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media/mundania



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Media/Mundania: Call and Response

Myron Orleans

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Issue Editor, JMB 2.1

Dear reader of this mundane journal,
As you hunch over your computer avoiding the glare off the monitor, you must be aware that your experience is occurring in a mundane place: in your home, your room, in your office. You are a human being in some sort of social and physical situation reading this material. I hope that you are comfortable and want to chat with me through this fantastic medium of computer communication. I know you are thinking this is a one-way process. You are receiving my thoughts but I'm not receiving yours. Trust me; I am hoping to learn at some point what's going on with you.

You see, this is our first special issue devoted to a theme. This is our first time we've asked you to be an integral part of our public forum. We don't just want readers; we want participants in a collective effort to address our theme: how our mundane world interacts with media. Perhaps right now the purpose of your involvement is not quite apparent. But let's look at the central idea and see how we can relate.

We, the editors of JMB, believe that how you live your daily life profoundly affects how you connect to the communication media in our society. Moreover, the content of media are themselves rooted in the ordinary lives of the people. Abstract points? Sure, but consider your activity at this moment as you read my essay here. Consider the place where you are reading this. Does that place impact how you are feeling about what we're trying to accomplish here? This talky style I am using, which is so unlike me the obscure professor, might be annoying you. I find it kind of annoying but as I sit here clicking it out, I am thinking I can use this approach to entice people to look at the issues of the media in relation to the mundane and get their help.

I am hoping you will provide the substance, the illustrations, and the applications of my general thinking. I'm pretty good on ideas, but I have this terrible memory for details. I'm good at suggestions, at asking questions, but my follow-through is frequently lacking. The essays contained in this issue of our journal address many of these areas, but I'd like to encourage your participation in the discussion by responding to my calls on any of the topics that I will raise in my writing below. How?

I entitle this introduction “Call and Response” after the practice common in some church services where the pastor ‘calls’ his inspirations out and his congregation responds, giving the whole thing the feel of a conversation. I am asking you to join our free discussion forum, *MundaneTalk* and affirm (or decry) the claims I will offer in this essay. If you haven’t already, you can subscribe at <http://mundanetalk.listbot.com>. In this essay I hope to strike some ‘responsive chords’ in you, hit on a phenomenon that has some meaning for you and provoke you to chime in with your own comments. Give it a chance and see what happens. Amen!

Media as Life Context

Did you ever find yourself judging the value of something in relation to media depictions? Well, consider that I have been teaching my students the study of the mundane for what seems like centuries. Many have been interested, some amused, but few seemed to feel that the endeavor was significant or useful. As it happened, the publication of *Journal of Mundane Behavior* was met with a great deal of media attention. When my students saw me being interviewed on television, all of a sudden they seemed to feel the importance and worth of their assignments to study everyday life situations. Value and expectations may well be assessed in terms of their representations in media.

Assessments related to media can well be demonstrated by the significance of a place in a movie or TV program. The Maryland town where *The Runaway Bride* (1999) was filmed seems to have runaway real estate values, and I understand that the actual town where *Northern Exposure* (1990-1995) was filmed has become an attraction. But I can’t think of other examples. Moreover, I can’t quite think of the significance of this. Could it indicate how life on the silver or blue screen magnifies mundane meanings of places? Also, I’m not sure how the production of a program or film affects a locale, although I remember seeing a film that touched on this, *Sweet Liberty* (1986). I wonder how the town this was filmed in was affected by the movie that depicted how a town was affected by making a movie. *State and Main* (2000) is the latest appearance of this, in which the locals thwart a crew filming in a Maine town.

When I see places familiar to me through the media depictions, I respond strongly. Recently, I visited the Gettysburg memorial site. Of course, I had read Shaara’s *Killer Angels* (1974) and had seen Turner’s film *Gettysburg* (1993) numerous times. As I viewed the hallowed grounds, I felt linked to the many who sacrificed their lives; I ‘saw’ their struggle in my mind’s eye, and admired their incredible heroism. Or was I rewinding the mediated depictions in my mind? I was confused as to the nature of my experience since that actual scene held meaning for me only through historical books, movies and place markings.

Certainly, my thinking was not clarified by all the mediated versions of the battle adjacent to the battlefield including massive paintings, replicas, mediated reenactments, etc. Are emotional responses related to the historical events or to their mediated versions?

I experienced the same dilemma upon seeing Normandy Beach. I found myself explaining the site to my children in terms of the film and book, *The Longest Day* (1962). I kept seeing the actors perform their heroics as I scrutinized the scene. (I just couldn’t get Red Buttons hanging from the church steeple out of my mind.) Just a few days after our return from France in early July of 1998, we saw the just-opened film *Saving Private Ryan* as site experts. We sat there in the theater evaluating the accuracy of the depiction based on our ‘firsthand’ experience. Thank goodness professional historians are immune to this.

Sometimes the easiest way to make someone understand what’s going on is to refer to a mediated image. Decades ago, when you wanted to tell a friend about your roommates, you might have to refer to *Three’s Company* (1977-1984). Perhaps a few gay people gained courage to reveal their orientations when Ellen came out as, well, *Ellen* (1994-1998). Surely, we have numerous examples of how certain human characteristics lost their stigma because of made-for-TV movies or films.

Self-referentiality

I must admit that I’ve learned everything I ever needed to know from media, not from kindergarten. I know how to greet different sorts of people, talk in styles, identify someone as being attractive, walk and look cool, choose and wear my clothing, kiss and so forth, all from watching. Chauncey Gardner and I both “like to watch.” I may not read T. S. Eliot intelligently, but I can understand just about everything Dennis Miller refers to. I feel that he’s not talking in a vacuum. He’s talking about mediated worlds where our prime knowledge is of those worlds and not those represented by the media. Like quiz shows that challenge contestants’ knowledge of programs and media personalities, or films that refer to films, these products assume a media-generated common culture.

The popularity of the *Scream* series of horror films (1996, 1997, 2000) speaks to the acceptance of self-conscious movie making. These movies posit their own rules openly, especially the sequels in which performers expect certain events to occur because that is what happens in teen horror flicks. Speaking to the audiences directly is not all that uncommon in movies. But what I find most intriguing are the war movies where a character says at the height of filmic tension, “This ain’t no war movie; this is for real!”

Sleepless in Seattle (1993) cruelly distinguished between guy and gal flicks, juxtaposing cynical male appreciation of Jim Brown’s heroism in *Dirty Dozen*

(1967) vs. sincere female emotion regarding *An Affair to Remember* (1957). Movies are increasingly based on movies mining the audiences' common knowledge of media-based culture. Our mundane lives are evidently so intertwined with filmic imagery that the paradigms we use to understand film are themselves significantly derived from media experiences.

The crossover of media is such an overwhelming phenomenon that I am almost reluctant to broach the topic. The source of far too many of our movies is TV programs that might have originated from other media. This process reverses as well, with movies becoming TV programs and other media products. The penchant to recycle media contents has proceeded unabated. Was not *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) a re-make of the 1936 film version rather than a rendering of Cooper's book or an effort toward historical reconstruction? It would seem that media is becoming its own world; however, the self-referencing, re-visioning and re-making of media reflects the interest of audiences in renewing the mundane moments of the initial experience, a kind of nostalgia for the feelings and responses initially experienced, a desire to resurrect the time and place of viewing. How else could Spielberg's success with the *Indiana Jones* series (1981, 1984, 1989) be fully understood except as baby boomer yearning for the feelings and experiences associated with Saturday morning serials?

Performance Reality

Some movies acknowledge that they are movies, while most deny that they are movies. Depending on the director's style, we, the audience, see the movie as if in a collective dream state, asked to suspend our disbelief or, on some occasions, to retain our disbelief. Mike Myers, particularly in *Wayne's World* (1992, 1993) tells us that his movies are just that. We pay rapt attention to the filmic world and detect their logics, become expert predictors of events and outcomes, and come to know the actors as if they were personal acquaintances.

Most performers want to convince us that the image they portray is a reality to absorb us. And then there is Kevin Spacey. I think that this fellow is telling us at each and every moment that he is an actor portraying a role for our entertainment, encouraging us to retain our grasp on personal reality. His charm rests on his distance from his portrayals, never appearing to take his own performances quite seriously. Perhaps the James Garner "let's not take me for real" style of acting foreshadowed this.

Celebrity encounters are another fascinating expression of intermixing media realities and mundane realities. We may say, "Hi Mr. Hanks" or at least nod in his direction. Maybe we have an uncontrollable smirk on our face and elevated blood pressure. Or we blurt, "Are you Sharon Stone?" as our gooney question. I do not know these people, but I do know that their roles are not them, even though I do think that Tom is a nice guy and that Sharon Stone is

hot.

It is truly difficult to accept an out-of-character performance, but we have seen some persuasive acting, such as from Burt Lancaster who played a Nazi in *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961). We all "know" that Burt was actually a hero. Perhaps in our mundane lives we might even think of him and other performers or celebrities as 'role models,' wanting to be as happily sturdy as Burt was in his early films. I think that performers and their media images are to us metaphors for our own persona in everyday life settings, in which we may feel one way but act as the tacit script and unseen directors indicate regardless of our sentiments. Some of us may reject the notion that we are who we appear to be and claim a distinct private self, not unlike celebrities who, seeking privacy, shun the limelight except when their next film opens. How paradoxical! Celebrities striving for privacy.

The Arts and Entertainment channel slogan 'Escape the Ordinary' captures the conventional notion that places media content in sharp contrast to the mundane. Is it not that the exciting, the scary, the sexy are in a realm of otherness to our boring routine lives? Surely, much of our media fare are so far fetched from experience that they bear no relation to the mundane. But it is more likely that quality entertainment (if this can be distinguished) *is related to* everyday life and possibility. I believe that decent art and culture is a layering upon the mundane. Plausible premises have served as the underpinnings for the truly provocative and genuinely absorbing media experiences many of us have had. I enjoyed *A Simple Plan* (1998) because of its credible roots in ordinary life.

Audience contexts

Authentic audience emotion is generated through media depictions that resonate within everyday life contexts. These contexts are the sites of audience responsiveness. The social and physical circumstances in which we experience media strongly impact the nature of that experience. The family, the couple, the friends, and the individual provide the human aspect of these circumstances, while the physical setting constitutes the other dimension. Does this explain in part what's going on in the movie theatre industry?

For example, the trust that is required to share with unknown others the dream images on screen in a darkened theatre is of considerable concern to some moviemakers. The THX certification process represents a concern for the audio quality of film presentation, but other conditions are significant as well such as print quality, cleanliness of theatres, audience noise, seating arrangements, and so forth. More importantly, most movie theatres chains have failed to create audiences as communities of viewers sharing collectivized media experience. Film viewing thus remains essentially an individualized experience

even though others are co-present. Are there ways to rebuild movie theatre audiences as communities of trust and feeling in this era of post-narcissism? Would live music, lectures and discussions add to a communalized media experience?

Individualized and perhaps isolating media experience may be increasing with the new technologies. Home theatres can be interpreted as a retreat from the public domain of shared media. Home theatre design is surely a consumer goods specialty of note as regular folks are increasingly aware of the importance of setting up appropriate ordinary contexts for viewing media fare. Is the home theatre generally an individual, couple or family experience? A frequently ignored context of TV viewing is the public place. Going out for a night may well just relocate the site of TV viewing nowadays. Pay-per-view sports may be the biggest draw, but any sports will do in most places. Televisions are frequently turned on in lounges, bars, lobbies, schools, airport waiting areas etc., so we cannot think of TV as solely home-based. It's possible though that this wide distribution of TV viewing opportunity may further isolate people in assembled settings.

Car audio is another consumer products area that has clearly identified physical setting as critical for maximal appreciation. Car audio surely produces a personal relationship to music and other forms of radio entertainment. However, we may ask whether music listening outside of concerts has become purely a solo activity. We generally assume that computer activity is also isolating and individualizing. Does it actually happen that you spend most of your time at the computer alone or do you do frequently compute with others present? Do you share your computing activity directly with others? Does reading our online journal sap you of your interest in actively conducting your mundane life or substitute for live relationships? We would expect not and hope not, but do let us know.

Media Talk

"Where's the beef?" "...your final answer?" "Frankly, my dear...." And so forth and so on, we have a kind of media lingo that creates more than just a sense of unity. I would go so far as to say that such colloquialism produces a common cultural heritage that transcends particularist sentiments of ethnicity, race, class and status. Not so long ago, when I was in another country, a would-be robber threatened me with a rock and demanded money. As he menaced me, I thought, "I'm thinking, I'm thinking." In a life-endangering situation, I was conjuring up an old Jack Benny joke from the immortal line, "Your money or your life". Ridiculous! (The thief must have gotten bored waiting, because he and his confederates left in disgust and broke.) When deep philosophy, powerful theology or animal fear failed to infuse my being, a joke I heard many

times on TV in my childhood cropped up in my head. That's what I mean by a common cultural heritage, a reservoir of meanings and strategies of adapting to circumstances that just seem to come to you. Since I was in another culture at the time, I didn't actually say the words, but that is how I internally responded to the terror of that moment.

Often media-derived phrasings, when spoken, lighten a situation, establish a common bond, open up possibilities for further conversation, and, as I tell my students, avow our cultural membership. I'm surely an OK fellow if I can appropriately employ the ritual expressions of media—you can trust me.

Of course, we all recognize that these very recognizable expressions themselves derive from everyday conversations. And it is beyond obvious to suggest that almost all scripted dialogue seeks to emulate common modes of discourse. However, it is only the rare filmmaker who even attempts to or succeeds in capturing the naturalistic talk of mundane life. Woody Allen comes to mind as one of those few who makes movies that include common speaking errors, talking over, disjunctive talk, etc. Mostly, movies and TV portray speakers as quite articulate and present talk as well-orchestrated. That's not the way I hear conversation in my circles. So, I tend to think of scripted dialogue and the culling of phrases from the mundane as a refractive or distortive process that misleads few but sometimes entertains and, even more rarely, elevates. And, as I have suggested, such selective word gleaning can fuel the extension of popular culture terminology.

The Mundane Invades Media

There are so very many places in media that the actual mundanity crops up and pulls us out of the reverie of otherworldness – in that realm known as "continuity editing," where people actually work to make sure that background elements of a scene don't interrupt (through their incorrectness) the drama on the screen. What about products in the wrong settings? Did you ever see a west coast bag of potato chips in a scene supposedly situated in New York? I am haunted by a bag of Laura Scudders in *The Owl and the Pussycat* (1970). Shame on the filmmaker if my perception and memory serve correctly! Those of us who saw the wristwatches on the USC student-extras portraying Roman soldiers in *Spartacus* (1960) have been forever scarred.

I am fond of picking out the relatives of filmmakers or stars in films, or identifying people playing themselves, or spotting nonprofessional performers, or most satisfyingly, finding Hitchcock (or any director in a vignette). Wasn't that Rob Reiner's mother crying out something like, "I'll have whatever she's having," in the restaurant orgasm scene in *When Harry Met Sally* (1989)? How many Scorsese films has his mother been in? The judge in *Erin Brockovich* (2000) must have been the genuine article. The director of *Glory* (1989), Edward Zwick,

was first a trash-talking union soldier and then a supportive presence in the climactic battle scene.

Television Reality Programming

Portraying itself as challenging everyday people to adapt to extraordinary situations, reality programming has suddenly cropped up to fulfill Howard Beale's worst nightmare from *Network* (1976). Foreshadowed by films such as *EdTV* (1999) and *The Truman Show* (1998) among others, such programs have garnered incredible ratings and have become a major topic of popular conversation. Since I've never seen *Survivor* (2000, 2001) or any other of this genre, I must leave it to readers to offer informed interpretations of the significance for the mundane on our public forum. Kindly help this culturally deprived editor!

My 'Friends'

In closing the general part of this introduction, I want to share with readers about a battle that I lost. In my editors' note for JMB 1.3, I indicated that I felt that I needed to "compete with TV's *Friends* for the affection of my 14-year-old daughter." Well, needless to say, *Friends* (1994-present) won, and rather than bellyache, I consented to escort my daughter and two of her friends to see a taping of her favorite program. An instructive experience for media/mundania it was.

We were not the only ones interested in attending. Evidently, for many people, it is entertaining to see entertainment produced. Not only that, but also the large number of people in this and many other studio audiences who significantly inconvenienced themselves to see these performances must feel that these are important events in their lives. I heard of long pilgrimages from other cities, sacrifices of time, and great enthusiasm in talking to others queuing up.

After nearly six hours of waiting, chatting, walking and snacking, we were finally allowed entrance to the studio. The kids were very excited seeing their favorite performers, and so were most of the others in the audience. It was an enthusiastic audience entertained by an energetic comic, fed with complimentary pizza, stretching to see as much as possible while remaining seated. They laughed without cuing and applauded appreciatively, even off-camera. It would appear that their 'spontaneous' reactions were used in final editing. The live audience participated representing all potential viewers and providing their 'valuable' input.

I was cool, even when I saw Susan Sarandon as a guest star for this episode, but there was Tim Robbins surveying the scene with clear approval. OK, my celebrity smirk took over my face, that is, I flushed and tried to appear

normal but stared at them as best I could. Sarandon, a wonderfully dignified presence, plays a soap opera performer ousted from her role and now prepping Matt LeBlanc to replace her. Off-camera she was joking and chatting with him. In her role she falls for the guy and sleeps with him. There is Robbins laughing and enjoying his wife's performance as a performer making love to another man with whom she seemed quite friendly. Of course, all the friends on *Friends* are friends and this is a friendly program, not to mention how friendly the staff, audience and everyone else surrounding the event appeared to be. This confused scholar had to consult with his sage daughter for help in deciphering these complexities.

In any case, this observation captured for me the theme of this introduction: we clearly live some portion of our mundane lives in relation to media and our realities partially derive from media. The media creates itself from pieces of the mundane, from itself and from the 'anti-mundane.'

* * * *

This Issue

This is our first special issue and we organized it around the theme of the reflexivity between media and mundanity. Most scholarly treatments of the media — as well as public discussions about the media — tend to focus on the unusual and exotic aspects of our visual and aural entertainment experiences. How it is that the mundane foundations of media in everyday life have been relatively neglected as a central topic of discussion? We contend that the mundane serves as the basis for the creation of media contents, provides the groundwork by which the products of media are understood and appreciated, and that, in turn, the mundane is crucially shaped by these media products.

The essays in this issue are devoted to the exploration of the reciprocal relationships between the media and the mundane world. We called for papers that would examine how consumers in their everyday lives use the various products of the media and how particular features of ordinary society are envisioned by media. We have a set of important and exciting essays for your delectation. The methods used by the writers are indeed varied, as are the specific topics and settings in which they were examined. The writers are from diverse intellectual and cultural backgrounds and the perspectives and methodologies they apply reflect their divergences while the thematic interplay of their pieces provides an opportunity for the reader to gain a sense of the fullness and significance of mundane research.

Gerard J DeGroot challenges our faith in documentaries that convey to us an image of history as filled with drama and excitement. This highly accomplished historian emphasizes that the past was shaped more by the

commonplace activities of ordinary people such as doing the laundry and coping with monotony than by great heroes or catastrophic events such as wars that are frequently viewed as driving forces in history. Will we ever view PBS documentaries with the same confidence – or interest?

J. Alison Bryant and Jennings Bryant present data and analyses derived from their current edited book *Television and the American Family* (2nd edition, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001) to tell us what it is like “Living with an Invisible Family Medium.” Their impressive accumulation of research findings reveals that television is an integral component of family systems. The Bryants dissect the everyday interactions of families and TV revealing the significance of such phenomena as the remote control, recording-playback devices, parental involvement in children’s TV viewing, and unrealistic portrayals of families on TV. Now kiss your TV goodnight, dear.

Using a small sample survey, Andrea McCourt and Jacki Fitzpatrick generate important discoveries about audience interest in particular types of media contents. Their research explores how viewers’ life situations influence their preferences for television programming. More specifically, they investigate why we tend to form certain kinds of social relationships with television characters. McCourt’s and Fitzpatrick’s work helps us to understand how television imagery interacts with our ordinary lives.

The routine challenges of working as a psychiatrist are made more difficult by distorted media portrayals according to Ronald Pies, himself a psychiatrist. Prospective patients applying ‘cinematic stereotypes’ may expect penetrating insight that unravels the mystery of their pain and instantly relieves them. They may pre-diagnose themselves or typecast their psychiatrist based on distorted depictions of mental phenomena and caregivers seen on the screen. They may well not appreciate the utter mundanity of the actual work of psychiatrists toiling mightily with patients to achieve small gains. Dr. Pies avows that he does not eat his patients.

Tatyana Kotzeva tells us why Bulgarian women enjoy watching Latin-American soap operas. According to Kotzeva, Bulgarian women appreciate the Latin-American soap operas as tools to help them construct a privatized life in the new social order. She discusses how the entranced viewers strive to understand newly experienced forms of femininity in relation to these soaps. The soaps encourage an emancipatory and self-assertive orientation among viewers filling the void left in their lives by the dissolution of statism. And, anyway, these programs are steamy.

We all love the Beatles. James MacFarlane Williams shows us why. The genius of the Beatles, he claims, is that they created music and lyrics that magnify our insight into and appreciation of mundane life. Lovers of Beatles music are comforted and sustained in their ordinary lives. Through their music, Williams

tells us, we are able to conduct our lives with greater grace and dignity. “Nothing is real, and nothing to get hung about.”

The power of media to promote a certain kind of mundane lifestyle associated with a fashion is explored by Kinga Talarowska-Kacprzak. She demonstrates how Japanese media created a fashion – *ganguro* – that became a major social trend affecting the everyday lives of many young people. She suggests that audiences of *ganguro* adherents, supporters and opponents created a dynamic that drove media to adopt a particular programming agenda that has impacted the broader Japanese cultural landscape. Although based on marketing strategy, media content related to the ordinary lives and concerns of *ganguro* youth and their families fill airtime and provide magazine copy.

Roland Seim thinks that censorship is a self-negating process. He shows how efforts by the German government to censor media products stimulated an active market for the banned material. Seim examines how censorship attracts some audiences by the very act of restriction. He suggests that the tedium of mundane living may provoke interest in banned material but that the search itself and the viewing of such material become routine, indicating the inescapability of the mundane.

As our “mundane manifesto” for this issue, Chris Atton studies various forms of alternative media as mundane activities and clarifies implicitly how this journal itself is embedded in the mundane. (And I thought that our work was so extraordinary!) Atton explores how these alternative media operate within and through the everydayness of their creators arguing that they, in particular ‘perzines’, personal homepages, provide avenues for social participation in the creation, production and dissemination of the creators’ own banal experience, a topic worthy of close scrutiny on its own merit distinct from any notion of resistance or opposition.

Finally, with JMB 2.1, we announce our new section, *Outburst*, and issue our first “call for rants”. This section will feature shorter, timely essays about mundane affairs in the world today. We plan to publish one piece per month or so. I encourage you to check out the *Outburst* Submission Guidelines – it will be a fun section.

As editor of this special issue, I want to express my deepest gratitude to the group of anonymous reviewers who toiled assiduously over the many fine submissions offering insightful suggestions and culling the most appropriate pieces for inclusion in JMB 2.1, *Media/Mundania*. I want to single out by name Jamie O’Halloran for her wonderful work as proofreader, but if any errors remain, surely they are my responsibility. I surely cannot neglect my former student, Mark Kostabi, the extraordinary artist whose images have graced the cover pages of our last three issues. He has adroitly applied the essence of my lectures in introductory sociology to his art even though he never appeared to be listening

in class. Mark always seemed preoccupied with his damned doodling! My fullest appreciation above all goes to the splendid contributors who uniformly showed patience and tolerance for this neophyte issue editor. It was certainly a pleasurable challenge to work with them to select and organize a coherent set of essays for your edification and enjoyment. I do hope that you are pleased with these results.

Editor's Note: I (morleans@fullerton.edu) have been working on nothing but this issue of JMB for the last few months, so I have no other scholarly accomplishments or activities to report. I have even had precious little time to see TV or movies and you might note that my media references above are out-of-date. When this issue is finally uploaded, I will definitely make up for lost time in front of a screen.

'When Nothing Happened': History, Historians and the Mundane

Gerard J DeGroot

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Abstract: This article explores the way perceptions of the past are distorted by the popular taste for the unusual, the exciting or the bizarre. As a result, history seems to be characterised by catastrophe, or, at the very least, by constant dramatic change. Historians have played to this popular taste by concentrating on the unusual. The past has been distorted further by the popularity of historical documentaries: unscrupulous producers often place greater emphasis upon the dramatic quality of a program than on its historical accuracy. As a result of these distortions, we fail to appreciate the importance of mundane events and the tremendous influence that stability and tradition have in the shaping of our lives.

A few years ago, a friend in publishing thought of a new idea for a history series called 'The Year Nothing Happened.' Authors would pick a year free of wars, revolutions, or depressions, and look at ordinary people—the food they ate, the books they read, the houses they built. The idea, of course, was to give the reader a feel for the mundane nature of human existence and, in the process, demonstrate how important the commonplace is in shaping people's lives.

Don't bother looking for these books on Amazon; they were never written. My friend's boss killed the proposal. You can imagine the discussion:

'What? Books about ordinary people doing everyday things?'

'Well ... yes.'

'But that's boring.'

'I know, that's the point.'

'But that's crazy, we're in the business of selling books.'

'But it's the way life really was. It's the truth. Surely it deserves to be written.'

'Don't be stupid. And don't go all noble on me by mentioning the truth. Get me books about kings and queens, preferably at war with each other.'

'Yes, sir.'

My friend's idea illustrates the difference between history and the past. The past is what actually happened—including the way people lived their often mundane lives. History, on the other hand, focuses on the extraordinary—the often bizarre events which disturb normality. Great events are like fireworks displays on the 4th of July—loud, colorful, and exciting, but very brief disturbances to the quiet calm that surrounds us. Visions of the past are distorted because bizarre events are given disproportionate attention. Since history is one of the building blocks of personal and national identity, we end up with a warped image of ourselves.

We live on a high-octane view of yesterday. For example, we've been led to believe that the Wild West was dominated by gunslingers who left a trail of bodies in their wake. In truth, Billy the Kid and Jesse James were anomalies. Cowboys were peaceful chaps and few pioneers had guns. Americans want to believe otherwise because they want the past to be exciting. The gun-toting cowboy also fits in well with America's image of itself and thus reinforces that image: he's an independent, self-willed type who took fate by the scruff of the neck and carved out a life for himself on the rough frontier. It is unsettling to believe that the West was settled by bankers, accountants, land speculators and lawyers who spent more time behind a desk than astride a horse. In a more practical sense, the belief that the frontier was rough leads naturally to an assumption that life remains rough today and that, in order to survive, cowboy qualities remain essential. America's obsession with guns (and the belief that they are essential to survival) is a direct manifestation of this cowboy myth.¹

The cowboy myth also feeds a hunger for vicarious violence. No one likes violence close at hand, but most people have a fascination for it when it happens to others. It's exciting. This explains why so many films have violence as a central theme; if they were an accurate portrayal of real life, there would not be much hope for mankind. This fascination with violence encourages a warped view of the world, one encouraged by the media's obsession with the subject. News broadcasts invariably begin with stories of one individual killing another or one group carrying out unspeakable crimes upon another. We seem to forget that, even in the most violent cultures, actual violence is quite rare. Take Northern Ireland. Thanks to the media, the accepted image is one of constant gunfire and exploding bombs. Few people realise that, even at the height of the Troubles, Belfast was a reasonably peaceful city with a surprisingly low crime rate.

I should backtrack here and qualify my condemnation of the media. It may be a demon, but it is one created by its consumers. Like Frankenstein's monster, it reflects the proclivities and fascinations of a society, though perhaps in grossly exaggerated form. It might rage out of control but that is because society has endowed it with the power to do so. The media shows little interest

in the mundane for the very understandable reason that the public craves action. The media uses its power to create a caricatured view of the present and the past, thus distorting perception of the world outside.

These distortions are evident in common perceptions of war. Make no mistake: wars are horrible. But if they were as horrible as individuals tend to assume, or as Hollywood tends to portray, then they would not last as long as they do – all the available soldiers would be annihilated within a matter of weeks. Wars last long because most soldiers do not actually fight.

During the First World War the soldiers' greatest enemy was boredom. They stood for days on end in miserable trenches while nothing happened. It is no wonder, then, that many of them craved a fight, if only to get the sense that they were doing something and to assert their individual power over the mind-numbing monotony. Trench raids, which were ostensibly for the purpose of collecting intelligence from the enemy, were in fact mainly designed to keep the minds of soldiers sharp by giving them something exciting to do – in other words, to combat boredom.²

The war was horrible, but it was not unremitting horror. Offensives lasted months, but fighting was not constant. On the Western Front, the great offensives took place along relatively short stretches of the line. While some soldiers endured a terrible struggle on the Somme, others simultaneously experienced a quiet time in Picardy or Flanders. Charles Carrington, who is generally agreed to have had a tough war, analyzed how he spent 1916:

I find that ...I spent 65 days in front line trenches, and 36 more in supporting positions close at hand. ...In addition, 120 days were spent in reserve positions near enough to the line to march up for the day when work or fighting demanded, and 73 days were spent out in rest ... 10 days were spent in Hospital ... 17 days ... on leave. ... The 101 days under fire contain twelve 'tours' in the trenches varying in length from one to thirteen days. The battalion made sixteen in all during the year. We were in action four times during my ... tours in the trenches. Once I took part in a direct attack, twice in bombing actions, and once we held the front line from which other troops advanced. I also took part in an unsuccessful trench raid.³

Since Carrington's experience was pretty typical, it is safe to say that the average British soldier spent more time in a French *estaminet* eating eggs and chips than actually fighting the Germans. On the Eastern Front, soldiers spent the majority of their war manoeuvring for battle (or trying to find the enemy). Actual battles were short. In Salonika over 200,000 men waited nearly the entire war for

commanders and politicians to decide how and where they were to be deployed. Allied troops landed on Gallipoli on 25 April, fought ferociously for a few days, after which the battlefield settled into stalemate. The monotony was finally broken the following December when the invasion force was withdrawn. Though the fighting was short and the stalemate long, subsequent perceptions of Gallipoli are of horror, not boredom.⁴

Recent wars are hardly different. The average Viet Cong guerrilla spent only a few days out of every month actually fighting. The rest of the time was spent in what was called 'armed propaganda' which in truth meant proselytizing the local population, all in the interests of spreading the revolution. Tasks as mundane as building latrines and planting crops served the revolution. On the American side, by even the most generous calculation, only 15 men out of every 100 were actually engaged in combat. Most men were safely ensconced in rear echelon base camps where their task was to supply the combat machine in the hinterlands, or supply those who did the supplying, or supply those who supplied those who did the supplying. (You get the picture.) When the Americans left, they abandoned 71 swimming pools, 90 service clubs, 159 basketball courts, 30 tennis courts, 55 softball diamonds, 85 volleyball pitches, 337 libraries and 2 bowling alleys, all of which had to be staffed, during the war, by 'soldiers' who did no fighting.⁵

Among those assigned to combat, contact with the enemy was rare. Troops were sent on search and destroy missions, but these consisted of much more search than destroy. Fewer than five percent of patrols found the enemy and fewer still resulted in a firefight. Yet, somehow, every night, the evening news presented film of soldiers in action, thus giving the impression that every soldier was fighting constantly.

The past is, in other words, extremely mundane. We might even call it boring. Each human being experiences dramatic events in his or her everyday life – mini-crises that make the heart race. But, most of the time, these crises are too particularised to receive much attention outside that individual's closed circle and therefore do not make it into the history books. No one really cares, for instance, that Henry McToople nearly hit a bicyclist at an intersection in Topeka in 1963, even though the incident was deeply unsettling to both Harry and the bicyclist at the time.

History is fascinating precisely because it concentrates on the extraordinary – weird events or larger than life individuals. Books are populated with scoundrels, megalomaniacs, psychopaths, manipulators and sadists – and those are just the politicians. We read very seldom of genuinely good people, for two reasons. Firstly, good people don't usually make it very far, except when their goodness is itself extraordinary, as was the case with Gandhi. Secondly,

goodness simply isn't interesting, except to the congenitally sentimental.

Social historians will howl in protest that they indeed focus on the ordinary. The discipline, which has flourished since the late 1960s, supposedly seeks to uncover those hidden from history. Some very noble, illuminating research has been produced, but all too often historians who set out to study the ordinary somehow settle on the extraordinary. There are simple explanations for this. Even the most earnest social historian has a low tolerance for boredom. Ordinary people in 19th century Britain might have spent a lot of time doing the laundry, but who wants to research a book about washing clothes, much less read one? How much more fascinating it would be to research gambling, even if few people actually gambled. No wonder, then, that we have lots of books about the fringe activities in which a few workers engaged, and very little about what most people actually did.

Another reason why 'real' history is not written has to do with evidence. Suppose we have a sincere historian who wants to write about what life was really like for the working class in 19th century Britain. All historians need evidence, but where is the evidence to be found? True, there is census data and government reports, but this kind of material does not give much texture to history. Unfortunately, richer repositories of evidence exist, but too often they are rich precisely because they deal with the unusual. Police reports provide great detail, but about whom? Criminals are fascinating, but not typical. It is perhaps no wonder that books on 19th century crime abound, even though crime itself was not a huge problem. In contrast, we wait in vain for the definitive book about dishwashing.

The historian might, of course, collect letters and memoirs to get a feel for what life in the 19th century was like. But how representative is this evidence? Illiteracy was high and, even among those who could read and write, letter writing was rare because there was no real reason to correspond in this fashion since those of importance to one's life usually lived just a few blocks away. Thus, those letters that do exist are unrepresentative because they were written by people who were themselves extraordinary. The fact that they have survived renders them even more special, unusual and untrustworthy. In other words, is the coal miner who somehow managed to leave behind an eloquent testimony of his life in any sense typical? Can his description of his life be taken as an accurate account of the way other miners lived? Probably not.

Or, to return to the First World War, are the famous poets such as Siegfried Sassoon, and Wilfred Owen reliable witnesses of the war? Their poetry undoubtedly provides a hauntingly evocative picture of the trenches. But they all came from privileged backgrounds, went to elite private schools and had high expectations of life. No wonder the trenches seemed horrific to them. But

are they spokesmen for their men, the great majority of whom lived pre-war lives of drudgery, ill health, and dire poverty? We judge life's circumstances by the extent to which they deviate from our expectations. For Sassoon the deviation was great, for the ordinary soldier it was not. For the latter the Army meant strong boots, a good set of clothes, three meals a day and regular medical care.

The problem of evidence is huge. We tend to preserve that which seems to be important, and we equate importance with uniqueness. So, even if the historian did want to study the mundane, he might find it hard to do so. Like the physicist in search of the electron, he is certain of its existence but can't actually see it. But there is a solution to this dilemma. While it might be difficult to find evidence about a particular individual at a particular time, we can write the history of those deemed typical. Their story is recoverable, if only by picking up a piece of evidence here, and another from over there, and in the process building up a composite picture of what life was like for ordinary folk. The result would be the history of Everyman (or Everywoman)—by no means an accurate portrayal of one person's existence, but a pretty true to life reconstruction of the way the multitude fared.

The Importance of Important Events

But who cares about the typical? Many historians would argue that the unusual is by definition important; therefore it is only right that we should devote disproportionate attention to extraordinary events. But is that true, or is it just a feeble attempt to justify an obsession? Let us look again at war, which Lenin once called 'the locomotive of history.' Historians used to put a great deal of store in what Lenin said, but now we're not so sure. (He was, after all, the same guy who thought communism a good idea.)

Historians in the 1960s, starting from the Lenin premise, developed a whole school of thought devoted to the assumption that war is a great engine of social change. They armed themselves with a set of principles (really just theories plucked from the sky) that explained how wars, by taking people out of their accustomed circumstances and thrusting them into big jobs of national importance (a journey from the mundane to the sublime), served to 'liberate' marginalized groups—in particular women and the working class.

But that was a theory well suited to the sixties, the decade of hope and progress. Nowadays, those ideas seem as outdated as flared trousers and love beads. Granted, society has changed, but the change has not been as drastic or profound as the 'war and society' school believed. Historians like Stansilav Andreski and Arthur Marwick failed to give due respect to the power of tradition and the dead weight of habit. They failed to notice that, for most people, war is a dramatic event of limited duration. Granted, there were a few people, like Vera Brittain, author of the egocentric *Testament of Youth*, who were deeply

affected by the war and whose lives were changed irretrievably. But they weren't representative. The turbulence of wartime existed only in Brittain's mind and in the minds of the unrepresentative, overly sensitive elites to whom far too much attention has been devoted. The real world was much more prosaic and boringly stable. War was tragic, in some cases catastrophic. But for most people it was an extraordinary event of limited duration, which, as much as it brought change, also inspired a desire to reconstruct according to cherished, familiar patterns. It is well to remember that, in every culture, wars are usually fought to preserve the status quo, not to change it. The re-establishment of old patterns is considered fitting testimony to the dead.

Recently, historians have begun to respect the power of tradition and are therefore much more cautious when writing about social change. Unfortunately, this change of heart has not been copied by those who produce historical documentaries—for understandable reasons. Dramatic change makes great television. The public loves to watch programs about heroes, villains, catastrophes and conquests. As a result, though academic history admittedly distorts, television history is like one great carnival mirror. Those who get their history from television (and that includes most people) are taken on a roller coaster ride through the past. It is no wonder that myths develop.⁶ About a year ago, a producer sought my help on a documentary to be called 'Love, Sex and War.' She started from the premise that the sexual revolution usually associated with the 1960s actually occurred a generation before, when millions of women (particularly those who joined the services) shed inhibitions (and clothes) during World War II. Lusty soldiers roamed the streets in search of sexual distraction and (according to the misguided producer), an understanding government made prostitution a reserved occupation.⁷ I'm afraid I was forced to throw cold water on these assumptions. My own research has revealed that the vast majority of women remained chaste. Joy Harwood, who served in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, expressed a typical opinion:

Most of the men we met, young and fit for military service, would at some stage pose the question, 'Do you?', but usually they were willing to accept 'No' for an answer ... Fear of The Consequences meant for most of us that we carried our virtue around like albatrosses, longing to shift the burden if only we could be sure it were safe to do so, hovering in a half light of indecision. ...

As far as I was concerned, passion was bound in any case to fight a losing battle in the face of the extreme discomfort of it all; the back seat of a car was the wrong shape, a cornfield prickly and alive with small black insects, the weather always too hot or too cold, and the boy friend

too hasty or too casual. Then again, we had to be back in billets by midnight, or else we had to report for duty just as the big film was coming on, and one way and another it was surprising there was any romance in our lives at all.⁸

Virtually all of the women I interviewed described an atmosphere of upright moral behaviour and strict discipline in which the opportunities for adventure were rare. They may have been naive, but they could not have been blind. One suspects, therefore, that this picture of restraint is closer to the truth than the licentiousness preferred by gossipmongers at the time and television producers since. As the Markham Committee—a government body commissioned to look into the ‘problem’ of licentiousness—concluded: ‘virtue has no gossip value.’⁹

The sense of restraint is yet another rebuttal of those who believe that war, that ‘great locomotive’, brought profound social dislocation. These women found war tragic, exciting, romantic, but also temporary. While adventures proved tempting, they understood that when peace came traditional morality would be revived and that the penalties for a momentary lapse of virtue might be a lifetime of woe.

Undeterred, the producer pressed for names of lascivious women whom she might interview. When I tried again to correct her misconceptions, she politely terminated the conversation and never called back. Needless to say, the documentary went ahead. A sufficient number of women were found to give the impression that the war was one continuous orgy. The critics subsequently expressed delight at the program’s gritty portrayal of the ‘real’ war.

Though the documentary was a distortion, the producer was faced with a real dilemma. It is difficult to make a film about something that did not happen, in this case women who did not shed their inhibitions. But that merely reveals the common problem of starting from the assumption that the past was exciting and that the mundane is therefore insignificant. By a queer process of logic, the unusual becomes customary and those who ‘did nothing’ appear strange. Yet all around there are people today doing nothing in the sense of refusing to defy convention and carrying on with accepted routine. No one seems to wonder: if the past was so exciting, why is the present is so dull? I recall seeing a brilliant cartoon in a magazine of a housewife doing the dishes and listening to the radio. The announcer on the radio asks: ‘do you remember where you were when Kennedy was shot?’ In her mind, the housewife conjures up an image of herself years before – doing the dishes and listening to the radio. A more honest portrayal of social stability would be difficult to find.

A year ago, I was asked to consult on a documentary about conscientious objectors in the First World War. The fascination with COs is understandable. The two world wars have inspired great abhorrence of conflict and consequent

admiration for those who resisted. But to elevate them into importance now simply because we admire the moral stand they took years ago seriously distorts our vision of the past, and also imposes a modern moral code on previous generations. To ordinary Britons at the time, the COs were freaks totally out of step with the way the country felt about the war. They had virtually no effect upon the government’s conscription policies and did nothing to cushion conscription.

In other words, history reflects the present more than it reveals the past. We mine the past for gems that mirror our current obsessions and leave aside the bedrock of mundane normality. This explains why British and American historians have given disproportionate attention to left-wing groups like the Wobblies or the Communist Party, despite the complete failure of the far left to alter the political landscape. Historians attempt to imagine into existence a left wing culture that was in fact never more than a tiny tributary to the centrist mainstream. In *The Revolutionary Movement in Great Britain* (which surely fits the definition of a book about nothing), Walter Kendall speculates on what might have been in 1920, when victory over Germany seemed sour, workers were restless and jobs were scarce:

If socialist influence had existed within any of the services, if there had been, for example, a common front between soldiers and sailors ..., if the soldiers had launched a coordinated movement, or established links with any of the trade union struggles pending, then the whole future of the state might well have been called into question.¹⁰

And if pigs had wings they might fly. Historians are supposed to analyse, not fantasise. The important issue is not what might have happened, but what did. There was no revolution because nothing happened; for most people mundane normality seemed preferable to chaotic uncertainty. The British people turned away from conflict; status returned to quo.

Does It Matter?

Perhaps it doesn’t matter that history deals disproportionately with the extraordinary. After all, every culture needs heroes and villains. Dramatic stories are the raw material of which national identity and civic pride are made. But what do our heroes say about our understanding of the past and indeed of ourselves?

Molly Pitcher supposedly fired a cannon during the American Revolutionary War. For this reason alone, she has become a heroic icon for generations of feminists. In fact, her story is hazy; she may not have been a real individual but rather a mythical archetype that represents those women who

serviced the needs of male soldiers. Her name was perhaps an expression of the function she performed, namely that of water carrier.¹¹ Had she only carried water, she would be forgotten to history. But that is unfortunate. Napoleon recognized that an army runs on its stomach, that the key to a unit's effectiveness is its logistics system. Throughout history women have played enormously important roles in looking after armies, but have not been recognised for doing so. The problem lies not in the contribution women have made, but in the standard by which it has been measured. The great tragedy of Molly Pitcher is that she has been remembered because she *might* once have fired a cannon, not because she *was* a camp follower who carried much-needed water to thirsty troops. In fact, the latter function was far more important to the survival of her unit than the former.

Feminist historians have often paid homage to those freakish women who dressed as men in order to fight in wars, apparently unaware of the fact that, by doing so, they have merely demonstrated how gendered the military was. Because these extraordinary women were freaks, they have not made a convincing case for granting status to the multitude of 'normal' women who show no such inclination to challenge gender boundaries in such spectacular fashion. For instance, Trieu Thi Trinh, another feminist hero, was a mythical nine-foot tall Vietnamese giantess who rode into battle against the Chinese in the third century A.D. upon a massive elephant with her pendulous breasts slung over her shoulders. Yet, as icons go, she is safe precisely because few women share her physiognomy.

The point, I suppose, is that ordinary people live under the tyranny of heroes. The importance of the mundane, and the contribution which plain people make to the texture of everyday life has been obscured by the overemphasis upon 'great men' who supposedly disturb the equilibrium (but in fact hardly do so.) Heroes are elevated to god-like status, yet, because they have little relevance to real life, they contribute little to social progress and an understanding of the past.

Some years ago, Martyn Lewis, a newsreader for the BBC, complained that the stories he read everyday consisted of invariably bad news about extraordinary events. He proposed that a certain section of the nightly broadcast be set aside for good news. For that blasphemous suggestion Lewis was branded a right wing stooge of the Thatcher government, a media lackey keen to deflect the public's attention away from its troubles.

Lewis had a point. News broadcasts do deal almost exclusively with disasters and tragedies that are not typical, even though they are immensely dramatic. But his solution was not really appropriate, since the sort of good news, which would have been included in his revamped broadcast, would arguably have been as extraordinary as the bad news it replaced. More typical

events would be things like Johnny goes to school, Elmer delivers the paper or Molly delivers the water. But these would not really fit the definition of news.

There is a solution, or at least a way toward a more balanced, realistic view of the past. We will never rid ourselves of our fascination for the extraordinary, but we can nevertheless encourage an interest in the mundane. Last year, Channel 4 Television in Great Britain produced a brilliant social history documentary titled *The 1900 House*. A Victorian house in central London was 're-modelled' to fit a 1900 style of life. The coal-fired range, gas lighting, and outside toilet were re-installed. A family was then found to live in the house, in costume, for three months. They were filmed going about the most mundane tasks, which suddenly became fascinating. The British were gripped by the story of a family nearly torn apart by the pressures of living a 1900 life.

The most fascinating part of the series was how the mundane took on much greater importance than the big events of the time. The family was too tired with the strain of merely existing to take part in, or even pay attention to, the political developments of the era in which they were supposed to be living. In other words, it was difficult for the housewife to become a suffragette if she had to give all of her attention to the task of keeping the kitchen range hot. The series as a whole provided a valuable lesson in how the routine of daily life reinforces tradition and acts as a brake upon change.

Historians can do their bit to remind students and the general public about the great and the small – how ordinary people are often affected more by tiny events than by catastrophic ones. Recently I suggested to a large lecture class that the lives of women might have been changed more by the invention of the tampon than by the advent of universal suffrage. The remark provoked howls of derision, but mainly among male students. The females seemed, at least briefly, preoccupied with what life would be like without the convenient tampon. Granted, I might have been exaggerating the importance of one development at the expense of another. But the point was to get my students to think about how small things shape people's lives.

The past (including the immediate past) is too often viewed from the wrong end of a telescope. The desire for unusual stories is not surprising, since there is entertainment in all things weird. But those stories are misleading. We study the past not for the purpose of understanding, but rather to find bits that harmonize with current obsessions. In this sense, we shape the past in our own image. But, in the process, we fail to gain a sense of ourselves.

Who are we? Most of us are normal people who live mundane lives and seldom disturb the status quo in any perceivable way. But there is great stability in the fact that almost all of us fit that pattern. The mundane is, for most people, happiness. Granted, there are crisis junkies who survive on an emergency a day, but most of us crave the simple life with just the occasional dose of unusual excitement. We all like fireworks, but would not want everyday to be the 4th of July. The fact that the mundane is pleasing explains the power of tradition; most of us do not want the world to change much. Most consider great events an aberration – an interruption that is exciting while it lasts, but great when it is over. If life really was the way the news, documentaries and history books would have us believe, it is doubtful that man would have survived as long as he has.

Like it or not, most of the time ‘nothing happened.’ But in nothingness there was stability. The renegades and misfits of yesteryear might make good copy for the historian and documentary producer, but they aren’t really the shapers of our world. The stability, tradition, and mundane normality of the past are the best explanation for who we are today.

Notes

For a fascinating discussion of the development of the gun culture and the way historians have colluded in the creation of the myth of the wild frontier, see Michael Bellesiles, *Arming America: the Origins of the National Gun Culture*, (New York, 2000).

² The trench raid usually consisted of a small group of soldiers (perhaps ten) who would creep to the opposing trench in the dead of night, kill or capture a few of the enemy, and then creep back.

³ John Ellis, *Eye Deep in Hell*, (Baltimore: 1976), p. 29.

⁴ See the film *Gallipoli* (1981), directed by Peter Weir.

⁵ William Hauser, *America’s Army in Crisis*, (Baltimore, 1973), p. 103.

⁶ I recently had a discussion with a producer for the BBC and asked why a particular historian, who commands little respect within his profession, get so much work on TV. ‘He’s young, intelligent, controversial and good looking’ came the answer. ‘Yes’, I replied, ‘but he’s also wrong.’ The producer looked me in the eye and retorted: ‘That doesn’t matter.’

⁷ ‘Reserved Occupation’ meant a job essential to national survival. The worker in such a job was exempted from conscription. In Britain, women were conscripted either into the services, or industry or the agricultural workforce.

⁸ Joy Harwood, ‘Green 232’, unpublished memoir, Imperial War Museum Mss 88/53/1, pp. 24-5.

⁹ Report of the Committee on Amenities and Welfare Conditions in the Three Women’s Services, (UK Parliament), August 1942, para. 199, p. 49.

¹⁰ W. Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Great Britain*, (London, 1969), p. 187.

¹¹ See Linda Grant DePauw, *Battle Cries and Lullabies: Women in War from Prehistory to the Present*, (Norman, OK, 1998), pp. 126-31, for a discussion of the myth of Molly Pitcher.

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Living with an Invisible Family Medium

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The longer we live with television, the more invisible it becomes. As the number of people who have never lived without television continues to grow, the medium is increasingly taken for granted as an appliance, a piece of furniture, a storyteller, a member of the family.

Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, 17

Television has been conceptualized in exceedingly diverse ways. Federal Communications Commission chairmen have offered some of the most memorable metaphors. For example, in 1961, Newton Minow labeled television as “the vast wasteland,” (Barnouw 300), and, in 1983, Mark Fowler called television nothing more than a “toaster with pictures” (Mayer K-6). Since both FCC chairmen were addressing assemblages of the National Association of Broadcasters, you can imagine how well these epithets were received. Both images are useful, however, in that they point to the vacuous and ordinary properties often used to characterize this powerful and ubiquitous medium of communication.

Two other conceptualizations help round out the image of television we hope to portray. In 1971, Librarian of Congress Daniel Boorstin played on a popular image of television as a “cool fire” when he noted that “myriad . . . audiences gather nightly around their sets, much as cave-dwelling ancestors gathered around the fire, for warmth and safety and a feeling of togetherness” (36). Even more relevant for our purposes is a family systems analysis in which “the family system can be seen to include the family unit and the television. Family members interact with each other and with the television, both individually and as a family unit” (Goodman 408).

This leads to the premise of this article, that families and television have become practically inseparable in American society. Moreover, their relationship is symbiotic. Television depends on families for viewership and for financial support through succumbing to advertising pressures. Families depend heavily on television for information and entertainment, for subject matter for conversation and casual interaction, and for many other social and psychological functions.

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Family Usage of Television

A veritable catechism of statistics has emerged to describe the ubiquity of television in everyday life in America. We presume that most readers now know that television is in 98% of US households; that one or more sets is on for approximately seven hours per day per household; that television viewing occupies more of the typical American’s time than any activity other than sleeping and working, et cetera, ad nauseum.

Fewer people are aware of how dramatically the context of family television use is changing. When televisions first entered American homes in the 1950s and 60s, they occupied a prime spot in the gathering place of the home—the den or living room. Only a few options for programming were available, and the norm was for the family to gather and watch collectively. As American homes increased in size and television sets decreased in price, the ratio of televisions to homes increased (Andreasen 8). A national survey conducted for the Kaiser Family Foundation (Rideout, Foehr, Roberts, and Brodie) revealed that, whereas in 1970 35% of homes had more than one TV set, by century’s end 88% of homes had more than one set. In fact, 66% of households surveyed had three TV sets, 20% of homes had four sets, and 12% had five or more sets.

In addition to the increase in the number of sets within the home, the number of channels to choose from has also increased dramatically. Whereas the television set of the 50s and 60s offered 3 to 4 channels of relatively homogeneous programming, today’s television has the potential, with the right cable or satellite plan, to offer hundreds of channels, most of which are targeted to particular members of the family. Not only can different family members retire to different rooms of the house to watch television, they can also watch incredibly different programs. The use of the television as a community-building device within the family, therefore, is no longer the norm.

One of the biggest revolutions in family television usage has been the shift in the locus of children’s television viewing from the family room to the bedroom or the children’s playroom. As Rideout, Foehr, Roberts, and Brodie noted,

Children’s bedrooms are rapidly becoming ‘media central’ — More than half of all children have a radio (70%), tape player (64%), TV (53%), or CD player (51%) in their bedroom; a third (33%) have a video game player in their bedroom, and almost a third (29%) have a VCR there. More than one in seven (16%) has a computer in their bedroom (11).

In addition, in marked contrast from economic “common sense,” children from lower-income families are more likely to have a television in their bedroom than

children from higher-income families.

These statistics reflect the fact that other media have joined television in a convergence into entertainment central, not only in our family rooms, but also in our children's rooms. With this convergence, and with the introduction of digital television, WebTV, Internet-streamed programming, and a plethora of other technological gadgets, the definition of "television" seems to be constantly undergoing revamping.

A New Edition of a Book that Examines the Interface of Television and Family

We recently invited several of this country's preeminent scholars to join us in preparing a second edition of *Television and the American Family* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001), which we edited. We are pleased to be able to share with you through the pages of this journal some of the reflections and findings of the scholars who contributed to this volume.

Remote Control and VCR Use

Although perhaps less newsworthy than the influx of high-techmedia into American homes, probably the most marked technological changes in how the American family relates to television came from the integration of the VCR and the remote control into the family television landscape. Both devices made television viewing easier and, when utilized in combination, shifted the amount of energy that the family had to use to exert considerable additional control over their viewing. These simple tools permitted what seems to be an oxymoron—a simultaneously more active and lazier audience (Walker and Bellamy 76).

Remote control devices (RCDs) are an integral part of the family television viewing experience. These devices, which can be found in nearly every household, empower the viewer and frustrate the advertiser, complicating the symbiotic relationship between the television industry's desire for revenue and the American families' desire for entertainment and information. They also maintain the dual function of enhancing both parental control and childhood exploration, depending on who holds the remote (Walker and Bellamy 77). So who is winning in the family pastime of Couch Commando? A review of the literature on RCDs by Walker and Bellamy found that according to research in traditional nuclear families the male head of the household controls the remote almost exclusively. Walker and Bellamy also highlighted interesting findings for those few families where the RCD is not male-dominated. In looking at RCDs and family communication patterns, Copeland and associates found that in families where women controlled the remote control, there was a tendency to be more socio-oriented, to avoid conflict through mediation, and to use emotional and direct communication styles. In addition, the phenomenon of channel surfing

is more likely to occur when members of the family are viewing alone because the desire for control over what one watches could discourage group viewing. However, Walker and Bellamy do not necessarily believe that the need for control over technology will supercede the desire for companionship).

In addition to the remote control, the VCR has also had a strong impact of the way American families use television. In 1980, 1.1% of American households had a VCR; by 1997, that number had skyrocketed to 89%; and the projected penetration by 2000 was 93%, almost as high as the penetration of television sets (A.C. Nielsen Company 1). This basic household appliance serves three functions for the American family – to entertain, to displace other leisure activities, and to provide social utility (Lin). The VCR empowers the viewer to become an active participant in their viewing environment, to "take control" (Lin 93).

One of the most often cited "control" functions used by family members is "time-shifting," or recording programming for later viewing. Another less often-cited function, but one of utmost importance when discussing the relationship of the family to television, is the social utility function (Lin). Although three-quarters of American households have two or more television sets, most have only one VCR. Therefore, using the VCR to share a viewing experience is reminiscent of the family viewing behavior of the earlier years of television (Lin). Surprisingly, it is not only the parental figures in the family who can control what is watched via the VCR. Lindlof, Shatzer, and Wilkinson found that children as young as 3 years old could understand how to operate a VCR; moreover, they could also make demands on their parents as to what to watch and when to watch it. In general, although the VCR may take away from other social activities, such as going to the cinema, it also can create a convenient family-viewing environment.

The new generation of VCR-technology, the Personal Video Recorder (PVR), promises to make television viewing even more convenient (Andreasen). The early models (TiVO and ReplayTV), which hit the market in 1999, are computer units that empower viewers by allowing them to pre-select what programs, content, personalities, or topics they are interested in and then leaving the PVR to scan the available programming and record all user selected items (up to 20 hours, with the ability to record several programs at once). The programs can be played back at the viewer's leisure, and current models allow viewers to skip commercials. This device has the potential, therefore, to move some of the locus of power of the network television programmer to family viewers.

On the one hand, this new technology can improve the family viewing experience by helping parents select programs suitable for the entire family (a feat that many hoped would be realized with the V-chip, but this has yet to happen). On the other hand, if one family member dominates the PVR, then the

scope of viewing possibilities for the rest of the family is greatly diminished (Andreasen). Moreover, if consumers retain the ability to ignore the commercial segments of the programming, it is unlikely that the television-advertising world will just sit back and lose money. A likely consequence would be that television programming would begin to include more product placement and in-program commercials, making the delineation between television and the marketplace even more vague (Andreasen).

Co-viewing and Mediation

One of the most commonly cited problems with the role of the television in the American household is the lack of co-viewing between parents and their children. By the early 1990s, as will be discussed in more detail below, more children had two television sets in their home than they did two parents, making constant co-viewing practically impossible. Research has shown, however, that there is a great need for both co-viewing and parental mediation in order to enhance the pro-social possibilities of television and to abate its negative influences.

Parent's beliefs about the effects of television on their children will most likely affect their control of their children's home viewing (Abelman; Sprafkin, Gadow, and Abelman). Studies by Abelman showed that parental attitudes toward television affect the amount and types of direct intervention. Those parents whose primary concern was the cognitive effects of viewing were more likely to discuss content of the programs with their children. Parents concerned with behavioral effects were more likely to mediate and focused their control on restricting when and what type of programming watched.

Gunter and his colleagues (Gunter and Svenning; Gunter and McAleer) found that children whose parents who did not see television as having negative effects, or who did not see the need to restrict viewing were heavy viewers of commercial television. Amount of co-viewing of family programs has also been predicted by parent's positive orientation toward television and its possible socialization of children (Dorr, Kovaric, and Doubleday). The results of positive parental attitudes should be encouragement to watch, selection of beneficial programs for preschoolers, and, hopefully, a positive model for children in selecting good programming (St. Peters, Fitch, Huston, Wright, and Eakins).

Weaver and Barbour add that mediation also includes the "subtle, unintentional influence of . . . adults to shape children's physical and social world in terms of what they view on television" (236). According to Mills and Watkins, parents are less likely to mediate if they do not perceive television to have any effect, either harmful or beneficial, on their children.

Parental mediation of television comes in many forms, for instance, encouragement, discouragement, co-viewing, interaction, or any attempt to

influence children's viewing patterns. Bybee, Robinson, and Turow identified three types of parental guidance: restrictive guidance, evaluative guidance, and unfocused guidance. Restrictive guidance is the authoritative approach, focusing on limiting viewing of certain kinds of programs, encouraging viewing of other types, and switching the channel to deal with objectionable content. Evaluative guidance is the most interactive approach, engaging children in a discussion of what is going on both on and off the screen. Unfocused guidance is the most comprehensive approach, including co-viewing with the child, encouraging specific programming, and discussing content.

Within the domain of restrictive guidance are rules. Rules are a form of parental mediation that limit television viewing. Research has been conducted to relate rule making to parent disciplinary styles, number of family members, number of television sets in the household, parental attitudes toward television, and so forth. The evidence suggests that rule making can be used to increase children's learning from television as well as to attempt to minimize negative effects of televiewing.

Buckingham found that when interviewing parents, they "tended to exaggerate the degree of control over their children's viewing" (258). He surmised that this was because as good parents it was their duty to protect their children from the "corrupting" influence of television. Rossiter and Robertson found that mothers reported more rules than their children did, and that upper-class mothers were more likely to give the socially responsible answer of having more control over their children's viewing.

In larger families, control of children's viewing appears to be more lax. Buckingham noted that in larger families the children found they were under less scrutiny and it was easier to escape parental rules. There were more television sets, so the parents found it more difficult to enforce viewing rules. When older siblings were left in charge, they often did not ensure that younger children abided by the rules. Younger children had it easier because the older children had already fought the battles with parents and had gotten the rules relaxed. In their research, Gross and Walsh also found that as the number of TV sets in the household increased, the amount of parental regulation decreased.

According to the most recent data collected by the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC), the vast majority of parents have some sort of rules when it comes to children's television viewing (Schmitt). Roughly three-quarters of the 3rd graders in their study had limits on the amount of television they could watch, with most restricted to one or two hours a day (with more relaxed rules on the weekends). For 6th and 9th graders, fewer reported having such rules, but for those who did, the rules were essentially the same as for the 3rd graders. In addition, almost all children had some sort of content restriction on their

viewing. For younger viewers, offensive language was the main issue of contention; for older viewers, more restrictions, especially on sexual material, were in place. The violence issue was more salient for those children who live in urban areas than those in suburban areas. Moreover, rule making decreases with the child's age (Schmitt; Lin and Atkin). Attempts to encourage or regulate children's viewing become less effective as children get older. "It appears, however, that many television viewing habits are established early, so the experiences of children during the first 5 or 6 years of their lives may indeed have long-term consequences for the ways in which they use the medium" (Huston and Wright 182).

Parental mediation is relatively rare, however (Desmond, Singer, and Singer). The majority of parents does not have or enforce viewing restrictions (Gross and Walsh). In the absence of mediation, the presence of restrictions can have adverse effects (Desmond, Singer, and Singer). If parents call attention to or react strongly to a violent scene, they are conveying tacit approval of the antisocial behavior.

Whereas rule making is intended to limit viewing and the exposure to the negative effects associated with television, encouragement by parents is intended to emphasize the positive elements of television. St. Peters et al. conducted a two-year longitudinal study of parents of 3- and 5-year-olds and found that parents of 5-year-olds encouraged public television most. (It should be noted that this study was conducted before Nickelodeon and Disney began offering curriculum-based educational programming for young children.) Sesame Street was recommended by 65% of the parents and other PBS programs by 32%. For those turning 7-years old, only 28% named Sesame Street, but 31% named other PBS shows, 33% nature shows, and 30% children's specials. The most frequent reasons for parents recommending particular times to watch television were the convenience of the parents (35% for 5-year olds; 19% for 7-year olds), to produce behavior change (e.g., to get the child to calm down; 15%), to occupy the child (9%), or when a special program such as Sesame Street was on (9%).

Parents who encourage viewing particular programs at particular times are not simply pro-television; instead, they appear to be thoughtful and careful about their children's viewing. They usually encourage child-appropriate viewing that may be beneficial and they coview general audience programs with their children more than parents who do not encourage television viewing. This finding is consistent with Dorr et al.'s (1989) findings for older children showing that coviewing was predicted by positive parent orientations to television. (1421)

In addition to recommending particular programs, many parents use the "safe harbor" reputations of channels such as Nickelodeon, Disney, Discovery Channel, and PBS as guides for encouraging their children to watch educational programming.

Television as a reflection of the American family

The American family has changed dramatically during the past 50 years. In the 1940s and 1950s, a stay-at-home mom and an on-the-job dad typified the internal structure of the family. The external structure was grounded in a close-knit community in which neighbors looked after each other's kids, and grandma and grandpa often lived nearby and served as supplementary caregivers. During the 1960s these dominant community and family patterns began to change, and by the 1970s a major internal and external restructuring of the prototypical American family had taken place. In many instances, close-knit communities had been replaced by urban or suburban anonymity. Moreover, volatile job markets and shifting societal norms and expectations for success and well-being influenced families to move away from their roots, creating a U-Haul generation. By the mid-1980s, half of all U.S. marriages were ending in divorce, contributing to a substantial increase in the number of single mothers in the workforce. In addition, the rampant consumerism of this decade created a perceived need in dual-parent households for both parents to be gainfully employed. If the parents were not at home, younger children typically were in daycare, and professional childcare providers became one of the fastest growing occupational categories of the recent era.

The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) has conducted annual nationwide surveys about families since the early 1970s. A NORC report entitled "The Emerging 21st Century Family" (Smith) indicates just how much the American family evolved in the latter quarter of the Twentieth Century. Among the major changes are the following: (1) whereas most American families two decades ago included children, by the turn of the century kids were in just thirty-eight percent of homes; (2) although two married parents with children aptly described the typical family unit a generation ago, by 2000 that type of family could be found in only one in four households; (3) the most typical household at the turn of the century was that of an unmarried person with no children, which accounted for one-third of all U.S. households (double the 1990 rate); (4) whereas three out of four adults were married a generation ago, only slightly more than half of them were by 2000; (5) divorce rates more than doubled between the 1960s and the 1990s; (6) the number of women giving birth out of wedlock increased dramatically over the past generation, from five percent of births to nearly one-third of births; and (7) the portion of children living with a single parent jumped over a generation from one out of twenty to approximately

one out of five children. In other words, those who see families only in stereotypical terms of a mother, father, and two plus children have a very inaccurate image of families.

This brings into question, therefore, how the average American family is portrayed on television. Stephanie Coontz emphasized the importance of this question in a sociological history of American families:

Our most powerful visions of traditional families derive from images that are still delivered to our homes in countless reruns of 1950s television sit-coms. When liberal and conservatives debate family policy, for example, the issue is often framed in terms of how many 'Ozzie and Harriet' families are left in America. (23)

Several scholars have systematically examined how families are portrayed on television. Perhaps the most comprehensive examination is an investigation entitled "Five Decades of Families on Television," by James D. Robinson and Thomas Skill. A total of 630 fictional television series that featured a family and were telecast between 1950 and 1995 were examined. All of these series aired on one of four commercial networks (ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC); seventy-two percent were situation comedies and twenty-eight percent were dramas. The investigators profiled numerous ways in which the depiction of families on television has evolved over time, several of which are noteworthy.

One major change over time has been in the type of programming in which families are portrayed. In the 1950s, eighty-five percent of the families portrayed were in situation comedies and fifteen percent were in dramas. The proportion of families depicted in situation comedies decreased to seventy-seven percent in the 1960s, and to sixty-five percent in the 1970s. At this point, a slight reversal of this trend occurred, with sixty-seven percent of television's families presented in situation comedies in the 1980s and seventy-six percent in situation comedies in the 1990s.

Families with children have become increasingly prominent in television programs over time. In the 1950s, twenty-five percent of television's families were childless; in the 1960s, twenty-four percent had no children; in the 1970s, twenty-three percent; in the 1980s, seventeen percent; and in the 1990s, fewer than three percent of the families on television were childless. Whereas a decreasing proportion of real-life families had children as the 20th century progressed, television featured a countervailing trend.

A similar pattern of disparity in real-world and television families was also found in terms of the size of families. As we have mentioned, the size of America's real families decreased rather dramatically as the century progressed.

In contrast, television families have tended to get larger over time. In the 1950s, the average television family had 1.8 children; during the 1960s, 2.0 children; during the 1970s, 2.4 children; in the 1980s, 2.2 children; and during the 1990s, 2.5 children. Although the reasons for the divergence in these trends between real and television families are not entirely clear, it seems plausible that television writers and producers find it easier to create comedic and dramatic plots when children are part of the family. Nevertheless, with both trends, television is becoming less and less realistic in presenting representative families.

Jannette Dates and Carolyn Stroman systematically examined racial and ethnic depictions of families in a chapter entitled "Portrayals of Families of Color on Television." They concluded that the social realities of African American, Asian American, Native Americans, and Latino families have not been portrayed accurately; rather their portrayals are the stereotyped views of minorities held by television industry decision makers.

In contrast, trends in television families have tended to mirror trends in real families on other essential dimensions. For example, the number of married people heading household has dropped during the past five decades, from a high of 68.2 percent during the 1950s to a low of 39.8% in the 1990s, paralleling census findings.

In many instances, substantial differences between television and real families have been rather over the years. For example, the "empty nest" family (in which children are grown and living away from home) has been a common configuration for real families for decades, yet such families are seldom presented on television. According to Robinson and Skill's analysis, no such families appeared on television in the 1950s and during the first half of the 1990s, and the only decade in which more than one percent of television's families were empty nesters was the 1980s. On the other hand, families with children headed by a father who is a single parent are rare according to census data, ranging from one percent in the 1950s to just over three percent in the 1990s. Yet such families consistently have been prominent on television, ranging from seventeen percent in the 1950s, to a high of twenty-eight percent in the 1970s, to twenty-three percent in the 1990s. In some of these instances, it would appear that television's deviation from real-world orthodoxy might well initially have been arbitrary; however, when such conventions arose, they have tended to remain part of television's popular culture. What, if any, effects such aberrant depictions have on viewers' perceptions of reality has been of interest to numerous scholars.

Concerns about Impact

Concerns about the way families are depicted on television are grounded typically in assumptions that such portrayals will be assimilated into the psychological reality of the viewing public. Theories such as Albert Bandura's

social cognitive theory or George Gerbner's cultivation theory (e.g., Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli) suggest that such media effects can and do occur, for better and for worse. Psychologists Jerome and Dorothy Singer (e.g., Singer, Singer, and Rapacznski) have underscored such concerns, arguing that television has as much potential to influence the family as does the home environment, parental behavior, and the socioeconomic milieu of the family. Moreover, several influential research summaries have reached the conclusion that such concerns are valid, after examining considerable empirical evidence of media effects on families. For example, the National Institutes of Mental Health, in their summary of research about television's impact, concluded that the behaviors in "television families almost certainly influence viewers' thinking about real-life families" (Pearl, Bouthilet, and Lazar 70). But what type of influence?

Recent research by Bryant, Aust, Bryant, and Venugopalan found that, contrary to what many very vocal television commentators (especially recent political ones) have said, the families portrayed on prime time television are psychologically healthy, when measured by standard clinical psychological criteria. This research included the oft-cited Connors of *Roseanne* and Bundys of *Married with Children*. The authors emphasize that psychological health is not the only aspect of the television family with which researchers should be concerned, but as a political or soapbox scapegoat, claims of aberrant television families do not stand up to empirical assessments.

What Next?

With television and families both changing so dramatically, it would be foolish to predict the future regarding the interface of these two dynamic social institutions. If the past is in any way prologue to the present, however, it is almost certain that their fates will be inextricably intertwined.

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The co-authors are co-editors of *Television and the American Family*, 2nd ed. (Erlbaum, 2001). Despite totally incompatible television viewing interests (HGTV/MTV versus ESPN/Mystery TV), the two Bryants have remained the best of friends for 25 years.

The Role of Personal Characteristics and Romantic Characteristics in Parasocial Relationships: A Pilot Study

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Abstract: This study examined how individual characteristics (e.g., loneliness and openness) and dimensions of involvement in actual romantic relationships (e.g., rewards, costs, and investments) were related to parasocial relationships. Parasocial relationships represent the degree of affinity and involvement in “interactions” with television characters. The respondents (n=45) completed a questionnaire packet to assess each of these factors. The results indicated that romantic, rather than individual characteristics were the best predictors of parasocial relationships. More specifically, individuals who had greater rewards, greater costs, and fewer investments in romantic relationships were more involved in parasocial interactions. These findings were interpreted in the context of spillover and compensatory processes, and highlighted the need for research that integrates media and close relationship studies.

Television viewing is one of the most common and pervasive of social activities among Americans. According to Lowery and DeFleur (1995), by 1959 Americans had purchased more than 50 million television sets and 88% of American homes had a television; this rate has continued to increase over time. The amount of time dedicated to watching TV has also expanded. According to the Global Child Health Society (2001), if current viewing rates continue, then individuals will have spent 7-10 years of their life span watching television. Much research on television has focused on extreme dimensions of programming such as violence (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980) and sexual images in soap operas (Greenberg & Busselle, 1996).

These are important issues, but fail to focus on the less explosive (but perhaps more relevant aspects of TV viewing) such as the enjoyment in watching a favorite character or show on a routine basis. Many people spend a great deal of their lives in front of the television, but might not attach much importance to this behavior. Yet, the repeated exposure to TV, and emerging attachments to favorite TV characters, can make demands that are easily ignored in daily and weekly routines (e.g., time, energy, attention). Further, the quality of one’s social

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interactions might affect viewing habits; that is, individuals who are less satisfied with their actual romantic partner might be drawn to more attractive others presented in TV shows. Schaffer (2000) argued that activities that compose much of our common routines deserve more empirical attention. Consistent with this argument, the present study focused on the ways in which romantic relationships are associated with attachments to preferred television characters.

Parasocial Relationships

The connection to TV personalities/characters has been identified as a parasocial relationship in media research. Perse and Rubin (1989) suggested this reflects “a perceived interpersonal relationship on the part of a television viewer with a mass media persona” (p. 59). The performers/personalities coax the viewers’ investment by speaking directly to the camera (enhancing the perception of a mutual “dialogue”), engaging in self-disclosure, and requesting viewer feedback. Similarly, Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) argued that TV stations promote such attachments to newscasters by attempting to make reporters attractive and consistent in their presentation style.

Horton and Wohl (1956) provided a classic overview of what they perceived to be the social dynamics of parasocial relationships. They argued that television viewers are not passive participants, but actively engage in a specific form of interaction with television personalities (e.g., Steve Allen). That is, viewers make not only an investment of time by watching shows on a regular basis, but they make an emotional investment of loyalty, interest in the personalities’ well-being, and “dialoging” by responding to personality questions/actions. For example, Levy (1979) found that some individuals reported verbally responding to television personalities’ greetings and acknowledging the end of the program as one might acknowledge the end of a social visit (e.g., saying “good night” or “see you later”). This parasocial relationship might also be reflected in such behaviors as “coaching” (e.g., shouting directions) a sports team from your living room when the game is being played 2000 miles away, answering questions asked by a game show host, or advising a TV character to take or not take a job while the interview is portrayed on TV. Similarly, feeling embarrassment, misery, joy, pride, etc. in response to the trials and tribulations of the character’s life reflects a parasocial investment. Indeed, in the film, “Marvin’s Room”, Aunt Ruth dresses in her finest clothes so that she is properly attired to ‘attend’ the wedding of her favorite TV characters when the episode is broadcast (Rudin, Rosenthal, & De Niro [producers], 1996).

These parasocial interactions offer many social benefits. In addition to companionship, they provide the opportunity to create/test new social personas,

see models of social behaviors (e.g., intimacy, generosity), and learn cultural values (e.g., importance of marriage, parenting). For example, Perse and Rubin (1989) indicated that due to the nature of repeated viewing, one benefit of parasocial interaction is a perceived reduction in uncertainty about social relationships. Their study of soap opera characters showed that individuals who watched more television perceived that they knew these characters better and that such characters had complex personalities.

Perse and Rubin (1989) concluded that these findings demonstrated that the same cognitive constructs utilized in building actual social relationships are extended to the parasocial domain. Similarly, Rubin and McHugh's (1987) study indicated that the more importance an individual placed upon a specific television character, the more likely he or she was to (a) find the character attractive, and (b) develop a parasocial interaction with that character. Horton and Wohl (1956) concluded that parasocial relationships affirm, rather than replace, actual social relationships for the majority of viewers.

Other researchers strove to determine what types of individuals were predisposed towards creating parasocial bonds with television characters. In examining attachment styles, Cole and Leets (1999) reported that individuals with anxious-ambivalent attachment were most likely, and avoidant individuals were least likely to enter into parasocial relationships. They argued that "anxious-ambivalents turn to relatively stable TV characters as a means of satisfying their unrealistic and often unmet relational needs" (p. 507). Such research indicates that personal characteristics are related to parasocial interactions.

In sum, this research has shown that TV viewing while perceived to be mundane is not unimportant. Mandel (2000) argued that the interactions between storytellers and audience are complex and in part define social realities; we would argue that the same can be said of the interactions between TV characters and TV viewers. This relationship might have been presumed to be unidirectional and passive, but a more complex process occurs when TV viewers see themselves as active participants in TV characters' lives. Such a view would support significant investments in these parasocial relationships. An examination of parasocial relationships in the context of actual relationships has received little attention to date. Media researchers might have considered the specific nature of the social network as irrelevant to TV viewing, but we suggest that there might be a significant interplay between actual and parasocial relationships. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to address this gap in the literature by determining the role that individuals' personal and romantic characteristics play in parasocial relationships.

The Current Study

In the current study, we chose to examine the personal factors of openness and loneliness. Miller, Berg, and Archer (1983) defined openness as the capacity to elicit self-disclosure from others. They theorized that high openness is associated with good communication skills and more positive interactions with others. Their own research indicated that openness was related to greater social competence and more affection from others in long term relationships. Similarly, individuals with greater openness demonstrated better interpersonal skills in social interactions (Shaffer, Ruammake, & Pegalis, 1990). Thus, openness might be associated with more gratifying interactions with actual relationship partners and less parasocial involvement.

The second individual characteristic we investigated was loneliness. This represents a subjective individual experience of deprivation or isolation, marked by a discrepancy between what is desired and experienced in personal relationships (de Jong Gierveld, 1987). Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona (1980) argued that loneliness is an important trait to investigate because it is experienced by so many individuals and has important implications for social functioning. They argued that loneliness is distinct from social integration; that is, individuals can have many members in their social networks, but still be lonely if the relationships fail to meet their expectations. Thus, individuals who are currently in romantic relationships may still experience loneliness if their relational ideals are not fulfilled. As a result, parasocial relationships may not be restricted to only those individuals who lack social relationships.

It seems reasonable to expect that lonelier individuals might be attracted to the companionable aspects of television, and thus be more involved in parasocial relationships. Indeed, Horton and Wohl (1956) stated that "nothing could be more reasonable or natural than that people should seek sociability and love wherever they think they can find it" (p. 223). Thus, they suggested that lonely individuals would be drawn towards parasocial relationships. Cohen (1997), however, argued that past research has revealed inconsistent patterns of association between loneliness and parasocial involvement. For example, Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) found that parasocial interaction and loneliness were both related to greater reliance on television, but loneliness was not a significant predictor of parasocial interactions. Further research will help to clarify the parasocial-loneliness association.

We also extended previous research by examining parasocial relationships in the context of romantic experiences. More specifically, we assessed the degree of involvement (as reflected in rewards, costs, and investments) in the romantic relationship. According to Nye (1979), rewards are the positive aspects of a partner and/or relationship. Examples of rewards

include sharing enjoyable leisure activities (Huston & Vangelisti, 1991), or expressing appreciation, sharing affection, and giving gifts (Davis & Oathout, 1987). Costs are negative aspects of a relationship, represented by such actions as intentionally irritating (Huston & Vangelisti, 1991), criticizing, ignoring or dominating a partner (Davis & Oathout, 1987). Rusbult and Buunk (1993) defined investments as resources that would be difficult or impossible to retrieve if a relationship ended. Years spent together, shared memories, 'couple friends', joint purchases (e.g., car, vacation) would all be examples of such investments. In addition, personal sacrifices, such as declining a promotion to stay with a partner, are a form of investment. Individuals are more committed and satisfied with relationships that are characterized by high rewards, low costs, and high investments (Kurdek, 1995).

Much research has examined how investment model factors contribute to romantic relationships (e.g., Duffy & Rusbult, 1986; Lund, 1985), but very little is known about how such factors affect parasocial relationships. Thus, individuals who find their actual romantic relationships more aversive (e.g., less rewarding, more costly, fewer investments) might become more involved in parasocial relationships. Similarly, it makes sense that from a compensatory perspective, individuals who are less involved or invested in their romances might be drawn to parasocial relationships as a more attractive relationship.

In sum, the present study focused on how personal characteristics and actual romantic relationships were related to the degree of involvement in parasocial relationships. Thus, the following research questions were addressed:

Research Question 1 – What role do openness and loneliness (individual characteristics) play in parasocial relationships?

Research Question 2 – What role do rewards, costs, and investments (romantic characteristics) play in parasocial relationships?

Method

Sample and Procedure

As part of a larger study, data were collected from 45 undergraduate students at a southwestern university. Individuals were eligible to participate in this study if (a.) they watched television, and (b.) were currently in a romantic relationship (steady dating, 69%; engaged, 22%; cohabiting, 9%). The majority of the sample (69%) were Caucasian, 22% were Hispanic, and 9% were African-American. Thirty-one percent of the students were male, 69% were female. The mean age for the sample was 20.3 years. The sample represented all undergraduate levels (freshman, 31%; sophomores, 18%; juniors, 20%; seniors 31%).

Parasocial Factors

All respondents completed a questionnaire packet. To assess the strength of parasocial involvement, we utilized Cole and Leets' (1999) modified Parasocial Interaction Scale. This scale originally focused on individuals who represent themselves on television, that is TV personalities (e.g., Regis Philbin, Star Jones). For the present study, we revised the items to reference favorite television characters because fictional characters represent a larger proportion of television programming and thus, a potentially richer source of parasocial relationships. For example, the original item, "I look forward to watching my favorite TV personality's show" was changed to "I look forward to watching my favorite TV character's show". Nineteen items from the original scale were adapted for this study. For all questionnaires, individuals indicated on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree", 9 = "strongly agree") the extent to which they agreed with each item. Higher scores represented more involvement in parasocial relationships. The internal consistency alpha was .90.

Personal Factors

Respondents also completed the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980). This was a 20-item scale (e.g., "My interests and ideas are not shared by those around me"). Higher scores on this scale indicated greater loneliness. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .88. To assess openness, Miller, Berg, and Archer's (1983) Opener Scale was utilized. The scale was composed of ten items (e.g., "People frequently tell me about themselves"). Reliability for this scale was .83.

Romantic Relationship Factors

The Multiple Determinants of Relationship Commitment Inventory (Kurdek, 1995) was used to measure relationship investment factors. The scale utilized a four-item subscale to measure each of the relational characteristics (e.g., rewards - "One advantage to my relationship is having someone to count on"; costs - "I give up a lot to be in my relationship"; and investments - "I've put a lot of energy and effort into my relationship"). Given the brevity of the subscales, internal consistency was adequate (rewards=.63; costs=.78; investments=.66).

Results

Preliminary analysis

To examine the strength of association between the variables, we conducted Pearson product-moment correlations (see Table 1). This analysis indicated that parasocial involvement was not related to personal characteristics, but was associated with greater romantic rewards ($r=.33, p<.05$). Openness was related to less loneliness ($r=-.51, p<.01$); this moderate correlation suggested that the two characteristics tap into somewhat unique dimensions of individual differences. Loneliness was associated with more costs ($r=.34, p<.05$). This finding was consistent with Rusbult and Arriaga's (1997) argument that personal traits contribute to the dimensions of relational investments in romances and marriages.

Research Questions

Given the associations between individual, romantic and parasocial factors, we utilized a single one-step regression to address the research questions. This regression allowed us to control all factors simultaneously, and thus provided a more conservative examination of parasocial relationships. The regression indicated that, collectively, the personal characteristics and investment factors accounted for 36% of the variance (Adj. $R^2=.27, p<.001$) in parasocial involvement. An examination of individual factors indicated that neither loneliness nor openness was a significant predictor. However, greater costs ($b=.41, p<.01$) and greater rewards ($b=.48, p<.01$), as well as fewer investments ($b=-.35, p<.05$) in actual relationships were associated with parasocial involvement. Thus, our findings indicated that romantic factors played a significant role in parasocial relationships.

Discussion

Mandel (2000) stated that "addressing the mundanities of our everyday existence reveals crucial truths about ourselves and our lives that, once put to scrutiny, expose the richness and diversity of what we may have assumed did not bear examination". Our findings supported this argument, as there was an important association between the dimensions of romantic involvement (e.g., rewards, costs) and the nature of parasocial involvement. This suggested that there might be a common interplay between interactions with significant others and TV viewing that was not previously considered. The degree to which individuals initiate and maintain parasocial relationships may be affected in part by their daily routines with their romantic partners. The association between loneliness and parasocial relationships detected in the correlational analysis

disappeared when analyzed in the regressions, indicating that romantic factors superseded personal factors in contributing to parasocial processes. These findings highlighted the importance of examining both personal and romantic factors in such research.

Strengths and Weaknesses

There were some strengths to this study that merit acknowledgment. First, the participants' responses to the questionnaire were anonymous. Given that some aspects of the study had the potential for embarrassment (e.g., the degree of closeness felt towards an imaginary television character), anonymity was assured to enhance more honest and accurate responses. Second, this study examined the association between parasocial and actual relationships. There has been past speculation regarding how parasocial relationships affect people's "real lives" (Horton & Wohl, 1956), but such speculation has not been empirically tested. Our findings suggested that there is indeed an interplay between the social and parasocial worlds, and indicate the need for more research.

Third, we directly measured the dynamic (e.g., degree of interest, affinity) features of parasocialism. Rather than presuming degree of involvement from structural dimensions (e.g., hours watching TV), we assessed the emotional/psychological dimensions, which more accurately reflect the concept of parasocial relationships. Finally, our study focused on favorite television characters, which has been an understudied phenomenon in media research. The frequency of exposure and long-term nature of fictional characters suggest that this is an important source for parasocial involvement worthy of more empirical attention.

In balance, there were some limitations to this study that should be considered. First, the sample was relatively homogenous, and the results obtained may not be representative of the general population. In addition, the sample size ($n=45$) was fairly small and might have limited the statistical power of this study. Second, data was collected from only one member of the romantic relationship, so it is unknown whether partners would support the respondents' view of the romantic (or parasocial) characteristics. A comparison of partners' parasocial and romantic experiences would clarify the associations between both relationships. We should note, however, that because parasocial involvement is an intrapersonal experience, self-report methods do seem warranted. Finally, data collection occurred at only one point in time, so we were unable to detect changes in the associations between personal, romantic, and parasocial characteristics over time.

Interpretation of Findings

Given that regression is the more conservative statistical test, we will discuss only the findings from the regression analysis. Consistent with past research (e.g., Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985), we found that an individual characteristic (loneliness) was not associated with parasocial involvement. Past studies have reported that loneliness was related to more structural characteristics of TV use (e.g., Perse & Rubin, 1990), but the association to parasocial involvement has been less clear. It is possible that the parasocial relationships fail to ameliorate the emotional aspects of loneliness, but simply watching television effectively "passes the time". Additionally, lonely individuals might lack the emotional energy to make an investment in a TV-based relationship.

Alternatively, loneliness might be related to parasociality in other mediums; Perse and Rubin (1990) noted that their respondents (undergraduates) were more likely to use movies, rather than television as a personal resource. In their early loneliness review, Perlman and Peplau (1981) argued that it is necessary to distinguish between the behaviors that create, accompany, or mollify this experience. It is possible that parasocial involvement could represent all three behaviors, and further refinement is necessary to clarify its association (or lack thereof) to loneliness.

We also found that individuals' degree of openness did not contribute to parasocial involvements. One explanation might be that the recipient quality of television viewing would preclude the need to utilize one's openness in a parasocial relationship. The nature of programs demands that TV characters reveal much personal information (e.g., preferences, traits); thus, eliciting self-disclosure (opening) might not be necessary or relevant to a parasocial bond. This is consistent with Kalekin-Fishman's (2000) analysis of everyday conversation. She noted that conversation works when there is presumed commonality among individuals. It is possible that TV viewers assume they have much in common with their favorite characters that would preclude the need to be more open.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that examined the association between romantic involvement (e.g., rewards, costs, investments) and parasocial interactions. The results of this study indicated that individuals who perceived more costs and fewer investments in their current romantic relationships were more involved in parasocial relationships. These findings support the investment model premise that individuals who are in aversive relationships (e.g., high costs and fewer irretrievable investments) might be less engaged in their romance and thus see parasocial partners as less unpleasant and more appealing. From a compensatory perspective, it makes sense that

individuals may use parasocial relationships as one way to fulfill desires or address needs (e.g., for attention, companionship) that are unmet in their romances. In addition, some individuals might perceive that parasocial relationships do not violate the conditions of a romance (e.g., fidelity) that other forms of media, such as the internet, provide. This allows them to continue both involvements simultaneously.

It was somewhat curious, then, that greater romantic rewards were also associated with more parasocial involvement. One possibility is that individuals who experience more rewarding relationships may be more willing to engage in other types of relationships. Interactions with significant others might create a pleasant social environment, motivating individuals to seek other gratifying experiences. Thus, it is possible that the rewards from actual relationships and rewards from television relationships are mutually reinforcing.

These findings are consistent with Wilensky's (1960) Spillover Model. This model has been used to explain the dynamics between work-family domains. More specifically, this model argues that consistency can occur across different arenas of people's lives, such that the gratifying aspects in one area of life (e.g., romance) would contribute to positive experience in another area (e.g., parasocial interactions). Another consideration might be that romantic partners watch the preferred TV shows together. If this is a pleasant experience, then individuals might enjoy both relationships (actual and parasocial) simultaneously. Further, a partner's tolerance and/or support of parasocialism (e.g., taping the show if one is out of town) might increase positive perceptions of the romance. The current study did not assess viewing patterns with or without romantic partners, but such research might help to clarify the romantic-parasocial association.

An alternative explanation might be that parasocial relationships offer unique relationship rewards that are not conveniently available in actual relationships. Just as Kalekin-Fishman (2000) argued that plain talk can offer multiple benefits (e.g., providing norms, clarifying future intentions), TV can be a source of multiple pleasant, albeit vicarious, experiences. This is consistent with Herzog's (1944, as cited in Lowery & DeFleur, 1995) finding that individuals utilize media as a means of obtaining several types of gratification (or rewards), such as emotional release, wish fulfillment, and valuable advice. It should be noted that the contrasting results for rewards and costs are consistent with social exchange principles that suggests these factors are somewhat distinct, and not simply two ends of a single continuum (e.g., Nye, 1979).

Future Directions

Given the primacy of television in American leisure, more research is needed to specify the nature of parasocial and actual relationship involvements.

Research can be enhanced by assessing the parasocial experiences of viewers that represent a broader demographic base. It is possible, for example, that the nature of parasocial relationships differ for younger and older adults, or African-American professionals and Caucasian-American at-home workers. A larger and more diverse sample might increase the generalizability of our results. Second, the investigation of other personal characteristics (e.g., self-esteem, shyness, novelty seeking) might provide more insight into the role of individual differences in parasocial involvement. In addition, the assessment of other romantic characteristics (e.g., conflict tactics, satisfaction, commitment) would enhance our understanding of the associations between these two types of relationships.

Third, longitudinal research would detect fluctuations in the associations among individual, relational, and parasocial factors, and would allow conclusions about causality. Such a study would also allow researchers to investigate how different stages of a romantic relationship (e.g., initiation, breakup) might contribute to parasocial involvements. Fourth, a multi-method approach might provide more detailed data about these factors. For example, focus groups would allow for greater participant feedback about parasocial processes that are not detected via a questionnaire. Similarly, TV viewing diaries might elucidate specific parasocial experiences. It is possible and perhaps likely that the nature of parasocial relationships is defined by idiosyncratic behaviors (e.g., talking to the television character during the program) that are not easily captured in more global measures. Given that most parasocial studies have relied on questionnaires (e.g., Cole & Leets, 1999; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985), it might be the appropriate time to expand measurement approaches.

In sum, our study identified some associations between individuals' actual romantic and parasocial relationships. Our findings defy the stereotype that parasocialism is limited to individuals who are socially isolated. Rather, it appears to be an important phenomenon in the context of relationships with romantic partners. It is possible that relationship researchers have considered TV viewing too mundane to be relevant to romantic functioning, and have focused on more extreme events (e.g., domestic violence). However, just as Orleans (2000) argued that ordinary individuals are undervalued by larger political systems, so too the ordinary moments of close relationships might be undervalued by social systems. Yet, some have argued that it is in the small moments in daily life that the most important relational processes occur (e.g., Duck, 1990). Given the centrality of romance and the extent of TV viewing common to so many people, further research into the confluence of these two dimensions of daily life seems warranted.

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Table 1. Correlations among the personal factors, romantic factors, and parasocial factors.

| | Openness | Loneliness | Rewards | Costs | Investments | Parasocial Involvement |
|---------------------------|----------|------------|---------|-------|-------------|------------------------|
| Personal Factors | | | | | | |
| Openness | | -.51** | .09 | -.18 | .03 | -.05 |
| Loneliness | | | -.01 | .34* | -.06 | .26 |
| Romantic Factors | | | | | | |
| Rewards | | | | -.26 | .26 | .33* |
| Costs | | | | | .16 | .28 |
| Investments | | | | | | -.15 |
| Parasocial Factors | | | | | | |
| Parasocial Involvement | | | | | | |

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 2. Regression of parasocial involvement on personal and romantic factors (n=45).

| Factor | B | SE B | β |
|-------------------------|-------|------|---------|
| Personal Factors | | | |
| Openness | .04 | .44 | .02 |
| Loneliness | .17 | .25 | .11 |
| Romantic Factors | | | |
| Rewards | 4.05 | 1.23 | .48** |
| Costs | 1.44 | .54 | .41** |
| Investments | -3.13 | 1.29 | -.35* |

Note: $R^2 = .36$ (Adjusted $R^2 = .27$), $p < .001$.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

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Psychiatry in the Media: The Vampire, The Fisher King, and The Zaddik

Ronald Pies, MD

Abstract: The portrayal of psychiatrists in popular movies has been colored by three main stereotypes: the "evil" doctor, the "kooky" doctor, and the "wonderful" doctor. On one level, these depictions represent the understandable ambivalence many people feel toward authority figures who, from time to time, may abuse their power. But on a more primal level, these stereotypes may be related to three *archetypes* that I call *The Vampire*, *the Fisher King*, and *The Zaddik*. A number of films and television programs are analyzed in light of these archetypes, and their antagonistic relationship to the "mundane". Some implications for the future of psychiatry and the cinema are discussed.

As a psychiatrist, I usually try to stay away from movies about mental illness. In the first place, I feel that I've already "given at the office" and usually want a little respite from the ravages of schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and suicidal impulses. More than that, though, Hollywood almost always gets mental illness wrong – and usually does a hatchet job on the psychiatrist, psychologist, or psychotherapist on the case. But why is this so?

It's probably obvious that the general public has strongly ambivalent feelings about psychiatrists and others usually referred to as "shrinks". (For purposes of this essay, I will use the term "psychiatrist" generically, even though, as *physicians*, psychiatrists occupy a unique niche among mental health professionals). This ambivalence shouldn't be surprising – after all, how *should* you feel about someone who has the power to help you rise from the depths of depression, or, potentially, to lock you away in the bowels of an institution? Many still share Emily Dickinson's perception that, when it comes to mental illness,

*'Tis the Majority
In this, as All, prevail -
Assent – and you are sane –
Demur – you're straightway dangerous –
And handled with a Chain –*

We are ambivalent about psychiatrists in roughly the way we are about priests

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and prophets—simultaneously revering and reviling them, wishing for their benign intercession while fearing their malign control. And, yes—it doesn't help that some of us in the profession are great, inexhaustible gas-bags, as the producers of *Frasier* well know. But I think the story is richer and more complex than this. Beneath the Hollywood depictions of psychiatrists are some enduring and ancient *archetypes*—those primal structures of the human psyche that Carl Jung called the collective unconscious. In this essay, I utilize the archetypal approach developed by psychologist James Hillman in his book, *The Dream and the Underworld* (1979). There, Hillman argues that dreams are phenomena that emerge "...from a specific archetypal "place" and that correspond with a distinct mythic geography...". Hillman invokes the figures of Greek mythology, such as Hercules and Narcissus, to develop a "depth psychology" of dreaming. Similarly, I want to suggest that beneath the three stock movie-types described by Irving Schneider—Dr. Evil, Dr. Dippy, and Dr. Wonderful (Gabbard & Gabbard¹; Clara²)—are three sustaining *archetypes*: respectively, *The Vampire*, *The Fisher King*, and *The Zaddik*. Finally, I argue that Hollywood's attitude toward the "mundane" has created an inauthentic sense of both patients and their caregivers.

The Vampire

When I think of vampires, I think of Bela Lugosi's wonderful movie portrayals of Count Dracula. As an adolescent, I was always mesmerized by Lugosi's mix of old-world charm and diabolical evil. Nobody set a better table in the old castle than Bela, and nobody had more courtly manners. Too bad you probably won't survive the night in Castle Dracula without having the blood sucked from your jugular vein...ah, well, I've met with worse at some motels on I-95.

The vampire represents one archetypal understanding of the psychiatrist: cultivated and intelligent on the outside, Pure Evil on the inside—a creature that saps his victims of their vital fluids (or "shrinks" their heads). This archetype, sadly, is always reinforced when a report appears of sexual abuse at the hands of a psychotherapist. (The same applies to the priest who sexually abuses the choirboy). In the cinema, the psychiatrist as vampire is nowhere better depicted than in the character of Dr. Hannibal ("The Cannibal") Lecter, in *The Silence of the Lambs*. Lecter is both a brilliant psychiatrist and a mass murderer who devours his victims. Despite his outward calm, Lecter is, in Roger Ebert's words, "...like a savage animal confident of the brutality coiled up inside him" (Ebert³). Lecter's connection with vampires is elaborated in Thomas Harris's sequel to *The Silence of the Lambs*, entitled simply *Hannibal*. There we learn that Dr. Lecter—now posing as a Renaissance scholar in Florence—traces his ancestry to a certain Giuliano Bevisangue, a fearsome twelfth-century figure. The name *Bevisangue* may be understood as a condensation of the verb *bevere* (to drink)

and *sangue* (blood). The book cover of *Hannibal* is also strangely archetypal, showing an object that, from a distance, vaguely resembles the physician's *caduceus*—but which proves to be a coiled serpent ingesting a human figure. Again, the primal image is that of the apparently benign care-giver who proves to be a monster.

The vampire archetype is played out in more or less flagrant ways in numerous "evil doctor" movies, including Laurence Olivier's infamous Nazi dentist, Dr. Szell, in *Marathon Man*. Sometimes, the evil psychiatrist has a stand-in, as in Milos Forman's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, based on the novel by Ken Kesey. There, the infamous Nurse Ratched (a conflation of "wretched" and "rat s-t") serves as the agent of outward calm and inward evil. In *Cuckoo's Nest*, psychiatrists are rather shadowy, background figures, but presumably it is they—acting under the evil influence of Nurse Ratched—who order Jack Nicolson's McMurphy character to undergo "electroshock" treatment. In short, whether it is a creature who sucks one's blood, devours one's body parts, or fries one's brain, the psychiatrist-as-vampire archetype underlies Hollywood's depiction of "the thoroughly evil psychiatrist" (Clara², p. 7).

The Fisher King

Fans of T.S. Eliot may remember that in his magnum opus, *The Waste Land*, Eliot plays with the mythic figure of the "Fisher King"—described, in Eliot's own notes as "the impotent King of the waste land..." (Eastman⁴, p.1002). The Fisher King pops up in the medieval myths surrounding the hero-knight variously known as Peredur, Percival, or Parzifal—the basis for Wagner's famous opera, *Parsifal*. (It was also the basis for the movie about a mentally unbalanced but inspired street person, played by Robin Williams). Depending on the version of the myth, the Fisher King is actually Parzival's uncle, and is custodian of the Holy Grail. But because of his sinful ways, the Fisher King has either suffered some kind of sexual wound, or has been struck dumb. Ultimately, Parzifal restores the Fisher King's power of speech, or heals his wound, and succeeds him as King.

Now, the Fisher King, as custodian of the Holy Grail, presents us with a paradox: he is a figure of authority who instructs Parzifal to "stay here with me a while, to learn courtesy and manners...I shall dub you a knight." (Goodrich⁵, p. 60). And yet, the King is himself *wounded*—in one version of the myth, he walks with a limp; in other versions (to which Eliot alludes), the King is impotent. In short, the Fisher King holds himself out as a "holy teacher", but is himself sick and powerless. I believe that a debased version of this myth has shaped many cinematic representations of the psychiatrist.

Being a "wounded healer", of course, is not all bad. We have the Judeo-Christian tradition that tells us, "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken

spirit" (Psalms 51:17). And in the Jewish mystical tradition, Rabbi Bunam of Pzysha tells us, "...it is a good thing to have a broken heart, and pleasing to God...A broken heart prepares man for the service of God." (Besserman⁶, pp. 184-185). In short, if you've been thorough some heartbreak yourself, you will be in a better position to help others deal with it—the basis, perhaps, for the psychiatrist's empathy. The risk, however, is that the "wounded healer" is not sufficiently aware of his or her wound, and continues to "act out" by mistreating or exploiting patients. Or, in a more benign comic mode, the psychiatrist is so oblivious to some obvious personal quirk or peccadillo that he or she becomes the butt of derision—a variant of "Dr. Dippy".

We see a positive instance of the Fisher King myth played out in Robin Williams's fine portrayal of psychologist Sean McGuire in *Good Will Hunting*. McGuire, we learn, is a maverick therapist working at a community college, and still grieving over the death of his wife. At one point, when Will (Matt Damon) makes some cutting remark about McGuire's wife, the therapist grabs Will and pushes him up against the wall of his office, saying, in effect, "Don't you *ever* go after my wife, or I'll break your neck!" Now, this sort of behavior is, to say the least, frowned upon by the American Psychiatric Association and related professional organizations. And yet, in the movie, this is a critical turning point in the therapy: McGuire reveals himself as a vulnerable but powerful human being, and Will realizes that he is not dealing with some poofy, pompous windbag (as wonderfully portrayed by George Plimpton, Will's previous "wounded healer"). In the case of Sean McGuire, the therapist's wound is put to good use. In less restrained films (e.g., *Lovesick*, *The Prince of Tides*), the psychiatrist "uses" the patient or a relative of the patient to heal some inner wound or fulfill some urgent longing. Gabbard & Gabbard⁷ have pointed out that, in this respect, female psychoanalysts have fared worse than males: as of 1989, there were more than twice as many films portraying unethical sexual behavior on the part of a female analyst as there were portraying male analysts in this light.

In a more comic mode, the Fisher King myth appears in the guise of the *psychiatrist as buffoon*. Frazier Crane—the pompous but well-intentioned windbag—can never escape his own self-involved insecurities. Frazier's "wound" is his unresolved narcissism, usually expressed as highfalutin' rhetoric that contradicts common sense. It is left to Frazier's sensible, ex-cop father to bring his son down to earth by exposing Frazier's fatuity and pretentiousness. This comic version of the "wounded healer" seems to serve an important *soothing* function: it reassures the public that our seemingly omniscient (if not omnipotent) "healers" are just a bunch of over-educated, insecure fops—and that it's really Joe Six-pack (father Martin Crane) who knows what's what.

The Zaddik

In the Jewish mystical tradition, the Zaddik is among the most revered of spiritual leaders. Somewhere between a rabbi and a saint, the Zaddik or "holy man" mediates between heaven and earth, between God and man (Dressner). The Zaddik helps his people break through the "blockage" that ordinarily separates man from God. Martin Buber describes the Zaddik in these terms:

A helper is needed, a helper for both body and soul, for both earthly and heavenly matters. This helper is called the Zaddik...It is he who can teach you to conduct your affairs so that your soul remains free...he *takes you by the hand* and guides you until you are able to venture on alone. (Dresner⁸, p. 135). (italics mine).

The Zaddik, I believe, is the archetype underlying the "Doctor Wonderful" character seen in many early Hollywood depictions of psychiatrists. In the 1980 film, *Ordinary People*, Judd Hirsch's "Dr. Berger" comes close to this archetype. In one review of this film, Berger is described as "...the sort of doctor that anybody could trust, a rock of compassion" (Cannon⁹). I liked Hirsch's portrayal of Berger, who, after all, struggles nobly to help his desperate patient, Conrad (played by Timothy Hutton), recover from a suicide attempt. But, in a sense, Dr. Berger is just too good to be true—too patient, too compassionate, too emotionally and physically available, and—most annoying to real psychiatrists—*too damn perceptive*. He is *always* prepared with just the right analytic interpretation, presented in just the right way. In short, Berger is a kind of secular saint.

In the recent film, *The Sixth Sense*, Bruce Willis's mournful psychologist presents an interesting twist on the Zaddik myth. (He is, arguably, also an embodiment—or disembodiment—of the "wounded healer", since he himself is wounded on many levels). Willis's job is to rescue the soul of a sad and tormented boy who tells him, "I see dead people." Without giving away the stunning revelation at the end of the movie, suffice it to say that Willis's character truly mediates between the living and the dead, between earth and heaven. He is a secular "holy man" who is wholly dedicated to helping his patient—though, on another level, Willis is also trying to make up for his therapeutic failure with another patient.

One of the curious things about the Zaddik is his relationship with evil⁸ (Dresner). In order to lift the people above evil, the Zaddik must *understand* evil on a deeply personal level. At times, this means exposing oneself to the sins and failings of the, well, ordinary people—and, in more esoteric Jewish lore, *even allowing oneself to be touched by sin*. This is the danger that lurks within the archetype of the Zaddik, and within "Dr. Wonderful" as well. There is always that risk that the good doctor will fly too close to evil's flame. This, too, is a

potential path to the “corrupted” psychiatrist in the movies, though it seems to be less traveled than that of the “wounded healer”.

Television and the Psychiatrist

Perhaps because a television series can broaden and deepen a character over many months, it's sometimes the case that psychiatrists are more realistically (if not always sympathetically) portrayed on TV than in the movies. I was always fond, for example, of Alan Arbus's character, Dr. Sidney Greenberg, on the old *M*A*S*H* series. Arbus managed to combine a deadpan, self-deprecating humor with a psychoanalyst's wisdom and a touch of the absurd. In one episode, Dr. Greenberg manages to persuade a skeptical Col. Potter (Harry Morgan) to permit a bonfire on the base. The psychiatrist rightly argues that it's just the sort of controlled chaos the medical staff need to maintain their sanity. A less developed but “solid” character is the forensic psychiatrist, Dr. Emil Skoda, on *Law and Order*. Skoda isn't at all flashy or brilliant; instead, he brings a kind of “street-savvy” to bear upon the case, and doesn't take any guff from anyone.

Finally, Tracey Ullman's therapist on *Ally McBeal*—while admittedly way over-the-top—nevertheless manages to hit the therapeutic target more often than not. She is saved from the “Dr. Dippy” stereotype by her relentless intensity, good-heartedness, and dogged pursuit of the patient's “truth”. Moreover, few viewers are likely to assume that Ally McBeal's therapist is supposed to be taken seriously.

Hollywood and the “Anti-mundane”

In the world outside of Hollywood, the work of clinical psychiatry consists mainly in slogging along. There is usually very little drama in the psychiatrist's office: depressed patients talk about their misery; anxious patients describe their irrational fears; and psychotic patients detail their endless struggles with “voices”, the CIA, or—on a good day—the unscrupulous landlord. The therapist doggedly suggests new ways of looking at these problems; relates them to larger themes in the patient's life; and, in the case of the psychiatrist, sometimes prescribes a medication. The “*aha!*” moments of psychoanalytic insight—those shattering epiphanies so prized in the movies—are rare, indeed. When insight occurs, it is usually gradual, hard-won, and even grudging. Getting a patient to see that he or she is not a worthless louse because of a broken marriage would be prized as a therapeutic triumph. In short, the work of psychiatry is quintessentially mundane. If there is a hero or heroine in this ongoing travail, it is surely the patient. The clinician is really something of a midwife—trying to deliver into the world the strength and insight that must grow within the patient. It is the patient, of course, who must bear the pain of parturition.

Hollywood has had very little to say about such everyday heroics. With the exception of a few films, such as *Ordinary People*, most movies on psychiatric themes involve the extremes or exceptions of mental illness: psychopathic serial killers (*The Silence of the Lambs*), multiple personalities (*The Three Faces of Eve*), or pathetic but loveable oddballs (*What About Bob?*). Indeed, when it comes to psychiatry, I believe Hollywood is fixated on the *anti-mundane*—the more bizarre, outrageous, or melodramatic, the better. Even a fairly empathic movie like *The Prince of Tides* felt obliged to throw in the gratuitous issue of the psychiatrist's affair with the patient's brother.

It has been argued, in this journal, that our task is to rectify “...the inauthenticity of representations of ordinary folks....” (M. Orleans, editorial, January 2001). I would suggest that in its zeal to avoid the mundane, Hollywood has given us precisely such inauthentic representations of patients and their caregivers. This is of more than academic interest, since, in my experience, the archetypes of the Vampire, The Fisher King, and The Zaddik have helped shape the public's outlook toward psychiatry. If a part of your psyche is telling you that your doctor wants to seduce you, extract your thoughts, or fry your brain, you are likely to face the prospect of psychotherapy with reluctance, if not dread. I have lost count of the number of severely depressed patients I have seen who have refused to undergo safe, modern electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) because “I saw what it did to Jack Nicholson!”. I have had other patients express surprise that I could not literally *read their minds*—isn't that what psychiatrists do in the movies? Even the relatively benign archetype of the Zaddik creates unrealistic expectations of miraculous cures and soul-wrenching revelations.

Where Do We Go From Here?

All that said, is it really the job of filmmakers to produce scientifically accurate and “socially responsible” movies about mental illness? I'm inclined to say “Sure, why not?”, but I hold out little hope that this will happen. I have seen little evidence of late that Hollywood representations of psychiatry are becoming more accurate or more even-handed. To be sure, the more sophisticated the potential patient, the less vulnerable he or she is to cinematic stereotypes. Unfortunately, that leaves out a large number of people in need of mental health services.

It might be argued that two near-impossible things need to happen before Hollywood produces a realistic portrayal of a psychiatrist. First, the stigma surrounding both mental illness and *those who care for the mentally ill* will need to disappear. And second, the public will agree to pay good money on a Saturday night to see a medical professional doing an imperfect but decent job, usually under trying circumstances, and often with very little “happening” in the melodramatic sense. I, for one, won't hold my breath. But even if these twin

goals were realized, society would likely not lose its ambivalence toward psychiatry and related professions. There is just too much power, too much energy, and too much danger surrounding the role of “healer” ever to permit a straightforward acceptance of those to whom we entrust our psyches. After all, when was the last time we saw an evil pastry chef movie, or a flick that extolled the saintly nobility of certified public accountants? *No*—so long as psychiatrists draw upon our deepest fears and most fervent wishes, there will probably always be Dr. Dippy, Dr. Evil, and Dr. Wonderful. Perhaps, though, as we come to understand the archetypes that underlie these stock characters, we will understand ourselves better as well. And then—who knows?—maybe Hollywood will stand up and take notice of the heroically mundane.

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Private Fantasies, Public Policies: Watching Latin American *Telenovelas* in Bulgaria*

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Abstract: This paper presents a social psychological analysis of soap viewing practices in a context of post-communist Bulgarian culture. My aim in trying to position the social life of soaps in people's everyday routines is to deconstruct media mythologies and ambiguous messages that soaps send to their outrageously increasing audience. My focus is on the gendering of the genre, which I do from the position that soaps produce and validate codes of femininity. My general conclusion is that the viewing of soaps corresponds to producing a consumer discourse, which can be regarded as a sign of women's emancipation and self-assertiveness. On the other hand, the romanticized stories fill a significant gap in people's psychological resources by appropriating the discontent of post-communist modernization.

Soaps' invasion started in the early '90s along with the rapid social change and transformation of post-communist Bulgarian society. As one of the media critics has ironically noticed, the delayed broadcasting of soaps on Bulgarian TV started when detergents disappeared from the Bulgarian market (the early '90s had marked the beginning of the economic crisis in the country). Devoid of their commercial messages to the Bulgarian viewers, soap operas, especially the Latin American *telenovelas*¹, attacked the TV audience on nation-wide channels as well as on the progressively proliferating private TV channels and cable TVs. *The Widow in White, Cassandra, Pure Blood, Rich People also Weep, The Black Pearl, With Love, Just Maria, Lus Maria, Rossalinda*, etc. – it is impossible to list all these Venezuelan, Brazilian, Mexican, and Colombian serials with which the leisure time and domestic routine of Bulgarians have been pervaded during the last ten years.

I have to confess. Ten years ago I was quite critical of this TV genre, being absolutely aware of its low-value as a cultural product, actors' casting and aesthetic implications. I remember the deserted evening streets in the '80s when people tuned in to watch the Latin American serial *The Slave Izaura* and to empathize with the endless sufferings of their beloved Izaura. I mocked fascinated viewers' sentimentality and wondered about the absence of a critical view toward soaps' theatricality and silliness. But as time went on, I changed

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my attitude toward soaps. What compels me to think of soaps is their on-going popularity, which is close to a mesmerized fascination on the part of their fans.² Moreover, soaps' viewers in today's Bulgaria are not being shrunk to 'isolated housewives' or members of the working class as researchers in the '60s or even later had labeled faithful soap viewers.³

Soaps' outrageous popularity in the years after the collapse of communism could be situated in the context of mass media broadcasting and the liberation of popular culture on one hand, and the shrinking of high elitist art on the other. That so many people from different educational and social groups get hooked on programs "where pregnancies can last for more than nine months" could be interpreted as the viewers' emancipation after years of sterile, socialist propaganda. During that time people were able to see only 'social-realist', i.e. politically indoctrinated and 'ideologically correct', films. (One can understand the enormous success that the above mentioned Brazilian *telenovela* had with Bulgarian viewers, which happened to be the first and only soap which Bulgarian TV showed in the '80s in order to liven up its programming.) The socialist visual rhetoric, including that of Soviet-type film productions, has actively exploited the figures of heroic people who display extraordinary courage and even risk their lives in order to achieve great goals signified by a 'shining future'. Western films were largely forbidden because they were conceived as an indulgence in an alien world of a capitalist consumerist society, and because they featured a world of ordinary people with their everyday concerns and pursuits of love, success, money, and recognition, which contrasted the heroic life in the socialist films.⁴

Bearing in mind an ideology⁵ inherent in media, what provokes my interest toward soaps as part of the mundane everyday activities and experiences of people in a post-communist country are two aspects. First, media texts of soaps as an interface between the audience and the social, political and cultural context contain their ambiguous messages which can be used by viewers as strategies to integrate into the new social surrounding. What are viewers' discursive potential to approach and deconstruct the "mythologies"⁶ of soaps in order to maintain people's needs for entertainment and self-identifications?

Second, in trying to position the social life of soaps in the day-to-day routine of post-communist people, gender is, of course, one of the crucial features of their mundane ordinary experiences. The twentieth century expansion of popular culture has been associated with a feminization of culture and an idea to admit and legitimize women's preferences for romances and melodramatic stories. At the same time, it is the gendering of this genre that causes mainstream art and media critics to devaluate and denigrate it as entertainment with low

prestige. Soap opera as a 'woman's genre', comparable to that of Harlequin romances and women's magazines, has been defined in terms of it primarily addressing the concerns and interests of a female audience, whose further associations are with domesticity, household cleaning and routine habitual everyday presence. Under Bulgarian conditions, where feminism as a political and academic activity is widely unknown, and even when known, having been accepted with skepticism, a critical feminist discourse toward stereotyped and domesticized presentations of women in popular media texts does not exist.

Speaking about soap viewing as a predominantly female activity does not mean that it is a feature of 'women' as a biological group. Although because of soaps' outrageous popularity with a female audience that cuts across social and educational strata, it is not easy to leave behind the essential stereotype of women as soap opera viewers. What is being argued in current scholarship about this TV genre⁷ is that its feminization presents socially-prescribed codes of femininity associated with prosaic, repetitive, irrational and playful life. Annette Kuhn precisely remarks:

Recent work on soap opera and melodrama has drawn on existing theories, methods, and perspectives in the study of film and television, including the structural analysis of narratives, textual semiotics and psychoanalytic audience research, and the political economy of cultural institutions (145).

In my analysis I will follow this positive strand in feminist media studies, making efforts to approach soaps from the point that they produce feminine codes, thus revealing "technologies of gender" in terms of Teresa de Lauretis. I will try to tackle the following questions: 'Why are soaps such an appealing TV genre, especially to its female audience?'; 'What kind of satisfaction and pleasures do they give to women and men, affording to everyone cheap and accessible forms of entertainment?'; 'Can we view the TV genre of soaps as corresponding to the social and psychological needs and habits of the viewers, regarding them as active participators in the media exposure?'; and 'How can we read the social construction of gender through popular narratives in the post-communist Bulgaria?' Additionally, beyond the explicit demarcation denigration/appraisal of soaps, feminist critical analysis could not be politically neutral toward "women's" pleasure and identification through soap narratives. In this vein, a set of political questions could range from: 'Does soap opera viewing reinforce women's affiliations with home and family, thus reproducing traditional forms of femininity?'; to 'Do soaps modernize women by offering a window to a modern marketplace, thus making them fit for consumer society, empowering them with their own space?'

In my efforts to answer these questions, I state several arguments, which I have supported with excerpts from the questionnaire I distributed in 1999 and 2000 to two of my classes. Because this is a small sample of student TV viewers, the excerpts have provided only an illustration of my general arguments, restricting me from generalizations about soap viewing practices across different social, age and educational groups. Thirty-two students answered questions about their TV viewing preferences and habits concerning Latin-American *telenovelas* of forty students asked. What is worth mentioning is that all students who answered the questionnaire are women, and that half said they watch soaps "regularly", and half "from time to time". Three of them openly confessed that they are hooked on soaps. Only one disputed the topic saying, "I don't watch them at all because it is a waste of time"; and she answered some of the questions putting her name on the answer sheet. The eight male students in both classes refused to participate in the survey simply saying "it's not our topic", thus trying to outline not only their disinterest in this TV genre, but also men's detachment in general. In fact, as the data from the national TV viewers' samples have shown, men also watch soaps although the genre clearly produces a demarcation line between men's and women's ways of leisure. For the sample, studied gender demarcation has been proven – almost all respondents claimed that their female friends and acquaintances watch serials unlike their male friends.

True-to-life films and "furniture art"

Soap operas are an appealing TV genre because they present everyday life and the concerns of everyday people. The topics being discussed, the situations in which the characters find themselves, the problems which need to be solved, are very much like the viewers' own. The social realism of soaps is one reason for their popularity, especially when people's personal problems and choices have been neglected in TV programs. This was the situation during past decades where most of the films broadcast on TV were indoctrinated by socialist realism which put priority on societal problems and touched upon domestic topics only marginally. Soaps are satisfying a need of the audience, especially the female one – the need to see true-to-life films, in which heroes and heroines are happy or sad, anxious or content, about their personal and family matters, unlike film fiction where their duties to the party, nation, and work community were the topic of discussion. Almost all of my students say that on soaps the topics of discussion are real and they point to "love" and "love matters" as the most frequent theme. One of the students says: "The topics, which are discussed in soaps are really human and emotional, i.e. related to love, its strength as well as marginal situations like hate, envy, death, fear but expressed to their culmination". Perhaps it is not surprising that in soaps, love appears to be a staple for 18-20 aged female students who put aside other topics

such as family relations, sacrificing motherhood, adultery, villainy, friendship, etc.

Being realistic, soaps induce viewers' identification with characters. Regular viewers, especially, get pleasure from being deeply involved with a character's emotions and experiences thus forming an active parasocial relationship with a TV character. Viewers enjoy watching the behaviors, experiences, and opinions of the characters in order to imagine or recognize their own behavior in similar situations. Such an intimacy between the viewer and the character locates the viewer in her own life situation and enables her to vent her emotions. In cases of the most fanatic spectators such intimacy turns into psychological fusion of reality and fantasy, when fans dress and behave like a character, they want to see, to touch, and to speak to their favorite actors/characters. Such a situation of mesmerizing of fans happened when the two soap opera stars—Venezuelan actress Koraima Tores (*Kassandra*) and Puerto Rican actor Osvaldo Rios (*The Widow in White*)—came to Bulgaria and met with their fans in huge, overcrowded halls. Even some politicians greeted them and high-art critics were flattered to interview them. Putting aside pathological cases of over-identification, Tania Modleski points to the "nearness" of the relationship, when "the viewer does not become the characters...but rather relates to them as intimates, as extensions of her world" (1983: 105). Such viewers' catharsis functions as real therapy which is highly relaxing and tension releasing. Especially in the highly stressful living conditions in Bulgaria an opportunity to be absorbed by watching a soap opera episode is a kind of escapism from the pressures of the day. Such escape or replacement of real stress with groundbreaking TV fiction is more magnetic when it happens every day at the regular time thus affording viewers' 'ritual pleasure' of security and longevity. As Griffiths says, "the indulgence of tuning in regularly is therapeutic".

I did not suggest that therapy would mainly motivate my young respondents to tune into soap operas. But it was a surprise that almost all of the young women, answering the question "Why do you watch TV soaps?", mention such 'releasing' motifs like "relaxing", "escaping from my own problems", "when I feel bored", "when I want to kill the time", "to distract myself". Only three of them who are soap fans say that they watch soaps because they can learn a lot and because of some actors, namely men, who are their favorites. "From these serials I receive information mostly about how to relate to men and in most cases I watch them because of Osvaldo Rios, Pedro Lander, that is because of the heroes", confesses one of the students.

Soap operas are habitual as our daily life, they are interruptible as our daily rhythm, in a phrase, they are a 'parallel life'. In her pioneering essay on soaps "The Search for Tomorrow in Today's Soap Operas" Modleski explains that soaps' narrative composition is analogous to women's daily rhythm,

especially to their domestic work. The repetition of dialogues, scenes and motivations and very slow pace at which soap narrative proceeds, urge the viewers' sense of suspense and expectancy. I find eloquent the answer of one of my students to the question "Why are TV serials labeled 'soaps'?" She assumes: "Maybe, because like a soap which is a long-lasting commodity and is hard to wash out, TV serials are for long consumption". Almost all of the students are censorious of soaps' slow plot development using such words as "torn apart in a Turkish-delight fashion", "slow action", "laggard", "wasteful". But as one of the students summarizes: "I don't like that action develops very slowly but on the other hand, soaps shouldn't be what they are". Soaps' redundant information produces a more comfortable and pleasurable spot for the newcomers or interrupted viewers who can catch up on the plot lines and restore missed *frisson*. Soaps' repetitive narratives serve as an insurance against a distracted viewers' attention being interrupted by habitual household activities. As the routine home cares are going on regularly, episodes unfold on the TV screen day by day. Almost all students say they are doing other activities such as cooking, cleaning and talking while watching the serials. So, viewers' distraction has been regarded as an argument for soaps' comfortable reception⁹ as "furniture art" in terms of Modleski (1983: 110) instead of critical blaming of viewers as passive containers of information.

Fairy tales, melodrama and the carnivalesque

The mass obsession with soaps could be explained with the closeness of their plot structure to that of fairy tales. Good and bad characters, magic transformations and metamorphoses of protagonists, reversals of events and fortunes are the key motives of *telenovelas*. As in a fairy tale, where a frog becomes a prince, in soaps a young woman who is poor and unfairly treated in the first episodes becomes a happy and rich bride/wife at the end of the film. Soaps' melodramatic stories nurture women's fantasies, thus inducing gratification from the activity of fantasising positive transformations, which could hardly happen in real life. One of the students says, "What I like in serials is that always great and true love has been placed on a pedestal". And the other sighs, "It is hardly that glamorous in life as it is in serials".

Thus, soaps make possible the switch in women's consciousness from an outside world full of violence, frustrations and helplessness to an imagined world where characters could be easily recognized and predicted, and good/evil confrontation always has its happy end. Soaps do not only advertise cleansers but, as Robert Allen (1985) has noted, they clear up in a rather metaphorical sense 'life' dirt (villain women, unfaithful spouses, egoistic children, authoritarian parents). These are miracles not people which have inhabited soaps' world, and to be-in-soaps means to feel cozy, because the miracle has replaced

the logic of the present day, irrationality has substituted the everyday pressure to take responsibility, thus producing a transfer of the burden of reality and desperation into a superficial world of hopes and happy closure. As Christine Gledhill mentions: "Melodrama functions both referentially and metaphorically, bearing witness to the underlying desires and impulses, which fuel social process. In this respect melodrama feeds off the ideological conflicts that accompany social change" (118). Because soaps' melodramatic characters are unrealistic and their theatricality is laden with parody, the genre of soaps reminds us of a carnivalesque play where unbelievable and puzzling inversions take place. John Docker explains in what sense popular culture accounts for the releasing of parody and the grotesque: "...with the rise of the "bourgeois public sphere" the bourgeois and professional classes broke their link with the carnivalesque. The carnivalesque became submerged in the unconscious, as a repressed desire for the low and the other". Soap opera narratives focus on the everyday presentness, on banal domestic events, thus bringing into light the marginalized and repressed desire for celebration of ordinary people's lives.

The indulgence in a feminine aesthetic

How have women and men been represented in soaps' narratives? On the one hand, we have those who take the position that "soap operas do not offer a great deal of escapism from the drudgery of daily life and seem rather patronizing to their female audience" (Griffiths). To substantiate this thesis, they speak about the domestic setting in which women are usually placed and the stereotypical images of women as good or bad mothers, the first being family-oriented and sexually-unattractive and the latter being seductive, using sex as a weapon. In addition, it is said that soaps' female characters are passive and submissive to man's power and desires, and even when women are portrayed as having jobs they rarely pursue careers, or if they do, they are always supported or hindered by a man. Therefore, while soaps present women in a more positive style than TV ads or romances, their focus on domesticity and emotional states as a mirror of women's interests and concerns enables the reinforcement of women's subordinate role in society.

A strong defiance against these statements comes from the feminist critics. The main thesis is that soaps as a TV genre construct a feminine aesthetic. A large part of this aesthetic stems from the validation of the emotional states and nurturing relationships. Thus, soaps emphasize internal emotional states and characters' emotions: soaps' heroines and heroes cry, suffer, smile, love, hate, vilify or revenge. Women's omnipotence is based on their enormous capacities to produce and control their emotions, thus having entrapped men in their web of emotions. Moreover, male characters on soaps are presented in a more feminized and domestic style - men speak, rather than act, they discuss,

suffer and even cry; men's presentations in soaps are mainly as fathers, husbands, sons, brothers instead of their featuring as professionals, public figures, etc. So, what makes soaps remarkable and attractive to women's audience is the domestication of men, the non-masculinist visibility of male characters, that can be interpreted as a challenge to the stereotyped image of the Balkan macho. One of the interviewed student answered the question "Why do you think men do not like to watch soaps?" saying, "Men are afraid that they could be viewed as powerless and emotional. It is evident that in our culture men usually do not speak of their emotions and concerns..." In other words, a highlighting of the domesticity on soaps serves as a validation of a new gender balance within which an overlap of men's and women's space is implicated.

Nochimson (1998) speaks of "a respect for emotion" on soaps and that viewers' regale in watching emotions getting out of control and expecting their exaltation and climax. I could suggest that visualization of the power of emotions on soaps is quite relevant to the everyday lifestyles of Bulgarians, where most people feel unable to rationally plan and control things and are seduced by the flow and excesses of their and others' emotions. Modleski stresses women's villainess and transgression as a source of strength and a way to manipulate men, and at the same time she states that the viewers take delight in despising the villains. I observed that in my sample the greatest part of viewers report emotional involvement with the soaps' characters, however remaining aware of the distance between the actor and their character. Most of them report that they feel angry at the negative characters, although eight women say that they like some of the bad guys. Most students say that they usually sympathize with the good characters, because they are victimized and humiliated and a few of them feel annoyed with the characters' pretended innocence. Only three students say that they are emotionally detached from the characters.

Besides the above-mentioned soaps' visualization of women's emotional power, feminine discourse has been featured as the other crucial aspect of a feminine aesthetic, which can be viewed as means of legitimization of women's oral culture. Mary-ellen Brown and Linda Barwick define feminine discourse as an endless talking: "...soap opera characters talk in cliches, they talk to themselves, they talk on the telephone, they lie, they dissemble, they encourage others to get it off their chests, to confess, to tell it like it is". In a word, this is talk just for pleasure, without being goal-oriented, "talk for talk's sake". Discussing events and predicting future actions or their effects is more important than the occurrence of events and actions themselves. Soaps' narratives look like gossip - different characters possess different pieces of knowledge, there is no one moral truth, there are multiple truths, which result in the openness of the plot and development of various plot lines. Media critics are certain that complex and long plot lines together with suspense and cliffhangers produce delayed

gratification, which is part of viewers' addiction. As in gossip, one character knows more than the other one, or the other one is oblivious to some crucial information, and what is important in this play of knowledge is the participatory role of the viewer. It happens that the spectator knows the secrets, which only a few of characters possess. Such an active position, which makes the viewer more knowledgeable and in more control of events in comparison with the characters, empowers her to predict the plot, mind read characters' plans and dreams, etc., thus creating "the pleasure of hermeneutic speculation" (Brunsdon 1984: 56) This occurs when viewers talk among themselves, share opinions about recent developments on a soap or speculate what might happen next, comment on their favorites' deeds, clothes, make-up, hair-style, and so on. Thus, the soap opera does not end when the television program goes off; it continues in the viewing community. And the viewing community grows into a fanhood community, which grows into a friends' community, which is the place where individuals get pleasure in being and talking together. As Brown & Barwick put it "...gossip and networking are a source of solidarity and group unity for women around which a political feminine can be constructed and further developed". Thus, soaps as visual texts produce active pleasures both of watching and discussing among a community. The latter results in the process of generating meanings at the intersection of fiction and reality, i.e. soaps' characters and watchers' lived experiences. Thus, the gossip network validates women's oral culture, producing a postmodern space of virtual reality and fusion of reality and fiction.

Is the communal aspect relevant to the studied sample of Bulgarian soap viewers? I should answer positively, because almost all of them say that their friends and acquaintances watch soaps and are convinced that soaps are a topic of conversation in company. "This is my first task when an episode is over", answers one soap fan to the question "Do you discuss things in serials with your friends and acquaintances?" Others confess that they recap and retell missed episodes to each other or try to predict plot development when "things are perplexing".

The pleasure of resistance

Besides the pleasure of being involved in such aimless play, watching of soap operas' also produces resistive pleasure. The pleasure of resistance means to delineate the viewers' own space of consumerism, thus rejecting other highly prestigious spheres of leisure. As with teenagers, whose worship of a rock band molds their identity both against parents and other peers, soap operas' fans construct their own world of pleasures and meanings as a refusal of the dominant one. As Brown states, through watching and enjoying soaps, women create their own cultural space and set the boundaries of their specific enjoyment: "Through

this enjoyment, they create the opening that for them serves as a wedge into dominant culture" (20). Brown's position is cogent that the "right to solitude" in leisure choices is a step to women's self-awareness and empowerment.

I was quite surprised by a firmly demonstrated 'resistance' in my sample of soap viewers. The last question in the list was "Would you be ashamed to tell someone that you watch soaps? Why and whom?" All of them strongly intend to stand up for their soap preferences saying "this is my right to choose". One soap fan defies stereotypes about soaps in such a way: "No, I'm not ashamed because if I am I would feel guilty, but it's not true, even it's silly to be so, so I don't care if someone doesn't approve of my watching". Only one student hesitates in answering and replies that she is not ashamed, but perhaps she would be when a man is highly respected by her. The latter makes me think of this. When I asked the students to fill in the questionnaire, there were several voices: "Will it be anonymous?" I responded 'yes' and only one of them signed her sheet. Two of the girls (I later identified as soap fans) asked me during the break: "Do you watch soaps? What do you think of them?" For me it was obvious that the students were reluctant to speak explicitly about their TV preferences to their professor. Perhaps this topic seemed quite intimate to them. On the other hand, they are very firmly convinced about the rightness of their choice to entertain watching and discussing soaps. Whom do they resist in their leisure preferences? I could suggest that they oppose their male peers, friends and colleagues, whose TV choices and habits are quite different. All female students are sure that their male acquaintances do not watch soaps because men think "they are dull", "irksome", "maudlin", "stodgy". Men like actions "films that take your breath away" or sports programs. "They would be mocked and they would feel less masculine, if they watched soaps", says one of the female students. Thus, having known men's different TV choices and even having acknowledged men's mocking and denigration, young women draw up the contours of their own space of entertainment thus forming a strategy of silent (subversive) resistance to "aesthetic hierarchies" dominated by men.

Concluding notes

Telenovelas have functioned as a new medium through which the nation has appropriated the popular mass culture. Bringing domestic space, family and blood relations into soaps' representations have served as a validation or even exhilaration of people's personal and intimate life. The personal has been emancipated from the political and state control, and moreover, it has been redefined as everyday women's and men's experience. My general point is that in the visual culture of the modernizing Bulgarian society soaps create islands of enjoyments, thus being very closely related to female mentality and concerns. From the politics of 'women's' pleasures I can support the thesis that soaps

liberate women through empowering them with new identifications. It can be argued that romantic love has been a significant emancipatory drive from conventions of marriages and the pressures of everyday life, thus granting women a control over intimacy and personal life. At the same time romantic love has nurtured the imagined world of fascinations with expectations, desires and lucky reversals of fate which could be viewed as an achievement over the playfulness of the everyday life. As Anthony Giddens says: "...it (i.e. romance) became a potential avenue for controlling the future, as well as a form of psychological security (in principle) for those whose lives were touched by it" (41).

A post-communist reading of gender through construction of melodramatic identifications of female viewers could be further linked to the opening up of the nation to a consumerist global TV world. Soaps' narratives correspond to producing a commodification of the consciousness, which can be regarded both as a sign of nations' modernization and individual self-assertiveness, thus providing an adequate answer to the contradictions of modernity. This answer serves as a compromise between the demands of the rationalized world and an individual lack of power to control it. In other words, contemporary soap fiction fills a significant gap in people's psychological resources by appropriating the discontents or even shocks of the post-communist world.

Notes

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Soap opera has been considered a unique popular art genre subordinated to melodramatic narratives. Some argue that despite their diversity (South American *telenovelas*, US daytime serials, US prime-time shows, etc.), these serials could be defined universally as 'soaps' because of their low aesthetic valuation (Brunsdon 1995). Others state that besides their closeness, *telenovelas* differ significantly from soaps because the former have clear plot endings unlike soaps, and *telenovela* stars are first-rate actors with high national prestige unlike the second- and third-rate actors and directors on the US soaps (Lopez 1995). In my analysis I focus mainly on the Latin American *telenovelas* because they have been predominantly featured in the '90s by Bulgarian TV stations. Because of their low price, *telenovelas* have been widely broadcast and compete against US serials such as *Dallas*, *The Bold and the Beautiful*, etc. In this text I use *telenovelas* and 'soaps' interchangeably.

² According to national data on TV audience monitoring produced by the Bulgarian sociological agency MARKET TEST, in June 2000 soap serials were ranked on the 8 position

among 28 programs aired on the most popular TV channel 'Kanal 1'. Data on the distribution of the TV audience by time intervals during the week days on the third most popular TV channel 'Nova TV' show the peak of the audience's interest in the time interval 6-7 p.m. This is the time when this channel broadcasts *telenovelas*.

³ According to national data from MARKET TEST in December 2000, the audience profile of the Latin-American serial *Rosalinda* aired on the 'Nova TV' is the following: 77.48 % women, 22.45% men; 55.64% with primary education, 34.91% with secondary, 9.43 with university; 19.71% resent in village, 50.85 in city, 29.41% in Sofia; 6-11 years - 5.43%, 12-19 years - 11.39%, 20-39 years - 23.09%, 40-59 years - 32.65%, 60+ - 27.41%.

⁴ See the detailed discussion on the contrast between "heroic life" and "everyday life" in Featherstone (1992).

⁵ An ideological meaning of mass culture has been broadly criticized from the left. In this vein, media critics and intellectuals devalue various forms of popular culture blaming it for its 'undemanding nature' and simplicity of comprehension. As a reminder, pop culture devaluation has its origins in the critical theory on mass culture, which has been defended in the early 1950s by Adorno and Horkheimer (1979). Jazz, hit songs, stars, magazines, Hollywood films, radio soap operas have been thrown away to the rubbish bin of cultural history. These cultural products are considered to be commodities of mass industry produced for a mass uniformed consumer. The critique is that standardized and easy-to-view forms of entertainment, especially TV programs, produce self-satisfied, intellectually passive, naive and trustful viewers, whose cultural preferences reflect "an infantile need for protection" and fit in with the totalitarian creed. In the '70s and the early '80s, British screen theory took much the same stand as the Frankfurt school did. It has been stated that the popular culture texts make viewers identify with visual narratives, thus having inscribed in them the dominant values of capitalist society. What is under critique in this theory is that the mass audience receives pleasure by being exposed unconsciously to society's power. As Laura Mulvey states, the audience's look should be liberated into "passionate detachment", or "a distancing awareness" which will initiate a new kind of pleasure, i.e. the intellectual's pleasure, rational contemplation (pp.25-26).

⁶ I use Barthes's concept of "mythologies" conceived as discourses and told stories (Barthes 1992).

⁷ As Robert Allen (1995) traces the stages of the critical studies on soap operas, their elaboration has moved from a functionalist model of viewer/text interpretation (Modleski 1982, Allen 1985) to their ethnographic reading of producing culturally-based meaning and pleasures (Hobson 1982; Kuhn 1984; Brunsdon 1984; 1993; Ang 1990; Geraghty 1991; Brown 1987; 1994; Seiter et al. 1989; Nochimpson 1993).

⁸ As mentioned above, it might appear reasonable to argue against the monolithic concept of women as a homogeneous group, but within the framework of mass culture exposure, I think it is possible to define TV viewers as "an imaginary community", where they

have been united on two premises: every viewer is a consumer and every viewer is a family member. Keeping in mind this fact, the position of intellectual women and men could hardly be defined as ambivalent when they ridicule the simplicity and patriarchal femininities featured on soaps, being at the same time soaps fans.

⁹ For this reason all the serials have no captions and are dubbed to Bulgarian.

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Mundanity In The Lyrics Of The Beatles

James MacFarlane Williams

*"When I wake up early in the morning
Lift my head; I'm still yawning
Wake up in the middle of dream
Stay in bed; float up stream
Please don't wake me, no, don't shake me
Leave me where I am – I'm only sleeping"*

This lyric, from the song "I'm Only Sleeping" from the *Revolver* album – British version, he said superciliously – came to mind quite recently. My nephew, Josh, has taken to falling asleep in mid-afternoon (he's four). His mother resisted this, on the grounds that a nap in the middle of the day would mean resistance to bedtime. Although I can see the logic, and Josh does have the reputation for resisting bedtime, I truly hated watching her trying to wake him up after he succumbed to one of these mid-afternoon naps, because Josh truly hated waking up, and, I think, honestly felt like he was being punished, or at least treated unfairly. And for what? He was only sleeping.

As a life-long insomniac, I could readily identify with Josh's discomfort. When his mother finally reached the conclusion that he resisted bedtime anyways, nap or no, simply as part of his renegade character, I was greatly relieved. Not only is it more pleasant not to have Josh screaming in the background directly prior to suppertime, but also it's pleasant to see that, in fact, he's only sleeping.

Of course, I would hardly be the first to suggest that a part of the reason The Beatles' songs stick with us is that they are about mundane behavior and mundane things, acts and articles that most of us, if not all of us, can identify as parts of our everyday lives and experiences. (It's also been suggested that they wrote about this stuff because they were under contract, under deadline, and absolutely had to produce something, a suggestion that gets borne out in large, in my opinion, in the film "Let It Be.") But it does, I think, bear examination: Are The Beatles part of many of our lives because they sang about things we are familiar with in our everyday lives? Is that why they're still with us, all these years? Why they are the only band in my music collection that my nieces, entering teenage and obsessed with N-Sync, don't turn their noses up at? Why their latest anthology, unassumingly labeled "#1" (all of the songs on the anthology were, in fact, #1 hits in either the US or the UK- or both) entered the charts, unironically, at #1?

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Could be.

It might sound a bit disingenuous to say that The Beatles had a unique grasp on the mundane, but that conclusion, I think, is inescapable upon examination. One of my favorite examples is "A Day in the Life." The first section of the song (Lennon's) is devoted not to extraordinary events, but to news of extraordinary events, presented in a tone so world-weary as to suggest that any and all news would be taken as mundane. This has always fascinated me: how did Lennon mean us to take these things? On the one hand, he seems to want to provoke us into a consideration of the way we go through the motions of our daily lives; on the other, and most disturbingly, he seems to want to provoke us into a state of shame for taking things for granted. In a world full of war movies and suicides by members of Parliament, how can we go about our daily lives with any kind of grace? On the other hand, what alternatives have we, except to observe the absurdity and remain as aloof to it as possible?

The middle section (McCartney's) presents a much brighter picture (this will always and interminably be the case). (Some day I'm going to find an excuse to compare Lennon's "Woman" to McCartney's "Maybe I'm Amazed," and then I'll REALLY get myself in Dutch with Lennon fans.) The theme is as mundane as it could possibly be; there's a mixture of militaresque order with bohemian disorder, a vivid picture of your average Londoner (or really anyone) of the office worker class, haphazardly doing what simply has to be done in the most nominal name of work. There is also a kind of sense of fun: the indulgence of getting up late, the thrill of racing for the bus, the illicit thrill of escaping work on the excuse of smoking a cigarette. And then there's a bit about falling into a dream, which has never made sense to me, and I've always thought of as a simple excuse to make a transition into the third part of the song, which, rather naturally, is a coda of Lennon's hearing the news. (I feel the same way about the way Lennon ended his sections, with the phrase "I'd love to turn you on;" it was just something Lennon liked to say, and it could mean all kinds of things, from "I'd like to make you see the world around you" to "I'd like to get you high" to "eh, what?") Of course, I'm quite comfortable with the possibility that I could be wrong.)

Both of them have in mind, I think, a kind of transcendence of the mundane, a notion that spiritual freedom can come from understanding how mundane ordinary life is. This would be the point of separating the three sections with the "wall of sound" effect. (In point of fact, I don't actually care why they put the effect in there. I'm just plain glad that they did.) Whether they achieve this, or whether the listener transcends due to their message, is up to the individual listener. My own verdict is that they achieve a nifty and ambitious pop song.

I think that's part of the magic of The Beatles as well: they were often after much bigger things than pop songs could acquire or accomplish. Consider the political message of "Nowhere Man:"

*Nowhere man, please listen:
You don't know what you're missing.
Nowhere man, the world
Is at your command!*

On the one hand, I think Lennon had in mind an energization of all the blasé people in the world who were letting war and famine go on outside their doors, which is not a hard guess since that's often what Lennon had in mind. On the other hand, though, I think he accomplished something that he should have found horrifying: a perfect description of those blasé people, with no real suggestion as to why they ought to turn their attentions away from tea cozies and football matches and take a good hard look at Bangladesh. To me, one of the most fascinating moments in the history of popular culture was when Lennon told Jan Wenner of Rolling Stone that (haltingly, hedgingly) he was a Nowhere Man, that he was describing himself in the lyric.

(Let me break that out here, and let me be clear on two things before I do so: first, I've put years of unnecessary thought into this, and second, I'm probably wrong. When Lennon first wrote this, I think he probably was writing about himself, in an excruciating, excoriating way: "I'm just a Nowhere Man. I haven't an original thought in me head." When it came time to turn it into a pop song, however, it became necessary to turn the hose on another target: society, even better yet, the anonymous society, that faceless entity known as "them." It is highly to his credit that he lets "them" off the hook, especially since he doesn't have to: "Isn't he a bit like you and me?" Yes, now that you mention it, I seem to be a bit of a Nowhere Man myself. Like I said, I'm probably wrong.)

Lennon's description here takes its strength from a broad generalization. I think, perhaps, that's part of why we have pop songs as such a large part of our culture: it's one place where broad generalizations can be fit in without much controversy or harm. After all, if Britney Spears can sing "Hit me, baby, one more time," and then go out and convince the popular press that she knew exactly what she was saying, and that it had nothing to do with sex, drugs, tequila, blackjack, or abuse, perhaps that says we need a place for that in our culture as well. Yeah, I don't know where that came from either. Don't get me started on Britney Spears. After all those years of R&D, they finally came up with a fully posable Barbie.

But back to The Beatles: consider if you will, McCartney's "Penny Lane," a portrait of a village virtually teeming with Nowhere Men. Penny Lane is a study in mundanity, the simple sights and sounds of a suburban British neighborhood; it's also one of the most stunningly gorgeous songs in the world. The descriptions of completely generalized, almost homogenous people and practices off set with small details and punctuated by a central contradiction (example: "And the banker never wears a Mac in the pouring rain; very strange), the revolving chorus ("And mean while back in Penny Lane is in my ears..."), all set to that rich melody, with the horns, the flute, augh! Splendid! Additionally, it contains the lines that probably most influenced my own artistic point of view: "Penny Lane is in my ears and in my eyes/There beneath the blue suburban skies..." The persistence of memory, the importance of experience, the way the smallest visual and aural details build up to form and inform this amazing thing we call A Life, all summed up in these simplest of lines. Or perhaps I'm imagining things. It's been known to happen.

But I think it's there. What used to be called "a love for the common man," trotted out among the virtues of the poets in the 18th and 19th centuries, in this instance converted to awareness of the ordinary, the happy little mundane moments that make up our everyday lives. The mundane rendered sublime. Consider the song "HELP!" (Pardon me, but I always loved the incongruity here: the title rendered in all caps with an exclamation point, while the song itself is simply about feeling insecure. When I was younger, so much younger than today, I dug into those lyrics with the madness of the monks, looking for something deep and elemental, and all I could find was "Help me if you can, I'm feeling down/ And I do appreciate you're being 'round." Naturally, I didn't realize until years later that being "down," itself, is elemental, in a low, ordinary way.) It's rather mundane.

Of course, some of the most mundane lyrics are the hardest for me to swallow. For instance, "Ticket to Ride." If it weren't for Harrison's heroic guitar riff, I'd probably never willingly listen to the song again. (Harrison, it should be noted, had a serious crush on that Rickenbacker 12 string.) The lyric is about the breakup of an apparently unrequited love affair. Great guitar riff, though. And if you listen closely you can hear the rest of the band hanging their parts, mainly drones, on that riff like tinsel on a Christmas tree, and then the lyric comes in: "I think I'm gonna be down, I think it's today, yeah/The girl that's driving me mad is going away/She's got a ticket to ride... But she don't care." What in the hell is that supposed to mean? I get the sense of "This girl can do no wrong," except that the girl is doing wrong. And there's the sexual metaphor, of course, but, in this context, well, that's just *sad*.

Probably a better example is “Eleanor Rigby.” The reason this is The Beatles most covered song (or second most, after “Yesterday,” I always get ‘em switched up) has, of course, nothing to do with the mundanity of its subjects. In fact I had better back off here, because I’m about to get myself in trouble by pointing out that McCartney tried very, very, very hard to make his subjects mundane, but they are all too tragic. “Wearing a face that she keeps in a jar by the door,” Sir Paul, cannot be taken for anything short of absolutely pathetic. “Picks up the rice by the church where a wedding has been?” Egad! I want to look this bird up and buy her a meal! But then you go and kill her! Not mundane, Paul; not mundane in the least.

On the other hand, he did accomplish “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da,” which is an absolute celebration of mundanity. Except, I think, that Desmond becomes a cross-dressing chanteuse at the end. I never could quite work that out. But it says it right there in the liner notes: “Desmond stays at home and does his pretty face/ And in the evening she’s a singer with the band.” (Has anyone but me ever noticed that the liner has the last lyric wrong? It’s very clearly sung “And if you want some fun/Sing o-bla-di-bla-da,” but the liner has it with the full title as the last part of the lyric... Oh, never mind.)

(If you play the song “Hey Jude” really, really loud, it sounds like there are people yelling unintelligibly outside your house. Little known fact.)

But to continue: How about “Norwegian Wood?” Can there be a more mundane song than “Norwegian Wood?” (If Lennon were alive, he’d hit me for that.) I have read a description of this as a tale of Lennon’s infidelity. That reviewer got it wrong: in the song, there is only a contemplated infidelity. It’s a sumptuously ordinary picture of an unfurnished apartment, a night of wine and conversation, an intoxicated collapse into the tub, and waking the next morning to find oneself alone in a strange apartment with the object of our intended debaucheries fled to parts unknown. Who amongst us has not had this experience? And the physical setting itself, “Norwegian Wood,” can only be a block of flats, cheap apartments that, due to having fireplaces, are enviable in that sector of the market (“Isn’t it good?”) And here’s the proof: as fascinating as the song is, that is absolutely all there is to say about it. If that’s not mundane, what is?

This brings us to “Taxman,” because that’s the first title I saw when, in a panic to find the next subject, I glanced at the back of *Rubber Soul*. At the time, no one had ever written a song about the modern system of taxation, and few have since. In fact, Harrison didn’t then. This is basically a screed against having to give away half of your compensatory riches to the government, which, as a British rock star in the 60’s, was apparently a fairly traumatic experience. But it qualifies as mundane, so there.

And another thing: to whom was McCartney referring in the little ditty at the very end of *Abbey Road*? Who precisely is “Her Majesty? It can’t be the Queen. I’ve always thought it must be some stuck-up beauty queen, rendering the lines absolutely hilarious. “Her Majesty’s a pretty nice girl, but she doesn’t have a lot to say.” If this is about a girl so stuck up that she wouldn’t speak to a member of The Beatles—well, that’s almost cruelly funny! (Then again, there’s the suggestion that Her Majesty is in reference to dear departed Linda, which makes perfect sense.)

Of course, there were deeper mundane subjects to discuss, both earlier and later. The subjects of “In My Life,” not to say mundane, are damned near anonymous. Yet, as countless beauty pageant contestants have proved, it’s evocative, no matter how badly sung! (Another note, ladies: lay off “The Wind Beneath My Wings.” It’s no good unless you’re singing it to Johnny Carson.)

But the greatest celebration of mundanity in the entire catalogue, of course, is “Let it be.” Even before I knew any of the context—the band was falling apart, the vultures were descending to feast on the carrion, Paul was so upset and obsessed over the whole mess that, he found to his horror, he was neglecting the upkeep of his physical self and his personal life—I recognized that this was the plea of an extraordinary man to reclaim an ordinary life, just to be able, at long last, to let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be; whisper words of wisdom: Let It Be. (Yeah; Her Majesty is Linda. That’s all there is to it. Just forget I brought it up. She’s probably Mother Mary, too.)

I could go on forever. Or nearly. I’ve barely even scratched the surface. But that’s part of the magic of The Beatles: you can go on forever about them. My wife has said that the most fascinating thing about The Beatles is that they were the first—maybe the only—band to make the transition from bubblegum pop singers to serious rock & roll musicians. And this is true, don’t get me wrong. But more than that, much more, is that they could sing about anything, they made tunes out of paper clips and toothpicks. And sometimes that was the best thing for them; Lennon could get off on some weird tangents, and, sometimes, ended up writing some absolutely horrific things (Take, for example, “Run For Your Life,” the last song on *Rubber Soul*, which is about homicidal urges in the face of purely hypothetical infidelity).

So what have I proved here? Nothing, probably. But in my view, when you get an excuse to write about The Beatles—*any* excuse—you take it.

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Media and the Construction of the *Ganguro* Trend in Japan

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Abstract: This paper claims that Japanese media have managed to effectively disseminate, and to shape the further development of a new style trend called *ganguro*. The *ganguro* trend among high school girls has had a significant and growing influence on everyday life in Japanese society. It introduces a new concept of “being a woman” and promotes specific elements of a woman’s appearance. By widely promoting the market for the *ganguro* trend, the media substantially increased popularity of this style and extended its social impact. The role of the media in the development of the trend as well as the media-*ganguro* trend interaction is discussed.

In the early 1990s a new trend developed among Japanese high school girls. The trend, called *ganguro*, promotes a new style of “being a woman”. The new style differs from the traditional one, where women have a peripheral position in society.¹ This peripheral position is reflected in the education and occupational careers of traditional women.² Statistically, women obtain less education than men. In 2000, only 36.2 % of university students were women. In their work, women are often confronted with unfair treatment. The Japanese female-to-male salary ratio is one of the lowest among developed countries.³ Women very seldom possess leadership positions in companies. They hold only 2% of the director positions.⁴

In the early 1990s the situation of women in Japan began to change. From the financial point of view, women are becoming more self-sustaining, which is partially-reflected in the growing number of female part-time workers (over 20% since 1990).⁴ Women started to change the “female position” in society and are more focused on their aspirations. The declining number of marriages (-4 % since 1993) and the rapidly growing number of divorces (+58% since 1990) has been noted.⁴ Media marketers have noticed the changes in the “female position” and reacted to these changes by focusing more of their campaigns on women. As one of their substantial projects, the media have constructed a new style for women – which today is identified by the term *ganguro*. When introducing this trend, media concentrated on the youth population because

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this part of the society is more apt to adopt new styles and fashion. Although the *ganguro* trend does not fit well with traditional Japanese culture, it is popular among girls who are just entering into adult life. Many non-*ganguro* girls and boys readily accept some of the trend elements. Fearing exclusion, they often conform to the style due to pressures they experience from media and peers.

In this paper, it is argued that the media created and promoted the *ganguro* trend and were, in turn, impacted by its own creation. After describing the trend in the next section, the author discusses the strategy of the media, analyzing the actions of three key media – TV, magazines and commercials. Aspects of media and *ganguro* reflexive interaction are also presented.

Ganguro girls in Japanese society

Ganguro girls can be identified by specific external features, which are typical only in this style. They make up their faces and necks very dark – highlighted by white makeup, dyed hair or wigs (Fig. 1), and wear high platform shoes.⁵ A dark face is one of the main features of the *ganguro* trend. Because of this feature, the name attached to the trend is *ganguro*, which means “black face” in Japanese. This trend is also called *buriteri* – taken from *buri no teriyaki* (fried fish with black sauce), as well as *Yamanba* – the name of a mythical witch who lives in the mountains.



Figure 1. *Ganguro* girls. (Photo by the author)

Ganguro girls differ from typical Japanese women not only in outward physical appearance but also in their behavior and their attitudes towards their social roles. In a society where many people still emphasize loyalty to social groupings and only 32.7% think about fulfillment in their personal lives,⁴ *ganguro* girls focus on being individuals. This is mainly realized by following the *ganguro* fashion, which is very different from the traditional one.^{6,7} Being an individual, having a new style and wearing different clothes is not an easy thing in Japanese high schools where uniforms are still compulsory.⁵ Following this style often involves problems in school and intergenerational conflicts within families. Those girls who are forced to wear uniforms, use the *ganguro* style only after classes, or combine the compulsory clothes with selected elements of the trend (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. *Ganguro* girls wearing school uniforms. (Photo by the author)



Ganguro girls also have their own entertainment – a collective dance called *Para Para*. Girls gather in clubs to perform this dance, repeating the sequential movements shown on the stage by a leader. (More details about this dance are presented in the next section.)

As high school students, *ganguro* girls cannot easily afford the cosmetics, clothes, visits to clubs and other expenses that are associated with the *ganguro* trend. So in order to get money, they take part time jobs, often having several at once, or changing them frequently.⁸ While it has been custom in Japan to remain employed by one company for many years, *ganguro* girls attach little importance

to being loyal to one employer. They willingly change jobs, searching for more suitable offers suggesting a future pattern of job mobility.

The majority of the *ganguro* girls do not attempt to explain why they follow this trend. They just accept it because it is widely touted by the media and by their friends. Through media exposure and word of mouth, *ganguro* has become more than just a fashion trend; it has become a cultural identity and personal commitment. Girls integrate elements of the trend into their daily lives, spending much of their time evaluating images and talking about items, shopping for *ganguro* cosmetics and clothes and using *ganguro* gadgets.⁹ In addition, the number of shops dealing with *ganguro* fashion is growing,¹⁰ and many more people than core adherents have ample opportunity to see the products, think about buying them and adopt some elements from this trend. The effect of this process on appearance and interaction of styles is visible among both the youngsters themselves and young adults. Elements of the trend are eagerly used not only by *ganguro* girls but also by non-*ganguro* youth (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. Girls using elements of *ganguro* trend. (Photo by Seva Patlan, used with permission)



Some *ganguro* girls treat the trend as a style of living, organizing their conversations, activities and life patterns around the fashion and its social implications. These girls adopt the fashion fully and maintain their commitment to the style for as long as possible into their adulthood. Those who are already married are quite visible meeting together frequently to shop or walk with their children. They call themselves *ganguro mama*.¹¹

Roots of Conflicts: *Ganguro* Girls, School and Family

Childhood is frequently a very difficult and stressful period for Japanese. Japanese youth often do not have adequate relationships with their parents, who are usually wrapped up in their work and loyalty to their companies. Most parents leave for work early in the morning and come back very late in the evening. Many employees spend over 90% of their daytime hours working and do not have sufficient time to learn about their children's problems, talk to them and understand them.

As adult life is focused on the job, children's time is devoted to education. In school, children face fierce competition and many difficulties. Education starts very early. Some of the children start attending schools in their first year. Young children are vigorously prepared for entrance exams to highly recommended kindergartens, primary schools and so on. All these efforts focus on the attainment of higher positions in society. It is difficult for children to conduct themselves as individuals in school. They must wear uniforms and are even expected to use similar knapsacks. They are engaged in many social activities that are designed to shape and enhance the strength of their young community. They are taught that they should think of themselves as components of the group, not as individuals. Very similar rules are also found in high schools, where uniforms are also compulsory and make-up and jewelry are prohibited. But during in high school children begin to sense the suppression of their differences and many chafe under the restrictions and start to ask questions such as, "Why do I have to do it?," and "Why can't I be myself?" As a result, an increasing proportion of high school age children readily follow various unconventional trends, including *ganguro*.

Being *ganguro* often involves problems in school and family. First of all, due to the style and clothes, *ganguro* girls do not comply with school standards. Frequently, they are asked to wear uniforms, and required to remove make-up and to stop dyeing their hair. In some cases teachers have colored students' hair in public by spraying black hair dye on them. Girls who want to stay with the *ganguro* trend are often forced to transfer schools. There are many alternative schools and the number of these schools is growing in Japan. These schools—mostly private, accept these dissident youth providing giving them opportunities

to complete their education.

The problems of *ganguro* girls in their families are also rooted in their appearance and related attitudes of defiance. Only very rarely do Japanese parents accept *ganguro* styles and related behaviors. Parents often do not comprehend why their children are involved in the trend and what they gain from being *ganguro*. Communication between *ganguro* girls and their parents about daily life routines are often severely impacted by the absence of understanding. Girls may avoid being with their parents or remaining at home and spend much more time with friends in clubs. Some are compelled to move out of their parents' homes. Involvement in the *ganguro* trend may disrupt its adherents' ordinary lifestyle and impose many hardships suggesting that some deeply felt meanings are associated with commitment to this trend.

Ganguro Trend as a Media Product

The media have successfully introduced and developed the *ganguro* trend for commercial purposes. The powerful influence of media over everyday life patterns is demonstrated by the growing popularity of the trend despite its variance from traditional norms and images of Japanese women. This phenomenon depends on the well-targeted marketing strategy of the media. To promote the trend to Japanese teenagers, the media first targeted the femininity of girls, presenting this new style in a manner that was intriguing and exciting for women offering a completely different look and character.

The media have been associated with the *ganguro* trend from its very beginning. One of the initial factors triggering the creation of the trend was delivered to youth via TV and radio. A new singer named Namie Amuro from Okinawa accomplished this. She was one of the first women to show her sun-tanned skin to the public. Namie Amuro quickly became very popular among young girls, and her popularity is still flourishing. According to Kei Ono from Meiji Gakuin University¹², Namie's sun-tanned skin had a huge influence on Japanese girls and encouraged them to adopt the style and introduce it into their daily life. A second view suggests that African-American musicians, shown so widely in the media, inspired the *ganguro* trend. This claim comes from Marlina Watrous⁷, who points to musicians such as the group TLC and singer Lauren Hill as a stimulus to the trend. Regardless of who actually provoked the trend, one point is clear: the initial impetus toward the *ganguro* trend was conveyed to Japanese youngsters by the media.

Besides taking part in its creation, the media have affected the further development of the *ganguro* trend. The trend has a firm place in Japanese television with many recent programs featuring *ganguro*. Some of these programs have been made directly on the streets in the most popular youth districts. These districts are well known for shops, beauty salons, and fashions catering to

Japanese youth. Thus, *ganguro* programming and the style feed on and reciprocally reinforce each other. Youth who watch these programs are prone to hang out around these districts spending time there with friends. There are three such major districts in Tokyo: Harajuku, Shibuya and Shinjuku. These places are attractive to all teenagers; thus they also have a special meaning for the *ganguro* girls. The presence of girls who gather there for shopping and entertainment attracts media producers, so many broadcasting stations send crews there to record interviews (Fig. 4), which are later included in popular programs. Broadcasters talk to the *ganguro* girls and ask about details of their style. This imagery in turn builds a viewer base of *ganguro*-sympathetic and susceptible youth.

Figure 4. Recording a program in Harajuku district. (Photo by the author)

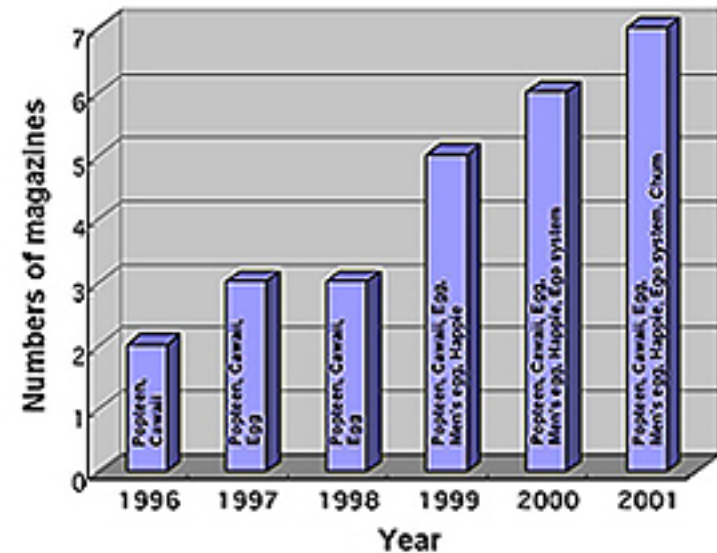


A wide variety of TV programs are produced depicting various aspects of the *ganguro* phenomenon. Teenagers have numerous opportunities to learn about the *ganguro* style, the daily lives and routines of those who adopt the style, their nightlife at clubs, and so on. Daytime programs target adults and concentrate

on the *ganguro* family relationship. These programs often present the conflict between the girls and their traditional parents thus building additional audiences through oppositional programming. In contrast, evening programs attract the youngsters by presenting the trend as a fascinating, cool style usually showing girls going to hairdressers and beauty salons and experiencing an alluring life style.

Teen magazines such as *Cawaii*¹³ and *Popteen*¹⁴ have intensively followed the development of the *ganguro* trend. The publishers of these magazines quickly noticed the existence of this trend, and the interest growing around it, and were among the first to use *ganguro* elements in their marketing. Soon, new titles were introduced such as *Egg*¹⁵ and *Ego System*¹⁶, specifically designed only for *ganguro* girls and fans of the trend. These magazines strongly promote the trend showing lots of photos, offering guidance on “how to become a *yamamba*”, listing new products and depicting elements of the *ganguro*'s apparel. The popularity of the trend is both magnified by and reflected in the growing number of published magazines that show elements of the *ganguro* trend (Fig. 5).

Figure 5. Numbers of magazines targeting the *ganguro* from 1996 to 2001.



The print media use many slogans that accentuate the attractiveness of the trend. Slogans such as “perfect style”, “egg stars”, “number one” or “get wild and be sexy” are prominently displayed in *ganguro* magazines. Another marketing ploy involves the sponsorship of certain budding girl celebrities and the further transformation of their images into stars. Later these girls appear in commercials, generating income for the media companies. Subsequently, they become idols for the younger *ganguro* and personifications of the trend. One example presented in Egg magazine¹⁷ is the model known under the nickname *Buriteri* who provides a great deal of advice for high school girls on how to transform themselves from a modest pupil into an extravagant *ganguro*. She promotes “everything” that is related to the trend.

Magazines strongly promote a *Para Para* dance, which has a collective character. Every month, new elements of the dance are introduced and presented in magazines^{18,19} as well as on the Internet.²⁰ *Ganguro* girls meet in clubs to dance together by repeating the same collective movements. Usually they learn about new elements by buying magazines or directly from their peers. The *Para Para* dance has an important meaning for them because it positively promotes the integration of *ganguro* girls into a kind of community. At the same time the dance promotes further dependence on the magazines in order for *ganguro* adherents to learn the latest movements.

Effects of the *Ganguro* Trend on Japanese Markets and Society

The print media interacts strongly with the trend and not only stimulates its development, but also is intrinsic to it. For instance, in order to understand the girls and their needs, the editor of *Cawaii* magazine has made certain locations available for the *ganguro* girls. In these places, the girls and supporters of the trend can meet to chat, correct make-up, and obtain information about new directions in the *ganguro* trend. The editor listens to the girls, observes them, and takes note of their opinions about fashion. The editor’s purpose is to investigate the desires of the girls and adjust the fashion to their needs. The information obtained from the girls is later used in the promotion of new products willingly purchased by youngsters. Products introduced to this narrow group are often modified before they appear on the wider market. Thus, these sites provide for market research, product testing and development. More importantly, they serve as venues that validate media influence as an apparently expressive, rather than dominative or exploitative feature of the trend.

These kinds of interactions are typical of the 21st century market where the boundaries between producers and consumers are fading. This effect, strongly dependant on bi-directional information flow, carries a mutual benefit. Producers and marketers learn about consumers’ tastes and desires, and, based on their expressed preferences, prepare new products. Customers are more likely

to be satisfied buying products that they feel represent and fulfill their wants.²¹

Not only editors, but also fashion designers and producers of other goods interact with the *ganguro* trend. Due to the growing popularity of the trend, producers and marketers recognize it as a powerful promotional tool in itself. Hence, many elements of the trend have been introduced into commercials to sell a whole range of items (Fig. 6). The *yamamba* image has been used to promote various products, from mobile phones to instant soups, while also being introduced to signboards and placards in many pubs, to make these places more attractive to the young.

Figure 6. *Ganguro* girls on the curtain of the popular automatic photo machine called *purikura*. (Photo by the author)



The new style, so different from typical Japanese culture, also captivates artists. Many are fascinated by the new image of the female presented in the *yamamba* style. For artists, this trend provokes a new combination of colors, shapes and characters. As shown in Fig. 7, some of the photographs introduce *ganguro* girls concentrating especially on the new elements of their apparel.

Figure 7. Photo presentation, Kayoko Uchida, Kanazawa Art Museum, August 2000. (Used with permission)



The media further promoted the trend by extending the *ganguro* image to include boys. In the beginning most boys were present in advertising merely as the *ganguro* girls' boyfriends. The extension of the style proved compelling for them, too. Gradually boys started to accept and use some of the trend elements changing clothing style and hair color. *Ganguro* boys and girls meet in popular areas such as Tokyo's Shinjuku and Harajuku, go shopping, spend time together and substantially organize their lives and identities around their mutual adherence to the trend. Today, the image of a *ganguro*-couple does not surprise anyone (Fig. 8.).

Figure 8. Ganguro couple. (Photo by the author)



Basically models shown in the girl-magazines have inspired the boy *ganguro* fashion. Since October 1999, the boys have had their own magazine, *Men's Egg*²², where they can find all-important information about fashion, trends and so on.

Conclusions

This paper demonstrates that the Japanese media have managed to create and establish the *ganguro* trend as a phenomenon that has significantly affected the everyday worlds of teenagers, schools, and families. In turn, much media content has been focused upon the orientation and activities of *ganguro* youth affirming their cultural power. As shown, the variety of media presentations reaching large numbers of people strongly affects the development of the trend and popular fascination with the trend has shaped the agenda of media. Although the trend is dissonant with traditional Japanese culture and lifestyles, it has become a powerful presence on the fashion market. More significantly, *ganguro* has impacted cultural definitions of Japanese young womanhood, spawned new types of collectivities while at the same time generating innovative concepts of the individual, produced non-conventional sorts of conversations and activities, is implicated in family schisms and educational disruption, and exerted its influence beyond the range of its core adherents. Even unaffiliated teenagers and adolescents willingly accept this style and often use the *ganguro* elements in their daily lives. *Ganguro* has become a relatively common feature of ordinary life in the streets, schools, and private sectors of Japan. Today, the trend is visible throughout the country and, indeed, until superseded by the next trend, it will be viewed as the style of Japanese teenagers.

This analysis demonstrated how media constructs a phenomenon that captures not only an audience but also the media itself. In constituting its audience of *ganguro* adherents, supporters and opponents, in creating and sustaining a particular form of mundane existence, a dynamic was set in motion that drove the media toward a particular programming agenda. Thus, the lifestyle trend of *ganguro*, initially produced and developed by media, became a force of its own influencing the direction of the media, and, more broadly, consumerism, art and social life in Japan.

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Fascinating Censorship: Mundane Behavior in the Treatment of Banned Material

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Abstract: This paper deals with the issue of free speech versus censorship in Germany. It examines the impact of censorship and the behavior of a special fandom that is attracted to banned material. The censors and fans of censored material are bonded together in a kind of a symbiotic relationship. The paper shows that censorship is accepted by the majority but proves both intolerable and fascinating for the fans of the bizarre. The exploration of banned material is explained as a thrilling if temporary departure from the mundane world of the censored. However, fans of the bizarre implement mundane practices in their individual behaviors and social interactions by routinely obtaining, discussing and disseminating banned material. While banning explicit material may be ineffective, it clearly delineates socio-cultural boundaries and renders standards of mundane media use explicit.

If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.

George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (unpublished introduction, quoted from: Robertson, 1993, p. xiii)

We are socialized by the different kinds of mass media that shape our view of life and influence our behavior. Socio-cultural experiences and associations do condition our opinions and preferences. Moreover, the contents of media are to some extent a kind of refractive mirror of society. How tolerant or restrictive we treat media reveals to us a significant part of our current socio-political situation and moral beliefs. But neither the official picture of the mainstream culture nor the research that often criticizes the portrayals of sex and violence in the media to justify control and censorship reveal the behavior of people who are fascinated by banned (and often bizarre) contents.

The “normal” taste of ordinary people as well as the members of so-called “advanced civilization” is distinguished from the activities of those who prefer unusual media precisely because of the restrictions. But even this behavior and the banned materials themselves are part of the cultural landscape, although

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they get rarely into the focus of academic interest, despite the fact that a huge number of theoretical studies have been written especially by jurists and social scientists. Yet, the ordinary, simple everyday things of life are a valid source of knowledge. The main questions are: What is the quarrel between censorship and free speech all about? How are these deviant products of the media used by which kind of consumers in their everyday lives, and why are these items “media-worthy” for them? And, what point of view do the censors have? What is at stake in banning dubious contents, and what is at stake in allowing the free flow of uncensored media?

My research in the field of the sociology of popular culture conducted in Germany (Seim 1997, Seim/Spiegel 1998³ and 1999), and even this short paper, deal with this “twilight zone”, a gray area where a strange struggle occurs behind the scenes. To be honest, I must admit that I collected dubious material myself. During my research for this paper I interviewed some fans of the weird, read a lot of special fanzines and books and investigated websites firsthand. I concentrated my investigation on the orientations and behavior of German fans of censored material rather than on the activities of the censors. The main source for the latter’s behavior might be the journal *BPjS Aktuell*, the official organ of the German bureau for examination of harmful media.

The Current Situation of Ambiguity

“Censorship happens whenever some people succeed in imposing their political or moral values on others by suppressing words, images, or ideas that they find offensive” (Heins, 1993, p. 3). Censorship always has a Janus-face. It creates an odd scenario of ambiguity. On the one side, the government and many pressure groups try to suppress unacceptable media content within the bounds of human rights and constitutional law regarding freedom of speech, art and press. On the other side, forbidden things become rather attractive to many fans because of the specific thrill of interdiction. Michel Foucault once said that a ban makes a book valuable. This two-faced phenomenon of repressive control versus self-determination of mature users raises questions about how fans on one side put into practice their fascination with breaking the taboo and, on the other side, why and how censors ban the items they select.

The Censors and Their Objects

According to Post (1998), censorship can be understood as a kind of cultural regulation. As with any other reasonable measure, censorship must try to balance the claims of the common good against the claims of individual freedom. In general, censorship as a mandatory requirement depends on the commonsensical application of contemporary community standards and conventions; in particular, it is implemented according to the taste and character

of individual readers and viewers. But even the censors act on their own subjective tastes to prevent feared anti-social attitudes and actions when they assess the intention and the possible effects of cultural objects they examine. Even a few objectionable sequences or pages that epitomize, so to speak, the bad – taken out of context – could be sufficient to ban an entire film or book. But there are at least two sides to everything. One person's obscenity is another person's bedtime reading. Art or morbid filth? Finally, it's a question of practical ethics and aesthetics as to whether one accepts and permits or condemns and banishes crass descriptions of the physical side of the body.

Most intrusive censorship is supported as taking place in the interests of protecting young people. These censors are likely convinced that they are performing a positive service to society. They must believe that no social system – even a pluralistic democracy – can allow their members total and absolute freedom of informational interchange or they could not do their work.

Insofar as the criteria censors use to distinguish between prohibition and permissible tolerance are in flux, censoring authorities must rely on all sorts of tacit assumptions of propriety in assessing how to do their work. Even today in the liberated time of a postmodern “anything goes” climate, the government finds it necessary to put the ‘kabosh’ on the free flow of certain kinds of information. Decision makers must copy with the problem of determining what would be harmful to minors or might endanger social stability. Many laws prohibiting modes of expression in literature, films and other media thought to be depraved or corrupt are currently deemed valid, but the application of these laws may be questionable. Even if there does not exist a major official agency concerned with pre-censorship in Germany, many authorities closely scrutinize the limits of liberty. Only the FSK (*Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft*), the German Board of Film Classification (a more or less voluntary self-regulating body of the motion picture industry similar to the MPAA in the USA), performs a pre-censorship assessment because all movies are required to be submitted before their first showing. Upon review, the FSK confers several ratings up to warning notices such as “Not to be sold to anyone under 18”.

Above all, the courts and the so called “*Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Schriften und Medieninhalte – BPjS*” (a unique federal office of examination that identifies the kind of media material that are likely to corrupt the young) can take action against disapproved items by putting them on its index to prevent minors from coming into contact with possibly harmful material. Special committees with from 3 to 12 mostly honorary members of socially-relevant interest groups, such as churches, youth welfare organizations, teachers, publishers and distributors decide if an item should be placed on the index. As we shall see, this index is a two-headed monster because some fans of censorable material use the index as a shopping list.

Restrictions, however, are in force for the more than 80 million citizens of Germany. Any individual can institute legal proceedings against dubious media products at any youth welfare department. About 14,000 videos, books, comics, records, computer games, World Wide Web sites and other Internet contents, and so on are restricted by virtue of being on this index. These items therefore are forbidden to minors because some censors deemed that viewing such material would result in “social-ethic disorientation” or wrong moral concepts due to – more or less – explicit obscenity, sex, drugs, violence, occultism, encouragement of suicide, or political extremism. All bans are mentioned in the lists of the official organ *BPjS Aktuell*. Banned media may not be advertised or sent via the mail. Most media content that is banned, particularly in the area of literature, comes from foreign countries, (compare with Ohmer, 2000) for example: Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, Dan Kavanagh's (Julian Barnes) *Duffy*, and Timothy Leary's *Politics of Ecstasy*. All these bans pose challenges for fans of banned items.

Additionally about 500 books, films, records and so on are totally banned in Germany. Even if Article 5 of the German Constitution establishes freedom of speech (*Eine Zensur findet nicht statt*, means: Censorship does not occur), many criminal and civil laws limit the possibilities of free expression. The reasons for prohibition are varied, such as: Hard core pornography under § 184 Criminal Code (about 175 objects banned), glorification of violence under § 131 (about 170 objects banned), libel or hate speech under § 130 (about 100 objects banned, especially Nazi propaganda and the so called “Auschwitz lie”). Any judge can make his own decision as what is to be banned nationwide for “antisocial harmfulness” (in German: *sozialschädlich*). But every isolated case is a matter for interpretation and many dubious decisions are inevitably made.

The main ground for book banning in Germany is Nazi propaganda (compare with Post, 1998, pp. 67-87), and I think this exception to the right to freedom of speech might be reasonable: More than one hundred publications and records are forbidden for xenophobic incitement, hate speech, right-wing extremism, race hatred, vengeance theories of a Jewish conspiracy, or because they question the Holocaust or German war guilt.

But even manuals for self-defense, such as many books from the US publishers Paladin Press and Loompanics Unlimited, have been seized by Canadian and German authorities: *Get tough! How to win in hand-to-hand fighting* by Cpt. Fairbairn (Paladin Press, Boulder, Colorado) or *The poisoner's handbook* by Maxwell Hutchkinson (Loompanics, Port Townsend, Washington 1988), although they were “sold for informational purposes only”. In the USA they were freely available because of the First Amendment; in Germany, they have been banned since 1991 because they contain instructions on how to commit criminal offenses.

It is questionable to ban virtual reality artworks or the artificial fantasy world of the movies, literature and comics. Concerning motion pictures, the violation of human dignity by the depiction of graphic violence is the main reason for prohibition. For example the following films are prohibited in Germany: *The Evil Dead* (director: Sam Raimi: This film has been banned in Germany since 1984. The censors passed this film only in an edited R-rated rated), *Halloween Part 2* (produced by John Carpenter), *Phantasm* (Don Coscarelli) and *Braindead* (Peter Jackson). Some confiscated records are: *Butchered at Birth* (by the death metal band Cannibal Corpse) because of violent cover artwork, and *Eating Lamb* (by the US punk band NOFX, 1996) because of the depiction of sexual intercourse with an animal. The band issued two different versions of cover art. The LP version *Eating Lamb* was banned in Germany in 1996 because of "bestiality" ("sodomistic porn"), however the similarly illustrated CD *Heavy Petting Zoo* was not. Another example of different cover art versions is *Bloodthirst* by Cannibal Corpse (Metal Blade Records, Germany 1999). To prevent further bans the label created two issues—one with original artwork and one softened for the German market to appease the morality guardians and, respectively, the watchdogs. But, Pieper (1999) shows, that restriction, even of music, is a world-wide problem.

The Fans of the Banned

The consumer's right to get what he or she wants is wider than the maker's right to spread ideas, because the laws (and the risks) have always been aimed primarily at directors, authors, publishers or editors. In other words, the law does not forbid consumers from reading banned books or watching banned films (except child porn, possession of which alone is criminal) if you find or own one. However, sale and trade is prohibited so these items could be confiscated and the producers or distributors punished.

Violent media contents and latent sexualization seem to have become quite common. People are exposed to a constant stream of more or less questionable items. Cable networks, videotapes, computer games, and the Internet offer the possibility of getting anything you could want. Anonymity ("Pretty good Privacy") and encryption technology ("FreeNet") could neutralize the ability to wiretap and to censor. In this confusing area, an index is unintentionally, of course, a point of departure helping some fascinated individuals to select what are probably the most exciting offers. Reading an index is like looking into an area that moralizers see as the blackest depths of the human soul and the farthest reaches of society's underground. Already the disreputable circumstances and the feeling of doing something forbidden thrill and entice the fan. The motivation for getting banned stuff may vary, but like a

"Pavlovian Reflex" every authoritarian restriction on the publication and distribution of suspicious material inflames the desire among fans of the banned to know what one shouldn't know.

The mainstream with its social definitions of good taste, impose taboos and speech codes that become predictable and boring to the connoisseurs of the really thrilling stuff. They crave unfiltered, unfettered gore, so they set out searching for the suppressed. Banned films, books, comics, records and so on strongly attract the buffs who want to test the limits and explore the 'dark side'. They yearn to find something very special. Most of these fans may come from the middle-class, and are young and male. Some statistical research seems to try to discredit these fans who are fascinated by these films by claiming that they tend to have lower education levels. Even serious researchers, such as Vogelgesang (1990, pp. 171f, 221f), attempt this in his analysis of juvenile peer groups that come together for horror film watching sessions. He admits, nevertheless, that the elaborate codes of knowledge of film aesthetics and special effects reflect a sophisticated interchange and involved behavioral style.

He summarizes that taste and habitus are not class-specific, but are rather oriented to specific scenes of like-minded individuals. As far as I know, a study that examines the ethnographic details of the fans of banned media does not exist. (Perhaps such a study would be banned.) Only some data are known: "Adults, particularly college educated males in their thirties or forties with above average social-economic status, are the dominant users of sex oriented materials" (Larsen, 1994, p. 93).

The notion of resistance held by many youth is to be independent from official orders, rules and regulations concerning matters of taste. But even if a fascination with violating taboos is a widespread feeling, especially among adolescent nonconformist groups—active opposition to the prohibitions is infrequent. Only on the relatively anonymous Internet can one find many sites and chatrooms concerning freedom of speech where people fight against suppression by condemning what they perceive to be a sad state of affairs. I would guess that only a few thousand fans demand and collect banned material systematically. But if a case of dubious suppression occurs, the public debate regarding the principles of free speech and human rights is dramatized for a short time in the feature pages, although apparently most of those writers have apparently not seen or read banned material.

Beside the superstructure of the official opinion of political correctness and judicial bans, which mainly are approved by the "moral majority", there are many sub-cultural scenes where groups try to counteract the authorities and their blocking strategies. It seems that successful circumvention of bans by gamesman-like ploys is driven by a sense of a sporting challenge and produces within the fans a feeling of gloating (*Schadenfreude*). As an *experimentum libertatis*,

youth culture members frequently support a standpoint opposed to omnipresent restrictive laws. Some minors, for example, ask their elder siblings or friends to get adult-only films or other media for them. This subversive system of distribution, lending, copying and swapping is delimited and works rather independently from the adult world. Only insiders are admitted to this autonomous underworld of the banned. Banned items become a kind of vehicle of oppositional meaning. Friends of splatter, gore and other violent artworks are connected in a special kind of provocative fandom that sustains their hobby. Many of those consumers communicate the results of their observations and interchange new information about banning, cuts and so on in chat rooms, fanzines, or e-mail newsletters.

The Internet has become a particular and seductive marketplace, even for strange ideas. In Germany the state criticizes that, for example Napster, could be misused as a barter platform for illegal violent skinhead or Nazi music. E-commerce bookshops also offer forbidden right-wing literature like Hitler's *Mein Kampf* for sale. The Government intends that cyberspace should not be a lawless sphere. In several countries Yahoo, for instance, blocks the access of web sites that offer Nazi "devotional objects". But, as the ITAA (Information Technology Association of America) says 1995 in its statement "Internet, Free Speech and Industry Self-Regulation" (www.ita.org/intrpt01.htm):

Technology itself has no value system or point of view; rather, it is the behavior of users which determines the purposes served by the particular technology in case of the Internet, the deviant behavior of a small minority has created fear in the public's mind about this new technology and, as a result, attracted the attention of lawmakers at both the federal and state levels.

In Germany many lovers of deviant, profane media feel that the state is making up their minds for them. The "gore-hounds" are probably more prone to interchanging the results of their observations than are the viewers of pornography. According to Cynthia M. King, the gore watchers are attracted to graphic horror with blood, death, and physical torture. They think these scenes with the "really ill shit" are cool, especially if the film classification board issues an *imprimatur*. To avoid this heteronomous lack of information and to satisfy fan curiosity, several US fan publications describe the results of video bashing and the current intrusions of censorship in motion pictures and TV. Sequences the censors cut out are detailed in so-called "fanzines", such as *Fangoria*, *Filmthreat* or *Gorezone*, and in German zines like *Splattering Image*, *Doom* or *Gory News* (<http://www.gorynews.de/>) and Websites like "www.schnittberichte.de", "www.filmzensur.de" or www.indizierte-filme.de. Special dictionaries by the

authors Trebbin (1998) or Bertler and Lieber (1999) list most of the available but banned films. The publishers obviously have a need to express their degree of freedom. They compare, for instance, the unabridged original versions with the cut versions for the local market and show some restricted stills. For similar reasons, other insider fan groups enjoy cracking the check codings of toned down computer games to reconstruct the original version.

Barred objects become rather fascinating to many collectors of the weird, who want to know what the State suppresses. For those inquisitive persons every ban is a cue (signal) and every index serves as a compelling shopping list with the special incentive of the taboo to savor the forbidden fruit. This different kind of adventure/sensation seeking of the fandom has its own conventions with a certain magic of exceptionality. It's astonishing that— except for some right-wing scenes of skinhead music— almost the only horror films that produced a vibrant fandom in which the members exchange their experiences are those with obliterated scenes, different versions and bans. I can't find similar interactions in other forbidden zones, such as pornography, perhaps because those films do not attach importance to originality. In comparison with viewing horror films as a test of courage or as an initiation rite, porn watching might be more of a lonesome event that, in terms of fan appreciation, probably requires no embarrassing informational exchange on different versions.

It may increase one's own experience and one's social status to find a special prohibited and therefore hard-to-get rarities with a high "market values". The manner of obtaining such material is "style forming". In negating the act of banning, alternative ways of procuring materials, along with several strategies of circumventing the bans, have emerged. For example, circumventions include re-issues of seized media under false names, pirated editions and bootlegging on the black market, mail-order lists with cover-named films, imports of foreign versions, or publication of documentaries and fanzines with suppressed details. More open-minded and liberal countries such as the Netherlands or Belgium, where nearly no media censorship exist, became very appealing to fans. Shops like Cult Video (Amsterdam) sell most of the banned tapes in the original unabridged version. German shops such as Videodrom or Incredibly Strange Video (both in Berlin) import foreign versions with harmless titles. While bootlegging is illegal and benefits only the profit of sellers of these bad copies, the re-issue of forbidden films under false fantasy names can work for some time. The Astrolabel obtained the copyright for several cult classics because in Germany banned films such as *Maniac* (William Lustig), *Last House on the Left* (Wes Craven) or *Mother's Day* (Charles Kaufman) were re-issued in digitally remastered and completely uncut versions. This confused the government for a while and ruined the prices for the original cassettes, but brought the suppressed and formally out-of-print material back to availability until the police, in a

concerted swoop, seized and charged many titles with being illegal. Since spring 2000 several judges in Berlin have blacklisted these “new” editions because they have the same condemned contents. I would guess that it’s impossible to eradicate a film if some copies survive.

Prohibition demands obedience, not understanding. Censorship demonstrates the power of the rulers, and, from the fans point of view, deprives them of their own free will eliciting their resistance. Those consumers set their own agenda by circumventing the official instructions.

Conclusion

“Every taboo deals with an awakening to the dilemma of curiosity about something both attractive and dangerous” Roger Shattuck (1996, p. 30) wrote in his book *Forbidden Knowledge*. Similarly, the everyday struggle of censors and fans is intriguing, but little is known regarding this phenomenon.

We have found a complex situation among certain interest groups that some people may identify as an aberration from the normal use of the media, although the provocative topic of “eros and thanatos” is as old as culture itself. But the dialectical process linking ethics, moral reasoning and society are perpetually in tension over the issues of personal freedom vs. social responsibility. This essay concludes with a consideration of mundane issues that enter into the debate on “how divided and diverse societies decide what is permissible to broadcast” (Shaw, 1999).

Some independent filmmakers try to create a special symbolic code by using exaggerated graphic violence to characterize the horror in everyday situations where the extreme becomes quite prosaic. Disturbingly nihilistic films such as *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (John McNaughton), *Nekromantik* (Jörg Buttgerreit) or *Combat Shock* (Buddy Giovinazzo) show an ambivalent mundanity of ordinary madness and abnormality in a degraded form. B-pictures can be made cheaply with no-name stars as long as they can keep an audience’s attention, especially by exploiting taboos (Balun, 1989:173).

Censors won’t tolerate that. media rating or banning of the so-called “video nasties” or “mind-raping” comics are commonplace for the censors. Society in the main is unaware that these media even exist. The censors routinely cut or prohibit those special interest and “no-budget” films, books and so on, if they feel that the majority agrees or indifferent to making disgusting or sleazy items available. The examiners of the diverse governmental offices feel that they are just doing their well-paid ho-hum jobs in the name of public mental hygiene. They often exhibit a sense of tedium regarding matters of taste, decency and hallowed icons. Most censors adopt a taken-for-granted, unreflective approach and do not recognize that their work depends on a variable “Zeitgeist”, shifting

boundaries of discretion, and changing values. As Greene (2000) verifies, when conventional tastes changes they just find new codewords to obscure their underlying notions of moral and political decency.

On the other side are the inquisitive fans who feel compelled to evade restrictions. In their view censorship is an obsolete and undemocratic instrument of control. More importantly, it provides a way for them to experience some form of otherness. Censorship creates contra-cultural fandoms of people who are exhilarated by the act of negating what are actually minor proscriptions.

Of course, some regulating curbs may be necessary, especially on media contents that might constitute a “clear and present” danger. But the fans of extreme cultural items usually do not trespass beyond the point that threatens the freedom and well-being of others. Viewing of repulsive splatter or explicit porn movies is for most simply an effort to neutralize mundanity. These viewers create their own diversions and ask for tolerance of their preferences. Their quest for and gratifications through X-rated artworks are mundane practices that rarely lead to any other violation. Their activities and interactions constitute a routine life pattern that permit them to experience themselves as outlaws while not threatening the sanctity of ordinary society or the dignity of fellow citizens since “normal” viewers are not forced to watch extreme material.

You may ask, what is at stake in banning this filthy material? Well, who can decide for future generations which kind of media content is unworthy? One characteristic of censorship is that it is mundane and tacit so that its sphere of influence can be inconspicuously extended. The consequence could be that a few judges routinely decide what all others will be allowed to receive. But the voices of dissent still need to be heard, particularly those that are rarely found in the power positions of mainstream media. Cultural history suggests that formerly banned things often convey a sense of the everyday thinking and acting of the common people. That is, what is viewed as degraded, unworthy culture in an era may be more indicative of mundane lives than high culture and superior art, which reach only a small elite portion of the population.

I submit that an emancipatory practice might be a better way to master the problems posed by deviant, disturbing or dangerous content. In order to enhance the media competence/literacy and the power of discernment of both the fans and the censors, new ways of understanding sensitive materials are needed. A reasonable use of control and regulation (bans for instance in the cases of child porn or hateful, aggressive Nazi propaganda; restrictions of violent and explicit material in the name of the protection of young people) is ok in my view, but most of the other prohibitions are not emancipatory, and, by the way, won’t work. To blame media for social ills (for example, the massacre at Littleton High School) and to demand restrictions is to take the easy route. Of course, people’s behavior and social interactions with others are not only regulated

through laws. Many social norms and everyday practices facilitate the social life of humankind. Censorship is not the only way to instill and regulate norms by official actions, but it is the most simple and discernible effort to accomplish this. But since imposed restrictions often have the opposite effect, it is possible that censorship serves more to convince the public that aberrance is being restrained and that cultural values are being preserved than it is to actually prevent access to material. Informal human kinds of social control on the face-to-face level of everyday life are more sensible constraints on the damaging use of bizarre items as long as interpersonal processes are effective.

“The threat of censorship is real. Laws can also be counterproductive. For some, they may only serve as labels to heighten curiosity” (Larsen, 1994, p. 95). If bans were removed, novelty would wear off and satiation would eventually set in. In allowing the free flow of uncensored material the aforementioned fandom of the bizarre would probably be destroyed because there is a symbiotic relationship between censors and fans of the banned. However, a postmodern scenario of an over-stimulated population with complete access to uncensored sex, violent media content, offensive and actionable symbols and racist speech is not desirable. Mysteries are exciting. Showing everything to everybody could not only be quite dangerous for the continued existence of society (as the censors fear), but it would be rather boring for all the trash seeking “truffle-pigs”. But there is no fear of that.

References: An annotated bibliography of mentioned books (further relevant books may be found in my books):

- Balun, Chas. (Ed.): *The Deep Red Horror Handbook*, Fantaco Enterprises, Inc., New York 1989.

The well-known horror film specialist gives insider views of the scene and presents some famous splatter film directors. His “gore scoreboard” contains many reviews of more or less bizarre movies.

- Bertler, Andreas & Lieber, Harry: *Hölle auf Erden Kompendium 2000*, Bertler+Lieber Verlag, München 1999 (Munich/Germany).

This huge dictionary reviews thousands of films and books of the horror, action and fantasy genres. Richly-illustrated with stills, this compendium is written for fans.

- *BPjS Aktuell* - Amtliches Mitteilungsblatt der Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Schriften und Medieninhalte, Forum Verlag, Bonn/Germany (published three times a year).

This official organ of the “Bundesprüfstelle” (Kennedyallee 105-107, D-53175 Bonn/Germany) contains the index lists of banned media objects.

- Greene, Marilyn J. (Ed.): *New Code Words for Censorship. Modern Labels for Curbs on the Press*, World Press Freedom Committee, Reston 2000.

This compilation contains some international texts on recent censorship worldwide. Some new code words are “codes of ethics”, “self-regulation” and “responsibilities” of the press.

- Heins, Marjorie: *Sex, Sin, and Blasphemy. A Guide to America's Censorship Wars*, The New Press, New York 1993.

In her in-depth study, Heins explores the boundaries of conventional taste and shows how sensitive taboos affect culture in the USA.

- Kiste Nyberg, Amy: *Seal of Approval. The history of the Comics Code*, Jackson/USA 1998.

This revised dissertation deals with the development of reprisals against comic books since Dr. Wertham. The author – a professor at Seton Hall University – researches the reasons for campaigns against graphic novels, especially by religious groups.

- Larsen, Otto N.: *Voicing Social Concern: The Mass Media - Violence - Pornography - Censorship - Organization - Social Science - The Ultramultiversity*, University Press of America, Lanham 1994.

Professor Emeritus Larsen (University of Washington), a participant on the President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, compiles in this book many elucidating lectures and speeches on these topics.

- Ohmer, Anja: *Gefährliche Bücher? Zeitgenössische Literatur im Spannungsfeld zwischen Kunst und Zensur*, Diss., Tübingen 1999, Nomos Verlag, Baden-Baden/Germany 2000.

This study examines book banning in the field of contemporary literature, particularly in the conflict between art and censorship.

- Pieper, Werner (Ed.): *Verfemt - Verbannt - Verboten. Musik & Zensur. Weltweit, Die Grüne Kraft, Löhrbach/Germany 1999.*

Based on issue 6/98 of the British magazine *Index on Censorship* this German book deals with suppressed and banned music worldwide. Several entries explain the situation of forbidden music mainly in Europe and America. Vol. 2, which focuses on the history of censoring music in Germany, is in print.

- Post, Robert C. (Ed.): *Censorship and Silencing. Practices of Cultural Regulation*, The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, Los Angeles 1998.

The compilation of symposium papers held at the Getty Institute in 1994-1995 contains many important papers in the field. It has three parts: Censorship: The Repressive State, Discourse: The Tutelary State, Silencing: The Egalitarian State.

- Robertson QC, Geoffrey: *Freedom, the Individual and the Law*, Penguin Books, London 1993, 7th Edition.

A classic guide to civil liberties and citizen's rights mainly in Britain.

- Seim, Roland: *Zwischen Medienfreiheit und Zensureingriffen. Eine medien- und rechtssoziologische Untersuchung zensorischer Eingriffe in bundesdeutsche Populärkultur*, Diss. phil. (Ph.D. thesis), Univ. of Münster, Telos Verlag, Münster/Germany 1997.

This German sociological dissertation ("Between Media Freedom and Censorship: The Sociology of Media and Law on Censorship Interventions in German Popular Culture") examines the reasons for censorship and the structures of such intrusions on the free speech. The examination begins with a historical overview, provides the important terms, legal basis and all key institutional players involved in control and self-regulation, followed by case studies of all kinds.

- Seim, Roland/Spiegel, Josef (Eds.): *'Ab 18' - zensiert, diskutiert, unterschlagen. Beispiele aus der Kulturgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Band 1*, Telos Verlag, Münster/Germany 1998³.

— — — — : *Der kommentierte Bildband zu "Ab 18" - zensiert, diskutiert, unterschlagen. Zensur in der deutschen Kulturgeschichte ["Ab 18" - Band 2]*, Telos Verlag, Münster/Germany 1999.

These richly illustrated and annotated documentaries ("Ab 18" means "from 18 years up" - censored, discussed, suppressed - Censorship in German cultural history) show examples of restricted or banned material in Germany mainly from the media. But most of the examples (films, books, comics, records, new media etc.) are of foreign extractions. Vol. 1 displays also some texts written by involved artists such as Klaus Staeck and Jörg Buttgereit; Vol. 2 contains an annotated bibliography and a list of important Internet addresses for further research.

- Shattuck, Roger: *Forbidden Knowledge. From Prometheus to Pornography*, St. Martin's Press, New York 1996.

This sophisticated book reveals the difficult history of some hidden topics in culture. His conclusion compiles the "Six categories of forbidden knowledge", for instance inaccessible, unattainable knowledge, prohibited by religious, moral or secular authorities, dangerous, destructive, fragile, delicate and ambiguous knowledge.

- Shaw, Collin: *Deciding What We Watch: Taste, Decency, and Media Ethics in the UK and the USA*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/ England 1999.

Shaw focuses on the moral basis and history of regulation as it has been applied to major issues of taste and decency, such as the protection of children, obscenity and indecency.

- Trebbin, Frank: *Die Angst sitzt neben Dir - Gesamtausgabe -*, Berlin/ Germany 1998 (published oneself).

This excellent large-format filmography on horror and fantasy assembles thousands of competent film reviews and valuations. Essential reading for cineasts and fans of strange movies.

- Vogelgesang, Waldemar: *Jugendliche Video-Cliquen. Action- und Horrorvideos als Kristallisationspunkte einer neuen Fankultur*, Diss. phil., Univ. of Trier, Westdeutscher Verlag, Opladen/Germany 1990.

This German sociological dissertation deals with the rarely considered topic of the juvenile fandom of horror videos. It researches into the complex structure of peer groups which are fond of films the majority of society rejects. He finds out that these fans are not "videots" but specialized and reasonable members of a "deviant" subculture.

- Winfield, Betty Honchin: *Bleep!... Censoring Rock and Rap Music*, New York 1998.

Expensive book on the history of censoring rock and rap music.

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The Mundane and Its Reproduction in Alternative Media

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Abstract: Alternative media may be characterised by the degree to which they are de-professionalised, de-institutionalised and de-capitalised. Using these characteristics as a starting point, the presence of the mundane in the production of alternative media is explored. Common features that are suggestive of a mundane approach include: the incorporation of media production into the routines of everyday life; the site of production in a domestic setting; and the depiction of everyday activities in the content of the media itself. Examples are provided from fanzines, perzines and new social movement media. The personal home page is presented as an exemplar of these ‘mundane media’ that draws on the resources of capitalism in both its communication form and its content. It is argued that, whilst the home page might lack the infractory dimension found in the popular production explored by John Fiske, its analysis offers insights into the development of identity and sociality through popular production by the ‘silent majority.’

In his 1934 essay ‘The Author as Producer’ Walter Benjamin (1934/1982) argued that in order for political propaganda to be effective, it was not enough to merely reproduce the radical or revolutionary content of an argument in a publication. The medium itself required transformation: the position of the work in relation to the means of production had to be critically re-aligned. This requires not only the radicalising of methods of production but a re-thinking of what it means to be a media producer. What we now term ‘alternative media’ can be thought of as being organised along similar lines to Benjamin’s desideratum. They are about offering the means for democratic communication to people who are normally excluded from media production. They typically go beyond simply providing a platform for radical or alternative points of view: they emphasise the organisation of media to enable wider social participation in their creation, production and dissemination than is possible in the mass media. Raymond Williams (1980) highlighted three aspects of communication as foci for this re-alignment: ‘skills, capitalization and controls’ (p. 54). In an explicit echo of Williams, James Hamilton (forthcoming) has recently argued that to

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distinguish alternative media from the mass media the former must be de-professionalised, de-capitalised and de-institutionalised. In short, they must be available to ordinary people without the necessity of professional training, without excessive capital outlay and they must take place in settings other than media institutions or similar systems. Such media will then have the potential to more closely reflect the everyday practices of de-centralized, directly democratic, self-managed and reflexive networks of ‘everyday-life solidarity’ that Alberto Melucci (1996) finds at the heart of social movement activity: what he terms ‘networks in the everyday’ (p. 113). It is at this level—the level of the mundane—that I wish to examine the creative and production practices of alternative media. I want to go further than those media that deal with social change to consider the ‘personal mundane’ as well as the ‘social movement mundane.’

This paper traces an increasingly ‘intimate’ trajectory. I begin by examining the fanzine, a medium that deals with the fan’s relationship with the celebrity, where the fan attempts to bridge the gulf between their two worlds through discrimination and productivity (Fiske, 1989/1991). I then turn to social movement media that attempt to personalise arguments and protests against global injustices (such as environmental destruction and human rights abuses) by locating them amongst the everyday activities of the activists. Through this process they are also made relevant at a productive level, encouraging and enabling activists and readers to participate in the creation of the media themselves. Finally I turn to the perzine and the personal web site where the consumption of mass media products is internalised to such a degree that we seem to see only the personal world of the author, where the external world appears only as a faint stimulus.

I will argue that these movements away from (and, in some cases, the absence of) professionalism, capitalisation and institutionalisation in alternative media practices are highly suggestive of a ‘banal media’ that, lacking three significant ‘markers’ of mainstream media, are likely to be unregarded, at least in terms of their productive capacities, if not in terms of their content. In short, they are ‘uninteresting’ media (Brekhus, 1998). To claim alternative media as uninteresting is to go against the grain of the critical histories of alternative media studies where such media are most often seen as extraordinary, whether as engines for radical or revolutionary social change, as the vehicles for remarkable rebels to proclaim their philosophies, or as vanguards of a new politics (Hamilton and Atton, forthcoming). I do not want to argue, as much cultural studies work does (following a position popularised by John Fiske), that all popular consumption is evidence of resistance and that the fanzine writer and the personal web page owner are as transgressive as the political activist. Instead I want to argue that in the case of the personal web page mundanity is

often all there is and that this itself is worthy of examination. Far from being a trivial observation this is a significant one – it provides insights into the power and significance of mundane tastes, opinions and experiences without the need for construing them as extraordinary or resistive. It also encourages us to consider electronic communication as instances of everyday sociality, again shorn of any resistive power that might occlude their analysis. These are arguments that to my knowledge have not been presented before in the field of alternative media studies.

What happens when ‘ordinary’ people produce their own media? I want to explore some aspects of ‘popular’ media production and its intersection with everyday life. To do so will be to reveal congruencies with the everyday cultural production that takes place through mass-production (as explored by variously by such as Michel de Certeau (1984), John Fiske (1989/1991), Paul Willis (1978) and others) as well as to take the notion of ‘everyday production’ and its place in identity-formation to a different place: to that of the originating producer within everyday life. Popular media production might then be considered a primary form of everyday cultural production.

Fanzines

In his classic account of British subcultures, Dick Hebdige (1978) briefly applies his method to punk fanzines, finding in their graphics and typology homologies of ‘punk’s subterranean and anarchic style’ (p. 112). He does not make this explicit, but we may read from this the extension of the everyday tactics of bricolage from the music and dress of punk (that is, from its dominant signifying practices) to the production of ‘an alternative critical space media within the subculture itself’ (p. 111). Teal Triggs (1995) further emphasises the homological and expressive values of fanzines in her survey of British fan production. She also offers purchase to an understanding of the significance of the mundane in fanzine production, where she reminds us that from the earliest days fanzine producers made use of available materials, improvising their publications from what was around them. Fanzines might be hand-written, duplicated with carbon paper. As simple and accessible office technologies became available, fanzine editors would employ the hectograph, the mimeograph, the photocopy. Surplus machinery would be bought cheaply and repaired at home; the photocopy shop would become the venue of necessity during a lunch hour. If possible, production would be surreptitiously slotted into the gaps in the working day (if the editor was in work).

As a former fanzine editor myself, I well remember my own clandestine fanzine production in various work places: agitatedly printing off and collating as many copies as I could without detection on the office photocopier, print runs dependent on my freedom from surveillance that week. At other times the

fanzine becomes interwoven into the domestic routine. The editorial office is in reality the spare bedroom, the collation taking place on the dining-room table or the living-room floor. There can be something of the ludic, even the festive in these activities. Where it involves more than one person, fanzine production is often the site for social gatherings, such as those that take place during the final stages of production: the ‘mail-out party’ might bring together editor and writers to collate, fold and staple copies of the publication, as well as to address and stamp envelopes. Fanzines offer the possibility for creativity within a social setting and of production that is structured not as a separate occupational duty (and certainly not as a professional activity) but as part of the activities of everyday life. (Whilst strictly outside the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that there is a further level of mundanity often present in the fanzine. Rather than presenting celebrities’ lives as remarkable or extraordinary, many fanzines are at pains to point out the banality of their professional lives. This is particularly notable in music fanzines, where the life of the touring musician is often pictured as unglamorous and tedious where the live performance is a site for error and fatigue rather than for perfection and energy; Atton, 2001.)

We should also consider how under such mundane conditions formal and professional methods of organisation, production, editing and writing are transformed. As such activities become de-professionalised, formal training becomes unnecessary. While some skills may be learned (such as how to operate a photocopy or a DTP software package), in other cases ‘skill’ may be scorned or minimised, as in the case of the deliberately cut-up and disruptive collage-texts that remain a feature of many punk fanzines (though such practices may come to constitute a skill of sorts, to be admired or emulated according to their own expressive criteria). Capital outlay becomes contingent: the production and distribution of the publication becomes dependent on the available resources. Self-exploited labour, petty theft from workplaces (whether of paper or copying facilities) defrays costs. No fanzine is immune from economic stringency, but it is one of the few forms of publishing (pamphlets and home cassette copying are other examples) where the dominant laws of the marketplace – supply and demand, economies of scale, break-even points – hardly apply. Production is emphatically de-institutionalised: it not only takes place outside a formal organisational structure, its reliance on improvisation keeps the process of production mobile, moving between work and home, different parts of the home, inserting itself between everyday routines – even becoming everyday routines.

Social Movement Media

Other alternative media share these features, even those that enjoy stability and longevity (most fanzines remain relatively short-lived and erratic in frequency of appearance). The direct-action newsletter *SchNEWS* (<http://>

www.schnews.org.uk) appears every week across the UK and has remained a fixture within the grass-roots environmental protest movement since its first appearance in 1994. *SchNEWS* disparagingly – yet celebratorily – calls itself a ‘disorganisation’, publishing weekly out of apparent chaos, out of that ‘hectic mayhem called, ominously, “the office”’ (*SchNEWS - as it is*, *SchNEWS Reader*, 1996, unpaginated). We should be wary of reading too much into what is surely meant (at least partly) ironically. After all, the publication, for all its brevity (it is only two sides of A4) does appear regularly every week. Though its distribution is occasionally haphazard (subscribers have complained that at times no issue appears, then the last three appear in one envelope), the concerted effort required to produce such a publication should not be ignored. However fluid the processes, however casual the editors seem to be, however random their methods might appear from their own descriptions, the work gets done. I believe that their deliberate self-effacement springs from a desire not to be seen as autocratic decision-makers, nor to be considered a clique. Whilst their methods of working might well be chaotic at times, this emphasis on amateurism and disorganisation seems to seek out readers (and activists) to participate who might otherwise be put off by a more ‘professional’ approach. If the content of *SchNEWS* is about changing lives and defending the environment in order to better enjoy life, and its form a model for enabling others to participate in it or even produce similar media, then it is appropriate that the publication itself should be an inextricable part of living, not something to bracketed off in ‘the office.’ For all the talk of ‘disorganisation’, there is a work schedule of sorts, though this takes its place as a part of wider schedule of domestic work, activism and play, described in a leaflet produced by the ‘Justice?’ collective responsible for *SchNEWS* and summarised by George McKay (1996: 177) thus:

Monday is for gardening at the Justice? allotment; Tuesday is a day off; Wednesday is for weekly meetings ending up in the pub; Thursday is for putting *SchNEWS* together; Friday is printing and distribution day, followed by the pub; Saturday there’s a street stall; Sunday is for chilling out. Actions and parties are fitted around these regular events.

The regular members of the collective

rely on people coming in [to the *SchNEWS* ‘office’], ringing up, writing stories, passing us bits of paper in the pub, taking bits from the paper [i.e., the mainstream press], [and from] the underground press. Someone starts a story, someone else adds a bit, someone else has their say – means you can’t have an ego or say ‘that’s my story’. Sit around on Thursday evening – people shouting out headlines. (Interview with

Warren, a member of the editorial collective)

Here we see alternative media production taking its place amongst the everyday routines of subsistence and leisure. For its producers *SchNEWS* appears as important as their more mundane activities. By preserving the production of the paper as an unprofessionalised and de-institutionalised activity its producers weave it into the quotidian fabric of their lives. We know from Althusser and Foucault that professional and institutional ideologies are also woven into our daily lives and therefore it is not simply the processes of de-professionalisation and de-institutionalisation that enable productive power to emerge in the everyday. There is though a distinction to be made: whether we are concerned with the Foucauldian microphysics of power or Althusser’s ideological state apparatuses their processes are, as Althusser has emphasised, deeply unconscious, indirectly transmitted through structures that reproduce ideologies rather than through the ‘consciousness’ of institutions and value systems. By contrast *SchNEWS*’s de-institutionalising impulses are deliberate and admitted – they operate consciously and reproduce explicitly.

In his exploration of what it means to speak of a culture of everyday life, John Fiske refers to the “weaving of one’s own richly textured life within the constraints of economic deprivation and experience, ... of controlling some of the conditions of social existence [and] of constructing, and therefore exerting some control over, social identities and social relations.” (Fiske, 1992: 160) Fiske is interested not in people who through their actions and activities proclaim themselves to be part of a subculture – nor, as in the case of *SchNEWS*, a counter-culture – but in people whose activities are not necessarily directed towards explicit social change. Their activities, while they might be culturally political, are not radically political. Fiske’s cultural consumers become producers through the process of selecting, collocating and critically incorporating media texts into their own lives. In his claims for these consumer-producers he stresses the infractory, political nature of their activities of identity-building and sociality. The appropriation of capitalist resources as elements of everyday culture is considered as resistance, as the activity of ‘guerrillas ... evading hegemonic capture’ (Fiske, 1989/1991: 137). He is careful, though, to talk of such cultural activity as ‘progressive’: for Fiske, the implication of such activity in capitalism prevents it from ever being radical. As with most studies that examine the deployment of mass-produced media and cultural resources in everyday life, Fiske’s interest in production focuses on how people ‘make do’ or ‘improvise’ cultural formations for and through themselves according to an everyday logic of bricolage. This making-do is concerned with ‘ways of using the products imposed by a dominant economic order’ (de Certeau, 1984: xiii; emphasis in

original).

The Perzine and the Personal Web Page

I want to explore some aspects of this process by focusing now on the personal rather than the collective, the interior and reflective, rather than the outward and impulsive. In alternative media terms, a suitable candidate for this type of 'everyday theorizing' is the perzine. The perzine can be thought of as a fanzine whose subject is the editor of the publication, that is, it deals with the editor's everyday life: their tastes, experiences, sense of humour, fads—if the fanzine offers a critical space for the amateur to write about their consuming passions (a phrase we may profitably read in the two senses Judith Williamson (1985) has encouraged), the perzine functions like a public journal of that person's life (a classic example is the American perzine *Cometbus*, each issue of which is filled with short, first-person narratives of the picaresque doings of one 'Aaron Cometbus' as he makes his way around the cultural underbelly of the United States (an example of his stories can be found at <http://www.glpbooks.com/oyb/cometbus.html>). Perzines can be considered as instances of popular production rooted in the specificities of everyday life. Their authors represent their own quotidian experiences, producing their own lives as a work (Lefebvre, 1947/1991). Through this they produce difference and through that difference (as Stuart Hall, 1990 reminds us) comes social identity and social relations. Production and sociation are together wrought from everyday experience through what Fiske (1992: 165) calls the 'bottom-up production of difference,' created by the popular producer from the available technological resources of the dominant order. The perzine (along with other types of zine) is thus able to liberate its producer(s) from the controls and limits set by the dominant order by redeploying its resources in infractory ways. In de Certeau's (1984) terms, the place that is the political economy and the site of production of the mass media becomes inhabited by those people normally outside it. As they practice media production within this place they establish their own spaces: the space that is the perzine might be considered as an instance of de Certeau's 'practiced place', an exemplar of alternative media production as a set of practices embedded in everyday life.

My last example takes us further into the mundane to where it becomes the raw material for cultural production by an 'ordinary person' to a significantly greater extent than even the personal stories of Aaron Cometbus (which, in the end, have a literary flair). For this reason I make no apology for examining it in some detail. What I now focus on is a personal web site that gives full flight to the banal as its subject matter. *The Big DumpTruck!* (<http://www.bigdumptruck.com>, subtitled 'Throwing Little Thought Pebbles at Your Windshield') is produced by Jody LaFerriere, a suburban office worker, mother

and resident of Massachusetts. The following give some indication of the type and style of content found on Jody's site:

1. 'My Favorite Xmas Music': this includes albums by The Carpenters, John Denver and The Muppets, Johnny Mathis and 'A Charlie Brown Christmas' ('These are the ones I listen to year after year.'). She encourages visitors to her site to 'have fun with Amazon. Enter "Christmas" as your search term and see what you get!' (from <http://www.bigdumptruck.com/xmas.htm> at 1 November 2000).
2. Jody's list of 'Famous People Who Have a First Name for a Last Name' which at 1 November 2000 comprised around 400 entries, including Woody Allen, Klaus Barbie (!), Eric Carmen, Joseph Conrad, Martin Denny, Philip K. Dick, Dean Martin, Diana Ross and Mary Shelley (from <http://www.bigdumptruck.com/lists>).
3. More lists (Jody likes lists a great deal). Others have included: 'What We're Giving Trick-or-Treaters This Year: Charleston Chews, 100 Grands, Baby Ruths, Twizzlers' (from <http://www.bigdumptruck.com/> at 1 November 2000) and 'Favorite Words that Begin with the Letter "P": Peanut, Pumpkin, Planetary, Pithy, Perhaps' (from <http://www.bigdumptruck.com/archive/oct112000.htm>).
4. 'Pick of the Dump' which at 29 Oct 2000 was the DVD of Toy Story 2. 'Ever since we bought this it's been playing in the DVD player. As the mom of an almost 3 year old, I can say that Toy Story 2 is less "scary" than the first one. And the animation is better (of course)' (at <http://www.bigdumptruck.com>).
5. An account of her brief meeting with American TV Food Network chef Emeril Lagasse at a book signing: 'He made the spinach salad with potatoes, onions and bacon from the Christmas book. I wish I had been able to taste it, because it smelled unbelievable. He didn't really pass it around to anyone, and by the time he was done he went to sign books so I didn't really see what happened to it.' (from <http://www.bigdumptruck.com/emiril/>).
6. Jody's Open Letters to, amongst others, the ice cream man ('I pray that you will fly by before I give in to the temptation and find my wallet or raid the change jar'); Massachusetts Highway Department ('I am so tired of the Route 2 commute getting worse every year'); and the US

Mint ('I just wanted to drop you a note to let you know that you can ease up on the pennies. I've got way too many of them.'). All from <http://www.bigdumptruck.com/letters/index.htm>.

Jody uses the products of capitalism to create both her own mundane cultural forms and her means of communication—the de-capitalisation in the hand-written or photocopied fanzine is not to be found here; personal Internet connectivity, as we know, remains largely the province of the affluent, white middle-class. In both her choice of cultural products and her choice of medium Jody is resolutely suburban. Doubly then, her activities will tend to be overlooked by academics who insist on or look for resistance and infraction in everyday cultural production (as does Fiske) or who regard popular (civic) use of the Internet narrowly as a tool for political empowerment within marginalised communities (such as Mele, 1999). Yet, following de Certeau, may we not argue that 'marginality is becoming universal' (1984: xvii), at least in the sense that there is a majority of non-producers of culture? Jody is surely part of that silent majority hidden from most studies of everyday cultural production by slipping through what we might think of as the standard 'grids of disempowerment' formed by the intersection of such essentialising categories as gender, age, class and race.

In part this might be because Jody's activities represent an uncomfortable accommodation with capitalism. Her consumption tends to the spectacular (her site contains many images of the products she adores: CD sleeves, Emeril Lagasse book covers), she unashamedly (and for her unproblematically) advertises amazon.com on her site ('Please support *The Big DumpTruck!* by using this link when you purchase books, videos and popular music from 'amazon.com'). Her site has been designed by a Massachusetts company, Aeropub Communications, which shares the copyright in the site and to whom requests to advertise on Jody's site must be addressed. Not only do we find the deployment of professional skills and reliance on an institution (in the employment of a web consultancy firm), capitalisation is sought, too. Much zine culture treats advertising with suspicion and scepticism, believing it a mechanism for the compromise, dilution and 'recuperation' of the radical. Jody has even had *Big DumpTruck!* mugs and mouse mats designed. Her activities force us to reassess the claims made by Jay Hamilton regarding de-professionalisation, de-capitalisation and de-institutionalisation as imperatives of alternative media. Such practices as Jody's alert us to the problem of 'purity' in alternative media practices (Atton, 2000). Whilst these three features may be eroded, there remains much in Jody's web site that might be considered alternative: at the very least, that she is giving public voice to her own cultural expression through a

publishing medium over which she, and not an elite group, has control.

To see these practices of 'mundanization' we need very different conceptual tools from those used in the valorisation of popular (productive) consumption. The latter seek the extraordinary within the everyday, finding there resistance, infraction and the refusal to accommodate with dominant cultural forces—that is, radical critical activity within mundane activities. Instead we require a model that encourages us to re-signify both the everyday and what we construe as 'significant.' Andrew J. Weigert (1981: 36) has described the everyday as 'a taken-for-granted reality which provides the unquestioned background of meaning for each person's life.' In Jody's case it is the very everyday nature of her web site that we must question—for that is all there is. It is not a background against which extraordinary actions are played out; it is the background that is itself of interest. We must not render this background as foreground since that would once again find the extraordinary in the mundane. Weigert's formulation offers us the possibility of examining the everyday (the background) as the substantive content of Jody's media production whilst it remains unmarked, significant but not extraordinary.

If popular culture produced by consumers has any political progressiveness, however liminal, it is surely not to be found here. Jody's producerly, cultural activities are concerned with the commonplace, the trite, even the dull. She creates her own texts through far more subdued means than the cultural 'guerrillas' that Fiske champions: 'evading hegemonic capture' could not be further from her agenda. Jody is 'breaking out' very differently from fanzine or perzine editors—taking with her the desires and pleasures of the mainstream, of the unabashedly popular, simply hoping to embrace them in the virtual company of like-minded others. This is hardly radical, there is nothing infractory or antagonistic here. She enacts a selection of texts rather than an interpretation of them—her choices are closer to 'top tens', there is little evidence of their being transformed into a new cultural form. What they do become, though, is communicated—and they themselves are the vehicles for communication. Jody does not just want to share her tastes with others, she wants others to use them to communicate with her—to embellish them, to embroider the mundane with more mundanity (how long does a list of people with a last name for a first name have to be? Answer: as long as Jody wants it to be). What do the texts she selects signify? Do they not stand as tokens for sociality? They do not simply proclaim Jody's tastes, they reach out to seek others who share her tastes and who will valorise them by contributing similarly to her web site. What is at stake here is the power of these texts as socially-centred signs for intersubjective communication—Jody's tastes are perhaps marginal

after all, at least marginal in her neighbourhood. So she looks more widely for a community. The texts then become socially relevant (regardless of any qualitative value they may have to either Jody or her virtual community), suggesting what Janice Radway (1999) has called 'the possibility of the social.' Are Jody's activities perhaps a 'therapeutics for deteriorating social relations' in suburban life (deCerteau, 1984: xxiv)?

Need this absence of interpretative significance in the site worry us? In the case of her favourite Christmas music Jody's texts are not there for appreciation, criticism or discussion—they are there as symbols of her taste. Unlike a fanzine, we are not taken into Jody's musical experience, what such experiences mean to her, how they explicitly contribute to her identity. What she does tell us, though, is how to purchase them—she links each item to its stock record at amazon.com. These are strong recommendations: we are urged to trust her and to buy them. Jody's version of 'networks in the everyday' constitutes readers and contributors but also reaches out to the commercial world—the immediacy and proximity that the practice of hyperlinking enables compresses these two networks further. While the space produced by Jody is reappropriated from the dominant value system, her choices of texts are largely untransformed—the societal space she produces is organized to a significant degree according to the dominant value system. Yet it is through such practices that her valorisation of the everyday perhaps exceeds even that found in perzines such as *Cometbus*. Jody's interests are in classification, in the ordering of the mundane. Her activities tend to the repetitious. Her self-publishing is far from radical in content, but in re-presenting her massified tastes and quotidian humour as particular to her, she is *producing herself differently*, constructing her everyday experience as her identity.

The fanzine and the perzine in their productive contexts have the capacity to reduce cultural distance—the everyday conditions of production and the everyday experiences from which they are created break down the classic aesthetic barriers we see erected in high-art value systems between cultural activity and everyday life (Bourdieu, 1984). High cultural capital and educational capital, along with economic capital, are not required. Further, the perzine *requires* the elision of cultural activity and everyday life: the stuff of the latter becomes the content and informs the processes of the former. Anyone can produce a zine, anyone can read one, goes the philosophy of the zinester: there are few barriers to participation at any level. With a personal web site such as *The Big DumpTruck!*, the cultural distance between the reader and the publication (and its author) is reduced further through the erasure of the physical object. Jody is perhaps erasing the vestiges of cultural distinction that even accrue to zine publishing by

producing her own zine-like publication in ignorance of zine-cultural history. She encounters not an already-existent subculture but a dominant, technologised culture that suggests ways of self-valorisation not open to her previously. By diminishing social and cultural distance such media practices are able to access the specificities of the everyday lives—their meanings, practices and values—of individuals sociated in 'occasional communities.'

The Mundane is not the Trivial

Meaghan Morris (1988/1996) has criticised two tendencies towards the banal in cultural studies, one that employs 'the term "banality" to frame a theory of media' (p. 147) (and represented by Baudrillard), the other which seeks to find subversion in every banal instance of popular culture (she cites Fiske). For Morris banality is an 'irritant' (as is its cognate, triviality) that is harmful when employed as a 'framing concept to discuss mass media' and popular culture (p. 165). Her argument rests in large part on tracing the etymological development of the term in its emerging cultural contexts through Old English and German. She highlights two related meanings: the first related to the issuing of a summons, the second to 'proclaim[ing] under orders', obediently cheering the conquering hero. Together they offer an exegesis of 'banality' as 'a figure inscribing power in an act of *enunciation*' (p. 165, emphasis in original). Morris argues that academics working in popular culture or mass media will themselves become subjects of banality through their celebration of that banality, formulating edicts about how the banal must be understood at the same time as slavishly mimicking the banal in their work. Is my work culpable of this twin sin? As Morris herself is aware, a later meaning gives 'banal' in mediaeval French to mean 'communal use'. Might we not recover that notion as well for our objects of study, to refer positively to the productive use of the 'common' people? It is perhaps not too far-fetched to suggest reviving this remaining dimension of the obsolete complex of meanings around 'banal' to refer to the productivity through which the texts created by Jody signify not the worthless and the worn (the 'trivial') but what we might call the 'significant everyday'. This is not, as I have stressed, to find in Jody's web site a resistive, Fiskean power of what we might call 'progressive consumption.' Instead we have the expression of the everyday as Weigert's 'taken-for-granted reality.' From this expression proceeds her desire to share her everyday annoyances (ice cream vans, commuting) and the foci of her preferred popular culture (the Carpenters, Emeril Lagasse) with whomsoever her mundane tastes, opinions and experiences resonate.

The mundane choices and quotidian accounts and images that Jody offers us suggest two consequences for the study of mundane behaviour. First, by becoming foregrounded they remind us of the power and significance such beliefs, choices and decisions have for ordinary people. Second, they encourage

us to look at web-based communication not simply in terms of the (now overworked) 'empowering' and rhizomatic models of networked, democratic opportunity (that is, as an engine for social change), nor simply as additional opportunities for commerce and industry, but as instances of everyday sociality – and to look at research into such communication practices as ethnomethodological, as the study of 'people's methods for doing everyday life' (Weigert, 1981: 38). Jody herself encourages us to do this – after all, she has already chosen these mundane aspects of her life to foreground on her site.

John Corner has spoken of access TV as presenting the 'accessed ordinary' (1996: 173). Access TV, though, however marginal its audience might be in comparison to news output, quiz shows and soap operas, is able to take advantage of the high profile publicity a national broadcasting service brings. It also deals only with those 'ordinary people' 'who had been judged [by TV producers] as having something interesting and/or important to say on national television' (p. 167). In a more direct manner we can consider Jody's activities as a species of the 'accessed ordinary', direct to the extent that she does not need to rely on the agreement of a professionalised other to legitimate the content and style of her communication. Her self-representation is bounded largely by her consumption, yet it is conspicuously productive in its methods. Not for her the modalities of the productive cultural activity found by John Fiske; hers is resolutely banal – her ludic activities have little place for the oppositional. These activities are worthy of attention precisely because the production of these 'banal media' are becoming so widespread. Even where popular culture is valorised and the binarism of high/low culture seems ousted once and for all, it is possible that a site such as Jody's might evade our attentions or, worse, be deemed not worthy of our attention at all. The personal web page is perhaps outrunning the self-declared zine in terms of its focus on the quotidian details of its owners' lives. Though it appears to have little of the socially transformative value we might expect from other alternative or radical forms of media, compared with the increasingly professionally-mediated products and processes of media culture it contains within it an 'awkwardness' that we must not ignore. It is of that 'sheer *awkwardness*, of communication by "fairly ordinary people"' (Corner, 1996: 174, emphasis in original) that we must take note in the exploration of the mundane in our media.

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OUTBURST: Call for Rants

A virtual soapbox for
Journal of Mundane Behavior

There you are in the shower, in that fuzzy “what’s-my-name-again?” state that characterizes every morning’s brief eternity between the 7 a.m. alarm and that first cup of coffee. You’re reaching blindly for the shampoo, just like you do every day, and suddenly, without warning, like a brief bit of cosmic illumination, the subliminal mantra strikes: water, rinse, repeat. And you’re still half-dreaming, so you’re not sure whether you do or do not see an infinity of people across North America falling into that semantic trap and watering, rinsing and repeating forever, just because it’s early, dammit, and they haven’t had their coffee yet. People don’t show up for work. Offices never open. Kids, unsupervised, run wild in the streets. Whole infrastructures collapsing. Government, what government? Is it the shampoo that did this? the instructions on the bottle? your own casual coffee addiction? Is this the apocalypse? Is our future to be determined by the unshowered, the tea-drinking, the insomniacs, the bald?

Write it up and send it to *Outburst*.

O*utburst* is a subsidiary of the *Journal of Mundane Behavior*. Its purpose is to provide a forum for editorials, public essays, creative work and constructive rants about mundanity. We envision this forum as a place where you can present your observations about the disturbing, humorous, and otherwise noteworthy ways in which the mundane impacts, interacts with, informs and otherwise enters into or interrupts our lives.

What distinguishes *Outburst* essays from the *JMB* articles is this: they are shorter, relatively informal, and explicitly non-academic. The essays will be posted to the website in a timely fashion, so responses to contemporary events or trends are especially welcome. We hope that this forum will enable a wide, varied and colorful range of style and tone which should complement the *JMB*’s more formal articles. Further, we hope that these essays, as well as the more formal articles, will introduce ideas, concerns and issues which can be explored further on the *JMB*’s chat-site, MundaneTalk (<http://mundanetalk.listbot.com>).

Criteria for Submissions:

1. Papers, when submitted, should be in accordance with the following guidelines. Questions or inquiries should be sent to the *Outburst* Manager, Naomi Mandel (mandel@uri.edu).
2. Because one of the significant aspects of *Outburst* essays are their brevity, essays should not exceed 1,500 words.
3. The author’s name, institutional affiliations if relevant, snail-mail and email addresses should accompany the essay. We will post essays anonymously upon request.
4. Files should be submitted to the *Outburst* Manager, Naomi Mandel (mandel@uri.edu), as an attachment, preferably in Microsoft Word 97-98 format. Windows-based files are preferred. If you are unable to attach a file to an e-mail message, please contact the *Outburst* Manager to find another means of transmission. Because of the on-line format of the journal and a lack of resources, *paper versions cannot be accepted*.
5. Please make sure that papers are spell- and grammar-checked and in publishable format.
6. No multiple submissions please.

Submissions will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Essays should be free from profanity and from racist, homophobic and otherwise derogatory remarks pertaining to race, class, religion, nationality, gender.
- Essays should present a coherent, well-worded and effective point.
- The essay’s relevance to the issue of mundanity should be clear.
- The essay’s contribution to our understanding of mundanity should be original.

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