This is to certify that the
dissertation entitled

Subversive Supremacy:
A Pop Culture Kaleidoscope of Somatic Sentiment

presented by

Marjorie L. Yambor

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Doctoral degree in Mass Media

Bruce S Vanden Bergh
Major Professor's Signature

6/30/2006
Date

MSU is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Institution

SUBVERSIVE SUPREMACY: A POP CULTURE KALEIDOSCOPE OF SOMATIC SENTIMENT

By

Marjorie L. Yambor

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTORATE OF PHILOSOPHY

Mass Media

2006

ABSTRACT

SUBVERSIVE SUPREMACY: A POP CULTURE KALEIDOSCOPE OF SOMATIC SENTIMENT

By

Marjorie L. Yambor

Recognizing that the body has evolved beyond just the physical into a socially constructed entity, this research describes how the body functions as a site for meanings of excess in contemporary popular culture. Adding dimension to the existing body literature, this sensemaking study engages Foucauldian theory to examine how pop culture texts exhibit the body as a site where the dynamics of excess, power, and knowledge articulate alternative imaginings of the human form (via distortion, animation, or self-destruction) that stretch codes of aesthetic or conduct for the conventional body. Specifically, this work presents a series of close readings of *Ally McBeal*, *South Park*, and *Fight Club*, all of which explore the popular body's defiance of current social norms related to acceptable and admirable somatic style and stance.

Ally McBeal depicts distorted body images in shifting gender contexts with its postfeminist performance and carnival caricature. Feminism and carnival theory inform content and thematic analyses of the computerized caricatures that reveal power/knowledge/body intersections within the televisual text of *Ally McBeal*. From its innovative inception to its postmodern pageantry, *South Park* illustrates animated body images in shifting narrative contexts. Postmodernism informs narrative observations and close readings that reveal power/knowledge/ body intersections within the television series *South Park*. Finally, *Fight Club*

mobilizes self-destructive body images in shifting capitalist contexts. Marxism and Debord's spectacle inform close readings of the consumer capitalism critique that reveal power/knowledge/body intersections within the film *Fight Club*.

The characters—be they the embellished emotions of *Ally McBeal*, the animated cutouts of *South Park*, or the psychotic sidekick of *Fight Club*—operate as discursive constructs. Moreover, the collusion of these popular culture texts subverts contemporary knowledge norms on multiple levels: to be powerful, a body must be emotional rather than rational, childish rather than mature, and destructive rather than docile. The manifestations of power reorient themselves and envision alternate approaches to being-in-the-world.

For Pere,

who bragged about me to anyone within earshot and
who phoned me in the middle of the workday just to remind me
that he was proud to have me as his daughter.

Fly free.

(Arthur Allan Yambor, 1948-2004)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Great gratitude goes to my committee members for their sound suggestions and profound patience: Dr. Brenda Wrigley, Dr. Dean Rehberger, and Dr. Larry Landrum. The expressive explorations evident in this manuscript proved possible by the grace and guidance of my committee chair, Dr. Bruce Vanden Bergh, who combines keen knowledge with creative vim; thank you so much for your conversation and inspiration. I would also like to thank the Red Cedar River, which carries its cool current through campus as a kind reminder of a gentler pace of life; may the goth squirrels play on your banks always.

Thanks to Eric Cartman of *South Park*, who taught me: "I'll do what I want!" Thanks to the cast of *Ally McBeal*, who reminded me to cry, laugh, and dance regularly. Thanks to Chuck Palahniuk of *Fight Club* fame (and so much more), who taught me: "What you don't understand you can make mean anything." (*That* trick proved extremely helpful.)

To Alucard, my nocturnal playmate, may we have an eternity of stormy mornings to soothe and seduce us into serene slumber. To Mere, thank you for my beauty, my spirit, my life, and for all of your letters and words that fill me with pride that I am who I am; always remember that I am an echo of you. To Rthor (who wrote to me on my 30th birthday: "Give me schmaltzy nostalgia as a crippled excuse for escaping responsibility for my happiness today....Give me a NEW story. Please."), this is the document that secures my festive future haunted with happiness. At long last, I have proven I was here.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION....1
Power, Knowledge, and the Body....7
Power....8
Power/Knowledge....12
Power/Knowledge/Body....14
A Postmodern Perspective....16

CHAPTER 1
ALLY MCBEAL....21
The *Ally McBeal* Allure....23
Literature Review....25
The Feminist Carnival....28
Postfeminism and the Third Wave....29
Carnival Theory....34
Feminism, Bakhtin, and *Ally McBeal*....39
Power/Knowledge/Body Intersections....40
Power/Knowledge and the Animated Body....41
Power/Knowledge and the Deviant Body....46
Power/Knowledge and the Gendered Body....51
Power/Knowledge and the Grotesque Body....56
Ally McBeal Matrix and Synthesis....62

CHAPTER 2
SOUTH PARK....70
The *South Park* Storyworld....72
Literature Review....73
The Postmodern Park....77
Reason Revamped....78
Subjectivity Self-Referenced....81
Boundaries Blurred....83
Power/Knowledge/Body Intersections....87
Power/Knowledge and the Animated Body....88
Power/Knowledge and the Deviant Body....94
Power/Knowledge and the Gendered Body....99
Power/Knowledge and the Grotesque Body....104
South Park Matrix and Synthesis....109

CHAPTER 3
FIGHT CLUB....117
The *Fight Club* Furor....118
Literature Review....121
The Consumerism Critique....124

Marxism....125
Debord's Spectacle....129
Artful Alienation....133
Power/Knowledge/Body Intersections....137
Power/Knowledge and the Animated Body....139
Power/Knowledge and the Deviant Body....143
Power/Knowledge and the Gendered Body....148
Power/Knowledge and the Grotesque Body....154
Fight Club Matrix and Synthesis....160

EPILOGUE....168

REFERENCES....171

INTRODUCTION

Our real discoveries come from chaos...
from going to the place that looks wrong and stupid and foolish.
~Chuck Palahniuk: Invisible Monsters~

A monster-fur top hat, afire with orange and yellow, ignites sunshine smiles on the faces of every stranger it passes on the Las Vegas strip. A similar faux-fur hat forms a pile of pink cotton candy atop the head and transforms winter-gray moods into spring-carnival amusement as it travels through the Detroit airport. A blood-maroon orchid corsage worn on any random weeknight prompts patrons in a French restaurant to inspirationally inquire if the dining couple just got married. An iris-purple and black petticoat engulfs the legs in a boundless sea of ruffles as it bounces through a New York subway station, eliciting immediate giggles and Saturday-night shoutouts of celebration. A lime-green stole worn to the bank on a Friday afternoon solicits questions about prom night. Boots boost an average female frame—bedizened in black vinyl, fencenet stockings, and a *Pulp Fiction* inspired black wig—to mannequin heights as a conference full of tenured professors whistle and applaud in anticipation that something spectacular is about to unfold. For some, life is a series of somatic celebrations for which aesthetic accoutrements convey pleasure and play. It is the knowledge that life is too fragile and fleeting that motivates the mind to deploy the body as inspiration for oneself and for others, making each moment (if not each lifetime) a little more vibrant. With all of its vim, poise, and toys, the body manifests the power of lived experience.

The human body is both universal and unique. Everyone has a body that enters life via another body. All bodies require nourishment, nurturing, and protection as they age, weaken, and eventually die. Yet, no two bodies are exactly alike. Some are healthy and resilient while others are sickly and frail. Celebrity and supermodel bodies set the standards for beauty; they are the publicized, spotlighted bodies that appear in advertising spreads and on film screens for society to idolize. Mainstream bodies that fail to achieve the ideal are regarded as weak and flawed. The imperfect and handicapped are the invisible bodies, those that society prefers to ignore and often refuses to see.

Once taken for granted as simply a person's physical being, the body in contemporary Western culture has become what some scholars identify as a "battleground."[1] The *body*, in the spirit of postmodernism, has shed its universal characteristic to reveal local, multiple, and conflictual *bodies*. The traditional organic body—a physical shell for the mind and spirit—now is "at best a nominal construct and a phantasmatic space, imagined very differently over time and across various cultural contexts" (Terry & Urla, 1995, p. 3). Presently, the meaning of "body" shifts according to who writes the definition; among the various conceptions of the body exist aging, cloned, cyborg, equal, exercised, medical, and virtual bodies, to name but a few.

Recognizing that the body has evolved beyond just the physical into a socially constructed entity, this research describes how the body is a site for meanings of excess in contemporary popular culture. Specifically, this work presents a series of close readings involving three texts: *Ally McBeal*, *South Park*,

and *Fight Club*. The combination of television, cartoon, and film provides a foundation from which to explore the popular body's defiance of current social norms related to acceptable and admirable body forms and conduct. Adding dimension to the existing body theory literature, this sensemaking study engages Foucauldian theory and contributes a discussion of how popular culture texts employ bodies of excess first as a device to capture society's attention and then as a stage to present an interpretation (and frequently, a subversion) of prevalent issues.

At a basic level, the body denotes the physical form and substance of any living creature. In the spirit of this fundamental definition of the human being, the Cartesian tradition asserts a separation of body from mind, suggesting that the physical, emotional self impedes the rational, thoughtful self. A contemporary, yet parallel perspective appears in Sheets-Johnstone's (1992) concept of "popular body noise," which refers to the array of literature and media devoted to information about fashion, nutrition, medication, and stress-management. In this sense, the body is little more than an object requiring maintenance so it will continue to successfully service its owner, and Sheets-Johnstone (1992, p. 3) offers the following warning:

> When the body is treated as a purely material possession, our humanness is diminished. Popular body noise drowns out the felt sense of our bodies and a felt sense of our individual aliveness. In place of these felt senses is a preeminently visual object groomed in the ways of quite specific, all-pervasive, culturally engrained attitudes and values.

Alternative notions of the body conceive of an intricate entity, one that does not (and indeed, cannot) exist outside of cultural practices. The body

knows no escape from its social construction, perpetually "a viral body, a time bomb of symptoms" (Halberstam & Livingston, 1995, p. 13), speaking about the society in which it lives. Considering that the body is interwoven with its surroundings, Lowe (1995, p. 175) asserts that the "body-in-itself" can never be fully comprehended since it is no longer "an individual identity, subjectivity, private self, or any other autonomous, stable, unitary entity." With this in mind, one might instead study the social practices of the body since these code, construct, and contextualize the human form.

An informed discussion of how *Ally McBeal*, *South Park*, and *Fight Club* present the body as a site for meanings of excess must consider that the body is a socially constructed canvas, capable of communicating information about the culture in which it resides. The physical element is not lost, though, since "the body, or the embodiment...is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category but rather as a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological" (Braidotti, 1994, p. 4). The body is a physical entity imbued with social statements that mirrors the surrounding culture in a perpetual state of evolution. In light of this, "if we want to better understand our culture and our history, they are to be found written on the body, not only for us to read but to learn from, and not only to learn from, but, subsequently, for us to act upon" (Wilson & Laennec, 1997, p. 12).

Accordingly, this research defines the body as a social text, a flesh form that also serves as a communicator of messages. The body is, moreover, a contested cultural site, a "screen onto which various ideologies are projected, a

battlefield for competing discourses" (Wilson and Laennec, 1997, p. 1). Hot topics such as cloning, abortion rights, and reproductive technologies focus attention on bodies and define them as public objects rather than private selves. The body, then, may be read for social messages since the "ways in which the body is treated, and attitudes toward it, are quintessentially informative of a civilization's basic tenets and values" (Sheets-Johnstone, 1992, p. 4).

As a social text, the body must be viewed in the context of contemporary popular culture for the purposes of this study. *Ally McBeal*, *South Park*, and *Fight Club* each highlight the body and, more specifically, the potential excess of the body. These artifacts of postmodern culture present alternative imaginings of the human form—via distortion, animation, or self-destruction—that stretch codes of aesthetic or conduct for the conventional body.

Excess, being a term of degree, may only be defined by its other, what it is not. As such, it is a boundary concept that constantly shifts due to newly evolving norms and changing cultural constraints. This research interprets excess as any characteristic that proves distinctive enough to demand attention in the current clutter culture; it serves as a prerequisite in order for a message to be heard. Lacking an extreme presentation, the communication would likely be lost in the static hum of information overload. The excess that is of interest here speaks through the body, a deeply personal entity (and therefore a potentially effective communicator), despite the fact that it appears as a public commodity in ethical controversies and gender debates.

Considering the vast interpretations of how to define "body," this study gives treatment to four body images—animated, deviant, gendered, and grotesque—because of their relevancy to the discussion of the meanings of the body and excess in contemporary popular culture. The animated body accepts its adjective in both the literal and figurative senses. It may specifically appear as a hand-drawn or computer-generated character, or it may more generally possess a cartoon-like quality of being hyperlively, hyperspirited. Understanding that the body is a "means for generating dynamic cultural meanings, structuring complex social relations, and establishing flows of power" (Terry & Urla, 1995, p. 3), the deviant body takes its cue from the culture in which it resides. It counters any combination of established aesthetic and behavioral norms. Next, the gendered body may present feminine or masculine tendencies, or both, or neither. As such, this body image receives widespread attention as scholars debate the consequences of gender coding within various social and cultural contexts. Finally, the grotesque body appears in both lay and scholarly terms: it may be that which simply is physically distorted or fantastic, or it may be that which theoretically revives Bakhtin's carnival. The grotesque image proves pertinent to the discussion since it vividly captures the spirit of excess and how this functions socially.

The body, as a social text, construction, and entity, is cogently mired in cultural practices. In Western civilization, connections among power, knowledge, and the body prove pervasive in both popular discourse and academic circles. Some threads of contemporary body theory engage the

philosophy of French intellectual Michel Foucault and emphasize that his working concepts and methodological perspectives provide sound analytical tools for investigations that deal with the power, knowledge, body intersection. Using Foucault as a conceptual catalyst proves problematic, however, since he resists the notion that any author conceives of a universally germane "truth." As Racevskis (1983, p. 19) observes, writing about or implementing the ideas of Foucault is "subject to an inevitable contradiction: it imposes a closure on a discourse that has been most adept at discerning various strategies of epistemological closure." Consequently, this research does not intend to offer closure of any kind but rather presents a discussion of how three popular culture texts illustrate the body as a site where the dynamics of excess, power, and knowledge unfold.

Power, Knowledge, and the Body

Foucault's oeuvre achieves an insightful mix of history and philosophy, which examines ruptures and transformations along the (characteristically calm) chronological continuum. To describe these periodic mutations and their surrounding circumstances, Foucault adopts the methods of archaeology and genealogy, which Racevskis (1983, p. 16) describes as such:

> Archaeology provides the necessary tools for effecting a fundamental reversal in the ingrained habits of our intellectual existence and thus produces the approach necessary for constituting a 'genealogy of the subject,' for uncovering the mechanisms that have served all systematic attempts at understanding and defining man: the means are archaeological, the ends genealogical.

Rather than offer a customary commentary or idle interpretation, Foucault focuses on the historical conditions and institutional tactics that cultivate knowledge formations and subject positions at particular moments. Interestingly, though, he collapses time in the process of writing history, as is evidenced by this statement from *Discipline and Punish* (1977, pp. 30-31): "I would like to write the history of this prison, with all the political investments of the body that it gathers together in its closed architecture. Why? Simply because I am interested in the past? No, if one means by that writing a history of the past in terms of the present. Yes, if one means writing the history of the present." These intermittent instances of historical disruption hold the potential to reorient perspectives about the present and enable the "systematic subversion of existing modes of explanation and rationalization" (Racevskis, 1983, p. 17). Foucault's critical enterprise involves several recurrent themes, three of which are predominant and pertinent to research about presentations of the body and excess in contemporary popular culture: power, knowledge, and the body.

Power

A discussion of Foucault's central tenets logically proceeds from the locus of power, an intangible yet pervasive energy in society. No one may necessarily gain, hold, or lose power, for it possesses no essence in and of itself; no single character, collective, or characteristic determines how it operates.[2] Instead, power exists in a matrix of relationships, in a series of societal networks (e.g., government and its constituency, wardens and inmates, teachers and pupils, parents and children):

> Between every point of a social body, between a man and a woman, between the members of a family, between a master and a pupil, between every one who knows and every one who does not, there exist relations of power which are not purely and simply a projection of the sovereign's great power over the individual; they are rather the concrete, changing soil in which the sovereign's power is grounded, the conditions which make it possible for it to function. (Foucault, 1980, p. 187)

For Foucault, power is ubiquitous. Even his definition of the most relevant histories revolves around power relations within a war metaphor: struggles, strategies, and tactics (Rabinow, 1984).

As a key proposition, Foucault juxtaposes the negative and positive functions of power. Power, considered in a negative sense, typifies an oppressive and prohibitive force that impedes imagination and constrains conduct. As a device of control, it breeds contempt since it stifles thought and activity. Foucault (1980, p. 119) suggests a departure from these strictly negative attributes and proffers that power instead reveals more positive traits:

> What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.

Having established that power permeates the intricate web of cultural practices and may serve a productive societal function, Foucault nevertheless recognizes that there exist those who take advantage of opportunities to exploit others. Certain conditions may indeed benefit individuals, groups, and/or institutions at given historical junctures. However, situations ceaselessly shift and the pendulum of power swings, rotating seats of domination.

Foucault dedicates much attention to a force which he terms "disciplinary power." This new method of power "is not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control, [one] that [is] employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus" (Foucault, 1978, p. 89). Much the opposite of the classical era's spectacular displays of public torture, this influence is invisible and involves three—rather simple—instruments: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and the examination. The observation model in military camps ranked and fixed gazes, so that all personnel knew their places, both literally and figuratively. Surveillance systems based on open spaces and general visibility later became apparent in schools, prisons, asylums, and hospitals.

Of particular interest is Foucault's dialectic of normalizing judgment. This disciplinary tactic operates concretely, yet more subtly, than traditional legal penalties. Normalizing judgment urges individuals to adhere to the set standards of society and observe general rules of conduct, including such minutiae as dress, speech, hygiene, posture, attitude, timeliness, activity, and sexuality. Refusal to apply these codes to one's existence results in punishment by humiliation or exclusion. One may encounter apathy or hostility from peers and colleagues; at worst, one may be ostracized from the social or work group altogether. Foucault (1977, pp. 182-183) speculates that disciplinary power achieves the following:

> [It] refers individual actions to a whole that is at once a field of comparison, a space of differentiation, and the principle of a rule to be followed. It differentiates individuals from one another, in terms of the

> following overall rule: that the rule be made to function as a minimal threshold, as an average to be respected, or as an optimum toward which one must move.

For instance, norms function for institutions including schools with standardized education, prisons with befitting behavior, medicine with health codes, industry with manufacturing methods and profitable products, as well as military with uniform utilities and secure stratagems (not to mention models within the widespread social strata). This ongoing process that "traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*" and automatically delimits the "external frontier of the abnormal" (Foucault, 1977, p. 183). The regulations set forth by disciplinary power are not traditional laws but rather social mechanisms designed to distinguish between the wrong and the right, the forbidden and the sanctioned, the deplorable and the desirable. An ironic point for Foucault's (1977, p. 184) normalizing judgment is that it utilizes uniqueness to coerce congruity: "It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within a system of formal equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences." Thus, the combined characteristics of each person epitomize the norm, which establishes itself as a power mechanism.

The logic of this perspective suggests that power inversely affects individuality. In the classical era, the unique person, typically a member of royalty, garnered respect and admiration for being smarter, stronger, perhaps

more human than human. In contemporary society, however, those capable of exercising the most power often boast the least individuality; they instead resemble "the average guy" or "the girl next door." These people have the ability to make the common denominators feel good about themselves since they present the persona of the extraordinarily ordinary. Pursuing this polemic, Foucault (1977, p. 217) establishes the following:

> Our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies.

The examination—the third instrument of Foucault's disciplinary power—organizes individuals quantitatively according to scores and thereby establishes a standard corpus of knowledge for the larger social group.

Power/Knowledge

Foucault (1980, p. 52) ascertains that power and knowledge share a reciprocal relationship in that "the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power." What exactly, though, constitutes "knowledge"? The French language uses two terms to refer to different types of knowledge, both of which Foucault deems significant.[3] The first, *connaissance*, denotes formal knowledge associated with an established discipline such as those taught at institutions of higher learning. The second, *savoir*, signifies general and practical knowledge one acquires

through everyday living. The traditional terminology for these two knowledge classifications is book sense and common sense. Foucault believes that both epistemological modes prove pertinent to all intellectual endeavors, since practical wisdom inevitably modifies attitudes toward and reflection upon conventional scholarship. Racevskis (1983, p. 27) recounts Foucault's conception accordingly: "Man's knowledge of himself is determined by a basically circular process: it is constituted by his empirical experience of his existence; this experience, in turn, is broken down into the facts that both make up the framework of his thinking about himself and provide an epistemological validation for his systems of knowledge."

Knowledge necessarily leads to the production of truths as people develop methods of discerning what they will accept as valid and reject as erroneous, as well as who holds the credibility to decree the "truth." In Western civilization, specific political and economic forces (e.g., military, universities, media) forge the pathways for truth, which Foucault (1980, p. 132) defines as "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true." In this sense, the production of truth follows a basic model of communication, in which statements circulate from senders to receivers, who process the information in light of personal experience regulated by preset social norms. This leads Foucault (1980, p. 133) to realize one of his critical enterprises: "It's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power), but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of

hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time." Often, these powers and truths associate themselves specifically with the human body.

Power/Knowledge/Body

Foucault observes that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a new form of power emerged that sought to impact individuals at the level of their daily existences. To successfully accomplish this task, power pinpointed the body, the physical being, the site at which expressions of knowledge and power—as well as the struggles that consequently arise—perform. A taxonomy of human beings develops based on details such as demographics, longevity, housing conditions, public health, and sexual orientation. Moreover, through the lens of Foucault's (1977, p. 146) disciplinary technology, the body constitutes a mere object, to be trained, corrected, classified, normalized, and potentially excluded: "Discipline is an art of rank, a technique for the transformation of arrangements. It individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations." The military body conforms to cadences for the sargeant. The student body perfects posture for the professor. The medical body moderates medications for the physician. This further objectification vests the physical form with moral and political significance; manifestations of power can then more easily manipulate the body. The result is a docile body, one that "may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault, 1977, p. 136). The docile body functions in an ironic manner as its force simultaneously

advances and retreats. For instance, the disciplinary technology ensures the body's efficiency in economic production, but limits its political voice with the threat of social scorn. The body becomes socialized and willingly succumbs to power coercions and restraints that support societal systems rather than promote personal aspirations.

This rise of body socialization leads to the development of a host of social sciences whose purpose is to study the human as object: hygiene, nutrition, psychology, and sociology (to name a few). These disciplines introduce the concept of a soul to human consciousness. Unlike the theological entity, this soul is veiled by the terms psyche, subjectivity, personality, the being "whom we are invited to free...already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself. A 'soul' inhabits him and brings him into existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body" (Foucault, 1977, p. 30). The discourse surrounding the soul begets obedience since one associates the soul with (im)mortality. Sheridan (1980, p. 219) captures this tension vividly by reflecting:

> To the extent that man has a soul, power does not need to be applied from the outside; it penetrates his body, occupies it, animates it, gives it 'meaning.' The soul mobilizes the body, gives it consciousness and conscience. The soul is both the result of the political investment of the body and an instrument of its mastery.

Foucault maintains that despite the internal control mechanism of the soul, power illustrates a productive energy that renders the body active rather than

passive. Therefore, the potential exists to shift the subordinated subject positions and blur the parameters of power and the nodes of knowledge.

A Postmodern Perspective

In speaking about truth, Foucault distinguishes between two categories of intellectuals: the universal and the specific. The universal intellectuals allow themselves a privileged position and undertake gross generalizations, whereas the specific intellectuals speak from immediate experiences and concrete struggles. Foucault (1980, p. 131) praises specific intellectuals for writing what they *know*, an endeavor parallel with the idea that "truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power."

Postmodernism echoes this local, partial, and contingent nature of knowledge and rejects cautious causality, totalizing truth, and universal unity. This postmodern lens colors the world fragmented and pluralistic, containing manifold discourses. Antonio and Kellner (1994, p. 129) explain the result of this rupture by noting that the "proliferation of contradictory images and messages 'implodes' the boundaries between signs and referents and between reality and fiction, dissolving the concepts of truth and meaning." Although Foucault too recognizes the merging and blurring of boundaries, he proposes the heuristic motivation to rearticulate the resulting social landscape and thereby avoids the association with senselessness. Instead, he centers attention on the

constructedness of power/knowledge/body relations within Western culture. Moreover, the organization of Foucault's oeuvre resembles a postmodern pastiche, "a philosophical quest [that] led him to psychology, the science of the mind, which led him to madness, the limit of the mind, which led him in turn to reason, to the will to knowledge and truth" (Sheridan, 1980, p. 206).

This study of the body, excess, and the power/knowledge dyad that functions therein presents a pastiche as well, composed of television, cartoon, and film texts. Such an enterprise must accordingly recognize that these body representations and intersections occur as mediated imagery in popular channels that are ultimately controlled by corporate entities. By their very essence, "with their permanent access to public visibility, broad circulation, and mass diffusion," they appear as part of the structure that they supposedly seek to subvert (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 47). Nevertheless, in order to evoke new perspectives from within a media culture, one must enlist that which is habitual and essential: the media. As Fiske (1987, p. 45) elaborates, "The arguments that television is always an agent of the status quo are convincing, but not totally so. Social change does occur, ideological values do shift, and television is part of this movement." The same of course holds true for all popular cultural artifacts: music, television, film, and all the adaptations of computer-mediated entertainment (e.g., MySpace, blogging, podcasting) where identities are created, negotiated, and reconstituted.

Ally McBeal, *South Park*, and *Fight Club* offer an alternate production of "truth" (defined as statements circulated in a society). Perhaps they are best read within the context of Fiske's (1987, p. 47) progressive text:

> Social change in industrial democracies rarely occurs through revolution....Rather it occurs as a result of a constant tension between those with social power, and subordinate groups trying to gain more power so as to shift social values towards their own interests. The textual equivalent of this is the progressive text, where the discourses of social change are articulated in relationship with the metadiscourse of the dominant ideology.

The texts in this research stretch the limits of acceptable excess via distortion, animation, or self-destruction, perhaps pushing the demarcation of "abnormal" while simultaneously reconfiguring what constitutes "normal." After all, normality, like excess, is simply a matter of definition and degree. The characters in the subsequent threads of research—be they the embellished emotions of *Ally McBeal*, the animated cutouts of *South Park*, or the psychotic sidekick of *Fight Club*—operate as discursive constructs. They all engage in a bodily rhetoric of excess, which proves compelling since "the body has been technically and rhetorically manipulated throughout history in response to cultural and social anxieties that are specific to a given historical moment" (Wilson & Laennec, 1997, p. 5).

Shaping the locus of this study, contiguous research questions include the following: What is this bodily rhetoric exposing? How is power/knowledge sculpting these bodies? In turn, how are these bodies reconfiguring power/knowledge? The following chapters appear as individual essays which will be addressed collectively in the epilogue. Each section describes a cultural

artifact that provides a site at which the power/knowledge connection supports bodies of excess. The first chapter considers the convergence of animation and verisimilitude in the Fox series *Ally McBeal* and recognizes the tensions between the televisual text and feminism; the discussion highlights the technique of expressing excess emotions via the body. With a focus on the Comedy Central hit *South Park*, a cartoon that follows the antics of several elementary schoolchildren, the second chapter presents a discussion of narrative instances in which excess mature experience contradicts the childlike body. The third and final chapter explores *Fight Club*, a film in which the protagonist remains anonymous, possessing only a pseudonym for his nihilistically ambitious alter ego. His prescription for awakening from his capitalism-induced coma is excess physical fighting. The collusion of these popular culture texts subverts contemporary knowledge norms on multiple levels: to be powerful, a body must be emotional rather than rational, childish rather than mature, and destructive rather than docile. The manifestations of power reorient themselves and envision alternate approaches to being-in-the-world.

[1] For a full discussion, see Barbara Kruger's work on body as battleground, cited in Terry and Urla (1995), *Deviant Bodies*.

[2] For example, Marxism maintains that social class structures power relations: people controlling the means of production possess the power in capitalist cultures. Foucault disagrees with such conceptions since they rely on only one explanation of the distribution of power in a given society.

[3] See Charles C. Lemert's and Garth Gillan's (1982) text entitled *Michel Foucault: Social Theory and Transgression* for succinct descriptions of Foucauldian terminology.

CHAPTER 1: ALLY MCBEAL

"Not that it's bad being a woman. This might be wonderful, if I wanted to be a woman.
The point is...being a woman is the last thing I want.
It's just the biggest mistake I could think to make."
~Brandy Alexander, a character in
Chuck Palahniuk: Invisible Monsters~

Traditional gender tales go something like this: men are hunter gatherers, and women are resourceful domestics. Men achieve. Women relate. Men protect. Women nurture. Men are logical, while women are emotional. The masculine and feminine dichotomy has long been drawn, so much so that even in contemporary culture, men and women expect each other to fulfill these roles. The storyworld of *Ally McBeal* circulates and negotiates these gender definitions in dramatic and comedic contexts. In the episode that introduces the infamous dancing baby, the narrative threads weave a discourse that investigates primal human nature for both men and women. Ally and some friends are enrolled in a sculpting class that features nude male models, one of whom is especially well-endowed. Although Ally tries not to judge him based on size alone ("We're women. We have double standards to live up to."), she accepts a date with him and ultimately has sex the second night out. Displacing her rather rash decision onto professional circumstances, she blames her attractive 19-year-old client: "He's got me in heat." Throughout the episode, a dancing baby provokes Ally's imagination; Ally's roommate suggests that the baby symbolizes her biological clock with its inevitable "tick, tick, tick." Exposing

gender roles further, Ally asserts that "A woman, if called a slut, would appreciate a little chivalry from her escort."

Meanwhile, John admits during his courtroom closing that his most satisfying and defining moment as a man, however medieval, occurred when he punched a man who was bullying him at a bar. The argument here is that regardless of civilized constructs like education, edification, or evolution, primal impulses in human nature still wield power. To confront her own human nature, then, and regain control, Ally concludes the episode by dancing with her imaginary infant to the oooga-chucka-oooga-oooga-oooga-chucka intro and tune of "Hooked on a Feeling."

Such a story illustrates *Ally McBeal's* idiosyncrasies that explore elements of the body, power, knowledge, and excess as life's impulses manifest via the physical and emotional experiences of women and men. Even more intriguing is the way in which the primetime dramedy represents human characters as computerized caricatures. The embellished emotions interface with robust reason to establish a unique identity, one that unifies the mind/body dichotomy and reorients traditional conceptions of femininity and masculinity. Before arriving at this observation, however, the chapter presents the evolution of the show from postfeminist performance to carnival caricature that depicts distorted body images in shifting gender contexts, which in turn expose the power dimension. Feminism and carnival theory inform content and thematic analyses of the computerized caricatures that reveal power/knowledge/body

intersections within the televisual text of *Ally McBeal*. Ultimately, the *Ally McBeal* matrix and synthesis offer implications of these intersections in the larger culture.

The *Ally McBeal* Allure

The television series *Ally McBeal* pushes the conventions of television in an interesting manner. In its first season, Calista Flockhart won a Golden Globe Award for best actress in a comedy for her title role, and the one-hour program won best comedy, a category usually reserved for the half-hour situation variety. Perhaps the term "dramedy" best describes *Ally McBeal* since it combines elements of both drama and comedy. The characters of the show constantly surprise viewers with new dilemmas. The title character Ally is a young lawyer with a stuttering wit and a hyperactive psyche; she presents a white, upper middle class, modern professional woman who embraces her quirks, her femininity, and her freedom.

Certainly, the remaining cast of characters adds allure to *Ally McBeal*. Portia DeRossi plays Nelle Porter, a blond bombshell who thrives on her superiority complex. Lucy Liu breathes scathing wit into her character, Ling Woo, another lawyer at the firm. Jane Krakowski plays Elaine Vassal, a legal secretary who prides herself on being the resident coquette and busybody. A former public prosecutor who recently opened her own private practice, Renée Radick (Lisa Nicole Carson) appears as Ally's roommate. Georgia (Courtney Thorne-Smith) and Billy (Gil Bellows) Thomas, both lawyers, are husband and wife (and Billy is Ally's lifelong love). Richard Fish (Greg Germann) and John Cage (Peter MacNicol) round out the character roster as the founding partners of the law

firm. Finally, James Le Gros plays Mark Albert, a lawyer who joins the firm in one of the late seasons, and Robert Downey Jr. appears regularly in the fourth season.

Produced and written by David E. Kelley (creator of television dramas such as *Boston Legal, Boston Public, The Practice, Chicago Hope, L.A. Law,* and *Picket Fences*), *Ally McBeal* premiered in September 1997 and aired for five seasons. From its inception, the program received mixed critical response from popular press writers, which is not surprising. After all, Ally sulks. She sasses. She dances with an animated baby. In its attempt to recognize and reflect upon the potential cultural messages of *Ally McBeal*, popular criticism of the show contains contradictions, much like Ally herself.

Some posit that the program follows strict demographic guidelines set forth by network executives, creating a "painfully feminist diatribe" that walks the viewer through the stages of disgust, annoyance, grudging tolerance, enjoyment accompanied by self-loathing, and finally actual enjoyment (Collins, 1997). Still others wonder if the "must-she TV" is a television program or just an extended therapy session (Marin & Chambers, 1997).

Other critics such as Goldblatt (1997) praise *Ally McBeal* for resonating with the lifestyle issues of young professional women in their 20s. Ally—attractive but not beautiful—is in the first stage of building a career, working in an upstart law office and sharing an apartment with a roommate. The comedy in *Ally McBeal* also proves to be a point of interest. As Goldsmith (1997, p. AR39) comments, "Beautiful women who make funny jokes that aren't at their own

expense? It's a breakthrough for all of us." Oddly enough, though, no critics deal in depth with the animation of human characters in *Ally McBeal*. Terms such as "visual effects," "dramatized inner voice," and "prime-time surrealism" appear in the popular press coverage, yet no writer elaborates on this intriguing characteristic of the show. Instead, the discussion concentrates on elements of feminism within the program ("must-she TV," "feminist diatribe," "beautiful women").

Literature Review

With this feminist focus, scholars explore gender implications of the hit television series *Ally McBeal*. Vavrus (2000) includes the program in her discussion of postfeminism and various media texts. In her opinion, Ally fails to embody any elements of feminism; in fact, the question that appeared below the picture of Calista Flockhart on the cover of *Time*—Is feminism dead?—serves simply as a rhetorical device rather than a statement about the current condition of women. Vavrus (2000, p. 11) worries, "If wacky, self-absorbed, apolitical Ally McBeal is considered a feminist icon, then feminism must surely be dead." She concludes that media messages continue—boldly or subtly—to perpetuate patriarchal perspectives.

Dow (2002) suggests a similar sentiment as she considers *Ally McBeal's* place in the context of television feminism, alongside such greats as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Murphy Brown*. She maintains that while popular programs do well to illustrate feminism as a lifestyle, they fail to accurately represent feminist politics. In addressing the implication that feminism has

launched women into an emotional void, leaving professionally successful women to crave traditional wife and mother roles, Dow (2002, p. 263) asserts, "Feminism has never promised women happiness—only justice."

With gender parity better situated than in years past, some scholars like Rapping (2000, p. 23) fear that the second wave's progress toward justice is taken for granted by TV characters (like Ally) and young women alike: "For all the female voices being heard these days, few are daring to say the really radical, angry things that need to be said if we are ever to revive the noble tradition of speaking truth to power." The urgency of this contemporary crisis in feminism—allegedly prompted and perpetuated by popular media portrayals—echoes to other ears. Dubrofsky (2002, p. 279) argues that the narratives in *Ally McBeal*, although they do well to introduce political issues important to women, inevitably pave an "extremely dangerous" path in that the "privileging of the personal in this show, of the expression of feelings, especially the feelings of a young woman about her dealings with the world, while remaining decidedly nonpolitical, is frightening."

Some examine *Ally McBeal* with a touch less melodrama from a lens that pits postfeminism in direct opposition to second-wave feminism. For instance, Ouelette (2002, p. 333) warns that although the program may be read as heralding flexible feminism for the current and future generation, it ultimately undermines feminist politics since its "topsy turvy logic presents a parade of women whose sanctimonious demands for justice are nonsensical." Such a promise translates as empty when it meets gender struggles in real time and

space. Leafe (1998) focuses, in part, on public and private distinctions in *Ally McBeal*. She contends that the public and private spheres prove to be hopelessly intertwined since court cases often serve as public metaphors for private dilemmas in the personal lives of characters. Moreover, success in either the career or the family arena appears to preclude accomplishment in the other, which exemplifies typical postfeminist portrayals of women on television.

Considering *Ally McBeal* in a broader perspective, Marek (1999) discusses how this show and *The Practice* (another David Kelley project) present positive television portrayals of women lawyers. She evaluates four female characters based on their balance of the personal and professional, their competence as attorneys, their appearance as it affects their success, and their acceptance in social circles. Overall, Marek (1999, p. 83) concludes that *Ally McBeal* and *The Practice* portray women lawyers in a new and positive way, reflecting "bright, successful professionals who are not defined by their relationship to a man."

Moseley and Read (2002) continue this more optimistic reading of *Ally McBeal* as they identify and investigate three tensions: feminism/femininity, fantasy/reality, and public/private. They examine the ways in which the narrative constructions of both the court cases and interpersonal interactions engage what it means to be female, feminine, and feminist. Moseley and Read (2002, p. 247) propose that the show appeals to so many young working women since it acknowledges the struggles inherent in women's motivation to "have it all": "It sees the choice between personal life and professional life for women today as

unrealistic, and articulates the tensions of living in the world where most of us do in fact reside, where they are mutually pervasive and impossible to separate." The storyworld situations and sentiments resonate with women negotiating their own personal and professional lives.

The Feminist Carnival

To intelligently canvass *Ally McBeal* as a cultural text, one must first consider issues of contemporary feminism, including liberal, radical, post, and third wave feminism. Liberal feminists, through a gender-neutral approach, argue for equality among men and women. Women should be allowed the same privileges that men enjoy, especially in the workplace. According to Grussendorf (2000, p. 17), "Liberal feminism attempts to include women in the malestream by riding the coattails of liberalism, a traditional male ideology upon which the U.S. is structured politically, legally, and culturally." Thus, liberal feminists accept the status quo and pursue a piece of the action.

Radical feminists, on the other hand, attack the systems of authority. This perspective takes on a political tone that considers the battle of the sexes to be a class struggle. Again, Grussendorf (2000, p. 17) captures this attitude well when she writes, "Women are viewed and treated as a class as stupid, servile, whorish and as objects for male use; therefore women's freedom must be gained by fighting for our freedom as a class, not as individuals asking for private solutions." Women, then, should work together to recognize themselves and fight back *as women*. The struggle for radical feminism stresses the political.

Postfeminism and the Third Wave

Feminism has entered its third wave, which the media consider synonymous with postfeminism. Generally, the term has been a product of assumption rather than definition (Coppock, Haydon, & Richter, 1995). Gamble (1999, p. 44) observes that this is because the postfeminist phenomenon has primarily been a media construct: "The term 'postfeminism' itself originated from within the media in the early 1980s, and has always tended to be...indicative of joyous liberation from the ideological shackles of a hopelessly outdated feminist movement." The popular media often associate writers such as Rene Denfield, Katie Roiphe, and Naomi Wolf—"a group of young, conservative feminists who explicitly define themselves against and criticize feminists of the second wave"—with postfeminism (Heywood & Drake, 1997, p. 1).

Within the context of popular media, particular themes of postfeminism recur. Women may achieve whatever they set their minds to, whether it be career, motherhood, a loving relationship, or a successful combination of all three. Women are no longer victims; they are empowered and capable. The theme of equality—in the home and the workplace—also pervades media postfeminism. Male partners share the burden of domestic duties while business organizations grant access, promotion, and job security for women that are equal to the male counterparts. Another theme is that women are individualistic. Each woman succeeds based upon her own initiative, and she may only blame herself if she fails to achieve personal fulfillment. Finally, media postfeminism promotes (ironically, considering the preceding notions that appear to

empower women) the concept that "women are desperately unhappy with their newly established status and that feminism is the culprit" (Coppock et al., 1995, p. 5). The portrayal reveals women who struggle to balance career, marriage, and children, and they often lose themselves in the process. This dilemma is cured by choice, the decision by women to either return to their traditional positions as caregivers in the home or to forego personal pleasures (presumably marriage and children) to pursue careers. Still, neither option results in utopia, leaving women in limbo. The conservative attitude leaves little room for women's success in this all-or-nothing equation.

Feminist scholars and activists disagree with the media construct of postfeminism since they believe it undermines collective feminist political action and encourages women to return to their "natural" role of nurturing the home and family, thereby undoing all that feminism (especially the second wave) worked so hard to achieve. Perhaps Siegel (1997, p. 75) captures the character of media postfeminism best when she observes:

> When invoked in the popular press, 'postfeminist' most often describes a moment when women's movements are...no longer moving, no longer vital, no longer relevant; the term suggests that the gains forged by previous generations of women have so completely pervaded all tiers of our social existence that those still 'harping' about women's victim status are embarrassingly out of touch.

Modleski (1991) echoes this concern about the ability of media postfeminism to return women to a "prefeminist world." In response to such anxieties, the academic community presents an alternative to the media vision of postfeminism. In a scholarly context, postfeminism suggests that feminism has

widened its perspective to include local and multiple voices. As Brooks (1997, p. 1) notes, "Once seen, somewhat crudely, as 'anti-feminist', the term is now understood as a useful conceptual frame of reference encompassing the intersection of feminism with a number of other anti-foundationalist movements including postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism." Viewing postfeminism through this lens enables the theory to evolve into a "dynamic movement capable of challenging modernist, patriarchal and imperialist frameworks" (Brooks, 1997, p. 4).

The link between postfeminism and postmodernism has met varying viewpoints from academic feminist writers. With its emphasis on local truths and multiple subject positions, postmodernism addresses the concern that feminist theory focuses on white, middle-class, heterosexual women, thereby ignoring women of color, with lower socioeconomic status, or with homosexual preferences. Postmodernism's emphasis on difference resonates with women of various racial and ethnic backgrounds who cannot locate a space for themselves within modernist feminism (Brooks, 1997). Moreover, postmodern feminists consider the social constructedness of both sex and gender, which allows much room for revamping the place of "women" within a larger cultural context.[1]

Despite the positive potential, though, some feminists dislike the dimension that postmodernism adds to the discussion of feminism. As Castelnuovo and Guthrie (1998, pp. 8-9) note, "Without intention or malice, postmodernists ha[ve] undermined the continuation of a women's movement

and, with it, the anger and moral conviction that demands and justifies specific changes in the status of women." Postmodernism, from this perspective, shifts the attention toward the differences among women and thus overlooks the need for collective action to achieve political ends. Similarly, postfeminism indicates a collapse of the consensus power that existed within second wave feminism (Brooks, 1997). At the core of discussion lies postmodernism's decentered subject and Lyotard's (1984) concept of the disintegration of universal truths. Some feminist thinkers posit that the decentered subject of postmodernism arose at an interestingly convenient time for patriarchy. Just as women began articulating their voices—their stable, rational positions—postmodernism appeared and reworked the rules. Mandzuik (1993, p. 181) locates another potential problem with the association of feminism and postmodernism by observing that when "feminism accepts the dehistoricizing tendency of the postmodern, it loses its specificity as a discourse different from and in opposition to the historicized power of patriarchal narratives."

It is at this juncture—of too much difference, too much confusion about the implications of "post," too much contention within and without feminism—that third wave feminism presents new possibility.[2] Third wave feminists (considered primarily women born between 1963-1974) such as Heywood and Drake (1997, p. 2) assert, "Because our lives have been shaped by struggles between various feminisms as well as by cultural backlash against feminism and activism, we argue that contradiction—or what looks like contradiction, if one doesn't shift one's point of view—marks the desires and strategies of third wave

feminism." The third wave, often associated with critiques of white feminism by women of color, embraces the ironies and imbalances that logically surface within a movement as large as feminism. Refreshingly, the variance among women is precisely that element which unites them in the third wave. Heywood and Drake (1997, p. 3) describe this pocket of peace eloquently in the following passage:

> We know that what oppresses me may not oppress you, that what oppresses you may be something I participate in, and that what oppresses me may be something you participate in. Even as different strains of feminism and activism sometimes directly contradict each other, they are all part of our third wave lives, our thinking, and our praxes: we are products of all the contradictory definitions of and differences within feminism, beasts of such a hybrid kind that perhaps we need a different name altogether.

In the realm of television portrayals, maybe that name is Ally McBeal, a character who acknowledges and accepts the contradictions within herself: babble/wit, emotion/intellect, desperation/determination, dependence/ independence. She is a voice—among many—in the third wave. As a Harvard-educated lawyer at a flourishing firm, she enjoys a solid financial foundation, as do the other female characters on the show, be they attorneys or secretaries. While they are proud of this fact, they refuse to rest, content with their professional achievements. They forge forward to their next goal of romantic relationships, proactively pursuing added success in their personal lives. One of Ally's most often quoted conversations takes place at home with her roommate, Renée, as they ponder why society promotes the ideology that women should be married: "We could change it, Renée. And if women really

wanted to change society, they could do it. *I plan* to change it. I just want to get married first." Despite the fact that Ally and Renée burn bridesmaid gowns in their living room fireplace, this comment has haunted *Ally McBeal's* status within both academic and popular feminist discourse. Maintaining that such lovelorn dialogue undermines the moxie and momentum of feminism in any form, such perspectives overlook the show's artful examination and negotiation of femaleness, femininity, and feminism that swirls not only in the actions of the women characters, but also in the men. The overarching conclusions about Ally are powerful: wacky, apolitical, anti-feminist, mentally and emotionally unstable. Yet, there might be another dimension to the lead character as a feminist icon and the program as a revisionist being-in-the-world. To pursue this potential, this analysis considers Bakhtin's carnival theory, which provides a cultural understanding of how the convergence of human characters and computerized caricatures functions in *Ally McBeal*.

Carnival Theory

Bakhtin, a Russian critic, is known primarily as a theorist of the novel; much of his work discusses how the novel evolved from multiple literary forms. Unlike other fixed genres such as odes, epics, and tragedies, Bakhtin (1981) asserts that the novel is unique in that it forever changes and shifts rather than adhering to pre-existing protocol. In studying and translating Bakhtin's work, scholars have noted that he rebels against the Russian post-revolution prohibition of certain kinds of laughter and satire. Bakhtin considers laughter to be a unique and

important element of human nature that certainly should not be stifled. To pursue this perspective, he focuses attention on the writings of Rabelais (a French novelist) and the social function of medieval carnival.

Carnival, in the contemporary mind, often denotes the general play and disorder associated with various festivals in medieval popular culture; in short, "it [carnival] was a time when the forbidden was normal" (Palmer, 1994, p. 49). This perspective of carnival as playful is apparent in the current attitude toward Mardi Gras. People associate bare breasts, bright beads, brimming beverages, and boisterous behavior with the annual celebration in New Orleans. This modern mindset echoes Castle's (1986, p. 53) description of carnival: "At the classic eighteenth-century masquerade...—the roiling, disreputable public assembly—a distinctly ungenteel liberty was the goal: liberty from every social, erotic, and psychological constraint."

What Mardi Gras partygoers rarely focus on, though, is the fact that carnival reflects much more than temporary reverie. The culmination of the celebration occurs on Fat Tuesday just before Ash Wednesday, the start of Lent in the Catholic tradition. During Lent, the religious forego foods and luxuries in order to prepare to venerate the resurrection of Christ on Easter Sunday. So, Mardi Gras—what one might argue is a contemporary cousin of medieval masquerade—symbolizes more than just getting drunk, loud, and naked; religion provides the foundation for the frolic. Bakhtin focuses on these social catalysts and consequences that underlie the masquerade. Going beyond the

spirited surface, he argues that a festival such as carnival emphasizes the grotesque body and possesses a quality of transformation.

At the heart of Bakhtin's carnival theory lies the concept of grotesque realism, which highlights bodily life. Here, the body transcends its physical state and reveals a more cosmic character. According to Bakhtin (1984, p. 19), "The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. This is why all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable." Themes of growth, fertility, and overabundance flourish.

The body follows the carnival logic of the "inside out" as participants belch, flaunt their flatulence, and bare their bulging stomachs, thereby achieving an atmosphere that is simultaneously scornful and exultant. As Bakhtin (1984, pp. 19-20) asserts, "The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract: it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity." Again, this disgrace does not lack a greater cause; it exists for the purpose of conceiving life anew. As Bakhtin (1984, p. 21) sees it, "To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better." Shame, in this respect, takes on a regenerative quality rather than a degenerative one. Stallybrass and White (1986, p. 10) describe how the grotesque realism of carnival functioned in society:

> ...it provided an image-ideal of and for popular community as an heterogeneous and boundless totality; it provided an imaginary repertoire of festive and comic elements which stood over against the serious and

> oppressive languages of the official culture; and it provided a thoroughly materialist metaphysics whereby the grotesque 'bodied forth' the cosmos, the social formation and language itself.

Taken together, Bakhtin, Stallybrass, and White assert that the carnivalesque combines the ritual, the social, and the political. The body and its actions accept the role of communicator, since "the body is actively produced by the junction and disjunction of symbolic domains and can never be legitimately evaluated in itself" (Stallybrass & White, 1986, p. 192). Thus, the body becomes an expressive tool during the masquerade. Fleshy parts of the body—such as the mouth, belly, and buttocks—receive the most attention during carnival since they reveal the transformation of the world passing into, through, or out of the human body.

At its most basic level, carnival represents life—a second life—shaped by a particular pattern of play. Bakhtin (1984, p. 9) describes how these marketplace festivals "were the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance." During this play in medieval society, all social, religious, and political hierarchies disintegrate. Masquerade melts the power structure by enabling people to play whatever roles they wish; people relate to one another as equals. They eat and drink in excess. Posterior bodily functions are cheered rather than quieted as the norms of social decorum surrender to raucous behavior.

Carnival embraces all people in its universal spirit, allowing them to act as central participants rather than peripheral spectators. Bakhtin (1984, p. 10) captures the heart of the festival in the following excerpt:

> [O]ne might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed.

So, carnival reflects a state of process, of becoming, of transformation that molds the mind, body, and spirit.

A historical shift in the perspective about carnival occurred during the Renaissance and neo-classical periods. Palmer (1994) points to these ages as introducing and cultivating the current concept of "civilization." The high culture began defining itself as superior to and detached from the low culture. In carnival, people had valued the low, the raucous, the grotesque. Then the tide turned. As Palmer (1994, p. 122) characterizes, "Now the purpose of the genre system of the seventeenth century was essentially to create and preserve a decorum based on the social hierarchy, a decorum which dictated that a single action could not be simultaneously noble and funny: the realm of the serious and the realm of the comic were to be radically distinguished." The paradox, of course, evolves clearly as members of the high culture define themselves in terms of the low culture.

Considering this, Stallybrass and White (1986, p. 5) suggest, "The result is a mobile, conflictual fusion of power, fear and desire in the construction of subjectivity: a psychological dependence upon precisely those Others which are being rigorously opposed and excluded at the social level. It is for this reason that what is *socially* peripheral is so frequently *symbolically* central." Applying this to *Ally McBeal*, it seems that the caricature (the program's carnival

aspect) makes symbolically central that which has been socially peripheral in patriarchal culture: feminist thinking and perspectives.

Feminism, Bakhtin, and Ally McBeal

Ally McBeal certainly raises feminist issues. The title character embodies collective feminisms and the contradictions that accompany them. Third wave feminism provides a theoretical and practical space in which to recognize the variance in viewpoints that the television program presents. It builds upon rather than breaks apart former feminisms in an effort to articulate new voices. In the third wave, no feminist thought is marginal; that which is peripheral becomes central, as it does in carnival.

Throughout his discussion of carnival and grotesque realism, Bakhtin (1984) refers to the traditionally feminine topics of conception, pregnancy, and birth, which often become intertwined with the subject of shame. Grotesque realism's focus on the body as well as growth and becoming automatically accents the importance of the womb and women. Some recent scholars have linked portions of Bakhtin with feminism and applied this perspective to both literature and television.[3] This sensemaking study contributes to this previous research and adds dimension to the discussion about tensions between feminism and *Ally McBeal*. Carnival's focus on the grotesque body and the transformational spirit informs a cultural understanding of the convergence of the human body and computerized caricature in the television dramedy. Content analysis generates the most evidence of this articulation and informs the discussion by providing a systematic, quantitative description of this unique

feature; then, what content analysis pulls out of context, thematic analysis recontextualizes. The *Ally McBeal* storyworld creates meaning as its emotional exigencies prompt complex characters to explore subversions of gendered power/knowledge.

Power/Knowledge/Body Intersections

'Living a life'— / the beauty of deep lines / dug in your cheeks.
The years gather by sevens / to fashion you. They are blind,
but you are not blind.
Their blows resound, / they are deaf, those laboring
daughters of the Fates,
but you are not deaf, / you pick out / your own song from the uproar
line by line, / and at last throw back / your head and sing it.

—Denise Levertov, "A Man"

Bodies exist in the taken-for-granted form of flesh and blood. To be without a body means no consciousness, no cognition, no continuance. In essence, the body provides the fundamental foundation for drives, dreams, and desires, indeed, all the imaginings of a mind that inevitably activate the body. Such physically manifest motivations and inscriptions integrate the personal and the cultural to create potential beings that are larger than life, or perhaps just richer in texture than the sole somatic subject can convey. As Sullivan (2001, p. 161) suggests, "Social imaginaries are incarnated in the movements, actions, and desires of imaginary bodies. But at the same time, imaginary bodies (trans)form social fictions." These individualistic, imaginary bodies impact those around them to tease transformational tendencies. Such a perspective engages Levertov's poem since it describes a body that is etched by tired time and bountiful banality, yet it maintains its own sight, its own sound,

and—most importantly—its own voice via which it may shout its own song. Such a position proves useful in situating the *Ally McBeal* emotionally distorted bodies in contemporary power/knowledge discourse.

Power/Knowledge and the Animated Body

Traditionally, emotion has been a point of tension in gender discussions. From a patriarchal perspective, women are often regarded as emotional and irrational, while men are considered intellectual and rational; women are of the body (fettered) and men are of the mind (privileged). Although some feminists have accordingly favored a reconfiguration of bodily behavior that is more staid and "sensible," others like Cowdroy (1933, p. 80) question such aims: "By what strange obliquity of vision did women come to exalt the capacity to imitate men and their works above that exquisite tact, that divine intuition, and that wisdom of the soul which are the endowments of true womanhood?" The idea here seems to be that women do not need to compromise their emotional sides to become better (wo)men. Butler (1999, p. 17) urges everyone to depart from this dichotomy altogether and warns that "any uncritical reproduction of the mind/body distinction ought to be rethought for the implicit gender hierarchy that the distinction has conventionally produced, maintained, and rationalized." Moreover, Sheets-Johnstone (1992, p. 15) boldly equates Cartesianism with a cultural disease which makes people believe that they are "schizoid creatures," a perspective that ultimately undermines wholeness, wisdom of the body, and the "richness of our bodily lives." To be sure, the notion

of emotion—and its placement within or without the body—creates commotion.

Emotion is a pivotal concept in the realm of carnival as well as gender. The masquerade reveals a celebration that affords people (especially those of the working class) the license to act and speak freely without derision from others; in fact, individuals intentionally overturn the norm system during a masquerade festival. As Babcock (cited in Stallybrass & White, 1986, p. 17) observes, "'Symbolic inversion' may be broadly defined as any act of expressive behaviour which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, social and political." Since emotional liberation perpetuates the transformational spirit of carnival, it might well do the same for feminism.

A show like *Ally McBeal* provides the perfect springboard for investigating the intersection of feminism, carnival, and mind/body since it incorporates particularly unique visual effects: it animates emotions. As the narratives unfold, characters and viewers alike know what typical feelings would surface in given situations. In reality, though, people know that they do not enjoy the freedom to express themselves with hearty honesty; rather, they have to stifle responses that (however logical) are inappropriate. By doing so, they submit to normalizing judgment and relinquish power to authentically react to life's dilemmas. The storyworld of *Ally McBeal* offers a different scenario, one in which the characters frankly say what they mean and do what they feel. Adding texture to the words

and actions, the animation of the human form punctuates, elaborates, and liberates the emotional pressures experienced by the characters. These imagistic idiosyncrasies then become focal points in and of themselves. As Aitken and Zonn (1994, p. 19) describe, "While image-events are predominantly organized in the interests of assuring narrative significance, they also develop as something fascinating in themselves, a source of visual pleasure, a spectacle." Indeed, the animated emotions attract attention.

Subsequently, emotion serves as an important component for interpreting the social significance of the convergence of humans and computerization in *Ally McBeal*. The category of emotion was coded as one of nine mutually exclusive classifications: anger, disgust, elation, embarrassment, frustration, guilt, heartache/jealousy, lust, and medical. With its animation sequences, the program engages illustrative visuals that enable indecorous emotions to spring to life. Although embarrassment produces the most instances of computerized human characters, the emotion categories overall receive a fairly even distribution of animation. The television program reflects emotions that run the gamut of human experience.

The animation in *Ally McBeal* serves one overarching purpose: emotional emancipation, making visual the internal emotions that the characters experience. Certainly, the poised and intelligent characters could uphold social norms and engage in appropriate behavior at all times. They choose not to. Instead, they follow the assertion of Bakhtin's carnivalesque and enjoy temporary liberation from decorum. The animation in *Ally McBeal* mimics carnival's

physical excesses of food, drink, sex, and fun. Yet, it twists this by suggesting that the characters more regularly—rather than just occasionally—engage in emotional excesses. Times of inner turmoil often trigger the computerized caricatures.

For instance, Ally expresses anger with her animated arm that stretches across the courtroom to punch opposing counsel. In a fit of frustration, Ally flushes a bottle of Prozac down a unisex commode as an animated shot depicts her spinning and screaming as she follows the medication down the drain. Ally's head inflates with ego and then bursts with a pinprick of jealousy as she quips to Billy about Georgia, sending her deflated head (and body) whizzing willy-nilly through the air. John appears in a succession of three black and white photographs—accompanied by camera clicks—as Ally captures the mental image of a guy who is in love (with Nelle). Hope embraces Ally's heart as she experiences the death of a child with cancer and the storyworld shows his glowing body holding the hand of an anonymous man and disappearing down the hospital corridor as a flash of light. When she first joins the law firm of Cage and Fish, she excitedly discovers that her childhood love, Billy, works there as well. However, when she first sees him again, he announces that he is married, and a series of arrows pierce Ally's chest, penetrating her heart(ache) and puncturing the prospect of another chance with the love of her life.

Ally McBeal presents an expressive contemporary woman whose emotions manifest themselves on the physical body; as the computerized caricatures write emotion on the body, they transfer the psychological to the

somatic. Hence, the animations diffuse the effects of a dolorous dilemma (like the heartache of losing Billy) and grant Ally a more manageable moment, even, a symbolic, carnivalistic death from which to be reborn. She no longer has to shroud her feelings in order to preserve the patriarchal stipulation for rationalism. Ally exposes her feelings and claims her emotions (e.g., embarrassment, elation, anger, lust, jealousy). The body here is certainly a "locus of subjectivity" that is "linked to language, feeling, pleasure, pain, power, and history" (Farber, 2000, p. 7). No longer does she stifle her appropriate moods for the sake of decorum. She instead frolics in her freedom and enjoys the comfort of being true to her sentiments. Moreover, the exaggerated physical appearance of her inner thoughts actually complements her intellect rather than discredits it. In talking about Foucault's principle of reversal, Shumway (1989, p. 16) says the "strategy of reversal in its broadest usage leads us to discard the assumption that human thought—which Foucault calls discourse because thought is always expressed in a particular linguistic form—is at root rational and positive, that when it fails to be rational and positive it is merely an aberration, a departure from its true nature." Considering this, the animation of Ally's emotions is not the abnormality that previous writers claim, but rather a reversal—even a reorientation—of how the rational can also be emotional without compromising power. This dynamic device functions as a kind of camp, a "subversive celebration of marginality, a style and humor that is intrinsically political" (Mizejewski, 1992, p. 63). The result is emotional liberation: the freedom to feel that engenders an enhanced existence. Instead of

adhering to their normalized separation, mind and body unite in the female character, transforming her into a more complete human being—mentally, physically, and emotionally.

Power/Knowledge and the Deviant Body

Feminist discussion about the division of private and public space often revolves around the socially constructed distinctions between women and men. According to conventional patriarchal perspectives, women maintain the private sphere with their emotion, sensitivity, and maternal instincts. On the other hand, men sustain the public system with their reason, logic, and competitive nature. After the feminist movement of the 1970s strongly shifted opinions regarding this dichotomy in Western culture, women began evaluating their life courses in the workplace and reconsidering marriage and family. The division eventually dwindled as traditionally private issues like childcare and maternity leave entered public space. Despite the intermingling of public workspaces and institutions with personal living quarters and offices, normative codes of social conduct still deem boisterous behavior inappropriate in the public arena and thereby relegate it to the private realm. One must act, speak, and look staid in order to gain success in both business and social milieus. Ebullient behavior should remain suppressed, except in the privacy of one's mind or individual space. Such is not, however, the case in *Ally McBeal*.

Consequently, this research explores the settings in which the computerized caricatures occur. Two overarching categories of public and private each encompass their own subsections. Public settings may be public

work, public institution, and public general. Public work includes spaces such as the law office lobby, elevator, and conference room. Public institutions reflect churches and hospitals as well as the courtroom and courthouse corridors. Describing a wide array of locales, public general ranges from a mud-wrestling club to a bar, drug store, coffee shop, bowling alley, and anonymous streets. Private locations, on the other hand, include private work and private personal. In addition to the unisex bathroom, individual offices comprise the private work category.[4] Finally, private personal refers to rooms within a character's apartment.

More than half of the caricatures surface in public space. Of the three subcategories, public work produces the most instances, while the scene categories of public institution and public general have an almost equal, but lesser, incidence. Private settings, alternately, account for about one-third of the caricatures. While private work reveals a tendency to include embellished effects in shots, few appear in private personal scenes. Accordingly, *Ally McBeal* predominantly punctuates emotions with computerized caricatures in public settings. In a conference room meeting, for instance, Ally's head transforms into that of a panting dog because she finds another lawyer "yummy." Lustful thoughts again arise in the unlikely setting of a hospital when her tongue calmly creeps out of her mouth and across the room with the intention of stroking a doctor's ear; it snaps back when he abruptly turns his head, sending her reeling against the doorframe where she is standing. Ally walks on air, in love, with birds singing, through the law office lobby. Yet, on a

church altar, where she serves as a bridesmaid for a friend, the groom winks at her and her mouth morphs with disgust into that of a growling werewolf beast. Ally deviates far from the docile body conduct appropriate for the given settings, totally disregarding normalizing judgment.

Recalling the grotesque realism and transformational spirit of carnival in which the abnormal becomes normal, the categories of angle and scale—two components which reveal how the camera communicates the narrative—indulge the normalizing of the deviant public-space caricatures that manifest in *Ally McBeal*. First, angle establishes the position from which the camera presents a scene and relates a sense of relative power in addition to the naturalness of a camera shot. Angles are typically low, high, or slight, conveying the relative power within a shot. A low angle (looking up at the scene) suggests enhancement, making the subject look powerful or extraordinary, whereas a high angle (looking down on a scene) proposes diminishment, overpowering the subject and implying a sense of weakness and vulnerability. The slight angle looks straight at the subject, asserting naturalness for the shot. Scale, then, determines how close the camera appears while imaging the subject. The scale may reveal a close, medium, or wide proximity, communicating a sense of relative intimacy. The close scale encompasses extreme close-ups in addition to head, shoulder, and chest shots. Depending upon the narrative context and viewer disposition, this camera placement may either invite intimacy or invade privacy. The medium scale consists of waist and knee shots and suggests a sense of comfortable indifference; the viewer experiences

neither closeness nor distance from the screen subject, which protects personal space. Comprised of full and wide shots, the wide scale offers viewers a sense of detachment from and even surveillance of the scene and subject. Shots presenting a wide scale prove overall less personal, less threatening than do those in a close scale.

For the computerized caricatures coded for this analysis, slight angles comprise the majority of camera positions. The camera angle suggests naturalness for the distortion of human beings, despite the fact that the computer-generated effects reveal surreal physical actions and characteristics. A scene that nicely illustrates how the slight angle functions in *Ally McBeal* appears when Ally is upset about her impending 28th birthday and she absent-mindedly forgets to remove a large purple roller from her hair before going into work. When Billy subtly brings this to her attention at a meeting in the conference room, she replies, "It's a fashion thing." Meanwhile, her face turns bright red and an audio sizzle complements the visual. Throughout this scene and in the shot with the facial effect, the camera angle remains slight, suggesting the relative absence of a power differential. Despite the embarrassing purple hair roller, Ally loses no authority in the scene, according to the angle presentation.

Considering the category of scale, more than half of the total shots present a close proximity, the majority of which appear as shoulder and chest shots. The camera presents extreme close-ups and head shots infrequently. Thus, the shots invite viewers to closely experience the animations; however, they do not demand people do so in an intense and potentially uncomfortable

(extreme close-up) context. While the detached wide scale accounts for almost a third of the total shots, the neutral medium scale appears infrequently. One instance of how the close scale reveals a sense of relative intimacy arises when Ally addresses a closed bathroom stall door, thinking she is talking to Billy. She tells him that she has seen him staring into the mirror lately, so she assumes he is having a problem with Georgia. Much to Ally's surprise, when the stall door opens, Georgia exits, sending Ally's hair straight up as electric blue current pulses through it with static sound effects. The shoulder shot (close scale) of Ally's animation invites intimacy from the viewers, urging them to relate to her shock and chagrin.

What proves ironic and interesting is that this analysis reveals few computerized caricatures in the private personal settings of *Ally McBeal*. Instead, the deviant emotional body surfaces in the public spheres, where interactions and negotiations usually occur. It is here that this television text enables women to reorient the public sphere into one that more closely resembles the private. Rather than adhering to such rigid standards of patriarchy as pure logic and reason, *Ally McBeal* opts to highlight—via the caricatures—an intellect that acknowledges and embraces emotion. Consequently, this program goes a step beyond merging two spaces; it actually pursues a transformation of public space into an environment that encourages the emotional freedom of women as well as men. Such an enterprise proves especially effectual since Ally and her colleagues are lawyers whose job it is to discipline and normalize. As "technicians of behaviour" and "engineers of

conduct," they routinely "judge, assess, diagnose, recognize the normal and abnormal and claim the honour of curing or rehabilitating" (Foucault, 1977, p. 304). Yet, they do so in a way that dismantles and reconstitutes hegemonic notions of appropriate behavior in public and private space.

Power/Knowledge and the Gendered Body

Considering the overall feminist context of *Ally McBeal*, it seems worthwhile to investigate which characters—male or female—receive caricatures more frequently. As expected based upon conclusions drawn from Kirkham and Skeggs (1998), Dow (1996), and Gray (1994), women characters receive much more computerization than do men. Females in the show, in fact, reflect 79% of the total distortions, with Ally herself accounting for more than half of these. In light of previous analyses of women/comedy/caricature intersections, such a result would support the argument that Ally, in particular, commands greater power than the rest of the characters, and women, in general, have more power than men.[5] Females enjoy the spotlight and provide the focal point.

An intriguing example of Ally's computerized caricatures emerges in the episode entitled "Love Unlimited." Laura Dipson is the Executive Vice President of an organization called Women for Progress. She approaches Ally several times, demanding—rather than requesting—that Ally serve as a role model for professional women. At first, Ally politely declines; however, Laura's subtle insistence soon turns to blatant harassment. Laura feels that she has the feminist authority to demand that Ally be a role model and claims that Ally has no

choice in the matter. Moreover, she insists that Ally "fatten up" and reform her attire (as if her short skirts reduce her to a demimondaine) if she expects other women to look up to her. Such comments correspond to a polemic examined by Pogrebin (1987, p. 13): "Men compete for rewards and achievements; we compete for men. Men vie for worldly approval and status; we vie for husbands. Men measure themselves against standards of excellence and an established level of performance; we measure ourselves against one another." What seems at first to be a progressive moment for womankind actually regresses to body image and hemlines, totally ignoring the perception of Ally as successful-attorney-role-model-for-young-women. Furthermore, in several episodes, Ally guiltlessly enjoys Asian takeout lunches at work, various dinners on dates, and gourmet ice cream at home, so her thin frame is more a matter of good metabolism than eating disorder. Consequently, "fattening her up" would be unnatural, unhealthy, and undesirable, *except* in the sense that it would inscribe Ally's body with feminist judgment and normalization. To this end, Laura also adjures Ally to suppress her emotions and "be exactly who *we* want you to be, nothing more, nothing less." It is at this point that the caricature kicks in: Ally imagines herself biting off Laura's nose (perhaps to spite her feminist face) and spitting it onto a nearby door window. This fantasy allows Ally to reclaim and write her power onto Laura's body. Serving a dual function, the symbolism suggests that Laura keep her nose out of Ally's business and serves as a warning to others who would encroach upon her territory (body) with either patriarchal or feminist hegemonies.

Feminist work has long focused attention on the bodies of women, searching for ways to transform the objectification and degradation into actualization and admiration. Exploring the Cartesian heuristic, Cole (1993, p. 69) poses the question, "How can we begin to approach the relation of mind and body not as a *problem* but as a source of liberatory insight and joy?" In other words, women need to shed old paradigms that damage and develop new ones that empower. This is where a television show like *Ally McBeal* implements unique insights, not only with its computerized caricatures, but also with its adumbrative accoutrements. Perhaps the most poignant example comes to life in an episode where MOPE (Mothers Opposed to Pornographic Entertainment) attempts to shut down Ling's mud wrestling club. Although such a venue is traditionally seen as degrading to women, Ling poses several compelling arguments about how the mud club empowers the female employees.

The female wrestlers maintain control over their bodies at all times since nudity and sexual touching are not allowed; they tease with objects that the men will never be able to touch intimately. The women's knowledge of their bodies and how to use them is their power, as Ling argues, which "goes to the very essence of a woman. Sex is a weapon. We all use it. We tease. We tantalize. We withhold it. God gave us that advantage by giving men the dumbstick." Consequently, the female employees appropriate the male gaze for their own benefit, to the tune of six-figure annual salaries. This reversal potentiates a hope that Shildrick (1997, p. 10) shares: "Although intending to

deconstruct the essentialism of the highly damaging historical elision between women and their bodies, postmodernist feminists might see, nevertheless, the embodiment of the feminine as precisely the site from which new forms of knowledge could emerge." Mud makes crystal clear how one reoriented rendition of power/knowledge functions. Along these lines, Fiske's (1989) discussion of dog "dirt" on a beach inspires insight as to how the mud itself empowers the women. Dirt is usually seen as a threat and an anomaly, dangerous in the medical gaze and hazardous to social norms. The nudity (dirty morally) in Ling's club has been replaced by mud (dirty physically), and both of these concepts tiptoe along the boundary between man and nature (not-man). In the mud club, the female wrestlers sustain an alliance with (via their displayed minimal bikinis) and control over (via their portrayed martial superiority) the natural. Ling proclaims that the male patrons, meanwhile, regress to nature as "drunken Neanderthals" that "hurl money" at the women. What is more, the mud—primal in nature—becomes the new mask for women to wear that replaces the mask of makeup, which Ling argues is the true exploitation of women since it celebrates the idea that "we have to paint our eyelashes everyday just to go to work."

Despite Ling's assessment that men are pigs and "Mankind is based on a kind of pigdom," *Ally McBeal* portrays the male body as capable of challenging hegemonic notions of masculinity. For example, John Cage (a.k.a. The Biscuit), one of the founding lawyers of Ally's firm, embodies excessive emotion and eccentricity. Traditionally weak by the standards of patriarchal hegemony, he

nevertheless proves nearly invincible in the courtroom. His self-reflection and emotional knowledge grant him an uncanny power to gauge jury members and opposing counsel alike and exact effective arguments.

Beyond John Cage's eccentricities lies the unisex, a ubiquitous point of gender conversation in *Ally McBeal* analyses. It is here that the other male characters are coerced to embrace femininity as well. Men do not have urinals and must instead use stalls as the women do. Such a situation subjects the males to a feminine gaze under which they must act as docile bodies, disciplined according to feminine codes of hygiene. Moreover, in the unisex, it seems that the men succumb to self-surveillance and spend as much time (if not more) in front of the mirror as women might, judging their faces, hair, and posture, but also locating their ego, confidence, and spirit. As John instructs Richard while in front of the mirror, "Look into yourself deeply," and then they concentrate to hear the "bells" of their success. The mirrors in the unisex become portals whereby both women and men arrive at the site where body and mind meld. The mind/body and masculine/feminine dichotomies disintegrate as men experience what it means to locate self-worth in a reflection and women experience what it means to locate power in a gaze.

Ultimately, *Ally McBeal* is able to "portray emancipation in terms of reciprocal role changes and not focus only on the ways in which men should become more like women in their concourse with the world" (Agger, 1992, p. 131). The computerized caricatures and adumbrative accoutrements dismantle dominant gender ideals by highlighting their myopia, atavism, and

absurdity. The female characters enervate normalizing judgment that deems emotions to be weak. The male characters undo much "of the woundedness... due to emotionally killing forms of enculturation visited upon little boys" (Demetrakopoulos, 1983, p. 7). Bidding a fond farewell to hegemonic gender codes, all of the characters freely express themselves in a storyworld that reconceptualizes gendered reality at work, at play, and in the unisex. And as Elaine so eloquently puts it, "The bathroom more than anything is a place to wipe the past away."

Power/Knowledge and the Grotesque Body

The unisex certainly epitomizes carnival symbolism in *Ally McBeal*. The characters leave society (the law office) to enter the carnival space (the unisex), where they dance, confess, and transform before rejoining society. It is the site in which they escape, release, and cleanse both literally and figuratively. The grotesque body, of course, constitutes one of the central tenets of carnival. The body—especially the lower portion—becomes the locus of and a tool for the transgressive and transformative actions and communications that mark the masquerade. As Stallybrass and White (1986, p. 26) elaborate:

> The 'carnivalesque' mediates between a classical/classificatory body and its negations, its Others, what it excludes to create its identity as such. In this process discourses about the body have a privileged role, for transcodings between different levels and sectors of social and psychic reality are effected through the intensifying grid of the body.

A look at the body parts most often caricatured in *Ally McBeal*, then, provides relevant information by revealing which areas of the body lend themselves most readily to distortion. This analysis considers the body in three divisions: the upper

body, the lower body, and the whole body. The upper body includes the head and the torso. The head consists of any body part above the neck, such as tongues, mouths, eyes, and hair. Any portions from the neck to the waist (arms, backs, chests, and stomachs) comprise the torso. The lower body involves those parts from the waist to the feet. Finally, the whole body includes an entire person from head to toe. Results reveal that the upper body accounts for a little more than half of the computerized caricatures. The head proves most prominent in the computerization sequences, which give special attention to tongues, mouths, eyes, and hair. Interestingly, the lower body alone receives no distortion. The whole body, however, appears in one-third of the computerizations.

The mouth best illustrates the predominance of *Ally McBeal's* caricatures of the upper body, especially the head region. Of particular importance for Bakhtin's grotesque body is the mouth since it is the opening through which renewed life—food and drink—pours into the body. The mouth also acts as a tool of desire, and it is this carnivalesque feature that the program flaunts. A recurrent computerization driven by lust reveals tongues stretching far out of open lips. For instance, Billy's and Richard's tongues roll out of their mouths and dangle, wiggling and dripping, as they gawk at the mail girl wearing a tight white T-shirt; in every sense of the word, they drool. Richard again enacts this behavior in the company of John while they watch women wrestle at Ling's mud club. Nevertheless, desire does not prove to be gender specific in that it only presents the pablum of woman-as-object set forth as male-gaze-pleasure; the

women exhibit lustful inclinations as well. Ally and Georgia drool over the sculpting class model, and Elaine joins them on another occasion when greeting Bobby, a lawyer from another firm. At one point, Ally even goes so far as to extend her tongue to wrap Bobby in a tornadic twirl, implying a kind of imbroglio that disorients him, subdues his masculinity, and thereby empowers her. Auspiciously, lust for the opposite sex actually builds a bond among the female characters rather than catalyzing catty competition. The women, in fact, seem to strike solidarity with one another via their liberation from suppressing their salacity. Beyond the gender implications of feeling and displaying sexual longing, what proves most interesting is that the impulses of the lower stratum (groin/genitals) manifest in the upper stratum (head/mouth). The computerized caricatures represent—for both the male and the female characters—a carnivalesque outlet for and release of physical desire, which ultimately preserves the intellectual and emotional purity of self as well as between friends and lovers. Ally and Greg, for example, share a scene in which their tongues taunt each other with a slow, sensual, pseudo-snakedance but never touch since they have agreed to "take it slow." Ergo, they release desire from the physical realm to privilege it in the emotional realm.

Some caricatures shift focus to other regions of the grotesque body. In one instance, Ally learns that Georgia's pregnancy test (which she conveniently takes in the unisex rather than in the privacy of her own home) is positive. A missile shoots right through Ally's torso, symbolizing her hurt, jealousy, and pain by annihilating her womb, what Bakhtin calls the reproductive lower stratum.

Throughout his discussion of carnival and grotesque realism, he refers to the traditionally feminine topics of conception, pregnancy, and birth, which often become intertwined with the subject of shame. For instance, Bakhtin (1984, p. 21) explains, "To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place." Grotesque realism's focus on the body as well as growth and becoming automatically accents the importance of the womb and women and surfaces in another narrative that involves a lawsuit in which Ally is defending herself against Risa, who claims that Ally destroyed her wedding and inflicted undue emotional distress. Prior to learning that Risa and Joel are engaged, Ally enjoys a torrid encounter with him at a car wash. The knowledge of the affair—and how good the sex was between the impromptu lovers—devastates Risa. Such circumstances signal the cautionary comment of Eichenbaum & Orbach (1987, pp. 10-11): "Behind the curtain of sisterhood lies a myriad of emotional tangles that can wreak havoc in women's relationships with each other." However, Ally consistently strives to side with her sisters in all things related to emotion, especially love. She refuses to date men with whom her friends are involved. She (usually) tries to steer clear of Georgia's marriage to Billy. Ally also works hard to reunite Risa and Joel, but one of Joel's pleas for Risa's forgiveness rubs Ally the wrong way. He tells Risa that sex with Ally was meaningless and says, "*She's* not the mother of my children." At that point, the scene cuts to caricature with Ally in a hospital bed, firing babies out of her body, which signifies her frustration with

the patriarchal conception of marriage as manacled to the lower stratum of copulation and childbearing. For her, marriage reflects the upper stratum of emotional fulfillment, which is much more endearing and enduring than marriage mired in the grotesque body.

According to Elaine's husband CD, though, the marriage/grotesque dyad proves a bit more popular than that of marriage/mind. Foregoing the natural and engaging the prosthetical, Elaine's inventions further exaggerate and lampoon the norms for masculine and feminine bodies. Her more notable inventions include the husband CD, a face bra, ice goggles, the cool cup, and the pregnancy dress, all of which represent a challenge of "heterosexual ideology, the defiance of binary sexuality and order through the deliberate imposition of ambivalence, reversals, and laughter" (Mizejewski, 1992, p. 63). With the husband CD, Elaine hopes to help satiate the single, divorced, or widowed woman's longing for male companionship by introducing the sounds of a man into the woman's personal space: ballgame cheering, silverware clanking, belching, farting, and toilet flushing, all of which position the concept of marriage not as emotional fulfillment, but as a grotesque union focusing on things going into or coming out of the body. The face bra is designed to secure the parts of the visage that could sag with time, preserving a notion of beauty similar to actual brassieres. The concept of the bra appears ridiculous in the shadow of the face bra, which is flagrantly foolish. The ice goggles serve a similar purpose—to reduce the puffiness of eyes that steals youth and makes women look tired—and look no less farcical. The cool cup refrigerates the

scrotum and thereby preserves male potency for those couples wishing to become pregnant (heat, of course, kills sperm); it is comically conspicuous and reduces men to a walking storage unit for reproductive provisions.

Despite its overtly frivolous nature, carnival serves a definite political purpose. Stallybrass and White (1986, p. 7) maintain that "Carnival, for Bakhtin, is both a populist utopian vision of the world seen from below and a festive critique, through the inversion of hierarchy, of the 'high' culture." For a specific and limited amount of time, carnival sanctions a shift in social roles and decorum. The low culture may don regalia and act without repose; spirits play freely and nothing is condemned. When carnival ends, society returns to its proper roles and routines. Yet, the world is not exactly the same after the masquerade as it was before.[6]

Ally McBeal presents a similar scenario. The animated human characters mimic the limbs of Bakhtin's grotesque body, which are "multiple, bulging, over- or under-sized, protuberant and incomplete" (Stallybrass & White, 1986, p. 9). Emotions urge the body to express itself in the form of flaming faces, teeming tongues, and amplified arms. During each episode, women freely and physically express their emotions without damaging their professional or intellectual reputations. They are bold bodies, mature minds, sprightly souls, yet they are also constantly evolving in the throes of their thirtysomething youth. The comic illusions end with each episode; however, the program's implications about women's place in contemporary culture linger.

Ally McBeal Matrix and Synthesis

Ally McBeal's most intriguing endeavor is the inscription of emotion on the body. As the content and thematic analyses in this chapter have unmasked, the program persistently pursues the portrayal of the emotional body as a site of power/knowledge for both women and men in public, not just private, space. The *Ally McBeal* matrix catalogs the implications evident in the computerized caricatures considered for this sensemaking study.

The Ally McBeal *Matrix*

THE ANIMATED BODY caricatured computerization feelings inscribed on physique	THE DEVIANT BODY emotional emancipation emotions liberated in public
THE GENDERED BODY tenuous transformation genders united in mind/body	THE GROTESQUE BODY sentimental sensation desires reoriented to mind

Ally McBeal's caricatured computerization configures powerful animation for the show in which feelings are inscribed on the physique. Even though each episode contains an average of less than two effects, the convergence of computer distortion and human form is a salient characteristic that fastens a fanciful flair to the familiar. *Ally McBeal* gains much of its appeal from its comedy, of which the caricature is a pivotal part. In addressing the subject of comedy, Bakhtin (1981, p. 23) offers this perspective:

> Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly, on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its center, doubt

> it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it.

To this end, it appears that *Ally McBeal* uses the humor derived from the caricature of human actors to intimately examine the place of women (and men) within contemporary Western culture. The televisual text portrays female characters that possess the power to govern both the emotional and the intellectual elements of their beings, thereby imaging a potential shattering of the confining patriarchal concept of the mind/body opposition.

Western society has long subscribed to the Cartesian model of the separation of mind and body. According to this viewpoint, in order to attain a true intellectual state, one has to mentally shed the physical. The body and all that is somatic hinder the ability of the mind to reach its full potential. In fact, as Shildrick (1997) notes, the traditional medical paragon renders the body peripheral and insignificant until sickness descends upon it. The dilemma for women within such a framework is that females, by nature, are irrevocably attached to their bodies. In particular, pregnancy—what Cole (1993) describes as the feminine metamorphosis—and menstruation establish a consistent bond between women and the corporeal. Although this in itself does not prove problematic, patriarchal perspectives that devalue the physical do create tension for women. Because they are so eminently linked to their bodies, women do not garner much respect from men who favor the model of the mind/body dichotomy. As Shildrick (1997, p. 26) contends, "In being somehow more fully embodied than men, women have been characterised simply as

less able to rise above uncontrollable natural processes and passions and therefore disqualified from mature personhood."

Subsequently, women prove too emotional and not rational enough to be considered competent; this atavistic attitude reveals itself in comments resembling "It must be that time of the month," which are linked to the menstrual cycle and are used to prejudice women's emotions and bodies. Via its computerized effects, *Ally McBeal* redirects attention to the body—more specifically, the female body—and offers a glimpse of femaleness (and maleness) transformed into an integrated self-reflexive whole that dismantles the mind/body fissure and instead proposes a mind/body merger. Always linked with the psyches of the characters, the distortions present a range of emotional emancipation. These feelings find freedom in public space, which catapults them out of deviant darkness into liberated light. The camera regularly presents a slight angle and a close scale, indicating naturalness, implying the absence of a power differential, and inviting intimacy.

The result is a tenuous transformation for female characters—Ally in particular—who manifest the most distortions. *Ally McBeal* intrepidly interrogates patriarchal systems of power/knowledge and defiantly deploys both overt and subtle tactics of humor to mitigate them. The words of Wolff (1990, p. 191) resonate when considering how the computerized caricatures "apart from anything else, achieve what a more separatist, alternative, woman-centered culture could not: namely engagement with the dominant culture itself." Instead of focusing solely on women as feminism does, *Ally McBeal* widens the

scope to include men in the discussion, solution, and transformation of society as a whole. Doing so avoids designating men as Other and instead deems the masculine/feminine dichotomy to be vestigial. Meanwhile, genders unite in mind/body: a new form in which the psychological and the somatic are instinctively, intelligently intertwined.

Highlighting the head of the upper body, *Ally McBeal's* human distortions reconceive the grotesque body in sentimental sensation. During masquerade, the lower body—with its focus on sexuality and flatulence—is prominent. As Bakhtin (1984, p. 224) explains, "Excrement was conceived as an essential element in the life of the body and of the earth in the struggle against death. It was part of man's vivid awareness of his materiality, of his bodily nature, closely related to the life of the earth." The computerizations of *Ally McBeal*, however, shift attention from the lower body to the upper body, and the head becomes the primary point of focus. Ally's distortions not only disintegrate the distinctions between inner and outer but also follow the call of "a resistant feminism [that] must seek to explore the body anew" (Shildrick, 1997, p. 9). The grotesque features ultimately reorient desires from the genital to the emotional, again advancing a mind/body mergence.

In his writings about the genre of the novel, Bakhtin (1981) emphasizes that the novel is unique in that it forever changes, while other literary forms like the epic or the tragedy adhere much more closely to established conventions. With regard for the hero of a novel, Bakhtin (1981) says that two prerequisite characteristics usually apply. First, the hero should boast a combination of the

positive and negative as well as the serious and the absurd. In addition, the hero should appear as an evolving individual who continuously learns from life and alters attitudes accordingly. Ally possesses both of these traits. She is a successful, Harvard-educated lawyer who freely expresses her emotions via physical animation. Making her daily life decisions, Ally negotiates the multiple balances of third wave feminism: career/family, political/personal, public/private.

Nevertheless, *Ally McBeal* offers only glimpses of the potential transformation of women and public space. Television is, after all, a temporary illusion. Adding to this ephemeral nature is the ramified realization that the emotional releases remain invisible to other characters in the storyworld. Only the one experiencing the mood and the audience viewing the program know the physical presentation of emotion has occurred. So, the computerized caricatures ultimately remain locked in a liminal space, neither of *Ally McBeal's* storyworld nor the real world. As Braidotti (1994, p. 6) advises, "The practice of successive poses or masquerades per se has no automatic subversive effect; as Judith Butler lucidly warns us, the force of the parodic mode consists precisely in striving to avoid flat repetitions, which bring about political stagnation." Indeed, these particular characters are anything but flat.

Ally McBeal—in the spirit of Bakhtin's carnivalesque—uses the humor derived from the caricatures to intimately examine the place of women within contemporary Western culture and to redirect attention to the female body with the added dimensions of intellect and emotion. The program offers a vision of

the contemporary woman as both serious and funny. Ally is deeply personal, yet she resonates with diverse women across boundaries of age and stages of feminist philosophy. This convergence of humans and computerization presents a conception of femaleness beyond the traditional mind/body dichotomy to an integrated self-reflexive whole.

Dow (1996) admits that the presentation of feminism on television has evolved in many ways. Nevertheless, it seems that she and others remain concerned that the political consequences of televisual representations of women do not extend far enough. Specifically, Dow's (1996, p. 209) argument is this:

> Television entertainment, for the most part, has taken this idea in precisely the opposite direction in representing feminism: the political is personal, it tells us, as a set of political ideas and practices is transformed into a set of attitudes and personal lifestyle choices. Feminist politics become feminist identity. Feminist identity, in turn, is defined by appearance, by job, by marital status and by personality, not by political beliefs or political practice.

hooks (1993, p. 38) echoes this when she pleads, "I want people to advocate feminism as a politics. Feminism is perceived as a lifestyle, as something you become rather than something you *do*."

Lifestyle, although it may seem superficial to some, *is* political; it is how one governs oneself. Similarly, the comic caricature sequences of *Ally McBeal* also have political implications. They allow the program to address serious concerns such as religion and feminism, sexual harassment in the workplace, legal consequences of infidelity, and social concerns about lesbian parenthood in a humorous manner. The argument that lifestyle feminism and *Ally McBeal's*

caricatures may trivialize the political concerns of women deserves merit. However, Bakhtin (1981, p. 23) helps to assuage this apprehension when he suggests that a more whimsical approach to serious issues might prove beneficial since "Laughter is a vital factor in laying down that prerequisite for fearlessness without which it would be impossible to approach the world realistically."

Ally's face turns fire-engine red and sizzles. Richard's tongue rolls two feet out of his mouth and drips saliva. Ling's body morphs into an evil alien, and Nelle's blonde locks spring loose as Richard applies knee-pit action. Georgia walks around with a knife sticking out of her back. Ally bites off a nagging feminist's nose and spits it onto a nearby door window, or she spins out of control as she flushes herself down the toilet. A garbage truck in an anonymous alley pitches various characters into dumpsters. Ally licks cappuccino foam off of George's chin. A cuckoo clock chimes 3 o'clock on John's forehead. *Ally McBeal* flaunts thought-provoking images of females and males who escape the confines of patriarchal poise, craft new conceptions of power/knowledge, and embrace emotional expression.

[1] For an overview of this discussion, see Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*.

[2] The prefix "post" proves especially problematic when coupled with feminism since "post" often indicates a break with that which is "posted." See Brooks (1997).

[3] For instance, see *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic* (1991), edited by Dale M. Bauer and Susan Jaret McKinstry, as well as Kirkham and Skeggs (1998) and Jaye Berman (1991).

[4] The unisex bathroom of *Ally McBeal* is, of course, an ambiguous setting that refuses to be strictly defined as either private or public. Restrooms are typically private domains, divided and coded according to sex. However, one might also consider *Ally's* unisex to be public, since both sexes use the facility.

[5] The works of Dow (1996), Gray (1994), and Kirkham and Skeggs (1998) elaborate the discussion of women and comedy, especially as depicted in popular media.

[6] Bakhtin's critics argue that carnival did not communicate any effective statements about society since authority figures ultimately decided when the festivals would occur. Regardless of the spirit displayed during masquerade, the populace gained no permanent power or liberation. According to Stallybrass and White (1986, p. 19), one of the key dilemmas of carnival is its "uncritical populism (carnival often violently abuses and demonizes weaker, not stronger, social groups—women, ethnic and religious minorities, those who 'don't belong'—in a process of *displaced abjection*)." Similar concerns have been expressed about *Ally McBeal* since a man pens all the facets of the show. However, if audience members view the fantasy visuals in the context of historic carnival (change and possibility) coupled with contemporary feminist body politics (body as empowerment, not impediment), the animated portrayal accepts a positive spin.

CHAPTER 2: SOUTH PARK

"I want to do a line of toys called 'The Better Tomorrow Toys.' They're going to be designed so that if a child had an IQ below a certain level, they wouldn't survive the toy. So you weed out the gene pool at a young age. Stupid kids are not nearly as dangerous as stupid adults, so let's take them out when they're young."
~Brian Walker (a.k.a. Rocket Guy), quoted in
Chuck Palahniuk: Stranger Than Fiction~

In the fall flurry of back-to-school excitement, parents annually purchase academic supplies for their children. A staple in the 1970s was a product known as Mead's Trapper Keeper, a handy binder that housed all the wares students required in a comfortable-to-carry case. Serving as an icon of elementary efficiency, the Trapper Keeper survives time as the title and topic *du jour* of one *South Park* episode. Both Kyle and Cartman acquire Dawson's Creek Trapper Keepers; however, Cartman owns the far superior Ultra Keeper Trapper Keeper that boasts overblown options: copy machine, compact-disc player, flat screen television, voice recognition, Onstar, and a privacy protection system in the form of metal spikes that pierce through the hands of anyone other than the owner.

Soon, a cyborg from the future posing as a student named Bill Cosby informs the children of South Park that Cartman's nifty notebook must be destroyed before it annihilates humankind. Cartman, known for his stubborn narcissism, refuses to heed this advice and unwittingly allows the power of technology to unfold. Reminiscent of *2001: A Space Odyssey* but bearing an updated *Terminator* skin, this *South Park* plot pits technology against humanity as

it explores the evolution of modern society. The Trapper Keeper assimilates Cartman and creates a man-machine mutiny that absorbs everyone in its wake; the ultimate goal is to merge with other computers, incorporate human life (consequently dissolving human power), and take over the world. It is only when the notebook digests Rosie O'Donnell that it becomes sick, weak, and vulnerable, allowing Kyle the opportunity to sabotage the supercomputer by removing the CPU and save civilization by restoring supremacy to human beings.

Such a tale presents just one of *South Park's* "lessons" that weave together elements of the body, power, knowledge, and excess as life's logic (and occasional lack thereof) reveals itself via the corporal and cerebral experiences of schoolchildren. This chapter examines the primetime cartoon as a cultural text that juxtaposes the fetiparous physical and mature mental; the immature rather than the mature of *South Park* emerge as the rational thinkers and thereby possess the power to amend extreme circumstances. Before arriving at this observation, however, the chapter presents the evolution of the show from innovative inception to postmodern pageantry that illustrates animated body images in shifting narrative contexts, which in turn expose the power dimension. Postmodernism informs narrative observations and close readings that reveal power/knowledge/body intersections within the televisual text of *South Park*. Ultimately, the *South Park* matrix and synthesis offer implications of these intersections in the larger culture.

The *South Park* Storyworld

Alien anal probes. Beefcake. Cheesy Poofs. Episodic death. Potty mouth. Talking poo. These are just a few of the topics that raise eyebrows, incite laughter, and awaken the American consciousness. It all started on August 13, 1997, on the Comedy Central network when a phenomenon called *South Park* debuted. One popular press writer says the show is "the latest giant asteroid to slam into American pop culture" (Ressner, 1998, p. 74). The success of the program bestowed virtually instant fame upon its late twentysomething creators from Colorado: Matt Stone and Trey Parker. Both of the artists attended the University of Colorado; Stone majored in math and film, and Parker was expelled for missing too many classes.

After college, Stone and Parker moved to Los Angeles to attempt to crack into the film scene. They succeeded. The duo created an animated short entitled "The Spirit of Christmas" that caught the attention of Brian Graden. At the time, Graden was a Fox TV executive, and he asked Stone and Parker to update the short so he could send it out as a video holiday card. Soon, "Spirit" circulated throughout Hollywood, titillating several power players. The rest is "pretty kewl" (as Cartman would say) history.

The animated 30-minute show revolves around four elementary schoolchildren: Stan Marsh, Kyle Broflovski, Kenny McCormic, and Eric Cartman. Stan is a generic all-American kid, although he vomits every time he attempts to kiss a girl. He appears to be the most stunned at his friend Kenny's redundant death, shouting, "Oh my god! They killed Kenny!" Kyle is Jewish and blurts the

token "You bastard!" that follows Stan's reaction when Kenny dies. Of the group, he tends to be the most reflective and do the most soul-searching. Kenny is poor and his speech is unintelligible, muffled by his orange parka; he meets a disturbing demise in virtually every episode during the first several seasons. Finally, Cartman is fat, munches Cheesy Poofs on a regular basis, and tends to be the most crass of the group. On a visual level, the children look just like normal kids. The animation is simple, rounded, and (although a bit more crude) reminiscent of such innocent favorites as *Charlie Brown*. However, the shock arrives once the children begin to speak. Profanity fills their sentences as they converse among themselves and with others about topics including but certainly not limited to sex, war, drugs, aliens, cloning, hunting, religion, euthanasia, and homosexuality. Indeed, the subject matter with which the animated children deal strongly conflicts with their orbicular, cutesy, construction-paper-cutout appearances. As Dunlap (1998, p. 34) points out, "It's the juxtaposition of that simple animation with the content that makes [*South Park*] so edgy." If ratings and retail sales of *South Park* merchandise serve as any indication, fans flock to the edge.

Literature Review

Scholarly comment serves to interpret this edge and includes multiple viewpoints about *South Park*. Gardiner (2000) offers insight about market masculinity and consumer resistance in her comparative analysis of *South Park* and performance art (in particular, the Blue Man Group). Using multiple moments of trivia from both the television cartoon and the performance piece,

she argues that these popular texts manifest a new masculinity that revolves around expulsive anality. Consumer culture catalyzes this contemporary characteristic as a "resistance to being positioned as passive, sexually objectified consumers"; more specifically, it is "a realigned anality that is neither the obsessive, hoarding anality of the bourgeoisie nor the polymorphously sensual anality of the Bakhtinian folk" (Gardiner, 2000, p. 258). Whether it be the explosive diarrhea suffered by *South Park* characters or the oozing orifices of the Blue Man Group, male audience members have perhaps discovered a creative—albeit childish—mode of counteracting consumer culture's commands.

Rhodes (2002) echoes this theme of the capitalistic impulse in his examination of how *South Park* critiques corporate powerhouses. He reflects upon an episode in which a local coffee shop owner, Mr. Tweek, stands to lose his business with the impending introduction of international chain Harbucks (an obvious spin on Starbucks) to the colorful Colorado community. Considering carnival constructs as they might inform organizational theory, Rhodes (2002, p. 305) suggests that popular culture texts contribute a supplemental form of critique that "work[s] to parody and relativise power—to always suggest alternatives and keep power in check. Such critique is ambivalent in that it does not send a 'message' that stands over the narrative, but rather it laughs at a world to which it belongs." Overwhelmingly, the critical enterprise of *South Park* engages a satirical twist at every narrative turn (Martinez, 2003). The delivery of

the satire usually issues forth with scabrous sarcasm that piques problems when parents realize that the show's principal characters resonate with their progeny.

Throughout media history, the socio-political prompt has been to protect youthful innocence from controversial content, especially when it centers around sex and violence. Advocacy groups such as the Parents Television Council argue that *South Park* offers nothing valuable to the media programming mix ("*South Park*: Entertainment," 1998). The abject nature of the show (rude language, bodily excretions, cultural taboos) signals a potential social failure since kids are being exposed to adult life—both fictionally as the characters or literally as the viewers—too early in their development (Quigley, 2000). Nevertheless, some authors modify this apprehension and propose a more positive reading of the adult-oriented cartoon which children find so entertaining.

Assuming a pedagogical position, Nixon (1999) considers elements that comprise the "transgressive edge" of *South Park* that factor into the show's popularity with preteens and adolescents. Nixon observes children who watch the cartoon and forms some productive perspectives about key narrative components that naysayers fail to find. Her central argument involves Kenny, the character who dies virtually every episode. Nixon (1999, p. 14) proposes that the parka-muffled character signals the "well-known mythic pattern of the literary hero's death, rebirth, and renewal" and evokes the habitual, predictable, and pleasurable nature of nursery rhymes and bedtime stories. Stevens (2001) complements the constructive context of *South Park* (along with other popular

culture tools such as music and movies) in children's educational evolution. She argues that intelligently integrating (what some may consider) inappropriate material into middle-school curricula actually invites student interaction with and involvement in sensitive subjects such as imperialistic themes, political correctness, and racial discrimination.

Chaney (2004) undertakes an analysis of contemporary cartoons, including *South Park*, to illustrate how they appropriate blackness and vaunt whiteness. Focusing on the flexibility of the voice-over talent to mimic multiple ethnicities, he argues that the creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone allow themselves to traverse wider totemic terrain than they do Isaac Hayes, the voice of Chef, the only recurrent black character. Parker speaks both whiteness and blackness while Hayes speaks only blackness; subsequently, *South Park* reinforces the superiority of white subjects. According to Chaney (2004, p. 176), the cartoon "get[s] away with spoofing raced characters by seeming to spoof all stereotypical identities [and] polarizes possible positions, binarizing according to the dictates of the same hegemonic system of difference that it seems to be critiquing in total, but which it is really only critiquing in part."

To date, scholarly explorations of *South Park* have focused on consumer resistance, capitalistic impulses, pedagogical implications, and racial representations. This chapter elaborates the cartoon's conversation with a consideration of how the show relativises and suggests alternatives to hegemonic power structures. Popular press writer Norris (1998, p. 66) notes that "Somehow, *South Park* must speak to some hunger deep within us, must reaffirm

some basic truths about humanity. That, or we're truly a nation of retards." This televisual text certainly counteracts the classic cartoon context in American culture by embedding controversial subjects in an animated form. It is precisely this complex combination—of mature material presented in puerile prose—which makes *South Park* so compelling. The verbal-visual contradiction boldly highlights the cartoon's own constructedness, a characteristic often associated with postmodernity.

The Postmodern Park

Although postmodernism (like all "posts") stems from modernism, many scholars suggest that it rejects several, if not all, core concepts of its predecessor and often refers to an "epochal rupture" from the modernist movement (Antonio & Kellner, 1994). Espousing the "progressive union of scientific objectivity and politico-economic rationality," the modern dialectic touts bureaucracy, industrialization, urban growth, corporate power, mass communication, scientific advancement, and technological development (Boyne & Rattansi, 1990, p. 5). While the modernist milieu spans many areas and attributes, this research privileges only a few of its essential elements: reason, metanarrative, subjectivity, and boundary.

Modernism asserts that rational processes represent progress. Science engages knowledge that is neutral and establishes objective, universal truths (metanarratives) for society. The subject, in modernist theory, also possesses these impartial and ordered characteristics. Modernity promotes the uniqueness of the individual and lauds the creation of unique art. Subsequently,

in the modernist framework, there exist distinct boundaries between hieratic and demotic culture; artifacts on the high end of the spectrum—usually those created by real "artists"—receive attention and celebration in intellectual circles, while those at the low end hold no real perceived power or promise. Interestingly, Boyne and Rattansi (1990, p. 13) characterize modernity as a "compound of futurism, nihilism, conservatism, and revolution, a contradictory celebration and condemnation of technology, and a thoroughly fearful invitation of social change."

Postmodernity admonishes this apprehension and generally opposes the central tenets of modernism. It dismantles the traditional conception of reason in favor of knowledge that is local, partial, and contingent, thereby rejecting the universal truth paradigm of modernism. Metanarratives melt into manifold mélanges of reality. Rather than mold to hegemonic codes of being-in-the-world, subjects assume a self-reflexive and self-referential mode. Accordingly, postmodernism perceives the world as fragmented and pluralistic, containing multiple discourses which elide the traditional conception of a single reality. The former dominant culture ethos dissolves as boundaries (e.g., cultural, political, sexual, sociological) blur. Confines between elitist and popular culture collapse as grand narratives decline and new forms of sensemaking circulate.

Reason Revamped

Part of the postmodern revamping of reason is that multiple local *truths* have replaced universal *truth*. The cultural project of postmodernism is committed to heterogeneity, fragmentation, and difference (Boyne & Rattansi,

1990). Totalizing theories yield to plurality and competing discourses. As such, previously manifest metanarratives no longer boast the believability or possess the power they once did since individual adults draw from personal characteristics and experiential knowledge for their own interpretations in an effort to advocate "pluralism in morals, politics, and epistemology" and celebrate "local canons of rationality" (Lovibond, 1990, p. 155). Still, some collective conceptions cater to the lives of children in the lore surrounding certain popular mythologies: Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy.

South Park addresses the consequences of these tales in "The Tooth Fairy's TATS 2000." In this episode, Cartman receives two dollars from the tooth fairy, prompting the kids to steal teeth from underneath the pillows of other children; the ultimate goal is to place all the teeth under Cartman's pillow so they can save enough money to purchase a Sega videogame system. After the 112th tooth, Cartman's mother reveals the truth: the tooth fairy is not real but rather is an adult construct intended for nothing more than childhood pleasure. The tooth fairy, the Easter bunny, and Santa Claus are all lies for fun. Cartman of course shares this newfound knowledge with his friends, and the death of the tooth fairy "metanarrative" sends Kyle into a postmodern existential tailspin. Kyle enters a typical postmodern dilemma in which he doubts the reality of anything and everything, including himself; he muses that perhaps he, too, only exists in his parents' reality and indeed has no self to call his own. He has no option but to succumb to the "postmodern viewpoint that everything is appearance, that 'truth' was always a species of self-promoting fiction, and that scepticism misses

the point since it still makes a big dramatic scene of this belated discovery" (Norris, 1990, p. 128). Kyle seeks to resolve his cognitive dissonance (perhaps to locate new metanarratives to replace the former ones lost to his problematic postmodern swirl) by reading books entitled *Descartes, Taoism and Zen Philosophy*, and *Space-Time and Quantum Theory*. Nevertheless, utter nonsense often underlies *South Park* narratives, evident in the periphery with cues like the "alphabet" poster hanging above the blackboard in the kids' classroom—DiOsMiOhAnMoToDoHo—as well as a school-bus ride to China for one of the children's fieldtrips.

The reorienting of reason in postmodernity shines again in "Thanksgiving Special," which reveals Cartman attempting to write lyrics for the school's Thanksgiving play about Helen Keller. To better tap into her life experience, he stifles his senses of sight with a blindfold and sound with headphones and spirals into a mind-melt montage—another postmodern trait. Cartman sees what he says he always sees when he closes his eyes, and the sequence footage is actual rather than animated: an ice cream sundae, a skull in the sand, bombs falling, an evil mime, "go dead be dead" written in red (blood) on aged wallpaper, a riot scene, a fish eye, a mushroom cloud, a snake head, and a mouse eating another mouse. Such a construction of chaos in the mind of an elementary child points toward the jarring jumble of media images that dominate the postmodern era.

Subjectivity Self-Referenced

Television is perhaps the most everyday experience and the most celebrated storyteller of contemporary culture. It transmits cultural norms, knowledge, and mores both within and among genders, generations, and ethnicities. Since television serves such a common connection for virtually everyone, it has conscripted the characteristic of self-referentiality, a "technique naturalized by the omnipresence of television in [the] culture" (Dunne, 1992, p. viii). Self-referentiality is a subtle or extreme "italicizing [of] conventions" that signifies the presence of the message-maker. It modifies the viewer's liminal suspension of disbelief by relating that the real world plays a relevant role in the creation—as well as the consumption—of the storyworld. As Dunne (1992, p. 11) describes, "Because of the increasing immersion of contemporary Americans in all forms of mediation,...the rhetorical intention of the self-references has shifted considerably, shifting away from the artist's self-expression and toward an affirmation of the mediated community that is embracing both creator and audience." Indeed, creators Parker and Stone—themselves thirtysomethings ensconced in heavy doses of mediated culture—invoke mass media self-reflexivity as the bedrock of *South Park* comedy and critique.

Trendy television teems throughout *South Park* episodes. Several popular press writers (Katz, 1998; Klinghoffer, 1998; Marin, 1997; Martin, 1998) maintain that *South Park* combines elements of various animated programs—*Beavis and Butthead, Charlie Brown, Ren and Stimpy, The Simpsons*, and, more generally, those "dreadfully pedantic" Saturday morning cartoons—to suit its own

purposes. When watching *South Park* (or any other television program), viewers may summon what Marc (1984) calls their "electronic shadow memory," which expresses how people have experienced various televisual devices and established expectations about what they watch based on those cultivated responses. Examples include steam used to suggest a serious plot enhancement or music to convey moods of elation, frustration, or trepidation.[1]

What viewers come to expect from *South Park* is a deconstruction and then a (re)presentation of itself: of its own origination and position within the media culture. This "deconstructive approach...is less method than perspective, a kind of interpretive self-consciousness" (Agger, 1992, p. 95). *South Park* proves successful at self-awareness. "A Very Crappy Christmas" (an episode dedicated to the video Christmas card that resulted in the creation of the series) highlights *South Park's* self-reflexivity as the kids create their own animated film using construction-paper cutouts of themselves shot at a tedious one frame per second. When the kids show their completed project to the community, the film breaks and burns onscreen, invading the liminal space of the viewers, reminding them that they, too, are absorbed in a fiction that could disintegrate. The show further parades its own constructedness with *Fat Abbott* (a play on *Fat Albert*), an animated show filled with profanity that the kids watch on television; they punctuate their storyworld viewing with random comments about the popularity of potty-mouth in contemporary cartoons, echoing a sentiment that swirls in the real-world pop press about *South Park*.[2] Via this nod to its critics, *South Park* illustrates some of the "elements that constitute self-referentiality on television: a

shared sense of the medium's presence, of its artificial arrangement of highly discrete segments, of its possible discontinuity, and of its inextricable involvement in commerciality" (Dunne, 1992, p. 26).

Mounting the mirror for more introspection, *South Park* exposes one of its own cultivated expectations: that of Kenny's looming death. It is of course amusing that the first episode in which Kenny escapes death is the first season's Christmas show (a traditional time for the selfless spirit), which revolves around the kids prepping the school stage for their politically-correct holiday play. Kenny has to unplug the twinkle lights, whose wires lie in a puddle of water. He succeeds. He then has to climb a ladder—which hovers over a tank of hungry sharks—to remove the offensive Christmas star from the top of the tree. He again succeeds. As the episode concludes, the kids comment that "Something feels...unfinished." Kenny survives with a resounding (although muffled) "Woohoo!" [3] Since viewers are well acquainted with the *South Park* convention of Kenny's death, this program indulges a "new rhetorical community based on a mutual recognition of conventional devices [which] thus allows the genre to continue even though some supposedly necessary illusions have been deconstructed" (Dunne, 1992, p. 13). This attention to and consciousness of the tactics of television highlight *South Park's* position within a postmodern media environment, where the division between reality and storyworld dims.

Boundaries Blurred

Similar to Western-stipulated society, the characters of *South Park* live in a media-centric environment.[4] Western civilization is immersed in media sounds

and images, and the kids of *South Park* demonstrate this with a piquant pastiche of pop culture particulars that include music, film, television, news, and celebrity. The postmodern term "pastiche" originates from "pasticcio," a word that describes an Italian mixture of various food ingredients. Members of music, architecture, and literature communities later assumed the term to reference a blend of creative styles and techniques. Jameson (1998) suggests that the postmodern element of pastiche reflects the fusion of the fine with the frivolous, a farrago of high and low cultural components. Neither original nor copy, "pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language; but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse" (Jameson, 1983, p. 114).[5] Such a statement might imply that pastiche lacks purpose, yet others argue that it may indeed prove useful as a tool for cultural critique (Hoesterey, 2001). It is precisely in this critical enterprise that *South Park* succeeds so well: the program presents its own form of postmodern pastiche that highlights—often to hilarity—contemporary American culture. Following good postmodern form, the script "assumes a thoroughly mediated knowledge of other cultural icons" (Dunne, 1992, p. 44). The show's matrix of media culture, news events, and pop icons (albeit juxtaposed with construction-paper characters spouting verbal pyrotechnics) blurs the boundary between reality and storyworld.

Mainstream music allusions from various genres energize episodes of *South Park* as Cartman gets Alanis Morissette songs stuck in his head and hallucinates pink Christina Aguilera monsters. Transforming into Jennifer Lopez,

Cartman's hand (puppet) strikes success with "her" hit, "Taco Flavored Kisses." The Sisters of Mercy play a battle of the bands and Radiohead visits South Park. Primus prompts the theme song for the program, and of course, the voice of Isaac Hayes reverberates in many episodes, conjuring the theme from *Shaft* with its hyper-masculinity and seductive sensuality.

Moving on to the visual media, feature film filters into *South Park* when Mr. Garrison (the children's teacher) finds Mr. Twig (his puppet alter-ego) boiling in a pot of water on the stove, reminiscent of *Fatal Attraction*. Cartman recalls *Full Metal Jacket* when he imitates the prostitute that will please for only a modicum of American money. Television references also prove plenteous and thus divulge the dominance of the medium in the characters' lives, a reflex also rampant in reality, evident in the idea that postmodernism "celebrates popular culture unashamedly, failing to make distinctions (which are rejected as modernist and mandarin)" (Agger, 1992, p. 171). Mr. Mackey (the children's guidance counselor) gets high and watches *Teletubbies*. The A-Team goes to India to rescue him and then admits him to the Betty Ford Clinic for rehabilitation. Spoofing reality television, *The Krazy Kenny Show* in "Fat Camp" underscores the urge for people to do anything for money; Kenny also appears on Howard Stern's show with Tom Green and Johnny Knoxville from MTV's *Jackass* in this episode.

South Park's pastiche deployed as cultural critique functions forcefully in its satire of timely themes and news events. Dunne (1992, p. 33) observes that the "continual shocks of recognition elicited from the viewer by the parody result

in a laughing acknowledgement," as evinced when Cartman attempts to escape the FBI in Kenny's Go-Go Action Bronco as television crews hover overhead, recalling O.J. Simpson's infamous white Bronco chase.[6] Another episode presents a parody of the Elian Gonzalez situation in the context of Romanian quintuplets from the Cirque du Cheville—a play on Cirque du Soleil. Mr. Garrison oversees voting for the kindergarten presidential election, which demands as many recounts as the 2000 presidential election; Rosie O'Donnell eventually arrives in South Park to offer subjective objectivity.[7]

A final dimension of *South Park's* pop culture pastiche emerges in the cultural icons overtly woven into the narratives. Wendy has a poster of Russell Crowe in her bathroom and Mr. Garrison's "friend" Mr. Twig has a poster of Leonardo DiCaprio above his bed. Kathie Lee Gifford visits South Park to present an environmental essay contest award to Cartman. Jesus jumps for joy when Robert Smith of The Cure saves South Park from Barbra Streisand. Celebrities permeate every part of the Park.

The media culture is as pervasive in *South Park* as it is in reality. Certainly, the program relies on the audience's immersion in pop experiences to achieve its full potential to make a critical comment. Even within this fictional media text, mainstream music, feature film, trendy television, iconic identities, and exoteric events suffuse the storyworld; the result is one of postmodernity's key qualities: a blend of reality and fiction in which the boundary between the two blurs. In ascertaining Baudrillard's essence of postmodernism, Norris (1990, p. 121) describes the following:

> It is no longer possible to maintain the old economy of truth and representation in a world where 'reality' is entirely constructed through forms of mass-media feedback, where values are determined by consumer demand (itself brought about by the endless circulation of meanings, images and advertising codes), and where nothing could serve as a means of distinguishing true from merely true-seeming (or ideological) habits of belief.

South Park presents viewers with a wry reality that closely resembles but indeed is not their own, a fuzzy fiction filled with an authentic pop culture collage that is comical yet concurrently critical. Consciously or not, it subscribes to the idea that cultural studies "lays bare the deceptions encoded in these dominant cultural artifacts" (Agger, 1992, p. 145).[8]

South Park reveals the real world as beholden to mainstream media via characters who depend on crutches like Maureen McGovern's song "The Morning After" to kill a brawny succubus or the sitcom *Facts of Life* to teach sex education. The cartoon (re)presents all sides of controversial issues—such as private pedophilia, corporate capitalism, and religious rudiments—with an insolent tone. Furthermore, the show recognizes that celebrities (e.g., Celine Dion, Sydney Poitier, and Barbra Streisand) serve as contemporary gods and kicks them off their pedestals, tossing them into banality. The *South Park* storyworld creates meaning as its narrative subjects and situations weave a critique that subverts hegemonic conceptions of power and knowledge.

Power/Knowledge/Body Intersections

When my body leaves me / I'm lonesome for it. / I've got
eyes, ears, / nose and mouth / and that's all.
Eyes / keep on seeing the / feather blue of the
cold sky, / mouth takes in / hot soup, / nose
smells the frost,

ears hear everything, all / the noises and absences, / but body
goes away to I don't know where / and it's lonesome to drift /
above the space it / fills when it's here.

—Denise Levertov, "Gone Away"

Conceptions of the body as a site for cultural meaning span the spectrum. For instance, on one end, naturalistic theories contend that the body is an active generator of social meanings. On the other, social constructionist perspectives counter that the body is more passive, shaped by culture rather than shaping culture. With social constructionist leanings, Shilling (1993, p. 81) suggests that society "is brought so far into the body that the body disappears as a phenomenon that requires detailed...investigation in its own right." The social directly influences the somatic as collective anxieties present themselves on the form of the body. This thinking echoes Levertov's poem since it describes a body which succumbs to cultural inscriptions and transformations that cast the original form to near invisibility. Such a position proves useful in situating the *South Park* cartoon bodies in contemporary power/knowledge discourse.

Power/Knowledge and the Animated Body

Many people commonly associate animation with Saturday morning children's programming.[9] Recently, though, programs such as *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, *Beavis and Butthead*, *King of the Hill*, and *South Park* have launched a primetime persona. Dunlap (1998, p. 34) refers to this trend as a new wave of adult animation, a "new breed...unlike animation before it, [that] is pushing the limits of respectability and taste, shocking some viewers and grabbing the attention of many others." Still, while such a comment rings true, the virtuality of

South Park's animated body unshackles the show to address difficult issues in a more approachable manner than reality might tolerate. The construction-paper-cutout aesthetic of *South Park* justifies only a two-dimensional existence for the characters.[10] Nevertheless, the narratives regularly present situations which mobilize a hyperanimated body—a subject that is larger than its two-dimensional life—that mimes power/knowledge relations.

One instance occurs in the *South Park* episode entitled "Ike's Wee Wee." During this story, the children learn that Ike (Kyle's baby brother) has to undergo a "circumstision" as mandated by Jewish tradition and celebrated at a Bris. After learning the particulars of the procedure ("They're going to chop off Ike's wee wee!"), Kyle embarks on a mission to save his little brother. Kyle's parents urge Stan to soothe Kyle's nerves and convince him that the circumcision is harmless. Their argument seems sane and innocuous enough until the parents' bodies morph into monsters with fangs, devil horns, distorted eyes, and large scissors (in place of a hand).[11] They demand in a demonic voice that Stan sway Kyle into accord "lest we cut off pee pee Stan." The children's fear of the parents' power to injure their bodies manifests in monstrous morphing of the animated adults.

This episode illustrates well the power relationship Foucault identifies between the body and the medical gaze. Institutions of medicine typically treat the body as an object, something that is premature, sick, pregnant, healthy, wounded, terminal, old, or dead. Little attention is paid to the cognition and emotion—indeed, the *person*—attached to the object. Medical professionals

apply an objectivity and detachment to the treatment of the body since it is nothing more than an object to be disciplined.

It is this disciplined medical gaze that Kyle, Stan, Kenny, and Cartman lack. At first, they have no idea what a circumcision is; they cannot even pronounce the word. They certainly have no capacity to comprehend that it is just one example of a "technological gaze [that] refashions the material body to reconstruct it in keeping with culturally determined ideals" (Balsamo, 1996, p. 58). They seek explanation from Chef, the only adult who honestly clarifies confusing topics for the kids. However, in this instance, even he refuses to explain after Cartman divulges that his mother taught him to call his penis his "fireman." Chef is both confounded and disgusted by the fact that the children's parents fail to foster a home environment that includes open communication as a foundation.

When the kids finally learn what a circumcision entails (Stan asks around), their newfound knowledge splashes fear on their faces and brews screams in their throats. As youth, they are still exploring their embodiment and have not yet cultivated the discipline that the medical gaze demands. Kyle sends his brother Ike away on a train to escape his impending doom. It is only when the parents offer a weak excuse ("We snip it so it looks bigger.") that the children's resistance concedes. Behind this random rationalization, though, lies a more compelling frame from the annals of Freud's (1939, p. 192) psychoanalysis: "Circumcision is the symbolical substitute of castration, a punishment which the primeval father dealt his sons long ago out of the fullness of his power; and

whosoever accepted this symbol showed by so doing that he was ready to submit to the father's will, although it was at the cost of a painful sacrifice."

A long-ago rite resounds in a contemporary cartoon. Initially, the adult body in *South Park* possesses power via its hyperanimation (monstrous morphing) that extends from a knowledge imbalance: the parents know that circumcision will not harm Ike, but the children have no medical lens through which to view the cutting of their core masculine appendage. Despite the immature logic in the adult argument advocating the snip, the kids eventually gain at least an awareness of the disciplining medical gaze, which will perhaps better prepare them to address it in the future.

Hyperanimation of the *South Park* body occurs in other less dire situations with no less dramatic expressions. One particular example is "Good Times With Weapons." This episode begins with the usual characters Stan, Kyle, Kenny, and Cartman at the county fair. Set among the glistening attractions is a "Martial Arts Weapons from the Far East" booth which immediately captures the children's attention and imaginations. Although the boys are underage and therefore ineligible to purchase the arms without parental approval, they convince the shop owner that their parents are dead and thereby release the restraint facing them.

Adorning their bodies with the weapons activates the state of hyperanimation, transforming their juvenile bodies into full-blown adult ninjas displayed in a spectacular widescreen anime style. This effect directly contrasts with the humorously simple dialog which expresses play. Generally, in their

normal animation, the children engage a mature rhetoric and reasoning that their adult counterparts lack. Aligned with this theme, the corporeal power produced by the hyperanimated mature state seems to rob them of their standard sensibility. The developed body inversely impacts the locus for logic.

Later in the narrative, the children's self-proclaimed sworn enemy, Professor Chaos (Butters in hyperanimated form), appears. His anime mode grants him the confidence to retaliate against those who have bullied him, and his repressed anger proves powerful. In a last ditch effort to trounce the professor's earth-shattering stomps, Kenny hurls one of his deadly ninja stars at Professor Chaos, plunging it directly into the eyeball of Butters. The seriousness of the situation releases the hyperanimated state for all of the kids as Butters lies squealing with his grievous injury.

Finding themselves in quite a dilemma (they do not want to go to the hospital since that would necessitate confessing their antics to their parents), the boys turn once again to their "enhanced" ninja analysis and conclude that dressing Butters as a dog and taking him to a geriatric veterinarian would serve a dual function: it would prevent them from getting into trouble for the weapons and provide Butters the medical attention that he needs. This ridiculous and elaborate scheme is uncharacteristic of the boys in their normal state, but the hyperanimated body holds a lingering illogical sway over them.

Butters wanders away and Stan, Kyle, Kenny, and Cartman employ their ninja directional senses to locate him back at the fair. They spot him stumbling in a shock-induced stupor, but unfortunately, between them and Butters lie all

the parents, watching an auction on stage. Cartman's hyperanimated body conveniently grants him the ninja power of invisibility, a power which coerces him to strip (clothing—even in the form of an imaginary costume—is never invisible in and of itself, of course) and "sneak" directly across the front of the stage.

The adults, never privy to or part of the hyperanimated imaginary body, behold a mass of Cartman stealthily slinking across the stage. He is naked, in front of a crowd, and on cable television. Butters also makes it to the stage and collapses. While the spectators disregard bleeding Butters, they gravitate to the public display of Cartman's penis, which outrages the community (much like Janet Jackson's nipple-crisis-wardrobe-malfunction during the Super Bowl half-time spectacle with its subsequent onslaught of media and public brouhaha). The scandal of his exposed sexual organ obfuscates the issue of Butters's blasted eyeball, which should demand immediate attention and concern. Here, Foucault's (1985, p. 206) concept of the disciplined sexual body surfaces, a body with the impulse "to mind one's own conduct when one is still very young, but also to look after the honor of younger men, when one has grown older." The compulsion to discipline is so strong in the mature mind that the adults cannot focus on that which needs to be noticed (Butters). The children, though, at last relieved of their hyperanimated state and the accompanying distraction from reason, realize the absurdity of ignoring the trauma of one kid for the sensationalism of another's genitalia.

Power/Knowledge and the Deviant Body

The South Park episode "Death" deals with the deviance of the elderly body. Stan's grandfather celebrates his 102nd birthday by wishing for death, specifically in the form of assisted suicide with the help of Stan. In the opening scene, Stan's family sings "Happy Birthday" as Grandpa sits in a wheelchair (which bears the aesthetic of a mobile highchair). Interestingly, plates are set for each family member except the grandfather. The patriarch, once a prominent provider for and contributor to the family and now a victim of time, is no longer worthy of a plate for his own birthday cake. Perhaps the most striking visual element is a bright yellow bib he wears that reads "Birthday Boy." Bibs typically adorn only babies, serving a disciplinary function as a barrier between stains and clothing; however, the bib remains on Grandpa throughout this episode, signifying the imminent return to the enigmatic pre-birth and post-death void from which everyone comes and to which everyone goes. The bright yellow color—usually suggesting vitality and well-being—of the bib sharply contrasts with his dull chocolate brown attire that accentuates his elderly age.

Balsamo (1996, p. 11) suggests that a contemporary reading of the vital (albeit still somewhat science-fictional in its attributes) body appears in the image of the cyborg, simply, "a coupling between a human being and an electronic or mechanical apparatus." In essence, Grandpa resembles the deviant body of a cyborg, permanently united with and reliant on his motorized wheelchair. Yet, he represents a rare breed of cyborg, one which defies the common cultural construct of the man-machine hybrid. The technology

supports his deteriorating human form but ultimately cannot liberate him from it. Subsequently, Grandpa's deviant cyborg state subverts the powerful discourse surrounding the technologically enhanced superhuman body. His is the elderly cyborg body that desires death, no longer able to relish life. Since his techno-body does not keep its promise of bodily transcendence, he turns to assisted suicide instead.

None of the adults in the storyworld will seriously address Grandpa's pleas for euthanasia (a word that literally translated means "good death"). Stan's family laughs him off with the aside, "Our silly Grandpa!" Such a dismissal seems typical in a discussion of death (much less euthanasia), considering that in "the present American cultural life-death value configuration, repression of death awareness and death anxiety are adaptive in the broadest sense of the term, and even necessary for the reduction of cognitive dissonance, created by the life-death antithesis created by the value system" (Schulz, 1980, pp. 250-251).

Stan and the rest of the children are the only people in the storyworld who seriously heed Grandpa's appeal for death. Sensing that assisting him with suicide would be wrong, the kids ask the adults if they should help Grandpa. Stan cannot ask his own parents since they went out of town to picket against a crude TV show, so he asks Chef, who evades the question. Jesus (who hosts a call-in public access show called *Jesus and Pals*) refuses to remark on the issue; even Christianity's major icon relinquishes the "right" to make a moral judgment. The storyworld presents a tamer overview of the impassioned political battle surrounding assisted suicide in reality.[12]

Stan recruits Kyle, Kenny, and Cartman to help him kill his grandfather, advising that "It has to look natural, or else we'll all get busted."[13] They fail in their attempts. Afterward, a ghost visits Grandpa. The spirit is Grandpa's grandfather, whom he assisted with suicide when he was a child. He warns Grandpa that he must wait to die of natural causes, or he will end up in limbo. In true *South Park* form, the narrative offers both sides of the controversy for conversation, laying some humorous fictional groundwork for debates such as the periodic work of Jack Kevorkian or the Terri Schiavo case which dominated network news coverage for a part of 2005.

The last scene reveals Grandpa sporting safari gear as he embarks on an adventure to Africa, where people die daily of natural causes like wild beasts. Stan and Kyle appear in the final frame, both laughing at the "silly Grandpa," ultimately spouting the warped adult sensibility. Still, Grandpa is not necessarily silly. He is the deviant cyborg body, trapped by the decay of human age, that reclaims its power based on knowledge linked to limbo.

Continuing the theme of an imperfect body meeting technology, "An Elephant Makes Love to a Pig" highlights the deviance of genetic engineering. It all begins when Kyle mail-orders a pet elephant from Africa, but his mother refuses to allow it in the house since it is too big. In school, the third-graders learn about an "exciting new science" called genetic engineering, which prompts a science fair project to create a pot-bellied elephant: Kyle wants to crossbreed his elephant with Cartman's pet pig Fluffy to produce a smaller elephant that he can keep inside the house.

The kids visit the South Park Cloning Ranch to determine what is possible. Although the four-assed monkeys, ostriches, and mongooses appear to be real, Cartman questions the validity of the genetic engineering enterprise when he sees that the ears of the bunny-fish are tied on with string. When Dr. Mephisto (the engineer) pokes Stan with a needle to extract blood without permission, the children flee the ranch, hollering "Genetic engineers are crazy!"

This narrative lends dimension to Foucault's conception of disciplining power. With the creation of the sheep Dolly (the first animal cloned from an adult mammary cell) and the progression of stem cell research, science is on the cusp of controlling or shaping the body in a myriad of ways. Normalizing power structures argue that "once a line is crossed, where human beings are created from asexual reproduction by copying the genotype of an existing human, then society will be unable to stop crossing more and more lines as it tumbles down the procreative slope" (Pence, 1998, p. 144). Instead of envisioning genetic engineering as evolutionary and positive, the conservative contingent does not believe humans should exercise power over nature. The progressive camp ignores conservative claims of technomadness and focuses on the promises of science to benefit the body, which may include (but are not limited to) providing a child for infertile, lesbian, or gay couples, preventing genetic diseases, and growing organs for transplantation (Glannon, 2001). South Park's Dr. Mephisto touts this side of the argument with the proclamation, "Genetic engineering lets us fix God's horrible mistakes, like Germans." He

elaborates his perspective with a grandiose vision that it may also end hunger, disease, pollution, and even war.

The debate erupts with the onset of what Rollin (1995, p. 2) refers to as "the Frankenstein thing" which holds the potential to "provide a Rosetta stone for deciphering ethical and social concerns relevant to genetic engineering." Dr. Mephisto creates a giant Stan mutant for his son's science fair assignment. By the time he realizes that the experiment has gone horribly awry, mutant Stan is already too powerful and breaks free from the ranch, wreaking havoc on the town by smashing windows, setting fires, and thumping townspeople. The ensuing chaos conjures science-fiction tales such as *Brave New World* or *The Matrix* that caution culture that it may be far better to be content with its hegemonic ideals rather than to rethink them.

The ironic twist arrives at the episode's conclusion with Dr. Mephisto's realization that consists of an admission and then an admonition: "I tried to play God, but I failed," and "Perhaps we shouldn't be toying with God's creations; perhaps we should just leave nature alone to its simple one-assed schematics." However, the doctor's hypocrisy shines when what he says and what he does directly contradict each other. Between his remarks, he shoots and kills mutant Stan to correct his mistake, and in this sense, he succeeds at playing God, just via a different instrument.

Oddly enough, Kyle, Stan, Cartman, and Kenny achieve a less destructive result under the guidance of Chef. They approach crossbreeding from the socialized, natural perspective by playing seductive music and getting the

elephant and pig inebriated enough that they have sex. In an even more deviant twist, however, Fluffy gives birth not to a pot-bellied elephant as anticipated, but rather a pig-Mr. Garrison. Their experiment also yields an unpredictable result, yet here it is Mr. Garrison's deviant desire of bestiality that serves as the variable, not science. This episode presents all intergenetic fusions—whether they are engineered or socialized—to be preposterous, along with the adults who steer the children in duplicitous directions.

Power/Knowledge and the Gendered Body

There exists an old adage that "boys will be boys," and the *South Park* episode "Proper Use of a Condom" illuminates just this notion. The narrative opens with Cartman's enlightenment proffered by 5th graders. He learns that dogs make "milk" and that he can milk a dog to the tune of a "Red Rocket!" chant. Eager to share his trick, he teaches Stan, Kyle, and Kenny how to do this. Stan rushes home to reveal his new knowledge with his parents, who happen to be hosting a book club and discussing imagery in Steinbeck's poetry. The vulgarity of Stan masturbating the pet dog in front of all the stunned guests soon shadows the poise of the book club attendees. Stan has no clue what he has done wrong, and his parents have no clue how to comfortably make him understand his gaffe.

Frustrated, the parents convene and determine that sex education should be taught in elementary school so they can avoid the burden of an awkward conversation at home. Even as early as 1941, similar themes circulated: "In a time of increasing public messages about sexuality and the

growth of a culturally diverse society, [perhaps] the schools could administer the sexuality of children better than could the parent" (Wagener, 1998, p. 154). Although they lack sexual experience, Ms. Choksondik and Mr. Mackey teach the sex ed classes. She is a virgin who squelches the girls' excitement about sex ed by inundating them with scary STD statistics and gory birth videos; he has not had intercourse in 21 years and cannot remember how he did it. Together, they extinguish any hope for informed guidance, and their ignorance inadvertently scares the children into a frenzy.

During gender discrete classes, the children learn about condoms and their necessity in preventing the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. They are taught to claim accountability for being "a normal male [or] female child whose bodily proclivities [can] be readily observed, not only by her/himself, but by others" (Wagener, 1998, p. 163). Realizing that the boys do not regularly wear condoms, the girls scream, flee their company, and refuse to allow them any reasonable proximity since they are afraid of catching any diseases. Such a frenzied female response to the sex act also appears in Balsamo's (1996, p. 38) discussion of how AIDS discourse portrays the female body: "Now that it is established that women can be infected, women's legacy as an inherently pathological, unruly, uncontainable, but essentially passive vessel returns to haunt her and render her again invisible within medical discourse." The girls simultaneously submit to and defy such an argument. They forge a stronghold for themselves and attack when the boys approach (the unruly female body), yet they rage against passivity and protect themselves (the active female

body). It is in this intersection that they must choose to either adopt the traditional passive feminine body that submits to the active male body, or pave a new path to galvanize their own power.

The boys, too, prove proactive in their initial rush to procure condoms at the drug store, where they encounter a pharmacist who almost refuses to sell them protection since he does not support children having sex. This exchange echoes contemporary socio-political discourse surrounding the dispensing of the morning-after pill to prevent pregnancy, as medicine with morals gains momentum under the current administration. Eventually, the boys get condoms and don them—all the time—in an effort to stop the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. When they finally learn that they only have to wear condoms during sex to protect themselves from the diseases the girls might have, the boys strike out to punish the girls for misleading them and a huge fight ensues. This shift in power ("males harbor disease and infect" to "females harbor disease and infect") is reminiscent of literature that privileges the male position, such as Foucault (1986, p. 112) notes in his exploration of early philosophical and medical reflections of sexuality: "there is the valorization of semen, of sperm....It gathers up all that is powerful in life and transmits it, thereby enabling us to cheat death. It is in the male that it reaches its greatest strength and its highest perfection. And it is this substance that gives him his superiority." This signals the segue to the narrative closure, which ultimately undermines the privilege of the male body-with-semen via the asinine antic in which Cartman, again, milks a dog.

In another episode entitled "Bebe's Boobs Destroy Society," the power of the gendered body is expressed in a more accessible way. The children's teacher, Ms. Choksondik, has died and the children are just returning from a two-week hiatus for mourning. During the time off, Bebe notices a significant change in her body: the development of two humble early adolescent breasts. It is not until she returns to school, though, that she begins to understand the power of her newly gendered body.

This knowledge unfolds when the boys begin to recognize her as suddenly smart, funny, and cool in a way that they never noticed before. The power that Bebe's boobs command increases, provoking primal competition among the boys. Bebe's gendered body has the power to turn the boys into apelike creatures, with drooped eyelids, hunched shoulders, and grunted speech; in fact, in their moments of Bebe-boob blindness, they possess no greater motivation than being with Bebe.

From a biological perspective, estrus is the driving force of sexual reproduction. Most typically used to describe the state of heat in female mammals, it signifies overwhelming—even frenzied—sexual desire as well as associated changes in the sexual organs. One of the defining qualities of human sexual interaction is the loss of estrus in the female. In her analysis of new models of physical anthropology, Haraway (1988, p. 231) elaborates, "As the result of a species-defining loss, sex...moved from the anatomically marked bodies of female and male animals to universal, unmarked human bodies. The social abstraction, gender, supplanted biological sex for both male and

female, as culture, the realm of deliberate action and choice, began its reorganization of the body." Humans, then, enjoy a freedom beyond what nature has granted in that they may select their sexual partners rather than succumbing to random mates.

Nevertheless, this episode of *South Park* recalls the instinctive, primitive response activated by biological drives. The boys, in their troglodytic condition, relinquish all power to the visibly-gendered feminine body of Bebe. Only she legitimizes the possibility of choice in sexual behavior; the boys have no option other than to be mesmerized even though they are too young to comprehend the potency of their sexual urges. As Foucault (1986, p. 106) explains, "experiencing this sting, even those animals that are incapable of understanding the purpose of Nature in her wisdom—because they are young, foolish (*aphrona*), or without reason (*aloga*)—do in fact accomplish it." The primal state of the boys overwhelms them yet simultaneously remains invisible to them.

The boys' reactions to Bebe prompt ripostes from Bebe's girlfriends. Contrary to the ideal of sisterhood unity mentioned in Miner and Longino (1987), the girls ridicule Bebe, calling her a "slut" and a "whore" for stealing all of the attention from the boys. Women have historically competed for the attention of men, usually via superficial devices such as hair, clothes, and personality, which seems logical in the past since women's lives were directly attached to men's (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1987). However, feminist arguments have destabilized the validity of this notion, as highlighted here, where the empowered developing female body invokes primal male behavior that competes for *her* attention.

Meanwhile, Bebe has to deal with the consequences of her naturally shifting body. Her developing breasts presage the approach of her menstrual cycle and its collusive social constructs: "Menarche represents the entrance into embodied womanhood in a society where women are framed by their reproduction and devalued, in part, also through sexualized cultural scripts attached to the body" (Lee & Sasser-Coen, 1996, p. 10). Bebe realizes the gravity of this and attempts to have a breast reduction on her premature, modest breasts in an effort to prevent unjustified preferential treatment for the rest of her life. She fears that if people just give her everything she wants and value her only for her breasts, she will grow up to be a "lame" person. The doctor refuses to grant her a reduction based on the argument that she is too immature to make such a decision; however he ardently advises that a breast augmentation would benefit her. In the end, Bebe dons a cardboard box that covers her chest and interrupts the trance. The boys finally realize that they were reacting not to Bebe as a person, but Bebe as a body, moreover, a gendered body. By recognizing the irrationality of instinct, they shatter the primordial spell and regain reason: girls are just girls, boobs or no boobs.

Power/Knowledge and the Grotesque Body

An episode entitled "Conjoined Fetus Lady" presents a particularly curious (de)formation of the gendered body. A rambunctious game of dodge ball leaves Kyle's nose bloody, so he has to visit the school nurse. South Park Elementary folklore foretells that Nurse Gollum is "hideously deformed" and "has tentacles and eats children for lunch"; consequently, trepidation torments Kyle.

Initially, the nurse seems as normal as anyone, with a kind countenance and character, in her white uniform decorated with the traditional red cross on her white cap. When she turns to fully face Kyle, however, she reveals the locus of her legend: attached to the side of her head is the dead fetus of her Siamese twin. It is interesting that the school nurse embodies such an odd affliction since the "baby is already a key site for the play of a dead power with and against the body of women: a perfect scene for the merger of technologies associated with the medicalization of the body, the investiture of desire with a code of prevention, and the production of designer babies equal to the possibilities of cultural genetics" (Kroker & Cook, 1986, p. 23). Nurse Gollum pursues a career in health, yet her monstrous malformation is the antithesis of wellbeing, a radical reminder about the scantiness of science in perfecting the human being, not to mention a poignant grotesque juxtaposition.

Despite her deformity, Nurse Gollum renders her grotesque body all but invisible. As she straightforwardly explains to Kyle, "I see you've noticed my disorder. I have a stillborn fetus growth attached to my head." To her, it exists only as a physical shell rather than a feature that focuses "on the inside/outside distinction in order to point to the inherently monstrous nature of the womb as well as the impossibility of ever completely banishing the abject from the human domain" (Creed, 1993, p. 49). In no way does she consider her existence to be wretched, defined by her flesh and flaws rather than her psyche and spirit; she instead claims to be quite a happy, secure person.

The adults of the South Park community cannot grasp the possibility that Nurse Gollum is indeed content and confident. Kyle's mother, Sheila, learns that the children make fun of the nurse, so she reads about the nurse's medical condition—conjoined twin myslexia—in her medical book *Freaks A-Z*. Sheila then invites Nurse Gollum over for dinner. The gathering features casual conversation infused with too many awkward silences as everyone gawks at the inert infant. Clearly, the dinner guests are vexed by the remnants of the womb, which "represents the utmost in abjection for it contains a new life form which will pass from inside to outside bringing with it traces of its contamination—blood, afterbirth, faeces" (Creed, 1993, p. 49). In the case of Nurse Gollum, her birth brought with it a somatic souvenir of this contamination.

To avoid future Freudian slips like "Please pass the dead fetus" (compliments of Kyle's father at the dinner table), the neighborhood starts to plan all the things that they can do to make her feel more comfortable in the community. But is this just a guise to hide their real motivation? After all, as Wilson & Laennec (1997, p. 3) speculate, "Often identified as diseases, deviations, or even subversions—in either or both sexes—certain designated problematic 'disorders,' real or imaginary, are thought to harm not merely individual health, but the very body politic." The typical response of any society is to reduce the damage and repair the imbalance incurred by any aberration, and this serves as an inveterate satirized theme of *South Park*.

Regardless of their best intentions, the adults in this episode cannot conceive of Nurse Gollum's body as just a physical form; instead, it is a tapestry

of events and relations which are surely unbearable in nature. With political correctness as an anchor, the townspeople normalize themselves with the grotesque body rather than forcing the body to normalize to them. They don headbands featuring a plastic dead fetus on the side to celebrate the culmination of Conjoined Twin Myslexia Week, which features a parade of one: Nurse Gollum. In her speech, she labels the adults as "freaks" and condemns them for targeting her with unwanted attention and disrupting her simply normal life. Through all of this, Nurse Gollum recognizes the children as the wise ones. They harness harmless humor as their way of coming to terms with what they initially do not understand; once they do understand, they integrate the new knowledge into their lives without a lot of hoopla and move on.

Disease rather than disorder marks the grotesque body in the *South Park* episode "Chickenpox." Stan's older sister, Shelly, contracts a case of chickenpox serious enough to warrant hospitalization. Their parents subscribe to medical knowledge that risks (even as dramatic as death) associated with such a virus increase proportionately with age. Shelly's pocked body fuels this fear and encourages the adults to engage problematic parental behavior. Upon learning that Kenny has also contracted chickenpox, the parents conspire to get their kids sick. They do so for the children's own good, of course, since, theoretically, the illness will prove easier in youth than in adulthood. Sheets-Johnstone (1992) observes that contemporary culture views the body as an object, one that may be fixed medically if it becomes broken or sick. Ironically, this narrative presents the kids as healthy objects at the outset, but the mere

threat of becoming "broken" prompts the parents to "break" them so that they may avoid having chickenpox later in life, when the impact may prove more dire.

So, the parents send Stan, Kyle, and Cartman to Kenny's house for a slumber party, "positioning...the body as a fragile entity in relation to its surroundings" (Foucault, 1986, p. 101). The venture for Kenny to infect the children with chickenpox proves successful for everyone except Kyle. As a result, Kyle's mother sends him back to Kenny's house and instructs Kenny to sneeze on Kyle whenever possible and makes the kids play a game that includes Kenny spitting down Kyle's throat. Meanwhile, Stan becomes so ill that he has to join his sister at the hospital, where he learns two things: first, that the children's parents *wanted* to get them sick, and second, that chickenpox is a form of herpes. Kyle, too, soon realizes the parents' sneaky scheme when his mother rejoices about his newly contracted case. Feeling the full weight of betrayal in his miserable itchy state, Kyle rallies the boys to enact vengeance on their parents: to infect them with herpes just as their parents did to them. They solicit the help of Frieda, a local prostitute, the apposite antithesis to the "normal," healthy woman (Horn, 1995). With her fuchsia bra, black boots, and smoldering cigarette, Frieda appears as a middle-aged woman with deep lines and a raspy voice. The boys—in the grip of their own grotesque bodies—explain that they want to contaminate their parents with herpes (thereby normalizing them to the children's "chicken herpes" state). For only five dollars, Frieda tours the children's homes to backwash the refrigerated beverages, use

the toothbrushes and lipsticks, tongue the wine glasses, and lick the telephone receivers. She embodies the Aristotelian notion that "moral character is rooted in the body" and the subsequent expectation that deviant actions such as homosexuality, juvenile delinquency, and (in this instance) prostitution may be explained via disruptions in body function (Terry & Urla, 1995, p. 1). Frieda possesses precisely the bodily disruption that the children need to retaliate against their parents.

In the end, the asinine adult scheme achieves just as ridiculous results: the bodies of the boys are splotched with "chicken herpes," and the mouths of the adults are inflamed with prostitute herpes. This episode of *South Park* engages the idea that diseases are "tracing the inscription of power on the text of the flesh and privileging the ruin of the surface of the body" (Kroker & Cook, 1986, p. 13). First, the adults "write" their power on the child body with chickenpox, and then the kids requite with their "graffiti" on the adult body. The children snicker at their victory, reveling in what could be perceived as "the pleasurable voyage under the sign of viciousness for fun" (Kroker & Cook, 1986, p. 13). Yet, for the kids, fun does not drive them and viciousness does not guide them; instead, the children simply seek to reintroduce reason (and honesty) into their relationships with their parents, especially when their health and well-being are at stake.

South Park Matrix and Synthesis

One of *South Park's* most compelling treatments is the adult/child or mature/immature dyad. As the episodes discussed in this chapter have shown,

the narratives recurrently stage circumstances in which maturity curtails power/knowledge and immaturity commands power/knowledge. The *South Park* matrix catalogs the relationships evident in the storylines closely read for this sensemaking study.

The South Park *Matrix*

THE ANIMATED BODY	THE DEVIANT BODY
hyperanimated adult = immature + p/k	nihilistic adult = immature + p/k
hyperanimated child = mature – p/k	nihilistic child = mature – p/k
THE GENDERED BODY	**THE GROTESQUE BODY**
sexual adult = mature – p/k	reactionary adult = mature – p/k
sexual child = immature + p/k	reactionary child = immature + p/k

Animated and Deviant Bodies: The Adults

The animated and deviant body readings reveal adult bodies whose immature states enable them to maintain power/knowledge. The hyperanimated adult bodies of Kyle's parents in "Ike's Wee Wee" reorient the definition of the disciplining medical gaze. Although the hygiene benefits of a circumcision seem clear, the parents fail to explain this reasonable rationale to the children. Instead, they offer an adolescent argument that ultimately undermines both the medical mentality and the religious ritual that command the cutting of a child's penis. The hyperanimated parents maintain the power of circumcision, yet they do so with a frivolously flawed foundation that casts doubt on hegemonic medical practices.

The nihilistic adult body of the deviant reading presents another immature adult with power. Stan's grandfather in "Death" embodies the geriatric

patriarch; although he lives in an adult form, advanced age steals his respect and remands him to a regressive role in society. He realizes that being sustained artificially—by his wheelchair and family—imposes upon him a diminished quality of life in which physical nonexistence becomes preferable to the limbo of mere consciousness dissociated from interacting, contributing, and living. In the end, Grandpa's immature deviant body locates the power to privilege a self-directed life (live because you are old) and refuse a hegemonic-directed life (die because you are old).

Animated and Deviant Bodies: The Kids

The child bodies in the animated and deviant body readings represent a mature state that dispossesses them of power/knowledge. In "Good Times with Weapons," the hyperanimated bodies of the kids transform—in the physical reality of their imaginations—into adult anime characters and subsequently lose the ability to implement logic as they normally do. The children's illegal acquisition of weapons symbolizes adult power and the accompanying responsibility for which they are not yet prepared and with which they cannot yet be trusted. As such, in the faux-adult mode, fear dominates the kids' motivations instead of prudence in much the same way that hegemonic disciplinary gazes occasionally override reasonable behavior.

A similar shift occurs in "An Elephant Makes Love to a Pig." Cells from Stan's child body are used (without his consent) to genetically engineer a larger, stronger, better clone of himself. However, this version of him, which is supposed to be more mature, more clever, more superior in every way, evolves

as mutant Stan, wielding nihilistic and destructive behavior. The child body, when engineered to objective "perfection," loses all power/knowledge. Consequently, the kid clone attenuates the arrogance of scientific knowledge, practice, and promise and presents the pitfalls of a dehumanizing gaze that disregards the ramifications of experimental genetic play.

Gendered and Grotesque Bodies: The Adults

Moving on to the gendered and grotesque body readings, *South Park* maintains the maturity-to-power/knowledge correlation, but it shifts the signifiers so that the adult body typifies the mature without power/knowledge and the child body characterizes the immature with power/knowledge. "Proper Use of a Condom" highlights two sexually mature adults: Ms. Choksondik and Mr. Mackey, neither of whom proves conversant enough to teach sex education classes. Their indubitable ignorance undermines the institution of education as it invalidates the ideal that schoolteachers understand their subjects and proffer knowledge competently. Moreover, this narrative invites parents to become attuned to and involved with the personal, emotional, and sexual development of their children rather than relying on outsiders to oversee the awkward moments.

"Conjoined Fetus Lady" presents the grotesque body of Nurse Gollum.[14] Due to a fictional condition called conjoined twin myslexia, a dead fetus decorates the side of her head. Kyle's mother, Sheila, renders the reactionary adult body, mature yet so ensconced in her own politically correct machine that she cannot gain perspective that she—not the nurse—is the "freak." Her

attempts to exert her normalizing gaze backfire when Nurse Gollum declares that her deformity does not rule her life. Unable or perhaps unwilling to understand this, Sheila rallies the townspeople to don dead-fetus hats for a parade that exposes hegemonic political correctness as poppycock because people should see a human being as simply that: a human being.

Gendered and Grotesque Bodies: The Kids

In the gendered and grotesque body readings, the child bodies reveal the immaturity necessary to achieve power/knowledge. Bebe in "Bebe's Boobs Destroy Society" showcases the sexually immature child body. Just on the initial edge of adolescence, she grapples with the reality that her breasts steal her subjectivity and ordain her objectification in society. She realizes that her existence will hold no value to her if she remains trapped in a primitive play in which her classmates, her doctor, and even her mother enact roles. Left to her own devices, Bebe fashions a costume to reverse the regression that plagues her playground peers. She successfully breaks the spell of the patriarchal gaze and enlightens her elementary cohort by wearing a cardboard box that covers her chest.

The reactionary child body in "Chickenpox" reveals a reprisal that shows subtle strokes of power/knowledge. Deploying debatable deduction, the parents intentionally infect the children with chickenpox, writing their power on the bodies of the kids. The children retaliate against this lack of logic by doing to the parents what the parents have done to them. With the knowledge that chickenpox is a form of herpes ("chicken herpes"), they gather information,

locate a prostitute who is communicable, negotiate a price for their project, and oversee the conclusive contamination. The children dismantle the cliché "parents know best" as they mimic the inscription of disease on the adult bodies, all the while doing so with improved informed intention.

Considering its ongoing longevity and popularity, *South Park* has proven to be one of the more engaging popular culture texts of the past decade. Filled with hardnosed humor and categorical critique, the iconic cartoon fashions a no-holds-barred philosophy: no economic, religious, political, social, or moral angle is safe from scrutiny. The *South Park* dialectic seldom takes sides, but rather wrangles with all perspectives to expose the absurdity of most of them. The often invective narratives rarely reward viewers with a resolute outlook on the issues presented; however, "Like the best satire, there is a genuine moral center in the midst of all the sick jokes" (Martinez, 2003, p. 9). *South Park's* "morality" surfaces in its subversion of contemporary knowledge norms as it relativises and satirizes hegemonic power structures: it privileges the immature—rather than the mature—body as that which holds power/knowledge.

It is with this satirical impulse that *South Park* succeeds so well. The cartoon takes timely topics and presents oppositional readings to those that circulate in mainstream media and dominant discourse. It disrupts the taken-for-granted power/knowledge schemes that are in place—virtually all of which hegemony has handily hidden—and offers alternative ways of perceiving culture and all that it worships: music, film, television, news icons, and pop celebrities. As a decidedly postmodern text, *South Park* seems never to forget

that "the radical task of postmodernism is to deconstruct apparent truths, to dismantle dominant ideas and cultural forms and to engage in the guerrilla tactics of undermining closed and hegemonic systems of thought" (Wolff, 1990, p. 190). With the spirit of the hackneyed mirror/lamp analogy of media's function in culture (see Bryant & Thompson, 2002, for an elaboration), the *South Park* storyworld presents society as society has presented itself to the world; only, the program refuses to airbrush the image and instead features the flaws.

[1] Speaking of music, Phil Collins is an audio artist well-known for his self-reflexive work in music videos, such as "Easy Lover," which is "admittedly a video about a video about a video about a song" (Dunne, 1992, p. 147). Realizing this makes it all the more fun to see the children of *South Park* sledding down Phil Collins Hill, a snowy mound featuring a rough-featured face of Phil Collins on its side.

[2] The children also watch the *Charlie Brown Christmas Special*. Moreover, *Terrance and Phillip*—a cartoon within the cartoon of *South Park*—is one of the kids' favorite shows that presents little more than excessive flatulence and maniacal laughter.

[3] The title of this episode is "Mr. Hanky, the Christmas Poo" and is 10th in the series.

[4] During the past couple of decades, the media have become pervasive and increasingly fragmented; demassification has replaced the mass audience. Niche programming thrives, catering to Asian-American, African-American, homosexual, and female markets as well as specialty markets including but certainly not limited to food, health, sports, science, and history.

[5] Although Jameson distinguishes between parody as modern and pastiche as postmodern, Rose (1991) suggests that both are mere devices that exist independently from any particular period.

[6] The O.J. association continues in another episode featuring a court case in which Johnny Cochran defends Capitalist Records against Chef by using the nonsensical Chewbacca defense. (Rick James, Elton John, Ozzy Osborne, and Meatloaf—purportedly previously named Cous Cous—also appear in that show.)

[7] Rosie O'Donnell in this case is Filmore's aunt, and he is one of the kindergarten presidential candidates.

[8] In a satellite seminar for the Museum of Television and Radio, both Matt Stone and Trey Parker denied that they produced their cartoon with any critical comment in mind. Instead, they maintained that they were only doing comedy for the sake of having fun, which perhaps reveals the perfect postmodern position of meaninglessness.

[9] The art of animation received its first major boost in the advertising realm during the early years of television. At the time, production techniques were fairly primitive for any sort of live action material; therefore, advertisers opted for animated spots to ensure better quality and more aesthetic freedom. Clients (many were cigarette and liquor companies) primarily geared these cartoon commercials toward adult audiences. As television evolved, so did animation, and cartoons eventually developed into full-length programs for children, often aired during the Saturday morning daypart.

[10] Here, one could engage the media aesthetics argument that the televisual medium itself mires all characters in two-dimensional space. However, *South Park's* computer generation of "construction paper" further enhances this effect.

[11] The scissors as an appendage seem to represent the ever encroaching intersection of body/technology/power discussed in cyborg literature (for example, in the works of Donna Haraway and Marshall McLuhan).

[12] See, for instance, the works of Timothy E. Quill and Margaret P. Battin (2004) in *Physician-Assisted Dying: the Case for Palliative Care and Patient Choice*, Gerald Dworkin, R. G. Frey, and Sissela Bok (1998) in *Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide*, and Carol Wekesser (1995) in *Euthanasia: Opposing Viewpoints*.

[13] This line in the script reaches far beyond the bounds of this particular episode, extending to the *South Park* series as a whole in its ongoing critique of culture's (both mainstream and subcultural) responses to both common and controversial issues.

[14] Her last name is actually based on a Hebrew word ("golem") used to describe a monster.

CHAPTER 3: FIGHT CLUB

"Disaster is a natural part of my evolution,"
Tyler whispered, "toward tragedy and dissolution."
"I'm breaking my attachment to physical power and possessions," Tyler whispered,
"because only through destroying myself can I discover the greater power of my spirit."
"The liberator who destroys my property," Tyler said, "is fighting to save my spirit.
The teacher who clears all possessions from my path will set me free."
~Tyler Durden, a character in
Chuck Palahniuk: Fight Club~

WARNING: If you are reading this then this warning is for you. Every word you read of this useless fine print is another second off your life. Don't you have other things to do? Is your life so empty that you honestly can't think of a better way to spend these moments? Or are you so impressed with authority that you give respect and credence to all who claim it? Do you read everything you're supposed to read? Do you think everything you're supposed to think? Buy what you're told you should want? Get out of your apartment. Meet a member of the opposite sex. Stop the excessive shopping and masturbation. Quit your job. Start a fight. Prove you're alive. If you don't claim your humanity you will become a statistic. You have been warned...[1]

Vision. Oblivion. Perception. Action. Stagnation. Salvation. Tyler Durden's admonition captures the dynamism of human existence and conjures an enthusiasm for life enhancement. Resounding with resolution, his words position a mirror up close, so much so that the moisture from one's own breath—which will inevitably cease sooner than considered or desired—condenses on the glass. Many find this uncomfortable. Those who neglect the

day-to-day appreciation of themselves and others will probably stifle their self-reflection because accountability and improvement are laborious undertakings. No worries, though, because those who are capable of understanding will. ("No fear. No distractions.") And to fight club they go, many to meet their own minds, bodies, limitations, and liberations for the first time in a long time (if ever before).

Such motivations manifest in *Fight Club's* critique that engages elements of the body, power, knowledge, and excess as life's banality materializes via the physical and palpable experiences of disenfranchised men. This chapter examines the stylized film as a cultural text that investigates identity crises and consumption impulses; the destructive rather than the docile bodies of *Fight Club* emerge as the radical revolutionaries who pursue primal promptitude and embrace economic equilibrium. Before arriving at this observation, however, the chapter presents the evolution of the film from consumer critique to satirical spectacle that displays destructive body images in shifting capitalist contexts, which in turn expose the power dimension. Marxism and Debord's spectacle inform narrative observations and close readings that reveal power/knowledge/body intersections within the filmic text of *Fight Club*. Ultimately, the *Fight Club* matrix and synthesis offer implications of these intersections in the larger culture.

The *Fight Club* Furor

Tyler Durden, the lead alter-ego of *Fight Club*, focuses on what most people forget about, spouting such maxims as "Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don't need." The film

is based on a novel of the same name written by Chuck Palahniuk, one of the more popular GenX authors with cult favorites like *Invisible Monsters*, *Choke*, and *Diary*. Directed by David Fincher (the music video mastermind also renowned for cutting-edge films such as *Se7en* and *The Game*), *Fight Club* hit theaters in the fall of 1999, just in time for all the millennial brouhaha that swept the nation. Aligned with the reflective tendencies of that historical juncture, the film advances an intense and intriguing indictment of contemporary consumer culture and reads as a "parody of some core obsessions of US culture: consumerism, therapy and violence" (Hooper, 2002, p. 131). Perhaps the words of Travers (1999, p. 113) capture the spirit of the film best: "It's about being young, male and powerless against the pacifying drug of consumerism. It's about solitude, despair and bottled-up rage. It's about how not to feel dead as Y2K approaches. It's about daring to imagine the disenfranchised reducing the world to rubble and starting over."

Anonymity provides the perfect clean slate. Since the protagonist (Edward Norton) has no name, people randomly refer to him as Jack, Narrator, Everyman, or Mr. Anybody; here, he shall be Jack, reminiscent of the medical texts written amusingly in the first person by various organs of that name. As a white collar cubicle cog, he has forged halfway through the formula for fulfillment (go to college, get a job...then...get married, have children), only to find himself steeped in insomnia and indifference. Jack locates refuge in support group sessions before meeting Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt), who piques his awareness about the futility of a "lifestyle obsession" that centers solely on

conspicuous consumption as an indicator of self-worth. Tyler touts his own tautology of "The things you own end up owning you" and rejects the routine rewards of materialistic pomp and circumstance. Eventually, a substantial shift surfaces when Jack's condominium—which he has painstakingly perfected in catalogue-kitsch—explodes; it is at this narrative juncture that Jack moves in with Tyler and forms a friendship that soon spawns fight club.

Fight club is free to all and provides a locus for men to escape their daily doldrums and energize their masculine moods, quite literally by engaging in bare-knuckled brawls. Indulgently liberating, fight club fosters the release of life's frustrations and failures. Accordingly, authors such as Deacy (2002, p. 62) describe how "Fincher delivers in *Fight Club* a metaphysical treatise on the nature of existence, death, and one's place in the grand scheme of things." But not everyone agrees with the film's positive potential. For instance, Cook and Mravik (1999, p. 31) propose that "*Fight Club* is as romantic about fighting as *Pretty Woman* was about prostitution—Pitt and Norton never slur their words, and the teeth they lose are always molars, because movie stars can't afford to have NHL smiles." Fight club evolves out of the basement and onto the streets with small "homework assignments" to provoke society. Eventually, these mischievous antics erupt into meditated anarchy in Project Mayhem. Tyler Durden assembles an army of "space monkeys," men stripped of identity whose sole purpose in life is to conduct missions to awaken society from its consumption coma. It is only after a "near-life experience" that Jack realizes the decadent destruction that could ensue. In his attempts to diffuse the momen-

tum of Project Mayhem, Jack discovers a more personal and dire dilemma: he is schizophrenic; *he* is Tyler Durden. The film culminates with Jack's forced "suicide" of Tyler and the implosion of several credit card headquarters, a demolition that erases debt records, wilts financial institutions, and equalizes economic history.

Literature Review

Research on *Fight Club* reflects analyses of both the novel and the film which engage cultural and political perspectives. From a literary standpoint, Tuss (2004) explores *Fight Club's* treatment of the modern male identity crisis in the context of *Frankenstein* and *Macbeth*. He speculates that the absence of fathers in childhood and the presence of homosexuality in society produce a compromised sense of masculinity in young men. Feeling like proverbial "sissies," they then devote themselves to deviance in defiance of their creators (fathers, society) to restore their manhood. Echoing the crisis of white male identity at the turn of the millennium, Boon (2003) explores the paradox of a culture that idolizes aggressive men while at the same time villanizes aggressive tendencies. Lee (2002) echoes this angle and observes that at different points throughout history, men have had to suppress some part of their instinctual nature, be it their sexual desires or their emotions, to compete successfully in culture and the workplace. This contradictory measure of masculinity still circulates in contemporary culture and necessarily causes men to feel like failures. Directing the discussion a step beyond gender to the political, Clark (2002) juxtaposes *Fight Club's* masculine crisis with environmental racism; he

accordingly proposes revisions—to regard more than just money—in the value systems that drive economic theories.

Giroux (2000) contends that *Fight Club* falls flat in its potential to engage a meaningful critique of consumer capitalism. Viewing the film through the lens of public pedagogy, he complains that the film reduces the crisis of capitalism to a crisis of masculinity. As such, it ignores a treatment of substantial social ills such as outsourcing, downsizing, job insecurity, unemployment, union dissolution, and general disintegration of public welfare institutions. *Fight Club* furthermore, according to Giroux (2000), makes no room for more critical versions of social change and defends authoritarian masculinity rather than critiquing capitalism. Since the film totally overlooks race and class, it offers little more than a sexist, fascist diatribe capable of teaching no real lessons in its politically indifferent and morally bankrupt voice.

Deacy (2002, p. 70) considers *Fight Club* (alongside *American Beauty*) in the more positive context of a modern religious parable; he acknowledges that the "film has the capacity to engage and wrestle with authentic spiritual and religious solicitudes." In his examination of *Fight Club*, he draws parallels between the film and scripture that flesh out religious symbolism. For instance, Tyler Durden resembles Jesus Christ, in that both are figures who lead by example, seek redemption through suffering, and lament when their disciples warp their teachings. Additionally, rather than serving just as a force of destruction, violence transcends into a site of potential liberation and salvation. Specifically, Deacy (2002, p. 70) elaborates, the "almost primitive—even primal—interpreta-

tion of violence as a means of reconnecting and re-engaging with other human beings from whom one has become estranged is not only at the heart of Fincher's film, but is also intrinsic to our understanding of...the concept of redemption."

Within the context of liberalism, Duncan (2003, p. 120) explores the concept of "the good life" and *Fight Club* in American culture and proposes that contemporary America is comprised of "plebeicians," a combination of plebeian and patrician defined as follows: "educated men and women of the middle class who take for granted that they have a right to pursue happiness but who do not have any clear idea or conception of what happiness is." He regrets that the youth culture (as well as everyone else) now parades "indifference masquerading as tolerance," unable to achieve that which they cannot even define. Despite *Fight Club's* potential to construct a concrete cultural comment, Duncan (2003) believes that the film falls, unfortunately, to offer audiences anything more than an apathetic shrug since it tells them only what to stand against but not what to stand for, as a liberalist stance would.

Friday (2003) submits that *Fight Club* is a master narrative of white male decline. Because masculine identity is imperiled by modern society in the film, it is reconstructed as having both evanescent and revolutionary attributes. Masochistic and sadistic forms of violence function as a deliberate compensation for the emasculating effects stemming from blue collar as well as lower white collar work culture. Key to *Fight Club's* construction of masculine identity are the violence and masochism; however, Friday (2003) maintains that

masochism itself is empty, an expectation of identity to come at a later point in the personal progression. Accordingly, these symptoms attempt to create a masculine identity that is retrospective: to situate one's history or one's future as the source of the absent (yet to-be-gained) meaning and identity.

As a symptom of what they call the network society, Diken and Laustsen (2002) claim that *Fight Club* reflects micro-fascism. Since contemporary capitalism revolves around spatial and temporal flows, power and control are necessarily reoriented.[2] What Diken and Laustsen (2002, p. 352) diagnose is a new smooth space in which territorial hierarchies no longer hold power; as such, the "source of anxiety in this open, smooth space is not lack of being; rather, too much pseudo-freedom, e.g. freedom to consume." It is this pseudo-freedom that catapults many capitalist consumers into a self-reflexive mindspin in which they search for unique identities, only to find that these identities are image rather than substance. The authors deploy the Deleuzian construct of lines of flight to reveal how *Fight Club* disorganizes social bonds in its rhizomatic social spaces and discontinuous temporal cuts. Overall, the authors conclude that the film does not deliver any alternative to the capitalist ideology which it fascistically overthrows.

The Consumerism Critique

The contemporary buzzword "consumerism" has become seemingly omnipresent as the motivation of media, the fabrication of desires, the constitution of achievements, indeed, the justification for all activities. It has by far transcended capitalism in its original conception. The former contempt shown to

the lower classes (since they were only needed to perpetuate production) has been replaced by a cajoling courtship since consumers now are a necessary commodity in and of themselves. Compelling capitalism to cater to those it once merely exploited, the proliferation of production has spurred the need for further cooperation from the "proletariat." This, however, is not to say that the exploitation has ended; verily, it has grown. The pervasive power of consumerism now not only controls the lives of the modern-day proletariat in work, but it also occupies the majority of "free" time and "free" thought. Categorically, Foucault (1980) asserts that power relations thrive during work, rest, and even holidays since these frames regulate the body's activity and leisure. Consumerism—that which presents itself as a hobby—is really a way of life.

Marxism

Industrial capitalist societies propagate disparity in all realms of society, namely race, class, and gender. Society is divided along lines of production in such a way that people's places in the production schema reflect their place in the cultural schema. Economy is everything. Capitalism is crisis. As Agger (1992, p. 16) observes, "late capitalism mobilizes people in their own domination." With this in mind, Marx lends a logical locus from which to consider elements of economy as they relate to potential power disparity. From a Marxist (1930, p. 25) perspective, the "history of all human society, past and present, has been the history of class struggles." Specifically, his pivotal polemic wrangles with economic determinism: the idea that history is fundamentally shaped by the influences of and interactions within production. Social, cultural,

and racial relations are thus direct manifestations of economic mechanisms. History has revealed a number of class distinctions through the ages, from those who owned property and those who did not in Roman culture, to the vassals and serfs of the medieval ages, to the proletariat and bourgeois classes (products of capitalism) identified as alienated by Marx. In each of the former systems, a revolution triggers transformation into the next.

Marx extends much attention to the theme and theory of alienation (Caute, 1967). First, man is alienated by the products of his work. Although these products directly represent his capacities and energies, they are not his; he creates an abundance of products that he does not own. The labor itself can also contribute to alienation because the "worker has become a mere appendage to a machine; a person from whom but the simplest, the most monotonous, and the most easily learned manipulations are expected" (Marx, 1963, p. 34). No longer a creative outlet, labor emerges as a banausic brain fade that dehumanizes the working class. Arnold (1990, p. 41) reiterates this by recognizing that "one of the defects of capitalism is its systematic frustration of the need to engage in...truly human labor." Moreover, production persists under the shadow of the hegemonic principle whereby the ruling class circulates an ideology which strives to normalize the tripartite configuration of worker/labor/product, a formation that is unnatural and unharmonious, despite appearances to the contrary. The attendant alienation creates a false consciousness, "a distorted mental picture of reality [whose] source is the alienation of man in class society. Alienated man no longer understands the

world for what it is; he feels estranged from and powerless over the products of his own hands" (Caute, 1967, p. 19). This proves apparent in the "shop talk" that Jack uses to communicate with his boss in *Fight Club*. Totally aloof and awkward, the language in the corporate setting avows alienation:

> BOSS: Gonna need you out-of-town a little more this week. We've got some "red-flags" to cover.
> JACK (listless management speak): You want me to de-prioritize my current reports until you advise of a status upgrade?
> BOSS: Make these your primary "action items."[3]

Even though Jack and his boss interact within their realm of "production," they do so in a didactic and disconnected discourse.

In his critique of capitalism, Marx identifies two values of commodities: use value and exchange value. Use value describes the practical usefulness of a commodity; exchange value, on the other hand, signifies the market price of a commodity. According to Marx, exchange values will always prove dominant due to the fetishistic nature of the production, marketing, and consumption cycle perpetuated by the market structure. As such, the roots of capitalism dig deep and promise that desire will always supersede necessity. Money defines the commodity. The commodity defines society. This assertion gains tangibility when considering the nature and power of brand names in adroit advertising and consequent consumption. Corporations work diligently to develop branding: the identity, personality, and vitality of their company as seen through the eyes of consumers. Although the commodity itself does not actually hold any more use value than another commodity, the one with the successful branding and imaging commands a higher cost, or exchange value. Consum-

ers who choose to afford the branded goods certainly gain the utility of the good, but more importantly, they buy bragging rights.

Fight Club foregrounds the fortitude of exchange value in contemporary culture. At one point in the narrative, Jack finally arrives home after one of his long business trips, only to find that the airline has lost his luggage (which finely foreshadows the explosion of his condo). He laments the loss of his CK shirts, DKNY shoes, and A|X ties. Beyond losing just his suitcase, though, he loses the extent of his materiality when his condo explodes, destabilizing his "Ikea nesting instinct" and manifold Horchow furnishings: the Klipske personal office unit, the Hovertrekke home exer-bike, the Johannshamnh sofa with the Strinne green stripe pattern, the Rislampa wire lamps of environmentally-friendly unbleached paper. Ultimately, Jack defines both his body and his space according to exchange values.

The unfortunate outcome of such an existence conjures Caute's observation of Marx's view of man "as an alienated and degraded being, a creature in the grip of blind greed, no longer master of his own fate, organised in mutually antagonistic classes and perpetually at war with his fellow men." Ironic is the circumstance of most residents in capitalist consumerism in which people work mundane jobs (as an automotive recall coordinator, in Jack's case) for mundane money that they then whisk away to the Calvin Kleins, Donna Karans, or Giorgio Armanis of the world, thereby granting them ultimate financial freedom, of which the proletariat only dream and for which they always work. Subsequently, they remain exploited and excluded by their simple

participation in the system that subverts them and stifles any thoughts of change they may have. As Marx (cited in Strinati, 1995, p. 131) reinforces, "the class, which is the dominant material force in society, is at the same time its dominant intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production."[4]

Nevertheless, Marx looks beyond the bleakness to revolution, to the demise of a society mired in class stratifications and the creation of one where men could be at last equal.[5] As Caute (1967, p. 11) describes, "Always he was sustained in his efforts by the vision of an ultimate communism in which men would recover their true nature and live in perfect harmony." This communism would eliminate private property and capital and thereby remove the need for people to work, other than to provide themselves with the products that they needed or wanted to produce. After all, Marx (cited in Engels, 1908, p. 216) considered capital useless, "dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks."

Debord's Spectacle

As with all vampire bites, a transformation is imminent. Capital consumes life, more life, until it spawns what Debord calls the spectacle. Indeed, the "spectacle is *capital* to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image" (Debord, 2000, p. 17). In its most basic form, the spectacle is the social relationship people experience as mediated via images. Agger (1992, p. 136) remarks that "Marxists like Debord argue that culture is a region of contestation in which people struggle over definitions of the good life as well as social justice."

The spectacle in culture reflects the representation of lived life that has evolved from capitalism—in such forms as information, advertisement, entertainment—rather than the realism of lived life. More specifically, Debord (2000, pp. 10-11) describes:

> The first stage of the economy's domination of social life brought about an evident degradation of being into *having*—human fulfillment was no longer equated with what one was, but with what one possessed. The present stage, in which social life has become completely dominated by the accumulated productions of the economy, is bringing about a general shift from *having* to *appearing*—all "having" must now derive its immediate prestige and its ultimate purpose from appearances.

As a result, appearance is privileged by modern man who has devolved from actor to spectator. Jorn (1964) observes that "Debord cut through all the aesthetics of pleasantness in favor of an artistic action that provokes action, even if the action provoked has every chance of spontaneously turning against the person who violently wrenched the spectators from their chairs."

At the root of the spectacle is power (as, Foucault would also argue, it is at the root of all interactions), a "laudatory monologue" by the present order to maintain the present order. Western capitalist culture is the society of the spectacle, especially in the United States, whose greatest export is its popular culture. Since the U.S. "owns" and circulates the spectacle, its imperialism and domination follow, instigating false needs in underdeveloped populations (as Jack relates, "the honest, simple, hard working people of...wherever") as well as its own. Marketing keeps the wheels turning, even though "Every *new lie* of advertising is also an *avowal* of the previous lie" (Debord, 2000, p. 35).

Since production has reached a critical mass, it outpaces consumption. More consumption, then, must follow, which encourages the spectacle to integrate everyone from the lowly proletariat to the powerful bourgeoisie. The spectacle is self-justifying in that it reflects the preferences in production, manages the choices of consumption, and dominates the routines of recreation. To be sure, "Commodification is not only visible, we no longer see anything else; the world we see is the world of commodity" (Debord, 2000, p. 21). Everything has a value. Everything is a value. All social relations are transactions. Accordingly, people too are commodities, spectacles. Tyler rages against this episteme during a direct address rupture in *Fight Club* when he scolds: "You are not your job. You're not how much money you have in the bank. You're not the car you drive. You're not the contents of your wallet. You're not your fuckin' khakis. You are the all-singing, all-dancing crap of the world."[6]

Nevertheless, the spectacle girds and grows, like a virus whose sole goal is to replicate itself infinitely. Although it was once created by others, it now has the power to perpetuate itself, and in doing so, it steals the lives of its architects. Debord (1970, p. 7) proposes that the "specialization of images of the world evolves into a world of autonomised images where even the deceivers are deceived. The spectacle is a concrete inversion of life, an autonomous movement of the nonliving." Everyone, in some way, devotes life to sustaining the spectacle—increasing its imagery, prolonging its power—all for the benefit of the spectacle itself. Means and ends intersect as identical in a tautological tease. Even a film as subversive as *Fight Club* cannot singularly shatter the

looking-glass since it, too, is a quintessential entertainment spectacle: a major motion picture ripe for consumption, starring Brad Pitt (a model "pretty boy") and Edward Norton (a model "rich boy"). Herein lies the success of the spectacle as it shackles all to it, rendering everyone and everything unable to abscond to pertinent politics or real revolution.

Debord's revolution is based on liberating oneself (fight club, where members wake themselves) and then liberating society (project mayhem, where members wake the masses). He seeks change in perspectives of the world through techniques such as détournement (translated roughly as "turnabout"), which uses preexisting images to create other works of media that subvert or even oppose the original piece. It subsequently steals the meaning of the spectacle and reorients the people's perspective toward it. Tyler mirrors this mindset in his many "homework assignments" intended to backslap the benightedness out of society. One example is when the project mayhem members replace airplane safety cards (where people—plunging to their deaths—are drawn "calm as Hindu cows") with catastrophe cards that more accurately depict the panic and fear that one would likely experience preparing to access the abyss. Characterized by the same overall style as the calm cards (which people are inclined to ignore), the catastrophe cards (which people are inclined to inspect) prompt an entirely different reaction from the passengers. Debord, like Tyler, believed that prompting new perspectives might save society from the spectacle. During his lifetime, he also engaged in vandalism and sabotage in an effort to provoke people to think beyond banality

and disrupt the zombie zone of commodity, all the while spouting Situationist slogans such as Never Work, Free the Passions, Live without Dead Time.

Artful Alienation

According to Diken and Laustsen (2002, p. 354), *Fight Club* succeeds in that, "Echoing the French philosophy, especially the Situationist manifesto, it especially attacks the society of the spectacle." It certainly does just that as it interrogates issues (and crises) of identity in the midst of the spectacle's advent of alienation and cacophony of commodification. In a world where everything is appearance, appearance is possession, and possession is identity, how do those who refuse this ideology *know* themselves? Diken and Laustsen (2002, p. 351) submit that "In the social space within which *Fight Club* emerges there is no father, only a ruse of signs, an experience of smooth space without symbolic hierarchies—a place no longer determined by the law and tradition or by the solidity of a habitus. What follows is the burden of reflexivity as one has to choose one's place in the social, because identity is no longer a matter of occupying an already given subject position."

In the film, Jack has succumbed so far to the consumerism impulse that he no longer has a name. Instead of being an individual identity, he is a composite commodity. As Jack—who dons brand-name corporate casual—introduces himself to the audience, he confesses that he has become a "slave to the IKEA nesting instinct" and proceeds to catalogue his condominium furniture. A clever yin-yang coffee table contextualizes the qualifying question, "What kind of dining set defines me as a person?" Meaningless materials and

designer duds substitute for passionate personality. Jack also identifies himself by his employment as a recall coordinator for a major car company. He hates his job. Constantly traveling, he applies the formula: "Take the number of vehicles in the field (A), multiply by the probable rate of failure (B), then multiply the result by the average out-of-court settlement (C). A x B x C = X. If X is less than the cost of a recall, we don't do one." Unfortunately, he applies this same flat formula to his life to insure that he remains well within the comfortable confines of hegemony. He is no one residing in a geography of nowhere. Society's equations are nothing more than the prescription to render bodies docile. Crash tests performed by automakers corroborate advertising's assurance of protection. Emergency procedures for aircraft bolster business's frequency of flying. Both, however, are mere illusions set forth by the spectacle. Tyler captures this well when he exposes to Jack the real reason oxygen exists on planes: "Oxygen gets you high. In a catastrophic emergency, you're taking giant, panicked breaths. Suddenly you become euphoric, docile; you accept your fate." And this is what people are supposed to do in the contemporary cycle of production, consumption, alienation, and hyper-consumption.

Agger (1992, p. 146) notes one of Marx's observations that "people [are] most human where they realize themselves in their tasks. This is possible where their tasks, and the products of their tasks, are owned and controlled by them, enabling them to reap the full value of their labor." Jack, however, is divorced from his labor. He produces nothing, and subsequently sees himself as nothing. The formula which he uses to redundantly trivialize the tragedy of lost life in car

collisions eventually applies to himself as well...until fight club. There, Jack and the other "members" forego artificial materiality to realign themselves with embodied reality; it is the sixth rule of fight club: no shirts, no shoes. Wedding bands come off. Through their fighting, the men release and escape the grip of the spectacle, which enables them to evolve to project mayhem where they engage in consciousness-raising exercises such as axing television antennas and bashing satellite dishes, demagnetizing videotapes at Blockbuster, and feeding pigeons on the rooftop of a BMW dealership (after which, of course, a mass expulsion ensues).

Such antics deconstruct the spectacle's myth of cultural autonomy and reconstruct a veritable version experienced by the members of project mayhem. Fight club provides the initial site at which the men realize that they were and most people are still "not free to choose because [they] are programmed by simulations that have been detextualized, dispersed into the sense and sentience of an unreflected everyday life so that they cannot be evaluated on their own merits" (Agger, 1992, p. 150). As Rousseau's (1984, p. 132) comment that "Citizens allow themselves to be oppressed only so far as they are impelled by a blind ambition; and fixing their eyes below rather than above themselves, come to love domination more than independence" gains clarity, the men evaluate and edit their focus. Fight club and project mayhem resurrect life's value, vigor, and volition.

Ironically, soap serves as the sustenance and the symbolism for fight club's rejuvenation and project mayhem's revolution. McClintock's (1995) history

of soap's evolution as a cultural commodity adds dimension to this theme. Prior to the late 19th century, people typically bathed only once a month, a standard set by royalty; clothing and bedding were washed once or twice a year as a community event. However, in the 1890s, lucrative slave plantations bestowed upon the middle classes a propitious purchasing power that jeopardized societal stratifications. McClintock (1995, p. 211) encapsulates this shift in the following passage:

> [Soap] emerged commercially during an era of impending crisis and social calamity, serving to preserve, through fetish ritual, the uncertain boundaries of class, gender and race identity in a social order felt to be threatened by the fetid effluvia of the slums, the belching smoke of industry, social agitation, economic upheaval, imperial competition and anticolonial resistance.

Subsequently, soap served as a technology of social purification. Literally, soap cleanses the body and in so doing draws a boundary between man and nature. Figuratively, soap plays a "liminal role in mediating the transformations of nature (dirt, waste and disorder) into culture (cleanliness, rationality and industry" (McClintock, 1995, p. 217). Tyler captures this sentiment nicely with his "yardstick of civilization" metaphor.

The burst of soap into the civilized scene saw four fetishes of soap advertising: soap itself, white clothing, mirrors, and monkeys (even Monkey Brand soap). Of particular interest here is the monkey fetish since Tyler refers to the members of project mayhem as "space monkeys." McClintock (1995, p. 217) describes how "the soap-monkey became the emblem of industrial progress and imperial evolution, embodying the double promise that nature

could be redeemed by consumer capital and that consumer capital could be guaranteed by natural law....the soap-monkey was eloquent of the degree to which fetishism structures industrial rationality." Tyler subverts this ideological positioning by stealing human fat from liposuction clinics to make his own soap, which he then sells to department stores for $20 a bar. While the profit proves pragmatic in that it helps fund project mayhem, it imparts the more integral irony of "selling rich women their own fat asses back to them." What was initially intended as a division from nature to secure social status transforms into twisted tutelage. Moreover, Tyler knows that "with enough soap, one could blow up just about anything." For the project mayhem crew, this includes that original boundary between man and nature, between cultural classes. It is the soap, with a revised recipe, that ultimately returns everyone to financial nature: the ground zero economic equilibrium in which the body frees itself from its spectacular shackles.

Power/Knowledge/Body Intersections

Something is very gently,
invisibly, silently,
pulling at me—a thread
or net of threads
finer than cobweb and as
elastic. I haven't tried
the strength of it. No barbed hook
pierced and tore me. Was it
not long ago this thread
began to draw me? Or
way back? Was I
born with its knot about my
neck, a bridle? Not fear
but a stirring
of wonder makes me

catch my breath when I feel
the tug of it when I thought
it had loosened itself and gone.

—Denise Levertov, "The Thread"

A societal shift has occurred whereby class struggles have become identity struggles, and many blame capitalism with its increased leisure time (Pitts, 2003). As Lowe (1995, p. 2) posits, commodity is everything, including the body: "All body practices—not just production and consumption, but social reproduction, gender construction and sexuality, and even psychopathology—have become commodified to such an extent, that the satisfaction of our diverse bodily needs is reconfigured by the requirements of flexible accumulation." With the sense of economic security (even if it comes in the form of a small plastic card) comes a proliferation of recreation. Yet these "vacations," which should be restorative for the mind, spirit, and body, often are more regimented and tiresome than routine work. Sullivan (2001, p. 29) speculates as to why this may be so: "Through processes of enculturation the body is discursively produced in and through procedures that mark. This inscription of bodies occurs via a plethora of social mechanisms and practices, that range from violent constraint to less obviously coercive means such as beautification, education, and the codification and partitioning of time, space, and movement." Even in rest, people are still working, still engaging the mechanisms of production, if not by producing, then by consuming. Consequently, they never fully escape the consumerism cycle. As Lowe (1995, p. 175) reinforces, the "body in late-capitalist USA is constructed and realized in an expanded,

accelerated whirlwind of exchangist practices. Yet none of us can entirely disavow exchangist practices for an alternative, ideal community." Be that as it may, *Fight Club* wonders otherwise. Such a tension teases Levertov's poem since it describes a body that is tethered by an invisible force, one whose strength has not been truly tested and whose grip—although not painful—remains ever hovering. Such a position proves useful in situating the *Fight Club* destructive bodies in contemporary power/knowledge discourse.

Power/Knowledge and the Animated Body

In *Fight Club*, the fighting itself animates the bodies of the men. While the anesthetic of consumption culture renders the body to be little more than a commodity object severed from spirit in its state of materiality and alienation, fight club accesses an approach to reanimate the bodies that have deteriorated to dullness in consumer culture. The physicality of fighting restores bodies to the site of *being* rather than *consuming* and refocuses attention to embodied experience in place of profane possession, ultimately undermining the "penetration of mass commodity production into the sphere of consumption as underlying the spreading privatisation of social life" (Callinicos, 1990, p. 111). Within the fight club culture, the singularity of self-destruction transforms into a community of sanctioned mutilation, which includes an initiation ingrained in the seventh rule of fight club: "If this is your first night at fight club, you have to fight."

Through the animation of the fight, the men beat life into the motto "No fear. No distractions." They forge a kinship of social acceptance that locates

meaning first and foremost through the body: "Who you were in fight club is not who you were in the rest of the world. A guy came to fight club for the first time, his ass was a wad of cookie dough. After a few weeks, he was carved out of wood." Although the first two rules of fight club command the men not to talk about fight club, the skin itself takes over as a silent yet vivid voice. The skin showcases "the wound which is a 'mouth' [that] can speak what the actual physical mouth has been forbidden to utter" (McLane, 1996, p. 115). The rebuilding of the body bond reunites them with themselves and with one another, ameliorating their alienation and annexing an alternative to fulfill the need for community and inclusion.

The fight club community eventually evolves into the project mayhem army of agents known as "space monkeys."[7] It is project mayhem's demolitions committee that catalyzes the chaos of the film's conclusion. The closing scene presents an animated extreme slow motion of Jack as he shoots himself in his suicide of Tyler: the bullet rips through Jack's cheek, the skin ripples in a wavelike motion, and blood rappels down his face. Tyler is the manifestation of Jack's (lack of) power; as Tyler tells Jack, "You were looking for a way to change your life. You could not do this on your own. All the ways you wished you could be...that's me!"

Despite this promising outset, though, Tyler develops into a normative power in his own right. Like capitalism, he strips away individual identity. He allows no names for the space monkeys in project mayhem. Moreover, his wisecrack about Bob's death ("If you wanna make an omelet, you've gotta

break some eggs.") devalues the sanctity of human life in relation to the utilitarian goals of the larger project: liberating the masses from commercial indebtedness. In this sense, Tyler animates (with his swaggering style) the very hegemonic power traits Jack wants to destroy. Foucault (1980, p. 56) orients such a situation by explaining, "Suddenly, what had made power strong becomes used to attack it. Power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counterattack in that same body." Where the animated body initially allows Jack (Tyler) the ability to escape his corporate course, the animated body suicide grants Jack (Jack) an even more poignant power to reconcile and release his own tendencies to emulate the nodes of knowledge which are so ingrained.

This inbred ideology instigates a unique use of filmic self-reflexivity in *Fight Club*. Before the film introduces the charismatic character Tyler Durden, it exposes animated flashes of him, foreboding the schizophrenic state that the narrative eventually unveils. Jack's insomnia fuels the flashes, which appear for only a subliminal wink, the epitome of ephemerality. Debord (2000, p. 7) notes that the "spectacle is a concrete inversion of life, an autonomous movement of the nonliving." This stagnant spirit closely resembles the state of insomnia where one is never really awake or asleep. Having not slept in six months, Jack explains, "With insomnia, nothing's real. Everything's far away. Everything's a copy of a copy of a copy." This voice-over accompanies the first flash, which coincides with Jack standing at the copy machine at work in the cubicle claustrophobia, performing a mundane task that nurtures his numbness. Here,

Tyler's flash taunts Jack for relinquishing his docile body to the corporate paradigm.

The second flash happens at the hospital, where Jack visits a doctor to get prescription sleep aids. Reassuring Jack that he cannot die from insomnia, the doctor refuses to prescribe any drugs and instead recommends healthy, natural sleep. At this point, Jack pleads for any kind of elixir since he is "in pain," and the doctor suggests that he head to a local church to attend the testicular cancer support group ("That's pain."). Tyler flickers next to the phlegmatic and patronizing doctor as a twit about the power of the medical gaze. At the group meeting, the third flash arises. Just at the introduction of the heart-pour portion of the meeting during which the men are instructed to "really open...up," Tyler blinks beside the counselor. The animation here signifies the evident as well as the embedded emasculation of the testicular cancer patients who are seeking some kind of solace or sodality. The fourth and final flash occurs on a street at night as Jack watches Marla walk away after another support session. As Jack confides, Marla has prompted the return of his insomnia since "Her lie reflected my lie. And suddenly I felt nothing. I couldn't cry. So, once again, I couldn't sleep." Tyler flits next to Marla in a Freudian tease.

In all of the animated flashes, the image of Tyler serves as a taunt, a temptation, and a trigger for Jack to revamp his docile body and reclaim his power. In the copier sequence, animated Tyler urges that people do not have to be copies that fuel corporate structures; they can break free. The flashes also relativise the power of the medical gaze. In relating the work of Foucault, Pitts

(2003, p. 36) establishes, "Through new technologies of bodily control, such as spatial separation, time management, confinement, surveillance, and examination, the individual body became a primary space to identify, label, and manage the psyche." Although there exists a perceived dependency on the doctor for a cure, Tyler counters this conventional wisdom and argues that medicine is not what people need. Instead, they need to destroy the day-to-day daze that issues the insomnia to begin with. The doctor acts as the modern medicine man who offers the testicular cancer group as a metanarrative for pain and dismisses local, partial, contingent knowledge of the body.

At the support group, Tyler mocks Jack's lie as well as the men's (fear of) castration and their subsequent feminization: hugging/crying, holding/sharing, emoting/nurturing. The Tyler flash next to Marla walking down an alleyway evokes Freud's symbolic vagina (wet streets, narrow passage). Marla manifests Jack's "power animal" in that she conveys the possibility of an alternative lifestyle, free from the constraints of consumption. She is his embodied option, whereas Tyler is his animated alternative. Both designate a kind of posthuman sentience since the "posthuman repudiates the psychoanalytical and so the posthuman is also postpsychic, beyond any therapy that attempts to rectify the disorder and illogic of desires with health, purity and stability" (Halberstam & Livingston, 1995, p. 13).

Power/Knowledge and the Deviant Body

It is not until the end of *Fight Club* that Jack (or the audience) realizes that he is schizophrenic. Despite his deviant genesis, Tyler—who is nothing more

than a voice inside Jack's head—conveys a sound logic throughout the narrative that works to negate negative notions of mental illness. Tyler is the source of Jack's knowledge ("I know this because Tyler knows this."); moreover, it is this intelligent insanity that enables Jack to subdue the spectacle and establish his enterprise to change culture. He actualizes what Wakefield (1990, p. 82) refers to as "a positive schizophrenisation of experience as an attempt to establish more heterogeneous and mobile relationships in which the unconscious could detach itself from the family structure of capitalism and act as a fund of new thoughts, desires, networks of social organisation and revolutionary change."

Unable to locate the locus of his spiritual stupor, Jack first seeks reprieve at various support groups, including Remaining Men Together (testicular cancer), Seize the Day (tuberculosis), Free and Clear (blood parasites), HOPE (sickle cell anemia), Incest Survivors Group, Alcoholics Anonymous, lymphoma, melanoma, brain parasites, ascending bowel cancer, and organic brain dementia. He finds refuge within the milieu of the medically deviant: "I let go. Lost in oblivion, dark and silent and complete, I found freedom. Losing all hope was freedom." Nevertheless, Jack achieves this at the support sessions by adopting revolving identities (Cornelius, Rupert, Travis) that successfully disengage him from the deviant bodies that surround him. Jack confesses, "I wasn't really dying. I wasn't host to cancer or parasites. I was the warm little center that the life of this world crowded around." In order for Jack's disenfranchised, schizophrenic self to experience any sense of empowerment, he has to situate

himself outside the normative structure of his corporate work and consumptive play (what Foucault would describe as the disciplinary control of capitalism). Within the already deviate domain of the sick support groups, his body holds the deviant dominion of "health." Such twisted logic prevails, feeding a new addiction for Jack until Marla arrives and, as a support session "tourist" in her own right, shatters the illusion that catapults Jack back into his insomnia.

Fight club provides the next evolution for the deviant body. Initially, Jack appears as the typical corporate employee who pushes paper in a cubicle and writes reports on the road; however, in his case, "the normalized and law-abiding subject is haunted by a spectral double, by a subject that materializes the will to transgress the law in perverse enjoyment" (Diken & Laustsen, 2002, p. 350). This is, of course, Tyler, an alter ego with the courage to see the world for what it is and strive to change it. He promises a counter-hegemonic potential to systematic legitimation, productivism, and consumerism since he "resists these definitions and instead proposes alternative formulations of the good life" (Agger, 1992, p. 10). Every day, Jack dons "professional" corporate branding at work: a tie, worn with a crisp clean white shirt. Such a uniform underlines Foucault's framework in that "Normative inscriptions of the body are not so much openly forced on subjects...as they are written into the psyche through what appear to be the 'voluntary' projects of adornment, ritual, habits, and lifestyle, which are encouraged by cultural values" (Pitts, 2003, p. 39).

Fight club represents the relinquishment of both the corporate costume and ideological code. Jack juxtaposes black eyes and blood stains with the

white button down shirt and tie. His boss sends him home because the blood and bruises begin to disturb the balance within the pristine appearance of the workplace. As his body sheds its docile daze in favor of deviance, Jack veers further away from disciplinary power ("I don't even wear a tie to work anymore."). One scene presents a voiceover in which Jack relates how fighting shifts perspective: "After fighting, everything else in your life got the volume turned down." The audio coincides with this comment when his supervisor approaches his desk, spouting normalizing judgment that is barely audible: "What are you getting yourself into every week?" Jack continues to explain, "You could deal with anything. I got right in everyone's hostile little face. Yes, these are bruises from fighting. Yes, I'm comfortable with that. I am enlightened." Jack has located nodes of knowledge that most of his colleagues have not.

Norris (1990, p. 144) notes that "Foucault offered the lesson that truth was nothing more than a product of the will-to-power within discourse, a value attached to certain privileged ideas thrown up from time to time within the shifting orders of language and representation." The rules and mottos of fight club and project mayhem signify "truth"—as well as a way of life and a call to action—for its members. Shedding their cultural collars (be they blue or white), they embrace a primal body comprised only of able hands and well-formed feet. The men echo Foucault (1980, p. 56) in believing that "Mastery and awareness of one's own body can be acquired only through the effect of an investment of power in the body: gymnastics, exercises, muscle-building, nudism, glorification of the body beautiful." Once this is achieved (the men

were "carved out of wood"), Tyler begins to devise what he calls "homework assignments" in an effort to move the fight philosophy into the common culture and subvert the commodity spectacle. They blow up computer stores. They annihilate access to popular entertainment distractions like television, satellite systems, and video rentals. They tear tires of limousines by reversing the stop strips outside a luxury parking lot. They edit billboard signs with hypocritical messages from government bureaucracies (like the Environmental Protection Agency).

Perhaps the most personal and poignant homework assignment that Tyler and Jack complete, though, involves a convenience store clerk by the name of Raymond K. Hessel. Tyler enters the store and takes Raymond outside to the back at gunpoint. Rummaging through the clerk's wallet, Tyler reads the address on his driver's license and notices an expired community college ID. After a few intense threats about impending death, Tyler asks Raymond what he wanted to be; he responds that he wanted to be a veterinarian. Unfortunately, the job requires too much school for him to seriously pursue his goal. Tyler asks Raymond, "Would you rather be dead? Would you rather die? Here? On your knees? In the back of a convenience store? I'm keeping your license. I'm going to check on you. I know where you live. If you aren't on your way to becoming a veterinarian in six weeks, you will be dead. Now run on home." This is the manner in which Tyler—the deviant voice in Jack's head—conspires to change the world by improving one life at a time, prompting personal awareness about past hopes and lost dreams that are still salvageable. As Tyler

tells Jack, "Tomorrow will be the most beautiful day in Raymond K. Hessel's life. His breakfast will taste better than any meal you and I have ever tasted."

Raymond's life is not the only one that improves. Project mayhem also benefits the space monkey members as they produce, organize, and distribute their own version of power/knowledge. Always "sizing things up," the men create their own subversive normalizing gaze. In project mayhem, they have no names and thereby enjoy "liberation of individuality from the fixity of identity" (Boyne & Rattansi, 1990, p. 39). Stripped of identity, they escape the manacle of individual accountability that swirls in the society of surveillance. Similar to armies throughout history, their anonymity creates a collective force that increases intensity and impunity. The space monkeys shave their heads, wear uniforms, share chores, sleep in bunkers, and work in teams and shifts. They even go so far as to be branded by the lye kiss in an initiation that presupposes pain, emits endorphins, and motivates the mind. In all comparisons, it is like war: a war against mind-numbing consumption that steals the spirit of living. The deviant bodies in project mayhem pursue subversion rather than perpetuation of hegemonic power structures that conceive of male bodies as complacent commodities.

Power/Knowledge and the Gendered Body

As a film about guys who fight, *Fight Club* could be considered just another test-fest flick. However, Friday (2003) refers to the film as a master narrative of the white male decline. While this perhaps seems intuitive, how exactly is the white male waning? The presumed pratfall parallels a slip in power

since the cultural control white males once enjoyed has diminished, thereby moderating the masculine identity projected by previous generations. Smith and Lisle (2002, p. 130) submit that the film contributes to discourse about the crisis of masculinity in a way that supersedes a simplistic investigation of hegemonic "manliness" since it "portrays the attempted resuscitation of a lost masculinity as a ridiculous pursuit. Instead, the film attacks *both* hegemonic Rambo-fed muscle pumping masculinity *and* the complacency of 'new-man' feminist-friendly, IKEA-draped manhood." A new model for masculinity must be molded to reclaim power, and that identity is inscribed in and on the body.

The passive posture of the testicular cancer survivors group propagates the very crisis in which the men find themselves. They are "Remaining Men Together," clinging to what has been lost: the physical manifestation of their masculinity. What hopes to hold on to an ideal of embodied manhood only constitutes collaborative mourning. The men emote as they proclaim "We're still men" in a defeated voice that seeks affirmation rather than serving assertion. Jack answers this plea with the placating proposal "Yes, we're men. Men is what we are." As the group that activates his addiction to support sessions, it seems to appropriately reflect his apathetic and abstinent existence.

Connell (1995, p. 206) establishes that one form of masculine politics is therapy that focuses "on the healing of wounds done to heterosexual men by gender relations," an apt description of Jack's support group partner Bob. With "eyes already shrink-wrapped in tears," the "big moosie" echoes Debord's assertion that all relations have become transactional; his body and pain are

commodified, shrink-wrapped, ready for trade. The most forward feature of Bob is his "bitch tits." During hormone therapy, imbalances caused Bob's body to breed breasts, after which his wife left him and his children refused his calls. His new body (and lost identity) vitiates all aspects of his life. The irony of this transformation is that Bob used to be a bodybuilder, pumping steroids and submitting to the normalizing notion that products can generate any desired body model. The very modes manufactured to cast his body as traditional strength mutated him, castrating the iconic symbol of masculinity, countering it with femininity, and ultimately signifying the futility of a return to classic male status. Bob suffers because he allows external market factors—advertising, products, and services—to dictate the definition of his masculinity. Even more disturbing is the fact that he then repeats the cycle of abuse by becoming an abuser via his chest expansion program that airs on a late-night infomercial, promising a new self to be obtained with the use of the product. Through a series of excessive consumption consequences, Bob's masculine body transforms into a feminine physique with bitch tits. However unfortunate this shift is for Bob, it ultimately provides maternal comfort for Jack and proves to be the only place that he finds silence and solace.

Serving only as outlets for frustration, the support groups offer no more than the obvious ploys of consumerism. They do not reconstruct what is lost. They do not provide power outside of the groups. In another session for cancer, a character named Chloe experiences a similar issue. Her cancer slowly steals her life and strips her of her femininity. In an effort to reclaim both her body and

her sexuality, she openly invites other members of the group to have sex with her so she may, one last time, enjoy sexual sensation. Unfortunately, Chloe has lost her commodity appeal; her body no longer directs desire. Still, the fact that she has the courage to exercise what remains of her gendered body is enough to deem her dynamic since, "According to Foucault, the preferred strategy is to 'desexualize' sexuality by multiplying and diffusing pleasures, in order to cancel the now-obsolete understanding of it as a circumscribed domain fundamentally opposed to power and the law" (Woodhull, 1988, p. 169). Even though Chloe no longer commands the male gaze, she suggests alternatives to contrived conceptions of sexual pleasure and embodiment.

A self-proclaimed "30-year-old boy," Jack regrets that he grew up in a "generation of men raised by women," devoid of masculine teachings. As a result, he is mired in docile body phases (go to college, get a job). Pornography magazines have capitulated to the Horchow collection, shifting sexual consumption to material consumption. Indeed, commodities are all that Jack knows. He grounds his identity in manufactured desires rather than mind/body desires. Although he finds temporary relief at the support sessions, Marla enters the scene and exposes the futile front for his emasculation. He finally conditions the courage to confront her, and they have an opportunity to connect as they admit to each other why they play tourist at the meetings. After an instant of intimacy, Jack retreats, unable to acknowledge or act on his desire for her. It is at this point that Tyler takes over as the new masculine identity in Jack's life. As Tyler tells Jack, "I look like you wanna look. I fuck like you wanna fuck. I'm smart,

capable, and most importantly, I'm free in all the ways that you're not." At the end of the film, Jack realizes that he *is* Tyler and flashes back to the events that transpired while Tyler took control. Among these is a sex scene in which the look on his face communicates confusion rather than pleasure, further reinforcing the idea that masculinity in sexual relations had become foreign to him. Rian (1982, p. 49) suggests that "Since our sexuality has been constructed for the most part through social structures over which we have no control, we all 'consent' to sexual desires and activities which are alienating to at least some degree." Jack's flashback contributes a quintessential characterization as to how deeply engrained the effects of alienating commodity culture are.

Marla also presents an interesting idea about how the female gendered body exhibits empowerment. She invades Jack's space in the support groups, cigarettes blazing, her unhealthy smoke dancing in delicate waves throughout the rooms. Moreover, she crashes his complacency. She is that which bridges man and nature, that which possesses the ability to reintroduce Jack to his masculinity. If her body had not been such a revelation of rebellion, perhaps he would have never acted to alter his life; as he states early in the movie, "And suddenly I realize that all of this—the gun, the bombs, the revolution—has got something to do with a girl named Marla Singer." Catalyzing his change and ripping him from the moorings of his zombie-like zone, she seems to be the only woman who fits into this world.

Marla's mystique serves as the solution Jack seeks. She fights the corporate hegemony in the most extreme way: by refusing to work. Instead, she

makes money by stealing jeans from laundromats and then selling them to thrift stores. Marla appropriates the American pop icon of attire, those urban camouflage clothes that commit conformity, herald hegemony, and inhibit individuality. When Jack questions this scheme, she silences him by securing his "manhood" in a squeeze. Marla moreover lacks maternal motivations and nurturing instincts; in fact, she steals meals donated to the elderly. Overall, her attitude balks at bureaucracy in all of its commercial, legal, and moral manifestations.

The sex scene in *Fight Club* positions Marla as dominant over Jack. She is on top, her breasts exposed, her arms in the air as she models a masculine use of the space around her body. As Tyler observes, "She's a predator posing as a house pet." Sure to secure her own sexual pleasure, she relativises female hegemonic sex that is typically passive in nature. She refuses to submit to prescriptive beauty ideals for women. Although the portrayal of Marla perhaps "positions the female body within transgressive sexual space," it does so in a way that grants her power (Thompson, 1997, p. 34). Additionally, aberrant sex acts are implied when Tyler emerges from a bedroom after much screaming and moaning with his hand encased in a yellow rubber kitchen glove. While Marla's moxie "produces instances of sexuality that reshape, constrain, and oppress human beings, it can also be said to generate new forms of pleasure and new positions from which to resist" (Woodhull, 1988, p. 168).

Power/Knowledge and the Grotesque Body

In *Fight Club*, the spectacle indeed rouses resistance. Consumerism has penetrated private life to such an extent that Jack is compelled to shop by phone while using the bathroom. Absorbing the catalog while on the commode, he sits on the phone, holding for a customer service representative so he may place an order for Erika Pekkari dust ruffles. He embodies garbage-in-garbage-out as a symbolic release of commodity culture. However, the release serves no real function at this phase since the cycle continues ad nauseum. Excessive consumption replaces retentive commodification and forces expulsive commodification, which inevitably leaves a void that aches to be filled by more excessive consumption, prompting the repeat process.

Tyler typifies the temperament of Jack's psyche that interrupts the cycle via manifold odd jobs that he holds. For instance, working at the Pressman Hotel affords ample opportunity to relativise the power of the wealthy. Despite the exclusive image circulated by the hotel, it really only offers two basic benefits: food and shelter. Tyler compromises the food. As a banquet waiter for the prestigious Pressman, he farts on meringue, urinates in the lobster bisque, sneezes on braised endive, and does you-know-what to the crème of mushroom soup. Besides putting his own personal twist on the flavor of the cuisine he serves, Tyler attenuates the trust that is taken for granted by the clientele of fine establishments. Such behaviors adjust his lower strata to a more level plane with the elite's higher strata, blurring the class lines with the reminder that a grotesque body of some degree exists for everyone. While the lower classes have been

traditionally linked with the lower body, the higher classes have been associated with the upper body (Bakhtin, 1984). Just as carnival mocks and distorts these conceptions, Tyler assumes this approach but takes it to the next level; instead of just caricaturing the elite, he directly engages their bodies (and renders them docile) in the carnival ritual without their consent.

As a film projectionist, Tyler uses his position to incorporate the grotesque body—in the form of single frame pornographic splices—into family films. In one sense, this signals a return to a primal male state in an effort to relocate power. Tyler is going to fight. Tyler is going to have sex. Tyler is going to be a man in his perceived natural sense of the word. In a larger sense, though, the porn splice negotiates the normalizing judgment for children's viewing from both parental and political surveillance systems. Tyler subverts the notion that bodies should be kept secret, shrouded as if foreign and dangerous. Although the flash is fleeting, it nonetheless appears as a subliminal stunt for subconscious memory. The porn splice flashes a second time in the closing scene of the film as a self-reflexive play that occurs as the financial buildings collapse. Debord (2000, p. 98) maintains that the "city is the *focal point of history* because it embodies both a concentration of social power, which is what makes historical enterprises possible, and a consciousness of the past." The men in fight club abstract that history for themselves and erase it for the greater good of economic equilibrium. The high-rises signify the bodies of the corporations: the taller the structure, the longer the phallus. In the end, though, the primal promenade comes full circle. Tyler succeeds at emasculating the corporate phallus (which robs

people of their peace of mind) and replacing it with an actual penis (the primal state free of consumption's corruption) as a symbol of his triumph over capitalism and his reconstituted masculinity.

Lou, owner of Lou's Tavern where fight club begins, manifests pure Mafioso machismo. One night, he appears at fight club with the intention of shutting it down since he does not receive any payment for the use of his property. Tyler taunts Lou to free his frustration by beating him. Naturally, presented with a challenge from another man, Lou accepts the offer and pummels him to an oozing bloody pulp. Tyler then reverses the situation, pins Lou to the floor, and vomits blood all over his face, in his eyes, nose, and mouth, unceasingly shouting, "You don't know where I've been, Lou!" Foucault (1980, p. 37) observes that the "body the adult has to care for, when he is concerned about himself...is a fragile, threatened body, undermined by petty miseries." Certainly, Lou brought this petty misery upon himself by refusing to recognize the powerful potential of fight club generally and Tyler specifically. Here, Tyler appropriates the fear of the medical gaze against Lou, who finally acquiesces to allow fight club to continue—free of charge—in his basement.

The knowledge Jack gains from Tyler's episode with Lou empowers him to use the grotesque body in an equally extreme way, although instead geared toward crippling the corporate hegemony. Jack arranges a private meeting with his supervisor during which he threatens to publicize the perilous and proscribed practices of the company unless he is put on the payroll as an outside consultant. Incredulous, his boss fires him immediately, at which point

Jack imagines his first fight with Tyler. He begins to beat himself into a blood-bath, pitching himself onto a glass coffee table and through a glass shelving unit. He pointedly pleads with his boss to stop "hitting" him, who all the while stands stunned in silence, shocked at the intimacy with which he experiences "a grotesque body [that] can represent a refusal of orderliness and social control" (Pitts, 2003, p. 41). As soon as he destroys most of the office furniture, Jack kneels at his supervisor's feet, disclosing his demands and promising never to return to work again. It is at this moment that the security guards rush in to witness the aftermath. Here too the grotesque body presents a poignant protest against corporate control, granting Jack the power to pursue his own purpose. Marshall (1992) mentions that the "Situationists...wanted a different kind of revolution: they wanted imagination, not a group of men, to seize power, and poetry and art to be made by all. Enough! They declared. To hell with work, to hell with boredom! Create and construct an eternal festival." With such a philosophy, they would have been proud of Jack. For his grotesque efforts, he receives a full salary, benefits, office equipment, and enough flight coupons to fund fight club and project mayhem on a national scale ("We now had corporate sponsorship."). The corporate hegemony agrees to fund its own demise. The men who achieve this are the "vocative and imperative force of the fleshly encounter, in and through which both self and other are continuously (re)constituted, are (re)read and (re)written, mark and are marked" (Sullivan, 2001, p. 35). The fight club bodies disrupt spectacle distractions and diminish disciplinary power.

This turnaround resembles the topos of Bakhtin's (1984) carnival as the members shed societal standards and turn out tensions that have festered within society. At the heart of grotesque spirit lies the cycle of death and rebirth, and Jack relates how fight club envisions this as well: "Every night I died, and every night I was born again...resurrected." Although the essence of carnival was to maintain hegemonic power structures in the traditional sense, contemporary culture cues different circumstances. The spectacle has grown to such an extent that it permeates both public and private life; because it is omnipresent in society, the only way to genuinely gain perspective is to leave society. Fight club members never really rejoin society, especially once project mayhem kicks into high gear. With each fight they garner new knowledge of their fetters, how to stretch, tug, and eventually break them. Their communal vision of power/knowledge designs the demise of—or at least an inconvenience for—capitalist hegemony.

To bond with one another and distinguish themselves from society, Tyler brands the project mayhem members with a lye kiss. Jack is the first initiate. Tyler licks his lips, kisses the back of Jack's hand, then pours lye over it to trigger a painful chemical burn. Although Jack struggles in agony, Tyler restrains him and requires him to acknowledge the inevitability of his own death so that he may relinquish all hope and be truly free to live. The lye kiss brands a figurative mouth on the body, screaming silently, never repressed, never ignored, never distracted. Born of enlightened pain, it is incapable of knowing anything other than the harsh truth that time will destroy the body and the world. Sullivan (2001,

pp. 160-161) captures the way in which the "flesh is (trans)formed into a *body*, in and through processes of inscription, reading, and writing" wherein the "body, gestures, desires, and capacities are the truth-effects of social imaginaries or systems of power/knowledge and are read, in and through socially and historically specific grids of intelligibility." Likewise, all of the space monkeys face their own deaths, enduring the lye kiss as a symbol of their departure from hegemonic society. As Siebers (2000, p. 10) explains, "Pain and mastery of pain become sources of pride, eroticism, and rebellion against middle-class consumer society." In his discussion of masculinity as collective practice, Connell (1995, p. 107) describes the context of controlled motorcycle fraternity violence that coincides with carnival and the philosophy of *Fight Club:* "Most of the actual violence is confined within the group, where it will not attract police action. Violence directed outwards is mainly symbolic." With its own set of rules to protect the participants, fight club occurs at a particular place and time and fosters mutual respect and classic camaraderie among the men. Symbolic actions in the homework assignments herald a conduit for communication with mainstream society.[8] In fight club, the men stand united in their grotesque bodies of the fight.

Many primal cultures have rituals characterized by pain that mark the traversal from one stage of life to another. Andrew, a "body piercer, modern primitive, and cyberpunk" cited in Pitts (2003, p.41) explains that "every culture has a rite of passage that involves a moment of pain, a length of time of healing and then the talisman to show for the experience that the society and

the individual collectively recognize as that journey, and where you are now. We don't have any of that." But fight club boasts all of this. The lye kiss simply chronicles the transcendence from a life of illegitimate illusion to a life of emancipating experiences.

Fight Club Matrix and Synthesis

Fight Club's most impassioned ideology is the will to self-destruct in order to fashion a more rewarding life by forging a more aware self. As the narrative observations discussed in this chapter have demonstrated, the anti-consumption sentiments actively advocate destructive bodies that are liberated enough to "let go" of materialistic spectacles of power/knowledge. The *Fight Club* matrix catalogs the relationships evident in the themes and scenes closely read for this sensemaking study.

The Fight Club *Matrix*

THE ANIMATED BODY "Let go." self-awareness & self-motivation of insane	THE DEVIANT BODY "It's very clever." escape & explosion of capitalism
THE GENDERED BODY "Slide." destruction of normalized gender	THE GROTESQUE BODY "all-singing all-dancing crap of the world" bruised hegemony & personality

One of *Fight Club's* key arguments is that people should learn to "Just let go." Let go of jobs or careers that fail to fulfill the spirit. Let go of the need to control everything all the time. Let go of manifold material possessions that demand too much time and energy, since "The things you own end up owning you." In the film, mental illness advances animated bodies that achieve a

requisite level of self-awareness to ignore the commands of consumption culture and initiate a more aware self-application in life. Most of the animated bodies relate to Jack in his sentient and subconscious realities, which are marred with insomnia and schizophrenia. A victim of the commodity spectacle, Jack defines himself according to a milieu of material objects rather than emotional fulfillment. Predictably, though, this system ultimately disappoints, just as it is programmed to, so that it infinitely perpetuates itself. Never is the consumer satiated because capitalism will not—indeed, cannot—feed that which truly yearns: the soul. Lowe (1995, p. 174) suggests that "the body has emerged as the sole, remaining other in the monologic of late-capitalist accumulation. Capital accumulation and the body constitute the new binary opposition: the body acts as the other to late-capitalist development." Sleepless, Jack—evidently on a subconscious level—realizes that he does not possess the power to release the spectacle shackles himself, so his mind summons a schizophrenic state as a tool to assist in his awakening of knowledge and subsequent reclamation of power.

The animated body depicts the application of knowledge newly cultivated by this state of self-awareness. Tyler typifies this self-empowerment in all that he is: his poise, his demeanor, his thoughts, and his actions. Despite the fact that he exists only as a voice inside Jack's head, he exercises logic, exorcises commodification, and expresses enlightenment for mass culture. As the animated body, he is free in ways Jack is not and can consequently change himself and the world around him. However, the concluding suicide

scene proves necessary to destroy Tyler's pragmatically inhumane and blindly dogmatic traits that mirror the world that Jack wants/needs to change/leave. *Fight Club* features animated body flashes, film burns, and direct addresses which fulfill a self-reflexive purpose as elaborated by Keating (2004, p. 82): "In general, once filmic apparatuses are exposed, viewers are more likely to believe that the film may have a causal impact on the 'real world'—the film is considered a statement about the world rather than merely a mirror of some 'objective reality'—and are therefore more likely to identify the film as ideology and perhaps challenge its messages."

Fight Club is very clever. It manifests the deviant body via individuals and the male collective that escape and eventually collapse the core of contemporary capitalism: the credit card institutions. As Jack explains, "If you erase the debt record, then we all go back to zero. It'll create total chaos." Mental instability and emotional numbness bequeath the deviant body to Jack. Initially, he has only clever quips to offer his single-serving friends. He eventually succeeds at establishing a new identity which enables him to regain confidence in himself. Jack (Tyler) and the other men locate hallowed ground in the basements of fight club where they consent to a kaleidoscope of injury to communally displace their aggressions against a world that does not work for them. Moreover, as Ducpétiaux (cited in Foucault, 1977, p. 324) notes, "Anything that helps to tire the body helps to expel bad thoughts; so care is taken that games consist of violent exercise. At night, they fall asleep the moment they touch the pillow." Self-destruction in the form of friendly fighting

releases and eases life's tensions. As the space monkey bond burgeons, they embark upon enlightenment enterprises to share their shibboleths ("This is your life and it's ending one minute at a time.") and meliorate mainstream society in an effort to annul archaic hegemony and integrate inspiring ideologies. Through fighting, the men reorient purchased identity (artificial) to embodied identity (tangible). What seems deviant from the outside ("Most people, normal people, do just about anything to avoid a fight.") liberates those on the inside; after all, "How much can you know about yourself if you've never been in a fight?" Death to the docile body.

At the core of discourse circulating within and around *Fight Club* is gender. Subscribing to Marla's poignant advice, "Slide," this reading of the film allays both misogynistic anxieties and testosterone reveries in favor of a perspective that recognizes aberrant forces acting upon both normalized females and males, thereby privileging the destructive body. Both Chloe and Marla disregard normalizing judgment. Chloe demands sexual gratification—an act of fertility, health, and reproduction—despite her proximity to death, disease, and repulsiveness. Marla mocks feminine beauty and behavior ideals; her aesthetic speaks in sullen shades of black and gray; tending toward hitting bottom at best and suicide at worst, she is selfish, callous, and autonomous. Her mind/body presents a personification of the slide mantra related by Jack: "No fear. No distractions. The ability to let that which does not matter truly slide."

Marla's personality traits segue nicely to the specter of the airport dildo "ticking" in Jack's luggage that haunts the normalizing gaze with its association

of female perversion. Like castration, the dildo denotes another derivation of the feminized male; even the possibility of feminized pleasure degrades Jack's image with airport personnel. Meanwhile, Remaining Men Together treats death and suffering as tangible life trials. Death is both symbolic in the loss of the ability to procreate as well as literal in the potential death of the self. Ironically, this is the locus at which Jack loses hope, finds freedom, and portends the promise of a primal power to rejuvenate his life, as well as the lives of other men like him. They, too, can now slide like Marla and Chloe, subverting and then destroying normalized gender codes for contemporary masculinity that leave them physically, spiritually, and intellectually impotent.

Fight Club vaunts visceral violence as a means of grotesque liberation from consumption chaos. As such, the members (as well as everyone else, but they do not yet know it) are the all-singing all-dancing crap of the world, hailing from—and eventually returning to—the same compost heap. Fight club and project mayhem manifest what Foucault (1980, p. 119) refers to as ubiquitous yet uncentered power relations, entities that circulate rather than resting in one place, productive rather than just negative: this power "doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but...it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be thought of as a productive network which runs through the whole social body." Jack admits, "It was right in everyone's face. Tyler and I just made it visible. It was on the tip of everyone's tongue. Tyler and I just gave it a name." To the elite of society who support economic stratifications in which the rich get richer, rendering the poor

ever more prostrate, Tyler reminds them, "The people you are after are the people you depend on. We cook your meals. We haul your trash. We connect your calls. We drive your ambulances. We guard you while you sleep. Do *not* fuck with us."

When Jack fights himself in the office of his supervisor, he reveals to the white collar cog what his management has bred in the worker bee body. To avoid having to bear further witness to his own contribution to the atrocity, the manager sets Jack free. Jack's self-destruct serves as a symbolic representation that "Under and behind and inside everything this man took for granted, something horrible had been growing." As people march passively to the capitalistic beat, a ubiquitous unhappiness grows in which an abysmal apathy haunts everyday existence and the first melees of a great spiritual war begin. Jack embodies the internal depression of a lackluster life without purpose and a war against avaricious manipulation by external forces (hateful jobs, needless consumption). *Fight Club* negotiates nodes of knowledge that issue from insanity to grant the destructive impulse the power to improve life. Smith and Lisle (2002, p. 135) elaborate in the following passage:

> Fight Club forces us to face our hypocrisies, but also the indulgences of our attempts at reconciliation...so read you IKEA catalogue. Don't read it. Drink in franchise coffee houses. Support cosy independents. Get in touch with your feminine side. Join a men's group. Watch action movies. Take up Martial Arts. Whatever. Just do not think your lifestyle choices allow you either to secure the moral high ground of pure resistance or take refuge in "ironic" self-detachment.

Just as the individual must destroy what it currently is in order to make itself into something better, so too do the civilizations of man destroy themselves

in order to create a new society that is better. Just as the individual must willingly acknowledge its own mortality—the inevitable destruction of the irreplaceable miracle that is its own consciousness—in order to choose freely to either let that miracle die purposeless or with the intention and inspiration to improve the world of its fellow man, the question is not whether you are going to die. The question is whether your death will help others improve the lives of others. So too the civilizations of the world must acknowledge that they are finite, that though they have singular benefits akin to the singular miracle of a person's consciousness, they must smash themselves to disengage that which is irrelevant and inhibiting, "to let that which does not matter truly slide." And ultimately, they too must accept their death when it is upon them and determine whether they shall die with their citizens bound in their drowning arms or with their citizens buoyed and carried above the waves by their dying breath. After all, "On a long enough timeline, the survival rate for everyone drops to zero." The destructive body is life's symbol for growth and change. The destructive body is life's everquest for perfection. "My eyes are open."

[1] This is the warning that plays on the DVD version of *Fight Club*, using the aesthetic of the copyright warnings.
[2] Palladino and Young (2003) also explore the spatio-temporal aspects of Fight Club and link them loosely with the World Trade Center.
[3] All film quotes are taken from a copy of the final screenplay available at http://hackvan.com/pub/stig/scripture/fight-club/Fight_Club_final.htm
[4] "This is commonly known as the base-superstructure model. The base of society is its mode of material production, the ways, usually economic, whereby it reproduces itself materially, and the source of exploitative class relations. It determines the superstructure of a society, its political and ideological institutions, the social relations and sets of ideas that lie outside the base, like the family, the state, religion, education and culture" (Strinati, 1995, p. 132).
[5] "When the proletariat, in the course of its fight against bourgeoisie, necessarily consolidates itself into a class, by means of a revolution makes itself the ruling class, and as such forcibly sweeps away the old system of production—it therewith sweeps away the system upon which class conflicts depend, makes an end of classes, and thus abolishes its own rule as a class" (Marx, 1963, p. 53).
[6] Keating (2004) provides perspective about the suspension of storyworlds and the introduction of the film apparatus that occurs in some films (like *Fight Club*).
[7] The space monkey reference recollects the first monkey "ready to be shot into space. Space monkey! Ready to sacrifice himself for the greater good."
[8] Although they hurt no "others" in the process of subversion, they do suffer the loss of Bob, shot in the head by a police officer, perhaps in the district of Detective Stern.

EPILOGUE

You realize that our mistrust of the future makes it hard to give up the past. We can't give up our concept of who we were. All those adults playing archaeologist at yard sales, looking for childhood artifacts, board games, CandyLand, Twister, they're terrified. Trash becomes holy relics. Mystery Date. Hula Hoops. Our way of getting nostalgic for what we just threw in the trash, it's all because we're afraid to evolve. Grow, change, lose weight, reinvent ourselves. Adapt.
~Chuck Palahniuk: Survivor~

He with body waged a fight,
But body won; it walks upright.

Then he struggled with the heart;
Innocence and peace depart.

Then he struggled with the mind.
His proud heart he left behind.

Now his wars on God begin;
At stroke of midnight God shall win.

—William Butler Yeats, "The Four Ages of Man"

Actively resisting theoretical hegemony, this sensemaking study prompts further discussion rather than capturing a sense of closure regarding how contemporary popular culture situates the body as a site of meaning. *Ally McBeal*, *South Park*, and *Fight Club* reorient manifestations of power/knowledge and envision alternative approaches—privileging emotion, immaturity, and destruction—to being-in-the-world. Just as Foucault observes that power and knowledge intricately intertwine in all interactions to create what he calls power/knowledge, this collection of chapters proposes the entity of mind/body or the essential/performative self. Together, mind and body, essence and performance surrender their separation and sculpt a soul that defines the self.

The words of Yeats eloquently capture the overarching spirit (waging a fight and walking upright) of the pop culture texts reflected in this exploration: *Ally McBeal* (struggling with the heart), *South Park* (struggling with the mind), and *Fight Club* (warring with God). In each of these, the body is a site of meaning that unveils internal dreams and demons that reel and rage inside everyone, refusing to surrender to the notion that "Conversation is almost dead, and soon so too will be those who knew how to speak" (Debord, 1998, p. 29).

The caricatured characters of *Ally McBeal* integrate reason and intellect with emotion and embodiment. They reflect mind/body and the essential/performative self by privileging the power of emotional bodies that reveal life's impulses. The animated cutouts of *South Park* juxtapose the fetiparous physical and the mature mental. They signify mind/body and the essential/performative self by privileging the power of immature bodies that locate logic. The psychotic sidekick of *Fight Club* advocates escaping the spectacle of consumption culture. It reorients mind/body and the essential/performative self by privileging the power of destructive bodies that release life's banality.

All of these pop bodies present what Curry (1993) calls dermagraphism, a reading and writing of the body. *Ally McBeal* writes excessive emotional bodies, *South Park* writes excessive immature bodies, and *Fight Club* writes excessive destructive bodies. While all of the body forms manifest meaning within their storyworlds, they ultimately impact culture in that they jointly inscribe it and are inscribed by it. It is here that Venturi's (1977) concept of "messy vitality" adds dimension as to how these particular pop texts contextualize culture. From an

architectural perspective, Venturi (1991) accents the advantages to a messy vitality of the built environment since it "promotes richness and ambiguity over unity and clarity, contradiction and redundancy over harmony and simplicity." It is contextual in nature, flowing with the theme of the surrounding environment rather than ignoring or attempting to override it. Venturi (1977, p. 16) describes the details in the following passage:

> elements which are hybrid rather than 'pure,' compromising rather than 'clean,' distorted rather than 'straightforward,' ambiguous rather than 'articulated,' perverse as well as impersonal, boring as well as 'interesting,' conventional rather than 'designed,' accommodating rather than excluding, redundant rather than simple, vestigial as well as innovating, inconsistent and equivocal rather than direct and clear. I am for messy vitality over obvious unity. I include the non sequitur and proclaim the duality.

Ally McBeal, *South Park*, and *Fight Club* all engage a messy vitality of mind/body in culture. They write the essential self—hopes, fears, thoughts, imaginings—onto the performative self: that cast which carries them through and exposes them to the world. Moreover, these texts do so in a way that subverts contemporary conceptions of the disciplinary gaze that proposes bodies should be rational, mature, and docile. Foregoing the visual vapidity of the khaki culture, they inscribe the physical form with all the vitality of the soul and parade what normalizing judgment negates for most. What flows forth is an enriching and enlightening array of personalities that actualize rather than just articulate uniqueness of form and individuality of spirit, rendering the emancipation of emotion, the clarity of childhood, and the reality of revolution to be possible projects in everyday life.

REFERENCES

Agger, B. (1992). Cultural studies as critical theory. London: Falmer Press.

Aitken, S. C., & Zonn, L. E. (1994). Re-presenting the place pastiche. In S. C. Aitken & L. E. Zonn (Eds.), Place, power, situation, and spectacle: A geography of film (pp. 3-25). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Antonio, R. J., & Kellner, D. (1994). The future of social theory and the limits of postmodern critique. In D. R. Dickens & A. Fontana (Eds.), Postmodernism and social inquiry (pp. 127-152). New York: The Guilford Press.

Arnold, N. S. (1990). Marx's radical critique of capitalist society. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ash, G.E. (2000, May). Not 'what little kids can be': Cultural appropriation and adults watching south park. Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 43(8), 747-750.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). The dialogic imagination: Four essays. (M. Holquist & C. Emerson, Trans., M. Holquist, Ed.). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1984). Rabelais and his world. (H. Iswolsky, Trans.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Balsamo, A. (1996). Technologies of the gendered body: Reading cyborg women. Durham: Duke University Press.

Baudrillard, J. (1983b). Simulations. New York: Semiotext[e].

Bellafante, G. (1997, August 18). South park: Television program reviews. Time, 150(7), 74.

Boon, K. A. (2003). Men and nostalgia for violence: Culture and culpability in Chuck Palahniuk's fight club. Journal of Men's Studies, 11(3), 267-276.

Bourdieu, P. (1996). On television. (P. P. Ferguson, Trans.). New York: The New Press.

Boyne, R., & Rattansi, A. (1990). The theory and politics of postmodernism: By way of an introduction. In R. Boyne & A. Rattansi (Eds.), Postmodernism and society (pp. 1-45). Houndmills: Macmillan.

Braidotti, R. (1994). Nomadic subjects: Embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory. New York: Columbia University Press.

Brooks, A. (1997). Postfeminisms: Feminism, cultural theory and cultural forms. London: Routledge.

Bryant, J., & Thompson, S. (2002). Fundamentals of media effects. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Butler, J. (1999). Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity. New York: Routledge.

Callinicos, A. (1990). Reactionary postmodernism? In R. Boyne & A. Rattansi (Eds.), Postmodernism and society (pp. 97-118). Houndmills: Macmillan.

Carver, T. (2002). Fight club: Dramma giocosa. International Feminist Journal of Politics, 4(1), 129-131.

Castelnuovo, S., & Guthrie, S. (1998). Feminism and the female body: Liberating the amazon within. Boulder: L. Reinner.

Castle, T. (1986). Masquerade and civilization: The carnivalesque in eighteenth-century English culture and fiction. London: Methuen.

Caute, D. (1967). Essential writings of Karl Marx. New York: MacMillan.

Chaney, M. A. (2004). Representations of race and place in static shock, king of the hill, and south park. Journal of Popular Film & Television, 31(4), 167-176.

Clark, J. M. (2002). Faludi, fight club, and phallic masculinity: Exploring the emasculating economics of patriarchy. Journal of Men's Studies, 11(1), 65-76.

Cole, E. B. (1993). Philosophy and feminist criticism. New York: Paragon House.

Collins, J. (1997, November). Woman of the year: Confused and lovable? Or a simpering drag? Taking sides on Fox's surprising new hit. Time, 150(20), 117.

Connell, R. W. (1995). Masculinities. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cook, K., & Mravic, M. (1999). Fight cult. Sports Illustrated, 91(17), 31.

Coppock, V., Haydon, D., & Richter, I. (1995). The illusions of 'post-feminism': New women, old myths. London: Taylor & Francis.

Cowdroy, C. (1933). Wasted womanhood. Metuchen: Charles F. Heartman.

Creed, B. (1993). The monstrous-feminine: Film, feminism, psychoanalysis. London: Routledge.

Curry, D. (1993). Decorating the body politic. New Formations, 19, 69-82.

Deacy, C. (2002). Integration and rebirth through confrontation: Fight club and american beauty as contemporary religious parables. Journal of Contemporary Religion, 17(1), 61-73.

Debord, G. (1998). Comments on the society of the spectacle. (M. Imrie, Trans.). London: Verso.

Debord, G. (2000). Society of the spectacle. (K. Knabb, Trans.). London: Rebel Press.

Demetrakopoulos, S. (1983). Listening to our bodies: The rebirth of feminine wisdom. Boston: Beacon Press.

Derrida, J. (1973). Speech and phenomena: And other essays on Husserl's theory of signs. (D. B. Allison, Trans.). Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Diken, B., & Laustsen, C. B. (2002). Enjoy your fight!: Fight club as a symptom of the network society. Cultural Values, 6(4), 349-367.

Dow, B. J. (1996). Prime-time feminism: Television, media culture, and the women's movement since 1970. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Dow, B. J. (2002). Ally McBeal, lifestyle feminism, and the politics of personal happiness. Communication Review, 5(4), 259-264.

Dubrofsky, R. (2002). Ally McBeal as postfeminist icon: The aestheticizing and fetishizing of the independent working woman. Communication Review, 5(4), 265-284.

Duncan, C. M. (2003). Liberalism and the challenge of fight club: Notes toward an American theory of the good life. disClosure, 12, 119-144.

Dunlap, B. (1998, June 26). Shock treatment: animation for adult audiences makes some advertisers blush. Shoot, 39(26), 34-35.

Dunne, M. (1992). Metapop: Self-referentiality in contemporary American popular culture. Jackson: U. Press of Mississippi.

Eichenbaum, L., & Orbach, S. (1987). Between women: Love, envy, and competition in women's friendships. New York: Penguin Books.

Engels, F. (Ed.). 1908. Capital: A critical analysis of capitalist production. London: Swan Sonnenschein.

Farber, S. K. (2000). When the body is the target: Self-harm, pain, and traumatic attachments. Northvale: Jason Aronson.

Fiske, J. (1987). Television culture. London: Methuen.

Fiske, J. (1989). Reading the popular. London: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1977). Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison. (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1978). The history of sexuality: Volume I: an introduction. (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1980). Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977. (C. Gordon, Ed., L. Marshall, J. Mepham, K. Soper, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1986). The history of sexuality: Volume 3: the care of the self. (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books.

Freud, S. (1939). Moses and monotheism. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Friday, K. (2003, May). A generation of men without history: fight club, masculinity, and the historical symptom. Postmodern Culture, 13(3). Retrieved December 11, 2003, from http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v013/13.3friday.html

Gamble, S. (1999). Postfeminism. In S. Gamble (Ed.), The Routledge critical dictionary of feminism and postfeminism (pp. 43-54). New York: Routledge.

Gardiner, J.K. (2000, January). South park, blue men, anality, and market masculinity. Men & Masculinities, 2(3), 251-272.

Giroux, H. A. (2000). Private satisfactions and public disorders: Fight club, patriarchy, and the politics of masculine violence. Retrieved from www.henryagiroux.com/online_articles/fight_club.htm.

Glannon, W. (2001). The ethics of human cloning. In M. Ruse & A. Sheppard (Eds.), Responsible science or technomadness? (pp. 153-171). New York: Prometheus.

Goldblatt, H. (1997, September). Fox nails the gen x vibe. Fortune, 136(5), 36.

Goldsmith, O. (1997, December 7). Word-perfect women: Out of the mouths of babes. The New York Times, p. AR 39.

Gray, F. (1994). Women and laughter. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia.

Greenfield, J. (1981). Television: The first fifty years. New York: Crescent.

Grush, B. (1981). The Shoestring Animator. Chicago: Contemporary Books.

Grussendorf, C. (2000). The feminist answer to the male backlash: Within and without. Off Our Backs, 30(1), 16-19.

Halas, J., & Manvell, R. (1970). Art in movement: New directions in animation. New York: Hastings House.

Halas, J., & Manvell, R. (1971). The technique of film animation. New York: Hastings House.

Halberstam, J., & Livingston, I. (Eds.). (1995). Posthuman bodies. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hall, S. (1993). Encoding, decoding. In S. During (Ed.), The Cultural Studies Reader (pp. 90-103). London: Routledge.

Haraway, D. J. (1988). Remodelling the human way of life: Sherwood Washburn and the new physical anthropology, 1950-1980. In G. W. Stocking, Jr. (Ed.), Bones, bodies, behavior: Essays on biological anthropology (pp. 206-259). Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Heywood, L., & Drake, J. (Eds.). (1997). Third wave agenda: Being feminist, doing feminism. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hobbs, C. (1997). Locke, disembodied ideas, and rhetoric that matters. In D. S. Wilson & C. M. Laennec (Eds.), Bodily discursions: Genders, representations, technologies (pp. 151-162). Albany: SUNY Press.

Hoesterey, I. (2001). Pastiche: Cultural memory in art, film, literature. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

hooks, b. (1993, September/October). Let's get real about feminism: The backlash, the myths, the movement. Ms., 34-43.

Hooper, C. (2002). Fighting offers no real redemption. International Feminist Journal of Politics, 4(1), 131-132.

Jameson, F. (1983). Postmodernism and consumer society. In H. Foster (Ed.), Postmodern culture (pp. 111-125). London: Pluto Press.

Jameson, F. (1998). The cultural turn: Selected writings on the postmodern 1983-1998. London: Verso.

Jorn, A. (1964). Guy Debord and the problem of the accursed. Retrieved from http://notbored.org/cursed.html

Katz, A. (1998, February 16). Those %#$@-*# kids. The Nation, 266(5), 35-36.

Keating, N. M. (2004). If looks could kill: Female gazes as guns in thelma & louise. In M. Pomerance & J. Sakeris (Eds.), Popping culture (pp. 75-84). Boston: Pearson Education.

Kellner, D. (1995). Media culture: Cultural studies, identity and politics between the modern and the postmodern. London: Routledge.

Kember, S. (1999). NITS and NRTS: Medical science and the Frankenstein factor. In Cutting Edge (The Women's Research Group) (Ed.), Desire by design: Body, territories, and new technologies (pp. 29-49). London: I. B. Tauris.

Kirkham, P., & Skeggs, B. (1998). Absolutely fabulous: Absolutely feminist? In C. Geraghty & D. Lusted (Eds.), The television studies book (pp. 306-318). London: Edward Arnold.

Klinghoffer, D. (1998, March 9). Dirty joke. National Review, 50(4), 48-51.

Kroker, A., & Cook, D. (1986). The postmodern scene: Excremental culture and hyper-aesthetics. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Leafe, A. S. (1998, August 3-6). Blurring the lines: Postfeminism, sanity and ally mcbeal. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the association for education in journalism and mass communication: Baltimore.

Lee, J., & Sasser-Cohen, J. (1996). Blood stories: Menarche and the politics of the female body in contemporary U.S. society. New York: Routledge.

Lee, T. (2002). Virtual violence in fight club: This is what transformation of masculine ego feels like. Journal of American and Comparative Cultures, 25(3), 418-423.

Lemert, C.C., & Gillan, G. (1982). Michel Foucault: Social theory and transgression. New York: Columbia University Press.

Levertov, D. (1983). Poems 1960-1967. New York: New Directions.

Lovibond, S. (1990). Feminism and postmodernism. In R. Boyne & A. Rattansi (Eds.), Postmodernism and society (pp. 154-186). Houndmills: Macmillan.

Lowe, D. M. (1995). The body in late-capitalist USA. Durham: Duke University Press.

Lyotard, J. F. (1984). The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Mandzuik, R. (1993). Feminist politics and postmodern seductions: Madonna and the struggle for political articulation. In C. Schwichtenberg (Ed.), The Madonna connection (pp. 167-187). Boulder: Westview.

Marc, D. (1984). Demographic vistas: Television in American culture. Philadelphia: U. of Pennsylvania Press.

Marek, J.G. (1999). The practice and ally mcbeal: A new image for women lawyers on television? Journal of American Culture, 22(1), 77-84.

Marin, R., & Chambers, V. (1997, October). High heels, low esteem: Two halfway heroines are hits with women. Newsweek, 130(15), 71.

Marin, R. (1998, March 23). South park: The rude tube. Newsweek, 131(12), 56-62.

Marshall, P. (1992). Demanding the impossible: A history of anarchism. London: Fontana Press. Retrieved from http://catless.ncl.ac.uk/Obituary/debord.html

Martin, J. (1998, May 2). A tale of three cities. America, 178(15), 21-22.

Martinez, G. (2003). South park tv satire skewers John Edward psychic pretensions. Skeptical Inquirer, 27(2), 8-12.

Marx, K. (1963). Manifesto of the communist party. In D. Ryazanoff (Ed.), The communist manifesto of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. New York: Russell & Russell.

McClintock, A. (1995). Imperial leather: Race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest. New York: Routledge.

McLane, J. (1996). The voice on skin: self-mutilation and Merleau Ponty's theory of language. Hypatia, 11(4), 107-18.

McLaren, M. A. (2002). Feminism, Foucault, and embodied subjectivity. Albany: SUNY Press.

Miner, V., & Longino, H. E. (Eds.). (1987). Competition: A feminist taboo? New York: The Feminist Press.

Mizejewski, L. (1992). Divine decadence: Fascism, female spectacle, and the makings of Sally Bowles. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Modleski, T. (1991). Feminism without women: Culture and criticism in a "postfeminist" age. New York: Routledge.

Moseley, R., & Read, J. (2002, July). Having it ally: Popular television (post-)feminism. Feminist Media Studies, 2(2), 231-249.

Nixon, H. (1999, September). Adults watching children watch south park. Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 43(1), 12-16.

Norris, C. (1990). Lost in the funhouse: Baudrillard and the politics of postmodernism. In R. Boyne & A. Rattansi (Eds.), Postmodernism and society (pp. 119-153). Houndmills: Macmillan.

Norris, C. (1998, March). Welcome to south park, fat-ass. Spin, 14(3), 66-75.

Ouelette, L. (2002). Victims no more: Postfeminism, television, and ally mcbeal. Communication Review, 5(4), 315-335.

Palladino, P., & Young, T. (2003). Fight club and the World Trade Center: On metaphor, scale, and the spatio-temporal (dis)location of violence. Journal for Cultural Research, 7(2), 195-218.

Palmer, J. (1994). Taking humour seriously. London: Routledge.

Pence, G. E. (1998). Who's afraid of human cloning? Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Pitts, V. (2003). In the flesh: The cultural politics of body modification. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Pogrebin, L. C. (1987). Competing with women. In V. Miner & H. E. Longino (Eds.), Competition: A feminist taboo? (pp. 11-17). New York: The Feminist Press.

Quigley, M. (2000). The politics of animation: South park. Metro, 124/125, (48-54).

Rabinow, P. (Ed.). (1984). The Foucault reader. New York: Pantheon Books.

Racevskis, K. (1983). Michel Foucault and the subversion of intellect. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Rapping, E. (2000, July). You've come which way, baby? Women's Review of Books, 17(10-11), 20-23.

Ressner, J. (1998, March 23). Gross and grosser. Time, 151(11), 74-77.

Rhodes, C. (2002, December). Coffee and the business of pleasure: The case of harbucks vs. Mr. Tweek. Culture & Organization, 8(4), 293-307.

Rian, K. (1982). Sadomasochism and the social construction of desire. In R. R. Linden, D. Pagano, D. E. H. Russell, & S. L. Star (Eds.), Against sadomasochism: A radical feminist analysis (pp. 45-50). East Palo Alto: Frog in the Well.

Rollin, B. E. (1995). The Frankenstein syndrome: Ethical and social issues in the genetic engineering of animals. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rousseau, J. J. (1984). A discourse on inequality. (M. Cranston, Trans.). London: Penguin Books.

Schreyer, R. (1997). Will the reel woman in body double please stand up? In D. S. Wilson & C. M. Laennec (Eds.), Bodily discursions: Genders, representations, technologies (pp. 187-197). Albany: SUNY Press.

Schulz, C. M. (1980). Age, sex and death anxiety in a middle-class American community. In C. L. Frye (Ed.), Aging in culture and society (pp. 239-252). New York: Praeger.

Sheets-Johnstone, M. (Ed.). (1992). Giving the body its due. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Sheridan, A. (1980). Michel Foucault: The will to truth. London: Tavistock Publications.

Shildrick, M. (1997). Leaky bodies and boundaries: Feminism, postmodernism and (bio)ethics. London: Routledge.

Shilling, C. (1993). The body and social theory. London: Sage.

Shumway, D. R. (1989). Michel Foucault. Boston: Twayne Publishers.

Siebers, T. (Ed.). (2000). The body aesthetic: From fine art to body modification. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Siegel, D. L. (1997). Reading between the waves: Feminist historiography in a 'postfeminist' moment. In Heywood, L., & Drake, J. (Eds.), Third wave agenda: Being feminist, doing feminism (pp. 55-82). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Smith, W., & Lisle, D. (2002). It's not really about fighting. International Feminist Journal of Politics, 4(1), 133-135.

South Park: Entertainment of irresponsible programming? (1998, May 21). New York Amsterdam News, 89(21), 22.

Stallybrass, P., & White, A. (1986). The politics and poetics of transgression. Ithaca: Cornell UP.

Stevens, L. P. (2001, March). South park and society: Instructional and curricular implications of popular culture in the classroom. Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 44, 548-555.

Strinati, D. (1995). An introduction to theories of popular culture. London: Routledge.

Terry, J., & Urla, J. (Eds.). (1995). Deviant bodies: Critical perspectives on difference in science and popular culture. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Thompson, T. L. (1997). Female bodies misbehaving: Mortification in early modern English domestic texts. In D. S. Wilson & C. M. Laennec (Eds.), Bodily discursions: Genders, representations, technologies (pp. 19-37). Albany: SUNY Press.

Travers, P. (1999). How good is fight club? It's so fired up with explosive ideas and killing humor that the guardians of morality are yelling, "Danger—keep out!" That's how good. Rolling Stone, 824, 113-114.

Turner, G. (1990). British cultural studies: An introduction. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Tuss, A. (2004). Masculine identity and success: A critical analysis of Patricia Highsmith's the talented Mr. Ripley and Chuck Palahniuk's fight club. Journal of Men's Studies, 12(2), 93-102.

Urla, J., & Swedlund, A. C. (1995). The anthropometry of Barbie: Unsettling ideals of the feminine body. In J. Terry & J. Urla (Eds.), Deviant bodies: Critical perspectives on difference in science and popular culture (pp. 277-313). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Vavrus, M. D. (2000). Putting ally on trial: Contesting postfeminism in popular culture. Women's studies in communication, 23(4), 413-428.

Venturi, R. (1977). Complexity and contradiction in architecture. Johnston: The Museum of Modern Art.

Venturi, R. (1991). http://www.pritzkerprize.com/venturi.htm#...about%20Robert%20Venturi

Wakefield, N. (1990). Postmodernism: The twilight of the real. London: Pluto Press.

Weber, M. (1998). Economy and society. In N. Zack, L. Shrage & C. Sartwell (Eds.), Race, class, gender, and sexuality: The big questions (pp. 116-121). Malden: Blackwell.

Wilson, D. S., & Laennec, C. M. (Eds.). (1997). Bodily discursions: Genders, representations, technologies. Albany: SUNY Press.

Wilson, E. (1990). These new components of the spectacle: Fashion and postmodernism. In R. Boyne & A. Rattansi (Eds.), Postmodernism and society (pp. 209-236). Houndmills: Macmillan.

Wolff, J. (1990). Postmodern theory and feminist art practice. In R. Boyne & A. Rattansi (Eds.), Postmodernism and society (pp. 187-208). Houndmills: Macmillan.

Woodhull, W. (1988). Sexuality, power, and the question of rape. In I. Diamond & L. Quinby (Eds.), Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on resistance (167-176). Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Yeats, W. B. (1966). The collected poems of W. B. Yeats. New York: Macmillan.

Zettl, H. (1999). Sight, sound, motion: Applied media aesthetics. Belmont: Wadsworth.