

Thorn, M. (1993). *Unlikely Explorers: Alternative Narratives of Love, Sex, Gender, and Friendship in Japanese "Girls" Comics*. Available online at: <http://www.matt-thorn.com>.

Thorn, M. (1995). *Shoujo Manga: Comics by Women for Girls of all Ages (Part 1 of 2)*. Available Online at; <http://www.matt-thorn.com>.

Thorn, M. (1997). *What Japanese Girls do with Manga and Why*. Working draft of paper presented at the Japan Anthology Workshop (JAWS), University of Melbourne, Australia, Available Online at: <http://www.matt-thorn.com>.

Turkle, S. (1997). *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Touchstone.

Wright, K. (1999). *Video Gaming: Myths and Facts*. Available online at: <http://www.womengamers.com/articles/myths.html>.

Questioning Fantasies of Popular 'Resistance:' Democratic Populism and Radical Politics in Visual Cultural Studies

jan jagodzinski

This is the second part to a complementary essay that appeared in JSTAE (jagodzinski 2003). It was also written in 1998 and is being revisited some six years latter given that the cultural landscape in art education is slowly turning its sights towards visual cultural studies, a position JSTAE has been exploring for almost a quarter of a century if we take into account our earlier "Bulletin" publication, which began in 1980. The theme of silence arises, for me, a question of what is a radical politics at the turn of the century? It seems that the only game in town is that of neo-liberalism, while the question of 'democratic populism' as a form of liberal pluralism continues to be debated within cultural studies. This essay critiques the question of 'pleasurable resistance' as it manifests itself in popular cultural forms as examined mostly by John Fiske, an exemplary left-leaning critic. It may seem anachronistic to analyze the *Newlywed Game* and Madonna, given that both 'forms' are in their retirement years. Her clone, Britney Spears, is slowly supplanting Madonna, while *The Newlywed Game* has been replaced by 'reality television,' which ironically subverts it. We now have the *Bachelorette* and even a television series where the sanctity of marriage has to be subverted in order to win a million dollars: *My Big Fat*

Obnoxious Fiancé (Fox). However, the distance traveled from these older genres is not so great. The question of 'pleasurable resistance' remains front and center. Irony, as has been often remarked, remains as a postmodern strategy to undermine dominant hegemony. This essay also questions star and fandom resistance, and consumerist resistance. It ends with a call for a structural consideration of political economy and material analysis in popular culture by left-leaning critics. For this is where the *silence* lies.

Romanticized Resistances

There has been a tendency in cultural studies (and visual cultural studies as well), over the years, to over-dramatize the political effectiveness of 'semiotic resistance' as opposed to socio-political resistance (e.g., Fiske, 1989a: 72). While fantasy is a private and intimate experience, which can be part of a strategy of resistance, it is also the very seat of seduction where hegemony reinstates itself (Miller, 1990). The excess of meaning which heteroglossic texts—like television—allow for resistant readings seem infinitesimal when compared to the machinery that enables dominant patriarchal and capitalist fantasies to be reproduced. Many fictive narratives where gay and lesbian or peoples of color are the protagonists remain under-represented or absent. If they are included, like *The Gay Eye for the Straight Guy*, it is done in an ironic, hyperbolized way, to make it more palpable so as not to offend anyone. As Dana Cloud (1992) pointed out, it requires a great deal of sustained energy to produce a counter-text. The economy involved in taking such a position eventually becomes untenable. It is far easier to enjoy the pleasures of the text, to let its lure swarm over you. Otherwise, why watch the series in the first place? In over-emphasizing resistance at the micropolitical level without differentiating between which practices are 'more' likely to be radically progressive than others with regards to principles of democracy (equality, liberty, justice), particularly when it comes to structural

changes for the betterment of human(e)kind, leads to a conservatism that treats virtually all practices that challenge the hegemony of the power bloc as celebratory. There is a flattening out of the distinctions between various counter-hegemonic activities and an underestimation of the seductive persuasions of pleasurable resistance as a form of containment, the way capitalist hegemony works in the first place. When Barthes' distinction is maintained between *jouissance* and *plaisir* (see Fiske, 1987: 227-230,) the circumstances which surround the production of one or the other forms of pleasure cannot be ethically and politically judged unless some accountability for the macro structures that inform that localized space are analyzed and set against other competing discourses of value. In Laclau and Mouffe's remindful words,

Although we can confirm, with Foucault, that wherever there is power there is resistance, it must also be recognized that the forms of resistance may be extremely varied. Only in certain cases do these forms of resistance take on a political character and become struggles directed towards putting an end to relations of subordination as such. ... What we are referring to is the type of action whose objective is the transformation of a social relation which constructs a subject in a relationship of subordination.

(Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:152-153)

Laclau and Mouffe distinguish and contrast relations of 'subordination' from relations of 'oppression.' The former is defined when an agent is subjected to the decisions of another, as in a family situation where the wife is subjected with respect to her husband, or an employee to an employer, while the later is characterized by those relationships that have become transformed into sites/sites/sights of antagonism. Subordinated relations can become 'relations of

domination,' which are different from 'oppressive' relationships only in the sense that they are judged as being illegitimate by a 'social agent external to them.' What they mean by this is that a democratic discourse has to emerge which *articulates* and 'interrupts' the different forms of resistance to subordination in such a way that their inequality is made obvious through a *social imaginary*. For example, the subversive power of a democratic discourse symbolized by the Declaration of the Rights of Man constituted a historical 'nodal point' around which a new matrix of the social imaginary became fixed, providing a new 'measure' for democratic social relationships. However, there is no teleological direction chartered for the course of this social democratic imaginary to take shape; nor is there any guarantee that forms of resistance to new forms of subordination will necessarily be articulated into a democratic discourse. The emergence of the New Right has, in many cases, successfully harnessed the new social antagonisms under the need for greater autonomy and individuality with less state interference in social welfare programs. Balibar (1991) has brilliantly argued that the new forms of neo-racism, or 'civilized racism,' rely on the need for a greater autonomy based on an argument that distance must be maintained between ethnicities and races. It is 'natural,' argue the ideologues of the Right, for each ethnic and racial group to maintain its own traditional culture. Without such cultural isolation and self-containment, 'peaceful co-existence' would not be possible. In this way inequalities are preserved. The rising tide of neo-Nazi skinhead cultures with their concomitant display of nationalist and fascistic music, protest marches, and speeches as resistant anti-democratic forms of subordination, confirm, more than ever, the urgent need to discriminate amongst various forms of resistance as to their commitment to keeping the horizon of democracy open.

Not all resistances are antagonistic. Resistances can be *internal* and accommodating to society, but antagonisms may be thought as "external to society, or rather, they constitute the limits to society, the

latter's impossibility of fully constituting itself" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:125). Antagonisms are 'floating signifiers,' polysemic in character, which can link themselves structurally to other struggles. They have, therefore, a constructed or constitutive character that enables the emergence of a counter-hegemonic bloc. In contrast, most of the applauded popular resistances are *not antagonistic so much as contradictory* in their relationship to patriarchal capitalism. They do not so much as present the *limit* of society as aid in its *organic suturing*. "We all participate in a number of mutually contradictory belief systems," write Laclau and Mouffe (1985:124), "and yet no antagonism emerges from these contradictions."

A particularly good example of how this contradictory form of resistance is held in esteem in cultural studies I turn to the theoretical position held by John Fiske. Fiske (1989c: 58-65) provides a sustained discussion over the various interpretations of a segment drawn from the television series, *The Newlywed Game*, as an example of a practical working out of his theory of popular culture. (But, it equally applies to its present-day spin-offs, such as *Bachelorette*). It must be kept in mind that Fiske has a very specific definition of what popular culture is. First, it is always a *practice* produced through text-reader interaction, and second, it is always a *reactive* practice to the forces of domination. Dominance has to be understood as the central core of values that reproduce the orderly society and maintain the system from any structural change towards democratic betterment. In this game against the power bloc, Fiske can claim that popular cultural practices are progressive and pleasurable in the tactical ways they create spaces of disruption in order to undermine the dominant power whose strategy is to keep them compliant. In brief, popular culture is a theory for the under-dog: it comes in all varieties and sizes. But, before examining *The Newlywed Game*, Fiske's understanding of power, which he borrows from Foucault, needs to be clarified.

It should now be noted that 'popular culture' seems to be a 'blink' phenomenon—one moment its on, the next moment its off—for "readings that fail to activate its [a text's] contradictions—that is, readings that consent to its hegemonic strategy—these are *not* part of popular culture" (Fiske, 1989c: 44, my emphasis). Both audience and the text are set in fluid motion interacting and touching at moments of 'relevance' characterized by contradiction if such readings are to be given the status 'popular.' In this regard, Fiske follows Foucault's understanding of power as being contingent, diffuse, and aleatory phenomenon. The power of the popular emerges only with the evidence of knowledgeability. But there is a problem here. How does one know *exactly* what the interests of the power-bloc are since the construed text is not the materiality, nor the structure, but the *act of reading and its pleasurable and tactful use*? Somewhere a text-centric socio-historical analysis is already required to identify what is dominant, otherwise a critique by resistance theorists as to the 'preferred' textual reading would not be possible. There seems to be a gap in acknowledging the significance of the power/knowledge distribution already in circulation through the various discourses that are available to the participants. Such an explanatory understanding presupposes a Marxist historical materialist critique, which articulates the unequal distribution of power between the haves and have-nots.

This gap is particularly glaring in Fiske's (1993) 'homeless' example. A group of 'homeless' men watching *Die Hard* in a hospice stop the cassette once Bruce Willis (the protagonist) begins to side with the police. The discursive knowledge that informed the pleasure of their resistance was a rather simple and gratuitous one: always siding with the under-dog regardless of the narrative. Their next cassette was *Robocop*. This is a long way from a discursive analysis that would work out Japanese interests in the U.S. (Nakatomi Corporation), link this to transnational capitalism, explore the racist overtones of the narrative,

and show why individualism and heroic action is valorized in capitalist society (see Elsaesser and Buckland, 2002:26-79). Would such knowledge make a difference to their social lot in life? The spectacular violence and inherent power struggles in *Die Hard*, as Fiske (1993:129) admits, provides these men with a way to vent their resentment at the social system (i.e., display cynical reason). Wouldn't it be more accurate to say that the consumption of 'popular culture,' like *Die Hard*, are specifically construed texts which can absorb a variety of contradictory readings and still assert hegemony? Doesn't its spectacular effects of violence as represented by Bruce Willis (or *Robocop*) allow for a cathartic release of frustration that these homeless men find themselves in? Don't these masculinist fantasies help appease their situation rather than change it? The strength of these texts lies in their polysemic capabilities for such a 'purchase' by capitalist modes of production. Hasn't hegemony already won the day (to some degree) as soon as one plunks down eight dollars to see a Hollywood film, rent a videocassette, or switch on a television set? ... A too pessimistic a view perhaps?

Such a definition of 'popular culture' is the exact *inverse* of Fiske's definition. Whereas Fiske defines popular culture negatively—as a reaction against dominance—here it becomes defined positively: in its ability to convince and persuade, thereby absorb differences for hegemonic ends. Fiske often recognizes this contradiction in his own theory (1989b: 183; 1991a: 115) but for the sake of 'semiotic democracy' Fiske is willing to take the risk of 'oversimplifying the dominant.' We arrive at Michel de Certeau's (1984) dichotomization of tact vs. strategy where such a binary structure maintains the hegemonic system through internal self-definition. The difficulty here is that resistance remains parasitic—producing no counter-hegemonic force, no transfer in 'real' power or capital (McGuigan, 1992: 70-75).

Complicity and Contradiction of *The Newlywed Game*

Let me now continue with Fiske's example that fleshes out the difficulties of the distribution of power/knowledge. In his review of the responses to a clip from *The Newlywed Game*, Fiske points out that the pleasure he personally found was complicated because of the intertwining of three different discourses: an academic one—his interest in popular culture; another was a discursive set which brought to bear aspects of his class/gender/age/race, and finally a populist discourse which both contradicted and complemented the other two. Fiske admits to having 'vulgar tastes and democratic inclinations' which make watching this clip pleasurable because its aesthetics did not belong to the class and its tastes that he 'objectively' belongs to. (But which class is that, one must ask, given that endowed professors can often earn executive wages?) Fiske's aside implies that such a class of people collect high art, go to ballets, the theater, eat out at fine restaurants, and wear spiffy clothes when they lecture. He has a fashionable disdain for 'bourgeois high art' which maintains an aesthetics of objectivity and distance. Such an exaggeration of Bourdieu's (1984) theory of class distinction, as interpreted and supported by Fiske, was severally criticized by a number of audience members who listened to a similar presentation of his position at the 'Cultural Studies Now and in the Future' conference held at the University of Illinois in 1990 (Fiske, 1992:165-173). Fiske's particular understanding of *jouissance* is achieved through transgressive tastes (or, in the vernacular—how one gets one's jollies outside the constraints of the law).² Such disruption, what a number of critics have referred to as a turn towards a 'ludic' *libidinal economy* (Ebert, 1996; Zavarzadeh, Ebert, and Morton, 1995), is almost always confined to the individual and seldom moves into socio-historical critique.

A staunch democrat, a brilliant critic, and an exemplary teacher, as a personality Fiske appears to exemplify the contradictory confluences

of the theory he defends. The institution of the university, for instance, allows such mavericks amongst its conservative midst. It even expects such critics given the contestations of discursive knowledge formations fought for in the name of democracy and the freedom of speech. But, I'm not so sure how far Fiske has escaped his class assigned position despite the pleasures he finds in the more 'vulgar' forms of culture (1989c:179). It is obvious, for example, that he has a great deal of mobility, and it is questionable whether his academic interests in these 'strong vulgar tastes' make him 'typical of the people in general' (ibid.). He underplays his rhetorical strengths and his insights achieved from the study of popular culture that enable him to maintain his 'cynical edge.' The academic critic seems to be caught by what Cornel West (1990) once characterized as an oxymoronic position of involved 'co-opted progressivism.' This charge is borne out in Fiske's interpretation of the various responses to the *Newlywed Game*.

Regarding student response to the *Newlywed Game*, Fiske observes that his male students read the clip as exposing the limitations of patriarchy while for some feminists the clip showed how sexual desire is enshrined by patriarchy. Both were given the approval as good examples of resistant readings. However, it was the women students—those mysterious creatures who were rhetorically categorized as being 'ordinary women' or 'housewives' and *not* feminists—who found the clip *pleasurable*. Their pleasure came from the way they coped with the patriarchy of male dominance as they related it to the clip. Not knowing the structural level of the system, these women students sided with the losers in the game since they were the ones who best contradicted dominant patriarchal ideology, displayed gender conflict, got the most laughs, and were chided by the host. As the saying goes: 'sometimes when you win, you lose, and when you lose you win.' The vulnerability of male power was revealed through the tactics of their wives' resistance. The embarrassment of the husbands was found pleasurable.

For this reason, Fiske claims this to be a progressive example of resistance since these women could relate to the micropolitics of gender as exchanges of power. Fan response to the *Newlywed Game* confirmed these preliminary findings. Fiske then points out something startling which, in my mind at least, undermines his entire argument, but vivifies the power/knowledge structures in circulation:

I do not wish to criticize the feminists' response to this tiny segment of popular culture. Their response was perfectly valid, but so too was the response of nonfeminist women. But the gap between the two illustrates the difference between the radical and the progressive, between strategic and tactical resistances, between structural and practical perspectives. In fact, *The Newlywed Game* was not part of the popular culture of feminists. They found no pleasure in the text (except, possibly, that of confirming their knowledge of the horror of patriarchy in the raw), they did not choose to watch the show as part of their everyday lives, and so they made no productive use of the resources it offered. For them the text was neither producerly nor popular.

(Fiske, 1989c:62)

Unless I am mistaken, this passage identifies the experience of popular culture (as Fiske defines it) as a 'gut level' unarticulated Marxism. 'Nonfeminist' student anxieties of patriarchy were relieved through the *cathartic* release of laughter. For fans, i.e., married women watching the game at home, it was a release from the contradictions of marriage. The social relationship of subordination would remain unchanged. If popular culture is such a source of resistant pleasure, then it seems to confirm its usefulness as a safety valve to insure the reproduction of patriarchy. In contrast the feminist response was one of *refusal*, and I would add—*more* valid. Their behavior was *antagonistic*,

calling on the limit of this genre. There is a vast difference between a 'gut level' Marxism and an articulation of what's going on at the level of structure. Feminist women in Fiske's class had worked through their desire to embrace such marital arrangements. They had been 'conscientized' (cf. Paulo Freire, 1970) to the workings of its ideology. Fiske says as much in the quoted passage. They see such behavior not in isolated familiar terms, but as an institutionalized behavior to insure male dominance. They are not 'dupes and dopes' of this particular institution, and are able to turn the television set off. Although they found *no* pleasure in *The Newlywed Game*, they *did* produce a private text with a subject position that defined them as the disenfranchised Other. For them, to take other available subject positions would be limiting and complicit. There was nothing for them to laugh at. In contrast, it strikes me that these 'nonfeminist' women experienced masochistic pleasure without being fully aware as to why. Caught by the system, like the Fiske's 'homeless' men, the best they could do was push it back a little. Calling such actions 'popular culture' seems ironic and rather disheartening. Refusal, not pleasure or evasion in this case should become 'popular.' A conscientized husband would refuse to be put in such uncompromising position as a participant on the show. The potential of 'gut' level Marxism (or to use Zavarzadeh's (1992) term —'ludic pleasure') would need to be conscientized to a structural level before anything more 'radical' occurred, like that of 'refusal.' The range of responses to the *Newlywed Game* points out the uneven distribution of power/knowledge relationships. While Fiske could enjoy the pleasures of this game show, he did so from a much more sophisticated subject position than any of his students. If he hadn't, it would have been impossible for him to present such a lucid explanation of the existent discourses.

Star and Fandom Resistance: Blue-Sky Utopias & Dark-night Dystopias

On a different level, Sci-Fi fandom's power of resistance is justified by providing readers "with an image of a better world, an alternative future, an ideal against which to measure contemporary life but also a refuge from drudgery and constraint" (Jenkins, 1992: 281). Penley (1992) has similarly defended the utopian impulse of SF fanzines of *Star Trek* which introduce gay relationships between Spock and Captain Kirk as a way of projecting masculinities that cannot possibly exist 'on earth.' Is this call to utopia yet another form of romanticized resistance? At first glance, the answer seems to be, no. Laclau and Mouffe (1985), for example, write that "without 'utopia', without the possibility of negating an order beyond the point that we are able to threaten it, there is no possibility at all of the constitution of a radical imaginary—whether democratic or any other type" (190). There is, however, an earlier cautionary warning when they say "not to fall into the different forms of utopianism which seek to ignore the variety of spaces which constitute those structural limits" (ibid.), 'Structural limits' refers to the need to recognize the constraints placed on the various sectors of society, i.e., the economy and state apparatuses which prevent the emergence of a pluralities of strategies for the construction of a new order. Put in the vernacular, this means avoiding utopias which "bite off more than can be chewed;" blue-sky utopias which avoid the difficult questions that a critique of political economy brings. As Lyon (1994) argues, most of the utopian literature, which contends that information technologies will free up more freedom deny the increasing concentration of corporate, state and military control over the means of generating information. The utopian benefits of virtual reality of cyberspace (e.g., Rhinegold, 1991), in particular, become "the 'symptom' that organizes the *jouissance* of the capitalist mind-set" (Brande, 1996:85). The other side of the coin is the 'new bad future' (Glass, 1990) of dark-night dystopias. The cyberpunk genre presents us with cathartic

fantasies of 'space cowboys' (Ross, 1991) who will eventually win the day. The 'symptom' that organizes *jouissance* here is a cathartic release from technophobic anxieties—the *fin de siècle* jitters of an apocalypse.

Both utopian and dystopian dimensions of SF are drawn from the current backdrop of society. As such they embody both the anxieties and hopes of the age. The early *Star Trek* series, for example, drew its utopian projections from the backdrop of the John F. Kennedy era of liberalization (Penley, 1992). *Star Trek: The New Generation* and *Deep Space 9* must deal with the changed world of intercultural exchange, single families, and the impact of feminism. There is, I think, an earlier lesson to be learnt from Jameson's (1981) examination of this utopian impulse, which is helpful when approaching this question. He charges late capitalism as constructing the subject as a closed monad, governed by the laws of 'psychology. "With the 'full-blown appearance of [a] filmic point of view, ..., the Utopian overtones and intensities of desire are ever more faintly registered by the text; and the Utopian impulse itself, now reified, is driven back inside the monad, where it assumes the status of some merely psychological experience, private feeling, or relativized value" (160). The Utopian impulse needs to be recognized, but the question as to how is complicated.

In his concluding chapter, Jameson (1981) quotes Walter Benjamin's great dictum: "there is no document of civilization which is not at one and the same time a document of barbarism" (286). He concludes that what is effectively ideological is also, at the same time, *necessarily* Utopian. For hegemony to maintain itself, it "must necessarily involve a complex strategy of rhetorical persuasion in which substantial incentives are offered for ideological adherence. We will say that such incentives, as well as the impulses to be managed by the mass cultural text, are necessarily Utopian in nature" (ibid.). Ernst Bloch is given credit for having uncovered the Utopian impulses at work in the most degraded of all mass cultural texts—advertising slogans. Here

can be found the "visions of external life, of the transfigured body, of preternatural sexual gratification," from the "crudest forms of manipulation on the oldest Utopian longings of humankind" (ibid.). Jameson is relentless in pursuing this argument. Adorno-Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is further singled out as demonstrating that "one of the ugliest of all human passions, anti-Semitism, is shown to be profoundly Utopian in character, as a form of cultural envy which is at the same time a repressed recognition of the Utopian impulse" (288). More to the point: "all ideology in the strongest sense, including the most exclusive forms of ruling-class consciousness just as much as that of oppositional or oppressed classes—is in its very nature Utopian" (289). This takes Jameson to his conclusion that all class-consciousness of whatever type is Utopian insofar as it expresses the unity of a collectivity; "yet it must be added that this proposition is an allegorical one. The achieved collectivity or organic group of whatever kind—oppressors fully as much as oppressed—is Utopian not in itself, but only insofar as all such collectivities are themselves figured for the ultimate concrete collective life of an achieved Utopia or classless society" (291).

Trekies and the phenomenon of fandom in general do not escape Jameson's injunctions concerning ideology and utopia. America's prosperity, its utopic 'dream,' is collectively both *disputed* and *affirmed* in every episode of *Star Trek*. Elements of both good and evil must *necessarily* co-exist together if this 'dream' is to be reconfirmed and reinscribed in the social imaginary. A 'negative hermeneutic' exposes the evil (the narrow sense of false consciousness), while a 'positive hermeneutic' exposes the Utopian good, but neither one is sufficient in and of itself. "[A] Marxist negative hermeneutic, a Marxist practice of ideological analysis proper, must in the practical work of reading and interpretation be exercised simultaneously with a Marxist positive hermeneutic, or a decipherment of the Utopian impulses of these same

still ideological texts" (Jameson, 1981:296). For Jameson, any cultural text is a 'mixed bag,' both 'blindness and insight' to use the title of a well-known book, which can be skillfully and effectively put to use for rhetorical persuasion by the Left or the Right. Richard Dyer (1981/1977) usefully explored this manipulation of utopian desire by commercial forms of entertainment some two decades ago. Sketching five categories of 'Utopian sensibility' parodied in popular entertainment: *abundance, energy, transparency, intensity* and *community*, he demonstrated how each of them was structured in opposition to actual living conditions: *scarcity, exhaustion, manipulation, dreariness* and *fragmentation* (cf. McGuigan, 1992:247).

If we return to Jenkins, now reading him with Jameson in mind, it can be seen that the notion of resistance remains a matter of decisive political interpretation. So while Jenkins (1992:283) quotes Lawrence Grossberg and Ien Ang, reminding his readers that "[consumer] relations to particular practices and texts are complex and contradictory' [Grossberg], and that 'reality is always more complicated and diversified than theories can represent' [Ang], the question of political choice cannot be avoided. Consumer responses are *never* made in total freedom and are not always critical because they are resistant, and while reality *is* always more complicated than is thought, we cannot escape from its reductive theorizations. Jenkins, seems to recognize this himself. His statement below supports Jameson's view.

[F]andom also provides a space within which fans may articulate their specific concerns about sexuality, gender, racism, colonialism, militarism, and forced conformity. ... Fandom contains *both negative and positive forms* of empowerment. ... In making this claim, I am not asserting that *fandom necessarily represents a progressive force or that solutions fans propose are ideologically consistent and coherent*. A poached culture, a nomadic culture, is

also a patchwork culture, an *impure culture*, where much that is taken in remains semidigested and ill considered.

(Jenkins, 1992: 283, emphasis added).

Saying this, however, does not get Jenkins off the hook. He still must commit an act of interpretation and throw his 'weight' into a discourse with a set agenda—not so easily done when both Ideology and Utopia swim around in the same pond. As McGuigan (1992:248-49) points out, there are 'critical Utopias' and 'achieved Utopias.' Examples of the former, like Mike David's analysis of Los Angeles in his *City of Quartz* (1990) are difficult to find, whereas the claims for the latter are in abundance under the guise of a liberal pluralism (e.g., Francis Fukuyama, 1989 and Richard Rorty, 1989).

The difficulty of such cultural assessment remains apparent even when it becomes possible to examine less contemporary events. Fiske (1993: 101-102) describes the 'hysterical' fandom that came with rock-'n'-roll and 'Beatlemania,' which peaked in 1963. He makes a convincing argument that such youth rebellion, as 'juvenile delinquency,' was propaedeutic to the rise of liberalist feminism in the mid-60s. It's oppositional expression came as a result of parental prohibitions, suburban order, and strict discipline. Elvis' gyrating and thrusting body is linked with Black culture, capitalizing on the emerging Black music rhythms and vitality. Yet, despite such rebellion, it cannot be denied that such 'resistance' was strictly divided along sex-gender lines. The rock-'n'-roll performers, virtually all male, represented the freedom and liberation from familial responsibility; girls on the other hand were their adoring fans who lived out this desire only in fantasy. As for Elvis, as Fiske freely admits, he was a white impersonation of Black, "making money out of Black talent" (1993:106). It was not only Elvis that made money from such 'resistant rebellion,' the entire music industry began its reign of profit that continues today. Perhaps the main difference

today has been the replacement of Elvis, as the white modernist icon, with the postmodernist 'hybridic figure' of 'bad' Michael Jackson: scratching his crotch, supported and abetted by Pepsi Cola transnational to support 'the children of the world,' while he himself has been implicated in pedophilic behaviors; neither Black nor White, neither 'natural' nor entirely 'artificial,' but certainly rich.

This 'impure culture' is very difficult to figure out. As informative as many ethnographic studies are in showing different responses to, say *Dallas* or *Cagney & Lacey* (Ang, 1990; Press, 1990; Clark, 1990), by various class strata, the cultural landscape is more like of a kaleidoscope, constantly changing, impossible to 'freeze frame' long enough to claim some sort of 'critical mass' to articulate a nodal point of fixed resistance. In terms of a more up-dated metaphor, the cultural situation is more like an HIV virus that is able to constantly change itself to anything the immune system (cultural critics) can throw at it. To solve this theoretical difficulty Fiske has turned to a cultural analysis of 'stars' where the situation seems stabilized long enough to take a reading before the star 'morphs' into a new image to assure novelty and insure profit dollars.³

Asking the 'Real' Madonna to 'Please Stand Up'

In his discussion as to how the field of cultural studies might be advanced, Fiske argues that the methodological strategies of ethnography (the meanings fans actually attribute to Madonna), and semiotic structuralist textual analysis (a close reading of the signifieds in Madonna's text as they are played out in the ideology of the culture) be combined. Doing so "recognizes that the distribution of power in society is paralleled by the distribution of meanings in texts, and the struggles for social power are paralleled by semiotic struggles for meanings. Every text and every reading has a social and therefore political dimension ..." (1989b:97.) Fiske is unquestionably aware of the politics of interpretation. He, of course, recognizes that being part

of a pluralistic capitalist society can lead to the conservatism of Daniel Bell's (1973) "end of ideology" thesis, or worse yet, Fukuyama's (1989) "end of history" thesis. However the more difficult question is how does one activate his sound proposal? How can one possibly begin to judge the responses to any text without a stand on the capitalist patriarchal order in the first place? Doesn't this again lead to charges of cultural elitism and 'false consciousness'? How are we to differentiate 'progressive' resistant practices from more reactionary ones without such a stance?⁴ As he writes at the end of his second book on the politics of popular culture:

On the one hand, it can be argued that progressive practices are panaceas allowed by the system to keep the subordinate content within it. By allowing the system to be flexible and to contain points of opposition within it, such progressive practices actually strengthen that to which they are opposed, and thus delay the radical change that is the only one that that can bring about a genuine improvement in social conditions.

(Fiske, 1989c:192.)

But this is *wrong-headed*, according to Fiske, for it ends up in a Marxist orthodoxy that leads to a "pessimistic reductionism that sees all signs of popular progress or pleasures as instances of incorporation, and therefore conceives of power as totalitarian and resistible only by direct radical and revolutionary action" (ibid.). No, it doesn't! Surely, any radical popular cultural research must differentiate amongst various 'resistant' readings in their complicity for or against social oppression? The shape of Madonna's 'image' exists within the bounds of capitalist and patriarchal socio-economic relations, doesn't it? Surely, this level of macro structure defines the parameters of her image, although Madonna can 'play' with its borders. Isn't her polarization

by fans as virgin/ whore the very consciousness of femininity which patriarchy supports?⁵ Doesn't she exploit this very structure that *precedes* her? What about the question of Madonna's *own* pleasure? Fiske seems to have direct insight into her head when he writes: "Her use of religious iconography is neither religious nor sacrilegious. She intends to free it from this ideological opposition and to enjoy it, use it, for the meanings and pleasure that it has for *her*, not for those of the dominant ideology and its simplistic binary thinking. ... The crucifix is neither religious, nor sacrilegious, but beautiful" (1989b: 103, emphasis added). Are we supposed to accept this aesthetic formalism, and believe that the crucifix is admired for its shape alone? That aesthetics escapes ethics?

Another way to theorize Madonna's use of the cross and other religious paraphernalia is to name them as forms of neo-kitsch, or 'second-degree kitsch' as Olalquiaga (1992: 42-45) sees it. In contrast to first-degree kitsch, where representation is based on an indexical referent, the hierarchical distinction between reality and representation is still maintained (e.g., as a symbolic religious icon where the relationship between object and user is one of genuine belief), second-hand kitsch "collapses this difference by making the object's representation into the only possible referent" (45). Representation itself becomes the 'real,' an empty icon devoid of sacredness. As an acquired taste for tackiness and defamiliarization, should such a brazen aesthetic, "a perspective wherein appreciation of the 'ugly' conveys to the spectator an aura of refined decadence, an ironic enjoyment from a position of enlightened superiority," (Fiske, 1989c:192) be praised as a form of resistance? After reviewing other objects in this "holy kitchen," Olalquiaga concludes that this camp sensibility is little more than "a safe release into sentimentality." The question remains, how intentionally and self-consciously resistant is Madonna's use of this 'holy kitchen' as she partakes in the passing over of kitsch to mass culture? (Her latest 'sacred' excursion in 2002, with her husband-

director Guy Ritchie, is to promote "holy water" as part of a curative Kabala ritual!) Perhaps she is merely one of the many aficionados of neo-kitsch, participating in the then current fad for religious objects found in New York's Little Rickie, playing with signs made possible in the consumerist world of simulacrum; their worth, as Fiske says, based on the formal and technical aspects of their appearance, and part of the general 'aesthetization of everyday life'? (Featherstone, 1991).

A lot has been made of the Left's painting the 'masses' as 'cultural dopes and dupes' of the system, as mere 'cultural subjects' rather than 'cultural agents' who actively make meanings. False consciousness has lost its currency. The concept has been deconstructed for its inherent binarism, suggesting that there is no 'true' picture to be uncovered. The Left is said to overlook the creation of active micro-political meaning, as in Madonna's case, within the "gaps and spaces in her image that escape ideological control" (Fiske, 1989b: 97) so that her *image* may be empowered, "not as a model meaning for young girls in patriarchy, but a *site* of semiotic struggle between the forces of patriarchal control and feminist resistance, of capitalism and the subordinate, of the adult and the young" (ibid., emphasis added). But how that 'iconic' site is to be interpreted falls right back on the shoulders of the cultural critic. Daniel Harris (1992:30-31) makes this point in his discussion over the rise of Madonna studies by academics of popular culture who accredit her with the kind of over-romanticized resistance being argued for here. Aside from Camilia Paglia's (1992) valorization of Madonna as the kind of woman who pushes back male aggression through the unleashing of 'inherent' chthonic powers, apparently available to every woman (tell that to the raped women in Bosnia-Herzegovina!), and Ann Kaplan's (1989) early examination of Madonna's rise to stardom in *Rocking Around the Clock*, Harris also mentions the Lacanian Madonna of Marjorie Garber, who says that the singer's recent tendency to squeeze her crotch like a man while singing

"emblemize[s] the Lacanian triad of having, being and seeming," the Foucaultian Madonna of Charles Wells, who claims that in her videos she is instructing us with a Foucaultian flair in the "end of woman," the Baudrillardian Madonna of Kathy Schwichtenberg, who reads "Madonna's figuration against the backdrop of Baudrillardian theory," or the Marxist Madonna single-handedly undermines "capitalist constructions" and "rejects core bourgeois epistemes." There is even the Freudian Madonna of Barbara Bradby. First published in the conservative journal *The Nation*, Harris's condemnation of academics who ascribe to popular culture's "potential to radicalize the huddled masses by providing typically quiescent MTV viewers with a subversive forum ...[so they] can actively challenge reactionary patriarchal ideologies" (32), should be seen as an indicator that much of the so-called radical potential has more bark than bite in the broader context of hegemonic reproduction.

Just how *do* adolescent girls and boys work out their social and sexual relations within a patriarchy following Madonna's site/sight/cite of resistance? Fiske admits that in his study of adolescent female responses to Madonna were only 'struggling' to find counter-rhetorical meanings (Fiske, 1989b:125; 189c:174). Shouldn't the quality of their responses be critiqued against other possibilities of sexual relations offered as alternatives by other feminists—social feminists, for instance, who have a structural understanding of dominance? Should Madonna's own 'feminist' image as the site of semiotic struggle be celebrated as *the* model of as the best form of resistance against patriarchy today? That is to say, as Paglia's chthonic woman who laughs at such authority, and who can use her sexuality for her own gain; like the old joke of Mae West: "I climbed up the ladder of success, 'wrong by wrong.'" To what extent should the 'Rrrriot Grrrl' phenomenon (Gyöngyösi, 1995; Reynolds, 1995)—which follows Madonna, Courtney Love and the Bikini Kill's manifestation in a "Revolution Girl-Style Now"—be seen

as a sign as a *reaction* to the symptoms of patriarchy rather than a political symbolic challenge to it? (see McGuigan, 1992: 90) 'Lady Di' was once the Madonna to the Royal Throne before her untimely death. She had been paraded as a 'feminist figure' by Camilia Paglia because of her divorce from Prince Charles. She was a site/sight/cite of resistance to Royalty, and to patriarchy. Her image and clothes were the new bricolaged signs of independence, strength and self-construction. Fergie, who had paved the way towards such 'freedom' before her through her own divorce, was just too heavy and clumsy to be made into a royal spectacle. She had to lose weight and promote dietary products before that could happen. Lady Di's bouts of suicide and bulimia had been successfully incorporated into her image as overcoming all odds that patriarchy could throw in her way. Even her romance with Dodi Fayed could be interpreted as yet another defiant 'slap in the face' towards the Royal Family. On a similar note, soap opera star Joan Collins is a self-proclaimed feminist, because she too, as a strong woman, can stare down patriarchy as it 'looks' at her in the face, and show off her 50+ body in *Playboy* as a sign of 'youth.' In Zha Zha Gabor's case, also a self-proclaimed feminist star, the 'look' was even slapped right back. No policeman was ever going to give *her* a parking ticket!

These are instances of individual, romanticized resistance where libidinal pleasure is given too much credit for its disruptive capabilities. What kind of patriarchal men are we talking about here who are being (metaphorically) kicked back in the groin? Surely not all men (as clerics, policemen, members of royalty) belong to this 'patriarchal' category, and surely there are other forms of (pleasurable) sexual politics that avoid outright exhibitionism to shock in the name of equality? Yes, Madonna's love of herself may be read as 'potentially' a form of resistance by teenage girls who gain greater self-esteem, but Madonna's body is a typification of the advertised model (and Lady Di was more

photogenic than Fergie). Madonna's body sells in films and in books. It invites the male gaze. It appears exposed in *Playboy*, in her book *Sex*, and in girlish poses inviting pedophilia in *Vanity Fair*. Are these merely prudish remarks? At what point do these contradictions outweigh her acclaimed resistant contribution for the emancipation of women? Should she be celebrated for her 'sexual emancipation,' or criticized for exploiting people of color, gays and lesbians, and marginal sexual subcultures for her own ends (hooks, 1992: 157-159)? From the viewpoint being argued here, the polysemic array of contradictory positions of Madonna's persona makes her (or any star like her) the perfect 'bloc buster' consumable object of 'flexible capitalism.' The rapidity of changes she has undergone in fashion, sex, and image enables her to be a 'chaotic personality' who must adapt herself to the changing kaleidoscope of conditions quickly and flexibly if she is to successfully exploit the opportunities that become available—no different than any other 'broker' working the market of desire. She is a master at it.

Although I would not disagree that textual 'poaching' goes on by fans all the time (Jenkins, 1992), but such a practice must be placed against the broader material conditions that shape fan response. Bourdieu's (1984) injunction that fandom can be identified as a proletarian cultural practice, is, by itself, not enough. Skinhead Nazis bands also have group following, but the production of secondary texts by their fans could never be identified as 'progressive' by virtue of them being 'fans' alone, even if they are extremely creative in such productions. No one would identify their productions as being apolitical. Without a critique of the broader social implications of their actions, there is no way to condemn such practice; no ground to judge their social effects. This is the same problem with Fiske's (1989b) reading of Madonna. True, she may be a contradictory phenomenon, read both 'against the grain' in her stances towards Church, patriarchy,

exhibitionism, bondage and pedophilia, as well as 'with the grain' as the 'Benetton Queen' of self-marketing, but what are the costs of her capitalist complicity and her fandom? That seems to be a question that popular culture theorists of resistance must responsibly answer. Is Michael Jackson's crusade to save the 'children of the world' through the backing of Pepsi Cola a clever ploy on their part to make profit, or is it he 'manipulating' them for the 'greater benefit of humankind'? Is their mutual complicity worth the specularity of their acclaimed 'good deed.' I know what a skeptic like myself would say.

Keith Tester (1994:86ff) has pointed out the moral hypocrisy of the Live Aid movement in the mid-80s. Such complicity overlooks how the creation of a capitalist star system denies other less 'spectacular' forms of democratic participation in human aid, i.e., school children's food banks, congregational Church collections for the needy, the thousands of packages sent overseas by relatives of loved ones to the have-not countries. A spectacular society overlooks these more modest gestures of love and help. Analogously, Lady Diana's generosity and work with sick children cannot be divorced from the spectacular role that Royalty plays in parading itself as a humanitarian institution which then helps to legitimate their privilege and wealth. And why is Prince Charles especially interested in saving historical buildings? Doesn't this 'heritage mania' have everything to do with nationalism and a particular form of social identity? Should it be surprising to note that the architects were the first to release themselves from the confines of their guilds so as to work for profit, and that postmodern pastiche first appears in architecture to promote the 'signed' corporate building?

Consumerist Resistance? Shop 'Till You Drop

ather than bad mouthing these 'romantic' forms of resistance perhaps it all comes down to a question of degree? What kinds of resistances are more likely to open up and change the system? This is the more difficult question. Which are the more radical as opposed to

the more romantic forms of agency? Derrida's notion of 'play' is important in this context. For Derrida, play is not equated with unbounded *freedom*, rather play refers to the possible disruptive strategies within the prevailing system of thought. It is more like the 'play' a machine part has in the larger machinery. If there was no 'play' the machine could not function properly, yet this also means that the system will eventually break down, or collapse. "In order for history to have taken place, in its turbulence and in its stases, in order for hegemonies to have imposed themselves during a determinate period, there must have been a certain play in all these structures, hence a certain instability, or non-identity, nontransparency" (Derrida, 1988:145). If a machine part refuses to play, or if it begins to redefine its function, or starts an engine 'knock,' such 'ludic resistance' has to be given its due. But it still remains a question of the quality of the 'knock.' STP can always be added to smooth things out, and often is. Libidinal consumerist pleasures appear to be late capitalism's answer, what Marcuse (1964/1991:76) once called the manufacture of the 'happy consciousness' in capitalism.

The point of this whole discussion is to be wary of a 'resistance for resistance sake' thesis. Fiske's (1989c: 159-194) discussion on the politics of resistance in his final chapter is helpful in this regard. Following Laclau (1977), Fiske makes several distinctions that differentiate the more conservative 'democratic populism' from radical populist movements. 'Democratic populism' is a liberal-pluralist view, which simply integrates difference through compliance into the state system so that conflicts and resistances are neutralized. Hegemony, in this instance, is overdetermined as all conflict is absorbed under a pluralist ideology, such as multiculturalism. Two further Laclauian differentiations, 'popular' and 'populist' oppositions differ from 'democratic populism' by virtue of their *antagonistic* relationship to state power. 'Popular' oppositionality is integrated within the state system

as a response to conflict over its hegemony, but this resistance is experienced as an overt oppression. Hence, there is not the complicity of 'democratic populism,' rather this 'popular' resistance keeps state hegemony on its edge. At certain socio-historical moments this 'popular' opposition turns into 'populist' radical movements that directly challenge state power.

Laclau's typology does not entirely satisfy Fiske. His point is that 'progressive popular culture' at the micro level identifies capitalist societies (Laclau's 'popular' oppositionality), and is a precondition to populist radical movements. The difficulty, however, seems to be differentiating 'democratic populism' from Fiske's 'progressive popular culture' since his category, and many of his examples, are not overtly identifiable by antagonism and oppression (as they are with Laclau), but can just as well be read as compliant practices. Nowhere are there examples given where popular resistant forms are shown to transform into radical populist movements *without the necessity* of requiring a broader structural social critique. The everyday is limiting without some form of conscientization. It becomes very difficult to accept Fiske's (1990) reading of the consumerism by women in patriarchy as a resistant pleasure in quiz shows (i.e., *The Price is Right*). This, in my mind, is a prime example of 'democratic populism' at work by the industry, which his analysis of *The Newlywed Game* also recapitulates. The distinction between work and leisure, set up by capitalist practice and inverted by women shopping for themselves, or displaying their consumption skills on *The Price is Right*, is hardly a liberating practice! It does, of course, recognize women's agency, and goes beyond any simple equation that women are mere commodities of exchange of capitalism, simply objectified 'beings.' However, it should not be forgotten that in the malls, the capitalist fashion industry targets the buying power of middle-class women. It sets the limits of consumption. On this particular quiz show, capitalism targets lower socio-economic groups. There is a *qualifiable*

difference between women's experience of quiz show consumerism and Fiske's resistant explanation as to how it differs from normal patriarchal practices in the home. These behaviors are not *necessarily* transferable. Often there is a gap between behavior in a game like-situation and lived-reality in the family, i.e., the fantasy of the game sustains the oppression that is experienced at home. Fiske has idealized the 'home' and the 'family' as having more of a command over their purchasing power than is possible in order to assure his argument of resistant practice. The practice about being 'clever' regards to shopping can just as easily be interpreted as a question of 'survival,' rather than resistance.

The idea that consumer mall shopping by women and youthful 'window shopping' (Fiske, 1989b, Chap. 2) are forms of resistant pleasure seem to indicate the height of impoverishment for such theorizing. While shopping at a mall, Fiske reads a card in a shop selling cards and gifts: "When the going gets tough, the tough go shopping." This is interpreted as a parody on masculine power, mocking the usual call to arms. Pushed further, this interpretation is taken as the achievement of an oppositional, competitive act—"as a source of achievement, self-esteem, and power" (1989b:19). But what if this is an expression of inadequacy, or lack? What if shopping, especially by middle-class women who can afford to do so, is simply another capitalist form of desire to colonize leisure? Mary Ann Doane (1989), and Jackie Stacey (1994) have made explicit the complicity between cinema, the star system, and the consumerism of women as its spectators. "If the film frame is a kind of display window and spectatorship consequently a form of window-shopping, the intimate association of looking and buying does indeed suggest that the prototype of the spectator-consumer is female" (Doane, 1989: 27). Sports, a middle-class to upper class pre-occupation, have become a major source of capitalist gain, i.e., sportswear and equipment. It seems to me that the entire fashion and sports industry can join in the chorus begun by the

advertising genius of Virginia Slims in singing: "You've come a long way, baby." In the public sphere, the power of shopping for clothes (bargains), or the power of elevating the knowledge of commodity prices by lower socio-economic women through the public quiz shows, *as inversions of the private sphere*, have been successfully appropriated by capitalism as the progress of women's 'liberation' under its 'democratic' umbrella.

This is 'democratic popularism' at its rhetorical best. Fiske's reading is intelligible only if such inversions are seen as resistant empowered practices. He again seems to contradict himself when he writes, "Such a move may not be radical in that it does not challenge the right of patriarchy to offer these pleasures to men more readily than women, but it can be seen as both progressive and empowering insofar as it opens up *masculine pleasures* to women" (Fiske, 1989b: 41, emphasis added). Read from the perspective of post-Fordian capitalism and 'post-patriarchal' viewpoints,⁶ such spending power by middle-class women can be easily accommodated, and liberal feminism appeased. In fact it enables a quicker turnover rate for 'batch' and designer commodities. The ambiguous space between public and private, work and leisure, the privacy of the home, and its public availability through the communication lines of the telephone, television and the VCR, have been successfully invaded by capitalism as a further example of 'democratic pluralism.' Television shopping continues to grow in popularity. Tactics such as price tag changing, stealing off the rack, pilfering, and trying on clothes without buying them, have been successfully curbed through surveillance cameras, passing on the cost of theft to the consumer and, in some department stores at least, limiting the number of clothes that are allowed to be tried on. To say that shopping tactics help consumers maintain their 'morale' (Fiske, 1989b: 33) appears gratuitous when the broader implications of 'flexible capitalism' (Harvey, 1989) are considered.

Talk of the mall and window-shopping as resistant forms are therefore, especially disheartening. Lewis (1990) argues that for girls, the mall represents a female substitute for the streets of male adolescents. Female spectatorship in the mall becomes the primary site for the consumption of stars and musical videotexts. One mall in California has been nicknamed 'the Madonna mall' because so many girls shop there who want to look like her. Lewis also mentions the promotion of 'Madonnaland' and a Madonna look-alike contest by Macy's Department Store in 1985. Madonna wanna-be's then strutted their stuff on both MTV and the ABC Evening News, in front of Peter Jennings. "On camera, they gushed that they too 'wanted to be famous' and 'be looked at' like their idol, Madonna" (Lewis, 1990:101). Cindy Lauper's style, to a lesser degree, has also been promoted by *Junior's* department stores at shopping malls where integrating music video displays has become a standard form of indirect advertisement. (The producers of *American Idol* have now turned such desire by young people into a productive capitalist machine.)

One would think that the exploitation of girls by the capitalist market would be self-evident in these examples for Lewis. But that is *not* the case. Lewis reads this practice against the grain of a male youth culture whose leisure practices exclude girls. As a result, fashion, shopping, and personal style become the complementary world of female cultural activity. Nowhere does it occur to Lewis that the very gendering of these leisure spaces furthers the market exploitation, especially of the middle-class youth. She concludes her article between the relationship of girls' consumerism and the market with:

Consumer culture has economic consequences, but it is still resilient and responsive to consumer interaction. Girl consumer culture is not *merely* a reproductive incorporation, for in practice,

it branches into a gendered *support system* for girls. Similarly, MTV videos *may* codify male adolescent ideology, *but* they also allow female authors and audiences to *command* their own symbolic vision.

(Lewis, 1990: 101, emphasis added).

This sounds like the good old fashion *laissez-faire* capitalism serving the needs of the public (more specifically, middle-class girls). I have italicized the rhetorical words that persuade us to believe that the benevolence of the consumer market is there to *support* rather than *codify* and *construct* adolescent ideology, and that the question of agency in this context can even be described as a *command!* again, a vivid example of 'democratic populism.'

In contrast I draw the reader to an extraordinary insightful and rich article by Martin Roberts (1991), "Mutations of the Spectacle: Vitrites, Arcades, Mannequins," who examines the historical developments of the birth of the arcades and *grands magasins*. But unlike Bowlby's (1985) laudation of this particular public sphere as being a safe heaven for women to exert their buying power (whom Fiske supports), or following Miller (1981) and Chaney (1983) analysis of arcade life whom Jane Gaines approvingly cites for her study of female consumerism (1990:14), Martin's historical analysis provides a psychoanalytic explanation of capitalist consumerist desire as it can be traced from the developments of the window display (*vitrite*) to the introduction of the display mannequin, which today has become the live model of fashion (mannequin meaning literally 'model' in French); and the 'frozen' live model posing in the mall who evokes the 'wax museum' aesthetics that further quotes the 'stilled' objects on display in the day long advertising cable channels. In contrast, the Situationists in the late '50s and early '60s (i.e., Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard, Henri Lefebvre) tried to provide a strategy to overcome the effects of capitalist

desire through the *vitrite*, to move from being merely a *flâneur* of the *vitrite* to make walking an active and critical *dérive* (drift). The *dérive* meant walking, i.e., drifting through the city, studying "psychogeographical effects" which were the effects of the urban geographical environment on the emotions and behavior of individuals. Roberts finishes his essay by pointing to the developments of the *télé-vitrite*—television shopping that is sweeping the country—pointing out how television watching is so closely related to the *vitrite* of the nineteenth century. He then moves his discussion towards virtual reality (VR)—the most sophisticated *vitrite* of them all, where it is said that in the future we will be able to live *in* our fantasies.

Celeste Olalquiaga (1992) has taken Roberts' thesis a step further. She argues that the urban culture, with its architectural transparency, "transforms shopping malls into continuous window displays where the homogeneity of store windows, stairs, elevators, and water fountains causes a perceptual loss, and shoppers are left wandering around in a maze" (1-2). This condition, identified as *psychasthenia*, is a disturbance in the relation between the self and the surrounding territory "in which the space defined by the coordinates of the organism's own body is confused with represented space." This is not a recent phenomenon. *Mal de mall*, a sort of 'zombie effect' has been identified as a similar condition that mall shoppers suffer by being caught up in its environment (Kowinski, 1985). Jameson (1983) has described this in part as a 'waning of affect' brought by the lack of direct experience of feelings, emotions, and sensations which are more effectively presented through media imagery of high-tech simulacra. More recently Mestrovic (1997) has characterized this as a "postemotional society." These effects of the contemporary urban experience have become the raw material for the futuristic dystopic projections of cyberpunk novels, e.g., Ridley Scott and William Gibson. I would argue, therefore, without a historical knowledge as to how we

arrived at our current simulated reality, without having a radical psychology to overcome it, identity formations will be recuperated to continue capitalist patriarchal reproduction.

What I perceived as being argued by some feminist authors in such books as *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body* (Gaines and Herzog, 1990), is the use of the traditional accouterments of 'femininity' as sources of power: strong women to combat strong men. Amazons, Medusas, Academic Madonnas like Paglia, steal back the 'look' so as to control the look of others upon themselves to achieve identity through style; a form of resistance—yes! A possible broader social transformation of patriarchy—no! Herzog (1990:159) has it right when she argues that 'the look' is meant for *both* women and for men, "the male perspective is assimilated into what she thinks is her own critical eye." Herzog equates this 'look' with the "shopper's eye" and concludes: "If we were to thoroughly probe the answers to this question [For Whom Do Women Dress?], we might find that the arguments as to whether they dress for men, other women, or themselves would break around lines of gender, social class, and sexual preference" (ibid.) I agree. Diana Fuss (1992) has called this a "homospectatorial look." The fashion industry becomes an institutionalized space "where women can look at other women with cultural impunity. It provides a socially sanctioned structure in which women are encouraged to consume, in voyeuristic if not vampiristic fashion, the images of other women, frequently represented in classically exhibitionist and sexually provocative poses" (713-714).

Gender confusion and the ambiguities of cross-dressing (Butler, 1990; Kuhn, 1985: 48-54, Haraway, 1991, Garber, 1992), 'performative acts' more prone to middle-class women it should be added, are caught up in plays of difference which are hardly "distressing to patriarchal culture" as Jane Gains (1990: 27) seems to conclude. Marlene Dietrich's (Studlar, 1990: 248) appeal to both straight and lesbian women as enabling 'spectatorial identification' with and *desire for the powerful*

femme fatale, is still caught up in masochistic fetishism. Whether Dietrich's change of sexual identity through cross-dressing subverts patriarchal power relations and heterosexual norms is surely questionable; "fascinatingly elusive" as Studlar, herself concludes. The fashion industry has successfully begun to market 'cross-dressing' and male narcissism, which is often attributed to gay men. Bikini briefs for men and boxer shorts for women are the most innocuous examples. Witness the incorporation of such differences into advertising. Androgyny abounds if it can sell and target such 'resistance' for profit.

Concluding Thoughts: The Necessity of Political Economy

The rhetorical arguments that have been presented here are a cautionary tale against the tendency to over-romantic resistance in cultural studies. (This, by necessity, extends to visual cultural studies as well.) It does not end with a prescription list, which ranks antagonistic resistant practices as to the force of their democratic discourse. It seems to me those theorists of the postmodern who still find it worth their while to rework Marxist concepts of political economy to the changed conditions of postindustrial capitalism, e.g., David Harvey (1989), Fredric Jameson, Susan Willis (1991), feminist social materialists such as Hennessy (1993), Ebert (1996), Landry & McLean (1993), Geyer-Ryan (1994), still provide a persuasive argument as to how global capitalism continues to exploit women in the third world through sweatshop-like conditions; how the incorporation of women in the work force in post-industrial countries has made them all the *poorer*; how different forms of patriarchal sweat shops employing women have been imported in post-industrial countries by various ethnic groups sub-contracting themselves to business; how 'postfeminsm' is reinstating the woman as mother and homemaker through the rhetorics of the New Woman; and how new dystopic forms of alienation appear as epiphenomena as more and more women enter the workforce. On this last point, Harvey's

(1989) broad attempt to understand “flexible capitalism”—designer capitalism—as doing away with the time between production and consumption to insure, so to speak, a pure burn of profit dollars, has been brilliantly applied to the way (white middle-class) women, who have entered the work force, are positioned inside this capitalist circuit of production and consumption as described by Willis (1991). I would agree with her more recent assessment of hard-core subculture in America: “Subcultural groups may appropriate, use, recycle, and redefine cultural commodities, but their practices don’t change capitalism as a mode of production. The spectacular designates the difference between cultural practice as a response to capitalism and political practice, which might have cultural dimensions but which does not aim at the transformation of capitalism” (Willis, 1993: 366). Sobering, once taken to heart.

To be fair to Fiske, he is sympathetic to a historical materialist analysis of postmodernity as well, claiming that postmodern theory belongs to the middle and upper classes who are able to achieve a degree of freedom through the play of signs. As he says,

Such a celebration of freedom expressed an individual creativity is a highly political depoliticization of culture, for it refuses to acknowledge the most fundamental of all constraints of economic necessity and socio-political subordination. It also disguises the social distinction between those who are able to evade these constraints and those who are not. For those whose material conditions of life remind them everyday of the omnipresence of these constraints, postmodernism is not an option. ...*The postmodern needs grounding in social materialism.*

(Fiske, 1991b:65-66, emphasis added)

Like Fiske, Kobena Mercer (1992:447) also speaks of “struggles over the sign.” He doesn’t avoid making hard choices that go on with the sign displacements from nigger/ Negro/ Black/ Afro-American/ African American. Nor does he avoid the issue of the misguided self-defeating coalitions, as in the rhetorics of “the black male as an endangered species.” Here, differentiations are made between ‘progressive popular resistance’ and more regressive coalitional forms, but this becomes possible with the backdrop of a historical materialism—periodizing the politics and identity of ‘1968’ in his case. A political economy plays a role in his cultural theory without being reduced to an economism. The urgency of a political agenda remains. Likewise, Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing* is a T-shirt war of signs between the violent activism of Malcolm X and the pacifism of Martin Luther’s peace marches set against the contemporary society of racist America. Although its deconstructive text gives us an enigmatic “do the right thing,” offering us a Lyotadian (1988) *différend* of impossibility, Lee does not lose sight of the urgency of racial struggle and the experience of nihilism, especially as experienced by the African American male in the decay of urban communities. The same may be said of Spivak’s (1988) earlier question, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Ultimately, her answer was “no.” If they could they would no longer be marginalized, and occupy the place of the subaltern. My point has been to identify the difficulties that pleasurable resistance brings to the Left leaning cultural critic—especially an exemplary one like John Fiske, and the difficulty of choice that must be made so as not to fall into perpetually romancing the ‘stone’ of resistance as ‘democratic populism.’ This is a challenge to all aspects of cultural studies, including specifically visual ones as well.

Notes

¹ While this was written in 1998, Michael Jackson still continues to be embroiled in pedophilic accusations.

² The argument, as developed in "Unromancing the Stone of 'Resistance'" (jagodzinski 2003), was that *jouissance*, as Fiske employs the term from Barthes via Lacan, is closer to pleasure (*plaisir*) than ecstasy where its disruptive effects are already contained within the accepted and established social laws.

³ Kaplan (1989) in her study of MTV anecdotally remarks that she was unable to obtain permission to fix an image of Madonna on her cover since her persona was changing. Since then she has moved from her "boy toy" image in the early '80s to the ambiguity of "Who's that Girl" in the mid- to late '80s, ending with her (even) more erotic phase—"Blonde Ambition" tour, and so on. This has become common fare for many entertainers—to get a "make-over" that amounts to another morphing alter ego, complete, at times, with plastic surgery to the face and breasts.

⁴ Fiske's discussion of Elvis (1993) referred to earlier, is premised on his previous assessment of Madonna as an icon where the personal and social meet. Such stars might be interpreted as "nodal points" where a number of sliding signifiers are finally fixed. What I am arguing is that the identification of such nodal points doesn't let the critic off the hook from the "difficulty" of making a critical assessment as to which way he or she throws her intellectual weight. This is a concrete problem of history. False consciousness as a concept may be over, but the question of ethical choice that underlay the concept in the first place still remains, i.e., how do you judge the performance of a Madonna, a Michael Jackson, for that matter, anyone that commands power in a spectacular society?

⁵ As McGuigan (1992:70) remarks, many feminists would disagree with Fiske's assessment of Madonna's resistance to patriarchy. He names

Diana Simmonds, Judith Williamson and Cheryl Garratt. We can add to that list: Wiseman (1993); Lloyd (1993); Pribram (1992); See also Kellner (1995: Chap.8).

⁶ By "post-patriarchal" I mean that even managers and executives have to be sensitive and 'feminized' today to ensure sales. The old authoritarian masculinity no longer 'sells.' Wall Street knows this as well, as does the Harvard Business School. (cf. Lasch, 1984).

References

Ang, Ien (1990) "Melodramatic Identifications: Television Fiction and Women's Fantasy," in Mary Ellen Brown (ed.) *Television and Women's Culture: The Politics of the Popular*. London, Newbury Park, New Delhi: Sage Pub.

Balibar, Etienne (1991) "Is There a 'Neo-Racism'?" in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (eds.) *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. trans. Chris Turner. London and New York: Verso.

Bell, Daniel (1973) *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*. New York: Basic Books.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. R. Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bowlby, Rachel (1985) *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola*. New York and London: Methuen.

Brande, David (1996) "The Business of Cyberpunk: Symbolic Economy and Ideology in William Gibson," in Robert Markley (ed.) *Virtual Realities and Their Discontents*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press.

Butler, Judith (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Chaney, David (1983) "The Department Store as a Cultural Form," *Theory, Culture and Society* 1: 22-31.

Clark, Danae (1990) "Cagney & Lacey: Feminist Strategies of Detection," in Mary Ellen Brown (ed.) *Television and Women's Culture: The Politics of the Popular*. London, Newbury Park, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Cloud, Dana L. (1992) "The Limits of Interpretation: Ambivalence and the Stereotype in Spencer For Hire," *Cultural Studies in Mass Communication*, Vol. 9 (no. 4, Dec.): 311-324.

de Certeau, Michel (1984) *The Practices of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Davis, Mike (1990) *City of Quartz — Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. London and New York: Verso.

Derrida (1988) "Afterward: Toward an Ethic of Discussion," in *Limited Inc.* Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press.

Dyer, Richard (1977) "Entertainment and Utopia," *Movie 24* (Spring): Reprinted in R. Altman (ed.) (1981) *Genre — The Musical*. New York and London: Routledge.

Ebert, Teresa (1996) *Ludic Feminism and After: Postmodernism, Desire, and Labor in Late Capitalism*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Elsaesser, Thomas and Buckland, Warren (2002). *Studying Contemporary American Film: A Guide to Movie Analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press,

Featherstone, Mike (1991) *Consumer Culture & Post-modernism*. London, Newbury Park. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Fiske, John (1987) *Television Culture*. London: Methuen.

Fiske, John (1989a) "Moments of television: Neither the Text Nor the Audience," in Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabrielle Kreutzner and Eva-Maria Warth *Remote Control: Television, Audiences & Cultural Power*. London and New York: Routledge.

——— (1989b) *Reading The Popular*, Boston, London, Sydney, Wellington: Unwin Hyman.

——— (1989c) *Understanding Popular Culture*. Boston, London, Sydney, Wellington: Unwin Hyman.

——— (1991a) "Popular Discrimination," in J. Naremore, and P. Brantlinger (eds.) *Modernity and Mass Culture*, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

——— (1991b) "Postmodernism and Television," in James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (eds.) *Mass Media and Society*. London, New York, Melbourne. Auckland: Edward Arnold.

——— (1992) "Cultural Studies and the Culture of Everyday Life," in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (eds.) *Cultural Studies*. New York and London: Routledge.

——— (1993) *Power Plays; Power Works*. New York and London: Verso.

Frerie, Paulo (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans, M.B. Ramos. New York: Seabury.

Fukuyama, Francis (1989) "The End of History?" *The National Interest* 16 (Summer): 3-19.

Fuss, Diana (1992) "Fashion and the Homospectatorial Look," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Summer): 713-737.

Gaines, Jane (1990) "Introduction: Fabricating the Female Body," in Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (eds.) *Fabrications: Costumes and the Female Body*. London and New York: Routledge.

Gaines, Jane and Herzog, Charlotte (ed.) (1990) *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*. New York and London: Routledge.

Garber, Marjorie (1992) *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety*. London and New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc.

Geyer-Ryan, Helga (1994) *Fables of Desire: Studies on the Ethics of Art and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Glass, Fred (1990) "Totally Recalling Arnold: Sex and Violence in the New Bad Future," *Film Quarterly* 44 (1): 2-13.

- Gyöngyösi, Stefan (1995) "Girl oder Girrrl," *Medien Journal* 2:44-51.
- Haraway, Donna (1991) "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: Reinvention of Nature*, New York: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, Inc.
- Harris, Daniel (1992) "Bonde Ambitions: The Rise of Madonna Studies," *Harper's Magazine* (August), 30-33 (originally published in "Make My Rainy Day," in June 8, 1992 issue of *The Nation*).
- Harvey, David (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Hennessy, Rosemary (1993) *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Herzog, Charlotte (1990) "'Powder Puff' Promotion: The Fashion Show-in-the-Film," in Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (eds.) *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*. New York and London: Routledge.
- hooks, bell (1992) *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Toronto: Between the Lines.
- jagodzinski, jan (2003). "Unromancing the Stone of 'Resistance': In Defence of a Continued Radical Politics in Visual Cultural Studies," *The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education*, Volume 23: 104-139.
- Jameson, Frederic (1981) *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Jameson, Frederic (1983) "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in Hal Foster (ed) *The Anti-Aesthetic Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press.
- Jenkins, Henry (1992) *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Kaplan, Ann (1987) *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism and Consumer Culture*. New York and London: Methuen.

Kellner, Douglas, (1989) *From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond; Critical Studies of Jean Baudrillard*. Cambridge and Palo Alto: Polity Press and Stanford University.

——— (1995) *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern*. London and New York: Routledge.

Kowinski, William Severini (1985) "Malaise: How to Know if You Have it," in *The Mall of America: An Insider Look at the Great Consumer Paradise*. New York: William Morrow.

Kuhn, Annette (1985) *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality*. London: Routledge Kegan Paul, Ltd.

Laclau, Ernest and Mouffe, Chantal (1985) *Hegemony & Social Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London and New York: Verso.

Lash, Christopher (1984) *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Landry, Donna and Gerald MacLean (1993) *Materialist Feminisms*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Blackwell Publishers.

Lewis, Lisa (1990) "Consumer Girl Culture: How Music Video Appeals to Girls," in Mary Ellen Brown (ed) *Television and Women's Culture: The Politics of the Popular*. London and Newbury Park: Sage Publishing Ltd.

Lloyd, Fran (ed) (1993) *Deconstructing Madonna*. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd.

Lyon, David (1994) *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Lyotard, Jean François (1988). *The Différend: Phases in Dispute*. Trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Marcuse, Herbet (1991) *One-Dimensional Man*. Boston: Beacon Press (original 1964).

McGuigan, Jim (1992) *Cultural Populism*. London and New York: Routledge.

Mercer, Kobena (1990a) "'1968': Periodizing Postmodern Politics and Identity," in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (eds.) *Cultural Studies*. London and New York: Routledge.

Mestrovic, Stjepan G. (1997) *Postemotional Society*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Pub.

Miller, Jane (1990) *Seductions: Studies in Reading and Culture*. London: Virago Press.

Miller, Michael (1981) *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920*. London: Allen and Unwin.

Olalquiaga, Celeste (1992) *Megalopolis: Contemporary Cultural Sensibilities*. London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Paglia, Camille (1992) *Sex, Art, and American Culture: Essays*. New York: Random House, Inc, Vintage Book.

Penley, Constance (1992) "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture," In Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler (eds.) *Cultural Studies*. New York and London: Routledge.

Press, Andrea L. (1990) "Class, Gender and the Female Viewer: Women's Responses to Dynasty," in Mary Ellen Brown (ed) *Television and Women's Culture: The Politics of the Popular*. London, Newbury Park, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Pribram, E. Deidre (1992) "Seduction, Control, and the Search for Authenticity: Madonna's *Truth or Dare*," in Cathy Schwichtenberg (ed) *The Madonna Connection*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview.

Reynolds, Simon (1995) *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebelling & Rock 'n' Roll*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rheingold, Howard (1991) *Virtual Reality*. New York: Summit Books.

Roberts, Martin (1991) "Mutations of the Spectacle: Vitrines, Arcades, Mannequins," *FCS*, ii, 211-249.

Rorty, Richard (1989) *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ross, Andrew (1991) *Strange Weather: Culture, Science and Technology in the Age of Limits*. London and New York: Verso.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1988) "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press. Reprint in Spivak *In Other Words: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York and London: Routledge.

Studlar, Gayln (1990) "Masochism, Masquerade, and the Erotic Metamorphoses of Marlene Dietrich," in Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (eds.) *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*. New York and London: Routledge.

Tester, Keith (1994) *Media, Culture and Morality*. London and New York: Routledge.

West, Cornel (1990) "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," *October* 53 (Summer):93-109.

Willis, Susan (1991) *A Primer for Daily Life*. London and New York: Routledge.

————— (1993) "Hardcore: Subculture American Style," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (2): 365-383.

Wiseman, Sue (1993) *Rights and Permissions: Sex, the Model and the Star*, ' in Fran Lloyd (ed) *Deconstructing Madonna*. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd.

Zavarzadeh, Mas'ud (1992) "Pun(k) deconstruction and the Postmodern Imagination," *Cultural Critique* 14 (Fall): 5-44.

Zavarzadeh, Mas'ud, Teresa Ebert, and Donald Morton (1995). *Post-ality: Marxism and Postmodernism*. Vol. 1. Washington, D.C.: Maisonneuve Press.