parliament had been abolished. While his ‘protectorate’ failed by 1659, the benefits of free trade with the English and its colonies was in the interests of Scottish and English administration, and mercantile citizens. Despite uprisings by the Scottish, the Treaty

of Union was approved in 1707 which “called for the creation of one inseparable British monarchy as well as a union of parliaments.”\textsuperscript{74} This alliance was more in the interests of effective and efficient government for the English and “Divine Providence”\textsuperscript{75} than for the benefit of Scottish nationality or economy. Despite heavy resistance, the Treaty was ratified by both parliaments and went into effect on May 1, 1707. The tensions and discriminations embedded in this alliance flowed through the national consciousness of the Scottish which, suffered six-fold from religious controversy, military disturbance, confined trade, famine, mass emigration and the triumphalist assumptions of English suzerainty revived in the shadow of William’s accession, assumptions which could only be reinforced by the increasing divergent material wealth of Scotland and England.\textsuperscript{76}

The implied superiority of the English over the Scottish was a result of this type of ‘internal colonisation’ where the “core is seen to dominate the periphery politically and to exploit it materially.”\textsuperscript{77} The intensely complicated emotional, political and economic relationship between Scotland and England resulted in a manufactured consciousness of collectivity under Britishness that worked against the interests of Scottish national identity. While the benefits of diffusion\textsuperscript{78} attracted Scottish powers to the union, it ultimately resulted in the marginalisation of Scottish identity, language and culture. Diffusion of core ideologies into the periphery ultimately results in, crystallization of the unequal distribution of resources and power between the two groups. The superordinate group, or core, seeks to stabilize and monopolize its advantages through policies aiming at the institutionalization of the existing stratification system. It attempts to regulate the allocation of social

\textsuperscript{74} ibid., p. 5
\textsuperscript{75} ibid., p. 9
\textsuperscript{76} M. G. H. Pittock, \textit{Inventing and resisting Britain: Cultural identities in Britain and Ireland 1685 – 1789}, (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1997), p. 26
\textsuperscript{78} The process of diffusion is outlined by Hechter, \textit{ibid.}, p. 7, as a beneficial relationship between core and periphery whereby “developing core regions will, after some time, diffuse into the periphery. Since the cultural forms of the periphery were evolved in isolation from the rest of the world, contact with modernizing core regions will transform these cultural forms by updating them, as it were.”
roles such that those roles commonly defined as having high prestige are reserved for its members.79

In Scotland, a reification of English values, languages and grammar percolated through social roles and institutional structures. The proximity of power amplified the resonance of oppression. Both Gaelic, spoken in the North, and Scots spoken in the South of Scotland, were quelled in favour of Latin linguistic precision and the Standard English that was “regarded as the proper form of public written speech.”80 Even today “Scottish schoolchildren can get a sharp reprimand for the simple use of the word “aye” for “yes” in class – let alone less common Celtic usage.”81 Even the Jacobite poets validated class distinctions via Latin language to distance themselves from commoners.

By the eighteenth century native Scots – the medium of the poets in the anthologies of Hogg and Mackay – had become increasingly dissociated from the high culture of the Scottish gentleman … Scots did not accord with propriety in letters, and increasingly in speech; eighteenth-century Scotland witnessed a rage for remedies to cure the halitosis of a Scots tongue. English elocution lectures and dictionaries of Scotticisms (to avoid) were essential props in the training of the Scottish gentleman.82

The desire to deny local Scottish subjectivity demonstrates the resonance of imperial ideology of Britishness and the cultural capital of the English in Scotland. Welsh’s mobilisation of the Scottish brogue in Trainspotting is a resistance to the imposition of Standard English onto vernacular traditions in his country. It is a key reinscription of colonisation via the working class that demonstrates a belonging outside of the dominant frameworks of Britishness. However, it is not a celebratory reclamation of authentic Celtic identity, but mourning for a space of otherness and difference to

79 ibid., p. 9
restate the loss of a colonised society. The vehemence of this disaffiliation with
Englishness and Scottishness is mobilised by Welsh in *Trainspotting*, via Renton.

| Ah hate cunts like that. Cunts like Begbie. Cunts that are intae baseball-batting every fucker that’s different; pakis, poofs n what huv ye. Fuckin failures in a country ay failures. It’s nae good blamin it oan the English fir colonising us. Ah don’t hate the English. They’re just wankers. We are colonised by wankers. We can’t even pick a decent, vibrant, healthy, culture to be colonised by. No. We’re ruled by arseholes. What does that make us? The lowest of the fuckin low, scum of the earth. The most wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash that was ever shat intae creation. Ah don’t hate the English. They just git oan wi the shite thuv goat. Ah hate the Scots.83 |

Here, Welsh moves in and out of Scottish vernacular and Standard English. Crucially, when he is articulating colonial politics he moves out of Scottish brogue. He is careful to demonstrate his point precisely and cleanly in the language of the colonisers. There is no Scottish grammar to articulate the feeling of oppression in this system. This communication of consciousness does not exist. He moves out of this Standard English in demonstrating the emotional yearning of disempowerment and disenfranchisement with a lost Scottish identity – that only exists in an absent grammar. Reclaiming the Scottish experience of colonisation is impossible outside of the imperial language. The crisis of identity in Welsh’s work encases the absence of a language to speak of English colonisation of Scottishness on Celtic terms. The intensity of imperialism poisoning Scotland’s soil whites out alternative experiences of power and oppression. The characters in *Trainspotting* embody the silenced experience of disenfranchisement within a system that values personal wealth, consumption, and happiness while denying large sections of the population access to the means of gaining these goods and their values. Begbie, Spud and Sick Boy mobilise politics of class, violence, masculinity and heterosexuality in crisis. They

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83 Welsh, *Trainspotting, op cit.*, p. 78
each seek to transcend their sense of disempowerment by accessing spaces outside of themselves and dominant society.

Begbie is a belligerent, psychotic and emotionally challenged masculinity. He is the metaphor for a social value system that denies marginal (illegal) behaviours and attitudes, while validating destructive, widely oppressive ideologies that support a dominant hierarchy functioning on the basis of widespread repression. His ever-present violent tendencies, fuelled by a cocktail of copious alcohol consumption and malicious malevolence, operate as a counterbalance for Renton’s largely passive, drug-fucked impotency and immobility. Begbie’s unmitigated, spontaneous abuse is indiscriminatory. Renton’s violence is (usually) directed at self-preservation or for the purposes of scoring a hit. Begbie is seen by those outside addiction in the book, as a role-model and decent bloke, while Renton and his friends are reviled as junkies. The message it seems, is be a violently controlling man, but never be a drug addict. A message embodied in contradictory legislation regulating drug use. Renton’s escape from himself does not harm others, while Begbie’s literacy in violence has wide ramifications on those around him, as he seeks to move outside of himself, and time, by both losing and reconfirming his identity through violent frenzy. Begbie remains the most volatile character in the book. He most clearly demonstrates the contradictions of a dominant society that values powerful men, but fails to negotiate the consequences of that value system.

Myth: Begbie has a great sense of humour.
Reality: Begbie’s sense of humour is solely activated at the misfortunes, setbacks and weaknesses ay others, usually his friends.
Myth: Begbie is a ‘hard man’.
Reality: Ah would not personally rate Begbie that highly in a square go, withoot his assortment ay stanley knives, basebaw bats, knuckledusters, beer glesses, sharpened knitting needles, etc. Masel and maist cunts are too shite-scared tae test this theory, but the impression remains. Tommy once exposed some weakness in Begbie, in a
square go. Gave um a good run for his money, did Tom. Mind you, Tommy’s a tidy cunt, n Begbie, it has tae be said, came oot the better ay the two.
Myth: Begbie’s mates like him.
Reality: They fear him.
Myth: Begbie would never waste any ay his mates.
Reality: His mates are generally too cagey tae test oot this proposition, and oan the odd occasion they huv done so, huv succeeded in disproving it.
Myth: Begbie backs up his mates.
Reality: Begbie smashes fuck oot ay innocent wee daft cunts whae accidentally spill your pint or bump intae ye. Psychopaths who terrorise Begbie’s mates usually dae so wi impurity, as they tend tae be closer mates ay Begbie’s than the punters he hings aboot wi. He kens thum aw through approved school, prison n the casualties’ networks, the freemasonaries that bams share. 84

Begbie is the embodiment of the social hierarchy performed to excess. He is also a result of the limitations of this system. The edges of Begbie’s behaviour cut into a cauterized colonial consciousness where power punctuates the personal. Space for his rendering of competence only exists in violence. His grammar for articulating dispossession in the colonial framework is corrosive amongst his immediate friends and acquaintances, rather than public and productive within wider social discourses.
Begbie is perhaps the most marginalized of all the characters in this book. He lacks the reflexive literacy of Renton, the sheer apathy of Spud, or the sexual confidence of Sick-Boy. He performs the Gramscian sense of subalterneity embedded in class struggle.

In Avanti!, Gramsci recognised a needed network of cultural and political structures to create consciousness in the working class. Consciousness must be formed, it does not just exist. He mapped out a process by which new members to the working class may be educated by the community.

[I]n Turin too the proletarian class is continually absorbing new individuals who are not intellectually developed, not able to understand the full

84 ibid., pp. 82 - 83
significance of the exploitation to which they are subjected. For them it will always be necessary to start from first principles, from elementary propaganda.85

Gramsci defined a pedagogic project for proletarianism that would enlighten workers to the conditions they exist under, and may emerge out of. He believed without such efforts, the working class was doomed to be forever silent and silenced. The Gramscian concept of subaltern that he defines as those “who ‘have no history’: there are no traces of their history in the historical documents of the past,”86 embodied the consciousness he was attempting to correct. Spivak reworked this concept in her politically powerful article “Can the subaltern speak?” to demonstrate the double disempowerment for Indian women under British colonisation. Gramsci’s class inflection with Spivak’s colonial rendering resonates through Welsh’s work where not only is working class history anxiously absent, but a grammar of Scottish national identity has been written over by English colonisation. The denial of a Scottish working class and colonised consciousness is embodied by Begbie who lacks a language of resistance, which results in excessive compliance to the literacy he has access to. Competence in oppressive violence remains the only space to articulate the rage resonating through bleak working class conditions in a doubly colonised society. Colonisation blocks consciousness because it maps its own meanings over class struggle. Within the Celtic colonial model, working class and colonised are synonyms for Scottish national identity. Begbie articulates the crisis encircling the colonial working class context. He is performing the anxiety of existing without a social sense-making grammar of disempowerment, whereas Spud, Sick Boy and Renton seek to

86 A. Gramsci, “Manzoni and “The humble”, in Forgacs and Nowell-Smith, (eds.), Antonio Gramsci: Selections from cultural writings, p. 294
escape consciousness of their condition. They use drugs to exist beyond the crisis of everyday life in Scotland. Overt resistance has no place or punch in their regulated and reigned-in realm, the only avenue left for them is to leave the discourse. Drug addiction enables them to passively subvert social regulation by denying the currency of space-based politics, and moving into the abstract aleatory of time.

Spud’s passivity is one of the few truly potentially redemptive aspects of *Trainspotting*. His scattered and incoherent approach to life and to drugs endears him to readers. He is just a ‘cat’ trying to get through life as best he can, without getting killed or hurting anyone else too much. Plagued by social ineptitude while he is sober, he unfortunately is not much more adept when he is stoned. As a result, he largely lives in his own world and functions like Begbie, as a moral marker for Renton’s behaviour. Spud unlike the others, is not brimming with suppressed anger, resentment or malicious intent. His wholehearted rejection of the straight-and-narrow is generated out of a desire for a peaceful life spent escaping from himself as well as the world around him.

Did ah ever say anything derogatory against ma man Franco? Well, likesay … he’s no a bad punter. Pure jungle cat, ken, but even jungle cats sit doon and huv a wee purr tae themselves now and again, likesay, usually after they’ve likes, devoured somebody.

Spud is pushed and pulled through the narrative, falling through experience and the everyday with limited resistance. He complies as best he can with the framework in which he has been placed. However, that compliance results in a desire to numb the social, emotional and economic difficulties of everyday life. His drug addiction is an escape from himself, and the economics of working class life in Scotland.

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87 Welsh, *Trainspotting*, op cit., p. 120
Sick Boy however, mobilises a problematic sexual politics that is deeply embedded with drug-use and its links to the spread of AIDS within disempowered communities. Indeed, “Edinburgh [was] the AIDS capital of Europe in the late 1980s.”88 His sexual potency is simultaneously respected and envied by his mates as he is seen devouring women by the dozen.

Alison and Sick Boy had been exchanging terse sentences, sounding like they were arranging another skag deal. Then they got up and trooped out of the room together. They looked bored and passionless, but when they didn’t come back, ah knew that they’d be shagging in the bedroom. It seemed, for women, that fucking was just something you did with Sick Boy, like talking, or drinking tea with other punters.89

His cunning linguistic seductions are a guise for his duplicitous scheming. The women are nothing more than living ‘fits’ - a conduit for the orgasmic high of pleasure that he gets via the needle. His desire to enter into a transcendent space outside of social regulation and conventional time and space flows through a series of embodied and emotional ports. His identification with James Bond mythologises his sexual prowess and popularises his sense of self. This mythologised masculinity provides a literacy in popular culture for competent manhood that is absent within wider social structures. The desire to possess a confident and controlled sense of masculinity can only be funneled through a needle. A powerful man is a promiscuous man, unable or unwilling to attach himself to any sort of meaningful engagement with women. The problems of gender politics are amplified through Sick Boy as he participates in a wider oppression of women and men by reducing their engagement to the extent to which a man may use, manipulate or coerce women into sex. In a world where the family unit offers less security, stability and success than single life, women

88 Howard, *op cit.*, online
have no other role except in his sexual service. The envy of his friends results in a replication of this behaviour, most obviously by Renton and to a greater degree by Begbie. This sexual politics is so firmly encased within the framework of social dispossession and marginalisation that women have no other role mapped out for them.

Welsh provides an astute insight into the manner in which women are silenced in this world. For while the men lack a language for resistance, the women are even worse off – having to embrace and consent to frequently abusive, manipulative and destructive relationships, employment and pleasure. Welsh’s female characters are predominantly active and vocal women. However, they only have a voice via their bodies. In *Trainspotting*, there is limited space for resistance outside of withholding sex, commitment through reproduction, and monitoring menstruation.

Ah’m smack-bang in the middle ay a heavy period, and ah’m feeling that scraped out, drained away. Ah go tae the toilet and change tampons, wrapping the used one, which is saturated wi discharge, intae some toilet paper.
A couple ay these rich, imperialist bastards have ordered soup; our trendy tomato and orange. As Graham’s busy preparing the main courses, ah take the bloodied tampon and lower it, like a tea-bag intae the first bowl ay soup. Ah then squeeze its manky contents oot wi a fork. A couple ay strands ay black, uteral lining float in the soup, before being dissolved wi a healthy stir. Ah deliver the two paté starters and two soups tae the table, making sure that the skinny, gelled fuck-up has got the spiked one … It’s a lot easier to keep smiling now.\(^90\)

For the women in this world, resistance is fleeting and fragmented. For the men, leaving the discourse disjoins time and space to exist beyond social silence and colonial class-based corruption. Welsh’s work is crucial because it reaffirms a language of dispossession and a grammar outside of Britishness.

\(^90\) *ibid.*, pp. 303 - 304
*Trainspotting* speeds through the capitalist economy and the citizens tethered to its machinations. The movement in and out of different levels of awareness articulates a contemporary disenfranchisement with historically framed realities, truths and experiences. The desire to access sensations outside of standardised times and spaces, characterises the era in which this novel was written. The ambiguities of autonomy and acceleration in this narrative, render an alternative imagining of identity in times and spaces of difference, disempowerment and difficulty. Music, drugs and acceleration course through *Trainspotting* in a mixing of memories and modalities. It accesses liminal spaces of being, between resistance and consent that activate ambivalence to corporate consciousness. Writing through the beat, Irvine Welsh melds audible and affective experiences into concrete resistive contexts. Between the novel and the film, this narrative moves, into and out of, popular consciousness accessing marginal and mainstream memories. Its attention to acceleration activates a speeding economy and the capitalist ethics embedded. Dance culture is called-up in a popular rendering of youth subculture, mixing moments of dancing pleasure. The drugs that both substitute and satisfy the affective activities of a celebratory consciousness are afforded a key currency in *Trainspotting* to politicise pleasure. This text’s cult status is enfolded within its affirmation of dancing, drugs and disenfranchisement. It moves between sanctioned ideologies of youthful rebellion and resistance, and the illicit imaginings and experiences embedded in drug addiction. Through race, class and gender, *Trainspotting* reinterprets the relationships between empowered and disempowered groups. It creates a matrix of meaning that integrates movement and memory in consciousness. *Trainspotting* sits uncomfortably within
popular culture. In moving through metaphors of consciousness in time, space and speed, it remains an ambiguous cultural text.
Endings are often excruciating. The finality of finishing conjures up feelings of insecurity, and necessity of completion. This thesis has been characterised by open-ended ideologies that simultaneously seek to solidify and slip through meaning. The cult category resists attempts to limit its definition. It is mobile and meandering. Trailing across time and space, this term has been tracked through popular culture and over empire. Colonisation, cultural studies, feminism, men's studies and the New Right have formed the framework for investigation into cult consciousness. Completing the arc of inquiry, this thesis turns to Australia and the terrain of difference in defining unpopular politics.

A cult aesthetic completes the trajectory of this dissertation. By reanimating writing, memory, resistance and colonisation, this final chapter revisits the central trope of cult currency. It uncomfortably animates the unpopular politics bubbling through contemporary times, and resituates contrary and complicated meanings in a cult context. By moving through the thesis and its theories, this ending embraces the moments of in-betweeness. It embodies Jon Savage's tenet that,

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\text{[it is a feature of our interconnecting media economy that loose ends cannot be left alone, that those moments – peculiar to pop – when some sort of emotional or perceptual breakthrough is made must be cauterized lest they spread their virus of freedom – or even truth.]}^1
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These ‘loose ends’ tie cult categories into popular culture. Containing and limiting meaning, this term is simultaneously clear and contradictory. Hesitating in hegemony, cult corrects moments of insecurity in ideology to stabilise a shifting social sphere. This fickle framework sheds its meanings.

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The dust is sweeping across the barren landscape as the man rides into town. Atop his horse, hat tilted over his eyes, he has been hardened by the frontier. There is a faint jangle of his spurs in time with the gentle swaying of his steed. Fastening his reigns to the railing that stretches along the verandah, his footsteps echo on the decaying boards as he strides along, raising the faint jangle to a melody of movement. He pushes open the saloon doors. Everything stops as he steps inside, his large frame silhouetted in the doorway. Six pairs of eyes are fixed on him. He quickly sizes them up. Scum. He could take them all with one draw. Sauntering up to the bar he squarely faces the nervous bartender. He can feel those twelve eyes boring into his back. Slamming his fist down on the bar, everyone flinches as he demands, “Gimme five chicken tandooris!”
This is fragment juts out of my memory. It is a trace of a time long gone, disappearing from view. It is only activated in my mind through a mixture of popular culture references, cultural knowledges and a faint recollection of real events. This artificially augmented memory comes from a scene in an Indian Masala\(^1\) film I viewed many years ago. This “pottery shard”\(^2\) has fixed itself in my mind. It is a break - a rupture in expectations. The conventions of genre are broken and rewritten throughout this film. The viewer is distanced from the text, pondering his or her place in the experience of its screening. This text becomes more than pleasurable viewing. It becomes a tool for interrogation and comparison. It marks a rupture in social meanings, and a conundrum for contemplation. When I watched this film, it captured the moment I began to think about cult as a term, concept and category. At the end of three years, I have returned to this film to mobilise a metonym for the cult paradigm.

The recollection I have of this text has been embellished considerably. Despite some inconsistencies with the description, the punch line, I remember clearly. This moment of incongruity has punctured my memory. The blending of genres that is characteristic of the Indian Masala film seems absurdly surreal to someone fed on a diet of traditional Hollywood genres. There is much singing and dancing - yes even in a western - and the obvious discontinuities are embraced, even indulged by the filmmakers. A following scene featured another man approaching a house, on

\(^{1}\) Masala films usually refer to predominantly Hindi cinema made in Bombay or ‘Bollywood’ and are characterised by a mixing of generic conventions. Frequent singing and dancing punctuate love scenes along with kung fu violence. They often run for three hours and are among the most popular films in India with the biggest budgets and stars. A solid analysis of the relationships between Hindi cinema, Hollywood and Indian avant-garde can be found in R. Thomas, “Indian cinema: Pleasures and popularity,” *Screen*, vol. 26, no. 3, August 1985, pp. 116 - 131

horseback, six shooter holstered and, - ringing the doorbell. Inside, an eclectic song and dance number ensued, complete with special lighting effects and a mirror ball.

Such fascinating viewing can be found on SBS, or the Special Broadcasting Service in Australia. Among their programming parameters is cult viewing. Late Saturday night features ‘the cult film’, a weekly dose of oddity, sexual depravity or quirky kung fu. Monday evenings provides a staple of ‘cult cartoons’ of which South Park is a regular fixture along with indecipherable Japanese Anime (Aeon Flux, The Bubblegum Crisis: Tokyo 2040, Neon Genesis) or MTV originated Dr Katz or The Maxx.

Cult television programming provides a rupture in conventional state-sanctioned viewing. It offers an alternative to the stream of canned laughter and crime drama found on commercial networks. These texts are traces and tremors of difference in a culture. SBS caters to audiences on the fringes of Australian society whose identities are not widely circulated among the myths of Australianness. This network adopts a charter around multiculturalism. It offers foreign language television and film, along with spaces for the articulation of unspoken subjectivities. What this network actually defines as a cult text remains elusive. The SBS website offers no insight into the criteria adopted in selecting this media. They occupy liminal and contradictory discourses.

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3 This myth is characterised by attention to primarily white masculinity articulated via the frontier and pioneering history as opposed to colonisation and invasion of indigenous culture.
4 SBS screens programs such as Alchemy - a show devoted to dance music and rave culture, ICAM - which interprets indigenous issues, Eat Carpet - a program consisting of short (student) films, Sportswoman - devoted to coverage of women’s sport, Tales From a Suitcase - short stories of immigrant experiences of coming to Australia.
Cult texts demonstrate no consistent characteristics by which to define them. Masala films, Hong Kong Action cinema, surrealist animation articulate widely differing agendas, themes and structural characteristics. Cult offers a way of ordering the deliberately disordered. The popularity of Masala films in India remains incongruous to its status as a fringe text in Australia. These films consciously critique and celebrate Hollywood genre. Masala films do not adopt generic modes and methods unreflexively. It is this differing mobilisation of methods that constructs the colonisation of meaning as the text moves from India to Australia. This film passes through radical redefinitions to reframe it in an Australian context punctuated by different structures of power and privilege.

This metonym for movement in meaning has materialised a fluid and fluctuating social system of negotiation. Cult can be claimed on the margins as an authenticated resistive strategy of perversity and difference to the dominant. On SBS, it is stabalised through this fringe viewing. The texts screened as part of its cult programming frame different and dangerous identities. Masala films are minority viewing. Within the ‘othered’ spaces of popular culture and television viewing embodied by SBS at the borders of broadcasting in Australia, outside identities (and texts that hail them) are monitored. Cult labeling services dominant ideologies. On this network, cult marginalisation is embraced in deviant and destructive actualizations of borderline sexual depravity, such as that found in Vampiros Lesbos, and the incoherence of narrative conventions engaged in Masala films. Japanese anime like Akira or truly disturbing series such as Lars Von Trier’s The Kingdom upset the conventions of narrative storytelling. These cartoons, series and films engage ‘foreign’ literacies, and are outside English language, and grammars of sense-making. The boundaries of
difference are pushed to their extreme on SBS. Its cult programming stretches to the edges of cultural, social and political difference. Even when English language films are screened, they extend the limits of taste and value within our culture. The Trey Parker and Matt Stone films of *Orgasmo* and *Cannibal: The Musical*, about a Seventh Day Adventist who gets a job as a porn star, and pioneers lost in the American wilderness consecutively, are at the perimeter of cultivated knowledges and experiences. These texts are fabulously frivolous and the cult label functions to reify them as marginal, and validate legitimised knowledges and viewing experiences. Cult texts are aberrances, momentary forays into the radically subversive. It is not a place to linger.

Definitions of cult tenuously monitor these fringes of culture. Spaces of otherness are permitted so long as they do not interfere with the maintenance of the dominant hierarchy. In popular culture, cult and the carnivalesque co-habit to limit the disruption of otherness to the mainstream meanings. An ethic of cultural colonisation simultaneously permits and problematises revelry in othered experiences, knowledges and identities. In contemporary times colonial methods are masked. Difference is monitored less overtly by imperial meanings of madness reified by the cargo-cults, and is now mortared onto inversions, simulations, and postmodernity in popular culture. Resistance to dominant meanings is trivialised and stylised via the cult label. It forms a stasis field around texts, identities and meanings to contain them within a space of otherness. Claiming the cult label involves reifying dominant modalities. It stabalises and limits negotiation for concessions. Colonisers frenzied the cargo-cults to ignore resistance and avoid negotiation. Exclusion from language, debate and consciousness redefines relationships with hegemony.
Colonisation is a defective case study for hegemony. It distinctly works *against* negotiation and consent. The colonisers impose their authority, rather than negotiate for it. The hegemonic institutions they activate are installed after, and through the administration of the gun. Colonisers attempted to change the everyday “imagining” in the colonies. It was an anxious and ambivalent process. Colonisation mobilised a crisis in colonial identity at home and abroad that was difficult to reconcile. The more time passed in the histories of the colonies and ‘mother’ country, the wider the gap between imagined imperial authority and the actual hybrid, confused conflation with the colonised. In the age of postcolonialism, these distinctions break down from their crisp categories, and become contradictory and confounded. In the postwar period it has been popular culture that has provided the most active space for collective imaginings and circulation of power. This is the terrain of everyday life where the maintenance of capitalism can carry most currency. The changes in the economy to postfordism, and a fragmented consumption landscape, have generated an industry of and for popular artefacts. Leisure industries and pleasurable politics dominate the culture of our contemporary times. Hegemonic negotiation and consent now take place at the check-out. The spaces for resistance are narrowed within this framework as consciousness is simultaneously mobilised and masked. We value choice over change. Purchasing power has replaced political debate. Happiness is measured in assets. Social justice is increasingly redundant as the dominant acquiesce minimal concessions. The increased monitoring of negotiation and consent is embodied in the function of the cult label. Cult both cauterizes and contains marginal meanings and artefacts on the edges of culture, and slows time to allow adjustment in mainstream

meanings to incorporate new consciousness. This strategy enables mainstream spaces that lack diversity and innovation to appropriate and annex alternative ideologies into the service of the dominant hierarchy.

As a key trope in this thesis, colonisation forms the framework for an interrogation of popular culture. It uses the colonisation metaphor to describe the process of incorporation and appropriation of ‘outside’ or marginal knowledge, practices and identities for benefit of dominant interests. In prising open the in-between spaces of thirddspace, a rendering of ambiguity through popular culture enables history and society to be seen as a process of hesitations and lags between new forms of consciousness and state sanctioned meanings and memories. Connecting the spaces of pleasure and resistance, legitimation and reinscription, cult captures the movement of meanings through time and across space. The mobility of this term over a variety of axis makes it an ambiguous and tremulous trope. It services dominant identities, power structures and knowledges by cauterizing movement – containing difference to control the hegemonic negotiation. The terms of debate are delayed and denied through the use of the cult label, allowing empowered frameworks to set the tone of otherness and their engagement with the dominant.

This thesis moves back through the postwar period and across the world, tracking empire to the antipodes and makes the return trip. It traces the extension and retraction of this empire, along with the ramifications of its decline. The imperial ideologies that have lingered politically are played out in popular culture. The cult chapter demonstrates the consequences of colonial consciousness in contemporary popular culture. Out of the Second World War the changes to the social and political
landscape have accelerated and amplified through culture. The decline of empire, the rise of the New Right and identity politics has formed the key social shifts in consciousness. An increasingly fragmented economy, corporate complexes and industrial downsizing have redefined the discourses of race, class and gender. Race-based politics have punctuated a postcolonial world with margins and centres blurring through decolonisation and immigration. Authors such as Homi Bhabha, bell hooks and Gayatri Spivak demonstrate the extent to which national borders, along with definitions of East and West, us and them are transgressed. These crumbling distinctions are valiantly pasted back into place by a woefully anxious dominant seeking to maintain authority on these shifting sands. Edward Said demonstrates how Orientalism stifles overflowing transgressions by explaining that,

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\text{it was in the Near Orient, the lands of the Arab Near East, where Islam was supposed to define cultural and racial characteristics, that the British and the French encountered each other and “the Orient” with the greatest intensity, familiarity, and complexity.}^7
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The proximity of otherness generated the most intense renderings of difference possible to maintain the distinctions of dominant and subordinate, and East and West for conquering powers. In the postwar period, with postcolonialism marking the movement of peoples through national territories and redefining geographical landscapes, digitising of knowledge and integration of technology, proximity and distance become confused in the compression of time and space. The meanings by which same and other are negotiated and maintained have become more complicated. In Australia a policy of multiculturalism has sought to negotiate radical difference and generate a proactive immigration campaign for population growth. In New Zealand, biculturalism reified indigenous Maori claim to sovereignty. However, far from the

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empire, “phantoms of Englishness” are ever present. Multiculturalism demonstrates a consciousness of Singaporean, Malaysian, Indonesian, Vietnamese, Greek, Italian and Turkish identity in Australia, but not a consistent currency of whiteness and Englishness. Ghassan Hage astutely explains,

\[\text{[n]o matter how much multiculturalism is maintained to reflect the ‘reality’ of Australia, the visible and public side of power remains essentially Anglo-Celtic: politicians are mainly Anglo-Celtic, custom officers, diplomats, policemen/women and judges are largely Anglo-Celtic. At the same time, Australian myth makers and icons, old and new are largely Anglo-Celtic, from shearsers to surfers to TV and radio ‘personalities’, to movie stars and rock ‘n’ rollers.}\]

Multiculturalism does not question the centrality of white power in Australian society, or present a distinctly flexible or fluid negotiation with indigenous identity. It offers space for difference that is coherent and on the terms of whiteness. Multiculturalism means that the concessions the dominant must acquiesce are nominal. In popular culture, cult currency maintains this pigeon-holing of difference. In New Zealand, whiteness has been directly criticised within the bicultural frame. Nevertheless, “80% of New Zealand’s population is still of European origin” and wider structures of power (while arguably better than Australia) are yet to demonstrate a deeper reflexivity in the conditions that lead to “Maori students … not doing well in the New Zealand educational system.” Further, Alan Duff remains enraged at “propaganda … on the part of the ruling class whites to impose on us [Maori and Pakeha] the notion that we were a happy family, whilst with the other hand they were mopping up the last of our Maori lands” in an attempt to demonstrate the unequal power distribution in his country. Immigration, diaspora and postcolonial identity are

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complicated and convoluted spaces within contemporary politics. Despite a desire to deal with the blurring of national boundaries and to address issues of invasion and oppression of otherness, fundamental ideologies of distinction are being maintained, even perpetuated within our culture. The cult moment closes off spaces for radical renegotiation. In the postwar period, concerns of race (enfolded into colonisation) have treaded volatile terrain. Through this time, great progress has been made. Now, the price being paid is a peeling back of this advancement. No better example of the subtle redefinitions taking place can be found than with the current refugee ‘crisis’ in Australia.

Draconian border policing demonstrates the level to which a fear of otherness has punctuated our time and spaces. A country with an operational (if flawed) policy of multiculturalism, built on the backs of postwar immigration has embraced destructive images of otherness. The reflexivity of the postcolonial era is lost amongst narrow renderings of otherness and denial of diversity. In New Right ideologies, policing the boundaries of the state only seems to apply to ‘others’ of Middle Eastern, Asian and African origins as “there are thought to be 50,000 people in Australia who failed to leave before their visa expired; the largest group among the over stayers are from the United Kingdom and the United States.”13 The criteria by which we monitor our borders are distinctly raced. These contemporary categories are a far cry from the progressive politics through the 1970s and early 1980s that saw both the implementation of multiculturalism in Australian and the ratification of the Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand. Spaces for otherness have declined with an increasing currency of the cult label. Monitoring movement of meanings and people is a central

trope of our time. On the political stage the quarantining of people renders the conservative New Times. In popular culture, shifts in social meanings are much more ambiguous, though no less rigorously monitored.

*The X-Files* hails a hijacking of the postwar project of rebirth through questioning authority. This text treads on the toes of legitimised ways of knowing and being. By messing with memory, it activates the popular as a collective consciousness of community in this postwar period. *The X-Files* redefines difference and rewrites histories. Positioned ambivalently between state sanctioned knowledges, and mythologies and memories, it squeezes into spaces of popular culture that ponder unclear politics. *The X-Files* problematises the categories of social sense making that we apply in everyday life. It queries the currency of authority, and demonstrates an imagining of otherness that circulates outside contemporary quarantining. This text is injected with the emotional, physical and economic changes that have punctured the postwar period. As a cult text, it is colonised and controlled by market forces that seek out product satisfaction in a capitalist context. Its radical rewriting is co-opted as a conventional code with mainstream meaning. *The X-Files* articulated shifts in social consciousness that were contrary to stabalised authority. It denied the cogency of science, celebrated myth and inverted the gender/knowledge hierarchy. These challenges were contradictory, and articulated adjustments in cultural consciousness not yet stabalised in the social sphere. Postwar politics in race, class and gender filtered through this program to redefine relationships between whiteness and blackness, working class and middle class, men and women.
The changes in gender relationships were best embodied in Mulder and Scully’s relationship. They articulated a functioning professional and personal relationship of equality in the workplace. Feminist politics was unpopular, yet Scully demonstrated a competent and controlled femininity. The status of women remained ambivalent. Still struggling to articulate autonomy, representations of women in popular culture treded a fine line. *Tank Girl* captures the insecurity of feminism in contemporary times. This text embraces unpopular politics. It demonstrates a functional and conscious feminist politics in an era where feminism has failed. The four women in this film mobilise matriarchal meanings in a phallocentric future. The colonisation of feminist politics by the corporate complex is encased in the fringe fodder of *Tank Girl*. Its rendering of vibrant, difficult women secures it as a marginal modality.

In the 1970s feminism articulated an agitated politics. Some women were annoyed at the lack of concessions conceded after World War Two. Naomi Wolf, Susan Faludi and Germaine Greer mourned the “failure of emancipation”¹⁴ and the inability of women to break free from the constraints of gendered performances. They hailed the working woman and demanded the rights of representation. Despite these radical renderings of femininity, they denied the specific experiences of working class and black women. For these middle class women, economic independence is bought on the basis of an economy that values middle class labour and knowledge. This is embodied in the notion that working class women ‘work’, middle class women have ‘careers’. The second wave movement made many gains for women. Not least the improvement of educational access resulting in increased economic independence so that they now “look very closely at the candidates for their hand, and the kind of

Rather than coupling for survival in harsh social and economic realities, these gains have the price of validating the very system that seeks to keep women subordinated. In seeking out ‘equality’, feminism has failed to change the terms of success and oppression. Making women define themselves in relation to, and in competition with, men in a system where men are able to silently occupy the centre, means women are structured in subordination. The failure of this movement is embedded in its reluctance to embrace radical diversity of femininity within society. In *Tank Girl*, different women are visualised engaging a series of strategies to negotiate patriarchal power. Nodes of feminist concern are validated and rewritten in this text to articulate a fluid and free movement of meaning. These women move through madness, violence, beauty and sexuality to probe and poke at phallocentric society. The cult label limits these potentially dangerous demonstrations of female autonomy and control. This text circulates carefully contained in marginal meanings. The intervention of the third wave enabled a friendlier feminism to be more easily colonised by patriarchal meanings – allowing Lara Croft and *Tomb Raider* to exist more comfortably in the mainstream.

The third wave of feminism has rewritten femininity in dialogue with the New Right. While economic independence is key to women’s autonomy in a capitalist system, its ethics of consumption have functioned to ignore rather than eliminate class differences. This means they circulate ever more powerfully, though silently in society. Kate Roiphe and bell hooks intervened and demonstrated a consciousness of class and race politics in the feminist movement. However, the currency of white, middle class femininity has deprioritised these correctives. In popular culture a fluid,

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funky and fragmented female was embodied in kick-arse girl heroes in hipster trousers with bad attitudes. The Spice Girls, and the re-release of *Charlie’s Angels*, embodied the extent to which feminist politics had been hijacked in the service of dominant meanings in sex appeal, fashionability and heterosexuality. The gains made by parts of both the second and the third wave were too easily stripped away. The more difficult challenges posed by postcolonialism are masked by the resonance of third wave women. A more complicated rendering of feminist politics inflected with race and class has been ironically silenced by the New Right. The interjection of digital technologies, have provided fresh terrain for an interrogation of women and feminism. It has reenergized commentary on the representation of women to the detriment of the wider interventions of second and third wave feminism. In the computer gaming world, the engagement and currency of interactive methods of reading are uncomfortably rendered within contemporary culture. This relatively new context for pleasure has no overarching (historical) methodology for regulation to frame individual participation and reading. Hence this modality hails a previous time and space through readership, colonisation and femininity (in *Tomb Raider*) to provide a comfortable and controlled frame of reference through which to anchor pleasure. Reconciling new readerships strategies within old ideologies demonstrate the difficulty of rendering a predominantly negotiated masculine readership gaining pleasure in the female subjectivity of Lara Croft. She is framed and fitted into a more comfortable time and space to facilitate these reading strategies. In the past, she activates a yearning for empire, and the crisp authority of colonisation. Gamers plunder and poach from exotic and emotional spaces of the ‘East’ in a reification of masculine, colonial containment of difference. Her virtual surfaces enable a New
Right re-writing of feminist pasts and possibilities to make women wither. While reaffirming masculinist methods and meanings.

Decolonisation has de-prioritised European, masculinised ideologies of invasion and oppression. Postcolonialism has seen a reification of othered voices out of the colonial melee. Spivak is the key authority in reclaiming feminine voices and literacies through this sphere. By hailing the subaltern she demonstrates the injection of white, masculinist thought throughout the world and the denial of othered consciousness in colonial contexts. By speaking of women in these spaces she reifies alternative subjectivities contrary to binarial knowledges. She creates a confluence between race, class and gendered concerns in arguing,

[according to Foucault and Deleuze (in the First World, under the standardization and regimentation of socialized capital, though they do not seem to recognize this) the oppressed, if given the chance (the problem of representation cannot be bypassed here), and on the way to solidarity through alliance politics (a Marxist thematic is at work here) can speak and know their conditions. We must now confront the following question: On the other side of the international division of labor from socialized capital, inside and outside the circuit of epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text, can the subaltern speak?]¹⁶

Inflecting Marxism with race and gender meanings in colonial and postcolonial frameworks generates a deeper, more profound analysis of subjectivity and consciousness. Spivak’s feminist politics visualises oppressions that remain unspoken.

Most crucially, her version of the subaltern moves feminism through the postwar period in time and space to create a confluence between women’s concerns and postcolonial fragmentation of identity and politics. Feminism moves beyond its white, middle class origins, to fill out othered identities in race and class. Despite Spivak’s activation of speaking positions in postcolonialism, women’s voices have continued to

be muffled. The corporate capitalist complex drowns out the concerns of culture. Feminism remains unpopular despite its connection to a deeper more complex rendering of identity politics. Meanwhile men’s studies is gaining increasing currency as men redefine and reclaim power wrested away from them via the feminist movement (among others). A more confluent masculine hierarchy is creating spaces for a more reflexive interpretation of male power in society, but is also reifying male dominance through a lack of conversation with feminist politics.

Men’s studies holds limited space for a dialogue with women, while feminist theory has always had to negotiate with masculine knowledges. A demonstration of this continuing, uneven distribution of power can be found in a barrage of statistics displaying glaring discrepancies between the currency and cultural capital men and women hold.

One effect … of the contradictions of women living in a man’s world is their comparative poverty; whereas nearly half of all women have a gross weekly income of less than $200, only 27 per cent of men do. Of men and women in the workforce, men earn on average $714.50 per week, women $468.30 per week.17

Three waves of feminism, and the explosion of men’s studies, has resulted in still dramatic discrepancies between the earnings of men and women. The gap in earning demonstrates profound disrespect to women. It assumes their labour is less important and limits their access to economic, political and social autonomy. When “women and men work on average about the same number of hours in the year”18 these statistics are even more startling in an economy that increasingly legitimises personal wealth as the cornerstone of social equality and freedom. Nevertheless, this trend of questioning and then reconfirming existing power structures has been a characteristic of our recent

17 M. Lake, Getting equal, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1999), p. 279  
18 R. W. Connell, Masculinities, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1995), p. 82
era. We live in conservative times that limit the articulation of difference. On the political stage these shifts have resulted in a series of draconian developments. Men’s power resonates through popular culture as they increasingly colonise spaces and knowledges of femininity. Doug Robinson anchors his analysis to Susan Jeffords demonstration of “masculine resurgence”\(^{19}\) directly aimed at reclaiming “ground lost from the 1950 to the 1970s to such cultural “others” as women, minorities and the young.”\(^{20}\) In an era where male authority is increasingly questioned, the accompanying ‘crisis’ articulates a desire to redefine and reclaim masculine power. Henry Rollins is a problematised masculinity who performs an unpopular politics.

Henry Rollins hails an excessive masculine subjectivity in a time where men deflect attention away from their power. He marks masculinity, and denies its currency to circulate unseen and unspoken in society. His place within the partial spaces of punk rock and popular youth politics activates a volatile subjectivity and experience of masculine marginalisation. Rollins’s excessive musculature maps masculine empowerment in embodied hardness, while concurrently questioning the resonance and rendering of his power. The ethic of corporeal control through bodybuilding is questioned in his spoken word performances. He articulates a process of interpretation and investigation into life not congruent with powerful, silent masculinity. His containment in punk politics cult(ivates) his fringe ferment.

\(^{19}\) D. Robinson, *No less a man*, (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University, 1994), p. 11
\(^{20}\) *ibid.*
The increase in visibility of men’s health issues, the boom in men’s magazines\textsuperscript{21} and men’s studies, along with films like \textit{Fight Club} demonstrate a waning resistance to unspoken and ill-defined masculine subjectivity within our culture. Many of these sites simply reanimate a redundant masculine identity trading on the traditional nodes of empowerment. Similarly, a fluid and forceful femininity (that is not embedded in ‘bitchness’) is also edging through the popular. This complex movement in gender politics is in a process of adjustment - not yet taken up as valid, but not discounted as ‘outside’ the mainstream. Spike from \textit{Buffy: The Vampire Slayer} demonstrates a conflicted and confused masculinity in a time when men are increasingly questioning their roles in culture. What makes Spike unique is that he actualizes a persistent questioning of his identity. The methods and modalities he uses to construct his sense of self are colonised by Buffy and a functional femininity in the public sphere. He does not (and cannot) simply reclaim or re-perform masculine power. He must negotiate a series of subjectivities located within the masculine hierarchy without lapsing into ‘crisis’ mode. Spike’s cult status is embodied in his marginal status within the \textit{Buffy} diegesis as a powerful \textit{and} disempowered masculine subjectivity. Unlike Rollins whose marginality is stabilised, Spike flits and fondles the mainstream. His movement through popular culture conjures up the cult label to limit the crisis he can cause. A questioning of male power is yet to become comfortable politics. Spike’s place in a popular text requires the colonisation of his meanings to contain his rupture. Dealing with a problematised and punctured masculine identity exists uncomfortably within our culture.

Ambivalence forms the fodder of cult labeling in this context. Cult monitors meanings in a postwar context, where the political shifts that have shaped our time are mapped through popular culture. The shifting and shaping of meaning activates a colonisation ethic of control and containment through cult labeling. Through race, class and gender and the jostling for autonomy in the postwar period, the rise of New Right ideologies have masked Leftist language. Economic concerns are traced over the top of racial differences to deflect attention away from the root causes of social inequality and discrimination - government policy in white, middle class interests. Via the rise of the New Right these ideologies are amplified through the mapping of national alliances over identity politics. Thatcher, Reagan, Bush and now Howard have embraced political, social and economic policies of corporate culture, national sovereignty, and “transnational economic networks” that reify middle class investment, consumption and culture. The legitimacy of the market as the great equaliser has cancelled out identity politics and social justice. Most crucially, it denies and oppositional working class consciousness by making all interests the same. Frank Mort explains,

Thatcherism’s orchestration of consumption has been adept at channeling perceptions of growing personal prosperity into its own political discourse equating the ring of tinkling cash registers with political and cultural freedoms.23

The desire for economic affluence and personal wealth is being bought at the price of social justice. The faith in monetary means to make life egalitarian is grossly misplaced in this equation. Through the postwar period, the manifestation of money and markets to monitor meaning has provided effective modalities for maintaining power. This collective cashing-in on social inequality has generated a gender dialogue mirroring the reconfigurations of race and class. Men’s place at the centres of social

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power is no longer silent, but is re-asserting new hegemonic authority, while the gains of feminism are being written over by workplace politics, fashion and popular culture. Culture is accelerating, with faster turnovers and transactions.

*South Park* presents a comprehensive attack on the overarching New Right ideologies that naturalise competition and common sense. It demonstrates the consequences of New Right politics and a denial of Leftist consciousness. Visualising homosexuality, incest, genetic deformities, illiteracy, corporate (ir)responsibility, and colonisation, this program speaks to, and of identities and issues ignored in wider consciousness. The place of popular culture as a pedagogical tool connects cultural studies to cult contexts where unpopular politics sits uncomfortably within popular modalities. Accessing tools for social empowerment operates against the numbing negotiations of hegemony. Activating social consciousness in popular culture supplements the scathing scandal of cultural studies courses at universities. Operating through fringe education paradigms, and questioning its role as a pedagogical tool, cultural studies operates ambivalently within university institutions. Its role in reifying Leftist critique in an era of a declining visibility of the working class, and accompanying Marxist politics, has been weakened. *South Park* amplifies and questions Leftist politics through popular culture. The in-between spaces of thirspace are revealed in the fragile and fringe political positions adopted by this program. Cult contains *South Park* by framing its subversion in a marginal context. The youth politics it engages sits ambivalently between the resistive and marketing discourses encircling it. Similarly, *Trainspotting*, occupies a disturbing ontology, both embracing and denying popular ethics.
Welsh’s novel (and film) is propelled by acceleration. The pages turn quickly as the Scottish brogue races through the narrative. By reenergizing empire, Welsh revisits the colonisation of the Celtic fringe. He reclaims the disposssession and disenfranchisement of colonisation through the New Right ideologies that have systematically wiped out entire industries in the service of Englishness. The characters in Trainspotting exist in a contradictory relationship with imperial and national authorities. Welsh uses dance and accompanying drug culture to articulate this illicit relationship. Writing through the beat, he activates alternative consciousness and thereby hails an entire history written simultaneously inside and outside of empire. The proximity that closes in on Welsh’s writing demonstrates a suffocating social sphere where acceleration remains a refuge from a speeding economy and society. The speed of this story mobilises belonging in literacies on the outside of legitimated cultural currencies. Drug addiction courses through the narrative. Its prevalence performs a ‘youth culture’ ethic both resisting and succumbing to corporate attempts at commodification. Carrying the cult label, Trainspotting is controlled by dominant strategies of marketing and industry sales, and claimed as an authentic resistance to that ethic.

Each of the chapters in this thesis demonstrates how cult contains culture. Cult suspends culture in time and space to reduce its capacity to be claimed by resistive meanings and identities. Hegemony is stabalised as limits to the level of negotiation and consent are imposed. Chapters on Tank Girl, Henry Rollins and South Park demonstrate the extent to which cult freezes and frames meanings on the fringes of our culture. Each of these texts embraces unpopular politics. Tomb Raider, Spike and Trainspotting show how new meanings and shifts in social sense-making are
suspended in popular culture while they settle over time. Claiming and mobilising resistance to New Right ideologies, these texts sit uncomfortably in popular culture. Their encroachments into the mainstream are controlled.

In the years following World War Two that began with such optimism and faith in social justice, men and women have jostled for power and position. Through this period, there has been a persistent questioning of the relationships between coloniser and colonised. It has lead to a decline in empire, but also a reification of fear in otherness and difference. Postcolonialism has enabled more reflexive interpretations of centres and margins, us and them. However, with the rise of the New Right, we are no longer flexible and fluid in these differences. As class has declined, fear of other races increased, and the concerns of women have been masked, while men’s are highlighted. There has been a reification of masculinity, through a reprioritising of colonial ideologies and consumption ethics valuing middle class values in dominance, rather than a diverse and varied social landscape and literacy. A rebuilding of old ideologies and boundaries works against feminist politics and ethics of emancipation, and autonomy. Men are gaining increasing fluidity and able to be marked on their own terms in society. The currency of the masculine hierarchy is being deconstructed enabling more men to question and embrace a subordinate subjectivity – though without due consideration to and engagement with women or feminism. In popular culture, these conflicted and complex negotiations have been carefully monitored. The cult term has been used to restrict the movement of meaning within the everyday. Social, political and economic movement is contained in culture where cult limits the spaces for otherness and contains disruption. This thesis has summoned the groups that do not fit within crisp categories - that move through the social landscape. It
speaks of resistance to containment. It provides a space and a time for unpopular politics in popular culture.
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“Becoming,” *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, written and directed by Joss Whedon, (Mutant Enemy: Twentieth Century Fox, 1996), episode 2.21/22

“Beyond the Sea,” *The X-Files*, written by Glen Morgan and James Wong, directed by David Nutter, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1994), episode 1.13

“Big Gay Al’s Big Gay Boat Ride,” *South Park*, written by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, director uncredited, (Comedy Central, 1997), episode 1.04

“Chinga,” *The X-Files*, written by Stephen King and Chris Carter, directed by Kim Manners, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1998), episode 5.10

“Chinpokomon,” *South Park*, written by Trey Parker, directed by Trey Parker and Eric Stough, (Comedy Central, 1999), episode 3.10

“Doomed,” *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, written by Marti Noxon, David Fury, and Jane Espenson, directed by James A. Contner, (Mutant Enemy: Twentieth Century Fox, 1999), episode 4.11

*Ducktators*, directed by Guus Van Waveren, and Wolter Braamhorst, (Holland: Avro Television, 1998), [television documentary]


“Excelsis Dei,” *The X-Files*, written by Paul Brown, directed by Stephen Surjik, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1994), episode 2.11


“Fresh Bones,” *The X-Files*, written by Howard Gordon, directed by Rob Bowman, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1995), episode 2.15

“Ghost in the Machine,” *The X-Files*, written by Alex Gansa and Howard Gordon, directed by Jerrold Freedman, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1993), episode 1.07

“Gnomes,” *South Park*, written by Pam Brady, Matt Stone and Trey Parker, directed by Trey Parker, (Comedy Central, 1998), episode 2.17


“Kill Switch,” *The X-Files*, written by William Gibson and Tom Maddox, directed by Rob Bowman, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1998), episode 5.11

“Lazarus,” *The X-Files*, written by Alex Gansa and Howard Gordon, directed by David Nutter, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1994), episode 1.15


“Pangs,” *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, written by Jane Espenson, directed by Michael Lang, (Mutant Enemy: Twentieth Century Fox, 1999), episode 4.08

“Pusher,” *The X-Files*, written by Vince Gilligan, directed by Rob Bowman, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1996), episode 3.17

“Sexual Harassment Panda,” *South Park*, written by Trey Parker, directed by Eric Stough, (Comedy Central, 1999), episode 3.06

“School Hard,” *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, written by David Greenwalt and Joss Whedon, directed by John Kretchmer, (Mutant Enemy: Twentieth Century Fox, 1997), episode 2.01

“Seeing Red,” *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, written by Steven de Knight, directed by Michael Gershman, (Mutant Enemy: Twentieth Century Fox, 2002), episode 6.18

“Shadows,” *The X-Files*, written by Glen Morgan and James Wong, directed by Michael Katleman, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1993), episode 1.06

“Shapes,” *The X-Files*, written by Marilyn Osborn, directed by David Nutter, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1994), episode 1.19


“Teso Do Bichos,” *The X-Files*, written by John Shiban, directed by Kim Manners, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1996), episode 3.18


“The Calusari,” *The X-Files*, written by Sara B. Charno, directed by Michael Vejar, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1995), episode 2.21

“The Field Where I Died,” *The X-Files*, written by Glen Morgan and James Wong, directed by Rob Bowman, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1996), episode 4.05


“The Jersey Devil,” *The X-Files*, written by Chris Carter, directed by Joe Napolitano, (Ten Thirteen: twentieth Century Fox, 1993), episode 1.05

“The Postmodern Prometheus,” *The X-Files*, written and directed by Chris Carter, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1997), episode 5.06


“The Unnatural,” *The X-Files*, written and directed by David Duchovny, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1999), episode 6.20

“Towelie,” *South Park*, written and directed by Trey Parker, (Comedy Central, 2001), episode 5.08

“Unrequited,” *The X-Files*, written by Howard Gordon and Chris Carter, directed by Michael Lange, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1997), episode 4.16

“Unusual Suspects,” *The X-Files*, written by Vince Gilligan, directed by Kim Manners, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1997), episode 5.01

“Weight Gain 4000,” *South Park*, written by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, director uncredited, (Comedy Central, 1997), episode 1.02


“Young at Heart,” *The X-Files*, written by Scott Kaufer and Chris Carter, directed by Michael Lange, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1994), episode 1.16

Films

*Cruel Intentions*, written and directed by Richard Kumble, (Columbia Pictures, 1999)

*James Bond: Goldeneye*, written by Jeffrey Caine, directed by Martin Campbell, (United Artists: MGM, 1995)


*Mask*, written by Peter Bogdanovich and Martin Starger, directed by Peter Bogdanovich, (United Artists, 1985)

*Tank Girl*, written by Tedi Sarafian, directed by Rachel Talalay, (United Artists: MGM, 1995)

*Terminator Two*, written and directed by Ridley Scott, (Columbia Tristar, 1991)

*The X-Files: Fight the future*, written by Chris Carter, directed by Rob Bowman, (Ten Thirteen: Twentieth Century Fox, 1998)


**Audio recordings**
