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LESSONS FROM ABU GHRAIB

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MANAGEMENT REVOLUTION, MARKET FETISHISM, AND NONSTANDARD LABOUR: IMPLICATIONS FOR KNOWLEDGE WORKERS.

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Note on contributors

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Adam King

“Intellectually, I like to interrogate capitalist exploitation and corruption of all kinds and I enjoy aesthetic arguments because I’m interested in writing poetry & fiction. **The punctuation in the piece is very deliberate.**”

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re-readings of culture and the political climate, centering his readings around the question of economic disintegration, poor leadership and the perpetual hope of economic equity in the future.

Babak Rahimi

Babak Rahimi received his Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and Political Science at the University of California, San Diego and his Masters in Philosophy at the University of Nottingham. He is currently expecting to defend his dissertation on the Iranian public sphere in the Safavid period, 1564-1590, in the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the European University Institute in Florence. For his *Ishraqat* column, Rahimi revisits the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal in an attempt to objectively theorize the workings of the torturers' minds and the cultural and political implications that must follow.

Ishraqat, Part II: Torture and War: Lessons from Abu Ghraib

By Babak Rahimi

*'Let me be cruel, not unnatural:
I will speak daggers to her, but use non'*

Hamlet

In recent weeks various images of cruel and inhumane images have flashed across televisions across the world. We are all appalled as we encounter images of hooded Iraqi prisoners with arms outstretched, standing on a box; nude men put on top of each other; military dogs barking at a detainee; and a female soldier holding a leash wrapped around the neck of a naked prisoner cowering at her feet. Such sadistic photos, along with numerous other ones, have largely been identified as textbook illustration of a classic torture method.¹ These “parameters” are a chilling demonstration that torture, as a method of submission and a means of subjection to physical torment, has returned to further discredit Victor Hugo’s famous pronouncement that with the coming of modernity “torture has ceased to exist.”²

As a result of this evident methodology of torture, the Abu Ghraib scandal has now grown into a full-blown political crisis. And rightly so! With each new revelation of pain and suffering inflicted by U.S. personnel in Iraq, it is becoming clearer that the damages go far beyond the atrocious act of a few mischievous soldiers of the 372nd Military Police Company. It now seems that the prisoner torture was more widespread, more systematic and orchestrated according to a chain of command from the Army military intelligence to Lt. Gen. Ricardo S. Sanchez and the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld. Even the former U.S. president, Bill Clinton, admits by saying that “the more we learn about [the scandal], the more it seems that some people fairly high up, at least, thought that this was the way it ought to be done, and they have justified it by thinking that that’s the way things are done in this region and we want to find out where terrorists and killers are.”³

To be sure, these patent systematic acts of torture bring to light the administration’s direct decision to

ignore domestic and international law after the events of September 11, 2001. The most recent Human Rights Watch report shows that the administration violated international law by inflicting pain and humiliation on (what it classified as) “enemy combatants”, in the case of the Al-Qaeda terrorists in Guantánamo Bay, and prisoners of war, in the case of Iraqi insurgents at the Abu Ghraib jail both in order to soften them up for interrogation.⁴ The American military borrowed heavily from a list of high-pressure interrogation tactics used at the U.S. detention center in Guantánamo Bay and transferred these tactics to the Baghdad detention facility.⁵ The problem of the Abu Ghraib scandal, along with the Guantánamo detention center, resides in the fact that the administration abandoned the Geneva Conventions by casting rules aside and advocating a “mindset” that “anything goes”. In this sense, as Seymour Hersh has put it, “Abu Ghraib had become, in effect, another Guantánamo.”⁶

The tactics applied included manipulating diet; imposing long-term isolation up to a month; use of military dogs; shock therapy; temperature extremes; sensory deprivation, mind games; sleep deprivation; and forced standing or squatting in positions for long periods of time or held in cramped spaces where the person can’t sleep or lie down. Among other interrogation techniques that were approved by high U.S. officials, including Donald Rumsfeld, were water-boarding or “dipping water into a wet cloth over a suspect’s face, which can feel like drowning; and threatening to bring in more brutal interrogators from other nations.”⁷ All of the above “mistreatments”, as some conservative commentators have called it, appear to underscore a systematic tendency in the application of torture.

While such new revelations reveal a more organized methodology behind these acts, the single most tantalizing question about the photos from Abu Ghraib prison remains unanswered. That is, what forces could have brought these American service men and women (including military-intelligence officers and civilian contract employees) to cause pain and suffering on another human being while appearing as though they were enjoy it? Were they simply an “exceptional few”, as President Bush quickly put it after the photos were televised? Or do their actions indicate something more institutionally orchestrated, something more organizationally sadistic?

I will, in all due brevity, offer three possible explanations to the question of what made the Abu Ghraib guards act as torturers.

The Dispositionalist Approach

The first explanation is a well-known one: the torturers at the Abu Ghraib prison were demented, psychologically disturbed persons—the so-called “bad-apple theory”. The thrust of this line of reasoning suggests that the horror of torture must be matched by the unstable mental condition of the torturer him/herself. The argument, then, mainly involves the assertion that the torturer is insane and a sadist.

But this can be easily dismissed as we learn more about the personality of the guards at Abu Ghraib.

With the exception of Charles A. Grander Jr, all of the accused soldiers in the prisoner-torture scandal appear “normal”. Friends, family and colleagues describe them as “kind” and “good” individuals.⁸ Sabrina Harman, the female soldier who was most famously seen giving the thumbs up next to a dead Iraqi man, has been described to be such a “good person” that once she finds a bug she picks and puts it outside of the house rather than kill it.⁹ In another case, one of the accused that participated or witnessed the acts, showed certain capacity for conscience by questioning the morality of the torture methods. This clearly suggests that some of the soldiers were aware of some act of wrongdoing and therefore it is highly doubtful that all of the people involved in these acts were mentally insane. But, of course, this still does not mark off the possible role of dispositional conditions in the conduct of torture.

Closely connected to this argument is the claim that the act of torture is in fact the manifestation of a biologically determined aggressive and death-seeking force or a destructive “instinct” that causes sadistic behavior in people, situated in a particular milieu that would encourage them to act in such ways. Organically speaking, we humans, so we are told, share an aggressive drive to act in such bizarre ways, and that such internal physiological states intensify responses elicited by situational and environmental stimuli, prompting aggressive and violent behavior.¹⁰

Research, however, has revealed the inadequacies of this argument. While such an approach might correctly highlight the significance of physiological changes that may result in aggressive behavior, it nevertheless overemphasizes the internal physiological as a predetermined quality in animals, particularly among the higher vertebrates.¹¹ This approach also fails to take into account the cultural conditions and the everyday situations, in which the act of torture usually takes place. As a number of anthropological studies have demonstrated, aggression and the act of violence upon another human being can be a result of social norms. Wild behavior and aggressive acts can be controlled and are in themselves learning processes; they are a result of socially (kinship or group-oriented) sanctioned customs and rules.¹²

In an important study of the torturers of the Greek military dictatorship, Mika Haritos-Fatouros has shown that the bio-psychologist model fails to give adequate account of everyday situational conditions where individuals carry out torture against other human beings. What forces ordinary men and women to transform into torturers, Haritos-Fatouros argues is “a matter of the denial of human rights, not only for the victims but for the victimizers themselves, who are exploited by the system.”¹³ In a sense, then, the torturer’s mentality is not a reflection of a totalitarian system of governance with a brutal rule of terror, but that the person is part and parcel to socio-psychological processes, in which he or she undergoes in form of training in order to become a torturer. Haritos-Fatouros’s notion of “authority of violence” underlines the significance of obedience as individuals undergo methods of selection and training that shape them to become torturers at the cognitive level.

The Institutional Approach

The factor of obedience highlights an important aspect of the institutional approach. According to this theory, individuals behave in cruel ways not according to dispositional attributions, but institutional-structural settings that enhance aggressive and brutal behavior in individual members of an organization. People participate in institutions that encourage them to engage in reprehensible behaviors; and they do so since their way of thought and action is restructured based on rule-orientated and conditioned ways.

Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is the best representative of institutional analysis. According to Arendt, the Adolf Eichmann trials in the early 60s illustrate how the torturer, regardless of the one that orders or actually practices the act, is merely following rules, and the real accountability lies on an institution or a (bureaucratic) system that regards the torturer as a follower of group organization and hierarchical order. In Arendt's view, someone like Eichmann, who ordered the death of Jews as a part of the Final Solution, felt duty-bound to obey the laws of the land, which was ultimately embodied in the Führer's command. It was indeed as a result of such institutional setting that the behavior of men and women were shaped according to a set of rules. Arendt famously states that evil "in the Third Reich had lost the quality by which most people recognize it—the quality of temptation."¹⁴

We continue to hear the echoes of Arendt's argument in the U.S. prisoner-torture scandal. William Lawson, uncle of Ivan Frederick II, for example, states that his nephew was following orders when he tortured and sexually humiliated the prisoners, and that he was simply carrying out their orders, from the intelligence officers in particular. "They had, he said, been told they had been doing a 'great job'; a lot of useful information had been extracted as a result of their work."¹⁵ Shoemaker-Davis, someone who knew four of the accused soldiers, agrees with Lawson by saying, "I think they were doing what they were told."¹⁶

But do these opinions, apparently shared by a large majority of people, explain the two features of joy and cruelty in the torturers? The institutional approach ultimately fails to explain why those soldiers in the pictures (and those taking the pictures) got a kick out of what they were doing. It fails to explain, in case of another example, why white people in the postcards circulating in the U.S. in the early 20th century, showing them smiling at the lynching of black men and women, appeared so joyful in what they were doing.¹⁷ Why were the civilians in the infamous My Lai massacre scalped before being killed? Why does the Bangladeshi police apprehend, beat and sexually abuse 50,000 children living on the streets of Dhaka? How can we explain cruelty and torture?

The Culturalist Approach

According to the culturalist approach, the answer to the above question lies in norms and perceptions

that determine the codes of behavior within an institution or organization, to which one belongs, which accordingly sanction and encourage individuals to act in certain ways. In the context of everyday situational life, violent or cruel behavior of individuals primarily reflects the person's perception of self and other relations, and the cognitive experience in classifying the world in hierarchical ways.

What the Abu Ghraib prisoner-torture demonstrates is the power of norms and accepted codes of conduct that enabled the American servicemen to carry out such acts. Since the prominent cultural norm of any kind of military organization is to subdue and ultimately destroy the enemy combatant, dehumanization as a systematic cognitive way of seeing the other as subhuman, serves as the best explanation for why the U.S. soldiers behaved in such manners. The clear show of joyful celebration with the act of torture and even the death of Iraqi prisoners reveals the way that the Abu Ghraib guards had in fact accomplished something that can be regarded as valuable or normatively praiseworthy in their particular organization, namely, the military. The praiseworthy norm, of course, is the successful realization of humiliation, domination, and the dehumanization of the captured enemy.

The feature of dehumanization has been clearly expressed in the sort of language and imageries that certain members of the U.S. military have used to identify the Iraqi prisoners. Consider the following three cases. The best evidence we have with regard to the humiliation of captured prisoners is the now infamous photo of PFC Lyndie R. England, holding a leash on the neck of an Iraqi prisoner. Here, the image of a dog in direct association with the Iraqi is dauntingly self-evident. The prisoner represents a subdued beast that has been tamed and domesticated under the hands of an (female) American soldier. In another case, on April 9th, during a military hearing in the case against Sergeant Frederick, at Camp Victory, near Baghdad, Specialist Mathew Wisdom testified: "I saw two naked detainees, one masturbating to another kneeling with its mouth open. I thought I should just get out of there. I didn't think it was right... I saw SSG Frederick walking towards me, and he said, 'Look what these animals do when you leave them alone for two seconds.'"¹⁸ In another instance, Joe Turnipseed, in his memoir of the first Gulf War, recalls a Staff Sergeant describing the Iraqi prisoners as the following: "... What that means, in plain English, is 'Don't feed the animals's and don't put your hand in the cage'".¹⁹ Although a thorough documentation of similar sorts of testimonies about the military's use of demeaning language goes well beyond this discussion, we repeatedly encounter the use of imageries of subhuman life form to identify the prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prisoner-torture scandal.

The key point in these accounts is the evocation and the portrayal of the enemy as an object that, having been hunted and captured, is placed in the prison; an enemy who falls short of qualifying as a human subject and therefore requires a special kind of treatment, the sort of treatment that an animal deserves. Why animals? Because they are assumed not only to lack the capacity to feel the pain and suffering inflicted upon them during captivity (since supposedly beasts act according to instinct and not intelligence), but also that they are devoid of any rights shared by human beings. Training and the application of certain language often used to portray the enemy as subhuman best captures the military's treatment of its enemy. This helps the course of torture, killing, and even atrocity in the minds of soldiers, to run more smoothly and easily. At times such behaviors are associated with a sense of duty to the nation and even

the attainment of higher values. In a worst-case scenario situation, this leads to genocide, as the case of the Second World War Holocaust testifies.²⁰

Torture and War

What is the relationship between torture and war? Dehumanization. This simple though significant connection explains why most of the brutal forms of torture, and by extension genocide, usually occur during periods of war. The televised pictures of Abu Ghraib prison that were first released in April (2004) should have not been the cause of too much surprise for those who have some knowledge of the brutality of war. At best, these photos highlight a common drive for cruelty that is central to the management of organized violence and the cultural technology of dehumanization. At worst, they bring to light a culture of denial that stubbornly refuses to acknowledge the undemocratic make-up of the military, which is fundamentally engaged in the business of annihilating an imagined enemy, portrayed as the subhuman other.

The Abu Ghraib guards were not born torturers, rather, they were situated in a distinct kind of institutional setting that operated according to a dehumanizing culture of enemy-friend relations. Without acknowledging a culture of humiliation in terms of a normative set of behaviors that encourages persons to view the other (i.e. the Arab) as lower than humans, the significance of the Abu Ghraib scandal cannot be fully recognized. But, most importantly, what the prisoner-torture scandal could also demonstrate is that the so-called paradigm that societies inevitably substitute physical with nonphysical punishment as they move towards modernity, so powerfully argued by Michel Foucault in his *Discipline and Punish*, proves to be false.

The photos we have seen over the last three months, recurrently flashing on our Television screen, are the manifestation of torture in modern societies, manifested even in the institutional setting of those countries that have had the longest history of democratic rule. Why? The answer lies in what we, living in the “modern world”, share with the so-called “traditional” or pre-modern societies, that is: a culture of war. Correspondingly, as long as organized violence remains the guiding force of global politics, torture will also remain a part of global modernity.

What is to be done?

The Torture scandal continues to grow, and with it the indignation of the Arab and Muslim world. While the administration persists to blame a few bad apples that apparently were doing it for the kicks, and while the right-wing activists continue to describe the photos as “good old American pornography” or “fraternity initiation” rites, suspicion and distrust of the United States deepens, touching off a global outcry. Ironically, while the administration attempts to “clean up” its mess, weeks after leaks in the media, the

Iraqi insurgency expands in reaction to the photos. Surely those images will remain vividly present in the “minds and hearts” of Iraqis for years to come, as a reminder that the military institution of a democratic state can also have a serious cruelty problem.

So, what is to be done? With the supposed transfer of sovereignty on 28th of July, we need the United States, more than ever, to exercise its power responsibly. This means, first and foremost, that the administration needs to act according to international law by unequivocally rejecting any process of imprisonment that includes pain or suffering, whether physical or psychological, that inflicts a person for such purposes as obtaining information or confession.²¹ But this also means that, above all, (certain) Americans (especially those working in the mainstream U.S. media) will have to become more aware of the dangers of dehumanization, on which a culture of war, or an ethos of organized violence, ultimately depends. An effective approach requires less blind patriotism and more critical sensitivity, more awareness of the grotesque reality of violence and war.

However, there is another important lesson that the Abu Ghraib torture-scandal could teach us. That is, the more we become aware of the horrid reality of an (unnecessary!) war, its politics and technology, the more we are compelled to discuss, debate and challenge those that support its ideological cause.

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Notes

¹ As Darius Rejalis explains, this kind of standing torture was used by Gestapo and by Stalin, although the wires and the electrocution were a Brazilian police innovation. Claudia Wallis, *Why Did They Do it?* *Time*, 5/17/2004.

² Cited in E. Peters, *Torture*, p.5.

³ “Interview” *Time*, 6/28/2004.

⁴ “Iraq abuse ‘came from US policy,’”BBC: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/3792957.stm>. 6/10/2004.

⁵ R. Jeffrey Smith and Josh White, “Sanchez Approved Torture Techniques,” *The Washington Post*, 6/14/2004.

⁶ Seymour M. Hersh, “Torture at Abu Ghraib,” *The New Yorker*, 5/10/2004.

⁷ Michael Hirsh, John Barry and Daniel Klaidman, “A Tortured Debate,” *Newsweek*, 6/21/2004.

⁸ See C Wallis, “Why did they do it?” *Time*, 5/17/2004.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ As a Washington Post reporter best articulates this view, “These [prison] photos are *us* [my italic]...these photos show us what we may become, as occupation continues, anger and resentment grows...” Cited in Diana West, “The Vietnam They so Desire,” *The Coast News*, 05/13/ 2004.

¹¹ See for example, C.H. Southwick, “An experimental study of intergroup agonistic behavior in Rhesus monkeys,” *Behavior* 28 (1967), pp. 182-209 and R. Meller, “Aggression in primate social groups,” in T. March and A. Campell (ed.s) *Aggression and Violence*, 1982.

¹² See C. Tavis, *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion*, 1982.

¹³ P. Hariots-Fatouros, M, *The Psychological Origins of Institutionalized Torture*, p. 31.

¹⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, P. 150.

¹⁵ “War and the Law in Iraq: Crime and Punishment”, *The Economist*, 5/8/2004.

¹⁶ C Wallis, “Why did they do it?” *Time*, 5/17/2004.

¹⁷ See Susan J. Brison, “Torture, or ‘Good “Old American Pornography”?’ *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 6/4/2004.

¹⁸ Cited in S.M.Hersh, “Torture at Abu Ghraib,” *New Yorker*, 5/10/2004.

¹⁹ Cited in Philip Kennicott, “A wretched New Picture of America,” *Washington Post*, 5/5/2004.

²⁰ See Richard Koenigsberg’s paper on the “The Logic of the Holocaust”. In it, he brings to light the Nazi use of sub-human imageries of the Jews, which helped them to implement the project of the Final Solution. R. Koenigsberg, “The Logic of the Holocaust: Why the Nazis Killed the Jews ” in <http://www.library-ofsocialscience.com>

²¹ “For the purposes of this Convention, the term ‘torture’ means any act by which severe pain and suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.” UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 1984. See Duncan Forrest (ed) *A Glimpse of Hell: Reports on Torture Worldwide*, p. 1.

Management Revolution, Market Fetishism, and Non-Standard Labour: Implications for Knowledge Workers

By Ryan T. Devitt.

As his first extended efforts at business organization theory, Tom Peters' *In Search of Excellence* and *A Passion for Excellence* laid the foundations for a series of seminars presented to the executives of large, successful organizations¹. The prescriptions arising out of those seminars in turn constitute *Thriving on Chaos: Handbook for a Management Revolution* – the progenitive text for organizational reengineering in the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The widespread acceptance of this seminarian's restructuring ideals, without due consideration of their negative consequences, occasions the enquiry below. The majority of Peters' imperatives for organizational reform in both public and private sectors arise from "market populism," the political-economic and cultural phenomenon chronicled extensively by Thomas Frank. Broadly, market populism – otherwise known as neo-liberal economics and discussed here as market fetishism – is the underlying pathology of a deregulated New Economy informed largely by supply and demand alone. Despite the adherence to these principles of myriad public and private sector organizations, Peters' market fetishism or determinism has negative implications for what Peter Drucker and others have discussed as knowledge workers. Peters' emphasis on the volatility of markets and corporate reengineering according to unstable customer demand and niche-market orientation has resulted in trends toward flexible labour arrangements that allow organizations to take advantage of specialized knowledge labour for short durations. Early proponents of Peters' prescriptions and the New Economy, including Drucker himself, believed that an emphasis upon specified knowledge and creativity meant a transfer of the very means of production to individual labourers. However, accumulated conventional capital and resources held by large organizations remains an *a priori* requisite for knowledge-worker employment. The issue thus becomes one of traditional Marxist preoccupation: an increasing amount of the knowledge-based workforce is exploited by organizations through the casualization of labour. Because of their appeals to the market as an immutable force beyond praxis, both post-capitalist and management revolution rhetoric

cannot hope to ameliorate the negative repercussions that have resulted from recent business reengineering trends. The first section of this paper provides a brief outline of Peters' management doctrine in terms of i) volatility and change, ii) niche-markets and specialization, and iii) the privileged customer. This is followed by a discussion of these phenomena as they relate to casualization or flexiblelabour trends relative to knowledge-workers.

I. Peters' Management Doctrine:

Volatility and Change

Volatility is the single greatest impetus for Peters' reengineering prescriptions². Change must occur at all levels of organization as dictated by a fluctuating market. Discussing his accounting practices in the mid-seventies, Peters notes how twenty-year projections were a standard practice once thought to involve a high degree of certainty. By the mid-to-late eighties, however, cash-flow projections, commodities, currencies, and other economic standards had become "highly variable"; as a result, "nothing [was] 'for sure' over a *three-month* time horizon, let alone one of *twenty years*" (466). For organizations to maintain profitability in such a variable market, a widespread acknowledgement of the collapse of relatively stable economies of scale had to occur. In Peters' literature and seminars, that acknowledgment took the form of a management revolution. Change begins as a response to an historical economic era, the defining characteristic of which is global competition resulting from unprecedented technological progress in transportation and telecommunications (Reich 219). A pervasive flexibility becomes the standard measurement of success: beginning with management, the restructuring venture shuffles departments and creates a team-based work environment with a certain emphasis on interchangeability. Everything from product development to payroll and all procedures in between abide less by stable market share and more by innovation. As Peters notes, the degree of change and originality in both product and process is directly related to the efforts of management executives: "creating a basic innovative capacity means inducing a steady, high-volume flow of new projects, products, and services" (275). Initiatives aimed at lowering production cost thus give way to research initiatives as companies change their products and services in accordance with elusive market fragments. In this environment, the organization man is a market fetishist, since every quality of his business must be as fluid as the volatile New Economy itself. This sentiment was assimilated early on by IBM executives, one of whom outlined the mantra of the company's reorganization in the late eighties: "we must reexamine every relationship, every element of doing business, every process, every procedure. The only plausible criterion for success is: 'Are you changing enough, rapidly enough, to successfully confront the future?'" (Peters 466). In the Peters paradigm, stasis of any sort is perceived not only as detrimental, but as corporate suicide given market volatility. In the rhetoric of his management revolution, "change" carries the greatest semantic weight and the highest truth-value. And the seriousness of the term is apparent in the modifiers that accompany it: urgent, disruptive, constant, continuous, passionate, and widespread.

Niche Markets and Specialization

The volatility that makes widespread and continuous change necessary is a condition of fragmentation, where either new products and services or variations of standardized products and services are introduced to the market en masse. According to this model, organizations reliant upon long-term production processes cannot remain competitive. Success depends upon the ability to specialize manufacturing and services as per consumer demand. This, of course, may be either highly impractical or altogether impossible for many organizations. However, Peters makes the claim that “there is no such thing as a nondifferentiable commodity...the more the world perceives a product/service to be a mature commodity, the greater the opportunity to differentiate it through the unending accumulation of small advantages – which eventually transforms the product, often creating wholly new markets in the process” (50). Organization hence becomes a matter of niche-orientation and specialization; a measure of success in established markets is no longer the guarantor of profitability. Instead, Peters prescribes “‘differentiators’ added to each product every 90 days” (491) regardless of performance or perceived demand. Thus while research and development departments generate myriad diminutive improvements of preexisting products and services, marketing divisions must effectively communicate those improvements or manufacture a previously non-existent consumer need. It is further necessary that the physical processes of product and service creation are flexible – it is more than probable that any given niche market can become saturated and that any given company can generate numerous markets. So in addition to fluid organization of personnel, the physical components of the business itself must be either quickly adaptable to new situations or replaceable without considerable cost. Peters’ emphasis on product specialization as a condition of volatility further makes necessary a reduction of centralized management and an increase in front-line supervisors – that is, a ‘flattening’ of the organizational hierarchy that is consistent with the fluidity and interchangeability mentioned above. Manufacturing a specialized product or offering a specialized service concomitant with rapidly changing niche-markets requires unfettered lines of communication. Peters requires that the critical information provided by engineers, programmers, and other design specialists be available to front-line workers from the specialists themselves. Indeed, the first prescription of Peters’ management doctrine is to “radically emphasize ‘specialist’ rather than ‘mass/volume’ thinking throughout [the] entire portfolio” of any organization competing with foreign or entrepreneurial business (50).

The Privileged Customer

In Peters’ model, the volatility and specialization manifested in ‘service-added’ or differentiated products are the results of a customer-centered New Economy. Where scale and stable currencies drove production in the past, demand – apparent either in need perceived by market research, or need created by marketing – has become the most relevant information for supply. In the past, x number of a given product was produced by a handful of large organizations for x number of consumers. Profitability was a measure of large-scale production – the greater the output and lower the cost, the greater the share of the market. With globalization in particular, the low production costs required for success in scale economies met with

high-quality goods from countries with weak currencies and high unemployment. The result was better foreign products consumed at much the same cost as domestic equivalents. X number of any given product still exists, but the unified form resulting from low-cost production methods has given way to any number of variations to meet the demands of consumer x, y, and z. As Peters maintains, “with everything up for grabs in every market,” and with the traditional market shareholders facing countless new competitors, organizations must become “customer obsessed” (184). The combination of choice and change has produced a self-perpetuating series of increased product differentiation and increased consumer expectation. The moment that domestic business began to compete with high-quality imported goods and services, or more recently, with niche-oriented entrepreneurial firms, was the moment that consumer demand became the single largest informant of business organization. The capricious whim of the paying customer has in turn generated the instability that Peters claims as advantageous for any organization willing to accept his revolutionary prescriptions. And to realize the opportunities of turbulence is to realize that “the customer, in spirit and in flesh, must pervade the organization – every system in every department, every procedure, every measure, every meeting, every decision” (Peters 184). While increased communication between design specialists and front-line labour better facilitates specialization, Peters further prescribes an “all hands’ direct involvement with customers” coupled with an advanced listening (that is, research) capacity focused on consumer demand (188). The result is a volatile, demand-driven market where customer appeals greatly affect supply procedures.

II. Knowledge Workers and Casualization

Tom Peters’ collective prescriptions for reengineering organizations according to the principles of a New Economy have been highly successful across countless areas of business in both public and private sectors. As mentioned at the outset of this paper however, for every benefit the management revolution provides, there are subsequent negative results that receive only brief treatment from Peters and his supporters. These consequences are suffered by an identifiable group of workers that, ironically enough, provided the foundational labour of the New Economy. Both the advances in technology that allowed global competition and the ability to differentiate products for marketing in niche segments are due to the labour of those designated by Drucker as knowledge workers. The defining characteristic of this group, according to Drucker’s most recent descriptions, is simply the completion of “formal and advanced schooling” (workforce, 8). For the purposes of this paper, however, we require a more extensive definition. To Drucker’s conception of knowledge workers, we can append Robert Reich’s description of “symbol analysts” as those who “solve, identify, and broker problems by manipulating symbols” (Reich 178). That manipulation, Reich notes, aims to increase efficiency, allocate resources, “or otherwise save time and energy” (ibid.). The design-specialists noted in the above discussion of Peters are also symbol analysts according to Reich’s assertion that efforts at symbol manipulation are directed toward innovation. Ultimately, the most helpful definition of knowledge workers arises out of the titles they assume. As Reich explains, these include, but are by no means limited to:

“research scientists, design engineers, software engineers, civil engineers, biotechnology engineers, sound engineers, public relations executives, investment bankers, lawyers, real estate developers...management consultants, financial consultants, tax consultants, energy consultants, agricultural consultants, armaments consultants, architectural consultants, management information specialists, organization development specialists, strategic planners, corporate headhunters, and systems analysts. Also: advertising executives and marketing strategists, art directors, architects, cinematographers, film editors, production designers, publishers, writers and editors, journalists, musicians, television and film producers, and even university professors” (177-8).

This assemblage may seem to constitute a powerful and respected segment of the labour force; if negative consequences exist for any group affected by Peters’ prescriptions, surely it would be for those workers in service-oriented or manufacturing positions that lack the expertise for knowledge-work positions. The difficulty with such a claim, however, is that political, economic, and sociological enquiries into the nature of the New Economy have taken it entirely for granted. The stratification of knowledge versus semi-knowledge workers is always-already there in any account of the present epoch, and it is always assumed that the lower castes suffer the greatest disadvantage in any economic shift. However, semi-skilled labour has historically occupied the lower strata of any economic arrangement, and, barring any atrocity that reduces the instruments of civilization to rubble, that trend will continue indefinitely. The best that this group can hope for or work towards is labour conditions that are consonant with skill level – and there is no evidence in New Economy literature that semi-skilled workers in manufacturing and service industries experience conditions any worse than in previous epochs. On the contrary, globalization has redistributed wealth within lower strata around the world, as technological advances have reduced the cost of accessing cheaper labour pools, lenient tax laws, and natural resources in other nations. Along with symbol analysts, Reich observes that semi-skilled labourers comprise the other categories that make up the lion’s share of occupations. “Routine production workers” are those who perform repetitive tasks in a factory or low-level data processing environment. In an economy of scale, these labourers were well compensated. Yet in the New Economy, this group is the most affected by globalization since the price of relocating any manufacturing or low-level data processing operation is quickly offset by decreased labour costs. According to Reich, this group has and will continue to suffer the greatest reduction in social and economic status. However, as Reich also notes, the category of “in-person service” is also occupied by semi-skilled labour and has been rising rapidly in North America since the nineteen-eighties. Most importantly, unlike routine production, “these services must be provided person-to-person, and thus are not sold worldwide” (Reich 176). Hence semi-skilled workers who have been displaced by globalization can conceivably occupy new in-person service positions, and as a historical collective, the increased disadvantages of this group from old to new economies is negligible.

As a result of the shift from scale to fragmented markets and the fetishizing of those markets as the primary impetus for organizational reform in Peters’ management rhetoric, knowledge workers or symbol analysts

-- not semi-skilled labour groups -- have endured the most negative consequences in the form of flexible labour or alternative work arrangements. The difficulty with assessing these trends stems from a lack of relevant research from government census bureaus and private statistic compilers; the dynamics of these arrangements – the magnitude and types of workers affected – are simply not available. Those reports dealing with flexible labour arrangements are moreover designed with extremely broad job categories that prohibit a distinction between the three labour divisions identified by Reich, and there is a persistent focus on traditional work alternatives such as on-call and part-time labour. Of course, fragments from several reports can be combined into a meta-analysis to uncover some of the broader trends relative to the argument here. Conferences and research articles in the industrial relations arena seem most helpful in this regard. That flexible labour arrangements are a valid concern in this field is evidenced by the 1998 conference of the North American Agreement on Labour Cooperation, which focused exclusively on contract labour trends in Canada, the U.S., and Mexico. Concomitant with the specialized problem-solving and innovation skills of symbol analysts, sub-contracting or contracting out (whereby traditional in-house operations are performed by independent workers) is the predominant non-standard work arrangement for this group of labourers. Professor Anthony Giles of Laval University began the symposium with an outline of the primary reasons for increased contract labour. Although Giles may be guilty of a type of market fetishism similar to Peters', he nevertheless attributes recent growth of nonstandard employment to the rise of corporate restructuring initiatives. As Peters' prescriptions gain appeal, corporate agendas are increasingly filled with projects designed to promote flexibility. Giles notes that a legislative return to market-based regulations further encourages the adoption of these reengineering programs. The result is a concentration on core business competencies while peripheral tasks are progressively contracted out to independent labourers.

That is, a handful of knowledge workers, who may or may not be employed under traditional conditions, generate product or service enhancements according to market fluctuations. The incorporation of these enhancements – say, for instance, GPS tracking systems installed on a line of luxury sedans – is contracted out to engineers or technologists who troubleshoot implementation during planning stages and work with front-line production members during installation. According to relevant literature, the extent of such arrangements has been increasing since the early 1990s³. As recently as 1998, Sharon Cohany of the U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics, also speaking at the NAALC conference, noted that 6.7% of all workers in the U. S. were independent contractors such as those described above. While some organizations may only rely on a small percentage of such labour, others could not exist without it. Case in point, the Washington D. C. based Iridium Communications, with sales of 85 million in 2001 – only three years after its inception. Senior manager Dale Hogg, also presenting at the NAALC conference, described the extent of contracted knowledge labour one month after the company became commercially active: “[Iridium] employs some 530 full-time employees and over 300 consultants working under several contracts. Additionally, the major element of the system is contracted out and includes several thousand workers...these contractors have mainly been involved with design, construction and deployment of satellites, as well as the development of all of our business models and software systems” (ll. 3004-9). The “major element” that Hogg discusses is the group of sixty-six low earth-orbit satellites that allowed Iridium to offer the first truly global communications network on the planet. Hogg further notes that the extensive contract labour

involved reduced corporate development times by several years. What Hogg fails to mention, however, is the ultimate fate of those knowledge workers so crucial in the creation of the company. Indeed, it is only in correlation with corporate success that he notes that “in three of our major departments we have now begun contract phaseouts. We expect, in the next six months, that 50 per cent of the 300-plus contractors will end assignments” (ll. 3133-5). For those involved in Iridium’s core competency processes – including senior managers like Hogg – this represents a considerable benefit in the form of cost reduction. But for the myriad symbol analysts responsible for the design, construction, and launch of satellites, as well as the drafting and implementation of business plans that direct Iridium’s future, or the software systems that ensure continued efficiency, contract phaseouts simply represent unemployment. This situation, of course, is not unique to Iridium. As Hogg insists, contract labour is becoming the norm for technology-based firms, because such companies “have talent needs that require specific and timely solutions” (l. 3015).

Recall, however, the scope of Peters’ management prescriptions: specific and timely solutions are not just the requisite of technology firms since differentiating is encouraged across all products and services from the Blackberry to Lima Beans. The high-tech industry sets the standards and outlines the cost-benefit ratios involved with substantial contract labour, while non-tech business follows suit in the rush to meet consumer demand or open new markets as per Peters’ suggestions. Even organizations that have traditionally been identified as non-market entities have felt the impact of current corporate seachange. One such example (which, thanks to Marc Bousquet’s influential *Workplace* journal, has received considerable attention from the academic community) is post-secondary education. Peter Babiak, a sessional English instructor at the University of British Columbia, refers to these institutions as “the new knowledge factories” (43). The conventional preparatory role of colleges and universities once allowed these organizations an *a priori* relation to the market. Profitability remained a priority, yet the primary foci of previous decades were issues concerning those members preparing for workforce entry. In this sense, the only control exerted by the market was how many and what type of engineers, chemists, psychologists and so on were required for any given period. Of course, even this situation had measurable impact on the numbers and qualifications of the symbol analysts who produced those competitive labour pools. Yet in the last decade, as Babiak explains, knowledge labour has been greatly affected as the ivory tower sheds its academic detachment in favor of corporate practices: “as budgets shrink and governments cut funding to education, universities downsize. When this happens, they start acting like market-driven knowledge factories. One of the ways they become more cost-efficient is by replacing permanent teaching positions with a pool of cheap, disposable teachers, which is easy to do given the oversupply of qualified personnel” (43). This phenomenon is not limited to institutions that rely on government subsidies. It is also manifested in private – and ivy league – universities in the U. S.; as of 1999, 70 percent of the actual teaching undertaken at Yale was performed by contract labourers (Babiak 47). Bousquet’s explanation of this trend highlights the extent of Peters’ influence on management techniques across sectors, since the defining characteristic of post-secondary management is that “it has managed to conceal its...less than critical adherence to what Thomas Frank dubs the ‘market god’ and its concomitant elevation of corporate management to a priestly class” (24). What Bousquet deems the pragmatist-managerial version of materialism is highly consonant with motivating factors of the management revolution. The effects, as outlined by Bousquet, point to the wide and sinister implications that this pragmatism wreaks on organizations, as he notes that while materialism

generally accedes to individual agency (manifested, for instance, in Marx's preoccupation with praxis), pragmatic management does not. The result is that "collective human agencies are conspicuously absent. Even the agency of individuals is radically evacuated: for pragmatists, markets are real agents, and persons generally are not, except in their acquiescence to market dicta" (25). Thus we see that the market fetishism comprising and arising out of Peters' management doctrine has a built-in rhetorical framework that belies human activity. In such a working environment, the tendency to rely on contract labour and the inevitable phaseouts that accompany those contracts are exempt from due moral and ethical consideration.

Morality (connected to the fate of individual workers) and ethics (related to the legislation that aims to protect those workers) are inextricably attached to non-standard work arrangements for one reason: casualization is exploitation. As I have shown above, the first casualty of contract labour is security. This is usually overlooked given the exorbitant pay that independent knowledge workers sometimes command. High pay for the duration of a contract, however, is quickly annulled when another contract is years away, and continued competitiveness requires costly training programs⁴. In a study of the New Economy in Canada, pollster Angus Reid provides a concise account of the nature of contract work: while some entrepreneurs achieve a measure of success, "most of them have become 'just-in-time' workers, used when they're needed and then discarded, perfect tools for the efficient just-in-time economy. Once they were parts of teams designed to make corporations more competitive. They're still competing, only now they compete against each other" (20). As Peters' notions of volatility and change, niche-market orientation, and customer obsession are inculcated by an increasing amount of organizations, only those symbol analysts with the most relevant (read, most current) training have viable contract options. Thus a knowledge worker not only contends with a market fetishism that tightens or loosens respective labour pools with great frequency, but also with every other phased-out symbol analyst willing to pay for renewed training. The ultimate benefactors of this arrangement are, of course, the corporate entities themselves. Otherwise, Peters' prescriptions would not carry so much weight across industries. And for knowledge workers, the corporate gains enabled through flexible labour arrangements come not just at the cost of security, but with all benefits traditionally associated with full-time work. Although some of the more lucrative contracts include retirement funds and other payouts, the majority do not. Susan Houseman, conducting a survey for the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, compiled benefit comparisons for non-standard versus full-time labourers. For the purposes of this paper, the contract positions normally occupied by symbol analysts fall under Houseman's heading of short term direct hires.⁵ Of this group, 11 percent received paid holidays or vacation pay, 5.7 percent were allowed paid sick-leave, 3.8 percent were given pension considerations, none were involved with profit or gain sharing, and 9.5 percent received health insurance or similar coverage. Compare this to full-time percentages of 95.7, 82.4, 71.4, 37.1, and 93.8 respectively. The overall numbers for short-term direct hires receiving any of the above benefits was 16.2 percent, while fulltime labourers secured nearly 98 percent of the same (table 7). Reductions in benefit costs resulted in a lower per-hour wage of contract labourers for 59.4 percent of organizations surveyed. What is most surprising, and what secures the argument for exploitation, is that before benefit costs, 8.7 percent of organizations reported higher perhour wages for contract employees, while nearly 22 percent stated a *decrease* in cost compared to full-time labour (Table 6). The "just-in-time" production systems together with the flexibility insisted upon by Peters have been the real impetus behind increases in contract

labour, the exploitive conditions which allow companies like Iridium described above to either establish huge frameworks under a one-time labour cost, or continually diversify products and services using a steady flow of short term knowledge workers.

III. Implications

To read accounts of symbol analysts, their roles in the workplace and society at large, is certainly not to realize any of the conditions just outlined. Rather, the efforts of knowledge workers – even their reliance upon contract work – are glorified even in the most seemingly detached accounts of this labour segment. Reich, for instance, cannot resist description of the symbol analyst’s work environment: while others in routine production and in-person service sectors are relegated to the factory floor or the utility closet, knowledge workers operate “within spaces that are quiet and tastefully decorated. Soft lights, wall-to-wall carpeting, beige and puce colors are preferred. Such calm surroundings typically are encased within tall steel-and-glass buildings or within long, low postmodernist structures carved into hillsides and encircled by expanses of wellmanicured lawn” (179). Inclusion of this statement (as one among many highlighting the comparatively comfortable labour situations of the average symbol analyst) diverts attention away from the issues raised above and renders knowledge-worker exploitation a difficult subject to broach. It is not as though, as Reich’s description implies, the conditions are constructed or even necessarily demanded by the knowledge workers themselves. The fact remains that corporate profits required for such settings are shared to a much lesser extent by contracted knowledge labour compared to other groups within the company. Yet according to Reich, this is of little concern since “the ‘work’ of symbol analysts...often involves puzzles, experiments, games, a significant amount of chatter, and substantial discretion over what to do next...Many symbolic analysts would ‘work’ even if money were no object” (222). If payment is not worthy of consideration, surely reductions in security and benefits should be overlooked by both organizations and the analysts themselves. The proliferation of this ethos has prompted Thomas Frank, in his usual trenchant manner, to remark that in the 1990s, “so powerful was this fantasy of the omnipotent ‘knowledge worker’ in the corporate imagination of the decade that even the casualization of the white-collar workforce could be understood as just another victory for those militant new proletarians” (203-4). And, as per the argument here, Frank further notes that this shift in corporate culture was in large part due to Peters’ reengineering principles:

the real result that management theory of the nineties aimed to secure, then, was not so much quality as quiescence; submission to the corporate agenda both in the workplace and in politics. And measured according to this standard, the management theory of the nineties – even with all its bullshit, its fads, its jargon – worked exceedingly well. It was thanks at least in part to the hyperbolic prose of Tom Peters that so many of the downsized agreed that what had happened to them was right, was necessary, was justified; it was thanks to the revolutionary crowing of *Fast Company* that so many left the parking lots of their former employers in such an orderly fashion, talking confidently about their impending careers as ‘free agents’” (180).

Although fetishizing the knowledge worker as the harbinger of New Economy profitability prohibits investigation into the actual conditions of their employment and provides an easy rhetoric to placate those affected by phaseouts and restructuring, there yet exists a more ominous type of argument relative to this labour group.

According to D. C. Hodges and Larry Lustig, the new political economy no longer favors traditional bourgeoisie, but instead has lent the majority share of power and status to symbol analysts, or, the “*expertoisie*.” In addition to the three traditional class determinants of land, labour, and capital, Hodges and Lustig add expertise as a new seminal element. This claim is warranted, they feel, since knowledge work has become a “decisive factor of production” (372). To transpose the terms of the new and old economies, the owners of the means of production who occupied the upper echelons of the past epoch have been replaced by the owners of the means of innovation, nichemarket capability, and flexibility. The real productive forces, according to Hodges and Lustig, no longer reside in the real-estate or equipment or capital of corporate owners, but rather in the minds of the symbol analysts who lend those corporations a competitive place in fragmented markets. This argument has been further extended by Drucker and results in his conclusion that as a consequence of the New Economy focus on knowledge labour, capitalism itself – with its old dialectic of haves and have-nots – has actually ceased to be the predominant Western economic model. A fervent idealist, Drucker maintains that the post-capitalist society is the first “where upward mobility is potentially unlimited. Knowledge differs from all other means of production in that it cannot be inherited or bequeathed. It has to be acquired anew by every individual, and everyone starts out with the same total ignorance”; moreover, the quest for knowledge that, presumably, can be peddled as relevant to corporate interests is “always universally accessible, or quickly becomes so” (workforce, 12). Undue optimism aside, knowledge workers in Drucker’s post-capitalist universe will comprise the dominant social collective. Consonant with Hodges and Lustig’s political-economic enquiry, the knowledge worker is the new owner of the means of goods and service creation. Drucker maintains that the specialized expertise of the symbol analyst is “fast becoming the sole factor of production, sidelining both capital and labour” (post, 20). As a result, the Marxist preoccupation with alienation under the Capitalist model, like so many manifestations of production technology, has been rendered obsolete.

What Hodges, Lustig, and Drucker fail to properly account for, however, are the networks, clients, contacts, resources, and capital by any other name that is still required for knowledge worker employment. A satellite technician, software developer, or commercial tactician is only useful if companies like Iridium exist to employ them. All of the symbol analyst adulation and market fetishizing in the world cannot alter this fact. The myriad base-structure changes that Drucker has personally witnessed over the last half-century have no doubt prevented his attention to the unchanging superstructure of productive relations. Capital may indeed be fluid and fortunes may ebb and flow with corporate seachange, but the liquidity of resources demand that they pool in the deepest pockets. Refusing to acknowledge this persistent economic circumstance, Drucker instead asserts that in the post-capitalist era, “the employee and the tools of production are interdependent. One cannot function without the other. And while the tools of production, such as the ultrasound analyzer, are fixed in place, the technician who knows how to run them and how to interpret their readings has mobility. The machine is dependent on the employee, not the other way around” (post,

65). Unfortunately for Drucker, something cannot be simultaneously interdependent and dependent. The truth is that the machines – be they cardiograms or robotic welders – preempt the knowledge workers that manipulate them. The existence of these tools allows for specialized training and lends value to knowledge labour, not vice-versa. And so the owners of the actual technology, the physical means of production for which a great deal of capital is still required, ultimately exert control over the fate of symbol analysts. This is clearly evidenced by the casualization trends and accompanying reductions in security, benefits, and pay that is noted above. It is irresponsible, then, for Drucker or analysts like Hodge and Lustig to contend that Marxist socio-economic theory is no longer viable. By arguing for the irrelevance of that framework, the class divisions that now exist (which are not altogether different from those of Marx's own epoch) are effectively glossed over in social, political, and economic accounts of the current era. In all their zeal to promote the New Economy, the demise of capitalism, and the irrelevance of Marxism, economists (political or otherwise) have failed to consider the actual working conditions of the purported new bourgeoisie, and the notions of inequality that underlie Marxist enquiry. Instead, there is a notable preoccupation with the historically outmoded terms of analysis in works like *Capital* and *The Grundrisse*. In their delineation of the new political economy, for instance, Hodges and Lustig cite Marx's location of intellectual capital in the upper strata of the proletariat as evidence of the irrelevance of his theories in the current epoch. They further argue that as a collective, symbol analysts are "neither a stratum of the capitalist class nor a stratum of the so-called working class. They are a class in and for themselves as the history of their relation to labour and capital in America through the twentieth century clearly indicates" (378). Given those conditions arising out of Peters' rhetoric outlined above, this statement is patently false. Moreover, the reduction of union activity in favor of a "free-agency" ethos has been widely acknowledged by Bousquet, Frank, Reich, and presenters at the NAALC labour conference. Add to this the competitive environment described by Reid, and it becomes clear that symbol analysts do not constitute a class in and for themselves. Thus, not only are the productive relations between corporate owners and knowledge workers similar to the dynamics of the bourgeois and proletariat, but the opportunities afforded to prior alienated groups under the aegis of solidarity has now vanished. One need only look to Marx's early work in *The German Ideology*, to understand the evolution of this situation:

"The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *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, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships" (Tucker 172).

Capital-rich organizations thus only needed a suitable rhetor to identify, delineate, and disseminate the intellectual counterpart to their ownership of the material productive forces in the New Economy. Tom Peters, of course, picked up that gauntlet with a zealousness that has not only maintained, but furthered the exploitation of the knowledge workforce. It is his fetishizing of volatile markets and demands for a pervasive customer orientation, coupled with the socioeconomic tenets of post-capitalist thought, that have enforced the dominance of the corporate class, and perhaps more perilous, placated the symbol analysts

who, like the medium of their trade, undergo serious manipulation. This situation and its origin has been properly identified by Thomas Frank, as he notes that “management literature is the wellspring of nearly every element of the corporate ideology...Above all, it explains the ways of the mighty so they might be better honored, better imitated by us the lowly” (173). The progenitive text of that quasi-literary idiom, identified both here and by Frank, is of course *Thriving on Chaos*. The self-perpetuating mechanism of volatility and customer orientation secured the widespread alienation of knowledge workers, while the downward flow of management principles simultaneously convinced the group that such is not only necessary, but positive for all involved. The casualization of labour is thus perceived, even by those who stand to lose the advantages of traditional work arrangements, as a thoroughly beneficial phenomenon. And even if the trend toward flexible labour was sufficiently identified as an exploitive practice, symbol analysts stand to gain nothing by organizing their ranks or seeking outside representation since the situation is beyond praxis given the decisive factor of fragmented markets. Or at least, that is how Peters’ revolutionary doctrine would have it. But as more and more analysts like Bousquet have begun to identify, the benefits of this pragmatism are exclusive to an ever-decreasing segment of the organizational universe. What he and Thomas Frank in particular have pointed out deserves consideration in the larger corporate ethos, and begins with the realization that “markets don’t exist transhistorically; they have reality to the extent that they are installed and maintained by human agents devoted to achieving particular market ideals. Pragmatist idealizations of the market conceal the human agency in the creation and maintenance of markets” (Bousquet 25). While assertions of the demise of capitalism and the consciousness represented by its antithesis in Marxism inform the social, political, and economic sentiments of this epoch, the market fetishizing of Tom Peters sanctions the removal of agency, and thus culpability, apparent in corporate behavior. The combined effects in turn have demonstrably negative implications for those symbol analysts that subscribe to misleading veneration in the New Economy.

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Notes

¹ In 2004, these include American Express, Philip Morris, Ericsson, KPMG, Bridgestone-Firestone, and Transamerica, among others (www.tompeters.com).

² It is also the most apparent difference between old and new economies, as noted by Robert Reich: "In the entire year of 1960, a total of 776 million shares of stock were traded on the New York Stock Exchange – about 12 percent of the outstanding shares – and each of these shares had been held, on average, about eight years. By 1987...900 million shares were exchanging hands each *week*, with the result that 97 percent of the outstanding shares were traded during the year. This figure did not include new speculative instruments like index options and futures, which turned over five times faster than stocks, and were held, on average, for a few days or hours" (193). Rapid stock movement is not only an indicator of market instability, but of the larger investor insecurity that results from increased competition and the destabilized profit margins of traditionally high-performing organizations.

³ University of Alberta sociologist Harvey Krahn puts Canadian non-standard employment numbers at 33% in 1994. This represents an increase of one percent every year for five years – a trend that has

doubtless continued well into this century (Reid 130).

⁴ As Angus Reid describes, workers in the New Economy are forced to “train, train and retrain, and pray [they] don’t fall off the merry-go-round as it gathers speed” (169). We can thus revise Drucker’s definition of knowledge workers as those with advanced, formal, and perpetual schooling.

⁵ The other categories under consideration were part-time, on-call, and agency temporaries.

“Why Aren’t We Seeing This Now?” Public(ized) Torture in The Passion of the Christ and Fahrenheit 9/11

Robert Gehl

This year, Mel Gibson and Michael Moore have both made films that have had writers and commentators scrambling to discuss and understand the polarization of America, to look for the differences between Right wing Christians and the Left wing. Both Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ and Moore’s Fahrenheit 9/11 have taken in hundreds of millions of dollars, despite being maligned in production as niche films at best. And, both films have inspired a vitreous flow of hateful criticism, furthering the belief that they are cultural representations of a bitterly divided nation.

However, as divisive as these films may appear to be, their similar content reveals something about American culture and mythology. To explore this, I will analyze the use of public (publicized) torture in both films, the roles of Jesus and soldiers, how the depiction of torture affects viewers, and what this might say about the American psyche.

According to Michel Foucault, the age of public torture in the Western world largely came to end by the mid 19th century. Previously, public torture was used by those in power to discourage crime through the horrifying spectacle that it created. It was meant to

[...] mark the victim: it is intended, either by the scar it leaves on the body, or by the spectacle that accompanies it, to brand the victim with infamy; even if its function is to ‘purge’ the crime, torture does not reconcile; it traces around or, rather, on the very body of the condemned man signs that must not be effaced; in any case, men will remember public exhibition, the pillory, torture and pain duly observed. *And, from the point of view from the law that imposes it, public torture and execution must be spectacular, it must be seen by all almost as its triumph.* (34, my emphasis)

However, this method was reformed and discarded during the Enlightenment, in favor of the modern system: public trials and sentencing, private punishment and execution. While this shift is assumed to be

more humane, its origin stems more from the state's desire to maintain power than from any humanitarian concerns. Foucault contends that those in power eventually realized that the public, rather than being reminded of state power and discouraged from crime, would instead *sympathize* with the condemned and perceive the executioner and the state as linked to the criminal act:

...punishment was thought to equal, if not to exceed, in savagery the crime itself, to accustom the spectators to a ferocity from which one wished to divert them, to show them the ferocity of crime, *to make the executioner resemble a criminal, judges murderers, to reverse roles at the last moment, to make the tortured criminal an object of pity or admiration.* (9 my emphasis.)

Clearly, governments prefer to suppress dissidents and criminals, not make martyrs of them. Thus, the age of the state publicly and violently challenging the criminal came to a quiet close.

However, The Passion and Fahrenheit represent a return to torture as public spectacle. While the town square has been replaced by the movie theatre, the popularity of these films demonstrates that the public's voracious appetite for torture hasn't diminished. And both directors, like the state powers that came before them, use the spectacle of blood and violence to influence the behaviors of their audience.

Obviously, The Passion most explicitly portrays torture. In the film, Jesus, who had been kicked, punched, slapped, spit upon, and dragged in chains, is presented to the Roman Consulate, Pontias Pilate. Gibson's portrayal of Pilate has been lauded for its sympathy, and his encounter with Jesus is an indeed human moment. "*Quid est veritas?*" he asks Jesus, "What is truth?" Pilate, unsure of how to handle the Sanhedrin's request for the death of this dissident preacher, searches for a tangible solution to the political problem he is faced with. However, seemingly evasively, Jesus merely replies, "I am truth."

If Pilate, or anyone in the audience for that matter, is hoping for a clearer presentation of Jesus' unique philosophy, he is disappointed: Gibson presents his audience very little of Jesus' teachings. Rather, *veritas*, the truth, is presented to the public through torture: "In the practice of torture, pain, confrontation and truth were bound together: they worked together on the patient's body. The search for truth was certainly a way of obtaining evidence... but it was also the battle, and this victory of one adversary over the other, that 'produced' truth according to a ritual" (Foucault 41). Indeed, The Passion deals almost exclusively with the ritualistic death of who is, given the lack of context, a political criminal. This is particularly true of the flaying scene, where the soldiers slowly, methodically, and publicly choose their weapons and brutally rip the flesh from Jesus' prone body.

The "truth" that is produced through the ritual of torture must be made public in order to be effective. According to Foucault, this presentation is the responsibility of the condemned, Jesus. "It was the task of the guilty man to bear openly his condemnation and the truth of the crime that he had committed. His body, displayed, exhibited in procession, tortured, served as the public support of a procedure that had hitherto remained in the shade; in him, on him, the sentence had to be legible for all" (43). Thus, since there is little in the way of Christian philosophy, Gibson's Jesus does no more than preach a doctrine of

state power and humiliating punishment.

Gibson deems this as necessary. In interviews, he repeatedly emphasizes the need for violence to portray the Christ story. “I wanted it to be shocking,” Gibson said in an interview with Diane Sawyer. “And I also wanted it to be extreme. I wanted it to push the viewer over the edge ... so that they see the enormity — the enormity of that sacrifice — to see that someone could endure that and still come back with love and forgiveness, even through extreme pain and suffering and ridicule” (“Pain and Passion”). Implied in this statement is Gibson’s Catholic belief that Christians are missing something in their conception of Jesus Christ: the gory violence of the Crucifixion. His use of Sister Anne Emmerich’s The Dolorious Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ as source material for the film belies his belief that Christian churches should return to presenting the Jesus story as a violent sacrifice in exchange for the sins of humanity. As he bluntly puts it in an interview with Peggy Noonan, “I wanted to overwhelm people with it” (94).

There is nothing wrong with “pushing the viewer over the edge,” but when the viewer is compelled to be in the audience, when the viewer is offered a black-and-white choice in terms of accepting or rejecting the content of the film, the idea of “overwhelming” takes on a whole new meaning. The millions of dollars’ worth of people who have seen the film have done so in large part because of the tacit promise that Gibson and the various churches have made to the public in interviews: simply put, you must see this film, because to see this film and not like it is to not believe in the Gospels. To not believe in the Gospels is to be bound for hell.

The power of the cinema is its ability to fulfill promises such as this. Films have the power to bring fantasy to a place that is larger than life, perhaps more real than life. Understandably, many Christian viewers have lauded the film for its accuracy. As the Pope was legendarily reported as saying, “It is as it was”; i.e., the film is accurate. It is as if faith so demands a visual representation of Christ that the film is no longer a film; it is *real*.

The result of this is that the film is a tool of social control. The viewer, who must accept the film, only does so out of self-interest and a desire to avoid pain and suffering in the afterlife. Evangelical churches clearly understand this; through evangelical efforts to present the film to the “unchurched,” church pews have swelled since *The Passion* debuted (Warren). Furthermore, the conservative community has also been intricately linked to the film: the guest list for early screenings included “Peggy Noonan, Cal Thomas and Kate O’Beirne; conservative essayist Michael Novak; President Bush’s abortive nominee for labor secretary, Linda Chavez; staff director Mark Rodgers of the Senate Republican conference chaired by Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa.; former Republican House member Mark Siljander of Michigan; and White House staffer David Kuo, deputy director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives” (Grove). Clearly, any popular culture vehicle that creates sympathy for Christ and an interest in Christianity is embraced by the conservative community.

Michael Moore’s politics are anything but conservative, but torture is an element of Fahrenheit as well. However, Moore’s use of it is far more complex than Gibson’s. While Gibson depends on the viewer to

bring her knowledge of Christian theology to the theater to understand *The Passion*, Moore relies heavily on the American mythology of the soldier. In American culture, the soldier is a Jesus-figure; the most common quality he embodies is sacrifice. The U.S. Army does not write the word Soldier without capitalizing it, just as any church always capitalizes Jesus. It is taboo, politically or socially, to mock soldiers or the Army. They are depicted as “heroes” and “leaders” who have faith in their country and the President, warriors for all that is right. It is common knowledge that, in the war on terror, President Bush has repeatedly used the language of good and evil to describe the conflict. This language includes the Soldier; in a typical speech, given 3 April 2003 at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Bush tells a gathering of troops

[The deaths of soldiers] are sacrifices in a high calling -- the defense of our nation and the peace of the world. Overcoming evil is the noblest cause and the hardest work. And the liberation of millions is the fulfillment of America’s founding promise. The objectives we’ve set in this war are worthy of America, worthy of all the acts of heroism and generosity that have come before. Once again, we are applying the power of our country to ensure our security and to serve the cause of justice. And we will prevail. (Votesmart).

Thus, the Soldier is called on to sacrifice his or her life, not only for the rest of the country but the people of the world. Those people and countries that they help are often depicted as feminized, oppressed, powerless nations; the “meek” that any good Christian or Soldier must help. Those who remain behind in the States are, in a way, sinners: consider the criticism of Bill Clinton as a draft dodger or of George Bush as a deserter. Like Jesus, the Soldier sheds her blood to buy the freedom of millions of sinner-citizens.

Just like Bush, or anyone else working in public life or the culture industry in the U.S., Moore’s sympathy has to lie with the martyred soldiers. However, he uses different language than the President. His comparison of the razed neighborhoods of Flint to the bombed-out streets of Baghdad presents the war in terms of race and class, and makes the decision to join the army sound like a compulsory economic move rather than voluntary. Still, in Moore’s language the Soldier is a Jesus figure: a poor and humble person who has faith in his country, hears the undeniable call of the recruiter and cannot refuse his destiny.

This is clearest in Moore’s depiction of Lila Lipscomb’s son Michael Pederson. Pederson is portrayed in *Fahrenheit* as an innocent sacrifice, full of faith in his father-president. According to his mother, he was “raised to...respect the respect the position of the president of the United States” (Schmitt). However, he was, like Jesus, conflicted between his duty and his human fear. Michael’s letters home, particularly the one Lila read in the film, contain doubts about the President reminiscent of Jesus’ moments of doubt in his Father in Gestheme: “He got us out here for nothing whatsoever. I am so furious right now, Mama.” His death, therefore, is as emotional as Jesus’ and raises the same questions: Why did he have to die? What kind of (father, president) would sacrifice his son?

Moore uses this mythology of “Soldiers as Jesus,” then, like Gibson, presents the viewer with disturbing images of bloody, maimed soldiers, tortured by wounds. Moore portrays them in the act of dying for their country’s sins. His justification for this footage sounds strikingly similar to Gibson’s tacit assertion about

the image of Jesus: Americans are not being presented with the uncensored, violent reality of the Iraq War. “Why aren’t we seeing [violent footage of the Iraq War] now? Because if you show this to the American public every night while they’re eating dinner they might turn against the war. And so the MPAA gives me an R rating. Images that we used to see on television at 6:30 are now considered an R rating?” (“Passion of Michael Moore”).

However, Moore’s message would not resonate nearly as much with anti-war viewers if he had merely presented wounded American soldiers. With the most controversial footage of the film, Moore builds sympathy for Iraqis as well. The scenes of American soldiers sexually abusing and torturing Iraqi prisoners adds an element of complexity to Fahrenheit.

This is a public display of disciplinary torture, the first genuine footage of these happenings. While the story of Abu Ghraib appeared in the news several months before Fahrenheit was released, the film footage and pictures involved were not gathered by reporters for public dissemination; rather, they were created by the military for blackmail and psychological torture means. As Seymour Hersh writes, “The government consultant said that there may have been a serious goal, in the beginning, behind the sexual humiliation and the posed photographs. It was thought that some prisoners would do anything—including spying on their associates—to avoid dissemination of the shameful photos to family and friends” (Hersh). Thus, although the Abu Ghraib abuses were visually documented, the documentation was meant to remain private – only exposed to the public in the event that the U.S. military wanted to shame an Iraqi.

Moore’s film is the first attempt to create and present a public spectacle of the Iraqi prisoner torture. Like any public spectacle of torture, the public’s sympathy lies with the tortured, not the torturer, and, since torture has the effect of making the “judges [appear to be] murderers,” Moore’s implicit claim is that the judges – Bush, Rumsfeld, et al – are the guilty parties, not “the poor kids at the end of the food chain” (qtd in Hersh).

In the end, a viewer leaving these theaters are to ask himself: who is responsible for the terrible things I have witnessed? Both directors lay the final blame for the spilling of blood and torture at the feet of the audience itself. Gibson states the Catholic philosophy of universal guilt: whenever asked in interviews about who killed Jesus, he typically replies, “The big answer is, we all did. I’ll be the first in the culpability stakes here” (“Pain and Passion”). Moore uses very similar language to explain who is responsible for the Iraq War:

We killed a lot of civilians, and I think that we’re going to have to answer for that – whether it’s now or in the hereafter. If you pay taxes and you’re an American your name is on those bombs. They were human beings who were just trying to get on with their daily lives. (“Passion of Michael Moore”)

Thus, the language of both directors belies a uniquely American sense of guilt and loss. Given the immense popularity of these films, this sense of guilt and complicity is made resonantly public. It reveals in a small

manner the way Americans look at themselves in relation to the world: as torturers, as corrupt judges, as murderers, in any case, not as noble as those we admire.

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Steal this Message, Part II: The Spirit of '73

William Matthew McCarter

As I was facing the deadline for the next installment of *Steal This Message*, I sat at my computer desk, reading and re-reading the books and articles that littered my workspace and listened to the radio in the background bombarding me with commercials about the various “4th of July” celebrations that would be happening in my little piece of America. Americans gets very nostalgic about their nation’s birthday and nearly all of us are filled with “the Spirit of ‘76” during that holiday weekend. However, during the other three hundred, sixty-four and one half days of the year, most working class Americans wax nostalgic about another spirit (whether they know it or not) - “the Spirit of ‘73.” However, “The Spirit of ‘73” is something that no one in politics or the media talks about. Because I am like most Americans and also get a taste of the teary-eyed nostalgia that comes with the 4th of July, my July installment of *Steal This Message* will discuss “The Spirit of ‘73” and how it can be used to galvanize a working class constituency in American politics.

Statistics can be deceiving in American politics. Both sides, the Right and the Left, each have their own set of statistics that reinforce the opinions they already hold. Miriam Schulman was right when she said, “we throw out anecdotal evidence, mixed with a few facts and figures, and then we all retreat to our preconceived ideas without any empathetic consideration of the other side” (254). Like Schulman and, like most Americans, I am very suspicious of statistics. What once was an “absolute” in Algebra class (remember the term *real numbers*) has now become something called “the numbers game.” But, what happens when nearly all of the numbers of nearly all of the studies suggest the same thing? Does that mean it is true, or somehow closer to the truth than any other statistic? I am inclined to say “yes” and it is within the labyrinth of statistics that “The Spirit of ‘73” will begin to take shape.

After World War II, the United States economy performed at an incredible rate for more than three decades. Between 1947 and 1973, the United States economy put working class Americans on an escalator to the middle class. Ruy Teixeira writes in *America’s Forgotten Majority* that

“stretching back into the late 1940’s and forward to the mid-1960’s... the first mass middle class in the world [was created] - a middle class that even factory workers could enter, since they could earn a relatively comfortable living even without higher levels of education or professional skills” (6). Teixeira substantiates his claim with a whole myriad of statistics. Among the most important numbers in this

statistical labyrinth are “a household in 1973 probably had an income of around 34,000, making it more than twice as well-off as the equivalent household in 1947” (11) and working class Americans achieved “wage gains of 79 percent for the typical worker between 1947 and 1973, as his or her hourly wage rose all the way from \$7.61 to \$12.77” (13). Teixeira also points out that these statistics suggest an average increase of \$10,750 per year for each family over this period. This “huge boost to family economic fortunes” (13) created an optimistic working class that could count on significant increases in wages and consequently, a more affluent way of life for the average American family. However, just like the escalators at the department stores, this economic escalator also had to reach a terminus and the terminus for the escalator of American affluence occurred in 1973.

John F. Kennedy’s economic policy was one in which “a rising tide would lift all boats” and throughout the 1960’s, even many of the smallest dinghy’s were lifted - even Huck and Jim’s river raft experienced some high tides during that decade, but since 1973, the rising tide has not lifted all boats - it only lifted yachts and working class Americans have suffered as the traditional economic waterways to prosperity have all but dried up. After 1973, working class Americans had to work harder simply to maintain their position in the economic class structure and the children of what Tom Brokaw called “The Greatest Generation,” grew up in a stagnant flat economy that was rapidly changing. As America moved into the rapture of its post-industrial economy, many working class Americans were left behind. Teixeira writes that “service-sector employment has continued to grow - to the point where it now accounts for 80 percent of employment... In other words, four-fifths of working Americans now provide services... instead of producing tangible goods for a living” (8).

Now that this economic revolution has taken place, there are only about twenty-five percent of Americans doing “blue collar” work. Jeffrey Madrick, in his book, *The End of Affluence*, chronicles the substantial drop in the United States domestic growth between 1973 and 1999. According to Madrick this drop in domestic growth accounts for the slowdown in wage growth in the post-1973 economy. Teixeira points out that in the 1990’s, “national income and wealth, of course, have continued to grow, but... only the top 20 percent have really made significant gains. And the bottom 60 percent... have barely budged” (11). Based on these statistics, it is plain to see that when John Kennedy’s economic policy of “lifting all boats” was replaced by Ronald Reagan’s “trickle down economics,” the working class Left were just that - left - left out of the new economy in the dried up creekbeds of economic uncertainty. The Working Class Left in America should invoke the “Spirit of ‘73” during this 4th of July holiday and tell those elected officials who still sound the trumpet of “trickle down economics” to “go float a boat.”

Unfortunately, there is a darker side to America’s prosperity in the early part of the 20th Century. Because of racism, people of color were often excluded from labor unions and could not share in the prosperity that took white America on an escalator to the middle class life. In the late 1960’s, African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and women all began to demand their Civil Rights and somewhere during the Civil Rights Movement, the Democrats commitment to the working class shifted to being a commitment to various different identity groups. This form of identity politics provides the capitalist class with a smoke-screen to help combat a political movement committed to the cause of the working class. Although many

minorities in the United States were not able to participate in the rising escalator of prosperity between 1946 and 1973, because the Civil Rights Movement occurred at approximately the same time that America's bubble of prosperity for all began to burst, minorities and women still have a lot to gain by getting behind a movement that tried to protect the interests of the working class. Statistically speaking (and you all know how I hate statistics), poverty is concentrated more heavily in minorities and women than in any other identity group. They would have a lot to gain if the Working Class Left starting compelling the United States to fight the war on poverty the way that President Bush compels its citizens to fight the war on terror.

FDR created a working class constituency that elected him to America's highest office four consecutive terms. Many of those same working class Americans elected Harry Truman President during his very narrow victory in 1948. Dwight Eisenhower gained most of the working class vote during the 1950's and his being a war hero probably contributed to this more than his economic policies. John Kennedy won by a very narrow margin in 1960 and the working class contributed to his victory as well. If one were to look at politics from the 1960's through today, the working class has played a very prominent role in Presidential politics. However, since the late 60's, the Democratic Party has abandoned the platform of "working class people" and has substituted it for a narrower platform geared toward women and minorities. I applaud the Democrat's commitment to provide women and minorities with a voice in government, however, by adopting a platform that would galvanize the working class into a political constituency in the same way that Franklin Roosevelt did, the Democratic party could still help women and minorities, but would also be helping more than sixty percent of the American people as well. FDR put a "chicken in every pot," and Democrats should keep that in mind and learn a lesson from their past while they "Don't Stop Thinkin' About Tomorrow."

On October 15, 1980, *The New York Times* printed a story on a man named Dewey Burton. At the time, Dewey was a 34-year-old autoworker from Detroit and, according to *The Times*, "is a strong union man, a Democrat by upbringing and conviction." The significance of *The Times* article was that Dewey planned on voting for Ronald Reagan in the forthcoming Presidential election. Men like Dewey became collectively known as "Joe Sixpack" during the 1980's. The rhetoric of the 2004 Presidential campaigns, thus far, has been one dominated by "middle class tax cuts" and other initiatives designed to garner the support of suburban soccer moms. This is the new constituency that everyone seems to be fighting over. In the 2000 election, Al Gore briefly touched on issues that confront working class Americans and was quickly accused of "class warfare." Conservative columnist Bruce Bartlett wrote that Gore's acceptance speech "was all about the rich versus the poor and the powerful against the powerless." Since the 2000 election, Americans have witnessed the scandalous behavior of Enron, Worldcom, and Halliburton, lending credence to Mother Jones' statement that the American government was a government "of Wall Street, for Wall Street, and by Wall Street." Maybe it's time that the working class Left resurrected "Joe Sixpack" and used him as the mascot for the Democratic Party. He might be showing a little butt crack through his faded Levis, but at least he wouldn't be a complete ass like the mascot (and most of the candidates) that they have right now.

Although "Joe Sixpack says in the global economy of the 21st Century, workers all have the right to a

decent wage and to speak their minds and seek union representation” won’t fit on a bumpersticker, “Joe Sixpack for President” will. Imagine what the United States would look like if a steelworker were to become President. Imagine what could happen if a homeless person was appointed Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. What if America was really a country “of the people, for the people, and by the people?” What if there was a political ad where Joe Sixpack punched out Wal Mart’s price slashing Zorro guy and said, “The age of corporate interests and cash and carry government is over?” In the immortal words of Louis Armstrong, “What a wonderful world it would be.” I live in one of the most conservative states in America (Texas) and the Republican Party has a chokehold on politics here. Because it won’t do me any good to vote for a Democrat in any of the elections, I pledge that I will write in “Joe Sixpack” so that my vote might send a message to the Democratic Party and let them know that there is a whole host of people in the working class Left that are dying to get behind a movement that will make their country better. And, I feel confident that, if elected President, that Joe Sixpack can hold a good old down home tent revival and “The Spirit of ‘73” will once again stir in the heart of America.

Steal This Message, Part III: Joe Sixpack Says: “Marx Rules”

I was talking to one of my working class friends – actually, I was listening to him express his concerns about his economic uncertainty. I heard a very defeatist tone in his voice, like he had given up on life – given up on hope. I tried to explain to him that better days would have to come eventually – the capitalist system had run amuck and soon, some kind of social intervention would be necessary in order for the system to correct itself. I had his undivided attention until I made the critical error of mentioning Marx. At that point, my friend fell back in to his despair and said, “Communism doesn’t work. We already know that. What we’ve got is what we’ve got and that’s it.”

I wanted to argue with him, citing Germany, France and several other Western European nations that embrace social democracies. However, I kept my mouth shut. I didn’t feel that it was the appropriate time – my friend needed me to listen, not to lecture him on Marxist philosophy. I thought about our little chat in the days that followed our conversation and wondered “Why are so many working class Americans so turned off by Marxism?”

To Americans, Marx is a boogeyman – the philosopher whose work resulted in the brutality of the Soviet Union and Korea – the very thing that those same working class Americans were taught that they were fighting against in Vietnam. Like Howard Zinn, I, too, am “annoyed by the way Stalinism was mistaken for socialism (Zinn on History, html). Looking back, I can recall several occasions during my lifetime when the capitalist media reported “Marxist rebels” in Third World countries staging armed insurrections against their governments. Unfortunately, the phrase “Marxist rebels” has given way to “Islamic fundamentalists” in recent history, and the end result of both phrases is the same – fear and paranoia in the hearts and minds of the American people. Because of the media, many Americans are almost as scared of “Marxists” as they are of “black males.”

Another reason Marxism seems so deplorable to many Americans is that it is equated with the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989, the media, once again, sang an ever-present hymn about how capitalism defeated communism and brought an end to the Cold War. However, “to see the disintegration of the Soviet Union as a sign of the failure of socialism, is to mistake the monstrous tyranny created by Stalin for the vision of an egalitarian and democratic society which has inspired enormous numbers of people all over the world” (Zinn, html). The purpose of this section of *Steal This Message* is to try and explicate Marxism in terms that the average working class American can understand so that they, too, will be like our Presidential hero, Joe Sixpack, and boldly proclaim that “Marx Rules.”

Before we go on to explicate “Marx for the Masses” let us first look at the active smear campaign that Conservatives have waged against Marxism in the media and on the web. Earlier in this section, the TV news’ depiction of Marxism was illustrated. However, these brief soundbytes on the television are mild

compared to some of the scathing indictments in print and on the web. For example, after searching a few blogs on the web, I found these quotes: “Communists despise traditional notions of family and morality and seek to undermine these institutions”; “Our universities have been taken over by social elites (Communists). They are indoctrinating the future leaders of this country with their propaganda”; “Our judicial system has been compromised by Liberal activist (Communist) judges who usurped the authority of legislature by arbitrarily making laws from the bench”; and “the mainstream news media is operated and controlled by Socialists and has evolved into nothing more than a propaganda machine.”

Although these claims appear – and are – outlandish, they are endemic. Not only are the blogs filled with anti-communist, anti-Marxist and anti-Socialist rhetoric, but there are also several articles in the print media that say approximately the same thing: “Liberalism has paved the way for the communization of the United States from within. Anyone who points this out will of course be branded a ‘McCarthyist,’ or proclaimed as being ‘politically incorrect’ or ‘intolerant,’ or other such disparaging terms in order to stifle debate” (*Communism in America*); “like the abolition of private property rights, progressive taxation, and government control of industry and media, the destruction of the American concept of family and marriage is part and parcel of the Marxist principles espoused by communism” (*The Marxist Underpinnings of Homosexual Marriage*); and “16 out of 17 Americans that were involved in creating the U.N. were later identified, in sworn testimony, as secret communist agents” (*Who Created The United Nations?*). Now, all of these things sound even more cloak and dagger than a *Spy v. Spy* film during the Cold War and are chocked full of conspiracy theory. However, these illustrations are very useful in demonstrating the depth and breadth of rhetoric against Marxism, socialism, and communism in the United States. The burning question is “Why should anybody care about Marxism in 2004? Didn’t we bury any threat that it might have been against the capitalist way of life in 1989 with the collapse of the Soviet Union?” Part of the answer to that question lies in the things about Marxism that these authors don’t tell working class Americans.

Einstein said “make everything as simple as possible, but not simpler.” By trying to be “constructively reductive,” I may be taking a complex philosophy and creating something else far removed from what it was intended to mean. However, in keeping my promise of breaking down complex issues into “bumper sticker” slogans, I must simplify Marx so that working class Americans can gain some understanding of what Marxism is meant to be – not what the media and Conservatives have made it out to be. Today, when capitalism, the free market and private enterprise are being hailed as the victors in the ideological standoff between capitalism vs. communism – a capitalist system that must be exported to the four corners of the world, I think it is time to “rekindle the idea of socialism” to “remind us of the powerful appeal of the socialist idea to people alienated from the political system and aware of the growing stark disparities in income and wealth – as so many Americans are today” (Zinn, html).

For Marx, the most important features of a society are its economic classes and their relations to each other. His history was an economic history of class struggles (between ruler and subject, lord and serf, and finally bourgeois and proletarian). What Marx called “bourgeois and proletarian,” we call “haves and have nots.” In the past, the middle class has always served as a buffer between the “haves” and “have nots” (see

Zinn's *People's History of the United States*) preventing capitalism from reaching what Marx believed to be a critical mass for a proletarian revolution. However, in very recent American history, capitalism has been creating more proletarians who have nothing to sell but their labor by bankrupting the middle class. This phenomenon can easily be seen in the erosion of the middle class over the past thirty years (since '73) and mega retailers like Wal-Mart wiping out the small business owners.

Labor unions and other organizations that sought to increase the standard of living and quality of life for workers also helped to prevent capitalism from reaching a critical mass. According to Marx, under capitalism, workers tend to be paid the minimum amount required for them to accept the job. This "minimum" is kept at a "minimum" because of competition for jobs from what Marx called "the reserve army of labor." Today, we just call them the unemployed. Marx believed that the capitalist sold the product of the worker's labor at a price proportional to its value and the difference between what the product sells for and what its cost is the "surplus value" (profit) that is kept by the capitalist.

Although, for the most part, Marx's theory was correct, he had no way of knowing about credit cards, marketing tools, and other capitalist inventions that create a market where products often sell at prices that far exceed their value. For example, if one were to buy a new car from a dealership and then try to trade it in for another one later, it is possible, if not likely, that the person would owe more on the car than it was worth. In cases like these, it doesn't take the proletarian long to be swimming in debt further exacerbating his ability to earn a "living wage." Marx also saw the capitalist market as being somewhat "fixed." Because he didn't live in the age of advertising, Marx didn't predict that the market could be manipulated (presumably by influential capitalists). Oddly enough, it is the capitalists who argue very strongly about "market factors" and claim that "it is the choices of the masses that create the inequalities of fortune and fame – and the only way to correct those 'injustices' is to control the choices" (Loberfeld, *Social Justice*, html). Conservatives, like Loberfeld, embrace Marx's "fixed" view of the market. However, they fail to acknowledge that the capitalists have found ways to manipulate the markets through advertising and other means. It only takes a short interview with someone who lost their entire savings in the Enron scandal to realize that the market is not "fixed."

Marx goes on to add that because workers cannot buy the full product of their labor and the capitalists don't consume all of the surplus value, there tends to be recessions. Perhaps the best example of how this part of Marx's theory rang true in the United States is The Great Depression. After the Stock Market collapsed, there was mass unemployment. People couldn't buy the goods that the capitalists were selling which resulted in more layoffs and even more unemployment. Because of the competition for jobs, wages went down even more and that resulted in what Marx called "the increasing immiseration of the proletariat" (Marx, html). However, according to Marx, it doesn't take a depression to cause this "immiseration." Increased productivity through labor saving machinery also creates unemployment and drives down wages. Howard Zinn points out that mass immigration has also been a way for the capitalist to keep labor costs down (see *A People's History of the United States*). In *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy* Frederick Engels (Marx's colleague) wrote: "the middle classes must increasingly disappear until the world is divided into millionaires and paupers..." (Engels, html). It is then that, according to

Marx, a “socialist revolution” occurs. According to Lenin one additional way that the capitalists maintain their power is through “imperialism.” Lenin believed this to be the highest stage of capitalism. By exercising imperial power the “mother country” is able to export its poverty to the colonies and, at the same time, keep the working class masses placated at home (Lenin, html).

Anyone can see that Marx and Engel’s “Communist Manifesto” talked a whole lot more about economic history than it did about Communist ideology. The Soviet Union, a consequence of Marxism, may have used some of Marx’s ideology but was, in no way, representative of what Marx might have envisioned when he wrote “workers of the world unite.” As an American, I think that Marx went too far in his critique of capitalism and history shows that “liquidating the capitalist class” only makes a country poorer. However, Marx’s economic theories seem to hold true. There is a substantial amount of anecdotal evidence that suggests Marx was right about the evolution of capitalism. So much evidence that Conservatives have to demonize and discredit Marxism so that people are not more receptive to Marxist ideas.

In contrast to all of the negative comments that Conservatives make about Marxism, let’s look at all of the things that America does that conceivably could have been lifted from the “Communist Manifesto” itself: we have public schools, a progressive tax structure, and separation of church and state. In addition, America has (or should I say “had”) adopted other Marxist positions in its society. For example, Marx advocated the abolition of inheritance. Instead of abolishing it completely, America has instead put an inheritance tax in place to help keep familial dynasties from becoming the aristocracy. President Bush is trying to do away with that one but oddly enough Conservatives also have an agenda that could be mistaken for Marxism:

Marx believed in the confiscation of the property of emigrants and rebels. One only needs to look at Conservative policies in terms of the Drug Enforcement Administration and parts of the Patriot Act to see the similarities. In addition, Marx believed in the state controlling a centralized communication system. The FCC owns the airwaves in the United States and aren’t the Conservatives the ones who are so bent out of shape about Janet Jackson’s breast, Howard Stern’s mouth, and internet pornography? Perhaps the best example of all this is the Conservative doctrine that all people have an obligation to work – better known as Welfare Reform. Couldn’t one see Welfare Reform as the creation of industrial armies? These things don’t seem to be stretching Marx any more than the Conservative arguments cited earlier. My question is “Why aren’t the Conservatives being called Communists?”

Perhaps the simplest answer to that question is that the working class Left leans toward Marxism in terms of helping the “have nots.” They want the government to step in and be responsive to the needs of all of its citizens. In contrast, Conservatives only lean toward Marxism when it comes to restricting the rights of its people which are protected by the Constitution. Having said that, I’ll let the readers decide where the real totalitarian threat lies.

In order to maintain our capitalist system, we must keep it in check. In the last 30 years, there has been an increase in the gap between rich and poor – a great divide between “the haves” and “the have nots.”

Because we have allowed our capitalist system to operate in that same “laissez faire” environment that it did during the time of the robber barrons, we have hastened the coming of Marx’s “immiseration of the proletariat.” Working class Americans don’t have to embrace Marxism as a way of life and march lock step with their comrades to the factory every morning, but we all should be familiar with Marx’s critique of capitalism and see it as a blessing that we have a pseudo-repair manual for the system that we are living under. See the “Marx rules” as a prescription for a better way of life. Plato says “the price good men pay for indifference to public affairs is to be ruled by evil men,” so be like Joe Sixpack, jump up on a hickory stump and shout out: “Marx Rules.”

Steal This Message, Part IV: Joe Sixpack says: “You Say Liberal Like It’s A Bad Thing!”

One of the most interesting phenomenon in American politics surrounds the word “liberal.” Conservatives throw the word around like it is an expletive. President Bush has accused his opponents John Kerry and John Edwards of being two of the “most liberal politicians in the Senate.” Christian Conservatives have also joined in on the liberal bashing. For example, on June 16th, the Southern Baptist Convention decided to no longer fund the Baptist World Alliance and severed all ties with the organization because of their continual drift to the Left. In short, they left the organization hanging because it was “too liberal.” In an effort to combat this negative branding of the word “liberal” and at the same time, playing into the hands of the Conservatives, Democrats are no longer referring to themselves as liberals. Now, the 21st Century Democrats in America are “progressives.” However, Joe Sixpack, our Presidential hero, wants to bring the phrase “liberal” back into the vocabulary of the Working Class Left, saying to all the naysayers, Democrats and Republicans alike, “You say Liberal like it’s a bad thing.”

Oddly enough, Conservative Columnists Barry Loberfeld invokes the word “liberal” as he tries to present an argument against Marxism in “Social Justice: Code For Communism:”

Justice as a political/ legal term can begin only when limitations are placed upon a sovereign. . . The historical realization traces from the Roman Senate to Magna Carta to the US Constitution to the 19th Century. It was now a matter of “justice” that government not arrest citizens arbitrarily, sanction their bondage by others, persecute them for their religion or speech, seize their property, or prevent their travel. This culmination of centuries of ideas and struggles became known as liberalism (Loberfeld, Frontpage Magazine.com 2/27/04).

Loberfeld goes on to write that “the expositors of liberalism (Spencer, Maine) saw their ethic, by establishing the political equality of all (e.g. the abolition of slavery, serfdom, and inequality of rights) as moving mankind from a ‘society of status’ to a ‘society of contract’ (Loberfeld, html). Loberfeld gives a very flattering history of liberalism and he is a Conservative. If this is the definition of “liberalism” from the point of view of a Conservative, it makes one wonder what a “liberal” really is.

Liberal is defined (by Webster’s online) as being one who is “not limited to or by the established, traditional, orthodox, or authoritarian attitudes, views, or dogmas; free from bigotry.” Basically, a liberal is one who “thinks outside the box” – a trait that many in corporate America appreciate and look for because many of their executives suffer from what is often called “groupthink” (incidentally, “group think” is one of the traits that many believe are problematic in the Bush-Cheney cabinet). Another part of the definition reads “liberals are those ‘favoring proposals for reform, open to new ideas of progress, and tolerant of the ideas and behaviors of others; broad minded.” Golly, that sounds like someone that Joe Sixpack would like to have for a neighbor. Webster’s also has a definition for the word “liberal” that it calls obsolete, implying that it no longer applies to the word that it used to define. This definition defines liberals as being “morally

unrestrained or licentious.” Isn’t it just a little disconcerting that Conservatives throw the word “liberal” around when they obviously are referring to a definition that Webster’s says is “obsolete”? Kinda makes you wonder if they are not just a little behind the times, doesn’t it?

In contrast to Conservatives, Francis Bacon thought that liberals were “bestowing in a large and noble way, as a freeman; generous; bounteous; open-handed; as, a liberal giver.” Likewise John Milton said that liberals were “Infinitely good, and of his good as liberal and free and infinite.” Tell me, who are the Conservatives of the 21st Century to argue with Francis Bacon or John Milton? How could anyone even put Francis Bacon, John Milton and Karl Rove in the same sentence? (Oops, I just did!)

The primary reason that Conservatives take issue with Liberals is that Liberals operate under the premise that the rich are too rich and the poor are too poor. Liberals see a world in which the wealthy retain their wealth on the backs of the poor – they are not rich because they deserve to be rich, they are rich because most of the costs of operating a society are shifted on to the poor. My question is: “isn’t that exactly what is happening?” If you have a high credit score you can leave your money in the bank and get a zero percent car loan for that new SUV, but if you are broke, then you have to pay 18 percent interest on a Kia Sephia. How is that fair and equitable? Jim Hightower writes in “Corporate Redistribution of Wealth” that “what we have is a redistribution of wealth from America’s working families to super-rich investors... it’s really nothing but stealing from the many to profit the few” (html). Brian Jones, from the Socialist Worker writes: “the key is fighting for a totally different society where the priority is providing for the needs of the majority, not the profit of the few” (html). Is that a liberal idea? I think that it might fit Francis Bacon’s definition of “generous; bounteous; open-handed; as, a liberal giver.”

Mother Jones once said the United States is a country “Of Wall Street, For Wall Street, and By Wall Street.” If working class Americans would like to reclaim their country and once again make it a country “Of the People, For the People, and By the People,” then it must embrace liberalism, not run from it. We, as a nation, and as a people, need to get rid of an economic and political system that increases the hardships of the working poor while the richest one percent of Americans live in the lap of luxury. We, as a nation and a people, need to embrace liberalism and remember what its history was and not what modern political pundits have made it out to be. We, as a nation and a people, need to look at our Conservative counterparts with sincerity when they call us “liberals” and politely say “thank you;” and when they stare at us with the eyes of bewilderment say with surprise in our voice, “You say liberal like it was a band thing.”

The Aunts as an Analysis of Feminine Power in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

Tara J. Johnson

Many scholars, both male and female alike, dismiss the Aunts in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* as having a token power granted to them by the Commanders in Gilead. In fact, the males in positions of Commanders are given full responsibility for creating and maintaining the Gileadan theocracy many years after the dissolution of Gilead in the novel's blatantly satiric epilogue. Lee Briscoe Thompson in her book *Scarlet Letters: Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale* believes that lecturer Professor James Darcy Pieixoto's "real interest" is in "the male power elite of Gilead" which means that he would dismiss any female involvement (53). Karen Stein in her article "Margaret Atwood's Modest Proposal: *The Handmaid's Tale*" describes the dystopic Gilead in this manner: "In the guise of a re-population program, Gilead reads the biblical text literally and makes it the basis for the state-sanctioned rape, the impregnation ceremony the handmaids must undergo each month" (195). The society is obviously founded upon principles that negate the rights of women, which would lead readers to believe that no woman, let alone a group of women, could have the type and the strength of the power of the Commanders. Critics such as Roberta Rubenstein in her article "Nature and Nurture in Dystopia: *The Handmaid's Tale*" believe that the Aunts only "retain power in the puritanical state through their role as indoctrinators of the handmaids" (104). This paper would argue that the Aunts were created by Atwood and portrayed in such a manner as to suggest that they have as much if not more power as the Commanders have.

Atwood has a history of placing powerful females in her novels who use their power against other females, and the Aunts in *The Handmaid's Tale* are a clear type of this feminine power. The Aunts fall into the long tradition of females with power in Atwood's novels. *Cat's Eye*, Atwood's novel immediately following *The Handmaid's Tale* continues this tradition. While most of the criticism concerning *Cat's Eye* is about Elaine Risley's ability to find her own power (after being tortured by her childhood friend), Cordelia and her treatment of Elaine are reminiscent of the Aunts and their treatment of females, and the handmaids in particular. According to J. Brooks Bouson, *The Handmaid's Tale* anticipates *Cat's Eye*'s dramatization of the female-directed oppression of women (which begins during the girlhood socialization process) and it describes the brutal reeducation of the Handmaids, who are coerced by the Aunts to forego the ideology

of women's liberation and to revert to the 'traditional' values of a male-dominated system" (141).

Atwood intentionally created the Aunts as powerful females in a dystopia. In a radio conversation with fellow writer Victor-Levy Beaulieu, she said that the character of Aunt Lydia "is based on the history of imperialisms. For example, the British in India raised an army of Indians to control the rest of the Indians... So, if you want to control women, you have to grant some women a tiny bit more power so that they'll control the others" (Atwood and Beaulieu 78). In a BBC World Book Club radio program last year, Margaret Atwood stated: "I think the Aunts [in *The Handmaid's Tale*] have quite a bit of power... Naturally, they would have to answer to a top level of men" (4 Aug. 2003). And during Professor Pieixoto's examination of the Gileadan theocracy in the novel's epilogue, he clearly notes Atwood's observation:

Judd – according to the Limkin material – was of the opinion from the outset that the best and most cost-effective way to control women... was through women themselves. For this there were many historical precedents; in fact, no empire imposed by force or otherwise has ever been without this feature: control of the indigenous members by their own group (390).

By taking this power offered to them, the Aunts were therefore able to "escape redundancy, and consequent shipment to the infamous Colonies, which were composed of portable populations used mainly as expendable toxic-cleanup squads, though if lucky could be assigned to less hazardous tasks, such as cotton picking and fruit harvesting" (390-91). According to Thompson, it is "the pleasures of power" that "seal the deal" along with the "small perks" and "personal security." Thompson claims the Aunts to be "a classic depiction of Victim Position #1 as described in Atwood's analysis of victimhood in her literary study *Survival*" (51). While the Aunts may be victims of a male hierarchy, they certainly choose to utilize the power that they have over other women.

Linda Myrsiades in her article "Law, Medicine, and the Sex Slave in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*" simply categorizes the Aunts as "a class of women assigned to educate the handmaids to their roles as surrogates" (227). David Coad in his article "Hymens, Lips and Masks: The Veil in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*" limits the role of the Aunts by saying that they are merely "sadistic propagandists" (54). It could be argued, however, that the Aunts are responsible for sustaining the rituals of the Gileadan society, and not only the training of the Handmaids at the Rachel and Leah Reeducation Center. When Janine, or Ofwarren, is ready to give birth, Aunt Elizabeth plays an integral part in the birthing process for both Janine and the Commander's wife (158-62). At the assembly of the Handmaids, Aunt Lydia directs both the Salvaging and the Particition ceremonies (352-60). Lucy M. Freibert in her article "Control and Creativity: The Politics of Risks in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*" describes both ceremonies in this manner: "At the hangings each Handmaid must touch the rope in assent to the murders. At Particitions the Handmaids ritually dismember any man accused of rape. The Aunts supply the rhetoric that arouses the women to savagery" (284-85). The Aunts are also responsible for directing the females who are not Handmaids. When Offred goes with the Commander to the club, which serves as a brothel for the Commanders, she is surprised to see that an Aunt is responsible for regulating the behavior of her friend Moira and the other prostitutes. The Aunt determines when the prostitutes take their breaks and

for how long the breaks are (313). The Aunt also determines whether they need to lose weight in their positions and will punish them if they are overweight (309). A comparison of the Aunts' responsibility and the Commanders' responsibility shows that the Commanders are in charge of much lighter duties. A Commander officiates the arranged marriages service (282-83). The Commander is responsible for reading Bible passages to his household (114). The Commander is also responsible for impregnating the Handmaid in order to continue Gilead (122). It is clear that that the Aunts have more responsibilities in the Gileadan theocracy than merely educating women for service as Handmaids.

Most scholarly criticism focuses on the Aunts' responsibility for maintaining the Rachel and Leah Reeducation Center. According to Barbara Hill Rigney in her book *Margaret Atwood*, "the control agency in this novel is, not the commanders, but the 'Aunts', who run their re-education centres with cattle prods, torture techniques, and brain washing slogans" (118). The Aunts have very clear goals that they want to accomplish with their training of the Handmaids. The first is to delete the women from history: "All official records of the handmaids would have been destroyed upon their entry into the Rachel and Leah Re-education Center" (387). The second goal is to teach women how to betray other women. Offred learns from the Aunts that "the only storytellings permitted or rewarded are informing on others or testifying against oneself" (Thompson 59). The handmaids learn that their behavior will be reported if it is thought to undermine the Gileadan regime. According to the Aunts, "friendships were suspicious" (91). Aunt Lydia wants Janine to listen to the other handmaids and tell her if anyone had helped Moira to escape (171). Ironically, after all of Janine's efforts to appease the Aunts, she has a mental breakdown when her baby is deemed a Shredder rather than a Keeper (361). The Aunts' final goal is to teach the handmaids that rape is acceptable. They are able to utilize Janine's gang rape to further this lesson as they wear her down and make her realize that her gang rape was her fault (93). The other handmaids learn how to call Janine a crybaby and jeer at her when she cries and is upset (93). Janine's gang rape story is a pivotal element in teaching the handmaids that ritualistic rape at the hands of their Commanders will not only be tolerated but also encouraged. Eleonora Rao in her book *Strategies for Identity: The Fiction of Margaret Atwood* notes that Moira is one female who "survives intact the programme of conditioning into the acceptance of female guilt and evil imposed on the handmaids at the Centre" (20). The Aunts are not only training the Handmaids, they are creating women who will not only submit to their Commanders but also further the goals of the Gileadan theocracy.

A clear indication that the Aunts have a more elevated status than other females in Gilead, including the wives, is the power that they hold above other females. Thompson agrees with me about this, describing the Aunts as "a paramilitary cadre in charge of indoctrinating Handmaids and enforcing female (even Wifely) obedience to the new rules" (32). Thompson goes on to say that "the Aunts wear army khaki without veils, befitting their quasi-military role, and reminiscent of the fascistic Brownshirts of World War II (not to mention the no less fascist childhood Brownie troop uniforms of other Atwood fiction!)" (32). Thompson states that the other females are not allowed to wear the "Aunt khaki since they have no administrative powers" (32). Included in the Aunts' administrative powers is the use of violence and other methods to fight resistance from other females. At the Rachel and Leah Reeducation Center, the Aunts have the power to put "some kind of pill or drug" in the food to keep the handmaids disoriented so that

they won't resist in the beginning (91). Offred notes that when Moira arrives at the Center she has a bruise on her left cheek (91). When Dolores, a handmaid in training, wets the floor because she isn't allowed to go to the bathroom, the Aunts haul her away and the handmaids listen to her moan all night after she returns (93). For Moira's first attempt at escaping from the Center, she is beaten with steel cables on both of her feet and the other handmaids have to carry her because she can't walk (118). The Aunts are very honest about their willingness to use violence to accomplish their goals: "Remember. For our purposes your feet and your hands are not essential" (118). The Aunts' use of violence is important because even the wives are not allowed to use force to abuse or punish the handmaids. Another power that the Aunts have in comparison to the other female characters is the permission to publicly read and write. No woman is allowed to read and write in Gileadan society. On the night of the handmaid's impregnation Ceremony, the Commander unlocks the drawer that holds the Bible and reads aloud to the women in his household (112). Only the Commanders and the Aunts are allowed to read and write.

Central to understanding the power of the Aunts is Moira's successful escape in the guise of an Aunt from the Rachel and Leah Reeducation Center and future servitude as a handmaid. Moira forcibly exchanges clothing with an Aunt and instantly becomes a respectable, powerful woman in Gileadan society (170-71). Moira had previously attempted to use her own power and wit by faking the symptoms of scurvy and was unable to escape from the Center (115). Wearing Aunt Elizabeth's clothing, Moira walks out of the Center and past the barricades set up to prevent women from leaving Gilead (170-71). Moira doesn't have to explain the nature of her business to any of the male security personnel (170-71). She does end up at the Commanders' club under the watchful eye of an Aunt, but she isn't executed nor is she banished to an Unwoman colony (324). As Moira explains to Offred when they find each other at the club, "I couldn't believe how easy it was to get out of the Center. In that brown outfit I just walked right through. I kept on going as if I knew where I was heading, till I was out of sight. I didn't have any great plan; it wasn't an organized thing, like they thought..." (317). Even Moira and Offred are surprised that Aunts are respected in the Gileadan theocracy.

The Commanders' behavior is more suggestive of freedom for women than the Aunts' behavior. Sema Kormali in her article "Feminist Science Fiction: The Alternative Worlds of Piercy, Elgin and Atwood" states that "it is the Aunts, as best exemplified by Aunt Lydia, who are probably the most guilty of enforcing this patriarchal/totalitarian rule on the members of their own sex" (75). Furthermore, Karen Stein in her book *Margaret Atwood Revisited* states that the role of Aunt Lydia [and the other Aunts] is to control "women's appetites for freedom and knowledge, slimming down their minds and behaviors to be acceptable to Gilead's social standards" (82). When Offred goes with the Commander to the club, she views her and the Commander's behavior as "...flaunting, such a sneer at the Aunts, so sinful, so free" (299). The Commander allows Offred rights that the Gileadan regime and the Aunts deny her. In his study, the Commander shares women's magazines such as *Vogue* and novels with her (200-03, 238). Offred is able to write out words while she is playing Scrabble with the Commander (199). Furthermore, Offred says "the Commander was patient when I hesitated, or asked him for a correct spelling" (199). This behavior of the Commander demonstrates his willingness for her to possibly relearn what she has forgotten and to increase her own vocabulary. Another way that he helps her is by explaining what the saying "*Nolite te*

bastardes carborundorum” inscribed on her bedroom floor means (242). When Serena Joy later reprimands Offred for spending intimate time with her husband, she alludes to the fact that the Commander engaged in similar activities with the former handmaid in their household (368-69). This admission of Serena’s confirms Offred’s suspicion that she is not the only handmaid to have been inside the Commander’s study to learn what “*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*” means (240).

While the Commanders are undermining the Gileadan theocracy with their behavior, the Aunts are promoting the future of Gilead. The Aunts consider the group of women that Offred is a part of to be the “transitional generation. It is the hardest for you....For the ones who come after you, it will be easier” (151). The Aunts tell the handmaids that the next generation “will accept their duties with willing hearts.... Because they won’t want what they can’t have” (151). The Aunts have a greater capacity for imagining what the future will be like for women in Gilead: “what we’re aiming for is a spirit of camaraderie among women” (287). Bouson finds this aim “ironic” because the Aunts “uphold the male supremacist power structure of Gilead with its hierarchical arrangement of the sexes, and they play an active role in the state’s sexual enslavement of the Handmaids” (141). When the Commander takes Offred to the club, he makes it very clear that the club was created so that “it’s like walking into the past” (306). The costumes that Offred and the other women wear at the club are reminiscent of the time before Gilead. Even Offred is shocked: “such cloth – feathers, mauve, pink” (298). And when they arrive, the Commander announces proudly to her that there are “no nicotine- and-alcohol taboos here!” (310). Offred observes that the Commander is “in the courtly phase” like past relations between men and women (297). Not only has the Commander kissed Offred on her mouth, which is a forbidden act between a Commander and a handmaid, but also at the club he takes her hand “and kisses it, on the palm” (310). As if they were two teenagers learning the rules of love at a high school dance, at the club the Commander surprises Offred with a room key: “I thought you might enjoy it for a change” (331).

Corel Ann Howells observes that in *The Handmaid’s Tale* “individual freedom of choice has been outlawed and everyone has been drafted into the service of the state, classified according to prescribed roles: Commanders, Wives, Aunts, Handmaids, Eyes, down to Guardians and Econowives” (127-28). What stands out in her observation is how she has used the word “everyone,” which suggests that the Commanders do not have power over the Aunts. In contradistinction, Freibert refuses to acknowledge that the Aunts have any type of power or knowledge in Gilead’s society. She places the Commanders, Eyes, Angels, and Guardians in a military hierarchy and only points out that “at the Rachel and Leah Center, the Aunts use electric cattle prods to keep the Handmaids in line” (Freibert 281-82). Freibert’s hierarchy of power is refuted by Atwood’s own skillful portrayal of exactly how involved the Aunts were with the design of the Gileadan society in a conversation between Moira and Offred. Moira explains to Offred: “What I didn’t know of course was that in those early days the Aunts and even the [Reeducation] Center were hardly common knowledge. It was all secret at first, behind barbed wire. There might have been objections to what they were doing, even then. So, although people had seen the odd Aunt around, they weren’t really aware of what they were for” (319). The Aunts are part of the long tradition of powerful females in Atwood’s fiction and *The Handmaid’s Tale* provides much evidence to support this claim. Atwood portrays the Aunts in such a manner as to suggest that they have as much if not more power as

the males in positions of Commanders in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

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Lokefog

By Adam King

He sat at the kitchen table with this friend who he had once been so close to, and really they had lived through so very much together—not just in the war but after they had gotten out they lived in New York—in a small apartment together. But then they slowly drifted away. His friend was married now. And they had very little to say to one another. In fact, the entire visit was disastrous, and neither of the two old friends felt much like pretending for long that it was anything special

He was at least grateful for what he said at the end of their get-together: “Life is a miserable business and men are torn in different ways.” He didn’t get any response from either the friend or his wife—except for the vacant miserable stares he had received all night, he felt good about it. And added, “each man goes his own way, and really we aren’t ever what we want to be

Then he was given his coat and a couple of pats on the shoulder by the man who had once loved him. Yes, he was certain of it as he emerged from the apartment into the cool grey soft light of an early evening. He decided to walk and spend some time deciphering the evening

It’s all so horrible he said to himself, how men turn to the most abominable things. Does he have any sense of how we used to be? Or how we just were? Any regrets at all? Is he there now weeping on his wife’s breast and also saying, What happened to us? Probably not. He’s only relieved that he can settle back into his familiar world. We can never be what we want to be

That is true, he thought as he pulled out a cigarette and felt a new shiver of joy from being free—combined with the cool, crisp air. It felt good, and the smoke of his cigarette became purple as it meshed with the dark atmosphere. He walked on—three blocks not really thinking anything at all. That was the way he was he could walk and think and come to the most sublime-illuminate realizations, but then he could also walk and think of nothing—his brain completely barren and his mind only tuned to some immortal plethoral humming. The buzzing of the lifeforce itself, but other than that, he was numb to everything except the steam from the cars and the exhaust from their tailpipes lifting gracefully up into nothingness, only becoming somehow fully enmeshed with the longer more shadowy autumn season

I can start things. I mean I’m a genius at beginnings but I can’t finish anything. That was profound, and it was all too true. He hadn’t amounted to anything, and he blamed everything negative in his life on that fact—that he had never completed anything. He had begun school but had never received a degree. He had fought in a war but that had never quite been resolved. Even his dreams were hazy and they always began colorful but then became a dissipated lokefog. Now a soft rain came down but he didn’t care

I suppose we just live—and really that's all. We try to do what's right. We find some joy and we try to hurt as few people as possible, but here I stand alone and empty again. I can't help but mourn, for yesterday in my imagination I had a friend who loved me, and I cherished our past together, but today I find that it is as though we had never even met. We will never see each other again. I suppose each moment in time has its place and then poof it's gone and to try and resurrect a memory or a remnant of that moment is sacrilege, for all of the elements of that particular moment are gone! So then what good is anything? A man has a son, that son grows— that son that he used to carry and kiss and dance with suddenly doesn't need him, doesn't want him, doesn't even know of the toil and anguish that the father poured into his life—until the father dies and then perhaps. The son will cry and remember

He really had nowhere to go so he bought a book and found a small place to read and drink whisky and dark coffee well into the night until the place closed and as he emerged a light snow was falling and he danced in it and then staggered home filled with the bliss of energy and lights which New York provides singing a song of the dead which he had made up a eulogy for all lost friends

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