

The "bad subjects" . . . on occasion provoke the intervention of one of the detachments of the (repressive) State apparatus. But the vast majority of the (good) subjects work all right "all by themselves," i.e., by ideology.  
– Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"

# Bad Subjects

**Political Education for Everyday Life**  
November 1997 / Issue #35 / FREE

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# Sport



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F R E E

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# Fever Pitch

*Steven Rubio and Jillian Sandell,*  
*Issue Editors*

There's a bumper sticker which says "The Labor Movement - From the People who Brought you the Weekend." The sticker is important because of the way it reminds us of the intimate relationship between work and leisure, and between the rights of workers at their jobs and their rights to have relaxation time outside of work; to have a weekend. Indeed, the right to have leisure time which is separate from labor time is deeply engrained in the ideology of the "work ethic." Which in many ways is remarkable, since few people have a weekend completely devoid of work.

For one thing, the weekend is frequently a time to catch up on other kinds of work, most notably those kinds of labor classified as "housework" or "domestic work," which can encompass everything from laundry to childcare to cleaning to gardening to neighborly duties to shopping and more. While these kinds of unpaid labor do not directly contribute to a person's income, they are - as feminists have long argued - crucial to the maintenance of the paid labor sectors. Furthermore, even when we are not doing housework on the weekend, our "playtime" directly affects "worktime" since it is the space within which we recharge our psychic and corporeal batteries, allowing us to be able to once more do our "work."

Crucially, there are also those who must work on the weekends in order that others can enjoy their leisure time. The labor performed by sports facility attendants, cab drivers, bar staff, hairdressers, video-store clerks, hot-dog vendors, security guards, waiters, store assistants, librarians, park rangers, gallery attendants, movie-theater ushers, cleaners, bus drivers, farmers, hotel workers, and more, makes possible the "play" of others.

All of which puts a kink in the neat dichotomy of "work" and "play."

Indeed, as the above list reminds us, the element of class enters into any discussion of work and leisure, with one large segment of the working-class populace engaged in work that eases the leisure of others. The things we enjoy in our leisure are also commonly utilized as a kind of semiotic code through which the astute "reader" can ascertain the class pretensions of the leisured. What we use for leisure identifies us in the public mind with a particular class of people; that such classifications are mostly bogus offers ample opportunity for people to play with their apparent class identifications, adopting the leisure activities of a "different" class (or exaggerating the attachment to the "correct" class leisure activities as a means of promoting class pride).

One of the ways in which this happens is that many of the leisure activities that get coded as "middle class" frequently look more like "work" than "play," thereby perpetuating a certain kind of myth that the only people who work hard are the "successful" middle-classes. At the gym people catch up with their reading while on the stairmaster. In cafes many customers are doing some kind of work. The rise of modems and home computers, and the ability to send memos or letters in the middle of the night, blurs the line between "work-time" and "play-time." In the park people jog while listening to their foreign language tapes. Hikers buy

the appropriate guide book and read up on the best walks to take (and the most quaint town to visit en route). Even the most personal and intimate kinds of play - like friendships and sexual relationships - are perceived to require a certain amount of therapeutic "work."

The underside of this class-coding of what is considered "play" is that those leisure activities which are relatively inexpensive, or which do not require large amounts of equipment - in other words, those available to the working- and poverty-classes - become not only class-coded (so that, for instance, watching too much TV is perceived to be beneath the upper-classes) but also morally and sexually coded (so that watching TV is perceived more "passive" than, say, going to an art gallery). These kinds of distinctions between "high" and "low" culture are widespread and important because they suggest that how we choose to "play," what kinds of "play" are available to us, and what our "play" will mean to us and to others, will have important cultural, political, and economic repercussions.

In particular, they have economic repercussions. Most kinds of leisure activities in western culture require some form of economic consumption. Play time is, therefore, not so much time which we spend "not working" as it is time in which we spend money - i.e., being a consumer. It's impossible to think of any kind of leisure activity that doesn't in some way require money. Even just "hanging out" invariably requires a specific and culturally coded space within which to do it - a mall, a park, a beach, and so on. This may sound like a no-brainer - since we live in western culture, and we live within capitalism, nothing escapes the workings of capital. Yet we continue to project and invest so much of our personal, intimate, and affective lives into how we choose to "play," so it's important to remember that no matter how much we think of our leisure time as our "free" time, we are still participating in the economy in vital ways, but as consumers, not as producers. Even the kinds of metaphors we use to think about our play are economic - we invest time and energy in activities, with the pay-off being a more defined body or seeing our favorite team win the World Series.

Not only does almost everything we consider "leisure" require money and participation in consumer culture, but that participation often demands or creates an implicit endorsement of a larger set of political ideas. As Scott Thill argues in his article on Nike, for example, being a "sports fan" frequently requires not only buying a certain kind of gear, but also buying into the mind-set and ideology of the producer of that gear. Or as Mark Van Proyen suggests in his article on the "theme-parkification" of art galleries, buying a ticket to see the latest traveling art show means participating in the society of the spectacle. And as Jim Castonguay argues in his article on the Superbowl, the underside of professional spectator sports can be the implicit endorsement of a number of conservative ideologies with which that sport becomes associated. Pro football in the United States, Castonguay suggests, is completely inextricable from the military-industrial-

complex, so that “team support” becomes imbricated with support for various forms of nationalist, racist, homophobic, and sexist agendas.

Furthermore, when you have no money, or are unemployed, free time is no longer “leisure time,” but, as Clint Burnham suggests, something else entirely. For kids living on the fringes of society, having “free” time, and creating “free” spaces, are not the same as being able to live a leisurely or leisured life. In other words, the very notion of having time to play implicitly depends upon having already spent other time at work.

Perhaps all of this is well understood. Yet how we spend our leisure time remains vital to how we think of ourselves, and how we assume certain kinds of identities based not only on gender, race, religion, nationality, and sexuality, but also on our emotional and imaginative investment in certain kinds of activities. Which means that leisure time is not just time spent spending money, but is also time spent re-creating ourselves, and connecting with people we identify as being like ourselves in some way - as art fans, say, or as Giants fans. As Lil Bartholo’s article demonstrates, despite her participation in a range of political and social communities, her identity as a baseball fan in many ways supersedes all other aspects of her life.

When we attend a baseball game or go to an art gallery, we are not only exchanging money for goods, we are also participating in various kinds of ideological exchange – participating, and implicitly endorsing, the ideas and politics of those who produce our “play.” “Playing” - no matter how we define it – becomes a crucial site for ideology in action. In part, this is simply because the existence of playtime often allows us to tell ourselves that the work we do is fair. (In his slave narrative Frederick Douglass argued that in allowing slaves to get drunk once in a while, the masters endeavored to distract and pacify their slaves into thinking that, since they were allowed to blow off steam once in a while, life on a plantation wasn’t so bad.) Some have argued that “play” amongst the working classes can be interpreted as a substitute for political action; desirous of a sense of collectivity, workers replace class-consciousness with camaraderie. Leisure amongst all classes similarly reproduces the status quo, but this would seem to be a problem only for those who are oppressed by that status quo.

However, as the articles in this issue demonstrate, many of us are far more aware of the contradictions involved in our pursuit of leisure. For instance, this column takes its title from a book by Nick Hornby about being an obsessive fan of the English soccer club Arsenal. The relationship between fan and participant is a complex one; throughout this issue, our authors work the wandering borders between spectator and actor, as often as not exploding the supposed separation between the two. Two contributors who are also admirers of Hornby’s book, David Hawkes and Steven Rubio, offer their perspectives on sport and sport fandom. Hawkes looks at the spectacular life of the great Argentine soccer player Diego Armando Maradona and finds parallels between the career of Diego and that of his countryman, Che Guevara. Rubio writes mostly about being a fan of baseball, but the influence of Hornby is clear in Rubio’s desire to understand himself

and the greater world through an examination of his obsessions. Robert Hamilton takes a more distanced approach in his essay on “virtual idols.” However, his analysis of the varying ways consumers use virtual idols describes a community which refuses to merely spectate. Finally, Cynthia Hoffman and Elisabeth Hurst describe their own active participation with a different kind of idol, female “action figures,” providing convincing evidence that our obsessions and our fandom involve much more than letting others do while we watch.

Indeed, play is not only a time for “escapist” fun; or, what Bakhtin referred to as “the carnival.” Indeed, where Bakhtin sees the containment of play, others also see an opportunity for social connection. Play is not only about denial, but also - as even the examples of going to the pub or a soccer game suggest - about our conscious desires for community. Play is not only an escape *from*, in other words, but also escape *into*. Because of this, how we play is a vital way in which we think about who we are. While the kinds of community and social connection we derive from sports and play may be ephemeral, or rooted in regressive politics, there are nevertheless a utopian elements to them as many of the authors capture in their articles. In other words, leisure time is more than simply an act of consumption; it is also an act of creation. And, according to some of the writers in this issue, an act of creation with implications that are not only economic, but frequently moral and ethical as well. As Steven Rubio argues, being a “fan” often means more than merely following a team. It requires an economic, emotional, and time commitment, the pay off of which is the sense of community and caring you develop with other fans over time. Or, from the other side of the diamond, as Chris Rubio suggests in her essay on lesbian softball, playing team sports and experiencing the solidarity between players and audience also creates a profound sense of community that many people rarely experience in their everyday life.

A couple of months ago we published an issue of Bad Subjects on the theme of work and many of the writers argued that what counts as “work” is inevitably bound up with larger networks of power and economic stratification. Moreover, many pointed out that the relationship between our “personal” lives and our “work” lives has become increasingly blurred and hard to sustain. It is appropriate, therefore, that in this issue on “Sport and Play” many of the writers suggest that how we spend our leisure time is inseparable from the larger political agendas of capitalism, nationalism, sexism, and racism. But also, importantly, how we play suggests some radical possibilities for a better world.

**Please join us at our next  
Bad Subjects Party!!  
December 4th  
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5pm-8pm  
All Welcome!!**

# Throws Like the Girl She Is

*Chris Rubio*

Although I was only twelve years old in 1972 – too young to understand the significance of Title IX – I am thankful that I am one of the first generations to benefit from a society in which women’s sports are more the rule than the exception. To those who know me, it’s no secret that sports have played a major role in my life ever since I was old enough to hold a baseball bat. Growing up as a tomboy certainly had its drawbacks, but playing any of a wide variety of sports on a daily basis was pretty routine, considering that I had three older brothers to toss a ball around with and an older sister who often quarterbacked the opposing street football team.

For many reasons, I was one of the fortunate girls who not only loved sports but was encouraged to play them. Never once do I remember, for instance, either of my parents wincing when I flew out the door to play ball, embarrassed that their youngest daughter seemed more interested in sports than dolls. The idea of girls not playing sports – and not excelling at them – was quite foreign to me. And since my brother David taught me how to throw at a very young age, even the popular phrase she/he “throws like a girl,” intended in most circles as an insult, meant only one thing in my household: that person obviously had a strong and accurate arm!

As I grew older, sports began to have even greater significance in my life. Although I mastered kickball and tetherball in my playground days, and as a teenager I quickly learned tennis and bowling (two of my parents’ favorite sports), softball was clearly my favorite game. I loved baseball passionately, but as a woman, softball represented the closest I would get to baseball. That was just fine with me, for looking back, I realize I really grew up on a softball field, tasted some divine successes there, learned about teamwork and a sense of community. My closest friends in junior high and high school played softball with me, and I came to know and understand myself through this game. I found refuge for seven innings from feelings I did not comprehend, found a place to belong. Even then, I knew the softball diamond represented a safe place for me and other lesbians, a place where we could be different (even if we didn’t understand how or why we were different) and yet belong.

Certainly, I realize not all women who play softball are lesbians, and I indeed hope all women find in their teams and games even a fraction of the sense of community lesbians enjoy on the softball diamond. But for me, I have come to realize that I cannot separate the two: I experience the sense of community I do on a softball diamond because I am a lesbian – not in spite of it. And for many lesbians my age (and older and younger ones, for that matter), the game of softball like no other has welcomed us with open arms, cradled us in our confusion and fear, and offered a home amidst the soft dirt and green grass. It helped us to no longer feel isolated in our youth and adulthood, providing us with a nurturing sense of community.

I’m not sure when I first became aware of the powerful connection between softball and my sexuality. Already by junior high, I

was very much aware of feeling different, of not being interested in boys but having strong feelings for girls. Even in the mid-1970s, however, I knew better than to tell anyone about those feelings. As many gay teens still do, I kept my confusing feelings to myself for fear of somehow being discovered (and perhaps even reprimanded). That fear and caution stayed with me through high school, and though I had a few good friends and some special connections with some teachers, I hid my crushes on other girls and young women. It was difficult to feel safe with anyone in my young adult years, but I knew I felt the most comfortable hanging around the locker room and those memorable PE teachers, the women Meg Christian tributes in her classic song, “Ode to a Gym Teacher.” No PE teacher who wanted to keep her job would ever acknowledge her lesbianism publicly, but I must admit that didn’t matter to me at the time. I simply felt at ease with these strong, athletic women – more at ease than I felt anywhere else on campus – and I was drawn to them. And when the junior varsity softball coach asked me to come to softball tryouts after seeing me play the game during PE, and once I made the team, I knew I had found a home on the softball diamond and a new family and friends in my teammates.

As a loner throughout most of my pre-softball days in junior high and high school, imagine my elation at recognizing myself in the seemingly uninhibited athletes I met on my teams who unselfconsciously ran the bases and dove for line drives – and were rewarded for such behavior! But that was only part of the connection I felt to these young women and consequently this sport. Since so much of what I saw in them I recognized in myself – a love of the sport, a confidence on the diamond, even an independence from males (even at this young age) – how could I not bond with my new sisters? And after finally finding a group to connect with, after finally finding a place where it seemed I, too, belonged, how could I not recognize this group of women as my family?

It is important to note that I did not seek (consciously or unconsciously) a new “family” because my biological family had deserted me. Quite the contrary, I have always felt blessed by the love I have come to count on from my four older siblings and two parents who encouraged me to seek and become whatever I wanted. Some of my fondest memories in high school, for instance, involve my father coming to watch me play softball. Whenever we played our arch rivals in the next town (where my father also worked), my dad would make a point to stop by the diamond and catch a couple of innings. He always stayed long enough to at least watch me bat once, and his hello and goodbye kisses were the envy of even the toughest girls on my team. Even my mom caught a game or two – my mother who battled agoraphobia most of her adult life. No, I didn’t long for a new family because I desired to trade in the one I had; I simply sought a connection with a group of people who I felt shared in my desire to belong – to shed our otherness, our fears – and seek comfort in a world in which we more often than not felt uncomfortable, sometimes unwelcomed. And on the softball field, we

often found such a place.

A lifelong connection between softball, community, and my sexuality originated in junior high and high school, but the experience that provided the strongest sense of community I have ever experienced on a softball diamond happened a few years after high school when I moved from Antioch, California to Sacramento. In 1982, a group of lesbians who had long since graduated from high school and college but still had a tremendous love for fast pitch softball organized a league. Industrious and determined, they organized through the city parks and recreation department a Sunday softball league, complete with a single umpire and reserved field. Only four teams made up the Sunday fast-pitch women's softball league, but make no mistake about it: this wasn't just any league – it was a lesbian softball league. There was no guessing about who was or who wasn't a dyke in this league; lesbians played every position on every team. Former high school and college fast pitch softball players not yet ready to join a recreational, slow pitch team eagerly found a home on one of the four teams which also welcomed newcomers to the game of fast pitch softball.

Two games were scheduled each Sunday; one at 10 am, one at noon. Regardless of whether your team played the first or second game – and even if you didn't even play the game of softball – dozens of lesbians gathered for both games. It was simply the place to be. The sense of community was that strong. You came out to visit with your own teammates, players of other teams, girlfriends of everyone, and the fans (including family members) who seemed encaptured by the sense of community as much as the players were.

At Curtis Park, we could be ourselves like in no other place. We got to play the game we loved the most, and our efforts were celebrated by fans of our community as much as fans of our sport. It simply never crossed our minds to not hug our girlfriends, current and former, or hold hands or snuggle close together on a blanket in foul territory in this park we inhabited. Homophobia, which seemed to peak during this Reagan era, had no place in this city park, and we grew strong as a group and as individuals. The softball diamond provided us the environment to build and foster the community and family that some experienced nowhere else. Though Monday through Saturday many of us hid our otherness from our co-workers and so-called friends, dressed in our mainstream attire and conformist attitudes, in this lesbian softball league we proudly wore our stylish baseball pants and custom-made, tattered tees.

In this sacred park (“our park,” as we came to call it), we felt free to be ourselves and protected this “comfort zone” with zeal. Because of this, we guardedly welcomed outsiders to pay us a visit. Heck, it was a risk for many to invite someone into our culture. After all, this was our place, our day, our few hours in the week when we knew we could be ourselves in an all-too-often homophobic world. We knew we had a haven here, and some were reluctant, even scared, to let outsiders in. But for many of us, we knew the additional support from straight friends and family members further enriched these moments when they came into our world – not us into theirs – and they, too, became a part of the

magic.

I was one of the Sunday regulars who invited outsiders to share in this experience, and I know my memories of this softball league are enriched because of the guests who accepted my invitations. How proudly did I introduce to my teammates my older brother, his wife, and his son, who all enthusiastically attended more than one game, regardless of the hour plus drive to Sacramento? My nephew considered me the best ballplayer he had ever seen, and he cheered for my team like we were the San Francisco Giants, not a group of softball-loving lesbians. For him, the sexuality – even the gender of the players – didn't matter. He just wanted to see a good ball game. But for those of us who had found a home and a kinship we knew no place else, our sexuality and gendered mattered greatly. Because as lesbians living in the early 1980s, we didn't see our lives reflected in an “Ellen” sitcom or a “Desert Hearts” big screen movie. We found our lives mirrored in the other women in the batter's box, in the fans in the bleachers, and ultimately, in the extended families who confirmed that we belonged, that we mattered, that we were not “other” – we simply were another.

The “lesbian league” has been defunct for several years now, and many of us long ago traded in our fast-pitch cleats and aggressive play for multipurpose shoes and the arch and pace of slow pitch softball. Today, I still play softball at least one night a week for a team that happens to also field all lesbians, some even from the old fast pitch league. We still play in a city park, though this league caters to any and all women interested in softball. We are clearly still a family, too, this group of aging lesbians who are not ready to hang up our gloves, but it is the sense of community that continues to bring us out each week, the safety of this family that motivates us to stretch our now loose muscles (ok, maybe that's not muscle there anymore) and get together on a softball field once a week. For on a softball team, especially for lesbians young and old, one can feel a part of a greater whole, a place to belong, a community just waiting to be fostered.

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# BC Hydroponic

Clint Burnham

“I shall begin with a proposition—one that is so commonplace that its significance is often overlooked—that in our society, youth is present only when its presence is a problem, or is regarded as a problem.”

– Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light* 1989

“A moment comes when people in general leave the *space of consumption*, which coincides with the historical locations of capital accumulation, with the space of production, and with the space that is produced; this is the space of the market, the space through which flows follow their paths, the space which the state controls – a space, therefore, that is strictly quantified. When people leave this space, they move towards *the consumption of space* (an unproductive form of consumption). This moment is the moment of departure – the moment of people’s holidays, formerly a contingent but now a necessary moment. When this moment arrives, ‘people’ demand a qualitative space.”

– Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 1992

“You can’t trust anyone. The school bus driver, your pastor, the babysitter, even your dad could rape you or beat you or lock you up and no one would ever care! So kids start to look in all the places adults tell them are evil. They figure maybe what adults say is evil is really good. Kids turn to Satan for all sorts of reasons.”

– Donna Gaines, *Teenage Wasteland* 1991

I was in Courtenay, a milltown on Vancouver Island on Canada’s West Coast, with Steve, an 18 year old out of a Beck song: sleeping in the park, carrying a guitar and amp with the price tag still on them, as if they’d been stolen (a more recent song – “Sissyneck” on *Odelay* – goes, “and everybody knows my name at the recreation centre”). For some reason this was turning into a total *Kids* weekend, all drugs and juvenile sexuality. I met Steve as I was walking around Courtenay, suddenly enraged by the music the town pipes along its main street to keep kids away. The mall-like texture of the tinny show tunes appeals to seniors, who shop the suddenly gentrified blue-collar main drag. Gentrification in Courtenay means a Mount Royal bagel store and a lingerie store, but old values hold true: displayed in the lingerie shop window was a poster for the local air show. Makes sense: guys shopping there for their girls, pick up some tickets, whatever. The airplane painting on the poster – all contrails and cockpits! – was titled “Houston, we have a problem,” the suggestion of air/space disaster lifted from Apollo 13.

In an article in local art rag *Boo*, Peter Culley, a Vancouver Island poet, has written that *Apollo 13* and Martin Scorsese’s *Casino* are both reactionary laments for the decline of marginal institutions. *Apollo 13*, with its astronaut wives as these sleek chicks in miniskirts in big open houses (so different from the air force life I remember – cramped little houses up north with five or ten coats of paint on the kitchen cupboards, moving every year or two; closer to Ray Carver than Ron Howard) also posited a parallel between heterosexuality and the space program: both come to crisis in the film. So it comes full circle, indicating the intentionless work of ideology, when a poster about air danger is displayed in a store for bed-clothing sexual danger.

Steve and I talked and then went down to the park by the river to smoke some drugs. We strolled over the river on a bridge out of Vancouver’s Stanley Park (cute but functional). You can see why EJ Hughes painted the area so avidly. It’s so pastoral – what with the Courtenay Hotel in white fake timbering, the rec centre in the background and the steady morning traffic of the highway. Very idyllic.

When we got there three teenagers were sitting on a bench. We walked over and one of them asked right away if we had any drugs. It’s tough to get high in this town – but the kids will find a way. So I kind of said sure and she sensed our hesitation – or Steve’s, he didn’t know I had some and thought he’d have to share the one joint with four now. The girl said well don’t worry about it if it’s your last one, someone’s gone to get some. But I rolled one up and Steve got his out and we smoked up. Only one of the three girls actually wanted to smoke. All three were pretty hardcore homegirls though. They were talking about smoking up with their mom, running from the cops with booze hidden – “never got my liquor taken off me” – all 16 year old bravado. They head off to the Arbutus – smalltown hotel with a cold beer and wine store – saying, “okay ladies, let’s get loaded.”

I headed off and walked over to the skatepark a couple hundred metres away. It was nice and grotty looking, with graffiti, and about a dozen kids 10-12 years old were skating. None of them were too good but they were enthusiastic, very cute & clean cut in their baggy pants and skinny chests. I was taking pictures all the time with the disposable camera I got at a corner store out at the industrial edge of town. Some of the skaters asked if I was doing it for a magazine or for a sponsor—the dream of getting free runners or skateboards. I didn’t have the heart to tell them it was just cultural studies.

This was when I started to realize how Courtenay’s class stratification also works along age lines, as seen in the increasing clout of “seniors” as a class as the last benefit of the post-war boom. Seniors – or the wealthy or even just well-pensioned members – are trying to control public space – as capital seeks to do – through tactics like keeping kids off the street, etc. So kids are forced to the margins, where they can find more freedom: the homegirls sitting in the park as a social space, the skaters quickly moving around their little park as traffic on the street next to it moves at a snail’s pace through the town.

When this article was being edited by Matt Wray for *Bad Subjects*, he asked me: Are they forced or is there some choice here – are they making *free* spaces that are *unfree*?

This is a good point. It speaks to agency. I locate their agency in a conflicted situation – i.e. one where authorities – adults – police a space that should be and once was shared by various age groups. I’m describing what I see as the dialectic of oppression and subversion/resistance. It is resistance – I don’t think I’m being romantic here, although I situate this in terms of my own desire. So at any rate, yes, the kids are forced to the margins – they are excluded from certain spaces (as in-

sufficient consumers, say, as youth, a danger). The spaces kids are forced to are various, however—some retreat into sanctioned activities, some to the private sphere (if it is attractive, i.e. class) and some to public spaces that are then themselves marked or demonized as dangerous youth spaces (the skatebowl, a park, a mall). And in some of those spaces, no matter how innocuous the activity sometimes demonization (including physical violence) takes place, and no matter how violent the activity sometimes they are ignored. So I'm talking here about oppression and about how youth resist that—how agency emerges precisely in that dialectic.

This marginalization also feeds into alienation: kids see the hypocrisy of the world around them, especially in how it addresses them solely as consumers in a pop culture flow that is also contradictory in its violent and moralistic messages. The homegirls talked about kids smashing in the windows of the elementary schools, about going with guys sometimes when they'd do it. Besides the kicks aspect, what leads kids to attack their previous institutions? Maybe it's that by smashing windows in a school they can get some action back against institutions, against adult power. At an extreme, then, kids get really bitter and cynical and perverse in how they want to manipulate the system – a Nietzscheanism answered by the adult world's desire to transform delinquent kids into adults to better punish them.

After hanging with the skaters for half an hour, I went across the street to a strip bar in the Courtenay Hotel. It was totally dark inside, and I got a glass of draft for two bucks something. The girl dancing – on a very small carpeted stage, her towel on one side with her bra and panties on it—was pale and blonde and tanned, anorexic, she hardly seemed to exist in the room, it was like she was a ghost. I looked at her impossibly high heels, her lipstick and hair. A guy was selling carvings, guys in sports shirts and shorts sat at the counter around the stage, talking. Tanned, moustaches. Baseball caps? Maybe. Sales guys.

There was more vitality outside, with the kids in the park. Both the park and the bar are in the world, but it seems as if sometimes adults will work to armour themselves against the world via material structures – buildings, cars. Whereas kids – some kids – carry that armour in themselves. But they also, in their marginal spaces, have a lot of fun. Adolescence, developmentally, is the period in which kids want to keep having fun – pursuing the pleasure principle, be in essence anarchistic – but the world is trying to change them into workers. This is accomplished via regulation, everything from curfews and spatial exclusions to moral codes and policing.

Courtenay has a long history of hippie activism and presence (the disreputable Renaissance Fair used to be held there) as well as a healthy and vital working class culture. This last advertises itself through such media as the *North Island Weekender*, published in Campbell River and sort of a logger's paper. One column is written by a mill worker, and uses phrases like "rural non-aboriginal" in fatuous attempts to unite white rural working class people into some imaginary front. The most common attribute used in the personal ads is "employed." Even the local "alternative" rag is right wing in its

mortgage and job-hunting and dope-smoking coverage.

The "alternative nation" is present in Courtenay as well, via a new hemp store. Here, in addition to the usual pipes and beige shirts, are stickers that look like the BC Hydro logo (the provincial power company) and say BC Hydroponic. This technique of subverting a commercial logo has really caught on the past few years with t-shirts advertising everything from Master-bate (instead of Master Card) to Adidhash (with a pot leaf instead of the Adidas trefoil). This form of cultural jamming works in part because of the overdetermined importance symbols will have in society. I bought a t-shirt at the cold beer and wine store that says "Logging makes the economy grow!" with a giant logging truck barreling off the chest. A debate at one local town council centred on a town crest, which had native animal designs on it. Councilors objected to the raven, calling it a crow.

Considering the white attacks on native symbols, policies, and culture, the local native culture was extremely generous in its presentation of itself at a pow-wow that I went to with my sister and her kid. The drumming was the best part, with three crews. One set of guys, I think from Alberta, just pounded their skins like crazy. They had printed foam and net hats on, sunglasses, and golf shirts too I think. The kids' crew all wore Adidas jackets, black and white. A kid near me said "head banging!" Some of the music was battle charges or whatever from over a hundred years ago. My sister was hungry so we went and got some bannock and corn on the cob. They had a cappuccino van there but it was mostly hamburger trailers, probably the same ones they have at the air show. We walked by the booths at the back of the fairground, some pretty junky stuff, some neat stuff, on a rack of native design t-shirts, a few Adidas jackets. Behind were some huge tipis that people were camping in who'd come in from the prairies. A guy told us about how they were going to have a demonstration of putting one up. He said a woman had just bought one and she didn't know how and an old guy from Williams Lake, he was a Blood, did it. Security kids hopped around with big walkie talkies. So in the end it seems as if, for all of its flaws and great oppression, native culture, here, in Courtenay (and elsewhere), is doing better at accommodating kids, providing them with a role in society instead of shunting them off to one side. The pow-wow is a multicultural place - as my sister said, everyone's inter-racial these days – and a multigenerational place.

The bus down-island slowly accumulated teen-aged kids in polyester uniforms: army cadets going to Vernon to be "instructors" for slightly younger kids. Waiting at the BC Ferry terminal in Nanaimo, a couple of them take sport at a South Asian family running down the pedestrian walkway – "lookit their turbans bouncing!" I turn around, scowling, and they shush each other up. In their uniforms, they're all too visible, can't be themselves. And for all my kid wannabe sartorialisms, they know all too well that I have the authority of an adult. When the bus drives out of Stanley Park and through the West End of Vancouver, the country kids are again in full gawk, at the buildings. "I'm gonna get a hoor," one guy from Port Alberni declares. A girl says, "yeah he said that when we got to Nanaimo."

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# The Importance of Being Tiger Woods: Race, Sports and the Nike Swoosh

*Scott Thill*

Sometimes I dream/That he is me . . .

Like Mike, I want to be like Mike

– Gatorade commercial featuring Michael Jordan

“I’m just who I am,” Woods told Oprah Winfrey,  
“whoever you see in front of you.”

– Gary Kamiya, “Cablinasian Like Me,” *Salon*

It is no longer a question of *like*, now it is a question of *am*. The tenuous difference, as DeLillo writes, is one of the “fine-points that ha[s] entertained several centuries of medieval idlers.” But in our present corporate culture, it can mean the difference between ending the fiscal year in the red or in the black. Nike, I would argue, is without parallel in transmitting this message to the world. Its latest vehicle, Tiger Woods, has successfully effaced the difference for them through the “I am Tiger Woods” commercials: the metonymical relationship between commodities and the icons who sell them has been supplanted by the metaphorical one. No longer embarrassed to proclaim themselves as separate from or potentially approaching the talents of Tiger Woods, consumers can now, with Nike’s permission, become the golden child himself, the multiracial millionaire, who, according to his father Earl, will make the world “a better place to live in by virtue of his existence.” Tiger Woods is also our multicultural future, the transcendent intersection of charisma, virtuosity and racial and political indefiniteness. Nike has seized upon Woods’ unique history to hawk its wares through the next millennium. Having exhausted the street-tough Georgetown Hoyas and Charles Barkley, and having relied upon the similarly but not entirely unclassifiable Michael Jordan, the shoe company has seized upon Tiger as the metaphysical equivalent to its ubiquitous swoosh: a racially and politically ambiguous icon which, through our absorption of it, promises to transport us into an exalted plane of being. Instead of trying to be *like* Mike, we *are* Tiger Woods, the multiracial millionaire.

Nike might not care if the above statements are true and verifiable – they sell shoes. But what of the other questions this ad campaign raises, such those about racial classification, equity and political leverage? In a recent HBO “Real Sports” segment, several private country clubs were criticized for having an unwritten law regarding the exclusion of minorities, without regards to class. One doctor with impeccable credentials, who had a buddy recommend him, couldn’t make the cut, but couldn’t sue under current legislation, because private clubs can select whoever they want as members as long as there are no written laws discriminating against anyone. To top it off, these clubs do not have to pay taxes under certain laws, saving millions of dollars a year. The race card is one each side still plays, to empower and disempower: what does a multiracial wunderkind, who excels in a homogenic/hegemonic sport like golf, promise minorities when he decides to not call himself black or Thai or Native American?

These are the issues he and we have to face. The erasure of racial classification seems to present as many problems as it attests to solve.

When Michael Jordan steamrolled over the NBA in the nineties, he had become the medium and the message of advertising: it was through His Airness that Nike came to power, but it was also Nike that made Jordan so special. Here, inarguably, was a piece of greatness the average slob could buy for \$80-\$150 at the nearest sportshop. Even though his early commercials with Spike Lee answered “No” to the queries, “Is it the shoes?” or “Is it the shorts?,” Nike’s marketing strategy indirectly suggested that it was indeed the products associated with Jordan that made him who he was. Gatorade was similarly declarative, asking us to be like Mike.

In the Gimme Decade of the 80s, where the mantra “greed is good” had its own materiality fortified by legislative and political exercises such as the various S&L screw-jobs, disastrous investments in minor markets (the Contras, Noriega et al.), junk bonds, cocaine-for-weapons trades, and Star Wars (the defense program), Nike put its foot squarely down on the neck of the racial and cultural pulse of the global village by co-opting everything in sight. The first targets were the Georgetown Hoyas, whose shoes, according to Todd Boyd’s essay “The Day the Niggaz Took Over,” “went quite well with the roughhouse persona developed by the Hoyas . . . [which] foregrounded Georgetown’s penchant for embracing the nigga as their conscious role model on their run for the championship.”

After bankrolling the transmission of what Boyd terms the “prevailing sign of Blackness,” the nigga, Nike then settled on the surreal display of skill that is Michael Jordan. What Jordan could do was so amazing, so inarguably awe-inspiring, he was the logical candidate for sponsorship: good-looking, affable, possessed with unclassifiable athleticism, what some advertisers might refer to as a sure-fire “crossover.” In order to expand their customer base (to pull it out of, according to Boyd, the “authentically ‘Black’” market of the Hoyas) into the mainstream, Nike made Jordan the Dorothy of basketball: click your basketball shoes together three times, and you too can defy gravity. Even though during the infamous Spike Lee “It’s gotta be the shoes” commercials the viewer was repeatedly being told that the jump from Average Joe to Jordan was impossible, there was no doubt that Nike was materially linking his abilities to its products. Even Boyd, who is less concerned with Nike’s commodification of Blackness than he is with African American culture’s appropriation of commodities, assents: “Here athletic ability is reduced to the ability to purchase the trendy Air Jordans, while Jordan’s image becomes indistinguishable from the commodity that he markets.”

The times they are a-changing, though. Tiger Woods, if you listen to Phil Knight and Earl Woods, is a the true market-

driven messiah of the next millennium, a multiracial, young, and good-looking athlete of boundless talent who can appeal to every demographic available. Witness:

– The old white boy network of golf is shaking in its boots: Tiger grabbed the Masters, reconfiguring not only the records themselves, but the standards by which they were judged. Masters officials are already looking for a way to alter the golf course to make it a more level playing field, to give lesser golfers a chance to compete, just as they did when Jack Nicklaus wrecked the course when he donned the Green Jacket back in the sixties.

– Days after Tiger’s victory, golf courses around America were seeing massive jumps in attendance. Most of the newbies were kids, of course, and a many of them were minorities.

– Woods graced the covers of several national magazines, including his infamous stint with G Q. His commercials were all over the airwaves. He signed new deals with Titleist for amazing sums of money.

– Earl Woods, Tiger’s father, claims, without irony, that “he is the Chosen One. He’ll have the power to impact nations, Not people. Nations. The world is just getting a taste of his power.”

*Insert maniacal shriek here.*

In Gary Smith’s mind-numbing article in *Sports Illustrated*, “The Chosen One,” the collusion of messianism and marketing reaches its apotheosis: Tiger Woods has been sent by God to rid humanity of its ills. Forget that he’s just a manchild with skills no one has seen before; forget that he makes jokes about black dicks when he’s around his friends; forget that he’s a wonderful son who tries to honor his father no matter how hard the work might be; forget that he gets 40 million dollars from Nike to wear the ubiquitous swoosh like a tattoo on his body whenever he gets dressed. Even if Earl Woods has been sniffing glue, there is still the question as to what exactly Tiger’s labor is. Whereas in earlier Nike ads, one had bad boys like the Hoyas or Charles Barkley hawking rebellion by telling you what they were not (“role model[s]”) and what they do (“wreak havoc on the basketball court”), or heaven-sent icons who told you what was not the key to their gifts (“the shoes,” “the shorts”), Tiger’s ads went the decided route of the immanent transcendent. They do not tell you a thing, except who to be.

To be serious, Tiger Woods marketability and skill are so immense that Nike’s campaign took the only logical, ontological slogan left over after the Jordan reign: “I am Tiger Woods.” It makes some sort of bizarre sense to see several kids of every nationality chant “I am Tiger Woods” like the drones of *The Manchurian Candidate*; if they chant it long enough, and buy the shoes, the clothes, the gymbags, and the rest of the gear, maybe they can convince themselves that they could be someday be as amazing as him. That is, they could unmask the long-held belief that people like Woods, Jordan, Barry Sanders, Michael Johnson et. al. aren’t the recipients of god-given gifts (the stock line of sports self-understanding), but just people who practiced really hard with the right equipment. Then the Gear becomes the God. If you can wear the right shoe, you can gain an advantage of some sort over your competitor, you can transcend your limits. In “On Money,” Karl Marx asserts that the product of alienated

labor is “the visible god-head . . . the general confusion and inversion of things,” a site of transcendence. Money turns “real imperfections and painful imaginings . . . into real faculties and powers,” and their vehicles are these commodities money can buy. Consumption transforms alienation into transcendence. When you meet the Chosen One through the medium of the swoosh, you are not buying a piece of divinity, activating the tenuous ratio of the simile “Be Like Mike,” which still holds heaven at arms length, you are, instead, becoming the commodity, becoming Tiger Woods. You are Tiger Woods: you are going to become God.

So now we know everyone is Tiger Woods. But who or what exactly is that? Tiger has a ready-made label which works for him; he calls it “cablinasian,” a truncated version of the aggregate Caucasian-Black-Indian-Asian. An inclusive term which strives to destabilize the essentialist restrictions of popular terms i.e. white, black, African-American, Latino/a, “cablinasian” denotes the diversity of America’s changing racial landscape, with an optimistic nod to a future where color of one’s skin is, as the immortal Bob Marley song “War” attests, as important “as the color of [one’s] eyes.” Except that both people of color and whites have specific grievances with terms like “cablinasian,” or multiracialism itself, mostly because the color of one’s skin is still ultimately relevant. For different and similar reasons (privilege, leverage, agency), proponents of blackness or whiteness depend upon essential configurations of race to empower themselves in the face of shrinking relevance and power. Both sides are facing a millennium that will disrupt every definition they have ever known, especially when it comes to racial politics. People like Tiger Woods, who refuse to pigeonhole themselves within the pathetic “either/or” binarism handed down from Western civilization, are visible markers of this changing landscape of American identity. Nike knows something that most of us don’t know, just as they did when they grabbed Jordan. The millennium will carry with it demands for equally new models of transcendence and consumption: Tiger Woods, the cablinasian God, is primed by Nike to achieve multiracial sainthood.

## “Fuzzy” Logic, or The Race Card

“Am I excited?” said a 47-year-old named Jap, nursing a Bud tallboy and marveling at the stupidity of such a question. “If golf was all black and one white guy was doing this, wouldn’t you be? Hell, yes, I’m excited.”

– Rick Reilly, “All is Changed,” *Sports Illustrated*, 4/21/97

We’re just getting ready to watch the Super Bowl  
We gotta black quarterback so step back

– Public Enemy, “She Watch Channel Zero”

If we doubt the prescience of a multinational like Nike, let’s make a comparison. Take another retail company, specializing in cheaper gear, like K-Mart, whose spokesman for a particular line of golf clothing is Fuzzy Zoeller. According to Zoeller, the cablinasian God is, in the words of writer Jack White, not “a golfing prodigy but a fried-chicken-and-collard-greens-eating Sambo,” a “little boy.” Although Fuzzy, who made his unsavory comments on camera, claims that his jibe was not “intended to be racially derogatory” and was, in fact, “misconstrued” (in what way he did not say) by Woods and the general public, he spent most of the post-comment period wishing it was over rather than explaining

himself. "It's over," he offered after a meeting with Woods, "I thought it was over three weeks ago." Fuzzy obviously has a fuzzier version of history than does Woods, who asserted "I have a problem with anyone saying it in that tone." Right after Zoeller inserted his foot into his mouth, he was dumped by K-Mart and was defended only by his cohorts in the old-boy's club. Fellow golfer, Fred Couples rationalized it this way: "Off-the-wall comments are made all the time. There was nothing racist about it. We don't have any problems like that out here on tour." No one has seen or heard from Zoeller since, however, and, like it nor not, hardly anyone is going to remember Fuzzy for being a jokester anymore. Nike knows something already that K-Mart doesn't, all right.

If we still doubt that racism still plays an ambiguous part in today's sport culture, let's take a quick look at the public exploits of our overpaid, racialized, recreational icons:

- 1997 is the 50 year anniversary of Jackie Robinson's step over baseball's color line. To commemorate this historical movement, Major League Baseball has retired Robinson's number forever. Bill Clinton threw a party inviting several major sports icons and their peripheral contacts to the White House, forgetting to include Woods. Once Woods scorched the Master's, President Clinton rethought and tried to recoup to no avail. Woods turned him down, stating rather simply that he didn't find the change of heart particularly meaningful.

- Recalling the immortal scene from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, where several black youths are jammed into a ring for an anarchical boxing match, only to scramble after prize cash thrown on an electrified mat, Mike Tyson, the receptacle for a populace's primal need for relentless rage and violence (and forcible entry) bit half of Evander Holyfield's ear off for millions for dollars. Offering the weak excuse, "I have a family to feed," Tyson was left not to scramble for gold in a booby-trapped boxing ring, but rather from a nation's hypocritical disgust and his membership in boxing's elite. HBO has made movies out of both his and Don King's life even as their cable rival, Showtime, rakes in tons of money from their fights. Tyson, a street punk still lost in his own confusion, will probably rake in three times the amount of money of the Holyfield match for his first fight once his yearlong suspension from boxing is up. Like the rabid white spectators of Ellison's free-for-all screaming, "Slug him, black boy! Knock his guts out!," America will feed upon Tyson's self-destruction once again, like an addict in search of the best fix, until his complete disintegration is effected. Even with Ice Cube rapping, "Don't say nothin' just listen/Got me a plan to break Tyson outta prison," even with all of the celebrity visits to his cells (Maya Angelou? He raped someone, remember?), even with all the so-called clarity bestowed upon him by his devotion to Islam, and even with his centrality in the sport of boxing even though his prowess is becoming liminal as we speak, Tyson will fulfill the unarticulated rage, violence and unmitigated greed of his multicultural spectators. He's still the ultimate "black buck" stereotype.

- At the U.S Open, which began on Althea Gibson's birthday and which smartly named its swank new stadium after Arthur Ashe, a black tennis player who spent his post-sports life helping out the less fortunate before he was destroyed by AIDS, Venus Williams, who may be the sport's "next Tiger Woods," according to *Sports Illustrated*, got into a chest-bumping match with the

jealous and lesser-talented Irina Spirlea, who in desperation figured that a head game was the only game she brought with her to the tournament. Asked to explain her actions after the match, which she lost, Spirlea accused Venus of caving in to her own mythology: "She thinks she's the fucking Venus Williams." What is obvious is that everyone else except Williams thinks that: other players complain that her brash off-court demeanor (which included, gasp!, not offering a hello back to reformed crackhead Jennifer Capriati), her self-imposed separation from the rest of the spoiled-brat coterie of tennis, and her cockiness, get in the way of a finer appreciation of her talents. What they could be thinking (and her father probably would agree with this, having attested he has heard as much) is that Venus is what used to be termed an uppity nigger who has the gall to think she's better than everyone else when she really is a talent so feared and obvious that her race seems to be a vocalized challenge to white hegemony. Her father, Richard Williams, as weakly as Spirlea, has caved in to this mythology himself: after accusing Spirlea of being a racist, and contending he has heard Venus called a "nigger" before by tournament players, he then permanently embroiled himself in the prejudice-game by calling Spirlea "a big, ugly, tall, white turkey." In a press conference after the match, race was the only issue at hand. One black reporter walked out because of the race-baiting media frenzy, and Venus herself had to set the record straight: "I think with this moment in the first year in the Arthur Ashe stadium, it all represents everyone being together, everyone having a chance to play . . . I think this is definitely ruining the mood." Good point. When a petulant star like Martina Hingis still gets to be top dog because she can say the same things, Venus Williams is getting slammed for being asocial, bent on winning and . . . not smiling? "Why don't you guys tell me what they want me to do?" she told the press, after being questioned again on her demeanor. "They should come up to me and say, 'Venus, I want you to smile so I can feel better.' When I want to smile, I'll smile. If I don't want to, I'm not going to. I think it's a little bit peevisish. Smiling, what does that have to do with anything?"

- Now, more than ever, there is highly vocal dissatisfaction over the NFL's continuing disregard for the hiring of black head football coaches. Last year was a banner year for potential head coaches; almost half the league had fired their coaches in disgust over records, incompetence, etc. but no new black faces showed up at the top position. Instead, pathetic throwbacks like Dick Vermeil and Mike Ditka got jobs, while talented strategists like the Packers's Sherman Lewis were yet again rebuffed by American franchises. Lewis was vociferous in his disappointment at not getting hired; his words have new resonance after Tony Dungy (a brilliant black coach hired last year), and his Tampa Bay Buccaneers have had an amazing year so far. Why the annual snubbing, especially at a time where the last privileged white position, quarterback, has seen an influx of incredible new talents like Pittsburgh's Kordell Stewart or Tennessee's Steve "Air" McNair? Something's rotten in the NFL.

We don't really need to go further but we can. The fuzzy logic of Fuzzy Zoeller makes sense to every American, whether s/he wants it to or not. It is the whiny complaint of

white privilege being dismantled, but it is equally a confusion of signification. If Tiger Woods has to explain racial terminology to an adult (even an ignorant one) there are problems of communication on both sides of the ball. Previous essentialist concretizations like “white” and “black” have given way to fuzzier inferences like “cablinasian” and “multiracial,” these third terms that screw with one’s comfy binarisms. Racial axiomatisation is a thing of the past, like the ridiculous “1/32” rule, which could legally determine you were black if you had one black grandparent among 32 others. Most racial classifications of blackness have their roots

in slavery, anyway: they were used to determine whether or not black children could be sold if their parents were slaves or free people. But for some reason, usually having to do with the safeguarding of privilege and/or material possessions, people find it hard to function without the power of non-fuzzy, that is, classical logics. They cannot live in a world where definitions are not absent, but fuzzy, fluctuating. They need the One True Logic or the One True Classification so they can keep that which gave them all they ever had: their power.

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# Maradona: San Diego

*David Hawkes*

October 30, 1997, was Diego Armando Maradona’s thirty-seventh birthday. That day, he received news that his father had died. Then he received news that this news was not true. Shaken by the experience, and doubtless reading into it various arcane and mystical significances, Maradona immediately announced his retirement from soccer. This is the sixth time in his career that he has made such an announcement, but it is probably the last. In August, Maradona tested positive for cocaine after a match for his present team, Buenos Aires’ famous Boca Juniors. The first time he tested positive for cocaine, in 1991, he received a fifteen-month suspension. He received another fifteen month suspension in 1994, after being thrown out of the World Cup in disgrace, the “performance enhancer” ephedrine coursing through his veins.

Like almost everyone else, only more, world soccer’s governing body FIFA hates Maradona. They will certainly persecute him to the fullest possible extent. Unless he can prove his claim that someone spiked his tonic water with cocaine, Maradona’s playing career is over. As his previous experiments in that direction have proved, Maradona conspicuously lacks the “leadership” skills required to function as a coach. It is possible to imagine all sorts of interesting futures for Diego Maradona, but they do not involve an active role in soccer. Nor is Maradona likely to follow the dignified footsteps of Pele to a ministerial position in his national government.

Although one never knows. Diego has always shown a keen interest in politics. Over the last couple of years, he has increased the distaste with which he is viewed by soccer’s governing bodies by campaigning for the formation of an international union of players. He speaks admiringly of Castro, muses about moving to Cuba, and it is reported that he has agreed to play in Iraq, wearing the Iraqi national colors to protest the embargo. Of more significance is the tattoo of Che Guevara that Diego now sports on his forearm. Like Maradona, Che was a *porteño* – a native of Buenos Aires – and a man of grandiose aspirations to heroism and fierce lust for martyrdom. Guevara essentially committed suicide in the hope that his death would provoke the third world war. In

the rash of studies and biographies that has broken out with this year’s thirtieth anniversary of Guevara’s death, as well as the reunion between los Manos del Che and the rest of him, it seems likely that, secluded in rehab, Maradona would have found a moment to learn and reflect on the life of his countryman.

There is a famous photograph of Maradona, under arrest for cocaine possession in 1991. Unshaven and leather-jacketed, Maradona is being hustled bodily through a doorway by a white, mustachioed Argentine cop. It is like an image from recent South American history; the continental Dirty War, in which Guevarist students in every country took up arms in the mountains, taking Che’s martyrdom as a blueprint for practical revolutionary action. They did not recognize a futile gesture when they saw one, nor did they understand the importance of futile gestures. The tragic mistake of the Latin American Left in the 1960’s and 70’s was to assume that the pattern of the Cuban Revolution could be repeated, that a small group of armed men could conquer a nation, or a continent.

In reality, Cuba was a freak. Castro’s aim was martyrdom, not conquest. He fully, and reasonably, expected to die in the raid on the Moncada barracks, and again when he decided to fight on following the deaths of all but eleven of his troops. Similarly, it is hard to believe that Che expected his Bolivian adventure to end otherwise than it did. He was addressing himself to a peculiarly Latin American conception of martyrdom. This was immediately recognized by the Indian women who spread the word of the dead Guevara’s resemblance to Christ, by the CIA officer who captured him and carried his last plug of tobacco in his pistol handle as a relic, and by the soldier who actually killed him, who is tormented by nightmares and remorse. Surely this is the aspect of Che that appeals to Maradona, a man who has reason to understand the value of martyrdom and the importance of futile gestures.

He is not alone in this. As with all folk heroes, there is a sense in which Maradona, like Che, embodies and represents the aspirations of entire communities. The recent history of Argentine soccer is intimately involved with that country’s internal politics, foreign relations, and collective psyche. In 1982, a young Argentine priest arrived on the Falkland Islands, to boost the morale of the young conscripts who had just snatched the territory from Great Britain. The time had come, he told a television interviewer, for

Argentina to have some real heroes: “No, I’m not talking about footballers, I mean heroism in the Greek sense of the word.” The comment is almost touching in its candid pathos.

The invasion of the Falklands was the desperate gamble of a society which saw itself in catastrophic decline. Before the Second World War, Argentina had a more prosperous economy than Sweden or Australia. Its citizens won a reputation among Latin Americans for arrogance, for snobbery, for looking to Europe rather than America for cultural inspiration. By the 1970’s, however, Argentina felt itself to be mired in the third world. Hyperinflation, military dictatorship punctuated by demagogory, guerrilla warfare and a general atmosphere of terror and chaos were prominent features of its experience. In 1976 the most brutal and effective military coup yet displaced Isabelita Peron. In the ensuing “Dirty War” tens of thousands of young Leftist Argentinians “disappeared,” suspected of ties to the various guerrilla groups who were also being systematically exterminated by the army.

It was in this atmosphere that FIFA, the intensely conservative governing body of world soccer, went ahead with its decision to hold the 1978 World Cup in Argentina. Like fascists everywhere, General Videla viewed national sporting success as essential to the prestige of his regime, and he was proved right when Argentina’s victory in the competition produced a euphoria which distracted his countrymen from more depressing matters. The manner of the victory, however, was less than heroic. Indeed, there were mutterings about the performance of “El Loco”, a Peruvian goalkeeper who allowed six goals in a game where Argentina needed to win by four in order to advance. There were even grumblings about the referee in the final, where an uninspired Argentinian team gouged and hacked their way to victory against an artistic Dutch eleven.

The Argentinians did not know it, but by behaving in this ostentatiously unsportsmanlike manner, they were confirming certain deep ideological prejudices in the minds of some observers. I recall how in Britain, in particular, the final was interpreted as a conflict between honest Protestant Nordics and devious Catholic Latins. Soccer relations between England and Argentina had always been as bad as political and cultural ties had been close. The many English sailors and railway workers who settled in Argentina at the last turn of the century had introduced soccer, and even today the names of Argentina’s most illustrious soccer teams, such as Newell’s Old Boys, have an English Victorian flavor. But the style of the game, and its social function, developed in different and contradictory ways in South America as compared to Europe. When London’s Chelsea toured Argentina in 1929, they were so horrified by the conditions in Buenos Aires – the moats and barbed wire around the pitch, the gun-toting spectators, the ungentlemanly conduct of their opponents, the flares and whistles, the bias of the referee – that they wrote a letter of complaint to the Football Association.

During the 1960’s, British teams gradually ended their sniffy isolation and began to compete in the big international soccer tournaments. The reaction of the public and press to seeing their boys competing against various breeds of swarthy coves was predictable: they invoked every Anglo-Saxon prejudice about Frogs, Krauts, Clogs and Sprouts they could think of. But the most dastardly opponents were reputed to be the Latins. British boys’ comics of the period regularly featured stories in which Melchester Rovers triumphed over the machinations of FC Machiavelli or

Sporting Torquemada. A favorite Dago trick was to pretend to be injured, and when the fair-minded Englishman tried to help them up, dig their long, effeminate nails into his flesh, thus provoking him to retaliation and ensuring his expulsion from the game. Such preconceptions undoubtedly colored the public’s perception of an admittedly brutal encounter between Argentina and England in the 1966 World Cup, which was hosted and won by England. The game descended into a brawl, and culminated in the dismissal of the Argentine captain, Antonio “el Rata” Rattin. Rattin, who resembled Eli Wallach in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, confirmed the anticipations of the English crowd by spitting at the referee and cursing and stamping his way off the field. Following the English victory the coach, Alf Ramsey, happily described his opponents as “animals” and “scum”.

The Argentine victory of 1978 was regarded by Argentinians as revenge for past injustices, and by the English as the result of Fascist tactics imported to the football pitch. One Argentine who also had cause to complain of political intrigue was the seventeen year-old Diego Maradona, the most remarkable prodigy ever seen in Argentine soccer. Maradona was deemed too “immature” for selection, but he smarted over the injustice all his life. Born dirt-poor in the slums of Buenos Aires, he was impelled by family pressure to liberate himself and those around him from misery. He therefore did not allow the setback of the World Cup to impair his genius, and he quickly became recognized as the best player in Argentina, some said in the world. He reached the apogee of his early career with Buenos Aires’ famous Boca Juniors, with whom he won the League title in 1981. La Boca is a tumultuous proletarian neighborhood in Buenos Aires’ dockland. It is the heart of the city’s huge Italian community. Most of its residents are one or two generations removed from Sicily, Calabria or Naples. Boca Juniors have always been regarded as the team of the working-class. This is born out in their deadly rivalry with the bourgeois River Plate, whose English name and nickname of “the millionaires” testify to their class associations. Games between Boca and River thus evoke connotations of class warfare. In a country where class conflict is also being waged on the streets and in the jungles, this can be dangerous: seventy-four people died at a Boca v. River game in 1968. In 1994 the murder of two River fans by Boca “ultras” caused a national uproar. The River-Boca rivalry is of an intensity and of a political and social significance which is perhaps matched only Glasgow’s “old firm” of Rangers (Protestant) and Celtic (Catholic).

It was no accident that Diego Maradona should reach his greatest fame in Argentina with Boca Juniors. More than any other sportsman in history, Maradona has always been identified, and has identified himself, with the poor. By the time of the Falklands War, Diego had already made politically outspoken comments to the press: as the popular hero of a nation under military dictatorship, his every move was watched closely, and his relationship to the military was wary.

Of course, the Junta self-destructed shortly after being unceremoniously booted out of the Falkland Islands. Another resident of Buenos Aires, Jorge Luis Borges, described the conflict as “two bald men fighting over a comb”, and his words accurately convey the sense on both sides that the war

was waged in the service of national pride rather than for any tangible purpose. Like Argentina, Britain conceived of itself as sadly fallen from its pre-war glory. In 1982, Margaret Thatcher was the most unpopular Prime Minister in British history. Faced with industrial unrest and widespread rioting in all major cities, Thatcher seized the Argentine occupation as a Godsent lifeline. No one living in Britain in 1982 can forget the universal hysteria which swept the land then.

This was especially true of the tabloid press, which exploited the war to consolidate their dictatorial power over public opinion, and their influence within the Thatcher government. Murdoch's British frontman, Kelvin MacKenzie, editor of the *Sun*, the biggest-selling newspaper in the world, was in his element. The headlines are too well-known and too distasteful to bear repeating; suffice it to say that the nation was very effectively whipped to a froth of anti-Latin vitriol and "Argie"-bashing frenzy. Best of all, their pathetic inadequacy as human beings did not prevent "Galtieri's Gauchos" from torching quite a few of "our boys", thus providing a useful well of bitterness from which to draw as needed.

Among the first victims of the Falklands War were Osvaldo Ardiles and Ricardo Villa, two Argentine soccer players who were unfortunately spearheading the experiment of allowing Johnny Foriegner to play in the English League. Ardiles managed to return successfully to English soccer, but Villa was not so lucky, probably because he fit so precisely the Hispanic stereotype then in vogue. It was also a bit bothersome that England and Argentina were due to play in the World Cup while the war was actually going on, but of course both governments knew that their publics would certainly cease support for the war if it meant they missed the soccer.

It was a disastrous World Cup for Maradona, who was sent off for a completely pointless psychopathic assault on a Brazilian. But by now it hardly mattered: his brilliance with Boca had made him an international superstar, and in 1982 he made the predictable move to Europe, joining Barcelona for a fee which broke the record he'd established when signing for Boca. In Spain, Maradona came up against much tougher defenders than he'd been used to in South America, where the emphasis is more on attacking skills. Standing only five feet five, but with something intensely arrogant and provocative in his demeanor, Diego got kicked to pieces, and spent much of his time in Spain injured. To kill the pain so that he could play, the trainers pumped him full of cortizone, disregarding the long-term consequences of such abuse. Following the same logic, Maradona began using cocaine, getting drunk in public, carrying on with prostitutes, and living what he probably imagined to be a rock-star life style.

Maradona has admitted to being a cocaine addict and an alcoholic, claiming that both habits began in 1982. This is truly remarkable. From 1984 until 1991, Diego Maradona was the greatest soccer player the world has ever seen. Pele, his only serious rival, always played on great teams – throughout his career his exploits were assisted by the likes of Didi and Jairzinho. But Maradona's Argentina were a mediocre bunch, and would never have won the World Cup in 1986 or reached the final in 1990 without him. Furthermore, any one of six or seven teams could have won those competitions if Maradona had been playing for them. And by his own ad-

mission, he spent most of the '80's as a rabid cokehead. Anyone who has met a rabid cokehead can tell you that the most pronounced consequence of this condition is dramatic physical deterioration, and that cocaine use is likely to diminish one's stamina, co-ordination and motor skills to a significant degree. It makes you think: what would Maradona have been like at his peak if he'd been sober?

Maradona spent these seven glorious years in Italy, playing his heart out for Napoli. There is a long tradition of Argentine players moving to Italy, dating back to the "orsini" of the 1930's. As with Boca, Diego chose a team which was strongly identified with the poor and the underdog. The aristocracy of Italian football were the great Northern teams, Juventus of Turin, and A.C. and Inter of Milan. No team from the South had ever won the Italian championship. Through the auspices of Maradona, Napoli won it in 1987, and again in 1990. The Neapolitans worshipped Maradona – not in a metaphorical sense, but literally. Particularly among the "popolino" – Naples' vast lumpenproletariat – and among the denizens of the "abbient" – Naples' capacious underworld – Maradona became a living saint, performing miracles on a regular basis.

A trade in Diego icons flourished. The Mestizo features of Maradona adorned five-story murals. Millions, possibly a majority, of Argentines can trace their families back to Southern Italy. The sacramental awe in which Maradona was held spanned the ocean. This caused a few problems in the 1990 World Cup, hosted by Italy, in which Argentina had to play Italy in Naples. Maradona urged the Neapolitans to put their loyalty to him above their patriotism – "What has Italy ever done for you?" – and many obeyed him. It was a serious concern to the Pope when, as frequently happened, Maradona demanded that the wealth of the Vatican should be distributed among the needy.

Playing for Boca, Maradona endured chants from the River fans regarding his background, his supposedly Indian heritage, his drug abuse and poverty. Playing for Napoli, he faced the hostility of infernos like Milan's San Siro stadium, plastered with banners proclaiming him a "nigger", Neopolitans "Africans", and expressing the hope that a new Hitler would arise to exterminate Southerners. He developed a defensive cockiness and a racy lifestyle, mingling with the Camorristi, who command more loyalty among Neopolitans than the state. His playing style evinced the Neopolitan "arte di arrangiarsi" (living by one's wits), and Maradona acquired a ruthless opportunism which evoked the Neopolitan adage "Ajutat'ca Dio t'ajut" (God helps those who help themselves). But Diego Maradona's finest hour was the 1986 World Cup, which he won for Argentina single-handed. The most portentous game of that competition was the quarter-final, which pitted Argentina against England. This was a nightmare for the organizers, but a boon to the gutter press in both countries, which had been praying for this ever since the Falklands. The tabloids invoked all the war propaganda about greasy Hispanics, and it was helped by the fact that "Diego" is almost indistinguishable (and may even be the root form of) "dago", which is the standard English slur for Latins.

For many reasons the quarter final of 1986 was sure to be the mother of all grudge matches. As expected, the teams were evenly matched, the game tight, the action tense, Maradona effective though tightly marked. The score at half time was 0-0. Five minutes into the second half, a loose ball bounces high towards the England penalty box. Maradona is the only outfield player who's

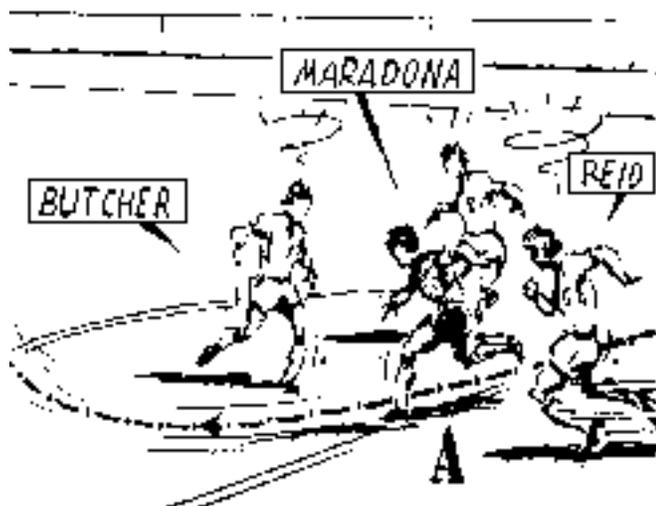
read the game properly, and he charges down the field in pursuit. From the opposite direction comes Peter Shilton, the English goalie, once among the world's greatest but now lacking a yard of pace at age forty. But the ball is 50-50, and Shilton has two huge advantages over Maradona: he's seven inches taller and he's allowed to use his hands. As they jump together, it seems it must be Shilton's ball. Maradona doesn't hesitate. In front of an audience calculated at more than one third of the world's population, he reaches up, his fist clenched, his arm rising above Shilton's, and he punches the ball into the England goal.

Everybody in the world saw him do it, and he knew it. In the seconds after that goal, Maradona's behavior is a case-study in the psychological effects of guilt. He runs wildly, frantically, trying to fake the usual orgasmic reaction of a soccer goalscorer, but repeatedly casting furtive glances over his shoulder at the referee, as if already pursued by demons. His luck was in. Stranded at the other end of the field, the referee was practically the only person in the world who did not see what Maradona had done. The goal was awarded, despite the gentlemanly protests of the England players.

No one had ever witnessed such a blatant act of chutzpah. Maradona had brought the morality of a Buenos Aires street hustler, the low tricks of a two-bit con artist, the trickery of the abbe to the greatest sporting event in the world. As long as he could derive immediate advantage from it, he didn't care who knew of it. Asked about it after the game, Maradona smirked and made the famous (though usually bowdlerized) attribution of the goal to "the Hand of God and the balls of Maradona". In England, the commentators couldn't quite bring themselves to say what they'd seen; there was much consternation and deferrals to the referee's decision. But the howls of outrage echoed from the living-rooms and pubs throughout the land.

Two minutes later, the stadium still a seething cauldron of celebration and recrimination, Maradona receives the ball inside his own half. He puts his head down, and begins to run past the English midfield, outpacing one man, out dribbling another, being forced out towards the wing, cutting back inside, working his way through the defence, beating a fifth man, then a sixth, until it seems that he is bearing in on the goal. In England, the commentator falls silent in mid-sentence. Terry Butcher, the aptly-named England defender, employs the time-honored, simple but effective English league tactic against such flamboyant foreign tomfoolery: he attempts to kick Maradona in the testicles. But Diego shrugs him off, leaves the two remaining defenders flat-footed, and charges towards the goal. Shilton comes out to meet him, and Diego seems to lose control of the ball, tapping it a little too far forward. Shilton dives at it, and immediately Maradona reveals his feint. He still has the ball in control after all. He prods it under Shilton's diving body, leaps over the prostrate goalie, and taps the ball into the England goal.

Even those who are so blinded by Maradona's vices as to deny the full extent of his virtues have to admit that this was the best goal ever scored. Maradona had run sixty meters in ten seconds with a soccer ball at his feet, beating the entire English team in the process. If Maradona could do this, there was no need for any other Argentine player to take the pitch: he could score goals all on his own. Those two minutes encapsulate the contradictory



nature of Maradona, saint and sinner. The most dastardly act of soccer history, immediately followed by the most sublime brilliance. The English looked like Salieri to Maradona's Mozart.

In the 1990 World Cup, Maradona again led Argentina to the final, which they lost to West Germany in one of the most thrilling games in the tournament's history. But it was all downhill for Diego in the 1990's. First he left Napoli amid acrimony and bitterness. He tested positive for cocaine and was banned for over a year. His ties to the Camorra were investigated. Prostitutes on five continents augmented their fees by telling tales to the tabloids. He was busted for cocaine possession in Argentina. There was talk of trafficking charges. Girlfriends were beaten up, associates were bumped off. His manager and closest friend was charged with being a major dealer in cocaine. Maradona's behavior became erratic: he wrecked elevators and hotel rooms, he locked himself in his room for weeks, he gave bizarre and aggressive interviews. He was reported to be "brain dead" from drug abuse; it was said that he could not control his aggression, that he could not sense people behind him and kept swinging around in a paranoid panic.

The 1994 World Cup was to be his comeback. Now thirty-three and paunchy, Maradona nevertheless played well, and Argentina looked to be in with a chance. Diego scored a brilliant goal against Greece, after which he memorably ran snarling and shouting into the television camera, prompting Terry Butcher, the defender Diego humiliated in 1986, to remark that he seemed to be on drugs. As turned out to be the case. With Maradona out of the tournament following his positive test, Argentina floundered and were soon defeated. The world's press was delighted, especially in England, where the squeaky-clean soccer star Gary Lineker's comment "good riddance" was widely echoed.

It was an offence against the order of things that such a grubby little sleazeball should be so outrageously favored by the gods; now that he had finally squandered his gifts, a moral

order was restored to the universe. The English attitude to Maradona was roughly that of the Servant to Cornwall: "I'll never care what wickedness I do,/ If this man come to good." If there was any kind of ethical justice in the world, it was necessary for Maradona to fail, for him to be not simply defeated but disgraced.

Now, it seems, the righteous have got their wish. Before his latest and presumably final comeback in the Argentine league, Maradona got it into his head that it would be fun to hire as his trainer Ben Johnson, the Canadian sprinter whose own failed drug test cost him an Olympic gold medal. Whatever these two got up to together, the end result seems to be that Maradona has failed a drug test for the last time. Its always been hard to get much sense out of the man, and he doesn't seem to be getting any more lucid with middle age, so the world may never know how it feels to be Diego Maradona. But it must be like being so prodigiously gifted that the gift comes to seem a curse, that you come to hate and resent the gift enough to destroy it, to give it back, by any means necessary. But that is to assume that Maradona's gift is the ability to play soccer. Maybe that isn't true. Maybe his true gift is the one he shares with Che Guevara, drawn from the tradition of Latin martyrology: the gift for the futile gesture, the ability to lose. The value of losing, of failure, is often underestimated, but it has always been understood in the slums of Naples and Buenos Aires, and that is Maradona's

proper milieu, from whence he came and to where, in one role or another, he may yet return.

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## Action Figures Have Sex on our Computers: The Real Value of Toys

*Cynthia Hoffman and Elisabeth Hurst*

"Looking at my action figure, it occurred to me that that's not a bad way to face the world: gorgeous, heavily-armed, and distinctively masked."

— Amy Rambow, contemplating Cosmic Angela

Crowing in triumph, Elisabeth pulled a "Mars Attacks" Martian Spy Girl off its peg, hugging it briefly before tossing it in the basket on top of the others. After more than a year of searching, she'd given up on the idea of ever owning this particular action babe.

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I am a sci-fi dweeb. I've admitted that in these pages before: I was the only girl in the comic book store as a teenager. I have more dialogue from Classic Trek episodes memorized (I can name that episode in 10 seconds or fewer) than song lyrics of the Rolling Stones. I can nitpick the temporal anomalies of the Terminator movies with the best of them. Stowed in my various bags, boxes and storage sheds, next to Chambers' History of the Elizabethan Stage and the OED, nestled between the shabbas candlesticks given to me by my

grandmother and the videotapes of BBC Shakespeare and the occasional episode of the X-Files is an original mint printing of the X-Men issue entitled the Death of Phoenix and entire runs of DC Comics Sandman and The Question.

I am, you see, a collector.

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A collector friend of ours told us about the Martian Spy Girl, with her interchangeable alien and human heads. I took one look at her, and my imagination was fired. This was one figure that I definitely wanted to own. I started looking for her the next day. I checked the displays in every toy store that we visited, without success. It wasn't until Cynthia and I visited a collector's store in Oakland, California, that I finally saw her. She was hanging on the wall above my head, and bore a \$25 price sticker. I gulped at the cost and then wandered away to see what other goodies I could see in the store. I was still new to the game and couldn't justify paying dealer prices for a doll that had only just been released. In the end, Cynthia bought something, but I decided to leave the Martian Spy Girl on the wall. After all, the Mars Attacks toys were selling for \$8 in the toy stores.

I never found another Martian Spy Girl, but I learned an important lesson in the realities of collecting female action figures. If

you don't buy an action babe when you see her, even at more than double the retail price, there's a more than even chance that you will never own her.



A little bit further down the aisle, Elisabeth pulls Cynthia over to see. Amid the myriad male and alien Star Wars figures there hangs an entire row of "Slave Leia," the current impossible-to-find action babe. Dressed in the harem gear she wore when chained to Jabba the Hutt, this Leia is definitely more "babe-like" than the previous incarnations.



Slave Leia is a rare exception to the lesson I learned from the Martian Spy Girl experience. In recent weeks, both of us have hunted through hundreds of Star Wars figures in more than one city in two countries. The racks are filled to bursting with every different variation of alien available, all kinds of robots, enough Han Solos, Lando Calrissians, Luke Skywalkers and other human males to populate a small town, and the occasional Leia in white robes or Leia in an ugly brown uniform. Cynthia has yet to see Slave Leia. I saw her once, shortly after she was released, in a comics and collectibles store in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Beneath the pegged rows of boys and aliens, Slave Leia was displayed on the counter, sealed into a clear plastic protector, and priced at \$50. The store manager was more than happy to hand her over to me and let me examine her through the clear plastic, while he hovered and watched. Maybe he wanted to be sure I didn't stash her in my backpack. Anyway, my first thought was that she wasn't really anything special. Her left hand was noticeably bigger than her right. Still, the collector instinct kicked in, and I stood and stared at her indecisively for several minutes. The part of me that wanted to buy her arguing with the practical side that balked at the obscene amount of money the store was asking for an \$8 action figure. In the end, I turned down the salesman's offer of a coin to flip, and handed Slave Leia back. I didn't want her badly enough to pay that kind of money. I noticed on my next trip to the store that someone had.



My question these days is why would two lesbian feminists want a Slave Leia? She is everything I hated about *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*. The figure is, in fact, total exploitation. Dressed in skimpy clothing, short packed, and only available at collector prices, she's everything about the entire enterprise of collecting female action figures that's annoying, all rolled into one. When Elisabeth and I found ourselves in a suburb of Seattle recently, we realized with a start that we had ceased being interested in our search for her and that our pawing through the stacks of Star Wars figures was mere habit, unsupported by any genuine enthusiasm. Senator Leia Organa is someone I might want to collect (even though I've always hated her hair), a character who might, like other action figures, both male and female, fire my imagination; the mere idea of Slave Leia bugs me and I don't want her on my wall.



As a teenager, I dreamed of She-Hulk and Wonder Woman, as if Diana Prince could save me when those around me who were supposed to failed. As an adult, I stick She-Hulk on my wall, next to a Jean Grey with transparent golden hair. They serve as part of a wallpaper chain around my living room. When Elisabeth arrived, the collection became organized rather than random: Spawn figures here, all in a row; X-Men figures there next to Spiderman; Star Trek figures, however, are everywhere because that's where it all began for me: a Troi figure and a Dr. Crusher figure doing the nasty on top of my computer, along with an animated Catwoman and a Michelle Pfeiffer Catwoman getting intimate on a windowsill nearby.

Tasha Yar was the first female figure I actively sought out. She was quickly followed by Troi and Dr. Crusher because Star Trek was merchandising Next Generation figures and Next Generation, unlike The Original Series, has female characters. But I have to admit, of the early efforts, the best ones were boys: Picard, who really looked like Patrick Stewart; and Q, who looked like John de Lancie. The Q figure had a place of honor atop my computer for years, playing with a dildo in earnest mimic of the man himself, who had fondled a microphone atop a piano at Visions Con in Chicago a few years earlier. Q has recently been joined by a Picard in a red suit, acquired six months ago at collector prices and only just now ripped from his original packaging. He and Q now do for each other what Troi and Crusher and before the two Catwomen did. They tell me stories about their exploits and encourage me to write them down, in graphic detail.



Abandoning Cynthia where she sat on the floor amidst a pile of Star Trek figures (the stores packed the toys onto the pegs so closely together that it was almost impossible to riffle through them without knocking some off), Elisabeth wandered off down the aisle. At the very end, against the far wall, she spied a small door with a small black sign that read "Comics and Collectibles." A gentle shove on the door revealed a room the likes of which she had never seen before in a major toy store. The walls were decorated with floor to ceiling racks, some filled with comics, others with videos and the rest with action figures from comics, all of them marked at regular toy prices. Elisabeth pinched herself to make sure she wasn't dreaming, then shrugged. Even if this was a fantasy, she was going to enjoy it as long as it lasted and pick up as many Hellinas, Warrior Nuns and other hard to find babes as possible, in every color available.



It's the summer of 1992 and *Batman Returns* has just been released. I find myself in a mall in Eugene Oregon getting fitted for a tuxedo and decide to wander over to KayBee and get myself a Catwoman. What I discover startles me: penguins abound. On rack after rack, shelf after shelf, Danny DeVito's character is for sale ... piles and piles of them and not a Catwoman in sight. I'm naive about the nature of the business, so I rather reasonably request that someone check in back for me. I purchase my Catwoman (she comes with her own whip) and return to the tuxedo store a happy person.

As a holiday gift that year, I receive a full (Barbie-size) Catwoman doll wearing her very own Harley Davidson jacket.

This simple request — that someone check in back for a toy — is one I probably would never make now, knowing as I do that the reason that the store manager looked annoyed when the youngster returned from the back room carrying that figure for me was undoubtedly that he had pulled her from the short packed box and put her away to sell later at a substantially higher price than the retail tag that I paid. I've grown cynical about toys.

The newest Catwoman doll is ugly beyond belief. I've never bothered to purchase her.

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While we tend to divide them into the kind we buy and the ones we don't like, most of the rest of the world use different criteria for categorizing action figures. The most common is mass-produced for children of all ages from popular cartoons and movies. They are relatively inexpensive, when found in a toy store. The other is specifically aimed at the specialty market, and are figures from adult-oriented comics and graphic novels. These figures are only available through comic book and collectors stores, and are rarely sold at the manufacturer's suggested retail price. Many of the specialty figures are female. Most of them have figures to rival Barbie and wear even less clothing than their mass-market counterparts.

The Hellina line is a prime example of this phenomenon. Her tiny waist and oversize breasts, emphasized by barely-there straps that comprise the top half of her costume, are truly impressive, if a little unrealistic. So far, we have come across two versions of the Hellina figure, one in red and the other in white. Like so many other action figures, they are identical except for the colors used to paint their costumes and accessories. After all, if the collectors are willing to spend the money for Hellina, they will surely buy her in every color of the rainbow.

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Bins at the end of each aisle were filled with older figures that were no longer produced, and Cynthia and Elisabeth had been unable to find them. They all had red stickers and were marked down by at least 50%. Maybe this trip to the toy store wasn't going to cost them quite as much as they thought.

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The action figure market is a very strange thing. Many manufacturers claim that they make fewer of the females because there is no market for them. After all, they argue, most of the figures are bought by pre-adolescent boys who are far more interested in male figures with big guns and/or cool weapons than females with big tits and cool weapons. Why waste their time and money producing action babes, many of which will wind up being returned by the stores or sold off at reduced prices. This claim is patently untrue in college towns and big cities, where most of the collectors

live. It is, however, often the case in small towns.

The regular 5" Xena doll is a case in point. Modelled after the character on the television show, and produced as part of the Hercules line of action figures, she is avidly sought after by both aficionados of the show and collectors. We had already picked up the only one available at our local toy store, when the pleading letters dropped into our e-mailboxes from fans on internet mailing lists asking for help finding one. One friend in Vancouver, British Columbia, bought a Xena doll in a comics and collectibles store, for a higher price of course. At the same time the manufacturer was claiming that Xena (like her Hercules counterpart) was not selling well; it discontinued some of their future production plans.

The manufacturer was not totally wrong though. While there were no Xenas to be found in larger cities, some smaller markets were glutted with them. One thing that our friends know about us is that when visiting a new place, we will want to go to at least one toy store. On a trip to Everett, Washington, earlier this year, the local Toys R Us had a sale bin full of action figures, including Xena dolls marked down to \$2.99. We now have three Xena dolls in our collection.

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Actually, we now only have two.

One of these Xenas spent the summer sitting on the ledge between my cubicle and the work station next door. Everyone in the office liked Xena: she was a hit who wandered around a corporate office but somehow always made it back to my desk. Xena is particularly fun because her clothes come off. When I finished the assignment that placed me in that office, I left Xena behind. My cellmate needed her far more than I did.

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Did you know that Xena is She-Hulk's twin? Neither did I until I saw the 10" She-Hulk. Manufacturers started to "repaint" existing action figures as a way to save money in production and, one hopes, to keep the retail prices down. The same basic, unpainted plastic doll is often used for more than one character, especially among the earlier dolls. So, the 10" Xena doll is repainted in different colors and, voila, a 10" She-Hulk is on the shelves for sale. Black Cat, from the Spiderman line, re-appeared recently with different color skin, clothes and hair as Tigra in a Marvel collection.

Some companies, like MacFarlane Toys, which produces the "Spawn" line, have taken the concept of repainting figures one step further. MacFarlane produces high quality figures which are highly sought after by collectors. They are well-known for the quality of the female figures they produce, in contrast to some manufacturers who knock off females as cheaply as possible. MacFarlane is also responsible for the repaint trend. Once the first run of a figure has been sold out, the next run is invariably painted in different colors. Most of them, like Widowmaker and Blood Queen, are available in two paint combinations. Others, like Tiffany, have three or four variations available. MacFarlane definitely had its finger on the pulse of the collector market when making this decision. We're well aware of the cold, financial reasoning behind this development, but have nonetheless purchased

both the original and the repaints of most figures, including Tiffany, She-Spawn, Thresher, Blood Queen and Widowmaker.

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What started for me as playing with Star Trek figures and then became playing with Star Trek figures who had tits has become an insurance nightmare. I have a large box at the foot of my bed marked "box o' babes" and that's only mildly a joke. In fact, that box is at the foot of my bed because its value so far exceeds the insurance on my current storage unit that I'd have to be a fool to leave that box unguarded. Who would have thought that Dax, Kira, Uhura, Dr. Crusher, Troi, the Orion slave girl — she's worth \$50 now — would cease being toys and become valued for something other than their provision of pleasure?

Recently, I chanced to host my friends' son for the afternoon. Tim is twelve and lives his life in Star Wars land. He was fascinated with my wallpaper collection of action figures and, quite frankly, knew more about them than I did. Tim could and did tell me what the value of every figure I own is: Leia in white robes is worth \$20 for instance, while Xena is only worth \$8 (I didn't tell him about the Toys R Us in Everett, Washington, that had them for \$2.99 because I'm convinced he would have wanted to go there immediately). A first run Cosmic Angela is worth \$40 while a Tiffany repaint is only worth \$25. After listening to his litany for a few hours, I found myself getting angry at Tim and tried to explain that I collect the toys because I like them, because I find pleasure in playing with them, and not because they're worth money. I attempted to teach him about use-value versus monetary value (ever think about that as applied to toys? I sure hadn't!) and to explain that what my Yoda provided for me in smiles by sitting atop my computer was worth far more than the \$50 I could earn for him had I left him in his original packaging.

I'm certain I wasn't successful. How could I be? He lives in a world where the man at the collector store is appalled to discover that I'd actually unpacked my Blood Queen (she's Queen of the Vampires and she has real hair and a red cape) and was having trouble making her stand up without leaning against something. Or a world where yet another friend, who had saved her Star Trek figures to give to her child, suddenly finds that she can't justify opening the packages because they're worth too much money to give to a little boy. Imagine that. Toys too valuable for a child to play with.

But we haven't stopped our search for Star Trek figures. We found Kira for a friend, at regular prices, and even found a set of Picard and Q talking figures, who speak in the actors' voices if we press a button on their backs. Q even says something disparaging about humans, which seems fitting somehow under the circumstances.

And the winner in this past weekend's immediately pre-Christmas rush on Toys R Us? How about the X-men figure Dazzler, another repaint of the Black Cat figure, who has a silver disco suit? Or the X-Factor figure Future Shard, with a punk haircut and a real hair braid that reaches her ankles? Or yet still, a large-size doll of Jean Luc Picard, purchased at close-to-retail price in a collector store, from a man who was selling KISS figures for five times their retail value, knew what he was selling us, and seemed pleased to be able to make two people happy.

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My Xena doll is still in her package, hanging on the wall over the breakfast bar. Even though she's with other dolls from other series, she still seems lonely. So, when the Gabrielle doll is finally released by the manufacturer, I'll pick one up. Then, I'll pop Xena out of her plastic prison and let the two of them cavort on my desk. Maybe they'll tell me another Xena/Gabrielle story so I can keep my promise to a friend.

\* \* \*

Still on my agenda? A large-sized Q doll, of course. If the five inch figures share interesting exploits and let me write them down, just imagine what the ten inch ones can tell me!

*Cynthia J. Hoffman is currently biding her time in a home that has more toys in it than she ever imagined were possible in a home that had only adults in it. Her box o' babes didn't even warrant a strange look. She is currently asking herself the following question on a daily basis: is there life when you're done with graduate school? Cynthia can be reached via email at [choff@lanminds.com](mailto:choff@lanminds.com).*

*Elisabeth Hurst moved into a new apartment almost two months ago and, so far, all that has made it onto the walls is a row of action babes over the breakfast bar and the one that reminds her not to turn off the switch that controls the computer current. The Psylocke on her desk at the office hasn't yet seen fit to go for a walk around the floor, but everyone seems to like her, particularly the button on her back that makes her sword light up. Elisabeth can be reached via email at [ehurst@mixon96.com](mailto:ehurst@mixon96.com).*



# Virtual Idols and Digital Girls:

## Artifice and Sexuality in Anime, Kisekae and Kyoko Date

*Robert Hamilton*

Sexuality is a commodity within any entertainment industry, and marketers and image-makers have taken advantage of this for centuries. The rise in popularity of virtual idols within Japanese popular culture is an indication that sexuality has been packaged to the point that the focus of attraction no longer needs to be a human being, or perhaps it never did. We are capable of creating seductive beings just as we would produce any other cultural product. The heroines of Japanese animation (or anime), the proliferation of kisekae dolls on the internet, and the debut of virtual pop-stars such as Kyoko Date exemplify the spirit of a movement that does not discredit the sensual value of simulated beings. In fact, the distance that these images have from perceived reality is central to creating an atmosphere within which sexuality may be explored.

It has often been observed (either positively or negatively) that the images of female sexuality in the media are highly artificial. Whether it be silicone implants, eyelid surgery or stereotypical portrayals that are being commented upon, the images that we consume in both Western and Asian cultures are highly manipulated. Much social criticism of this scenario stems from the assumption that viewers gain some form of comfort from the fact that what they are looking at is a real person, therefore a deception is at work. However, the increasingly artificial nature of sexual icons within Japanese culture would tend to indicate that there is an astute awareness of the artifice surrounding these images for both producers and consumers. Images are being produced that are overtly artificial. Artifice becomes part of the charm and much of the reason that these images are appealing to their audience. Furthermore, the extreme separation from reality hinders (although doesn't necessarily prevent) any normative social function that these images may have.

I am not attempting to discredit claims that negative or unrealistic portrayals of females in media are damaging to



social practices and attitudes. There is much writing on both sides of that issue, and most of it will be able to deal with the subject matter in a more comprehensive manner than I can. That is not the focus of this work. I am instead attempting to explore the appeal that such imagery holds for the audience that is consuming it, and the manner in which this form of imagery functions within a fantasmatic diegetic space. My interest in the removal of image from reality has to do with the psychological impact that it has on the viewer and the viewer's interaction with that image, as opposed to how the consumer's relationships with other (human) beings is affected by that interaction.

Throughout this paper, I will be referring to the consumption and enjoyment of products within a Japanese market, by a Japanese audience. I am not implying by this that there is a marked difference in the appeal that virtual idols would have from the Japanese context to a North American one. Rather, many of these products are only commercially available in Japan. Therefore, that is the only large audience that I have to use as an example at this point. For similar reasons, I will be focusing on a male audience. While readers of manga (Japanese comic books) and viewers of anime are both male and female, virtual idols such as Shiori Fujusaki and Kyoko Date are almost exclusively consumed by males. Since this is the group that actively consumes the product, they will be the primary focus of this paper.

The proliferation of internet sites devoted to anime and manga heroines can give us a fair idea of how many North American and Japanese males find these images attractive. There are innumerable devotional pages and virtual shrines in honour of individual characters, and of course they all sport a few pictures for the viewers to admire. These pictures will often cause the uninitiated to take pause, for the stylized nature of the females is grossly exaggerated in a manner that has only recently been exposed to a widespread North American audience. While the success of the television program *Sailor Moon* (and its

extensive merchandising campaign) has spread the show's images across the continent, the exaggerated forms are often perceived as an anomaly to television animation as opposed to being a good example of a far larger art form anime in general. The heroines in *Sailor Moon* have quite a bit in common with their anime contemporaries. Characters such as "Mamono Hunter Yohko" share the exaggeration of form that make these images incongruous with human anatomy. The legs account for approximately two thirds of the character's height and the eyes are extremely large. In fact, if we were to imagine the rest of the orb that makes up each eyeball, there is a slim chance that they would fit within the character's skull...never mind leaving room for a brain.

So what is it that makes these images so attractive? They are physically deformed by human biological standards. They are depictions of persons that do not and cannot exist. So why are hundreds of thousands of young males drawn to them? I propose that it is precisely this impossibility that holds the most attraction. These images are free of any material referent. There can be no flaw in a synthetic girl, and there can be no deception from a person who is overtly 100% artificial.

There is a definite lineage within popular Japanese cultural products that stems from an understanding that artificiality and physical distortion can itself be sexual. An example of this are the woodblock prints that have been produced in Japan since the Edo period (17th century) that employ highly stylized and exaggerated human forms in the name of sexuality.

Before expanding on the qualities of sexuality in the virtual body, it will be useful to look at the psychology involved in an interaction between a living person and the representation of a sexual being. In 1979, Jean Baudrillard claimed that seduction is always in the realm of artifice. His example of the perfect artifice of seduction was the transvestite. In such a case sexuality becomes purely that which is signified through conscious construction – a male body, given female sexuality. Biologically, the transvestite does not possess the necessary parts to be female, but instead creates a hypersexual version of femininity through simulated physical features and exaggerated mannerisms. Baudrillard's words are poignant when we think of them in relation to the female body in anime. In *Seduction*, he writes about the way a woman or man applies makeup in order to exaggerate her features: to turn them into more than a sign, by this use of, not the false as opposed to true, but the more false than false, to incarnate the peaks of sexuality while simultaneously being absorbed in their simulation." Is this not also what happens within the process of stylization of an animated female? The sites of sexuality and implied innocence are amplified. It doesn't matter to the

viewer that these images do not closely approximate the human body. What matters is that the features that are deemed to be sexually appealing – legs, eyes, breasts – are exaggerated and brought together into a completely artificial, yet extremely seductive image.

The hypersexualizing of characters in anime is dependent on certain preconceived notions of feminine sexuality. The sites of sexual expression and the attributes that increase the

implications of sexuality are quite often the result of a patriarchal image of what "feminine" should be. This may lead us to assume that, as in the case of the transvestite, the imagery in anime is a male construction of femininity for consumption by other males. Interestingly, a large proportion of the artists and writers that create manga and anime (including *Sailor Moon*) are female. In the context of this paper, that may seem odd, but manga cover a huge



spectrum of genres that I do not have the space or inclination to describe here at length. Unlike the North American comic book market, females in Japan consume manga in similar or even greater numbers than males do. The stylized body and facial features are common across the different genres of the medium. This can be seen as akin to the portrayals of women that we would see in American fashion magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* or *Vogue*. These magazines are largely produced by, and marketed to, women. However, the women in such publications are portrayed and exploited in an overtly sexualized manner that cannot easily be differentiated from the images of females that we would see in men's magazines. The point of this observation is not to implicate females in the process of exploitation, but to differentiate between the female imagery in manga and anime, and the portrayal of women in the form of virtual idols that I will be discussing soon. The manga/anime form being something that is produced and consumed by both genders (although often in different contexts or genres), and the latter being deliberately produced for and consumed by males.

Despite the sensual nature of anime images, there is a limited amount of interaction that is possible between a living being and an image. That is, the interaction between viewer and image is generally confined to viewing. This does not prevent fantasies around the characters from extending to more physical interactions. Turning once more to the internet as an example, there are numerous sites of "fan-art" and fiction ("fan-fic") that depict the schoolgirls of anime in sexual



cause a person to aspire to be like her (besides her lucrative career). Where anime/manga girls are visually stylized, Shiori is further simplified as a character as well as visually.

The point of *Toki-Meki* is to take Shiori out on dates and carry on conversations with her in attempts to woo the anime-styled heroine. The player must be a perfect gentleman, choose the correct responses and avoid the advances of the 12 other female characters in the game. If he can accomplish this, then he receives a confession of love from Shiori and the game is won. That is, if the player wants to win, which is only one way to enjoy the game. Apparently many players find the other characters more appealing, and actively pursue those females instead. This is evidenced by the fact that all the female characters in the game have large fan clubs of their own.

There are quite a few similar interactive video games on the market at the moment, with various alterations in theme, and levels of sexuality. Many of these games are openly pornographic, in which the player must sleep with, or torture the female characters in order to “score”. However, no other game has reached the status of *Toki-Meki*, which focuses on an innocent courtship. In the process of this courtship, Shiori has become an idol to scores of young Japanese males. To capitalize upon the success of this character, Konami (the company that owns Shiori) has produced several pop music CDs under Shiori’s name, and she has even performed “live” in concert via an on-stage video wall. The interactivity of the video game format is a natural progression from animated entertainment, while maintaining the blatantly artificial nature of the form.

One could argue that many earlier points in this discussion do not apply to *Toki-Meki* because Shiori does acknowledge the viewer. There is a level of interaction that does not allow for the same implied anonymity that Kisekae dolls provide. However, that would imply some sort of natural discourse between the player and the character in the game and there is very little that is natural about *Toki-Meki*. The conversational interaction that exists between Shiori and the player is limited to multiple choice questions and answers. “Isn’t it a beautiful view?” Shiori asks as she rides the monorail. The player then has three options from which to choose a response, the most obvious being “I hadn’t noticed, I’ve been watching you the entire time.”

The form of conversation offered within *Toki-Meki* holds very few of the elements that MIT’s Andy Lipmann set forth as defining interactivity. These are: *interruptability*, which means that each participant must be able to interrupt the other, mutually and simultaneously; *graceful degradation*, which means that unanswerable questions must be handled in a way that doesn’t halt the conversation; *limited look-ahead*, which means that since each party can be interrupted, there is a limit to how much the shape of



the conversation can be anticipated by either party; *no default*, which means that the conversation must not have a pre-planned path [and] the impression of an infinite database” (Stone, 135).

*Toki-Meki* falls short of almost all of these criteria except for the “no default” condition. The form of interaction that is possible between Shiori and the player is maintained as artificial, protecting the impression of autonomy in the player. This is compounded by the fact that Shiori refers to the player as a schoolmate, implying that she is seeing a persona other than the 18-35 year old male that generally plays the game.

The pop-idol success of Shiori has opened the door to the marketing of other virtual idols. This led directly to the creation of Kyoko Date. Within Japanese popular culture, the term “idol” refers to a genre of pop stars. They are generally pretty young girls or handsome young boys who perform concerts, make videos and often appear on television programs and magazine covers. Kyoko Date performs all of these tasks, but the major difference between Kyoko and her counterparts is that she was created using a computer program. Horipro is Japan’s top modeling agency, and they collaborated with software engineers to create the 18-year-old singer who was first introduced to the Japanese market last November. She has now graced the covers of several magazines and even played a small role in a soap opera.

Now, why would a company create a singer when they can simply hire a young girl to do the same job? Well, the idol market in Japan has steadily declined since the late seventies. Flesh-and-blood representations of female sexuality are apparently no longer as appealing to young Japanese males as they once were. Devotional magazines for young men have become increasingly filled with anime and video game characters. A figure like Kyoko Date has the advantage of being able to pose for commercial consumption without her personal life interfering with the process. A major reason that fans cite for preferring virtual idols over their predecessors is that virtual idols cannot become involved with scandals, and they don’t ever get married or grow old. Of course, that doesn’t mean that they don’t grow obsolete.

It is worth noting here that magazines geared towards young girls in Japan are still filled with young male pop-singers and television stars. Perhaps this is due to the fact that a greater number of males buy and play video games, and are therefore more heavily socialized to accept a computer generated image as a being in relation to themselves.

Another reason for the popularity of virtual idols is the play between accessibility and denial that surrounds the figures. Anybody can buy a copy of Kyoko’s dance video or a CD-ROM of *Toki-Meki* for their PC, yet neither of these figures can actually be touched by the consumer. Of course, that means that other consumers cannot touch them either. Depriving access to the viewer acts to increase the allure of the figure while ensuring the player that the idol’s innocence remains intact. The psychological comfort that this product provides holds parallels with the proliferation of *Rorikon* (Lolita-style) manga and anime in the Japanese market. When a small girl (especially a small girl in a sailor-style high school suit) is portrayed in a comic, there is an assumption of innocence. This innocence is highly valued by the consumer, and

it is no coincidence that Shiori spends most of her screen-time in just such an outfit. Of course, Lolita manga (as the name would imply) are infamous for portraying these girls in explicitly sexual situations. However, the age and wardrobe still act as signifiers that the character was innocent and virginal up until that point when the viewer gains the privilege of visually deflowering her by witnessing the event. As in Lolita manga, the youth of the idol singer is important to the naive appeal and innocent look of the genre. They are untouchable. It is a societal taboo for a grown man to violate a high school girl. This taboo increases the appeal of the figure because it automatically makes a relationship more naughty. In the case of virtual idols this logic is compounded by the fact that there is no feasible way to access the person. Desire is often more permissible when there is no way of attaining that which one desires. Not only do Kyoko and Shiori appear as young girls, but they also do not exist in our physical reality. Even if the social taboo is virtually transgressed, it remains physically uninterrupted.

Given the elements that have combined to create Kyoko Date, along with an intense marketing campaign, it would seem natural that she would be winning the hearts of millions of Japanese men. Not so. The sales of Kyoko's first CD have been sluggish when compared to the projected figures. There seems to have been a flaw in logic when creating this persona. If it is the artificiality of image that attracts young men to virtual idols, then perhaps the error was in Horipro's intense efforts to make Kyoko appear and act human. Much of Shiori's appeal lies in the fact that she is pure simulation in Baudrillard's sense of the term. That is, Shiori was created through "the generation of models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal." Kyoko, on the other hand, is an amalgam of features that directly reference the real without necessarily being real. Her physical features are a combination of those seen in former idols from the Horipro agency, which have then been mapped onto a virtual body. Her singing voice belongs to one female and her talking voice belongs to another. Her dance routines are created by applying sensors to the body of a performer, and then mapping those sequences onto the virtual model. Where Shiori's lineage comes from manga and video games, Kyoko owes her genetic make-up to human models: former idols from the Horipro agency – those same idols that young Japanese males have largely turned away from.

There is a phrase for this phenomenon, *nijikon fetchi*, that translates as "two-dimensional fetish". The term applies here, although it is generally used in a negative context. It is seen as a negative social phenomenon that affects young males who are unable to cope with living females in a social envi-

ronment. The assumption is that they turn to manga and anime versions of the female in order to compensate for their social ineptitude. Perhaps this is true. One way or another, it's an unfortunate label, but it addresses the innate appeal that an image has when there is no physical signified for that image to correspond to. The term, although it implies that the image being fetishized must be flat, does not necessarily exclude three-dimensional idols such as Kyoko Date. It was after all coined before Kyoko had made her first appearance. In essence it implies the preference for a created body as opposed to a living body, the artificial nature of the latter being a primary draw.

Since Kyoko's debut, Horipro has continued its efforts to create a three-dimensionally articulated virtual idol and other corporations have followed suit. Pink Lady X is a duo of virtual idols that sing and dance together. They are intended to pick-up where Kyoko left off. This time, choreography for the idols is not determined by the limitations of human movement. The two frequently perform impossible kicks and movements within their dance routines. However, the physical bodies still conform to human standards. Absent are the impossibly long legs and huge eyes that are so common in two-dimensional idols. The designers from Horipro have yet to take advantage of their ability to distort the body. Furthermore, Pink Lady X references past idols even more directly than Kyoko Date does. If it is true that the "transubstantiation of sex into signs is the secret of all seduction," then perhaps designers should keep that in mind. The seductive nature of imagery is more complete when the signs of sexuality are made explicit. Perhaps future prototypes will take proper advantage of these elements and produce a fully articulated computer generated idol with the exaggerated qualities and limited interactivity that make Shiori Fujisaki so successful.

From anime girls to Kyoko Date, virtual idols fulfill a "need" for many young males. A site for affection is provided that is completely risk free. The woman is created to the specifications of a selected audience. There is no risk of her character betraying the model that has been constructed because she does not exist as an entity outside of her function. Idol otaku (extremely devoted fans) feel free to add aspects of personality to the character, or even write fan-fiction or *dojinshi* (amateur comic books) with the character as central. If there is no material person, facts can be invented if they are not already available. While accessibility to each character is key to their success, these synthetic girls also share an elusive quality that adds to their appeal. There is no mechanism for satisfaction within these images, only the simultaneous perpetuity of sexual possibility and impossibility...and that's what keeps us watching.

*Robert Hamilton is from the School of Visual Art at the University of Windsor.*

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# From Maracana to Coliseum

## *Lil Bartholo*

*Lil Bartholo was born and raised in Brazil. She moved to the United States in the early 50s and received a BS in biology before attending the Sorbonne and studying neurodiagnostics. She went back to Brazil in the 70s, and finally returned to the U.S. for good in 1979. A lifelong sports fan, she has been a season-ticket holder for the Oakland Athletics baseball team since 1980.*

\* \* \*

I grew up going to soccer matches at the Flamengo Futebol Clube, a famous soccer club in Rio. My family has a lifetime membership with the Flamengo (you are born into it). Soccer clubs in Rio are like country clubs, but they are also the home of the professional teams that play in regional championships. The clubs have many social functions for their members, but the main events are the soccer matches.

Children and adults play and follow soccer on a daily basis, all year round. The rich and the poor, the young and the old. The entire country breathes, eats, sleeps with soccer. All year round.

I studied in a boarding school, but I was home for the summer of 1950. I was seven years old and remember the big excitement of the 1950 World Cup, which was the most important event that Brazil ever had. They have never hosted a World Cup again.

During that entire summer I remember sitting next to my "vovo" (grandfather), listening to the games on the radio. There was no TV and I had never been to a World Cup soccer game. I don't recall much else, except going to Maracana with my brother to the final match of Brazil/Uruguay. My uncle got us all seats with the other big shots from the Flamengo Club. Some of what I remember may have been "added" as years went on, and it is difficult to really know what is the memory of a 7-year-old child or what I heard and felt in subsequent years.

\* \* \*

*The 1950 World Cup in Brazil was the fourth such competition, and the first after a twelve-year absence due to World War II. Uruguay, winners of the first World Cup in 1930, were large underdogs to the host team from Brazil. The final match of the tournament took place at the Maracana, and was attended by more than 200,000 people.*

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Maracana was built for the 1950 World Cup. It was at that time the biggest soccer stadium in the world, with a capacity of more than 160,000. It was huge and round and the field was beautiful.

That day, the stadium was filled to capacity and then some. There were people standing everywhere, even on the roof. The excitement was hard to describe. Brazil needed only a tie against Uruguay and they would be the champions of the first World Cup hosted in Rio.

I don't recall much about the game, other than hearing the crowd singing a well-known chant, "ai, ai, ai ai, esta chegando a hora," meaning "the time is coming." Brazil was ahead by one goal to nothing in the second half. The crowd started yelling "Ole!" everytime a Brazilian defensive player would pass the ball to another, while the Uruguayans would try to get the ball away to initiate an attack.

Then it happened. One player did get the ball and quickly initiated a counter-attack and a goal was scored. The game was tied. The cheers started to grow, screaming to the Brazilian team to attack and score another goal. I remember my uncle saying "No problem. A tie will do it. Just close up the goal. The game is almost over. No problem."

The crowd was throwing confetti and chanting and cheering and everyone was standing, just waiting for the final whistle to blow. Then, out of nowhere, Uruguay got the ball and scored. A second later, the game was over. The Brazilian players didn't even get a chance to try an attack.

The entire stadium was silent. I looked around and all I saw was grown men crying and some just sitting with their hands holding their heads. No one even dared to look at each other. I just looked around and felt like crying and I felt scared. I didn't know anything could cause such grief. I remember shaking and trying to stop shaking and holding my brother's hand real tight.

On the way home, I looked out the window of the car and I saw flags being burned and people throwing bottles. My uncle got us home quickly and safely. My vovo was there waiting and gave me and my brother a big hug and took us to bed.

I remember quite well looking at his face to see if he was crying. He was not crying, but his nose and his eyes were red.

I don't even remember names of players, nor the times the goals were scored. What really remains in my memory is the intense emotion and despair that surrounded me that day. In my entire life, I have never experienced such an intense feeling of loss and shock. I didn't really feel it myself. I just remember feeling scared and sad.

\* \* \*

*Lilian spent most of the following decade in the United States, getting her biology degree in Vermont.*

\* \* \*

I had finished college in the States in Vermont, and was thinking of entering med school, possibly in Brazil or France. I went to Brazil to spend some time with family and got involved with a huge political movement. The social injustice and poverty in Brazil was shocking to me, after having lived and enjoyed life in the United States with all its wonderful college atmosphere. I was totally unaware of what was going on in Brazil until my arrival.

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In 1964, the leftist movement that had the backing of intellectuals and the Catholic church was crushed and a military dictatorship took hold for the next 10 years. I had met and fallen in love with a very amazing, intelligent and wonderful man, Raphael. He was an activist and lived very dangerously. He was involved in the “student union” that was our meeting place.

We were all bracing for the coup. A group of right-wing politicians were secretly conspiring to oust socialist President Joao Goulart from power. They had the backing of the Brazilian armed forces. Washington applauded the military intervention and had its naval forces under alert, but they were not needed.

So on March 31, 1964, the military struck quickly, the President fled to France and the leftist movement crumbled in disarray. There was no opposition. They crushed the unions, allowed no strikes and “put people away” without batting an eye.

By 1969, the human-rights situation in Brazil had deteriorated badly. Most of the intellectuals who had dared to speak out had to leave the country, or risk “disappearing” forever. Political prisoners were placed in jails with regular criminals. Tortures and beatings were common practices.

I left to continue my studies in Paris and so did Raphael. We married and we spent our time just talking about what had happened. We did nothing. We could do nothing but talk. We would meet at coffee shops with other “Brazilian exiles” and it was a very bittersweet time for all of us. There I met Vinicius de Moraes, the poet and ex-ambassador that led the intellectual movement in Paris. I met the now-president of Brazil, a wonderful and cultured man, a socialist, Henrique Cardozo.

At the time, there was a huge student movement in Paris. The students were destroying the “myth of the professor.” The unquestioned word. The useless and false information that was fed to us without questions. I had joined this movement too, but I was also pregnant. Motherhood changed my life.

I knew that I had to take responsibility and could not continue the reckless and bohemian style I had lived till then. So I took my son and I came to the United States.

By 1979, as part of an amnesty that permitted political exiles to return to the country, the military regime made certain that there would be no investigations and no accounting for the barbarities that took place. No trials, no probes. Just silence and impunity.

Raphael still lives in Brazil, in the north. I still love him. The last time I saw him was at the beginning of this year. He was in Rio with his friends, Brazilian song writers and poets. They are now embracing the cause of the “Sem Terra,” the poor people that have no place to live because of the land-owners who took large portions of land and don’t allow settlers there. He still loves me too. But it’s not enough for either of us to give up our independent lives. Some of his friends are Brazilian composers like Chico Buarque de Holland, Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso and others. I had the most wonderful time when I spent a week with them earlier this year, but my life is here now.

I don’t know if you ever saw the movie “The Way We

Were.” My life was very much like that, only one generation later. I feel the frustration and the bitterness of having witnessed so much injustice and so much unfairness, without really having done nothing but talk about it. And here I am, still talking about it.

\* \* \*

*The Oakland A’s have been one of the most successful baseball teams in America since coming to the Bay Area from Kansas City in 1968, winning three consecutive World Series from 1972-1974, and a fourth in 1989. They have recently fallen on hard times. Lil is one of their most outspoken and passionate fans, as anyone can attest who has attended games with her at the Oakland Coliseum or argued with her in online forums.*

\* \* \*

Baseball. Take away everything from me. And I mean everything. But leave baseball in my life.

I was 10 when I met baseball. I had heard about it, but I had never seen it nor knew anyone that had ever played it. There was no baseball in Brazil.

When I came to Long Island, I met and started a wonderful friendship with a schoolmate and her family. They had moved to Long Island from Brooklyn and were, like myself, strangers in town. They introduced me to the Brooklyn Dodgers. I spent weekends with them in Brooklyn during baseball season and went to as many games as they were willing to take me.

Later, when I was in Paris, whenever I would meet an American student I would always find a way to steer the conversation towards baseball. I never found an American that had the interest in baseball that I had. In fact, they found it very strange that I would be asking baseball questions in the intellectual and political setting we lived in.

Baseball to me became America and America became baseball. To this day, it still is. They say that in order to be a real baseball fan, you have to have played the game or you have to be the parent of someone that played the game. I think you have to fall in love with it when you’re a child. As a child, you play it and you watch the real players and you play it in your dreams.

To me, baseball is more than that. I grew to love America (and its people) in a baseball park. People of all walks of life, sitting together and talking, laughing and crying. No sense of time. No hurry.

To this day, I’m always sorry when a game ends.

Coming from a country of great social disparity, I was amazed to find so much integration at the ballpark. Interesting that I had found the same thing in Brazil, at the soccer stadiums. The integration of fans.

This country was going through all the civil rights struggles, and baseball was at the forefront of integration. Not only with Jackie Robinson, but also in the stands, among the fans. I remember the love the fans in Brooklyn had for Jackie. And how they cried when he was traded.

I always felt that baseball is America at its best.

Between 1953 and 1958, I watched the best players who ever played the game. I watched Campanella and Yogi and I watched the greatest ballplayer that ever played the game in my opinion,

Willie Mays. I watched him hit his homeruns against my Dodgers, and I hated him for it, but I was always in awe of him. I watched Jackie steal home in a World Series game in 1955, even though the Dodgers lost the game. Yogi was the catcher for the Yankees.

Those things you never forget.

When I moved to California with my 10-year-old son, I introduced him to baseball. He was born in Brazil and I brought him to the States at the same age I had arrived. He also learned to love America through baseball. What better way to become an American than to learn English and baseball at the same time? So I bought him a mitt and a bat and enrolled him in Little League. I taught him English and baseball. He fell in love with the game, just as I had done. I brought him to see the Oakland A's, simply because I could not bring myself to root for the hated Giants of my childhood. I outgrew being a Dodger fan, thank goodness. But I could not bring myself to love the Giants that had broken my heart so many times when I was a kid. But I respect the Gi-

ants and the Yankees and I respect the players.

Life took me all over the world. To Europe and back to Brazil and back to the United States. But I never lost track of what was going on in baseball. While in Europe and in Brazil, checking the box scores was almost an obsession for me. Never could my day end during baseball season, without first finding out what teams did and how players were doing, no matter what part of the world I was in at the time.

I will always love and respect this game that goes on slowly, with exciting moments and plays that stay in your memory forever. It takes a special breed of people to love baseball. Maybe that's why I love the United States so much. It is here that the game is played and loved the most.

I love baseball with an undue passion. And what's worse, I'm not ashamed to admit it.

*Lil Bartholo is an independent neurodiagnostician. You can find her in section 119 at the Oakland Coliseum during baseball season. Or, email her at [elbee@crl.com](mailto:elbee@crl.com)*

# The Gulf War TV Super Bowl

*Jim Castonguay*

## Desert Storm: The Sequel

When Saddam Hussein notified the United Nations earlier this month – in response to continued sanctions against his country – that American weapons inspectors had to leave Iraq and that Iraqi forces would shoot down American U-2 reconnaissance planes, the networks quickly dusted off their military analysts, Gulf War graphics, and Desert Storm rhetoric for what continues to be a remarkable display of TV *deja vu*. CNN has created a “Showdown with Iraq” logo for its coverage – reminiscent of the title “Showdown in the Gulf” used by CBS for Desert Storm updates seven years earlier – suggesting that this casting of the current conflict with Iraq as a Hollywood western is quite familiar. Indeed, during the Gulf War the standoff, pistols-at-dawn mentality ensured that cultural events like the Super Bowl would not be canceled during wartime so that Americans could display their collective patriotism to Saddam and other would-be terrorists/bullies who were out to destroy the world and wreck everyone's good time (“Saddam Sacks Super Bowl” worried *Advertising Age*). It is not surprising that President Bush encouraged the NFL and ABC to proceed with the game, since this wimp-turned-warrior had already described the Gulf War as his Super Bowl (and was counting on mobilizing the massive Super Bowl TV audience).

As the centennial observance of the 1898 Spanish-American War fast approaches, it becomes even more important that the 1990-91 neo-imperialist adventure known as “Operation Desert Storm” be recognized as yet another chapter in a long and bad historical novel of American frontierism – one that includes not only Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders but the more recent Cold

War and a much older Crusade for a different New World Order. And while historical distance may revise the Gulf War text, at the time of this writing Gulf War commanders continue to be valorized and Operations Desert Shield, Sword, and Storm are still consistently presented as just and successful endeavors in opposition to the morally and strategically misguided failure called “Vietnam.” In the end, the Gulf War was less about forgetting history (as some have argued), than it was an ambivalent attempt to create a new history (which Bush explicitly presented as the founding of a New World Order) while also insisting that we remember—not only the lessons from Vietnam and the mistakes of anti-War movement but also the ethics of a just and honorable World War II. This therapeutic process was translated into Gulf War propaganda, like the Super Bowl half-time show discussed below, and into the literal overkill of Iraqi soldiers and civilians.

What the U.S. public does remember from the Persian Gulf War is a just and successful military operation with few casualties – a sanitized, quickie technowar in which laser-guided missiles destroyed buildings not bodies. In his October 2, 1997, letter to the UN Security Council, however, Ramsey Clark offers the sobering reminder that U.S.-led sanctions against Iraq “have now killed more than 750,000 human beings, perhaps twice that many, the great majority, infants, children, older persons and those who suffered serious chronic illnesses.” During the Gulf War, the sanitized media coverage became complicit in the killing by adopting an uncritical, self-censored position toward the conflict which facilitated the slaughter of Iraqis and the destruction of Iraq's infrastructure (including the leveling of the historic city of Baghdad).



Figure 1

President Bush provided the definitive conclusion to the Gulf War TV miniseries “Operation Desert Storm” when he announced in March of 1991 that “by God, we’ve finally kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all.” Continued revelations that our smart technology was much dumber than we thought and the increased public awareness of Gulf War Syndrome/Illness might suggest that George Bush’s therapeutic tale of the Gulf may yet be significantly revised. But the Gulf War TV show has already survived the images of suffering Kurds shown shortly after the war and recurring criticisms that the president ended the war too soon by leaving Saddam Hussein alive and in power.

As it becomes more and more apparent that the media and the Clinton administration have once again embarked on an unyielding march toward aggressive action against Iraq, it becomes especially timely – indeed crucial – that we revisit the original production of the Gulf War. We need to examine the ways in which it constructed not only the instant history of the war but also a desire for violence. In the case of the Gulf War Super Bowl, it is football’s generic conventions and its mode of reception – which socializes us in different ways than the evening news – that facilitated the uncritical reception of the Bush administration’s propaganda.

## Super Bowl XXV

During the Gulf War the commentary of military and football analysts – and the methods deployed to illustrate and explain sports and the war – became almost indistinguishable. During ABC’s broadcast of Super Bowl XXV, an important part of the rhetorical strategy was to turn the event into much more than a game in order to justify playing the contest. Indeed, the Super Bowl and its viewers became important—even essential—participants in the war effort. To be sure, the Super Bowl is already not just another football game, and the usual hype and relentless references to football history (which is a television or televisual history) mark its cultural significance. It is particularly important that Super Bowl XXV took place on January 27, 1991 – just days

after the beginning of U.S.-led coalition bombing. Consequently, the American public was immersed in a culture of fear and anxiety, unsure about the possibility of a long war with high U.S. casualties, waiting for chemical weapon attacks from Iraq’s mobile scud launchers, intimidated by Saddam Hussein’s elite “Republican Guard,” air force, and vast army, and – in the ultimate invocation of a cold war logic—terrified of Saddam’s possible nuclear weapon technology.

The “Silver Anniversary Super Bowl” began with an establishing shot of the entire stadium (figure 1a) and, as Whitney Houston performed her rendition of the national anthem (figure 1b), there were several shots of flag-and-sign-waving fans (figures 1c-f). There were also dissolves to soldiers on the field (figure 1g), including a direct address close-up of an African-American marine (figure 1h) and tracking shots of several rows of enlisted men and women on the field holding the flags of various coalition countries. Houston’s performance – which immediately became a hit record and made her an instant homefront hero – was punctuated by a fly-over of F-14s (figure 1i) and an extreme long shot of the stadium accompanied by the graphic of the Super Bowl XXV logo/shield. In a case of intertextual *deja vu*, a less spectacular version of this *mise-en-scene* and rhetoric appeared in a special issue of *People* magazine on Gulf War heroes: a story on Whitney Hous-

Figure 2



ton and her Super Bowl performance ran opposite a color advertisement for a pewter sculpture of an F-14 Tomcat. The story points out that the Star Spangled Banner has been “dutifully performed at sporting events since World War II” and then notes that “Houston’s ‘Star Spangled Banner’ was the first to hit the pop charts since Jose Feliciano’s 1968 World Series rendition.” The explicit references to World War II and the year that marked the turning point in U.S. public opinion against the war in Vietnam are symptomatic of the larger attempt during the Gulf War to return to a just war mentality in the name of “kicking the Vietnam Syndrome” (as WW II veteran George Bush so baldly put it).

The Super Bowl’s *raison d’être* became participating in the war effort by doing a performative duty for the troops in collective support of the U.S. government. The fact that both team’s colors were red, white and blue contributed to the already ubiquitous presence of those colors in the form of the many U.S. flags which were purchased at the event. In addition, many fans brought to the game homemade red, white, and blue posters announcing “America’s Best Citizens Support our G.I.s,” “God Bless America,” and “Go USA,” literally signs of support for the war. From the outset of the contest the garb and paraphernalia which fans normally bring to the Super Bowl in support of a football team were usurped by “higher” allegiances to God, country, and the troops. Thus the symbolic performance of the crowd was an important component of the television event and, like the larger media coverage of the war, meticulously orchestrated. More interesting for my purposes, the fans in the stadium were no longer just supporting a football team, but became Gulf War fanatics, cheering on “our side” and the “coalition team.” Later, during the half-time show, individual fans held up colored cards at the appropriate moment in order to form a huge red, white, and blue Super Bowl XXV shield (resembling both a U.S. flag and the icon of Operation Desert Shield) that could be seen only on television—thanks to the bird’s eye/camera view from the Good Year blimp. Thus the stadium crowd was incorporated into the spectacle of the half time show, literally performing their collective duty for the troops, the war, George Bush, ABC, the NFL, and the home TV viewer. The conscious participation of Super Bowl fans is analogous to other media-sponsored displays (e.g., human flag forming and “USA rallies”) intended to simulate a unified U.S. body politic and alleviate historical insecurities during the war. At the same time, this excessive spectacle must be viewed as part of a larger attempt to redeem the apparatus and institution of television, which, according to the military and popular memory, contributed to losing the Vietnam war in American living rooms. Consequently, while the spectacle of the stadium experience of the Super Bowl is important to the construction of societal memory, these “live” and “spontaneous” collective practices were also transformed into a symbolic ritual for hundreds of millions of Gulf War telespectators.

During the first commercial break during the Super Bowl XXV, Diet Pepsi launched its “You got the right one, baby” ad campaign featuring Ray Charles and the soon-to-be celebrity “Uh Huh Girls” as his back up singers. One of the commercials shows an African tribe, masses of cheering Asians, worshipping Eastern Buddhists, and Geisha “girls” singing the “Uh- huh” song and doing the “Uh-huh” dance (figures 2a-c). By suggesting that inside these non-Western inhabitants of the global village reside cola drinking Americans dancing and singing to get out, Pepsi



Figure 3

partakes in the larger ethos of giddy neo-imperialism present in Gulf War popular culture (exemplified by the photograph of a Kuwaiti man kissing an American flag which appeared on the front page of *USA Today* celebrating the “liberation of Kuwait”) (figure 2d).

Leading up to the U.N. deadline, the “diet cola wars” began to take on new connotations, reaching a fever pitch during Super Bowl week when both Coca Cola and Pepsi canceled some of their prepared commercial promotions. The trade journals dubbed this “bait and ditch non-event advertising,” a new technique that Coke took too far but Pepsi would negotiate perfectly. During the first half, Coca-Cola scrolled the following up the screen as a male voice spoke the text: “Prior to the Middle East Crisis, Coca-Cola scheduled a Super Bowl Promotion, which will be aired later. However, we also want to recognize what is truly important: our men and women serving in the Persian Gulf. Today on your behalf, The Coca Cola Company donates \$1 million to the U.S.O.” (figures 3a, 3b). Coke’s rhetorical strategy (in essence advertising that it was not advertising) proved ineffective, since they failed to capitalize on the unmitigated celebration of global consumerism and Americanism (ironically most embodied by their product). Indeed, Coca Cola’s aesthetically bland commercials were, in the end, the most blatant reminder of the seriousness of war (and television’s conventions) in the Super Bowl flow. As we would see later, Coke was taking the war more seriously than the actual troops in the Middle East, who were enjoying the game on TV and (much to the dismay of Coca Cola executives) drinking cans of Pepsi (figure 3c). The following week Coke was officially pronounced the loser when Advertising Age’s editorial staff declared that “Coke made the wrong move baby.”

In the end Pepsi’s ad “campaign” elevated the “Uh-huh” girls to celebrity status (albeit short-lived) and, like the images of singer Whitney Houston, these performances represented a major component of the abridged American Dream for many African-Americans: to become successful performers in the entertainment industry. The two other components of the African-American Dream – professional sports and the more realistic option of the military – are also ubiquitous in the Super Bowl *mise-en-scène*. In the case of the Gulf War TV Super Bowl, the performers and entertainers (e.g., the “warriors” on the football (battle)field and the children paraded onto the Disney stage during half-time) were mostly people of color. Like the troops fighting in the Gulf War “theater” who were killing in the interest of establishing the global New World Order, the immediate beneficiaries of these performances were the white men whose economic and political interests these performances served. The televised Su-

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**Figure 4**

per Bowl thus unwittingly reflected the demography of U.S. soldiers who, left with few economic and institutional alternatives, were coerced into fighting on the front lines in the

Middle East.

The “half-time show” was prefaced by another ABC news update from Peter Jennings behind the helm of the ABC news desk in New York, telling the viewer that Saddam Hussein had delivered on his threat to use “the Oil weapon . . . [a]nd now the most significant U.S. attack of the last 24 hours has been to turn the oil off . . . using laser guided weapons . . . to seal the pipes.” The first two news segments, “The Gulf War: The Strike” (figures 5a-b) and “The Gulf War: The Clean Up” (figure 5c) explain that many of the techniques and companies being employed to clean-up the spill were first used after the Exxon Valdez oil spill. While the reality is that the relentless bombing by the U.S. was responsible for the vast majority of oil damage in the Gulf, this report even goes so far as to suggest that Exxon’s record oil spill was a positive event in light of the Gulf War. NBC practiced a similar deception when its parent company General Electric – which was involved in designing and/or building almost every major weapon used to destroy Iraq and kill its people – continued to insist in its wartime commercials that it was “bring[ing] good things to life.”

In the next segment, “The Gulf War: The Bombing” (figure 5d), we see a Marine major with an array of mines in hand and others displayed in the sand before a group soldiers elaborating on Saddam Hussein’s arsenal: “This ain’t the war to be out there playin’ Rambo! The guy knows what he’s

doin’! He likes land mines!” Accompanied by reaction shots of young U.S. soldiers visibly shaken by the major’s words, Jennings’ voice-over explains that “only a tiny fraction of American soldiers have any combat experience, [so] the major paints it as real as he can.” The major continues shouting: “If you find one of these [mines] you’re gonna win it! You’re gonna eat about 14 pounds of explosives! They’re not gonna find your shoes! They aren’t gonna find nothin’! [They’ll just] see a little red mist there!” (figure 5e).

This segment highlights the insecurities and anxieties about the impending ground war and how the inexperienced U.S. troops will perform in the battlefield. As if tailored to highlight anxieties present in the news stories, Super Bowl XXV was the closest in Super Bowl history (the final score was 20-19) as the Buffalo Bills kicker Scott Norwood missed a last second field goal that would have won the game. This is precisely the type of outcome to the ground war—failed performance under fire—feared by the U.S. and present throughout the Super Bowl broadcast. And while press reports tried to accentuate the positive, claiming that both teams had performed marvelously, the missed kick takes on increased significance in light of the discourse over the impending ground war and speculation over whether or not our Patriots missiles were “intercepting” SCUDs or if our inexperienced troops might miss the Iraqi butts they were supposedly going to kick. The final “news” segment during the half-time break is reserved for the Super Bowl itself: “And just before we get back to the game,” says Jennings, “an answer to one of the more obvious questions. Yes, men and women in the war zone have been able to see the first half.” We cut to a shot of Whitney Houston beginning her performance of the “Star Spangled Banner” with the logo “The Gulf War: Super Bowl!” (figure 5l). This blatant self-promotion by ABC and the NFL historicizes the Super Bowl even before it is only half-over, raising its newsworthy status to that of bombing updates and environmental damage caused by actual events of the war. Within the context of the larger rhetoric of “support the

**Figure 5**





Figure 6

troops,” the supposedly overwhelming public support for military aggression, and the patriotic display orchestrated by the NFL and aestheticized by ABC, the stage was set for instantly documenting that the Super Bowl was an essential morale booster. ABC thus presents the Super Bowl as performing an indispensable USO-like function for the troops who were enjoying the game along with the home TV viewer (figure 6a). The high production values and seamless unfolding of the news reports about our first half entertainment serve to construct an illusory sense of live history in the making – a feeling that the home viewer is doing his/her part in couch potato support for the war effort.

ABC’s Judd Rose begins the report by noting that “It began with the national anthem dedicated to the troops in the Persian Gulf.” These remarks are accompanied by a close-up of a soldier with tears streaming down his face, shots of soldiers drinking cans of Pepsi and watching the game enthusiastically on television, and testimonies from soldiers about how much the game meant to them (figures 6c-h). The only woman soldier watching the game claims that “Saddam has a history of hittin’ us right in the middle of when we’re doing somethin’ good (laughs).” In response to the reporter’s question, “what happens if [a SCUD attack] happens?,” she says, “Oh, we’ll put our [gas] masks on and hopefully be able to keep watchin’ if it’s not too bad,” suggesting not only how heretically disrespectful a SCUD attack would be on the Holy Day of the West, Super Bowl Sunday, but also pointing to the religious conviction of the Super Bowl spectator who is willing risk her life to watch the game. The reporter concludes that “there were concerns this week that playing the Super Bowl in the shadow of war seems frivolous, but if anything it meant more to the troops here—a glimpse of home before heading on to the front.” A *Sports Illustrated* article reinforced this take on the Super Bowl, quoting one soldier remarking that, “[w]e were here for Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year’s. Now we’re here for the Super Bowl” – a further testament to the significance of the Super Bowl in U.S. culture, placing it along side national holidays and adding explicit religious overtones to the ritual. Of course, when CNN’s “hotel warriors” broadcast the outbreak of the war live over an audio feed, it was immediately aligned with the most patriotic of U.S. holi-

days as John Holloman, Bernard Shaw, and Peter Arnett literally “oohed” and “ahhed” at the awesome spectacle of anti-aircraft tracer fire and the explosions of U.S. bombs. When both Holloman and Shaw described the bombing as resembling the “fireworks finale on the fourth of July at the base of the Washington monument,” replete “with red and white flashes” of tracer fire, George Bush – who scheduled the beginning of the bombing for prime time TV viewing (or listening) – no doubt agreed that we were indeed witnessing the historic rebirth of a nation and the launching of a revolutionary New World Order.

The *Sports Illustrated* piece also reports that the Defense Department estimated that only 10% to 15% of the U.S. forces in the Gulf region could potentially see the game live, making the half-time segment yet another piece of misleading propaganda (for both ABC and President Bush). When one takes into consideration that most of the men and women in the Gulf were working twelve to eighteen hours days and fearing for their lives given the impending ground war, the reality is that few troops had any desire to watch the Super Bowl. Such facts notwithstanding, after the report of the troops enjoying and appreciating the first-half, we return to a smiling Jennings looking off-screen right at his monitor. He concludes that we have “a small reason to smile today. It’s a little after 4 O’clock in the morning in Saudi Arabia. That’s our brief news report, we’ll go back to the game in Tampa . . . after this . . .” (figure 6b).

If the Gulf War Super Bowl seems like an isolated moment in recent U.S. history, witness the the brief but intense media blitz surrounding the recent “Promise Keepers” rally in Washington, D.C. Replete with images of football stadiums filled with men praying, sobbing, and kneeling before huge video screens (all under the direction of their spiritual coach Bill McCartney) – the Promise Keepers provides us with another striking example of the conflation of a football stadium experience with right-wing politics, religion, and the military. The uniform-like outfits of the leaders (and their past careers in sports and the military), as well as the ubiquitous use of military language (e.g., “spiritual warfare”) and the participation of sports figures in the stadium rallies, further point to the connection between the Promise Keepers and these other institutions. P.K. guru/coach McCartney launched the movement during Operations Desert Shield, Sword, and Storm – aided by the hyper-patriarchal climate of a militarized U.S. culture – when in 1990 he left his job as head football coach at the University of Colorado to begin his own crusade to “take back the nation” for Christ with his “Godly army.”

One of most interesting aspects of the TV coverage of the

Figure 7



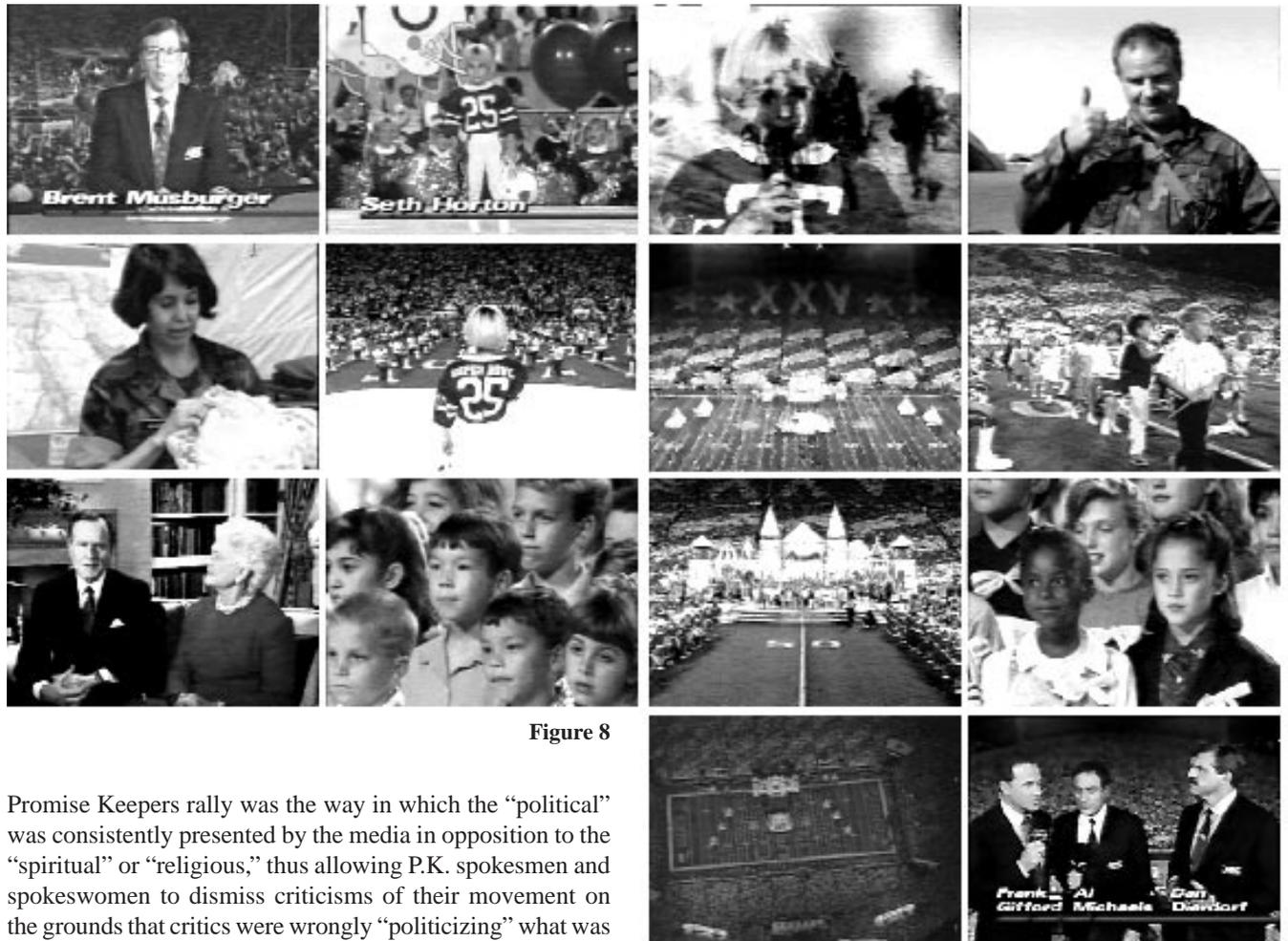


Figure 8

Promise Keepers rally was the way in which the “political” was consistently presented by the media in opposition to the “spiritual” or “religious,” thus allowing P.K. spokesmen and spokeswomen to dismiss criticisms of their movement on the grounds that critics were wrongly “politicizing” what was in actuality a “purely religious” nation/family/father-building event. As *The Nation* observed over a year ago in October 1996, “[T]he political significance of Promise Keepers has eluded most of the media coverage lavished upon its stadium extravaganzas, which are bedazzling and often emotionally affecting for the reporters who cover them. Last February, McCartney was named “Person of the Week” by ABC News, a signal of the generally positive attitude toward the Promise Keepers in the secular media, which no doubt will persist . . . Friendly reporting has been encouraged by the superficially uncontroversial subject matter of most Promise Keeper rallies.”

The recent Washington rally suggests that this right-wing movement continues to masquerade as a kinder, gentler, spiritualized masculinity divorced from political agendas. In the case of the Gulf War Super Bowl, the genre of sports programming—and the stadium experience of football in particular—enabled George Bush and ABC to turn the game into a “bedazzling and often emotionally affecting” piece of political propaganda under the guise of the less controversial act of “supporting the troops.” While this affective spectacle is already apparent in Whitney Houston’s performance, it became even more excessive during the stadium half-time show.

During the Gulf War protesting U.S. policy became equated with not supporting the troops, which ignores the major reason for opposing the war in the first place: to prevent troops being sent to the Gulf or to bring them back sooner and alive.

This “support the troops” strategy benefited from the false yet apparently accepted claim that the U.S. lost the war in Vietnam due to a lack of support on the home front.

After a reminder from our local anchor to watch his “live homefront reports from the Middle East tonight,” we return to Brent Musburger who explains, “while you were away, Walt Disney world and 2,000 children entertained the crowd . . . [with] a stirring tribute to our men and women stationed in the Persian Gulf” (figure 8a). We cut to Seth Horton, a young, blond boy dressed in a red, white, and blue football jersey who dedicated the song “Wind Beneath My Wings (You are my Hero),” “[to] the real heroes in the Middle East protecting freedom for all of us kids” (figure 8b). As he begins to sing, we dissolve to a montage of smiling and waving troops in the Middle East (one woman soldier is holding a pink heart-shaped pillow and a man gives the thumbs up sign) (figures 8c-f). In addition, hundreds of young children with a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds with parents serving in the Persian Gulf were paraded on to the field wearing yellow ribbons and carrying U.S. flags (invoking the myth of the great American melting pot, the global family of nations, and the allied coalition). Meanwhile, the stadium crowd, which had erupted into a deafening roar, forms a red, white, and blue flag-like Super Bowl shield across the stands (figures 8g and 8h).

During an instrumental break, the narrator announces, “Ladies and Gentlemen. The President of the United States,” and we dis-

solve to a pre-recorded message from George and Barbara Bush delivered from the White House on a couch in front of a fire place and book case (figure 8i). As the music from the stadium performance continues for (melo)dramatic impact, the President and First Lady address the global village

PRESIDENT BUSH: Good evening from the White House to everyone in the sunshine state and around the world enjoying this wonderful game.  
BARBARA BUSH: What a pleasure it is to say hello to all the young people on the field tonight. Looking at you it's easy to see why America can count on a bright and hopeful future.  
PRESIDENT BUSH: Well that's right. And you make us all very proud. But today we should recognize the men and women in our armed forces. Far away from home, they protect freedom in the Persian Gulf and around the world.

A lone trumpet in the stadium can be heard playing "America the Beautiful" over the president's "message," which continues to refer to the troops and their "mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters . . . the true champions of our country." While the camera dissolves to several close-ups of racially diverse children in front of the Disney Castle (figures 8j-8l), the president concludes: "God Bless you all, and God Bless all freedom loving people around the world." The field is now entirely filled with American flags being waved by the cast of thousands of children and young adults on the field and, as the music's crescendo reaches a fever pitch, a flock of white doves are released from the front gate of the Castle. While the chorus belts out the words "AMERICA! AMERICA! AMERICA!," there is a final dissolve to the original extreme long shot which reveals that the on-field participants have formed the

letters "USA." As the deafening roar of the crowd fades out, Brent Musberger voice-over concludes: "Dawn is now breaking over the Persian Gulf and some of our fighting men and women have been watching this Super Bowl throughout the night, and our hearts go out to them. Now for the second half. . ." (figure 8n).

In the end, this half-time spectacle clearly demonstrates that during wartime culture the Super Bowl became a *whole new ball game* – an official spectacle of nationalist propaganda made possible through a televisual conflation of football and war, news and entertainment, politics and sports, history and the present. Overall, the Super Bowl broadcast was much like the television coverage of the war in general – sanitized, packaged, and stylistically polished – creating a euphoric feeling of patriotic nationalism grounded in the U.S. public's ambivalence toward the American military and other insecure collective memories. Like the U.S. news media during the Gulf War, Super Bowl athletes, fans, and the home TV audience functioned as cheerleaders for the U.S. military and the Bush administration's policies. In addition to the structural complicity among the media, the military, and the oil industry (e.g., top executives at the major networks also sit on the boards of big oil companies), the Gulf War TV Super Bowl also revealed to an unprecedented degree the existence of an industrial-military-sports-media complex.

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# E-Ticket Masterpieces: Notes on the Theme-parkification of the Art Museum

Mark Van Proyen

*After more than a decade of debate and discussion of disciplinary crisis, it is perfectly clear that art history knows what it does. And it frequently knows why it does what it does. What it knows less well, however, is what what it does does.*

– Donald Preziosi *Rethinking Art History* (1989)

Because of the hubris born of convenient misconception, I came close to blowing a great opportunity on a recent trip to Europe. The hubris in question was a picture I had of myself as a scholar on a research trip to several museums and ancient cathedrals. The almost-missed opportunity was to see the reality of my relation to the art that I was looking at, the reality of its being a set of strategically positioned points on a tourist's parcourse rather than an array of objects presented for "edification." Both realities amount to paying obeisance to a series of sites via a predetermined set of rituals-of-appreciation. The former is clearly the one that today's museum must necessarily gear itself toward, at the inevitable expense of the latter. This is because, like everybody and everything else, public museums are in a race against the bottom line. In terms of presentational aesthetics as well as pro-

grammatic decision, that race goes to those who are swiftest when it comes to getting paying visitors in and out the door with the greatest efficiency after their self-inflicted fleecing at over-priced coffee and postcard boutiques. Thus, we now see multi-lingual signs in big museums, such as "Nightwatch this way" at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, or "Mona Lisa this way" at the Louvre. The Winged Victory? It now lives (and is displayed accordingly) as a grand backdrop for snapshots of smiling friends and spouses printed 'round the world, evidence of the perspicacity of tourist bureau employees, and of hotel and restaurant bills settled up with 18% credit card splurges.

I suppose that it is possible to shrug all of this off as yet another sign of our pan-capitalist, post-ideological times, just another entry in the new globalism's all-pervasive ledger of front money expended and profits gathered. In the past decade, we have seen unprecedented numbers of people flowing into new or newly renovated museum buildings such as Mario Botta's San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, or the Musee d'Orsay in Paris, the grand building that Gae Aulenti fashioned out of a defunct train station. These buildings and others like them are the new cathedrals of our seamless union

of private and public capital, the palpable proofs of history's proper resting place in our post-historical nightmare. We have also seen prodigious collections of statistics routinely marshaled to point out how museum attendance is growing exponentially. These statistics are intended to convince us that the visual arts, despite their apparent elitism and recent political vilification, are indeed crowd pleasers, and should be supported accordingly (i.e., they should receive corporate funding).

This recent shift in museum priorities was illustrated by a recent talk given to the trustees of a Bay Area Art School by outgoing San Francisco Museum of Modern Art director John Lane. Lane compared the present financial status of the museum with its financial position ten years ago. Then, paid attendance made up less than a quarter of its eight million dollar operating budget. Now, it makes up half of a sixteen million dollar operating budget, a feat that has been accomplished for the time being thanks to the spectacular new building Botta designed for that institution. Contributions from government agencies are in a state of decline, as are those from corporations looking for tax-deductible charity advertising, and from private and semi-public philanthropic foundations and affluent individuals. Still, even though they are paying a smaller percentage of the bills, these sources are being courted ever more energetically, with a zeal and fealty that borders on the psychotic. The reason for this zeal is that there is one implication of this new financial climate that no one involved wants to have to face: that if the whole operation were entirely dependent on the revenues generated by paid attendance, those institutions would have to regularly and even exclusively think in terms of "putting on a show," with all the crude, vaudevillian connotations of populist pandering implied by the phrase. And yet, a new presentational vaudeville has suddenly become the *de rigueur* standard practiced by big budget institutions, appearing to issue from the financial unconscious of the museums that I visited on my European tour. It was particularly obvious during the summer months, when the largest crowds of tourists visit. Suddenly, it seems quite evident that for museums, times are indeed changing.

Twenty and even ten years ago, nothing could have been more anathema to the entrenched professional habits of the directors and curators ("art administrators") who were involved in the programming decisions of their institutions. The era in which those individuals came of age was one marked by a pervasive skepticism regarding the powers of corporate oligarchy and a concomitantly naive faith in the future of a (semi) public sector that could ostensibly "protect" the People from the evil influence of this oligarchy. The Vietnam-era position that there should be no more wars in which the blood of lower-class youth would be shed in order to protect the profits of corporate stockholders became a focus for more than just a retrenchment of Imperial America's foreign policy ambitions. It also signaled a collective willingness to practice coalition politics on a variety of domestic and/or social welfare fronts. The theoretical model for this position was the shared governance of a university community that had long sustained a self-protective anti-oligarchic grudge over the abuses of the McCarthy era.

To a large but temporary extent, acting on this position created an environment in which the organizing power of ideas was able to challenge the atrophied mythmaking powers of long-standing vested interests. However, this moment was only sustainable when the organizing power of ideas was matched by the idea (and technique) of complex organization and organization-building modelled after both the participatory ideals and labyrinthine structures endemic to academic governance. In this environment, those who could sustain a mastery of the committee arts were the ones who could get things accomplished (pure populism without guiding principles always reverted into factionalized chaos), and this mastery bred a calculating, passive-aggressive personality that stood in sharp, ascendant contrast to the impatient short-sightedness of oligarchy's ego-maniacal self-made men.

Thus was born the art of bureaucratic self-servitude using ideological righteousness as a cover, earmarked by a conveniently hypocritical faith in the idea that one could somehow sustain a progressive politics without any appeal to populist politics. In the hands of a newly professionalized class of non-profit administrators, links to grassroots communities of support were quietly severed, and replaced by the rhetoric of strategic compromise, complex tradeoffs, and spin control. Underneath this suave hypocrisy resided an even uglier truth – the truth of a rarefied discourse of progressive thought secretly serving elite agendas by ignoring the actual facts of people's daily lives favoring instead the advance of useless speculations about how those lives are supposedly structured. This valorized the efforts of the person doing the structuring (i.e. the administrator) instead of identifying with the struggle of the people being structured.

It was from this socio-political ferment that the currently entrenched generation of art administrators gained their sentimental education as well as their ideological justifications and professional contours. All of these quickly coalesced into an orthodoxy of art-administrative practice that still exerts great (albeit declining) influence in determining the goals of institutional behavior, thus inaugurating what art critic Dave Hickey has called "the therapeutic institution," — a quasi-religious domain of unquestionable authority, where "peer review" euphemistically masks a collective self-appointment to the position of determining what is good for everybody else. On a practical level, this meant that those involved viewed themselves as being professionally charged with the duty of making censorious decisions on a day-to-day basis, while viewing these decisions as articles of protected speech whenever external political mechanisms sought to question their merit or viability. Hal Foster provides the polemical gloss on this vexing contradiction by writing "there is a fundamental stake in art and academy: the preservation, in an administered, affirmative culture, of spaces for critical debate and alternative vision," eliding the fact that when one takes the king's shilling, one does indeed become the king's man. Put another way, we see how the idea of an "institutional avant garde" carried the seed of its own collapse into contradiction. What is still standing after this collapse is simply institution.

When viewed in this light, we can see that, despite its baptism in the radical moment of the late 1960s, the world of 1970s art administration was in many ways not so different from the historical sources of our concept of the museum going back to the Renaissance nobleman's private sanctuary of art, treasure and objects of wonder. The objects contained in these sanctuaries and

the rationalizations for their presentation may have changed, but the idea of sanctuary has remained a crucial component of a widespread culture of entitlement and birthright, even though this sanctuary was often used as a platform to decry the entitlements and birthrights of others. Add to this the encouragements stemming from a then-burgeoning federal arts bureaucracy and the critical establishment of the 1970s' enthusiasm for artistic projects that challenged the exchange-commodity status of works of art, and you see the makings of a brave new world of fervent experimentation. Buffered by a solid set of administrative firewalls protecting institutional practices from any and all external demands for accountability, including that form of popular accountability called democracy, art did not have to court public appeal. By unrealistically clinging to a refusal of all forms of instrumental reason, the world of 1970's art administration, in its mouthing of grand rhetorical flourishes and its secret, albeit omnipresent chronicle of Byzantine palace intrigues, resembled nothing so much as a decentralized panoramic portrait of the court of Louis XIV at Versailles. While artists who sought institutional visibility in this environment seemed more and more like applicants for an 18th-century position as an assistant wig powderer, the administrative players operating in this world engaged in elaborate strategies for positioning themselves near the fluctuating paths of political influence. The semi-secret bartering of such positions and influences became the hallmark of successful climbs up the art administrative career ladder. Bureaucratic ambition created its own marketplace, not a marketplace for the exchange of works of art-as-commodities, but a marketplace for the exchange of art administrative career profiles. In this setting, speculation about whose art administrative stock might be rising or falling thrived, even as the notion of "investing" in actual works of art became hopelessly unfashionable.

Granted, all of this happened behind the scenes of a show that, by design, had limited appeal. The magic worked as long as there was a widespread belief in the desirability of supporting a generic idea of "creativity." It didn't matter whether much thought had been given to what this creativity was supposed to accomplish: the demonstration of blind faith in a hopelessly over-generalized idea of progress was sufficient. In actuality, the ascendancy of the 1970s culture of art administration was exactly what put the brakes on the progress of art as well as the use of art for progressive purposes. When Paul Valéry bemoaned the authority and constraint of the bourgeois museum in the 1920s, he could have just as easily been writing about the museum practices of the 1970s: "Did I come for instruction, for my own beguilement? or simply as a duty and out of convention?"

As the Reagan-Thatcherite 1980s began to roll out its agenda for the privatization of civil society, the culture of the museum was already undergoing remarkable changes. Corporations such as R.J. Reynolds Tobacco saw in the arts a rich intersection of opportunities for image enhancement, tax exemption and market management. Perhaps the most noticeable change was the advent of the traveling "blockbuster" exhibition, such as the Treasures of Tutankhamun. These costly exhibitions required huge attendance figures just to break even. An inevitable by-product of these blockbuster shows was the setting aside of additional museum space for auxiliary, event-specific bookshops and headphone rentals, all of which produced additional, expense-defraying revenues, demonstrating that there was an untapped relationship between

museum visiting and disposable income. And then there was the 1985 opening of the new Museum of Modern Art building in New York, with its ostentatious condominium towers sold to patrician urbanites. This was an undeniable architectural symbol of the soon-to-be pervasive shift of emphasis from the idea of the art museum as site for monkish study to the art museum as an urban country club, consecrated to the social enrichment of corporate pharaohs who needed a worthy backdrop for the complex rituals of networking that constituted their trade. Suddenly, bigger was better, and even the entrenched echelons of art administration were lulled into a sleep that eventually proved self-destructive. This time, the narcotic was the claim that hugely popular exhibitions were needed so that they might defray the costs of those exhibitions that were deemed of special interest to the agendas of art administration. Never in the history of art has such large writing on the wall been met with such blindness.

From the standpoint of programming, this shift is only now playing itself out, due to the intersection of a complex chain of factors. The most obvious of these are the direct and indirect effects of the 1995 attempt (still only partially accomplished) of the US Congress to privatize the National Endowment for the Arts. For museums, this was bad enough financial news in its own right. But it is made worse when one considers the ripple effect that this initiative has had in relation to state and local arts funding. Without the NEA imprimatur, state and local agencies have proven themselves incapable of sustaining any conceptual distinction between fundable and unfundable institutions or projects. The same leadership vacuum also seems to have affected the efforts of private foundations to mount a meaningful arts-funding policy, although these agencies are showing signs of at least recognizing the new ball game in which they are playing. But the largest indication of shifting art administrative priorities is the sudden proliferation of grand cathedral-like museum buildings, implying the sudden availability of funds for such construction in the spare economic climate of the 1990s (a decade that will no doubt be remembered as the one where "the art market fell flat"). Again, history provides a precedent of sorts: remember that both the New York and San Francisco Museums of Modern Art were originally founded in the mid 1930s at the height of the Depression. Then as now, the average artist would have been grateful to sell a work for what one of these institutions has spent on burnished aluminum door knobs or marble veneer. But these projects are carried out without much thought for the welfare of the average artist. Rather, the buildings themselves are what is attracting the visitors, with the collections that they house staged as little more than visual incidents to be apprehended during a quick circumnavigation of the new symbolic architecture. At least the 700-year-old cathedrals of Europe don't charge \$7.00 for admission. Once inside, worshipful tourists are spared any presentation that might represent a professional's view of quality, significance or just plain interest. Instead, they are routinely greeted with a succession of exhibitions honoring the collections of private collectors who might someday donate a portion of their holdings to the museum in recognition of the recognition that the museum has bestowed on their collecting prowess. Gone are the ob-

scurantist days of the art administrative priesthood, and gone are the days of the international blockbuster, the respective victims of funding cuts, political inconvenience and displacement by new fancy buildings that already are starting to age.

One of the curious truisms that dogs the practice of contemporary art criticism is a widespread denial regarding the relationship between patronage and art, an odd fact if you consider how important patronage studies are to the study of the art of the past. And maybe we can agree with Valéry when he wrote:

Painting and Sculpture, says my Demon of Analysis, are both foundlings. Their mother, Architecture is dead. So long as she lived, she

gave them their place, their function and their discipline. They had no freedom to stray. They had their exact allotted space and given light, their subjects and their relationship...While Architecture was alive, they knew their function.

Now that art is once again given place by the resurrected Frankenstein's monster of the new spectacular museum, my own role of art historian looms strangely clear. I am meant to provide a tour-guide's panegyric for the display oligarchy makes of its own visionary wealth parading as wisdom, and a eulogy for the once-living hope that art itself could legislate a shared future.

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# You'll Never Walk Alone

*Steven Rubio*

I was alone at the ballpark with 60,000 other Giants fans.

The Giants, picked by many to finish in last place, had occupied first place for much of the season. But a recent slump had placed them two games behind the hated Dodgers with only a handful of games to be played. The enemy came to town for two games; if the Giants could win those games, the teams would be tied for first place, while two losses would effectively end the Giants' chances of finishing first. They won the first game, setting up the all-important second game, which is why I was sitting at Candlestick Park on a Thursday afternoon in mid-September watching the Giants and Dodgers continue their rivalry.

I was alone because everyone I knew had somewhere else they had to be. Which made sense; most people are busy on Thursday afternoons. But there was only one place I had to be that day, and I was there, alone with my 60,000 friends.

An epic battle ensued between the rivals, one of the greatest in their long history. After the regulation nine innings the teams were tied, and into extra innings they went, with the evil Dodgers mounting one attack after another and the local heroes diffusing each of them in turn. And on and on it went, until the bottom of the twelfth inning, when a catcher named Brian Johnson, who had only recently joined the Giants, came to the plate and hit the first pitch a very long way.

The ball soared through the air towards the centerfield fence, as 60,000 fans leapt from their seats in anticipation. Onwards it flew, the defender in pursuit, all the way to the fence, and then ... OVER! Home run! The ballgame was over, the Giants had won.

60,000 people cheered and screamed and yelled and whooped. Tears filled my eyes as I clapped, and I wanted to scream with joy, scream as loud as I could, but a part of me held back, thinking I would appear foolish screaming in public. Then I realized everyone else was already screaming, so no one would hear me even if I did scream. Then I realized I'd been screaming all along.

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Roger Angell, writing about one of the most famous game-winning homeruns of all time (Carlton Fisk's blast in Game Six of the 1975 World Series), says it comes down to caring. "It is foolish and childish, on the face of it, to affiliate ourselves with anything so insignificant and patently contrived and commercially exploitative as a professional sports team," he states, knowing that for many the story ends right there. But Angell is concerned that the capacity for caring may be disappearing from our lives, and wonders if perhaps "it no longer matters so much what the caring is about ... as long as the feeling itself can be saved." In answer to the scorn of the non-fan, he writes: "Naivete – the infantile and ignoble joy that sends a grown man or woman to dancing and shouting with joy in the middle of the night over the haphazardous flight of a distant ball – seems a small price to pay for such a gift."

How small is that price? The gift can be large. But is naivete a reasonable price to pay? Is naivete the proper word to describe the acceptance of contrived exploitation? Does our joy matter when the cause is "something so insignificant?" I don't consider myself a particularly naive sports fan; I spend far too much of my time exercising my brain on the analysis of the various sports that occupy a special place in my heart for me to embrace the naive approach. But I doubt my brain was working very hard when Brian Johnson's ball cleared the fence. I gave myself over to joy, and that joy was as great as it was because I cared. Angell wants to recapture the capacity for caring in the society of the spectacle, but caring is not the goal. The goal is joy. It is joy that we want to recapture when we go to the ballpark. We care because we believe in some part of our hearts that if we care long enough, joy will come. We keep caring because we know the longer we care, the greater the joy.

"This Wembley win belonged to me every bit as much as it belonged to Charlie Nicholas or George Graham ... and I worked every bit as hard for it as they did. The only difference between me and them is that I have put in more hours, more years, more decades than them, and so had a better understanding of the afternoon, a sweeter appreciation of why the sun still shines when I remember it."

– Nick Hornby, *Fever Pitch*

I have been a fan of the San Francisco Giants baseball team for 40 years. The greatest Giant of them all, Willie Mays, was only a



Giant for 21 years; others spent far shorter periods with the team. Some remained with the club after their retirement from the playing field, in front office positions or as coaches or managers. But as a player ... there has never been a player who performed on the field for the same team for 40 consecutive years. And I'm not retired;

I hope to spend another 40 years doing the same damn thing.

Perhaps the players should be rooting for us fans, since we're the ones who transcend the seasons, the pennant races, the faces that come and go over the years.

I think that's what Nick Hornby is talking about.

What does it mean to be the spectator at a spectator sport? What does the spectator get out of spectating? What effect does our spectating have on the "real," non-spectacular world? Are spectator sports merely another opiate of the masses? The story is likely apocryphal, and I don't recall any longer which 60s revolutionary was involved, although I believe it was a guy in the Weather Underground. Anyway, this guy reportedly once said that he couldn't fully give himself over to the revolution until Willie Mays retired, because until then, a part of him still loved a part of Amerika. Did that make him a bad revolutionary?

Just what *should* I have been doing with my life the last 40 years, anyway?

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If there is something universal in this, something that reaches beyond sport fandom and into other kinds of fandom, it would seem to be obsession. I am talking about obsessive people here, not casual fans who take in the occasional game and know the proper answer to "how 'bout those Niners?" Obsessive behavior is something people of diverse interests can appreciate. Helen Fielding, a British writer, wrote a novel, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, that earned a cover blurb from Nick Hornby himself, it was so Hornbyish in its chronicling of obsessions, but Bridget Jones didn't care a whit about sports. She obsessed about calories, and male fuckwittage, and alcohol units. But her detailed record-keeping, her ability to recall exactly what she ate on a particular evening, her OBSESSION with categorizing her behavior, mark her as the kind of sports fan known in baseball circles as a "stathead" (SDCN, Stats-Drunk Computer Nerd, a pejorative reclaimed by statheads as a laudatory term).

Much of the writing about popular culture that has appeared in *Bad Subjects* over the years has been inspired by obsession. We try to work out our personal obsessions in writing about them; we obsess about our obsessions, and sometimes we might even conquer the obsession, only to become obsessed with the writing that conquers obsession. Writing is the methadone to the heroin of our obsessions, one addiction replacing another. Or we write about the obsessions of others, an approach which allows for more distance, and distance is good, some of the best writing in *Bad Subjects* comes when a writer uses distance to illuminate common cultural obsessions.

And I am one king-hell obsessive when it comes to baseball. Baseball is a sport that encourages obsessions. Its history is minutely chronicled; I can pick up a book lying on the floor next to my computer as I type this and find out that my boyhood hero, Orlando Cepeda, who began his major-league career in 1958, the

year the Giants came to San Francisco from New York, was 20 years old in 1958, that he batted 603 times in 148 games, that he got 188 hits, 25 of them home runs, that he played firstbase in 147 of those 148 games. The same page tells me that one reason Orlando got a chance that season is because another firstbaseman on the team, Bill White, suffered a broken bone in his shoulder (as did teammate Jackie Brandt ... apparently there was an outbreak of broken shoulders that year). Baseball encourages obsessions.

Such obsessions force me to use my brain. It's rare that I experience baseball without my brain being engaged. It's a spectator sport that demands brain power of its spectators. It can get tiring over the course of a game, a season, a decade, 40 years. Which perhaps explains the irony of the baseball obsessive: we care because we want joy to come. Because I know what Orlando Cepeda did in 1958, I am better prepared to appreciate Brian Johnson's home run in 1997. But when the ball leaves the ballpark, I am overwhelmed with joy, my brain quits working, I forget to be an obsessive. Alone, I join my 60,000 friends in screaming.

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There is an underside to the action I've described, where tens of thousands of people scream in brain-dead delight. Our craving for joy and our need to quit thinking in order to experience that joy certainly might lend itself to more desperate matters than "mere" sport. Large crowds of like-minded people emoting as one ... I respond in this instance to a ball crossing over a fence, but we are all aware of the ugly power of similar crowds when our passions are stirred, not by a ball but by a leader. I've long felt that the documentary "Gimme Shelter," which chronicled the events leading up to the Altamont murder at a Rolling Stones concert, would be effectively double-billed with "Triumph of the Will." Even as we marvel at the ability of a Mick Jagger or a Tina Turner to wield magic power over an audience, the movie draws us into the fascist impulses underlying the crowd's joy. I'm hard-pressed to imagine a baseball version of these movies; when fans go mad in baseball films, they are almost always psychotic individuals, and the baseball movies which are commonly thought of as the best deal with the mythic aspects of the game as experienced by individual fans rather than its effect on crowds of rabid seekers of joy. (This mythic shit gets so tiresome after awhile, which is why the baseball scenes in "The Naked Gun" are so welcome in their idiocy.)

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Like most Americans of my age, I came to soccer later in life. I don't "know" it the way I know baseball, certainly don't know it the way fans in other more soccer-obsessed countries know soccer. I can analyze it all day long, but it remains maddeningly resistant to such analysis. In this, soccer is the opposite of baseball, and perhaps that is what I love about it. By the time Brian Johnson hit his home run, I had calculated 13,230 facts in my mind, had mulled over every possible outcome of his appearance. At the soccer game, though, there is no time for such calculations, and even if

there was, I wouldn't know where to start. The essence of soccer is the essence of the joy we spoke of earlier. It is entirely appropriate that the most common thing most Americans recognize about soccer is the orgasmic cry of "GOOOOOOOOOOOLLL!"

that emerges from the Spanish-language announcers at the appropriate moment. Soccer at its best is close to pure joy.

(Andres Cantor, the great soccer announcer who is currently the most well-known orgasmic crier, tells the following anecdote about the magnificent goal scored by Maradona in the 1986 World Cup, mentioned elsewhere in this issue in David Hawkes' essay. Cantor, like Maradona from Argentina, was enthralled as all fans were by Maradona's goal, considered by many to be the greatest goal scored in the history of soccer. But at the time, Cantor was a print journalist, not an announcer. So he had to write the story of that goal, rather than broadcast it. Now, says Cantor, "when I look at soccer stars for the joy of soccer and do not find it, I load up the VCR [with a tape of Maradona's goal] and do a play-by-play alone in front of the screen. After I shout my longest and most beautiful "gooool," I have the same feeling I had when I saw it years ago.")

I am not exactly a fan of the United States of America. You could say I am a fan of things American, but that's not really the same thing. I believe that many bad things have been done in the name of the United States of America. I believe that nationalistic fervor, enlivened by the Powers That Be, can be used to support the most nefarious of governmental deeds.

When I attend soccer matches of the national team, I bring an American flag with me and wave it gleefully.

More than one player has stated that when they play for the national team, they love to see a crowd full of fans waving their flags, the fans make the players feel special, make them ready to give their all for their fans. And once you've seen the outlandish brilliance of Mia Hamm, America's greatest soccer player (and coincidentally a woman), you're ready to do pretty much whatever she tells you if it will make her happy.

Does this make me, like the above-mentioned Weatherman, a bad revolutionary? Have I been co-opted? When I wave my flag, have I given naivete the upperhand?

Of course, in this country, there is something appealingly non-mainstream about being a soccer fan. Americans don't like to watch soccer; I know, people tell me that all the time. When I wave my flag, I am not honoring the United States of America as much as I am honoring Americans like Hamm or Eric Wynalda. And, since soccer-as-spectator-sport seems to be the anti-America of team sports, perhaps I could claim



that it is I who am co-opting them, rather than the reverse.

The San Jose Clash, our local professional team, features a Nigerian, a Hungarian, a Salvadoran, a Honduran, a Brazilian, and Eric Wynalda. When Ronald Cerritos of El Salvador, the team's

best player last season, scores a goal, he races over to the group of fans carrying huge El Salvador flags and celebrates with them. Meanwhile, the club's front office works overtime trying to sign a good Mexican player, because, as one Chicano said on a gigantic banner he brought to the team's first-ever match, "Sign a Mexican, we'll be back!" Last year they succeeded in bringing Missael Espinoza to the club. The first time he scored a goal, he ran to the corner where Mexican fans were gathered and did a somersault of happiness. The fans poured out of the stands carrying a humungous Mexican flag, under

which they buried their beloved Missael.

Who are we rooting for here? Are we naive? Co-opted? Is this merely contrived exploitation?

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Ultimately, I go to the ballpark because it is there that I feel at home. I know that place, I've been there so many times, in concrete reality and in my mind's eye during the long off-seasons when all that remains are memories. Roger Angell says it is about caring, about preserving that one particular emotional response to life in the midst of a world of irony. But it is also about home. Being rooted, not necessarily to a place, but to an obsession. Being able to counter the restless changeability of postmodern life with a connection to things that happened before and will happen again. I go to the park, I scream with joy, I am alone with my 60,000 companions, at home with my obsessions.

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"One thing I know for sure about being a fan is this: it is not a vicarious pleasure, despite all appearances to the contrary, and those who say that they would rather do than watch are missing the point.... When there is some kind of triumph, the pleasure does not radiate from the players outwards until it reaches the likes of us as the back of the terraces in a pale and diminished form; our fun is not a watery version of the team's fun ... The joy we feel on occasions like this is not a celebration of others' good fortune, but a celebration of our own; and when there is a disastrous defeat the sorrow that engulfs us is, in effect, self-pity, and anyone who wishes to understand how football is consumed must realise this above all things...."

— Nick Hornby

*Steven Rubio is the proud brother of Chris Rubio. He's proud of all his siblings. He is a co-author of The Baseball Prospectus, due in the spring, and he recommends the following as an example of the best work an obsessive Giants fan: <http://www-leland.stanford.edu/~greggjp/EEEEEE/EEEEEE9608.html>*