



## **THE ENEMY / Issue One**

**David Robbins  
Gelare Koshgozaran  
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CJ Pascoe  
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# **PLAY DATE IN THE FAME COMPLEX**

**David Robbins**

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[theenemyreader.org](http://theenemyreader.org)

The band Arcade Fire’s driving, intelligent, often beautiful art-rock advances modest formal experimentation without sacrificing emotional depth. That isn’t easy to do, and their achievement has been well received, enough that in 2011 the group won Album of the Year at the Grammy Awards, for *The Suburbs*. As a fan of Arcade Fire’s ambitions and music I am usually curious to see what they’ve been up to, which is why I recently took time to watch a music video created by the band to promote their latest album, *Reflektor*. Directed by Roman Coppola, the colorful video for the song “Here Comes the Night Time” features the seven-member group performing in a crowded dance club and comes with a bonus: cameo appearances by a number of currently popular Hollywood actors and comedians — James Franco, Ben Stiller, Michael Cera, Aziz Ansari among them — saying this and that in scripted club-themed vignettes. While I didn’t much care for the song, we all know new musical directions often need time to grow on the listener, so eventually I may love it. The video itself elicited a less charitable response. I hated it — far too strong a reaction, you’d think, to so harmless a critter. Isn’t a music video featuring walk-ons by currently popular entertainers merely a more recent bottling of the show biz fizz served us in *The Big Broadcast of 1938* and *Circus of the Stars*? We’ve been downing the stuff for years, so what’s there to get riled about?

As a genre, music videos have been around since the 1960s, pioneered by visual artist Bruce Conner and, independently, The Beatles. The birth of MTV in the early 1980s made them a cultural staple and, for a time, something to talk about. That was then. The days when a music video had cultural impact worth discussing — indeed of anyone caring one way or another about it as a communication form — are in the past; MTV itself

replaced them years ago with reality shows. But music videos are still being made, and since producing them costs real money, we can only assume that somewhere along the line the form proved itself, to the recording industry, a sufficiently useful marketing tool.

***From the evidence of their musical output — anxious anthems for an anxious time — Arcade Fire do not seem natural candidates for “going Hollywood.”***

Their very functionality keeps them from attaining high levels of art. Conceived to sell something other than themselves, music videos are saddled with an illustrative aspect whether or not the image track closely corresponds to lyric content. And however vital a video’s individual components, in combination pop music, pop stardom, youth, and “concept” can’t be guaranteed to take flight. More dependable is the impress of music business machinery. To make a music video agents and managers, publicists and lawyers get into the act. Your people contact my people to talk over budgets, schedules, intellectual property agreements — the arrangements. Taken together these arrangements — the artifice of deal-making — constitute a kind of aesthetic, and it’s this aesthetic that colors Arcade Fire’s “Here Comes the Night Time” video, in which reciprocal, all-access-pass fandom is on insular display: Arcade Fire is a fan of Franco, Cera etc, and vice versa. Famous people having as much right to their fandom as anyone, the only substantive difference between theirs and yours plays out in terms of scale — in effect, how celebrities may exercise their fandom. Fame has its privileges. The chances that a star will gain access to the objects of his fandom far surpass our own.

It happens that in this race I do have a horse. From a base in the art world I've been reflecting, in artworks and books, on the similarities and differences between artists and entertainers for almost thirty years, and through the process of connecting to an audience, I've acquired a public life. Though I long ago lost interest in actively using public identity, in the post-modern fashion, as a material — or did I just lose my nerve? — it is there, earned but dormant, should I change my mind. Arcade Fire and the Hollywood performers who appear in their video are, then, public figures of one sort and I, an artist and writer of more modest public mien, am one of another. What they make travels through the culture in a different way than what I make but I have as much claim to this culture — it is as much mine — as any artist whose abilities are configured to play in popular media. I'm tooting this horn because I intend that the critique I'm here advancing should be cast in artist-to-artist terms. I am not a critic. I have zero interest in the "text" of the video and whether or not there is one. I am, rather, an artist asking, "What are these artists making?" What are they doing with our culture? What are they doing with their opportunity? What are they doing with their easy access to our attention? Just what is transacted with us by presenting a work that is for all intents and purposes a visual analog of name dropping? It's entirely fair to ask such questions since by the very nature of their work these people ask for our time.

From the evidence of their musical output — anxious anthems for an anxious time — indie-rockers Arcade Fire do not seem natural candidates for the absorption process historically referred to as "going Hollywood." And the sight of young alt-pop masters teaming up with comedic actors for a play date in the Fame Complex is, I will admit, disheartening. (Isn't there something a little bro about this video as well? Somehow it just doesn't

seem a premise that would interest a woman.) But objections of these sorts have their limits. Isn't the narrative wherein Underground Artist Gains Mainstream Acceptance a classic way that any culture advances? We want good art to find an audience. Artists can't be asked to stay underground forever (although some prefer to remain there), and commercial success is itself a reality to explore. A music video like "Here Comes the Night Time" is just part of that process, isn't it? As for the presence of all those actors, Hollywood has always been about "personalities," so why should seeing a gaggle of them here give us pause?

***Does it not qualify as an act of bad faith to base work upon the assumption that I, as your audience, believe some sort of magic attaches to celebrity and that merely reminding me of my belief is sufficient to constitute not only a transaction but a work?***

I do realize that every generation gets their chance to be at the success party. You can't keep people from attending. You can't tell them not to go. However, anyone is just as free to decline the invitation and do something else with their time — and by extension, with ours. Declining the invitation to the party is always an option.

None of those who appear in "Here Comes the Night Time" made that choice. None said no to business arrangements intended to increase the likelihood that we would watch and talk up this video — omg it's James f'n Franco! Michael f'n Cera! Bon-f'n-o! — and, thereby, give it promotional momentum. Why would an invitation of this kind when a) entertainers decline

participating will most likely be fun/painless, and b) it's business as usual in a business dependent on — expert at — attention-getting? Anyway, when it comes to our friends' work, don't we, all of us, tend to suspend critical judgment?

These arguments may make sense from the supply side. But the supposition that an aesthetic of business arrangements is sufficient and deserving of attention is one that the consumer has every right to question.

**Vehicles with these aspirations annoy us when their authors are uncool people whose art we dismiss. How is it any better when a work of business aesthetics is sponsored by cool people whose art we dig?**

*This* consumer half-expected to see Bob Hope pop up in the “Here Comes the Night Time” video, such are the coordinates of its aesthetic ambitions. That a music video which showcases an alternative, indie band and alt-comedy players should cause a viewer to anticipate an appearance by Bob Hope is troubling. As a sexagenarian, Bob Hope donned a hippie wig and love beads to mock that era's counter-culture on network television, if you want to know his opinion of trying to work and live outside the mainstream. Bob Hope was an establishment entertainer who had gained power within the post-war entertainment system, and he exercised that power to keep himself before the cameras and microphones, serving his own interests far longer than he served the culture's. To today create a work whose aesthetic coordinates are sufficiently self-satisfied to suggest the imminent appearance of an entertainer of his ilk amounts to, if I am not over-stating it, a species of generational artistic

treason. How is the value system in the “Here Comes the Night Time” video fundamentally differentiated from a Bob Hope television Christmas spectacular featuring Joey Heatherton? What was the point of all that effort by people who devoted themselves to giving this culture better alternatives? Why had we gone to all the trouble of hand-building options to taking the interstate if in the end all roads still lead to Bob Hope Drive (an actual road in Rancho Mirage, California, if you didn't know it)?

Music videos are not, I recognize, these artists' primary endeavor (director Coppola possibly excepted?); they're just part of the reward for jobs well done in other arenas. Success begets the perks of success. Fine, we get it. As conceived, though, in order for it to work the “Here Comes the Night Time” video requires the audience to look upon the Won Perk as in itself theater sufficiently worth our attention. If for any reason the audience isn't willing to sign the contract proffered — if, for instance, the audience resists finding any fascination in the self-regard of performers who have agreed to appear on a business-aesthetic platform — then the circuit is broken, and the transaction collapses.

Refusal to sign that contract calls for some degree of self-possession on the part of audience members, true, but in fact many, many audience members are sufficiently self-possessed. The current concept of “celebrity” blends a dizzyingly powerful set of mythologies: it-could-happen-to-you, change-your-name-change-your-fate, sky's-the-limit, only-in-America — into a cultural absinthe with the potential to cloud our judgment but the self-possessed audience member keeps his wits. He or she will be heard to ask, reasonably: Why is it interesting to watch a celebrity do *anything*? And further: Does it not qualify as an act of

bad faith to base work upon the assumption that I, as your audience, believe some sort of magic attaches to celebrity and that *merely reminding me of my belief is sufficient to constitute not only a transaction but a work?* I think it does qualify as exactly that. An invitation to complete a circuit of bad faith is disturbing under any circumstances but it's more emphatically disturbing here, for the reason that we do not expect strata of culture that seek to offer or embody any kind of "alternative" to be operating in bad faith. That they were never to do this was part of the point — very likely *the* point — of alternative subcultures. They were not going to act in bad faith. They might do business, they couldn't be expected to forego doing business, but — a very different thing — they were not going to generate culture from within the frame of a business aesthetic. This was the contract with their audience. This was how they were going to distinguish themselves from the mainstream culture. This was to be their difference, fundamentally.

So, yes, it does bother me that artists of a generation who have been exposed to the identical history of the imperial phase of American show biz — the Bob Hope phase — as the rest of us should opt to reinforce that template. Don't ask us to watch you splash about in culture-foam in support of your latest product and expect us to applaud you. Vehicles with these aspirations annoy us when their authors are uncool people whose art we dismiss. How is it any better for the cultural ecosystem when a work of business aesthetics is sponsored by cool people whose art we dig? In an era when our culture is wading up to its eyeballs in the ludicrous notion that it somehow constitutes interesting theater simply to observe a celebrity do something — the post-war imperial style entering its mannerist phase — we expect our better artists either to have enough self-discipline to eschew applications of magic that fit a Gaussian blur over our

judgment or else to inflate these until they shatter and in shattering liberate us.

Since 1938 we have collectively, as a culture, sat through *The Big Broadcast of 1938* (which movie, as it happens, featured the young Bob Hope) many times. As a culture we could sit through it yet again — and no doubt will; there are periods when Hollywood seems to have imagination for little else. Fortunately, we now have genuine alternatives to this fare. The entertainment system no longer enjoys a lock on what constitutes entertainment. There's real competition now, underwritten by an irreversible evolution of technology. Imaginations independent of both the art and entertainment systems may efficiently create using pop languages — movies, TV, music — and, crucially, via the internet, get them to an audience. Reinforce *that* template, you Arcade Fires of the world. It's in your interest, and it's unquestionably in ours.



# **UNDER CONTEMPORARY ART'S VITRINE**

**Gelare Khoshgozaran**

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[theenemyreader.org](http://theenemyreader.org)



Last September, a curator from Tel Aviv contacted me about including my work in an exhibition opening in Tel Aviv, and possibly Berlin and Los Angeles “about contemporary art from Iran and Syria”. “There is such a gap between our cultures, even when we are so close and related in many ways,” he wrote in his email. We met in person after exchanging a few more emails, where I expressed my skepticism about my participation in this exhibition. My reluctance was in part because it sounded to me like yet another attempted curation that pigeonholed identity in the name of exhibiting something “provocative.” I also felt that my commitment to the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel<sup>1</sup> could present a problem. In our short meeting he mentioned the names of a few potential participants in the show, a predictable list of self-exotifying, self-orientalizing auction stars, most of them women with photographic practices that I had criticized previously in my writings.<sup>2</sup>

I knew that this was neither the first nor last time that I would receive such an invitation for my “identity” to be exhibited in the vitrine of cultural tourism by means of “art.” Since the 2009 uprisings in Iran, and later, the so-called Arab Spring, Iranian art has experienced a new tide of interest. This trend consists of an increasing number of scholars, curators, and gallerists researching, curating and showing the works of ‘Iranian artists.’ This new wave is following the great market attention that had thus far been given to Iranian art through the Dubai, Sharjah and London auctions among others, evolving from the tradition of white colonial “art and culture enthusiasts” travelling around the world, “discovering” and buying artifacts from “Persia” and adding them to their growing collections.

Today the new “aware and politically correct” white

subjects traveling to the Middle East are no longer just collecting antiquities, handicrafts or precious exotic objects. They are culling the fragments of a contemporary art from practices of those referred to as ‘professional’ and ‘revolutionary’ artists from the region. These new “connoisseurs” of Iranian contemporary art are interested in exploring the difficulties and challenges of Iranian contemporary artists, including how such artists are striving to create their own language under the systematic censorship, western sanctions and economic depression. These conditions are often presented in contrast to the U.S. practice of extending tolerance and self-reflexivity to the institution.

These “politically correct” contemporary Iranian art savants are often superficially aware of the post-colonial discourse, although, unsurprisingly, treat it as passé or “last-century.” Their gracious inclusion of “insider” voices in the discourse for the sake of authenticity, however, fails to exempt them from the underlying neocolonial tendencies in their approach. Today, Iran has become both a real and virtual destination for art lovers, collectors, scholars, critics, curators and artists. But the outcome of this kind of attention, and the endeavours of scholarly tourism, besides the harm it does to Iranian contemporary art<sup>3</sup> is often no more than a repertoire, survey or a PowerPoint presentation of travel to that region.

In *The Problem with Privilege* Andrea Smith writes:

*The western subject understands itself as self-determining through its ability to self-reflect, analyze and exercise power over others. The western subject knows that it is self-determining because it compares itself to ‘others’ who are not. In other words, I know who I am because I am not you. These “others” of course are racialized. The western subject is a universal subject who determines itself without being determined by others; the*

*racialized subject is particular, but is supposed to aspire to be universal and self-determining.*

She then refers to Hiram Perez's analysis of "how the white subject positions itself intellectually as a cosmopolitan subject capable of abstract theorizing through the use of the "raw material" provided by fixed, brown bodies. The white subject is capable of being "anti-" or "post-identity," but understands their post-identity only in relationship to brown subjects which are hopelessly fixed within identity. Brown peoples provide the "raw material" that enables the intellectual production of the white subject.<sup>4</sup>"

The exposure that the brown artist, like any other artist today, needs in order to emerge and ultimately establish their career is similar to that of the photographic process. The transparency of the negative after developing and fixing the film depends on the amount of exposure to light that it receives during photography. The more transparent the negative, the more detail is lost until the loss of all of gray scales, all subtleties. Similarly, the exposure that the brown artist receives in order to emerge into and succeed in the art world often denudes layers of subtleties off as the artist gets more fixed in identity under such determining and confining labels as "successful Iranian woman artist."

The western contemporary artist with a "post" practice—ranging from "post-studio" to "post-identity" and "post-human"—can walk into numerous galleries and museums across greater metropolitan areas to look at collections of work from 'the Middle East,' by 'Iranian Women,' 'Syrian Artists,' 'Islamic Art,' 'Leading Arab Artists,' exhibitions with generic titles such as 'Inside Out,' 'Veiling/Unveiling,' etc. These exhibitions function as representatives for arts from an imaginary region such as the "Islamic World," and thereby create a dynamic

where the post-identity artist and art enthusiast is viewing the art by those who are so fixed within identity, "representative" of a region, a culture and a brand of brownness.

A month after that curator's email, I was visiting an exhibition of "Iranian Modern Art" at NYU's Grey Art Gallery. In order to walk to the show I had to pass through another current exhibition at the gallery, "Radical Presence: Black Performance In Contemporary Art." Walking around the gallery a dark and still TV monitor caught my attention. The monitor was permanently switched off and a note posted on it read: "Adrian Piper has requested that Peter Kennedy's film, *Becoming the Mythic Being*, be removed from this exhibition." She articulated her reasoning in correspondence with Valerie Cassel Oliver, the exhibition's curator. It reads in part:

*"I appreciate your intentions. Perhaps a more effective way to 'celebrate' [me], [my] work and [my] contributions to not only the art world at large, but also a generation of black artists working in performance' might be to curate multi-ethnic exhibitions that give American audiences the rare opportunity to measure directly groundbreaking achievements of African American artists against those of their peers in 'the art world at large.'"*

The Iranian Modern Art exhibition at NYU coincided with the "groundbreaking" exhibition *Iran Modern at Asia Society*. This exhibition includes work from the 50s, 60s and 70s, three decades that led to the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Those thirty years were a period that Melissa Chiu, Museum Director and Senior Vice President at Asia Society, describes in the following way: "It was when Iran as a society was modernizing so the artists were also modernizing their work in many different ways and it became a real kind of cultural flowering of Iranian art during this time."<sup>5</sup> Through a series of programs and publications organized in conjunction with the exhibition,

along with its curation, Iran Modern posits a glorified “modern” pre-revolutionary Iran against an oppressed Islamic Iran.

Among the publications glorifying this era in Iranian history is an interview with Bob Colacello about Andy Warhol’s visit to Iran. Colacello says Warhol enjoyed the caviar and they enjoyed the warm hospitality shown them by Iranians. He goes on to say, “Everything seemed normal and nice. I never heard the word “Shiites” in the 10 days we were there.” The interview ends with the question, “Did you get the feeling you were there for a unique moment in Iran’s history?” Colacello responds: “Yeah, I think we were there at a time that, kind of looking back, was a golden age for Iran. And seeing the Iran Modern show I realized all the more what kind of creative energy that was there... And I think it was wonderful moment in Iran.”<sup>6</sup>

Not surprisingly, a talk by the once “underground” Iranian musician, Mohsen Namjoo was organized in conjunction with the exhibition as well. For years underground rock music in Iran has been constructing a palatable image for western eyes, depicting the brown Middle Eastern Muslim man rehearsing indie rock in broken English against a backdrop of walls decorated with posters of western icons. In this scene the brown man gets a chance to present himself as “harmless,” as opposed to the western held stereotype of a bearded, hairy savage, a potential suicide bomber speaking a language they do not understand.

*“Legally I’m nobody  
When I cross the border I’m somebody mean.  
My international rights are in some politician’s thought.  
I’m just a dream  
As I turn to this microphone and scream”<sup>7</sup>*

Exhibitions such as Iran Modern, which reduce Iran to the binary “glorious pre-Islamic Republic” versus the

“oppressed post-revolutionary,” are part of a larger neocolonial attitude granting Iran legitimacy through modernity. The desire to be legible to the western subject is at the core of this exhibitionism and (over)exposure. Documentary practices of photography and fictional short or feature films where the brown subject is a “representative”—both depicting and delegating<sup>9</sup>—for the eyes of the white Western “art and culture lover,” contribute to this desire. The responsibility of the pedagogical brown is to be willing to educate the western white enthusiast. Hence there is always going to be a documentary about “gays in Iran,” a TedTalk about “Iranian Contemporary Art,” an NPR story about underground rock in Iran and an exhibition “about contemporary art from Iran and Syria”.

## Endnotes:

1. PACBI: Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel. PACBI's Call for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel published on July 6, 2004: <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=869/>
2. Khoshgozaran, Gelare, *Nostalgia for a Past I Never Had*, Parkett, No. 91, 2012, (241-242)
3. For a list of some of the ways that this surge of attention is not helping Iranian art read: Salemy, Mohammad, *Six Reasons As To Why The Recent Surge Of Interest In Iranian Contemporary Artists Is Not Productive For Iranian Art* <http://dadabasenyc.com/six-reasons-as-to-why-the-recent-surge-of-interest-in-iranian-contemporary-artists-is-not-productive-for-iranian-art/>
4. Smith, Andrea, *The Problem with Privilege*, published August 14, 2013 on Andrea Smith's website: <http://andrea366.wordpress.com/2013/08/14/the-problem-with-privilege-by-andrea-smith/>
5. In a video clip entitled "Inside Asia Society's 'Iran Modern' Exhibition" published on Asia Society's website, Melissa Chiu offers insights into the exhibition Iran Modern, on view at Asia Society Museum in New York City through January 5, 2014: "What this exhibitions allows us to do and for many Americans is to learn about a time in Iranian history when the U.S. and Iran actually had many relations. Many Iranian artists were engaging with international art. It was a time generally speaking when there was an enormous amount of creativity. Artists were experimenting with new ideas that were on the one hand very localized. They were adapting local or even folks sometimes even spiritual ideas about an issue. But on the other hand it was developing an international language. So on the one hand in the exhibition we have works that are about a movement called Saqqakhane, which is about being grounded in Iranian culture. And then on the other hand, we have a theme in this exhibition, which is all about abstraction, which is very much an international medium. So we're kind of trying to set the stage of understanding how complex Iranian art was at that time." Chiu goes on to say that artists continue to face censorship in Iran. "In the midst of increasing tensions between Iran and the West," she hopes "the exhibit sheds a different light on Iran's history." <http://asiasociety.org/video/arts/inside-asia-societys-iran-modern-exhibition>. On Sep 16, 2013 Charlie Rose also covered Iran Modern Exhibition in the absence of any Iranian individuals, including the curator of the exhibition, Fereshteh Daftari. For more commentaries and insights watch the full interview here: <http://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/watch-charlie-rose-covers-iran-modern>
6. Read the full interview conducted by Dan Washburn and published Oct 22, 2013 on Asia Society's blog here: <http://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/interview-what-it-was-travel-iran-andy-warhol-1976>
7. From *My Sweet Little Terrorist Song* written by Sohrab Mohebbi of 127 band from the album Magnitizdat [Songs of Terror & Hope], 2007



# **HOLD UP TO THE LIGHT**

**Hedi El Kholi**

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I am looking at the record cover of Paul Quinn's *The Phantoms and the Archetypes*, released in 1993 by the influential label Postcard. It shows the singer sitting pensively, a cigarette in his hand. The photo is solarized, crudely cut out and pasted on a black background. His face and hands are washed out by a beautiful incandescent-neon blue light. He's like an apparition. The white silhouette has very little detail and the shadowy grain on his shoulder has some speckles of magenta dust, which let you know that the source photograph used for the cover was a cheap color photocopy. The effect is striking; it's almost painful to stare at and conjures perfectly what's to come when the album is played, a *séance* of cinematic sophistication and Velvet-inspired roughness, mediated by Paul Quinn's voluptuous and sorrowful voice.

The son of a Pentecostal pastor, Paul Quinn grew up in Dundee, a Scottish city near the North Sea in a household where pop music was banned. "We lived behind the church. The only tolerated music was religious hymns from the 18th century. We didn't have a TV or a record player, just a small wooden transistor. At night I would borrow it and secretly listen to pop music programs."

At 11, Quinn was a classmate of Edwyn Collins (of Orange Juice). "I remember I'd just go into school carrying Roxy or Bowie albums under my arm, and he was getting into pop music at the time so he must have thought that I was a like-minded soul. That's how we became friends. It was rock that brought us together." When Collins moved to Glasgow at age 15, they stayed in touch: "Edwyn used to keep me up to date with what was going on in punk. There were no like-minded people in Dundee. I used to go up to Glasgow to watch Roxy Music and buy smart gear."

Edwyn Collins was the first to start a band, The Nu-Sonics, the first incarnation of Orange Juice, in 1976. Opening for Steel Pulse in 1978, he met Alan Horne, who founded the label Postcard (The Sound of Young Scotland) two years later to release music from the burgeoning scene. Horne, a gay depressed adolescent, took a trip to Europe at 16 and forced himself to communicate with strangers in an attempt to overcome his debilitating shyness. Horne was obsessed with movies and music, particularly disco, soul, and the Velvet Underground. Bored with punk self-righteousness and lack of humor he developed a vague interest for Reggae music. The Nu-Sonics did two things that night that impressed Horne greatly, "they begin their set with the relatively obscure Velvet Underground's song *We're Gonna Have a Real Good Time Together* (only featured in a live album from 1974) and later a friend brought onstage sung the chorus from Chic's latest hit."

***Records were made and every Postcard single had to be played against the Velvet's Pale Blue Eyes.***

A friendship started between Horne and Edwyn Collins. The Postcard core group shared the same 4-bedroom apartment in a working-class neighborhood of Glasgow. "It's in this apartment that I truly learned to play music. The atmosphere was amazing. Music was played 24 hours a day. Malcolm Fisher on acid would play his grand piano at 4 AM. ... It's also at that time that we started taking drugs for the first time. The big thing then was speed. Alan brought some back regularly from London," remembers Paul Quinn.

Records were made and every Postcard single had to be played against the Velvet's *Pale Blue Eyes*. Horne would

then lament tearily that they could never make a record as good as that. Postcard released a handful of singles (Aztec Camera, Go-Beetwens, Josef K) and folded a year later, when Orange Juice signed to the major label Polydor in September 1981. Paul Quinn's band, Bourgie Bourgie, was picked up by MCA Records. Two singles were released in 1984, *Breaking Point* and *Careless* but failed to enter the charts despite the good press the band was getting. Bourgie Bourgie was dropped while recording their debut LP in Bavaria. The same year Quinn signed with Alan Horne's Swamplands Records, his follow up to Postcard, which was bankrolled by London Records.

The first released single was Paul Quinn and Edwyn Collins cover of the Velvet Underground's *Pale Blue Eyes*. The new label was also short-lived and Paul Quinn's full-length super-8 movie, *Punk Rock Hotel* never materialized. Very few of Horne ideas—including the “campy, family-oriented trio,” the Savage Family, with new-wave chanteuse Patti Palladin, Warhol transsexual Superstar Jayne County and a live chimpanzee—ever came to fruition or made an impression on the charts. Horne recalls, “I used to go round to Patti Palladin's and smoke loads of dope. Jayne County would come around looking crazy and she knew I loved hearing stories about Bowie and the Velvets, so she would play up. I would be sitting there stoned, lying on the couch, and she would be performing stories. It was better than any theatre, or rock, or anything.”

His contract with London prohibited Quinn from recording anything for another label, and his career was put on hold for eight years. “I stayed home, played guitar. I decided to be calm and patient. I built for myself a little artificial world.”

Alan Horne resuscitated Postcard in '92 to set the record straight and close the book with the aim of releasing both Paul Quinn's much delayed debut album and a less polished version of Orange Juice's debut album, which was already recorded but rejected by Polydor. The new incarnation of the label closed after 3 years with an EP called *Pregnant with Possibilities*, which included Paul Quinn's last recorded song ever, *Tiger, Tiger*, a cover of the band Head. According to Edwyn Collins, Horne—who didn't do promotion and didn't tour his bands—was disappointed by the lack of interest in the revived Postcard. Paul Quinn had a different take on Horne's ambition, “the image of Postcard is too beautiful, and there was no desire to capitalize on the nostalgia.”

***The virus of pop culture, the initial rush morphs into a stubborn allegiance to a moment in time when something was activated.***

In *Cheap Flight*, the handmade zine that accompanied what was to be Quinn and Horne's ambitious last voyage, the *Cowboy Resonating Tour*, all the clues are revealed in a procession of influences and excavated excerpts from books and newspaper clippings: McLuhan, Warhol, Brando, Barbara Rush, Ronald Firkbank, Bunuel's *Un Chien Andalou*. The first page starts with the proclamation, “Don't forget Marcel Duchamp.” Quotes: “Allow us to side-step the collective amnesia that constantly threatens to engulf us.” Titles: “The invention of adolescence,” “Contact and love for sale,” “Loneliness followed me my whole life.” Personal recollections from Horne, “As a teenager *Midnight Cowboy* really got me. *Taxi Driver* really got me too. *The Wild One/Scorpio Rising/The Loveless*—such a perfect triptych.” Nothing seems superfluous. An excerpt from *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: from A to B* about the nature of beauty becomes a

Maybe the most revealing moment in the zine is when Alan Horne tells the quintessential story of ditching school on a Thurs- day afternoon and taking a train to London for a couple of days in 1976 (a 12-hour ride then)... watching movies, shoplifting Bowie singles. “I was 17... all the sex-shops and bizarre records you wouldn’t see anywhere else and xerox ads for the Sex Pistols—some new group I’ve never heard of. It was a good name. You had to remember everything in those days. Your mind was your video so you could get things wrong and they turn out better that way. I could rerun *Cracked Actor* over and over in my head— all the lines and the clothes... wish I didn’t have to sit through another exam on Monday and I could stay in London. So much stuff down there. You could get yourself lost down there.” This is the point of origin; he exposes the birth of an obsession that can’t be undone. The virus of pop culture, the initial rush morphs into a stubborn allegiance to a moment in time when something was activated. A life spent trying to recapture it endlessly, while knowing that it carries no currency in the present, and that *life is elsewhere*. “When they said they wanted real life, they meant real movie life!”

Paul Quinn’s records were received enthusiastically by the press: “criminally overlooked,” “a great lost pop voice of the ‘80s,” but failed to connect with an audience. John Mulvey in his review for the NME exposes the problematic the record poses and makes the best case for it: “There is no doubt the whole package is something of a hangover from another time, but when it’s from a time so maverick, exciting, and too often forgotten, and when it gives a talent like Quinn’s a belated showcase, then living in the past can be wholeheartedly forgiven.”





# **BULLYING AS SOCIAL INEQUALITY**

**CJ Pascoe**

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[theenemyreader.org](http://theenemyreader.org)

We live in the era of *the bully*. One can hardly open a newspaper, watch television or talk to a colleague without encountering some sort of reference to the current “bullying epidemic.” One book even claims that we live in a “[bully society](#).” According to one report, up to seventy percent of young people experience bullying.<sup>1</sup> Though rates of bullying have declined since 1992<sup>2</sup>, attention to the phenomenon seems to have increased exponentially. The White House hosts an anti-bullying webpage. Superstars run anti-bullying foundations. Legislatures enthusiastically pass anti-bullying laws. Schools prominently display anti-bullying policies on their websites. Indeed, bullying has become big business as trainers and consultants hawk anti-bullying programs guaranteed to stop the scourge.

In many ways, to be anti-bullying is akin to being anti-terrorist. What good citizen could endorse an alternate perspective? As such, it is small wonder that this essay advocates an anti-bully stance. But the generic anti-bully position poses a problem in current discussions of the subject (as perhaps it does in a discussion about ending terrorism as well). The term serves to denote interactions between an aggressor and a victim (be they groups or individuals) in which feelings are hurt. This approach leads to situations in which some surprising groups claim victim status while assigning blame for bullying to those who disagree with them. For instance, while the prevalence of anti-gay bullying in schools has been well documented, some voices on the Christian right claim that statutes that protect GLBTQ people (such as school anti-bullying ordinances that protect students based on sexual identity or gender expression) serve as a way to bully Christians for their religious beliefs. Situations like these make it seem as if we live in a society in which *anyone* can be bullied for *anything*.

It is precisely because of the way in which the term can refer to any sort of interaction in which one may be opposed to the view of another or suffer hurt feelings, that this essay calls for “an end to bullying.” In doing so, I follow the lead of other initiatives such as the [Beyond Bullying Project](#) and [The Queering Education Research Institute](#) both of which seek to reframe contemporary understandings of bullying by refocusing the discussion on issues of social inequality and power, rather than on individual pathology. I suggest that rather than casting bullying as a psychological or individual phenomenon in which any hurt feeling or disagreement qualifies, we

***The term “bullying” serves to denote interactions between an aggressor and a victim in which feelings are hurt. This leads to situations in which some surprising groups claim victim status while painting those who disagree with them as bullies.***

attend to the role social inequality plays in the current bullying “epidemic.” I call here for bullying to be understood as not necessarily about one pathological individual or group targeting another, less powerful individual or group, but rather as an interactional reproduction of structural inequalities that socializes young people into accepting social inequality. That is, the interactional process of bullying both builds on existing embodied, classed, raced, gendered and sexualized social inequalities and simultaneously prepares young people to accept such inequalities as a “normal” part of living in the world.

In this model of bullying, we as a society assign some of the dirty work of the reproduction of social inequality to our children, then pathologize them for interactionally

acting out the sort of inequality that we as adults instantiate in law, policy, cultural values and social institutions. The current discourse of bullying obfuscates the role of social inequality in these interactions, instead assigning blame for these interactions to cruel young people who have a particular set of psychological problems. Our culture-wide discussion of bullying needs to shift focus from individual *behavior* to the aggressive *interaction* itself. It also needs to attend to the social contexts in which bullying occurs as well as ask questions about meanings produced by such interactions. These interactions also shouldn't be understood as the sole province of young people. Shifting the discussion in this way would place social forces, institutionalized inequality and cultural norms that reproduce inequality at the center of the discussion. This would bring policies and phenomena pertaining to social inequalities such as the dismantling of social welfare systems, current anti-fat bias in medical and health research, continued criminalization of young men of color, widespread Title IX violations in education and laws that specifically target the civil rights of sexual minorities into a discussion about bullying such that this discussion would not solely focus on young persons' seemingly random cruelty to another.

Such a focus on social inequalities is not, as of yet, reflected in current popular and academic analyses of bullying. These approaches rest on the assumption that the key to understanding and solving the epidemic lies in individual-level variables pertaining to aggressors, victims, causes, and effects. This research tells us about the age, race, class, home-life, educational accomplishments, emotional dispositions, intellectual levels and other important identity markers of bullies and victims. Bullies, for instance, are more likely to be high status, popular boys who are school leaders and

who feel good about themselves and their interactions with others<sup>3</sup>. In this model, bullies are a distinct set of young people, as are victims.

Similarly, in this model, young people (and indeed most of the research is about young people) are bullied for exhibiting "difference." However, these differences are not neutral or accidental. Take for example two of the most common bases for bullying among young people: body size<sup>4</sup> and sexuality<sup>5</sup>. When young people are engaging in homophobic bullying, their behavior reflects dominant legal and cultural standings of LGBTQ people. When young people tease their overweight peers, they are reinforcing a culture-wide approach to bodies that endorses fat-shaming. When people who are gender-variant are not protected in 44 states<sup>6</sup> (to say nothing of the lack of federal protection), homophobic bullying doesn't seem so divorced from the adult world. Similarly, when overweight adults can be charged more for plane flights, legally discriminated against at work and denied medical care, young people's "bullying" seems more like enforcement of social norms already well entrenched in adult society.

Sexuality and weight-based bullying are not the product of pathological individuals, but are interactional reproduction of larger social inequalities. That is, overweight and sexual minority young people are not bullied because they are different than the average student. They are actively framed as undesirable in the aggressive interaction itself. The young people committing the bullying are not so much acting pathologically as they are behaving as well-socialized individuals who have successfully internalized social norms. The young people are enforcing said norms, acting, in effect, as agents of social reproduction of inequality—socializing others into accepting inequality.

Framing young people's aggressive behavior as bullying elides the complicated way in which these interactions are a central part of a gendered, classed, raced, sexualized and embodied socialization process that supports and reproduces varied lines of inequality. Looking at bullying as an interactional reproduction of larger structural inequalities, rather than a manifestation of a particular set of individual-level variables, indicates that current popular and academic discourses about bullying exclude important elements, resulting in responses to bullying that are largely individualistic and symbolic rather than structural and systemic.

***When young people are engaging in homophobic bullying, their behavior reflects dominant legal and cultural standings of LGBTQ people. This behavior cannot be dismissed as youthful bad decision-making or rendered marginal by the word “bullying.”***

This reframing necessitates that young people are taken seriously as social actors. If they are doing the dirty work of social reproduction, then their behavior cannot be dismissed as youthful bad decision-making or rendered marginal by the word “bullying.” We often don't take young people seriously as actors in their own social worlds, but instead frame them as beings in the process of becoming actual people.<sup>7</sup> The deployment of the word bullying (so often used to describe young people's behavior and not adult behavior), is part of the process of infantilizing and delegitimizing youth as full-fledged social actors; it minimizes the importance of their interactions, allowing adults to be blind to the way in which bullying often reflects, reproduces, and prepares young people to accept inequalities embedded in larger social structures.

When bullying is framed as the interactional reproduction of social inequality, a picture emerges wherein young people socialize each other into accepting inequality. In many ways, this is a much more complicated and serious issue than framing their behavior as teasing one another for neutral, random, isolated or undesirable forms of difference. Importantly, thinking of these aggressive interactions as the reproduction of inequality frames them as *normative* rather than *pathological* behaviors. When considered in this light, bullying is not so much an epidemic of a pathological way of interacting, but a common mode of social reproduction.

This reframing also necessitates a focus on interactions, not individuals. That is, instead of looking at the type of person who bullies, we need to attend to what the bullying interactions look like, when they occur, where they occur, what actors are involved, and what social meanings are embedded in them. Likely what we will see is that by looking at the interaction itself, rather than at the static identities of *bully* and *victim*, we might see a dynamic interaction that does not always have a single victim or aggressor. Indeed, that the two can switch place—even within a single interaction—is evidence enough that trait-based research can only take us so far.

This shift in analysis becomes important in discussions about bullying and violence like the one that followed the Columbine shootings, for example, in which some analysts claimed that the shooters were bullied, while others claimed that they were bullies<sup>8</sup>. Prioritizing the interaction over the individual renders this discussion unimportant; instead, it enables analysts to understand how aggressive interactions were an important part of the social world at this particular school. Both sides argued past one another because each relied on a conceptualization of bullying that conceives of “the

bullies” and “the bullied” as two discrete groups. Focusing on the interactions, rather than individuals, enables an understanding of how both sides may have been right and refocuses a discussion about solutions.

***Instead of looking at individual “bullies”, we need to attend to what the bullying interactions look like and what social meanings are embedded in them.***

Moves like these may well render use of the actual term “bully” irrelevant by indicating that it is artificially separating some interactions from others and some individuals, “bullies,” from others, “victims.” When we label aggressive interactions between young people “bullying” and ignore the messages about social inequality in these interactions, we risk divorcing what they are doing from larger issues of power. Doing so discursively contains this sort of behavior within the domain of youth, framing it as something in which adults play little role. It allows adults to project blame on to kids for being mean to one another, rather than acknowledging that their behavior reflects (and reinforces) society-wide problems of inequality and prejudice. It allows adults to tell them “it gets better,” as if the adult world is rife with equality and kindness and not one that encourages social inequality through social policy and cultural norms. It allows the rest of society to evade blame for perpetuating the structural and cultural inequalities that young people play out interactionally.

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# **NEUROFETISHISM AND MIND MARKETS**

**Adrian Bangerter**

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*Imagine a brain floating in a tank with millions and millions of electrodes attached to specific nerve centers. Now imagine these electrodes being selectively stimulated by a computer to cause the brain to believe that it was walking down Hollywood Boulevard chomping on a hamburger and checking out the chicks. Now, if there was a technological foul-up, or if the tapes got jumbled, the brain would suddenly see Jesus Christ pass by down Hollywood Boulevard on his way to Golgotha, pursued by a crowd of angry people, being whipped along by seven Roman Centurions. The brain would say, “Now hold on there!” And suddenly the entire image would go “pop” and disappear.*

*I’ve always had this funny feeling about reality. It just seems very feeble to me sometimes. It doesn’t seem to have the substantiality that it’s supposed to have.*

- Philip K. Dick in discussion with Joe Vitale, *The Aquarian*, No. 11, October, 1978

Over thirty years ago, science fiction visionary Philip K. Dick illustrated the delusionary nature and ultimate reality conjured by the human brain. Vivid and arousing to our imagination, Dick’s thought experiment now resonates along an entirely different landscape in which neuroscience has expanded into every aspect of our daily life. Consider the number of terms and concepts the prefix “neuro-” gets attached to. For the intellectually inclined, one can pick from neuromarketing, neuroeconomics, neurotheology, neurolaw, neuroethics, or neurosexism. But neuro-stuff is not just for the nerdy. It can be fun, too. A Japanese company produces [neurowear](#) and organizes a [brain disco](#), where DJs get kicked off the stage if they fail to keep the audiences’ brain waves above a certain threshold. If you don’t want to get down, you can hang out at the bar where, if you hook up with someone nice,

can order a [neurogasm](#) drink to make sure your performance doesn’t flag. Neuro-neologisms have also been infiltrating colloquial language. Interestingly, many of these pair “neuro” with bodily functions or substances, as in [neural pus](#) (“A substance secreted by neurons when the brain is stressed, resulting in slowed or fuzzy thinking”) or [neuroflatulence](#) (“A sudden (and often unexpected) demonstration of complete ineptitude by an athlete at a critical moment in a game”).

Perhaps a little more disquieting is the appearance of management consulting services based on neuroscience. Management, and especially consulting, is notorious for its faddish culture. In Germany, an [Institut für Neuromanagement](#) offers an e-learning course on leadership, work-life balance, and similar topics based on the results of neuroscientific research for 2,500 euros.



An [Institute of Neurocognitivism](#) (servicing Belgium, Switzerland and Québec) purports to teach participants how to activate various cerebral modes to solve everyday work-related problems.

Images are an important component of the spread of neuroscience in popular culture. Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), a technique which relies on blood flow to map brain activity, produces images of parts of the brain that are active in a particular task, or that accompany a particular emotion or mental state. For example, a news report in [Nature](#) interviewing a team of University of Pennsylvania scientists suggested that fMRI-supported lie detection could detect potential terrorists, a claim based on an algorithm that analyzes which part of the brain lights up when people lie. The algorithm can distinguish lies from the truth with 99% accuracy. In another example of the persuasive power of brain images, people are more convinced by scientific research results when they are accompanied by brain images than when they are [not](#) (although there is some [controversy](#) about the “seductive allure” of such images). In any case, brain images are widespread in popular culture, in both gritty, high-resolution detail and iconic simplicity (the latter form suggesting that the brain has entered the [pantheon](#) of other instantly recognizable cultural artifacts like Christ, the Coke bottle, or *el Che*).

Notwithstanding the claims of some neurohucksters, much of the enthusiasm for neuroscience results is not really new. In the 1970s, the neuroscientist Roger Sperry and his colleagues conducted studies on so-called “split brain” patients. These were people suffering from severe forms of epilepsy, who had agreed to undergo brain surgery to alleviate their symptoms. The surgery

consisted of severing their corpus callosum, a bundle of nerves connecting the two hemispheres of the brain. Sperry and colleagues studied the cognitive performance of these patients and discovered that the patients made specific errors, suggesting that the brain was lateralized in many of its functions following the operation. Notably, the left brain houses areas responsible for production and comprehension of language, while the right brain houses areas responsible for vision and spatial perception. While lateralization is a subtle and complex phenomenon, popular fascination with split-brain research led to an overly simplistic reconstruction of this distinction: a purportedly rational, logical, analytic and “male” left brain, and a purportedly emotional, intuitive, holistic and “female” right brain. Henry Mintzberg, a distinguished management scholar, even went so far as to [suggest](#) the idea of hiring managers and accountants based on differences in brain function: Managers are right-brainers, accountant are left-brainers (interestingly, almost forty years later, nothing has come of Mintzberg’s suggestion).

***Much of the enthusiasm for neuroscience results is not really new.***

Another example of past fixations on brain research is the [Mozart Effect](#) fad from the 1990s. A series of studies purportedly showed that listening to the music of Mozart increases spatial intelligence by as much as 8 IQ points. These studies were popularized in a [big way](#); a slew of pop psychology books, educational toys, brain-building CDs, and even legislation were produced based on the findings, which have since been debunked. Part of this fad can be attributed to magical thinking. Mozart is the poster boy of youthful genius; his music was composed in his extraordinary brain. Hearing that music, we imagine, might similarly modify the listener’s brain. Media

[coverage](#) of the Mozart Effect at that time seems to reflect cultural anxieties about childhood education, offering guilt-ridden middle-class parents and educators a quick fix to the complex problem of how to nurture young children towards genius in a competitive, meritocratic society. For some, the Mozart Effect constituted a bourgeois strategy to acquire cultural capital (in the form of high culture) to gain an edge in the rat race of life.

***We might entertain the possibility that the brain has become a fetish in popular culture.***

What are we to make of the omnipresence of neurostuff in popular culture? Some interpretations might involve the popularization and objectification of scientific research. Social psychologists Cliodhna O'Connor and Helen Joffe and neuroscientist Geraint Rees have [charted](#) the diffusion of neuroscience in the public sphere. Via such diffusion, neuroscience gets re-appropriated and transformed by a range of agendas, hence the emergence of the “brain-as-capital” theme in many of the examples above. Many cultural commentators might also relate such an account to Marxist-inspired explanations about commodification of the brain. But all of the examples we have examined suggest that neurostuff gets used to explain things or to make things seem plausible, concrete, attractive or easier to understand. Developmental psychologist Alison Gopnik has [suggested](#) that human beings are wired to like explanations. As she puts it (Gopnik, 2000, p. 300) “explanation is to theory-formation as orgasm is to reproduction.” In other words, we experience orgasms because they are evolution’s way of motivating us to have sex. Likewise we feel cognitive satisfaction when we can explain something because explanations are evolution’s way of motivating us to seek causal understanding of the world around us.

If this is true, what does it mean for our tendency to like neurostuff and brain images? Pursuing Gopnik’s sexual analogy, we might entertain the possibility that the brain has become a fetish in popular culture. There are sexual fetishes and religious fetishes. Sexual [fetishes](#) are objects that individuals rely on to experience arousal and orgasm. Well-known sexual fetishes include shoes, gloves or lipstick, or body parts like hair or feet. Religious fetishes, in anthropological parlance, are objects (e.g., voodoo dolls or the cross) to which particular magical powers are ascribed. Western culture may be subject to explanatory neurofetishism—in both a sexual and a religious sense (and an economic sense, if one follows the Marxist commodification thesis). This means that we tend to experience explanations featuring neurostuff (for example, brain images) as intellectually arousing or gratifying. Having a neurofetish means that explanatory orgasm is never far away when intellectually racy brain images are unveiled. Neurofetishism could also be understood in an anthropological sense. If some alien anthropologists were to travel to Earth to conduct field studies of postmodern Western society, they might come to notice how our culture is festooned with images and icons of this particular organ. They might be struck by our quaint tendency to explain a range of everyday phenomena by appealing to mysterious neurological processes, or scratch their leathery green foreheads when observing our conversations peppered with colloquialisms like neuroflatulence.

But then the brain disco would really blow their minds.



# **TOWARDS A THEORY OF HYPERHISTORY**

**From the Here and Now to the Everywhere and Forever**

**Elizabeth Anne Watkins**

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[theenemyreader.org](http://theenemyreader.org)

Writer and historian Benedict Anderson thought of the nation state as an “imagined political community...*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”<sup>1</sup> This communion requires glue to operate; a material that imparts to individuals the idea of themselves as units in a larger whole. Newspapers are one example of such nation-binding material, wherein “[t]he idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history.”<sup>2</sup> Now, with the onset of digital dissemination of data and stories across both space and time, we emerge into a popular construction of temporal experience that is complex and continuously shifting. The question arises: How can a community that was previously defined by its shared receipt of a constructed national identity, disseminated via authored materials such as newspapers and, more recently, national news outlets, find its sustainable center amid this new cacophony of voices?

***How can a community that was previously defined by its shared receipt of a constructed national identity find its sustainable center amid this new cacophony of voices?***

YouTube is exemplary of this massive gesture of accumulation, especially as the tools of video recording and uploading become cheaper and more widespread throughout diverse nations. Their statistics sheet claims that 72 hours of video are uploaded every minute.<sup>3</sup> Without a structure of regulation, chaos would render this tidal wave tough to navigate. Who decides how YouTube people read and sift through YouTube videos?

In broadcast media, editorial control is concentrated among editors, producers, and stakeholders, a power balance already widely explored by a number of thinkers. These authorities use popular stories to create a narrative arc, embedded with ideology and the concerns of capital, and then distribute them through products like periodicals and broadcast news. These distributed materials, and their construction of cohesive audiences, carry with them social conceptions of nation state, citizen, and identity. Online, however, the process of editorial influence and audience is decentralized and dispersed back to the community of users. News media is a primary example of such a shift. The speed, low cost, and distributed global access of decentralized authorship carry traction in the space of web distribution, more influential even than established media’s attribute of weighty authority. Independent blogs can deliver coverage faster and closer to the origin event than traditional voices.

In spaces such as YouTube, where there are so many authors, it’s necessary for the community to participate actively in the organization of content; otherwise, as noted, the sheer mass of information stored online would be too chaotic to sustain itself. In 1986, as the personal computer began to gain a foothold in the homes of everyday Americans, media theorist Friedrich Kittler wrote, “[s]oon people will be connected to a communication channel which can be used for any kind of media ... the memory capacity of the computers will soon coincide with the war itself [when] gigabyte upon gigabyte shall exceed all the processing capacity of historians.”<sup>4</sup>

This dispersed structuring of meaning can be understood as a new type of writing, with the collective video data of millions acting as the ink in an emerging form of historical narrative. This nascent narrative practice, an

entirely new Now made possible through billions of individual view counts, opens the doorway for innovative shapes of history to be drawn. As German Utopian philosopher Ernst Bloch wrote, “[n]ot all people exist in the same *Now* ... [history is] a polyrhythmic and multi-spatial entity.”<sup>5</sup> This new Now has the potential to resist ideology and capital, where navigability is drawn not in the space between memory and history, but between memory and memory, not by an oligarchy of authority, but by the users themselves. This new *hyperhistory* creates a new system with the potential for emergent self-regulation.

The lines of historical narrative, i.e., the way that history is made into a mode of storytelling, have traditionally followed a predictable path (notwithstanding the representation of conflicting or “alternative” histories, which via their very definition as “alternative”, serve as testimony to the hegemony of dominant narratives). These stories are expressed through the shared material of communication that binds a group—in this case, a group of citizens, i.e., a nation. In the context of distributed digital authorship, we now have a multitude of voices, all singing out, and all recording and distributing their memories at once. Organization of all this information becomes paramount to the social makeup of community, and has been the topic of wide debate across a number of academic disciplines. As technology writer and NYU professor Clay Shirky put it in his book *Here Comes Everybody*, the sheer mass of material creates a mass of data beyond the filtering abilities of traditional authority figures: “the brute economic logic of allowing anyone to create anything and make it available to anyone creates such a staggering volume of new material, every day, that no group of professionals will be adequate to filter the material.”<sup>6</sup> Without a voice of authority to filter the of

material of memory into a “knowable” order reflective logic, a vehicle of shared cultural identity, then to whom does the task of organization fall? The answer, perhaps not surprisingly, lies in the very same makers who’ve created the cacophony of perspectives in the first place: the users.

***Without a voice of authority to filter the material of memory into a vehicle of shared cultural identity, then to whom does the task of organization fall? The users.***

On YouTube, user behavior and interface interaction (specifically, the act of selecting a video from a list of search results) plays a large part in crafting how content is represented and accessed in subsequent searches by other users with similar queries. This is a key phase in designating meaning in a set of data from the ground up as a community, and in transmitting that meaning to the communities of tomorrow. In his book *The Future of the Internet and How to Stop It*, Harvard professor of law and computer science Jon Zittrain describes with great verve the system of self-appointed regulation that has allowed such perilously decentralized projects as Wikipedia to grow and thrive, which he terms “generativity.” Individual act of participation—on Wikipedia it’s individuals editing, on YouTube it’s individuals viewing—contributes to a constantly evolving body of data, creating a space of perpetual authorship. As demonstrated by the concept of emergence, individual actions when viewed at a macroscopic level can reveal patterns of popularity, shifts in attention, and ultimately collective relevance. The participatory actions of today’s audience shape what tomorrow’s audience sees; tomorrow’s history is writ large via the collected gestures of millions today. Simple, individual participatory gestures contribute to articulations of cultural relevance. New hierarchies of

meaning are constantly constructed, broken down, and rebuilt by the audience through this process of authorship-via-systemic participation. This opens the space for a platform of historical narrative bound by a new set of motivations and ideologies. Whether such a development actually takes place, resistant to the corporate and state interests that are bound up in these digital platforms, is yet to be determined. The potential is there. It's possible to propel a video, via the collected efforts of millions of watchers, to the front page of any YouTube search query, choosing by a million strokes those videos that lie at the end of a search for answers in a sea of moving images. One of the earliest examples of disruptive online collective action was a 1998 *People* magazine "Most Beautiful People" online poll, held six months after the release of *Tiger Beat*-set favorite *Titanic*. The winning "Beautiful Person" was an alcoholic dwarf who appeared regularly on the Howard Stern Show. Hank the Angry Drunken Dwarf received nearly a quarter million online votes. Leonardo DiCaprio? Just over fourteen thousand. [7](#)

***The connective tissue between memory, power, agency, and communication technologies is not a new subject, but it is being played out in real time on the space of the Internet.***

At this point, attention must be given to that fact that YouTube, held by Google, is under the control of a privately owned corporation. It is therefore not a truly "public" space, even though Google itself makes sure to note that "[w]e believe strongly in allowing the democracy of the Web to determine the inclusion and ranking of videos in our search results,"[8](#) though they do not explain precisely how their search engine algorithms actually choose videos for any particular search query (besides their use of view count, they also claim to

include key words and tagging, the age of a video, links from other sites, and number of subscribers to the uploader's channel, among a number of complexly connected parameters). The position of the digital space as a potential public sphere has come under special scrutiny recently as the relationship between corporate owners of these platforms, and the government entities that exploit them as user data farms, have come to light. The awareness of this is due in no small part to Google's own documented history of compliance with NSA requests for data on users.[9](#)

In the shifting landscape of authoritarian control over spaces of digital expression, corporate and state interests are becoming increasingly overlapped, as each entity employs the other in a slippery bid to move around boundaries of legislation and permissions. This is especially now, as governments around the world update their laws on, and sometimes actively limit, the freedom of the Internet within their borders. In determining the potential for digital spaces to support resistant forms of self-representation, the consequences for users, information, and their abuse via a coordinated effort between corporate and government actors is no small matter, and in fact magnifies the need for users to be their own advocates in the free and open use of these and other platforms. A key component of such advocacy is the open distribution and free interpretation of memory and history on the part of citizens, both as individuals and as a collective whole. The connective tissue between memory, power, agency, and communication technologies is not a new subject, but it is being played out in real time on the space of the Internet.

French historian Pierre Nora, whose book *Between Memory and History* ruminates on the connection between national identity and collective memory, asserts



that for history to be written, a space between memory and history must exist—a necessary gap from which a singular linear narrative drawn. He describes the difference between memory and history as such:

***We should be aware of the difference between true memory ... and memory transformed by its passage through history, which is nearly the opposite: voluntary and deliberate, experienced as a duty, no longer spontaneous; psychological, individual, and subjective, but never social, collective, or all encompassing.***[10](#)

The accelerated rate of material accumulation facilitated by digital technologies has collapsed this space. History itself now has the potential to be transformed into something resembling Nora's personification of memory. Personal histories are being constructed in real time as never before. This rate of production is coupled with a vastly dispersed authorship, as many millions of stories are now being concurrently and from a multitude of perspectives (though the distribution of access to digital tools of expression is itself uneven and problematic). On the whole, distributed authorship through emergent self-regulation by users has the potential to shift the way that collective memory, and by extension structures of power and control, are shaped (one cousin of which can be seen in the digital movements enacted against perceived structures of authoritarian control, including DDoS attacks and hacktivists). The archive unmakes traditional modes of history, allowing decentralized participatory significance to develop and paving the way for new models of historiography. This is the redemption inherent in the chaos of *hyperhistory*: frenzied accumulation of meaning, when submitted to a system of self-regulation and democratic classification, allows new histories to emerge. New systems of the social imaginary can be built. Internet users' vastness of number and dispersal is their greatest asset, fostering the

principles of a democratic, self-regulating system. This creates the platform for a set of ethics whose boundaries are defined by something other than geography, ideology, or capital.

## Footnotes

1. Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.
2. Ibid.
3. <http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html>
4. Friedrich Kittler. "Gramophone, Film, Typewriter." Reprinted in *Literature, Media, and Information Systems*. The Netherlands: G + B Arts International. 1997. 31.
5. Ernst Bloch. *Heritage of Our Times*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991. 62. Indebted to Joao Ribas' use of this passage in his text, "What To Do With the Contemporary?" *Mousse Magazine* #27. Milano, Italy: *Mousse Magazine and Publishing*. 2010. 89.
6. Clay Shirky. *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. New York: Penguin, 2008.
7. "Hank the Angry Drunken Dwarf." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hank\\_the\\_Angry\\_Drunken\\_Dwarf](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hank_the_Angry_Drunken_Dwarf)
8. <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/66493?hl=en>
9. Adam Estes. "Confirmed: NSA Paid Google, Microsoft, Other Millions for PRISM Aid." Posted August 23, 2013. <http://gizmodo.com/confirmed-nsa-paid-google-microsoft-others-millions-1188615332>
10. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*" (trans. Marc Roudebush). *Representations* No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring, 1989). University of California Press. 7-24, 13.

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