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**PERFORMING CONSUMERS: THEATRICAL IDENTIFICATIONS IN A
CORPORATE CULTURE**

By

MAURYA WICKSTROM

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York**

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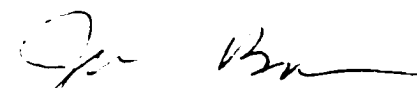
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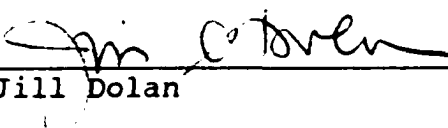
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Chapter One

Introduction

Some years ago I visited what was at the time the only Disney store of the five New York city boroughs. It was inauspiciously located in a generic mall on Staten Island. I was a Ph.D. student in theatre taking a class in tourism from Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett in the Performance Studies Department at New York University. I was also a person with almost no personal history of exposure to Disney movies, parks, or products. A Disney novice, but predisposed to a critical attitude, I was not sure exactly what I would find, or what I was looking for; only that I was looking for evidence of performance not in the theatre, but in more quotidian encounters or relationships, particularly in the context of consumption.

What I began to observe while I was in the store was a curious phenomena. Products, to be sure, were displayed everywhere, but there was a pronounced sense that consumers were being invited to step into them, enliven them, become part of a scene which was simultaneously already in progress and awaiting the participation of consumers. Overhead, Mickey and his cartoon crew were pointing film cameras down at shoppers. Film spilled from a reel out into the air—each image an image of cartoon characters as though shoppers were transformed by the magic of Mickey Mouse into the inanimate beings which "people" the Disney films. It was as if we were being absorbed into the very heart

of the Disney production machine, made to live inside it. All around me the packaging on toys beckoned to children to "be" Pocohantas or John Smith through the use or enactment of the toy's potential. I asked a little girl who was trying on one of the costumes, which duplicate the costumes on the Disney characters, why she wanted to wear this Snow White dress. She said it was because she wanted to "try and try and try to be a princess."

The open-ended verb, "to be," was what captivated me. Theatre is the medium which explores all the complications and potentials of that verb. In this store, though, the verb was framed, limited, articulated through a corporate imaginary. I began to think of what was happening in this store, this joining of enactment and corporate narrative, as corporate performance. I wanted to ask what forms it takes, and why it is ever more pervasively a feature of retail and entertainment environments. Elin Diamond writes about her own work in Performance and Cultural Politics that "in planning this book, I wanted performance critics and artists to move beyond explicit theater contexts and confront performance issues within structures of power."¹ I have made this my own challenge. I begin with theatre and the market in the early modern period and travel 600 years to the end of the 20th century, where I spend the bulk of my energies, hoping to identify some of the ways in which within late capitalism performance has everything to do with power.

Questions of Methodology, Interdisciplinarity, and Political Allegiances

¹Elin Diamond, ed., *Performance and Cultural Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 7.

The critical foundation of this dissertation is to apply to popular culture a language of theoretical inquiry which derives primarily from theatre studies. In a sense, theatre, because of its long history as a laboratory designed specifically to explore, fantasize, and embody questions of affinities and identifications, bodies and otherness, is a discipline uniquely qualified to contribute to studies of cultural processes which extend far beyond the stage. Theatre can provide some of the language with which to gain insight into and recognize the modalities of performances which are implicated, in this case, in the reproduction and strengthening of corporate culture.

But if theatre is concerned with questions about bodies, otherness, identification, identities, so are the disciplines of cultural studies, performance studies, anthropology, sociology and political science, among others. I am indebted, in particular, to cultural studies and to the sociological, political and economic modes of analysis which are such an indispensable component of its nexus.

Cultural studies emerged in the 1950s with new and challenging approaches to culture. Early texts which became foundational to the discipline approached culture as a holistic system, a system of economic, political, personal structures in which individuals were deeply embedded.² It drew and still draws upon a diverse range of disciplines, experimenting with strategies by which to understand subjectivity, agency and potential resistance. By the early 1970s, the discipline might be characterized as concentrating on the mechanisms through which power is exerted. Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Louis

²See especially William Hogan, "The Uses of Literacy," Renato Rosaldo, "After Objectivism," and Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950*.

Althusser's formulation of ideology and the Frankfurt School's analysis of the culture industry provided much of the theoretical underpinning of the new discipline and have been very influential in my own work. With the term hegemony, Gramsci meant an ever changing formation of political power which operates not through coercion but through the consent of those over whom it rules. This consent is given because hegemonic power is elaborated through ideologies which appear natural, grounded in "common sense," repeated so often that they have become "true" in the lived experiences of people. This Althusserian definition of ideology as the "'lived' relation between men and their world, or a reflected form of this unconscious relation,"³ has helped scholars to theorize how it is that people experience the particular social formations of their own historical period as natural, and universal, and, consequently, lose potential critical distance. Prevailing ideologies are reproduced through identifications which feel "real" because they are produced within a totalizing system which is not recognized as such.

Gradually, however, the Birmingham school of cultural studies theorists began to make persuasive claims over and against the Frankfurt School. Members of the Birmingham school became very interested in questions of agency; that is, they observed that people are not necessarily completely manipulated by ideological systems whose strategies are to reproduce dominant power structures through configurations of lived experience which feel inevitable and natural. These theorists began to suggest that every signifier has multiple meanings and people can appropriate meanings in ways that contradict or resist dominant ideology. Simon During uses as an example the "Marlboro Man," whose ideological function

³Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London, New York: Verso, 1969), 252.

is to produce unconscious identifications whereby masculinity feels the most "real" when it is linked to cigarettes. On the other hand, During points out, the image can also be used in ways that link it to cancer.⁴ This ability of people to negotiate their movement in and through ideology in such a way as to critique it, and appropriate its constructions in unexpected ways, has become a central focus of cultural studies.

The discipline has also incorporated a changing language of ethnography which is, in some ways, linked to the question of agency. Scholars who were deconstructing a monolithic model of power worked also to deconstruct representation and, in particular, representation of their human subjects. Scholars began to engage with the complicated question of how to represent subjectivity. Determined to search for the crucial intersections between individual and often quotidian experience and cultural productions, cultural studies scholars have rethought the practice of ethnography to theorize how it is possible to speak for the subject, to speak as the subject, to allow the subject to speak for herself.

My work here is situated in the thick of all these questions. I wish to preserve a sense of superstructural power while at the same time complicating it with ideas of performance and mimesis. I wish to preserve a sense of individual reaction and agency, while at the same time postulating an idealized consumer. Throughout the dissertation I use as the imagined target of all the processes of an environment a "self" assembled from personal history, political biases, theoretical predispositions, and argue as if the space were, in fact, producing the effects that "I" experience and describe. I occupy an uncomfortable position described by

⁴Simon During, "Introduction" in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), 5-7.

Meaghan Morris in her attempt to clarify her own "ethnographic" stance in relation to shopping centers.

So the task of analyzing shopping centers partly involves on the one hand exploring common sensations, perceptions and emotional states aroused by them and on the other hand, battling against those perceptions and states in order to make a place from which to speak other than that of the fascinated describer—either standing “outside” the spectacle qua ethnographer, or ostentatiously absorbed in her own absorption in it, qua celebrant of “popular culture.”⁵

Like Morris I immerse myself in the space and attempt to delineate its pleasures, while simultaneously bringing to bear on the experience an attitude of theoretical inquiry. As such my position is tremendously artificial, constructed with the foreknowledge of a critical goal, while attempting an engagement with the space that I hope will approximate the seductive experience intended by the corporation.

While many cultural studies theorists are primarily interested in the diverse uses to which an environment or other cultural product can be put, I think it is also important to focus on corporate intentions. I would argue that the emphasis in cultural studies on use and reception has to a certain extent diverted attention from the underlying strategies which maintain and increase capital accumulation regardless of forms of resistant appropriation of signs and meanings by consumers. It is obvious that in the spaces I study in the dissertation each

⁵Meaghan Morris, “Things to do with Shopping Centres,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), 299.

consumer is having his or her individual reaction to them. I might have studied this variety, interviewing and recording the experience of individuals, and arrived at a very different kind of narrative about entertainment retail. But given my concern to articulate the peculiar process of identifications and performances that I first observed at the Disney store, I have chosen instead to construct a kind of imaginary subject whose reactions I can theorize as the "ideal" subjective interaction with the space, the interaction which ideally will weave the corporation into the imaginary identifications of the consumer. As such, even my own reactions that I narrate as I visit the locations described in each chapter are, to a certain extent idealized. That is, from what I can understand about the space, this is the experience expected from me; this is the experience of the place that could have been hypothetically posited in the board rooms of the corporation. Conversely, my reactions could be described as a "real" response, but tempered by the critical position I simultaneously occupy; the odd doubleness of the critical observer described by Morris. I proceed from this position to make claims about the intentions of corporations toward consumers in corporate retail environments, suggesting that these intentions are actualized. While the little girl trying on the Snow White outfit may be experiencing irritation from the scratchy fabric, finding that the matching shoes don't fit, putting off the demands of a tired mother that they leave, nevertheless, she is enacting a commodity. My description of this corporate performance neglects the girl's specific use of the dress and its potential array of meanings, and it does not claim objectivity. It is, after all, my way of seeing informed by my theoretical bias. But my suggestion of corporate performance as a hypothetical relation between corporations and consumers is a

way to refocus attention on corporate power and its ongoing hegemony.

With this focus I hope also to position myself vis a vis a growing activism specifically aimed at corporate power. It does seem that, at this beginning of the 21st century, more and more people, especially young people, are protesting the world wide exploitation of corporations. Aware that consumerist resistance to corporations is ineffective as each new resistance is simply absorbed and marketed as the next day's fad, activists are investigating and resisting corporate labor practices, product development and marketing strategies, environmental degradation, global imperialism, and the corporatization of everyday life, as Starbucks replaces coffee houses and college bookstores are bought by Barnes and Nobles.

However, Naomi Klein makes the point that anti-corporate activism, or "brand based activism"⁶ takes the risk of devolving into consumer choices, albeit politically progressive ones. Not only that, corporations have been quick with containment strategies when evidence of their misconduct has been made public. They publish statements of their good intentions, they hurry to form organizations under their umbrella that refer to fair labor or environmental sustainability. As a result, Klein says, what we've got is a "haphazard and piecemeal mess of crisis management. In mid-1999, for instance, when Nike was coming off as a savior in Indonesia for increasing wages, it was also cutting its ties with higher-waged workers in the Philippines and rushing into China."⁷ As Nike acknowledges its labor abuses, it surrenders none of its power. Rather, it implies that even as it generously admits its mistakes, so will it take the responsibility to

⁶ Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (New York: Picador USA, 1999), 434.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 434.

improve them. Thus, as Klein points out, no power other than the power of consumer choice is transferred to global citizens and workers.

Klein suggests as the alternative to this corporate promise of accountability, monitored by the corporations themselves, a kind of global democracy spearheaded by public education projects. She points to the alternative globalism which occurs simultaneously to almost every summit on globalization; organizers, teachers, workers proposing forms of global organization in which the corporations would be dethroned. Aided by the internet, organizations have formed oppositional networks across the world. She writes,

On June 18, 1999, these virtual connections were made real when a coalition of groups including Reclaim the Streets and People's Global Action held the second Global Street Party in Cologne, Germany. The event, billed as a "global carnival against capital," took aim squarely at corporate power. All around the world parties and protests were held in financial districts, outside stock exchanges, superstores, banks and multinational headquarters. With simultaneous action in seventy different cities, the day was the coming-out party for this new global political player.⁸

I would like to imagine this dissertation as part of an activist network such as this. It takes place in hard copy on the page, but it is identified with the oppositional politics of its historical period. It is my goal, using theatre and cultural studies, to provide an analysis of corporate practices which will contribute to their demystification. Corporate performance, as the bodily practice of inter-identification with corporations and commodities, obscures the political

⁸ Klein, 434.

and social malpractice of corporations in an act of imagination. Just as Klein points to activists organizing on a global grassroots level around labor rather than consumption or lifestyle issues, so I hope that this work will contribute to a critical understanding of some of the primary processes through which corporate power attempts to yoke subjectivity to itself.

Performance

Performance is a slippery word, having become even more so in recent years as the disciplines of performance studies and cultural studies have questioned the representational allegiances traditionally associated with theatrical performance. Many of the theatrical mediums of the Western theater rely on representational practices grounded in an apparent correlation between the representation and an original of which it is, supposedly, the faithful copy, and on clear categorizations of the real and the not real. Steve Tillis, in his work on folk theatre, quotes Italian performance theorist Marco De Mafinis as saying, "The neat separation between theater and social life presupposes a fixed, one-dimensional, and immutable definition of entities such as 'fiction,' 'illusion,' and 'reality' and their respective boundaries."⁹ The concept of performance can preempt that understanding of theatre in which make-believe is understood as representative of, but firmly separate from, the real world and its political and social processes. Performance can suggest a mimetic relationship to the world of the real, in which the boundaries between the real and the not-real are not so firmly drawn, in which the real and the not real are mutually intertwined and

⁹ Steve Tillis, *Rethinking Folk Drama* (Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1999), 88.

mutually productive of social relations.

Part of the work of performance studies in claiming and redefining our understanding of performance is to redefine the relationship between performance and textuality. Early on in the history of the emerging discipline, theatre was criticized as being yoked to dramatic literature and hence to a mimetic representation of the "truth" of the text and/or the "truth" of the playwright's intentions. Rather than referring to the textual origins which presumably invest a (theatrical) performance with representational validity, performance studies has identified a broad range of cultural phenomena as performances and made them independent of claims to the authentic, the real, the model, the origin, as manifested in a written text. To read the "texts" of these performances has meant, for performance studies scholars, to see in them a form of textuality which creates as it goes, which plays rather than preserves.

As William Worthen points out in his essay on the subject, the binary between the two kinds of textualities, which is also generally posited as the opposition between theatre and performance, fails to account for the ways that performance can invoke and reproduce authority, or representational truth, just as surely as can the written text. Performance studies, says Worthen, also risks falling into the trap of requiring authenticity, requiring the truth of the model to emerge in the representation, even if that model is not a written text.¹⁰

Elin Diamond suggests further that in rejecting the theatre as so many proponents of performance studies and performativity have done, these same scholars may have deprived themselves of theatre as an important site of political

¹⁰ W.B. Worthen, "Disciplines of the Text/Sites of Performance," *The Drama Review* 39.1 (Spring, 1995): T145

intervention and, I would add, of insight into developing cultural and political strategies within capital. Without preserving the authority of a text written or otherwise, I do wish to preserve the theatrical, or what Diamond calls the "lures to identification"¹¹ which inhere in theatrical practices. Specifically, this means that I use a sense of performance dislodged from its traditional foundations in the actor's service to the playwright, but which remains firmly grounded in the promise and reward of mimetic otherness which, as we shall see in my history of mimesis, always contains the potential of exceeding, becoming other than, the model. Diamond also shows how, in a context in which the bourgeoisie, humanist ideal of a self-contained "I" is understood as having evaporated or never existed, that "I" can only appear as the result of performance. But, when that "I," which is not empirically real, appears on "the scene" it nevertheless exerts effects on the world that are real. She writes,

In the sense that the "I" has no interior secure ego or core identity, "I" must always enunciate itself: there is only performance of a self, not an external representation of an interior truth. But in the sense that I do my performance in public, for spectators who are interpreting and/or performing with me, there are real effects, meanings solicited or imposed that produce relations in the real.¹²

These understandings of performance--that through it the real world and the not-real world are mutually productive, that through performance subjectivities emerge and that these subjectivities and performances have real effects--are central to my thesis and to an understanding of performance which

¹¹ Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

links cultural analysis with theatre studies.

The work of Jean Christophe Agnew, which forms the foundation for chapter two, has contributed many of the ideas essential to my application of the term performance to the relationships consumers have to commodities and commodity environments. Just as Diamond suggests that performance is a technique for the production of "self," Agnew proposes that the theatre of the early modern period was a place for the rehearsal of new conceptualizations of identity that were emerging as an effect of capitalism. In Agnew's study, the production of a provisional "I" which, though made up, has real social consequences, is contextualized as a systemic result of economic relations which began to emerge seven hundred years ago.

When I say that Agnew contextualizes the theatrical making up of the "I" within emerging capitalism, I must attach the caveat that, in the Renaissance, the production of a provisional "I" is not necessarily equivalent to the provisional "I" in the postmodern period, the one to which Diamond refers. Scholars disagree about the extent to which early modern people experienced a self in the modern understanding of an individuated, unique, inner being. Catherine Belsey, for instance, argues that this sense of the self only begins to emerge in the late 1500s, and is not consolidated until after the Interregnum.¹³ Others disagree, pointing to Medieval texts as proof that as early as the 14th century people had a developed sense of inner self.¹⁴

Regardless of which is the more convincing point of view, it's clear that

¹³ Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), 119 etc..

¹⁴ David Aers, "A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing on the History of the Subject," in *Culture and History, 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities*, ed. David Aers (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992).

performance would have had different experiential qualities for people with either an emergent or unformulated sense of self, and postmodern people, for whom a fully developed sense of self is confronted with its own evacuation. The vociferous anti-theatricality of the Renaissance is evidence of the extent to which the protean changeability inherent in theatrical performance was suspect and feared. This is true even though the performance of identity, most clearly visible in the theatre, nevertheless met its most ardent detractors in the members of the Protestant merchant classes who stood to profit most by it. As in the plays of Ben Jonson, like Volpone and Bartholomew Fair, the theatre becomes, ironically, the medium through which to criticize the hypocrisy of a changeable self which so many believed to be the immoral core of performance.¹⁵

By the end of the 20th century, by contrast, the conception of self has, unevenly and at different rates and in different ways for different people, undergone a radical change. Self refers less to an the inner, unique core of the humanist tradition and more to the ways in which we identify with and even as commodities. For instance, an article in the New York Times in 1997 reported a trend in which people are seeking the advice of consultants to turn their "selves" into brands. One of these consultants remarks that she thinks "it's really alarming that we let a market economy dictate our human relationships."¹⁶ Nevertheless,

¹⁵ In *Volpone*, for instance, Mosca is the director of spectacles staged specifically as the best technique by which to dupe the parade of rich gentlemen who hope to profit from Volpone's death. Volpone himself is a masterful actor, the central character of the spectacle. In *Bartholomew Fair*, the puppet performance staged by Leatherhead is at the center of the carnival, topsy turvy world of the fairground, in which the profane and grotesque body momentarily triumphs over both the Puritans and the equanimous forces of justice. When Justice Overdo arrives to halt the puppet performance, in which the puppet Dionysus has defended the theater against the attacks of the Puritan, Busy, Overdo condemns Puritans and theater in one breath. Even though he is discredited and embarrassed, he is, in the end, the voice of reason exerted against the carnivalesque and deplorable nature of the theater.

¹⁶ Alex Kuczynski, "Hold Me! Squeeze Me! Buy a 6-Pack!," *New York Times*, Sunday, 16 November 1997, sec. 9., p.1.

she works for a client who reports that he wants to learn how best to brand himself to "add value to me."¹⁷ A professor of Media Services quoted in the article locates this trend in the 1930s motivational advice of Dale Carnegie, who urged people to apply to themselves the same techniques used to market products. Professor Miller says, "You are offering yourself as a commodity, as a thing. You're not a winning personality; you're a salable item."¹⁸

Implicit in the idea of branding the self is not that you are highlighting the best qualities which already are a part of your "self." Instead, the idea of self seems to be inextricable from market value, as if it can only be created as a function of the market itself. If it fluctuates in effectiveness, in "value," it's not "you," and you'd better come up with a new performance, a better brand image, to maximize your profitability. Mr. Kurtz, the person who wants to find out how to "add value to me," also says, "If I wake up at four in the morning and say to myself, 'Hey, why am I not having a great month?' I think to myself, 'I've got to get moving, I've got to think about my brand.'"¹⁹

During the early Renaissance period which Agnew studies, the theatre is the privileged site for experimentation with the kind of protean identities whose status would approximate that of commodities. Not yet fully integrated into social relations, performance could be treated both metaphorically in the content of the plays and in certain key characters, but also materially in the bodies of actors. The affinities and identifications between human and commodity that are at first rehearsed through the representational and metaphoric techniques of the stage become, gradually, the practical, quotidian understanding of "self." The ongoing

¹⁷ Ibid., 1.

¹⁸ Ibid., 4.

¹⁹ Ibid., 4.

work of renewing and reworking this understanding is no longer confined to the stage. It moves into the public venues studied in this dissertation via an increasingly overt representation of the human as commodity. In chapter two I use the slave markets of the 19th century as a clear instance of the performance of the human as commodity. But by the end of the 20th century, the experience of self as a playable correlate to the endlessly changing and renewable commodity becomes a key source of pleasure. The market replaces the theatre, or becomes like the theatre, to the extent that it combines the pleasures of the "as if" with the sensation of the "real."

Mimesis

The doubleness of performance, its way of calling into existence a made-up self which is, at the same time, a real action in a real world with real consequences, can be understood within the conceptual parameters of mimesis as articulated within its long and much contested history. In fact, although the word mimesis has been supplanted almost everywhere in this dissertation by the word performance, I am indebted for what insight I have into performance as it occurs in retail environments, not only to Agnew's historical study, but also to provocative theoretical work on mimesis. While mimesis is perhaps most commonly used to refer to the act of copying an original (and thus is allied with the kind of text-based performance whose allegiance is to an original model), there are also ways to understand mimesis which unsettle the very idea of an original. The de-emphasis on the original and the supposed truth content of the original is the first step to

being able to formulate mimesis in such a way as to locate its function in both consolidating power (the subject of this dissertation) and resisting it. This is as true when trying to understand the postmodern performances by consumers in retail environments as it is in grasping the relation between theatre and emerging capitalism in the Renaissance. Mimesis in both these cases has little to do with truthful imitation and everything to do with the productive capacities of embodiment and the protean self.

Since mimesis, then, serves the critical function of helping me arrive at a working concept for corporate performance, it will be useful for me to provide a brief survey of the history of ideas about mimesis as well its applications in practice, as a mode of performance. The most traditional, Western understandings of mimesis locate it in the field of aesthetics and revolve around the relation of an artistic product to nature or any other model on which it is based. Plato and Aristotle's work begin this tradition. On the other hand, as glimpsed by western scholars and social scientists in non-western cultures, mimesis is located as a part of an anthropological analysis of culture. In these cultures, mimesis seems to be less related to representation and more related to the practice of a bodily affinity between self and other, the absorption into and identification with the other. Anthropologist Michael Taussig's work exemplifies this position. And added to this mix of mimetic theory, by the mid 20th century the radical propositions of Derrida assert that the original has completely disappeared, and thus mimesis describes the simulacrum, the copy with no model.

The social practice of performance belongs to both aesthetics and anthropology, just as mimesis is key in the production of both art and societies.

However, I am concerned to locate mimetic processes at the places where culture and economics (entertainment and retail) converge. Gebauer and Wulf write of Derrida that he wanted "to make it clear that mimetic processes must not be examined in isolation from the political and the economic, that, in fact, mimetic processes cross over boundaries drawn between culture and economy."²⁰ In this vein, I tend to privilege the insights into mimesis arrived at through Western ethnographies of non-western cultures, perhaps because these theories acknowledge or are even predicated upon the mutual interrelationship between representational or aesthetic practices and social and economic systems. Also, contemporary and anthropologically based theories tend to focus on the generative capacities of dissolving the boundaries between self and other, and of a radical affinity for what is not yourself. This affinity is practiced and experienced, as it is in the theatre and in performance, through the body. The theories I draw most from are those of Marx and William Pietz (who explicates Marx on fetishism), Adorno, and Michael Taussig. I rely also on the work of Elin Diamond in her recent book on mimesis. Finally, I am greatly indebted to Walter Benjamin's essay on mimesis, as well as on fragments from his Arcades Project and Susan Buck-Morss's reconstruction of the fragments into a coherent book.

The question of mimesis is fundamentally a question of how and why one thing becomes like another, and, in particular, why so many of the aesthetic and social expressions by human beings involve an effort to make one thing like another. At different points in history, this question has seemed more or less urgent. In our own time it has probably been posed most urgently in Baudrillard's

²⁰ Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis: Culture/Art/Society*, trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1992), 302.

theory of the simulacra, which, as in Derrida, refers to the multiplication of copies which have no point of origin. That is, things seem to be like something, or refer to something, which, in fact, does not exist. Baudrillard writes, "Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real. Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference."²¹

The idea of simulation, following Baudrillard, has helped to determine much of a postmodern understanding of representation. The demise of the real, the original referent, is celebrated and exploited by some, mourned by others. For many, the real seems irretrievably threatened.²² The politics of representation in our postmodern period often seem organized around a polarity between real and fake, a polarity which, as I hope to show, performance and mimesis continually unsettle. Even a brief historical survey will show that just as as our shorthand definition of mimesis is usually summed up and dismissed in one word, "imitation," a copy which always refers to a model, the concept (and practice) has been problematic, complex, and slippery for all of known western history. The chapters of this dissertation take advantage of this complexity. The pleasures of the fake, mimetic absorption into the commodity, the social productiveness of the imagination are all phenomena which occur in contemporary corporate retail and they are all rooted in mimesis.

The Earliest Account of Mimesis: Bringing the Real and the Imaginary into

²¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 6.

²² I discuss this polarity at greater length particularly in my chapter on Las Vegas.

Dynamic Relation

The known history of speculation about mimesis in the Western world begins with Plato, whose observations on the subject enter it into the canon of philosophical thought on aesthetics. Plato saw that we know through mimesis; by producing similarity with what we observe we come to know it. In producing similarity, we produce an appearance, an image. This image belongs to the imaginary and thus, as Gebauer and Wulf comment, "the real and the imaginary come into combination. If images are defined by similarity, they belong to the world of appearances; they make something visible which they themselves are not. They have an intermediary status between being and non-being."²³

Plato's identification of the indeterminate nature of the mimetic image--it both is and is not that which it represents--underlies almost all subsequent valuations of mimetic actions. This is the case because, though it is clear that mimesis is fundamental to human knowing, it is entirely unclear what the relation of mimesis to "the real" is. What is the ontological nature of the images we create through mimesis? While, on the one hand, a mimetic image may look just like the image upon which it's modeled, because it is an image, an appearance, it is also different from the model. It cannot be entirely the same, even though it may strive for absolute similarity. Again, Gebauer and Wulf comment, "The human ability to produce images, such that what does not have real existence is dovetailed together with what does have real existence, Plato terms mimesis. Insofar as the image is defined by similarity, the production of the same, not of the other, is the characteristic of mimesis. On account of its character as image, the image never

²³ Gebauer and Wulf, 26.

represents solely the same, but always at the same time something other as well."²⁴

Because of the production of this double, then, the "truth" of the original cannot be reproduced mimetically. The image always contains an addition. Thus, for those like Plato, for whom "truth" must always be guaranteed, mimesis must be suspect. Mimesis introduces into culture a troubling indeterminacy which threatens a culture's ability to guarantee truth. It is precisely the production of this doubleness that is the object of the anti-theatrical prejudice which originates with Plato. As Jonas Barish comments in The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice, Plato initiated an ongoing tendency on the part of various philosophers and theologians, who simultaneously acknowledged the "potency" of the mimetic act and sought to repress and control it.²⁵

Anticipating Entertainment Retail: Sympathetic Identification and the Creative Power of Mimesis

Plato's ability to identify and articulate the dangers of mimesis may have been possible because he lived at a time during which a cultural shift from oral to literate culture was taking place. In oral culture, Gebauer and Wulf argue, mimesis referred not to imitation but to the sympathetic identification involved in becoming like something else. In these cultures, as Gebauer and Wulf write, drawing from the words of Plato, "Mimesis is the name of a 'submission to a spell'; but it is also 'an act of composition which constitutes an act of creation'".²⁶

²⁴ Gebauer and Wulf, 41.

²⁵ Jonas Barish, *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1981), 5.

²⁶ Gebauer and Wulf, 49.

Now the threat of mimesis multiplies. It is not just that even when seeking to reproduce the real, mimesis cannot because it always produces an image. It is also that mimesis is experienced as "spell," magic, a giving way which, rather than guaranteeing a model, produces what did not before exist. As such, mimesis affords the opportunity to escape from social constraints and to experience this escape as creativity. A rational, literate culture built on "truth" cannot afford such creativity, especially a creativity derived from disintegration of social, cultural and personal identities. Again, Gebaeur and Wulf comment, "Rather than being accepted simply as representation, imitation, or whatever else it might be taken to mean, it has always been understood as a problem; mimesis, by virtue of the changes it effects, makes of one thing something Other."²⁷

It may be accurate to say that this act of becoming other, which is an act of making, is what Plato wanted to circumscribe. He advised that any mimetic act must take place only within tightly prescribed parameters. In his theory, mimesis must be restricted to an act of reproducing what already exists. It becomes an iteration which is not performative. That is, it does not bring something into being. Rather, it enhances selectively chosen and preexisting qualities. People should emulate only those who are most noble and most wise, and, even then, mimesis should only be used to reinforce what is already best in one's own character. Even the potential taking into oneself of good qualities risks the integrity of social boundaries. One must take into oneself only qualities that are already identical to one's own with the purpose of augmenting rather than changing the self. Risking emulation of qualities which are not of the very best, and which are foreign to the self, puts the entire social order at risk. As Barish says, "Wherever [mimesis]

²⁷ Ibid., 7.

might involve imaginative displacement, adoption of unfamiliar psychic hypotheses, experiments with untried states of feeling, wherever it might promise (or threaten) to release the individual from the cage of his ego or his fixed place in the social order, it becomes the first step in a disintegrative process that can only end in anarchy."²⁸

Aristotle rescued mimesis from Plato's condemnation, and fashioned a route by which the Renaissance scholars who worked from the new translations of Aristotle and Plato could simultaneously imagine theatrical practice and work to control it. He resolves the Platonic dissonance between the appearance and the real by conceding that the copy is certainly not the real, but that it nevertheless has value as something which models itself on but also can improve the original. Therefore, poets work from the original, but transform the unique qualities of the original into a more universalized and beautiful artifact. Thus art improves on and is superior to reality. Yet while he releases mimesis into a certain creative potential, Aristotle continues Plato's work in theorizing mimesis as part of an aesthetic sphere which can limit its identificatory dangers.

The theories of Plato and especially of Aristotle, translated and distributed in the Renaissance, contributed to an ongoing attempt to circumscribe these dangers and construct a mimesis which would be instrumental in the reproduction of power, and limit the creative power of renegade playwrights and actors. Italian Renaissance theatre theory and, subsequently, French neoclassicism, were important players in the attempt to confine mimesis to a strictly delegated relationship to, as Gebauer and Wulf point out, the "truth" of the model, both of character, circumstance, and situation.

²⁸ Barish, 22.

Bodily Mimesis: an Opportunity for Capital and a Threat to Feudalism

The practice of theatre is a profound challenge to attempts to regulate the cultural effects of mimesis. As my chapter which traces the history of mimesis and performance will show, the onset of capitalism provoked particularly in the new for-profit theatres in the suburbs of London an ever greater exploration of the dissolution, through mimesis, of social boundaries. On the other hand, for a time, the neoclassical dictates of the French Academy, as well as those of the earlier theorists of the Italian Renaissance, to which playwrights of the period worked to conform, preserved for the aristocracy a sense both of the inviolability of the identity conferred by birth and of its own power. Capital, of course, was linked to the emergence of the merchant and middle classes, in opposition to the aristocracy and feudal economic structures which depended upon a strictly boundaried and reinforced system of social identities. As Chapter Two will show, capital and the bodily otherness and proteanism of the theatre are well suited to each other and mutually profitable from the inception of capitalism, even as theoreticians attempted to regulate the socially disruptive bodily identifications and performances which belong to the theatre and which, as we shall see, are at the core of contemporary entertainment retail.

The attempts to regulate mimesis, then, came to full fruition in Neoclassical France. Members of the French Academy exhorted playwrights to adhere to a rigid interpretation of Aristotelian "rules" concerning unity of time, place and action, as well as the doctrine of decorum, in which no character's

behavior can deviate from the behavior accorded his or her social place. While there were differences of opinion, in general it was proposed that the stage could be most effective in this sense if the audience was confronted with characters it could recognize and believe in. The Italian scholars Lombardi and Maggi contributed to this discourse their interpretation of Aristotle as meaning that we are most likely to believe in a king if the characterization is a generalized one. What is believable is what is most recognizable as a type. The same is true of time and place. The time span of an enactment must correspond to the time span of the event that the enactment portrays. The audience will not be able to believe that a drama which unfolds in three hours covers a story which takes three days to unfold. Nor will they believe that scenes are real if the scene must keep changing to different locations.

The French neoclassical tragedy was built on abstracted and idealized temporalities, places, and plots. Gebauer and Wulf argue that this is true because the "truth" of the social order must be reflected by creating onstage an insular and generic world where no reference is made to the quotidian and its wealth of experiential and individuated detail, and in which the powerful expressed themselves in idealized motions and emotions.²⁹

Even the spatial orientation of the audience/stage relationship, based on perspective, allows for a sense of making fully visible that which must be known, i.e. power. The messiness of the quotidian, the multiple points of view of heterogeneous daily life, obscure the underlying truth, which is the truth of power. Violation of decorum, as when a peasant character acts with the nobility of a king and a king with the vileness of a thief, also obscures the correct or true relations of

²⁹ Gebauer and Wulf, 124-130.

power. The mimetic characteristics of the quotidian, of the experienced rather than the idealized world, must also be suspect because, in allowing ourselves to become like others, we might violate the rules which dictate our social place.

Neoclassicism was at once Platonic and Aristotelian; providing for a model only the most noble while at the same time improving on the model. Gebauer and Wulf comment that neoclassical playwrights were creating an image of a king based not on an empirical model, but on something better than the real could ever be. In this way, they served the powerful by representing "the king on stage in a way that the real king could never be shown. He is made to appear as an essence that determines the course of history."³⁰

Proteus: Encouraging and Managing the Permeable Boundaries of Flesh and Identity in the Interests of Capital

Even as the philosophers of the ancient world and the scholars of the Renaissance and 17th century worked to limit and order the effects of mimesis, Renaissance theories of acting identify mimesis as a profoundly physiological relationship between self and other which was not necessarily controllable. I am primarily concerned here with theories of the body from the ancient world and how they shaped beliefs about acting, mimesis and the body in the Renaissance. In these theories, the boundaries of flesh and identity are permeable, susceptible to the other, drawn toward the other. The theories are an important foundation for the following chapters because they enrich an understanding of how and why capital appropriated the suggestive identifications of mimesis for its own

³⁰ Ibid., 127.

purposes. In the Renaissance, Proteus, the mythic spirit who could continually change shape, was used to refer to actors who, moved by animal spirits, could truly become, move into, or be inhabited by the character they were portraying. Likewise, people in the postmodern period, as documented in Chapter Two, rely upon the ability to change their “brands,” on a protean lack of attachment to an underlying, “real” self.

According to Joseph Roach, in ancient culture the body was thought to be permeable, penetratable, particularly by spirit. It was built as a sort of vehicle for interpenetration, movement of the spirits in and through it, transformation, becoming different. The animal spirits were thought to mediate between soul and material body. The result of a final purification of a series of increasingly purified bodily substances, the spirits charge through the body, filling it with something akin to possession. The spirits are set into motion by an image. That is, if something is strongly enough imagined, the body is set into such great, responsive unrest that it will produce an effect of the imagined image. That is, a person, taking into herself an image from the external world, becomes possessed by it, and then changed by it as it sets the spirits and the humors coursing through her body.

Not only are the boundaries of the actor thus susceptible, Protean-like, to being overtaken by an other, even to the point of losing the original self entirely, those same spirits which occupied and changed the actor could travel across space to enter into and change the spectator. This theory of mutual porousness or infection between spectator and actor was based, says Roach, "on the ancient concept of *pneuma*. It was widely believed that the spirits, agitated by the passions of the imager, generate a wave of physical force, rolling through the

aether."³¹ The pneuma could enter the body of the spectator especially through the eyes. Some emotions in particular pull the spirits in through the eyes. Here mimesis is an act of exchange and reciprocity, an infection first of the player and then of the watcher, whereby the player literally produces as his own body the characteristics of the other which he is not. Furthermore, he does this at the risk of infecting himself permanently with the passions of the other, the spirits he has produced as his own. Bodily mimesis of the Renaissance, rather than the idealized mimesis directed toward the reproduction of power, is risky and destabilizing, the reach toward otherness made dangerous by the realness of what the actor brings into herself.

A celebration of the idea of proteanism was introduced by certain Renaissance humanists for whom men and women's ability to change shape made them alike in creativity to God. Men and women needn't stay who they were, but indeed could call the notion of any permanent self into question, always capable of self-transformation. Jonas Barish suggests that, according to Ficino, "[The soul of man explores], it extends itself; it seeks all things and tries to become all things. The intellect unites itself to all things by transforming them into itself, the will by transforming itself into the things."³² Pico della Mirandola, another celebrator of proteanism, writes, "'On man when he came into life the Father conferred the seeds of all kinds and the germs of every way of life . . . Who would not admire this our chameleon? It is man who Asclepius of Athens, arguing from his mutability of character and from his self-transforming nature, on just grounds says was symbolized by Proteus in the mysteries'."³³ If Renaissance and neoclassical

³¹ Joseph R. Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1985), 45.

³² Barish, 108.

³³ *Ibid.*, 109.

theatre theory belongs specifically to those periods during which the absolutist power of monarchies depended upon the strict maintenance of social positions, by contrast, proteanism is tied to capitalism's need for a population which is not attached, whether to place, identity, or history. It needs a population which can be transferred from job to job, from job to unemployment, and individuals who will understand that their well-being is no longer in the hands of anyone or anything except their own ability to materialize the multiple identities necessary to effectively market their labor power.

Astute observers of the political and economic scene, among them playwrights like Dekker and Webster, did not fail to note that in the precarious world ruled by the commodity, the only security lay in one's hoard of selves, in this ability to become whatever a particular exchange situation demanded. Jean-Christoph Agnew cites the following excerpt from the play by Dekker and Webster, *If It be not Good, the Devil is in It*.

That, for which many their religion,
Most men their Faith, all change their honesty,
Profit, (that gilded God) Commodity,
He that would grow damn'd rich, yet live secure,
Must keep a case of faces.³⁴

However, even as mimetic interchangeability served capital, it may simultaneously have posed a threat to the developing demarcations of class within capitalism, just as it had posed a threat to feudal identity structures. The tension between the promise and the threat resulted in various attempts to control and

³⁴ Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 57.

manage the body and its unpredictable affinities with otherness. Within this context, it is possible to see the proteanism of the Renaissance not as a free play of mimetic affinity, incongruous in relation to Puritan condemnation, but as an instance in the range of techniques used to manage the self's relationship to otherness. That is, the "case of faces" was a range of identities constructed as aspects of market exchange, in effect organizing mimetic affinities according to the imperatives of commodity exchange. Puritan outrage, which reached its zenith in the mid 17th century, and became institutionalized theatrically in the sentimental comedy and bourgeois tragedies of the 18th century, may have been the undercurrent sweeping the performance of multiple selves toward the imperative to control identity and the proclivities of the body to secure the class relations which began to be consolidated in the 18th century.

In the light of the history of mimesis in the Renaissance and Neoclassical period, it may be possible to argue that the complicated relationship of the stage and of performance to mimesis is such that the stage, far from being the mimesis, or imitation, of the real, is the rehearsal of forms of social management made necessary by both the potentials and the dangers of mimesis; a rehearsal conducted, ironically, through bodily mimesis.

The figure of the actor, then, embodied the tensions around mimesis. As the professional representative of mimetic affinities and, as such, entrusted with the task of exhibiting otherness, the performer was simultaneously accused of degrading the boundaries of identity. Caught between the need to elicit mimesis as the behavioral standard within capitalism and the need to suppress and manage that same mimetic behavior, the actor bore the brunt of the insecurities latent in

economic transition. The Puritan invectives, whose antecedents were in the condemnations of the early Christians, excoriated actors and the theatre on the basis that taking on qualities which are other than the self is a betrayal of one's true, God given identity. In these criticisms, mimesis is gendered; it is by allusion to the finery and cosmetics used by women that actors are categorized as impostors. In the Puritan position, according to Barish, "God requires us, that is, to live in strict conformity with the self he has bestowed on us, and that in the most minute particulars. Puritan apologists wax clamorous over the offense to nature involved in incorrect dress and use of cosmetics. Distinctions of dress virtually belong to our essence, and may no more be tampered with than that essence itself."³⁵

The Calvinists argued, further, that any external significations of faith were, like the theatre, only trappings, costumes. True faith was a matter of the inner spirit alone. Even the sacrament was criticized for the degree to which it allegedly materialized the spirit. Its suggestion of incarnation was regarded by the Protestants as inexcusably theatrical. Nevertheless, there is a curious space within the Protestant diatribes which solicits mimesis while circumscribing its effect. Barish points out that even the most rabid of critics of the theatre, Gosson and Prynne, use theatrical imagery, and, in particular, the figure of the world as a stage, as the basis for their anti-theatrical argument. In the structure of their analogy, they preserved for the theatre a socially useful effect as long as its uses were collapsed with the divine intentions of God as they are to be understood through the *theatrum mundi*. Barish writes about Prynne's *Histriomastix* from 1633 that,

³⁵ Barish, 92.

Players are to be shown that whereas they imagine themselves to be acting comedies of their own devising, they are in fact performing tragedies instead, tragedies of their own damnation composed by the pen of God. The concept of martyrdom, too, was a theatrical one, and necessitated spectators, or, at least, a celestial Spectator. Scaffold, in Elizabethan English, meant both the executioner's platform and the playhouse stage. To court martyrdom was to claim a starring part on the stage of history, theatricalizing one's sanctity by revealing it triumphantly before the Supreme Gaze. The stage, then, whatever its defects as a human institution, provided a useful set of correlatives for man's relations with the rest of the cosmos, and even offered some serviceable precedents for godly conduct.³⁶

The desire to make use of the stage while also controlling it is also visible in the struggle between text, or playwright, and actor, or between language and the body. In this binary opposition, the body was distrusted as that which could at any time betray the deliberate, premeditated organization of textuality. The struggle between body and text is usually recognized as appearing first in the efforts of Ben Jonson to privilege the written version of his plays over the acted version. Barish recounts how Jonson was unique in Elizabethan England for publishing his plays with priority given on the title page to himself as author, rather than, as was customary, giving priority to the play as acted by a particular company of actors.³⁷ Borrowing from Derrida, Scott Cutler Shershow describes

³⁶ Barish, 166.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 136-137.

Jonson's theatre as theological. In the "theological theatre,"

literal authorship and literary authority—an "inspiration" which is linguistically, and philosophically derived from the primitive belief in a divine spiritus "breath"- descend from the poet down to player-puppet, who represents in articulate multiplicity the singularity of authorial intention. This theological model of authorship has been rhetorically constructed, upheld, and imposed on the theatrical enterprise from the humanist revival of the early Renaissance to our own century, even though it has seldom accurately described the theatre's real conditions and social relations.³⁸

The figure of the puppet expresses the yoking of the mimetic, the embodiment of multiple others, to the intentions of an authority. It signifies the potential of the body to be other than it is, while reminding us always that the body can do nothing unless the author originates and determines its movements. In this way it is an apt metaphor for the situation of the actor and for mimesis itself. Shershow says that, for Jonson, "theological theatre," performed, as it were, by puppets, would be "powerful enough to subsume [within a master text] even the most degraded and degrading form of performance."³⁹ Performance is degraded by the way that the performer embodies what she is not and in so doing inevitably adds unanticipated significations to the literary text from which her performance is derived. The puppet does not change. Its performance is not a mimetic act of othering. The puppet is the thing it enacts. It is always disciplined because it is

³⁸ Scott Cutler Shershow, *Puppets and Popular Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 20.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

always, apriori, subjected.

By the early 18th century, however, bourgeois playwrights in the English theatre seemed to trust in the possibility of safely representing the dangers of theatre using the medium of theatre. If the established merchant class still depended upon its "case of faces," it increasingly aimed to represent bourgeois subjectivity as a coherent, "true," and singular, living example of an anti-theatrical temperance and discipline. Somewhat like the earlier Calvinists, it saw fit to preserve the theatrical as a articulate extension of its own philosophy. That is, the English merchant class of the early 18th century attempted to coerce the theatre into an image of its own disciplined selfhood.

Even so, its ambivalence toward the theatre was clear in the general discouragement of young employees on the up and up from attending the theater. Even the sanitized theatre of the sentimental comedy and the bourgeois tragedy could not be entirely purged of the seductive powers of the theatrical. Thus, attending performances might eat away at the discipline of workers, eventually rendering them dissolute and corrupted. The theatre, it seemed, still reeked of a kind of bodily license which might contaminate wage-laborers, just as a prostitute might corrupt them. Like the prostitute, the theatre threatened to set socially proscribed identity into motion, converting it into something outside, marginal, uncontrollable. This is exactly what befalls George in Lillo's exemplary domestic tragedy from 1731, The London Merchant. Diverted by the sexual deceit of a professional kept woman from his disciplined course, in which he will would likely have become as successful a businessman as the merchant to whom he is apprenticed, he becomes other than that which he is known by all to be. This

becoming other is his downfall because it is irrevocable. There is no turning back after betraying absolute identity, a singular identity necessarily severed from the body, which is figured as the source of transformative passions and affinities.

In this landmark play of the new bourgeois social order, the merchant class produces itself as immune to the dangers of the theatrical, of otherness, of the body. The play exposes the dangers of theatre, while simultaneously providing a guarantee that it is not infectious, or, rather, providing for its audience the flattering reinforcement of the superiority of its discipline. Unlike the more vulnerable working class, vulnerable because it lacks the discipline to resist the bodily temptation which inheres similarly in sexuality and performance, the merchant class is disciplined enough to witness theatre without succumbing to its temptations.

The English bourgeois theatre of the 18th century, then, stages the subjection of mimesis as bodily otherness within a logic of mastery of the self and of the other. In his discussion of the castrati and of acting in general in the 18th century, Joseph Roach points to a "technology of self-mastery [that] implies a control over the body so deeply inscribed that it seems to originate spontaneously from within."⁴⁰ Roach, in fact, argues that "the governance of the body"⁴¹ had already defined performance at least since the Renaissance. This argument would seem to contradict my own argument and Agnew's--that performance in the Renaissance was a performance of the protean ease with which it was possible to inhabit multiple identities and thus a public display of bodily mimesis. But

Roach's argument makes it clear that "governance" and mimetic proteanism can

⁴⁰ Joseph R. Roach, "Power's Body: The Inscription of Morality as Style," in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 108.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

and do exist simultaneously; theatrical display of performed identity becomes an exhibition, a proof, of the dissemination of power into bodies. And, as Roach says, the regulatory effects of power, lodged in techniques of the body and, in particular of performance, are experienced as if they were indigenous to the self. It might even be valid to claim that bodily mimesis, an affinity for the other which produces embodiment, gradually becomes, with the help of the theatre, the embodiment of the regulatory discourses of power.⁴² The following quote from Roach is rich in the insight it provides as to the imbrication of performance and power--the ways that theatre, and the forms of performance specific to historical periods, have provided a medium through which power breaths itself into people.

The theatre tests behaviors on the bodies of exceptional practitioners, but it does so in the process of a wider distribution. Generalities that govern conduct and establish priorities of value--Taste, Duty, Beauty, Honor--gain from the theatre an otherwise unattainable specificity under conditions of precise selection and control. As ritualized discourse, the theatre plays a part in what Foucault calls the capillary form of the diffusion of power. Theatrical performance provides a 'point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and

⁴² Roach is drawing on Michel Foucault's work on power. Foucault theorizes power not as an objective force imposed from the outside, but as something which occurs within social relationships and bodies such that it seems natural to them. The following quote is only one of many which work toward a new definition of power: "Power's condition of possibility must not be sought in a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and descendent forms would emanate; it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable. The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere." Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol. 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 93.

inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses,
learning processes and everyday lives'.⁴³

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have also done fascinating work on the subjugation of the body in the 18th century in England and its relation to the formation of identity and self through a process of identifying and objectifying the undesirable other. Mimetic processes are stunted as otherness is situated across a gap made increasingly unbridgeable. According to Stallybrass and White, who also point to internal discipline as a critical social accomplishment of the period, the performance of the body in public was the linchpin of a new formation of identity. They look closely at social space of the period, and the reformations in its use. As the bourgeoisie defined itself, alehouses, for instance, were replaced by coffeehouses as locations for their gatherings; sobriety and caffeine induced energy and "rational pleasures,"⁴⁴ replaced the license and laziness induced by alcohol, the "irresponsibly protean"⁴⁵ tendencies of the grotesque, lower class body. What is most critical for a history of mimesis is this sense of public discipline. Whereas Roach focuses on the discipline of the performer, Stallybrass and White focus on audience, groups appearing in public. Forms of bodily expressiveness, relatedness, affinities are suppressed into a distanced stance and through this stance a certain public defines itself as superior to those who are not so disciplined. This is a self-knowledge arrived at by disconnecting subject from object and disciplining the self against behaviors that would reach toward otherness. They write,

what is new, and contrasts strongly with the Shakespearean stage,
is the urgent attempt to expel the lower sort altogether from the

⁴³ Roach, "Power's Body," 110.

⁴⁴ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 106.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

scene of reception, to homogenize the audience by refining and domesticating its energy, sublimating its diverse physical pleasures into a purely contemplative force, replacing a dispersed, heterodox, noisy participation in the event of theater by silent specular intensity.⁴⁶

This suppression of the body's unruliness in favor of the specular is not unrelated to the tendency toward privileging the text over the actor, the author's intentions over the anarchic improvisations of the actor. Stallybrass and White, commenting on a 18th century text by James Wright say that what is being accomplished is

the fabrication of an idealized space of consciousness which is being systematically scoured. Wright would rather "read than see" a play: in common with the playwrights and the new coffee-house public he feels his relationship to culture is threatened by outside interference, by the flow of noise and urine and sexual excitation. The flux and heterogeneity of the theater audience in consuming mood must be discharged elsewhere where it will not contaminate culture.⁴⁷

The Real and the Really Made Up: Mimesis for Postmodernism

The gradual rationalization of the body, and of its mimetic proclivities is, according to Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the central narrative of the

⁴⁶ Stallybrass and White, 87.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 93.

Enlightenment, and a narrative upon which all subsequent culture is built. At the core of this narrative is the separation of subject and object such that the subject comes to dominate the object. The mimetic world, "the world of magic,"⁴⁸ by contrast, is characterized by a fluid interidentification, an affinity between forms, such that the category of identity can only exist in relation to others, rather than in a relation of domination to others. Adorno and Horkheimer write in The Dialectic of Enlightenment that the Enlightenment has induced "man to attain to the identity of self that cannot disappear through identification with another, but takes possession of itself once and for all as an impenetrable mask."⁴⁹

Like Roach, Horkheimer and Adorno identify the violence of self-mastery as the ultimate effect of the loss of a mimetic relationship between subject and object in favor of a relationship of domination in which the body is objectified. They point to the myth of Odysseus and the Sirens as an early articulation of the separation and control of "self" when confronted with the allure of the other; Odysseus puts wax in his ears to be immune to the song of the Sirens. Thus he sacrifices beauty to instrumentality, the beauty of becoming other to the efficiency of staying separate; he becomes his own object and he dominates what is different from him and threatening to him.

Walter Benjamin, Adorno's contemporary and sometime collaborator, also positioned mimesis (understood in the anthropological sense of mutual affinities between diverse forms), as one of the foundations of his analysis of culture. For Benjamin, the mimetic faculty in human beings is their tendency to produce similarity between themselves and the other, coming to know through producing

⁴⁸ Max Horkheimer and Theodore W. Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1969), 10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

likenesses, becoming like another, whether animate or inanimate. This mimetic faculty shaped the relationship between humans and each other, humans and nature, even through the Renaissance. But Benjamin agrees that by the 17th century and the onset of classicism, and then as the theories of Descartes contributed to a binary division between body and mind, the sensual kinship between forms disappears in the formation of rigid boundaries circumscribing "self." As Gebauer and Wulf, writing about Benjamin, say,

Only as the human relation to the world began to undergo a fundamental change in French classicism did there arise a new form of the perception of self. Since knowledge had not yet been separated from nature in the Renaissance . . . irremovable similarities appeared to determine the relation between nature and human being . . . To know means to recognize the natural signs of similarity, to discover the unity of the world, and to read the correspondences . . . But [since the 17th century] knowledge of the world loses the sensuousness it had in the mimetic cosmos of the Renaissance, the reconstruction of which is one of Benjamin's central ambitions . . . Mimetic sensuous experience is devalued, [and] comes to be regarded as a fantasy world.⁵⁰

Benjamin stressed the sentience of mimesis. He emphasized that it is a physically becoming like, a physical exchange of forms, a similarity experienced by the senses. He drew on the play of children to develop his theories, observing that children easily occupy imaginary worlds, physically seizing hold of them, becoming them, with a creativity inseparable from action. This tactile

⁵⁰ Gebauer and Wulf, 270-271.

apprehension of the possible was the key, for Benjamin, to a revolutionary future; mimesis is the key through which ideas become action. He suggested that, while certain manifestations of the mimetic faculty had indeed disappeared from human history, new ones were taking their place. He looked particularly to the film camera as a source of a new mimetic relationship to the world. The camera he thought, through its close-ups, its focus, its scanning, provided a new tactility, a way to reappropriate technological culture and to reestablish "the connection between imagination and physical innervation that in bourgeois culture had been snapped apart."⁵¹

Michael Taussig follows Benjamin in trusting mimesis as, if not a revolutionary practice, at least a resistant one. In Mimesis and Alterity, he writes about cultures which use and have used mimesis as a technique to perform an alienated, distanced, parodic mimicry of the commodity, even as that culture is commodified. Taussig echoes Benjamin's insistence on the senses, calling the merger of sense and body, "corporeal understanding."⁵² He states as one of his own objectives the theorizing of "a sensuous knowledge"⁵³ and an understanding of the "sensate skin of the real,"⁵⁴ derived from the capacity made possible by mimesis to experience "an ineffable plasticity in the face of the world and the world's forms of life."⁵⁵ For Taussig, the desire to have which characterizes commodity society is the antithesis of mimetic thinking, devastating the possibility for a sensual relation to otherness because the senses and their objects

⁵¹ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1989), 270.

⁵² Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 30.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵⁵ Taussig, 34.

are acquired as private assets.

One of Taussig's ambiguous phrases threads its suggestiveness through this dissertation as a whole. It is also the figure with which Taussig begins his own work on mimesis; it is the paradox which motivates his questions. He asks, to start, why it is, when postmodernism has taught us that everything is a construct, we so often proceed, in full awareness of that fact, as if the ingredients of our lives are also "real." He says that, as such, most of us spend our time in between "the real and the really made up." Taussig's choice of this construction, rather than the simpler opposition between the real and the made-up, is a provocative one. Using the same phrase again he says, "Imagined worlds become not only theatricalized but factualized as religious axiom and social custom. Illusion thus serves the cause of belief, if not truth, thanks to the magical series of transfers between theater and reality held in place by mimetic art. Mimesis sutures the real to the really made up."⁵⁶

I read the phrase "the really made up," as referring to the way that what is imagined takes on the qualities (in the imagination) of the real. He shares this insight with the early Marx who, according to William Pietz, hypothesized in his initial work on economic value that what is imagined has just as much reality for the one imagining as does an objective real.⁵⁷ That is the significance I have given Taussig's phrase in my appropriation of the term for my own work; that contemporary corporate culture positions consumers in a fluid continuum between the real and the made-up. In this continuum the made-up is experienced as real even as we know it's made up. The effects of the environment are as real as

⁵⁶ Taussig, 86.

⁵⁷ William Pietz, "Fetishism and Materialism," in *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, ed. Emily Apter and William Pietz (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 134.

if the environment were real, but our awareness that it is not real makes the effects even more pleasurable.

In a report on the boy band, 2gether, Alex Spiegel of National Public Radio, provides a delicious example of the postmodern consumer whose sophistication includes pleasure taken in the simultaneity of the real and the really made-up. 2gether was originally formed with the intention to parody boy bands like 'N Sync and Backstreet Boys. Its founders approached MTV with a "mockumentary" which included these five men, including thirty-five-year old Kevin Farley, who describes himself as overweight and bald, singing satirical songs. In a completely unexpected turn of events, they became overnight sensations. Teenage girls have gone as crazy for 2gether as they did for 'N Sync, even though they are completely aware that 2gether is not a "real" boys band. Alex Spiegel comments, "Some of the press coverage of 2gether has portrayed the band's teen-age fans as hapless, hopeless victims, adolescents too unsophisticated to distinguish what's real from what's fake."⁵⁸ However, and this is the crux of the matter, "Mark and Brian Gunn prefer to see it another way. They view the fans' embrace of 2gether, not as evidence of the teenager's lack of sophistication, but rather as a signal that they are in fact more highly evolved consumers."⁵⁹ What this means to the "musicians" is

What's interesting to me is that people watch so many shows right now that plug themselves as reality shows and yet, also people know that they're engineered in countless ways. And people are able to hold within themselves something being an artifice and

⁵⁸ Robert Siegel, *All Things Considered* (National Public Radio: Transcript, 2 November, 2000), 4 of 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

something being real at the same time. And in many ways 2gether is a lot like pro wrestling. All the fans completely know that it's fake and yet they give themselves over to it wholeheartedly. And what's interesting to me is that in some ways now, you have to admit of the form. You have to show both the artifice and what motivates that artifice. And I think, actually, I give credit to people not for mistaking the construct, but for admitting of the construct and being able to indulge in it at the same time.⁶⁰

In this dissertation, I often use the phrase "as if" as a shorter version of "the really made-up." By the "as if" I mean precisely that mimetic yielding to the indeterminate real which so often defines the postmodern commodity form and the environments in which it is circulated. Consumers act in those environments as if they were real, but in full knowledge that they are not. As the comments on 2gether would seem to indicate, postmodern capitalism may provide an intensely pleasurable mimetic relationship to the commodity form, rather than, as is often imagined, duping consumers with a sleight of hand trick whereby they take as real what is only simulation. The "as if" is a concept which allows for an understanding of retail environments as scenarios in which the imaginary and a protean-like breakdown of identity occur simultaneously with an awareness of the conditions of the market: the imperative to consume, the positioning of the person to consume, and the relative sophistication of the consumer in simultaneously embracing the real and the really made up as a measure of personal value.

Not only does mimesis open a space for a fluid relationship between the real and the not real, it can and does, within capitalist cultures, imply a

⁶⁰ Ibid., 4.

relationship to the inanimate which continually reproduces the commodity fetishism which is fundamental to capitalism. Adorno, working on this theory, uses the word mimicry to identify the form of mimesis which is related to commodity fetishism. Adorno argues that mimicry functions in capitalism as a kind of degraded mimetic impulse. In this he is working from theories proposed by Callois, who suggested a theory of mimicry based on a biological model. He wrote that the "search for the similar would seem to be a means [toward] assimilation to the surroundings."⁶¹ In mimicry, one thing can become so like another that there is some question about whether it exists as "itself" at all. The chameleon, for instance, becomes so like its surroundings, and at all times, that it is hard to say what is the nature of the chameleon apart from its mimesis. Other animals "play dead." They mimic the state of death in order to escape death. It is this form of mimesis that Adorno sees still at play in the "enlightened" world. People are revisited by the mimetic desire, however unconscious, to be like the dead things (commodities) around them. Michael Cahn writes about Adorno's theory,

The modern reification of man and human relations can be taken as a recurrence of an unconscious imitation of, or rather identification with lifeless nature. This unconscious mimicry, which initially was to guarantee the continuation of life, is no longer a neutral tool of which one can dispose at will. The paradox of feigning death in order to stay alive parallels that of unchecked instrumental reason which turns against man by transforming itself into an autonomous

⁶¹ Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," trans. John Shipley, *October* 31 (Winter, 1984): 27.

end instead of being a controllable means.⁶²

The erosion of the boundaries of "self" within corporate culture is directed not toward a sustaining sympathy with other forms created by sensuous affinities, but toward an affinity with the commodity, a sense of a likeness between the life force of the human and the perceived "life force" with which the commodity has become endowed. But because the commodity is, in fact, dead, the likeness is based on an experience of death as life-like; becoming like a dead thing to recognize the life in oneself. Corporate mimesis creates likenesses with what is not alive, and, in the process, alienates or distances consumers from the potentials of empathetic or mimetic affinities with other living beings.

Jack Amariglio and Antonio Callari, in elaborating their understanding of commodity fetishism, suggest a way by which commodity fetishism can be understood as a process which undergoes constant revision and is, in essence, creative. They argue that the uses of commodity fetishism in the construction of subjectivity are ever new, ever unexpected. The construction of subjectivity depends upon an unresolved openness in the consumer (which might, in the particular formation of entertainment retail, be understood as the mimetic "as if"), in tandem with the "objective" economic conditions which this ongoing process of subjectivity makes possible. Amariglio and Callari write:

In our view, Marx's choice of the figure of fetishism to convey the mystery of commodity exchange suggests his own commitment to depicting the creative, innovative, and even fantastic process that creates the reality/myth of the "individual," the form of

⁶² Michael Cahn, "Subversive Mimesis: T.W. Adorno and the Modern Impasse of Critique," in *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. Mihai Spărosu (Philadelphia and Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1984), 33.

subjectivity that is continually shaped by and, in turn, shapes market relations. Even Marx's slight departure from a descriptive "scientific" language here precisely invites readers to enter into the continuing mystery, never fully resolvable, regarding the lack of ultimate closure of the individual and of the commodity relations this form of subjectivity makes possible.⁶³

The subject then, is always unformed in any complete or final sense precisely because this lack of stasis is ensured by commodity relations as the conditions for the continual reproduction of the commodity. A given state of commodity relations produces the subject in a form which will be advantageous to the market in any given period, and which will return to that market a shaping sense of who the "individual" is. Thus the commodity seems creative, alive, seductive. A person shopping for his or her own personal brand as the replacement for "self" is living with an "identity" which can only be resolved, and only temporarily resolved at that, by an identification with a dead thing. But he or she nevertheless attributes to this dead thing the powers through which his or her "self" can be negotiated and concretized.

My goal is to identify a resurgence of mimesis, but also and primarily to identify the subsequent instrumentalization of that mimesis as a way to structure subjectivity and consumption within contemporary capitalism. Mimesis becomes performance, throughout the dissertation, not as a repression of the idea of mimesis, but as an articulation of the doubleness of mimesis within corporate culture. Thus, with the term "corporate performance" I refer to a sensuous

⁶³ Jack Amariglio and Antonio Callari, "Marxian Value Theory and the Problem of the Subject: The Role of Commodity Fetishism" in *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, ed Emily Apter and William Pietz (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 203.

mimesis which has been instrumentalized primarily through the "as if" and through commodity fetishism.

The Chapters

Chapter Two traces the interwoven histories of theatre and capitalism from the early modern period to the fashion industry and department stores of the early 20th century. It traces the palimpsests which capital has etched onto subjectivity, such that any one period retrieves echoes of a former, or anticipates a period yet to come. I trace this echoing, specifically, through the use of themes which occurred as I began to look at the imbrication of performance and capital. Cloth, clothing and fashion, as themes, create much of the skeleton for the chapter, for they are often able to articulate the links between performance and subjectivity, commodity and changing formulations of self.

I begin by studying the texts of plays. These include a Medieval play of conversion, The Play of the Sacrament (Croxton), and a late-Medieval French farce, Master Pierre Pathelin. Wildly different in both form and content, each of these texts nevertheless begins to articulate the changing ontological status of both objects and selves with the onset of capital. Objects and selves cease being what they are. They become representational, they begin to create multiple and fungible meanings, they become equivalent to other objects, other selves.

A brief analysis of Mandragola and The Alchemist follows. Here I focus on the bodily ingestion of the commodity, how the commodity begins to shape the sensory apparatus of the human subject to conform with the socially

necessary conditions for its existence; that is, performed identity becomes the root of fantasy, desire, and possession. From here I move through the extravaganzas staged by the merchant class during the restored monarchy of Charles II in England, showing how these performances began to claim for the growing bourgeois class the global triumph of the commodity form. With the ascendancy of this class, my narrative begins to trace the complex and ambivalent ways in which a globally practiced capitalism begins to be performed on the bodies of women, in particular. Women, especially women actors, become the location on which the bourgeoisie projects both the anxiety and the gloating which accompanies its dealings in commodities.

Arriving at the 19th century, I move away from the theatre per se and into the slave pens of New Orleans to study not only how humans become commodities through performance but how, perhaps even more significantly, the category of the human itself is displaced by the commodity in performance. “Human” becomes a quality which does not exist, but is represented in performance, with the intention of exchange on the market. It is this deconstruction by the commodity form of the category of human that persists through my account of a black South African choir brought to tour in England, and then on through a study of the beginnings of the fashion industry and the department store theatres of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Through the weight of these examples, I make the case that there are in history many precedents for, many echoes of what I’ve observed in contemporary corporate retail culture. There is such a sustained record, in fact, of the mutual interdependence of performance and capital, that I hope, in this chapter, to make

valid my attempt to theorize the one through the other.

Chapter Three focuses on Julie Taymor's stage production of Disney's The Lion King at the New Amsterdam Theatre in New York City, and the Disney store which was, at the time, adjacent to it. In the chapter I describe a kind of commodity fetishism in which humans are brought to "life," animated, as they take on, fill out, embody, or wear the commodity. This is a process which begins in "the New Times Square" outside the store as the global tourist arrives in the anywhere of this newly corporate environment.

But in the theatre itself, the process involves a complex interface with the modernist opposition between high and low art forms, the primitivist topos of modernism, and Disney's marketing strategies which have historically created a link between animals, "primitives," and children. One of the reasons for the production's unprecedented success is that it has been perceived as a work of art, uncompromised by the similarity to the mass produced films and commodities which characterized, for instance, Disney's stage production of Beauty and the Beast. However, this perception overlooks the extent to which any version of a Disney product, whose images and product tie-ins have already been marketed world wide, is inextricable from the others and it also overlooks the extent to which presentation of one version of a product as art confers value on the non-art version because the non-art version achieves by proximity some of the "aura" of the art object which it reproduces. I show how, in fact, Disney is quite invested in setting up the play of art versus mass production in its store, such that the stigma of the mass produced object loses some of its edge as it is placed in relation to the "original" and the "artist" who created it. Likewise, as high and low products are

set into circulation with each other, the high art product also becomes more viable as a commodity. That is, it becomes the province not of the high art snobs, but of all Disney consumers.

Also overlooked by commentators and fans as they applaud the "artistry" of The Lion King, is a relationship between consumers and product which cuts across the "high art" of Taymor and the mass reproductions in the Disney Store. The Disney store offers clothes, playsuits, toys and other products which are all designed so that, in the using of them, consumers are bringing those products to life. I make the argument that even Taymor's gorgeous, imaginative puppets are nevertheless still Disney products, modeled as they are on the film's narrative and images. And though the performers model mimesis in an artistic key (their bodies meld almost imperceptibly into the animal carapaces which they animate such that they seem to become that animal, and that animal them), ultimately that mimesis is a merging of a human with a commodity. This mimesis is not a vision of alterity, of the possibility of understanding what one is not, but rather an enactment of the ongoing corporate effort to produce an affinity between humans and commodities. And further, it is African bodies who are positioned to evoke the "primitive" and "primitive mimesis" since it is through the labor of their bodies that most of the transformations of one thing into another occur. Through the bodies of black performers, and in this instance of corporate mimesis, the "primitive" is both evoked and subjected.

In the fourth chapter, Niketown and the Ralph Lauren Store on Madison Avenue, both in Manhattan, are the subjects of a study of use-value and habitus as they are implicated in corporate performance. Here I develop most fully an

important feature of the whole dissertation, but one that remains only implicit until this chapter: the sensuality of the commodity's relationship to the consumer in the new mimesis-driven retail environments. It is also the place where I document the changes in marketing practices which have resulted in entertainment retail, including changes in how identity is conceptualized, an address to consumers which treats them as the savvy sophisticates fully aware of the manipulation of the "real" in older forms of advertising, and a switch from emphasis on products to an emphasis on brands, the "soul" of the corporation.

I make the case, following Jean Baudrillard, that use-value has no material reality, but is, rather, an invention which justifies exchange value. In brand-based capitalism, the use-value may most often be what corporations hope to communicate as the "soul" of their brand. This "soul" is an apparition, a construction, but nevertheless, it needs to become tangible to be effective. The way in which it can be felt is through the body's tendencies to become like something else. As such, another variation on mimetic phenomenon in retail environments is that the body materializes the imaginary, or the soul of the brand, rather than the product itself, and this imaginary attribute feels as if it were real. Through the mimetic process, the brand imprints itself on the body of the consumer, such that it is not product but brand which we are consuming, the brand's mark on us, us as the brand's signature.

In the second half of the chapter I turn to the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to deepen the analysis of the role of the body in consumption. For Bourdieu, the social order is indeed inscribed on and in the body; bodily choices in eating, exercising, environments all express social relations. But while

Bourdieu suggests that the habitus, that nexus of bodily practices of each class or class fragment, is a permanent feature of each person's life, I make the argument that entertainment retail is built precisely on producing the bodily sensation in consumers that they have been liberated from their habitus, their class-identified habits. In other words, habitus is playable in these stores. Even habitus different from our own can feel as if they were real. This would explain the elaborate lengths to which the Ralph Lauren Corporation, for instance, has gone to produce incredibly detailed sensuous environments which invite consumers to linger, partake, become part of. Identity, especially class-defined identity, is transcended through the brand. Because it feels so very much "as if" it were real, the body can experience sensations it would otherwise not have "as if" they belonged on that body. The brand lives on, at the expense of class identities, while seeming to erase the distinctions between them.

In Chapter Five, on Caesar's Palace Casino in Las Vegas, I have borrowed a very old metaphor, a very old emblem: the *theatrum mundi*, or, the world as a stage. In its oldest forms, the world is imagined as a kind of staged illusion upon which human beings play their parts in a drama scripted and spectated by God. The real is only attainable through God, after life on earth, and if we have played our parts without deviation from divine authorial intention. The metaphor begs to be recussitated because the simulated "reals" of postmodernism, the ambivalent and ambiguous relationships between experiences of the real and the not real, the illusion and the truth, are precisely the issues which the emblem of the world as a stage thematizes, probes, and reformulates again and again.

Peter Weir's film The Truman Show is a brilliant contemporary

recussitation of the metaphor, used to interrogate the uniquely postmodern relationships between the appearance (performance) and the real, the producer/director/product designer (formerly the divine) and the commodity, which I'll later explicate in my discussion of Las Vegas. In the film, appearance is produced as a commodity, but the popularity of that appearance/commodity is based, paradoxically, on its real-ness. Its capacity to evoke and produce what is simultaneously real and fake becomes the selling point for the commodity. As in the *theatrum mundi*, the unstable, tricky contiguity between the real and the made-up places performance at the center of social and personal experience.

Truman is the leading character of the television show named for him, a show which is broadcast around the clock, even as he sleeps, to a world-wide, enthralled audience. The catch is that Truman doesn't know he is performing. Truman's "world," the town in which he's lived his entire life, the ocean which borders it, the roads which lead into it, is all a set. From birth onward his life has been televised. Tiny cameras have been positioned everywhere and are linked back to the huge editing studio where the director sits, passionate about this product he has created, maniacally managing the edits of this live footage by his staff. The other residents of the town, including Truman's wife, father, and best friend, are actors, whose lines are fed to them through tiny headphones by the director, when he wants to inflect the storyline of Truman's life. Product advertisements are subtly integrated into Truman's life as what he eats and drinks and buys.

Truman's fans know that the TV show is not real, but at the same time it is real. Truman is real, but, then again, in what sense is he real? Because Truman's whole life is a performance, with everything in it manufactured and scripted by a

benevolent producer who claims Truman as a product of his own imagination, and, furthermore, his life is a product, a commodity made for television, the film is able to raise provocative questions about the instability of the real, the production of the unreal as lived experience, and the relationship of these to consumption. Stripped of its moral valence, its proscription for behavior according to theological directives, the world as a stage in this contemporary form links the real, performance, and commodities into a parasitical relationship in which each needs to other to thrive.

I argue that in the Forum Shops, as in The Truman Show, the potential productivity of performance's interrogation of the real and of identity is unable to materialize as a destabilization and critique of social categories. Just as the *theatrum mundi* evoked performance and the pleasurable possibilities of the not-real, it was simultaneously a coercion of those possibilities through its emblematic warnings and proscriptions. What is real (worldly experience) is conceived of as a performance (a faked worldly experience) so that experience (as a hybrid of these two) can be coerced. In both The Truman Show and the Forum Shops, the commodity form replaces the theatre as the space in which the real can be exceeded but also as the disciplinary form which determines that form and outcome of the excess. In The Truman Show the television show is that commodity, while at the Forum Shops it is a series of robotic deities who, through a process of surrogation, perform a synthesis of the divine and the commodity as the author of the text by which we live.

In the chapter, I make use of Walter Benjamin's theories of aura and of the way that humans come to empathize with commodities, as well as Philip

Auslander's argument about mediatization, to show how consumers come to empathize with these robotic performances/commodities, thus becoming absorbed both in the narration and in its proscriptive determinations. The robot who "sets the stage" at the Forum Shops is the Roman god Bacchus. In robotic form, Bacchus, god of excess, is subjected to an endlessly reproducible template identical to that by which the commodity is produced and given value. The narrative which organizes the Forum Shops is an allegory based on the fall of Atlantis. Robots, who are forever recurrent, good as new, and who are surrogates for the commodity, set the stage for the unfolding of the allegory and also perform it.

But unlike the fabled city, commodities (and robotic as opposed to human performers) can be continually refreshed with new meanings. Commodities are themselves performances, theatrical things which can always adopt new significations, just as alterations in Truman's "life" made by the producer/director can change the "meanings" his life has for viewers. At the Forum Shops, the virtual reality ride which consumers enter as the pinnacle of their experience of the allegory, encountered in the architectural narratives of the mall and the robot performances, is the ultimate hollow commodity. Consumers enter its "body" to triumph over the evil of greed which caused the downfall of Atlantis. Thus the body of the commodity comes to signify the opposite of the greed with which commodity culture is usually associated. The commodity becomes the way we rescue ourselves from greed; an allegory especially meaningful as set inside a shopping mall set inside a casino. In the face of ruin, we can count on the commodity. In the postmodern theatrum mundi of both the Forum Shops and The

Truman Show, the instability of the borders between real and unreal is profitable business; the commodity is a performance, but a performance controlled by a template which produces a self-serving narrative into which consumers are drawn, and which limits the transgressive possibilities of the not-real, the performance.

The entertainment retail environments I discuss are only a select few of many I could have chosen. Far from being a unique phenomena, and as the Disneyfication of Times Square would seem to indicate on a massive scale, they are new "post-geographical" spaces which can and do insinuate themselves into any location. I hope that my analysis in the following pages can serve as an index to the questions they raise, and as an attempt to identify at least some of the ways in which their seductive pleasures yoke us to the marketplace.

Chapter Two

The Fashionable Life of Things: 500 Years in the History of Subjectivity and the Commodity

In this chapter I travel across 500 years. My intention is to layer, one onto another, historical developments in the history of capitalism and performance to construct a dynamic conceptual underpinning for the rest of the dissertation. It is an attempt to say that what I've witnessed of postmodern entertainment retail is not a historical anomaly. Rather, it points backward, to the many different ways that performance has helped capital to be absorbed as subjectivity.

After a discussion of the historical, social and economic changes which created the conditions in which theatre and capital would be crucial to one another, the bulk of the chapter is taken up with examples ranging from roughly the middle of the 15th century to the beginning of the 20th. The earlier examples are more detailed than the later, as I establish the language of my analysis. Undoubtedly, like any historical narrative, mine could have been structured by innumerable other examples, but I made my choices based on certain thematics which articulated most clearly to me the relationship between theatre and capital. As I felt my way around history and various texts, these thematics tended to surface over and over.

Of these thematics, cloth, clothes, and fashion stretch throughout the early modern into the modern and postmodern periods. Each of these is inextricably linked to both capitalism and performance, forming nodal points out of which the relationship between the two often seems to grow and develop. Each is also linked to identity, which is another thematic. Performance and the developing forms of capitalism each inhabit the interstices created when the relationships between self and otherness, interior self and exterior self, are

troubled. Performance and capital each are also the agents of that troubling, that unfixing. They have become partners, ultimately, in the capitalist drive to unmoor the ontological certainty of subject and object, to objectify the subject and release objects from their cultural and mnemonic weight into the gravityless, infinitely exchangeable circulation of the commodity.

Setting the Stage

What follows is a brief and partial survey of an economy and a social organization which scholars are only now beginning to untangle. This small history is focused on the effects of a change in the character of economic transactions when, after the Middle Ages, they are unmoored from their anchors in place, identity and history. During the Middle Ages, transactions between producers of goods occurred in marketplaces, first in an intermediary zone between villages and then, increasingly, in town centers. The designation of a specific geographical location as the site of these exchanges was important for many reasons. Perhaps the most significant of these is that the church was able thereby to apply considerable legislative controls over how exchanges were made. These various controls limited the effects of exchange, literally keeping it in its place. They anchored the economy in known social identities (based on family or household ties), with exchanges guaranteed by systems of personal honor. The controls also protected participants from fraud and other financial schemes: it was not acceptable to use a sample as a stand-in for the product itself and goods were regularly inspected by city magistrates. Jean Christophe Agnew describes the presence in the market of the goods themselves as a market in which

goods were "presented, not represented."¹

However, the gradual displacement of the geographical and cultural root system of the market begins to facilitate the movement of objects and humans through a space no longer delineated by a city's architecture, a place one travels to. The market becomes, by the end of the 16th century, a space of transaction. Patricia Fullerton differentiates between space and place by referring to studies by scholars like Henri Lefabvre which "unmoor conventional place to make room for space: as a state of consciousness, as constructed, as mobile, as free...space is more strange, shifting and malleable, more open to being differently inhabited."² The fluidity that characterizes space as Fullerton describes it, emerges as a key to the commercial space of transaction. Indeed, Agnew, delineating the etymology of the word "market," notes that the moment in which market as a space in Fullerton's sense becomes differentiated from the sense of market as a place, also marks "the historical appearance of exchange value as a perceived or half-perceived property of the commodity distinct from and alien to its specifically useful or aesthetic aspects as a human artifact."³

To understand the relation between exchange value and the placeless market, it is necessary to understand exchange value. An object takes on exchange value when, along with other commodities, it is measured according to a universal standard of exchange. In

Marxist analysis, the universal standard of exchange is socially necessary labor time, and

¹ Jean-Christophe Agnew, *World Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 30.

² Patricia Fullerton, "London's Vagrant Economy," in *Material London ca. 1600*, ed. Lena Cowen Orlin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 219.

³ Agnew, 42.

has little to do with the use that the commodity has been purportedly designed to fulfill.

All products then, at some level, become equivalent, uprooted from social obligations, meanings and functions, and circulating instead in a market which values them according to a universal standard, expressed in the form of money. Once the money form becomes the primary conduit for the value of products, and systems of accountability based in social ties are swept away, money can begin to accumulate as capital and speculative investment, representing the products of human labor in abstract and interchangeable forms, most often through the intercession of a burgeoning merchant class. The exchange of goods in the absence of those goods, accomplished through representation of them rather than their material presence, the consolidation of the value of those exchanges in the interchangeable form of money, and the transference of money into the fluid forms of investment, created a market space freed from geography. Exchange, by the end of the 16th century, became an unlocatable everywhere. Agnew writes, "Whereas the classical and medieval definitions of the market implied a society that placed exchange at the threshold, seventeenth-century usage intimated an exchange that put society at the threshold, translating the infinitely various contents of that society into a rich and readily transactional stock." ⁴

Fluidity of form, then, is a central feature of capitalism. A thing is changed into the money form, and then changes again into a different form, or into a money form of added value, and then into another thing. Human identity, human form, was not insulated from

⁴ Agnew, 53.

this new market space. In fact, the cultural matrix of developing capital began to produce new practices of subjectivity corresponding to and enacting the fluidity of the commodity. Fullerton captures some of this new subjectivity in the figure of the vagrant. As up to thirty percent of English land went onto the private market, those peasants who could not seize hold of tenancies went onto the job market, traveling between hiring fairs, having nothing to sell but their labor power. As Fullerton says,

ISubjected to the vagaries of an unpredictable marketing network, the vagrant subject, shifting from place to place, relationship to relationship, and job to job, apprenticed in a range of different identities without ever attaining the “freedom” of a whole and stable subject...The vagrant subject...can be seen to be composed of dispersed, serial selves...which could be taken up, adjusted, and cast off as occasion demanded.⁵

In their recent work on cloth and clothing in the Renaissance, Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones also theorize early modern subjectivity as adopting, assuming, or constructing identities, rather than as expressing an identity which is already intact. More accurately, they begin with the contention that a study of “investiture” in the Renaissance unmakes the conventional opposition between a trivialized or inconsequential surface of the body (what it wears) and the deep interior of the person. In the Renaissance it was precisely the putting on of clothes that gave a person “a form, a shape, a social function, a

⁵ Fullerton, 218.

depth."⁶

This shaping of the person by clothes was possible because of a relationship to objects that was just beginning to change in the Renaissance. To the typical charge that people in capitalist cultures are too obsessed with objects, Jones and Stallybrass answer that we are not, in fact, materialist at all. For them, materialism means something quite different and they base their definition on a reading of Marx in which they sense that his disdain is not for objects but for a lack of connection to objects. The commodity form emerges from severing a deep relation to objects, in which they are depended upon to carry and maintain memory and attachment. The commodity form depends upon being the same as, exchangeable for, any other commodity. By contrast, the pre-capitalist object, especially in the form of the fetish, is personified, granted rich histories, deep significance, immersion in social connection. Jones and Stallybrass remark that the vilification of the fetish as a superstitious trinket used by "primitive" peoples

implied a new definition of what it meant to be European: that is, a subject unhampered by fixation upon objects, a subject who, having recognized the true (i.e. market) value of the object-as-commodity, fixated instead upon the transcendental values that transformed gold into slaves, slaves into ships, ships into guns, guns into tobacco, tobacco into sugar, sugar into gold, and all into an accountable profit. What was demonized in the concept of the fetish was the possibility that history, memory, and desire

⁶ Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

might be materialized in objects that are touched and loved and worn.⁷

I depend in this chapter on Jones' and Stallybrass' analysis of objects, and especially on how this analysis redefines the body, deconstructing the conventional binary between exteriority and interiority. For them, objects can be the agents of this deconstruction. Objects can permeate the skins of interiority and exteriority, pulling the substance of one through the other until they are indistinguishable. In all the contemporary places that I study, and also in the historical performances that are discussed in this chapter, capital relies absolutely on the body. It writes its inscriptions on the body, inscriptions which seem to seep between interiority and exteriority.

One of the most generative questions of this dissertation is one asked by Michael Taussig: "Why embodiment?" As I moved through the environments about which I've written, I was struck by the way in which they target the body. For awhile the buzz in the news was that virtual shopping would overtake brick and mortar stores, that consumers would no longer be interested in going bodily to a particular geographical location to browse, absorb, buy. Why, then, have corporations continued to devote so much energy and money to creating environments designed for the systemic, mimetic absorption of the body into the brand?

In her book on theories of resurrection in the Middle Ages, Caroline Walker Bynum explores the question of the body within shifting Christian theologies. One central problem was whether or not the spirits of the dead, at the resurrection, reassume their

⁷ Jones and Stallybrass, 11.

mortal bodies in all their specificity. The question is the same as Taussig's, and it is the same question that continually tickles capital, and turns it toward performance from the early modern period to today; why do we need to appear, enact, be, in bodies? According to Bynum, the medieval consensus was that the body is necessary because it bears the inscriptions of a life lived, and only through the text of those bodily inscriptions can the soul be evaluated. She writes, "Body was the locus of differences and of experience. Soul, which itself grew in life and beyond life in purgatory, was understood to need body to be fully itself, it needed body in order to inhabit heaven in its own particular 'mansion' and in order to experience God as it deserved."⁸ Again there is the sense, contrary to the ideological formulations of the body as a superficial shell obeying "natural" processes outside of our control, of the body as the sole means by which (social) experience can be ingested and by which it can then become manifest. It is the means by which identity is constructed and enacted and materialized. Without inscriptions, whose scarifications spread throughout the fabric of the self (which is the body), there can be no means by which a culture can produce (selves) as enactments of dominant social relations. This theological paradigm from the Middle Ages provides a starting point for understanding the effects of postmodern entertainment retail environments, which depend upon bodily inscriptions, and somatic absorption of branded experience.

Gail Kern Paster, similarly, argues that it is precisely the ideological formation of our bodies, or that way in which we live our bodies, as habitat, natural, and involuntary,

⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 180.

that "social operations" can so powerfully shape exactly those processes which we continue to feel as natural. In other words, it is precisely through the body that dominant power structures inscribe their meanings and behaviors, so that identity is constructed as an embodiment of a particular culture's social relations. But, unlike the theological construct I have just described, in which it is precisely the visibility of bodily inscription which matters, these inscriptions are invisible because they are masked by that ideology of the body which naturalizes them as an indistinguishable part of what is lived and observed merely as habit "natural" behavior. Paster provides an excellent quote from Pierre Bourdieu which I want to reproduce here in its entirety. In his lucid vocabulary, he describes this continual, but masked interchange between subjectivity, interiority and the body. Embodied, dominant ideologies are naturalized, the habits of the flesh putting political change, conscious articulation out of reach. Here is Bourdieu:

If all societies that seek to produce a new man through a process of "deculturation" and "reculturation" set such a store on the seemingly most insignificant details of *dress, bearing*, physical and verbal *manners*, the reason is that, treating the body as a memory, they entrust to it in abbreviated and practical, i.e. mnemonic, form the fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of the culture. The principles embodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made

explicit; nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and therefore, more precious than the values given body, *made* body by the transsubstantiation achieved by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy, capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysics, a political philosophy through injunctions as insignificant as "stand up straight," or "don't hold your knife in your left hand".⁹

Bourdieu's description of the way that political and ideological structures are ingested into the body such that they are not observed and are not acted upon, but are, nevertheless embodied and enacted, might serve as the underlying assumption of this dissertation as a whole; that the body is central to capital, that it ingests capital in a process which dissolves distinctions between interiority and exteriority, and then manifests and enacts the specific conjugation of capital and identity in a given historical period.

Jean Christophe Agnew asks a related question, which has generated his work on theatre and the market: "Why do we lack anything approximating a phenomenology of the market experience? What is it that debars us from describing in a systematic fashion the fundamental structures of meaning and feeling that have accompanied different forms of commodity exchange over time?"¹⁰ We lack it, perhaps, because of the acculturation into the body, as the body, of capitalist configurations of subjectivity. Performance, the

⁹ Quoted in Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 5.

¹⁰ Agnew, 1.

theatre, mimetic processes of becoming like; these embodiments are the moments in which capital is ingested, the moments in which it slips into flesh. Capital is of the body, in the body, constitutive of subjectivity. Performance, or enactment, begins a process whereby, as exchange becomes a dominant process which levels all difference into exchangeable and commensurable units, so must people enter into the market, seeing themselves, as Agnew says, "in the likeness of the commodity."¹¹

The Play of the Sacrament (Croxtton)

Ingestion, swallowing into the body, occurs in the pre-capitalist Christian world as swallowing the body of Christ. In The Play of the Sacrament (Croxtton), this curious play of conversion, the act of ingesting the body of Christ begins to slide into the act of ingesting the commodity. The play enunciates the tension between religious hegemony and the emerging market. It explores the unsettled relationship between the church's claims to the absolute and unquestionable truth of a thing, an object's claim to carry a unique and unrepresentable attachment to the divine, and the way that the market was reconfiguring objects into relativity and equivalence, shorn of their status as carriers of meaning and relationship, drained of their fullness.

As Sara Beckwith notes, the 15th century was marked by tension between the church and the market, with the church increasingly disenfranchised, both in terms of its

¹¹ Ibid., 12.

ability to extract tithes in the marketplaces and in terms of having to sell land in order to cover costs. So when, in the play, the rich Christian merchant Aristorius haggles over the price for which he will sell the Eucharist to an equally rich Jewish merchant, the price of the host is, Beckwith argues,

relativized by the market economy from which it has been supposedly immune in the priceless realm of the sacred. Its value, its worth, is no longer contained by, or activated in, the priest's handling. It becomes determined by an economy which is represented in the play as being outside ecclesiastical range and reach, with its value accruing as the result of a negotiated process of exchange.¹²

What makes the play so especially remarkable, as Beckwith points out, is that the host appears onstage, stripped of its theological mystery, its implicit transubstantiation. In this way the theatre enacts, brings into being, the uprooting of the object from its moorings in pre-capitalist structures of meaning and feeling. It appears as a thing, equivalent to all the other things in which these two merchants deal. It is striking that the merchants themselves enact their equivalence despite their religious difference. In the beginning of the play they have twin speeches in which each brags of his wealth and of the countries out of which he has extracted that wealth. In the marketplace, the apostate

¹² Sara Beckwith, "Ritual, Church and Theatre: Medieval Dramas of the Sacramental Body," in *Culture and History, 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. David Aers (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 66.

and the faithful are equivalent.

In the course of the play, Jonathas, the Jewish merchant, acquires the host/bread/prop from Aristorius, sets it on the table and hacks at it with his knife to see if it will bleed. Mocking the faith of Christians which allows them to believe that a loaf of bread is the body of Christ and in a parody of the crucifixion, Jonathas and his cohorts pierce the "body" in four quarters and then, finally, in the middle. But upon this fifth attack, the bread does indeed begin to bleed. Jonathas panics and calls for a cauldron of hot oil, into which they will throw the bleeding bread. But just as Jonathas picks up the bread, it sticks to his hand. The situation becomes even more gruesome as, trying to help him, Jonathas' friends hammer the bread to a post and then try to rip the arm free. Instead his whole hand separates from his body and remains attached to the impaled bread.

The commodity then does transfigure into Christ, but it is a bloody drama, a struggle over bodily claims. It dramatizes the body's attachment to the commodity, in the form of the host that is bought and sold. And it dramatizes the body's attachment to the church, in the form of the host that is Christ. It shows that the body is integral to the claims of both. Jonathas' body is inscribed through its amputation by the competing claims of the market and the Christian church. His body is marked by his allegiance to the commodity, to the principle of equivalence. It is marked by disfigurement because the church inflects the process; the church is still in a position to assert its power.

Jonathas goes off to a private room and the amputation scene is followed by a

comic one in which a drunken doctor and his servant are enlisted to minister to Jonathas. The doctor has his potions, his medical commodities, his urine based diagnosis to make. Jonathas has him driven off, and then instructs his men to unnail the host and to throw it, with his attached hand, into the cauldron of oil. Even more alarmed when the cauldron boils blood, Jonathas orders the hand/bread thrown into the fire itself, and the oven door shut. But blood begins to run out from the oven, the oven door bursts open, and an image of Christ appears. Christ speaks to Jonathas, and under the influence of this apparition, Jonathas declares his conversion to Christianity. Christ heals Jonathas' body, restoring his body to wholeness. Where the doctor, selling his wares as a participant in the marketplace, is merely a joke, utterly unable to do anything for Jonathas, Christ, because of Jonathas' new found faith, can heal him. This conversion and restoration follows the dominant Medieval theories of the resurrection and the nature of Christ's saving graces. It was fundamental to this theology that Christ's power was the power of corporeal healing, the restoration of bodily wholeness. Christ heals, the doctor with his sham marketplace drugs does not. Astorius, the merchant, is sentenced by the Bishop to exile from the market; he is never to buy or sell again.

The play ultimately restores the church to a position of power over the forces of the market. But the corporeality of the play is remarkable. It is a drama of flesh and blood, dismemberment and restoration, through which Christ's relation to humanity is expressed through the body and its inscriptions, inscriptions written by pain. But Christ

first appears in the play as a piece of merchandise, which is also a stage prop, a "cake," an object to be acted upon. Because it occurs in a play, the bread, the blood, never stops circulating through the action as a prop. The play itself then, must initiate doubt, the same doubt which its narrative is intended to alleviate. If the theatre, with its obviously faked simulations, can produce the same effects which, in the church, are intended to produce faith, then how is it possible to be certain that the church's rendering of the same object is not also a fake, merely representation? The play attempts to resolve this contradiction by the undoable fixing of body to body, human to Christ embodied. The corporeality of the bond, whereby faith is literally inscribed into and through the deepest interior structures of the body, blood and flesh, is the church's assertion of its power. But, doubting, we and the play's contemporary audience, must simultaneously understand that, as prop, and as merchandise, Jonathas' body is also grafted onto a representation, an exchangeable product. The battle between faith and the market is fought in and through the body.

Pierre Pathelin

Like The Play of the Sacrament, a French farce of the same period, Pierre Pathelin, explores the new social space of an economy built around accumulation of capital, wage-labor, credit and investment. But the church is absent from Pierre Pathelin. There is

nothing but the market, and the anarchic, ludic space which it creates in this play about cloth, protean identity, ingestion and embodiment. In the new world which the play begins to explore, people must learn to take on many shapes, playing the market, learning to win.

This early dramatization of capitalism is subversive. Like The Play of the Sacrament, but in a very different way, it asserts an alternative to the market. But in this play the alternative is to better the market at its own game, to outwit its processes. In a sense, it anticipates and introduces the behaviors which will become the mistrusted but necessary behaviors of the marketplace in the Renaissance. Pierre Pathelin, a trickster, a rascal, a scoundrel, but an extremely clever one, is a shape shifter. Ostensibly a lawyer down on his luck, he is determined to procure some cloth in order to make his wife, Guillimette, and himself new coats. Over Guillimette's objections that they have no money, Pierre insists that he will be able to outwit the cloth merchant. He goes to the merchant's shop, cajoles the man with flattery, convinces him of entirely invented familial and business kinships from the past and even in the face of the merchant's lingering suspicions, convinces him to let him have two bolts of the very best fabric on credit. Saying that he left his money at home, he invites the merchant to come collect the money and stay for a dinner of roast goose, and it is the prospect of rich food and drink which seems to convince the greedy merchant.

Of course, there is not a crumb of food at Pathelin's house, nor is there any

money, So, when the merchant knocks on the door, he encounters a distraught Guillimette presiding over the death bed of a lunatic, raving Pierre. Guillimette, who was given her act by Pathelin when he arrived home with the cloth, gradually manages to convince the befuddled merchant that he could not possibly have given Pierre the cloth because Pierre has been home dying. The merchant only overcomes his suspicions that they are tricking him when Pierre starts making speeches, each in a different dialect.

In this way, the play begins to create the space of the theatre as phenomenologically similar to the space of the market. Pathelin negotiates the market more successfully than the merchant, because he eludes identification. A rogue trickster, he brings the theatre to the market. He directs his wife's performance, and she plays her role to the hilt. Against the stolid, inert subjectivity of the merchant, he puts the market into motion for his own profit. He enacts the proteanism which Agnew identifies as the characteristically necessary behavior in the capitalist market. The merchant finds himself bettered at the game of appearances and fictions. He feels vertiginous:

THE CLOTHIER (*leaving the house*): By the gracious Virgin, I'm more confused now than ever. The Devil, in his shape, took my cloth to tempt me. (*Crosses himself.*) *Benedicite*, May he leave me in peace. But since that's the way it is, I give the cloth, in God's name, to whoever took it.

PATHELIN (*getting up: to Guillimette*): Now then, didn't I instruct you well? There he goes, the gullible simpleton. Now he's really got some

confused ideas under that bonnet of his. I bet he'll have nightmares when he goes to bed tonight.

GUILLEMETTE: We really put him in his place. Didn't I play my part well?

PATHELIN: By God, you played it to perfection. Now at least we have enough cloth to make some clothes.¹³

The clothier stands on the brink of a social structure in which dissimulation is becoming a systemic practice. He participates in negotiations which are brought into being by a merchant class on the basis of imperialism and exhibition. In such a system, nothing was not for sale, and what was for sale was displayed in an abundance of new shops and new kinds of performances, including the performances by Africans and AmerIndians which were initiated in the early Renaissance. As Daryl W. Palmer remarks, "The coming of all things into commerce depends upon the creation of acquaintance through the exhibition of people as well as commodities."¹⁴ In an emerging social lexicon, the display and circulation of commodities is paralled in the display and circulation of humans. The word "disposition," Palmer continues, which refers to "the natures of people as well as the arrangement of things . . . suggests . . . the way that the language of human nature easily functions as a language of property, place, and exhibition."¹⁵

Pierre Pathelin fingers the goods in the clothier's shop, admiring the colors of the

¹³ Donald Maddox, *Semiotics of Deceit: the Pathelin Era; with a new English Prose Translation of Maistre Pierre Pathelin by Alan E. Knight* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1984), 190.

¹⁴ Daryl W. Palmer, "Merchants and Miscegenation," in *Race, Ethnicity and Power in the Renaissance*, ed. Joyce Green MacDonald (Madison Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997), 40

¹⁵ Palmer, 39.

fabrics, a historically new panoply of choice. And, indeed, various dyes alone were metonymic indicators of imperialist expansion, with dyes coming from far-flung sources.¹⁶ Matching the display of commodities which the clothier hopes to sell, Pathelin in effect responds in kind by displaying a "false" self which he hopes the clothier will "buy": a deeply ingratiated family friend who traffics in the gold currency which he has only accidentally left at home. Pathelin enters himself into circulation alongside the cloth and it matters little that he is only pretending to be what he is. For Pathelin's benefit, the clothier also (mis)represents himself, as a man who never rests, because he is himself attempting to cheat Pathelin. Blustering with (fake) altruism, he offers to give the cloth to Pathelin for a special rate of only 24 sous, but, believing himself to have had the better deal, even after Pathelin leaves with a bolt of cloth under his arm, he reveals his "act": "Well, there's no buyer so clever that he won't find a seller who can outwit him. That would-be trickster was stupid enough to pay 24 sous a yard for cloth that's not even worth 20!"¹⁷ Agnew calls this reciprocity of dissimulating strategic maneuvers, the "hedonistic calculus"¹⁸ by which economic negotiations were increasingly driven. With all things surrendered to fungible exchange, loss always threatens, and therefore, strategic manipulations of appearance and the real become ever more necessary.

Therefore, the play is built around transactions which, unsecured by traditional social placements or loyalties or legislation (as the church exerts in The Play of the

¹⁶ Jane Schneider, "Fantasical Colors in Foggy London: The New Fashion Potential of the Late Sixteenth Century," in *Material London*, 112-113.

¹⁷ Maddox, 178.

¹⁸ Agnew, 3.

Sacrament), are performed as simulations, enactments calculated to ensure gain. The characters “change their copy,” a phrase which Agnew links to the litigious copy-hold, the most common form of land-holding, subject to highly manipulable regulations. This phrase, he says,

became a common sixteenth-century expression for any alteration of “style, tone, behaviour, or course of action” so abrupt and startling as to suggest that a person had assumed an entirely new character. To attempt a pretense or imposture, according to standard usage, was to make a copy of one's countenance. Embedded within the idiomatic analogy between legal and social forms of identity was a new and somewhat sinister implication that the human face, like the “skin of parchment”, was an autonomous, even alien, instrument of misrepresentation. It seemed as if the personal properties of self were becoming as ambiguous as the “real” properties to which that self might lay claim.¹⁹

And, says Agnew, while the courts could adjudicate the copy-hold, the theatre was the place in which human beings could test the efficacy of their various adopted countenances.

The early modern period was full of the discourse of the made-up self or selves. To the extent that the theatre embodied the made-up self, rehearsed it, elaborated it, made the vague, circulatory, protean powers of money human, the Puritans, and even some men

¹⁹ Agnew, 58.

of the theatre itself vilified it. The actor became the impersonator par excellence, the exemplar for the new marketplace person, that figure who Hobbes would, in the seventeenth century, label the "artificial man."²⁰ Hobbes made direct analogies between the businessman and the actor, arguing that the word person comes from "persona," or mask. To be effective in business, to make good in place of another, less effective, person, merchants must make representations of themselves to others. These representations are read in and through acts of exchange, just as the value of commodities is realized in and through acts of exchange. In this way, persons in the market are like, and are encouraged to see themselves as, commodities.

But long before Hobbes, Renaissance "mercantile manuals" began to circulate advice about how best to comport oneself on the market. With the Royal Exchange, the English stock market, opening in 1566 and thereby institutionalizing commerce, global circulation of commodities, credit, and the transactional fluidity of money as itself a commodity, the construction of human behaviors which would lead to success within this system became imperative. Psychologized inventories of motives to both perform and guard against, these chapbooks laid out the terms of "a serial self, not a cumulative self--that is to say, a self composed in, of, and for successive performances. For these and other reasons, advice manuals urged on their readers a skepticism and empiricism that refused to take the world at face value. How futile it would be to alter oneself if, while doing so, one failed to observe the shifts of others."²¹

²⁰ Ibid., 99.

²¹ Agnew, 83.

Pierre Pathelin is a laboratory exploring the consequences of the performance of serial selves, and of negotiating a system in which others are dissimulating also. The ironic twist which shapes the final third of the play comes when the shepherd who cares for the merchant's sheep is introduced. He's received a court summons for the disappearance of many of his employer's sheep. He comes to Pierre Pathelin to ask Pathelin to be his lawyer, saying he'll pay him well. He confesses that he did in fact kill the sheep, though he told the clothier that they'd died of disease. What's more, he ate the sheep. Paid too little to survive, he subverted the merchant's chain of capital accumulation, literally ingesting the would-be commodity, asserting its use value as food and subsistence.

Pathelin's direction to the shepherd, when he agrees to take the case, is for the shepherd to pretend to be slow-witted, so slow-witted that he thinks he is talking to his sheep and therefore will only say "Baaa." Any question he is asked in the courtroom is to be answered only by "baa." In the courtroom scene that follows, there is no standard for moral or financial valuation. The scene illustrates a vertiginous situation where "truth" or what is real is impossible to ascertain, a market space built on "false representations": the clothier's characteristic misrepresentations of his retail and labor practices, Pathelin's and the shepherd's facile self-representations. Even a "genuine" response becomes a performance in a system of exchange where a protean construction of self is the standard for human exchange.

When the clothier recognizes Pathelin in the courtroom, Pathelin again evades

identification by turning the clothier into a madman, through maddening word play. This strategy is very effective since the clothier becomes increasingly befuddled, his lack of market finesse fully revealed as he keeps confusing his commodities: his sheep, his cloth, the wool from his sheep. The more the angry merchant tries to pin down Pathelin's identity, the more foolish he looks. He tries different methods by which to objectively verify identity, including, as in the following passage, the sound of Pathelin's voice. Here, even as he insists on the singular identity of Pathelin, he thinks of Pathelin as at least two people at the same time.

THE CLOTHIER: Do you think I'm an imbecile? It was you in person; you, yourself, and nobody but you. Your voice proves it and don't think it doesn't.

PATHELIN: Me, myself and I? No, it wasn't, I swear. Get that out of your head.

THE CLOTHIER: I'll renounce St. Peter if it wasn't you--you and nobody else. I know that to be absolutely true.

PATHELIN: Well don't you believe it, because it positively wasn't me. I never took a yard or even half a yard of cloth from you. I don't have that kind of reputation.

THE CLOTHIER: Damn it all, I'm going to go back to your house to see if you're there. We won't have to squabble here any more if I find you

there.²²

In the meantime, during the trial, the shepherd has persisted in his baaaa's. It is a blackly humorous version of ingesting commodities and becoming like them. He speaks in the language of the commodity which, by the end of the "trial," he will have successfully appropriated from the merchant by virtue of his superior command of performance in the marketplace. But in the final twist in this drama of market space performance, he continues to respond only with "baaa" even after the "show" is over. Pathelin paternalistically congratulates him on having played his part very well and asks for his money but the shepherd sticks to the role that Pathelin himself gave him. Even Pathelin expects that market performances have boundaries and that participants will return to the real.

THE SHEPHERD: Baa!

PATHELIN: Is this the only pay I'll get? Who do you think you're playing games with? I was taking such pride in your performance; now really make me proud of you.

THE SHEPHERD: Baa!

PATHELIN: Are you trying to pull the wool over my eyes? God's curse! Have I lived so long that a shepherd, a sheep in human clothing, a churlish knave can make a fool of me?

THE SHEPHERD: Baa!²³

²² Maddox, 198.

²³ Ibid., 199

It is not insignificant that a dispute over cloth is what sets the plot of this farce into motion. As Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider contend, cloth has had powerful symbolic, ritualistic and social functions in most societies. It is often relied upon as a way to bring the past into the present, even as its fragility and vulnerability to decay threaten this process. The ways in which it is treated are pivotal in the maintenance or erosion of traditional social relations. In an article on the Sakalava people of Western Africa, for instance, Gillian Feeley-Hamik differentiates the use of continuous stretches of cloth used as wraps for the body from European tailored clothes. The wrap has specific connotations which cannot be maintained in cloth that has been cut into fragments.²⁴ The spread of cloth manufacture as part of a commodity economy, in fact, made cloth producers incapable, as Weiner and Schneider contend,

of generating or sustaining the idea of benevolent spiritual or ancestral involvement in the production process. Even when factory production has yet to emerge, market pressures to cheapen and streamline labor prevent spinners and weavers, dyers and finishers, from thinking about or ritually acknowledging the transmission of a sacred ancestry through cloth. From its inception, capitalist manufacture elevated entrepreneurs [who] procured raw materials, structured the production process, supplied equipment or credit for equipment, and arranged for eventual marketing and distribution. Above all, they pressured workers so as to

²⁴ Gillian Feeley-Hamnik, "Cloth and the Creation of Ancestors," in *Cloth and Human Experience*, ed. Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 79.

reduce the cost of labor in production.²⁵

Precisely because Mister Pierre Pathelin is initiated by the theft of cloth whose production has been at the hands of just such an entrepreneur, and which has no meaning other than as a commodity, the play expresses in very precise terms the new tensions within emerging capitalism; it is unclear to whom the cloth really belongs or, as Jones and Stallybrass put it, "Whose name is materialized in cloth? The spinner, the weaver, the tailor . . . The name of the silkworms, the cattle, the sheep from which the materials of the clothing come?"²⁶ If cloth once bore the inscription of symbolic meanings woven into it by manufacturers who were themselves woven into symbolic and ritual organizations, what inscription can it bear if its manufacture is fragmented, if it is itself produced in fragments, and if the identities of those who deal in it keep slipping?

But even more than this, cloth and clothing, separated from traditional frameworks, can function quite differently, and theatrically, as the disguises or costumes through which identity can begin to be played, altered, experimented with, brought into market space. Jones and Stallybrass point out that by the end of the fifteenth century, the traditional codes for reading dress maintained by the livery system were thought by many to be oppressive. In the livery system, the place of a person in the social system was marked by wearing the clothes of the house with which he was affiliated or in whose service he was indentured. The mark of the vagabond was the absence of livery, of belonging to a place, and this lack of belonging was criminal. Livery, in other words, kept

²⁵ Weiner and Schneider, 11.

²⁶ Jones and Stallybrass, 32.

social relations in stasis in a situation antithetical to the demands for social mobility that the transition to capitalism would begin to produce. Pierre Pathelin is located just at the intersection of the emergence of a different relation to cloth, clothing, capitalism and identity.

As the struggle over livery proceeded during the sixteenth century and into the Renaissance, as codes of investiture began to disintegrate, clothes began to circulate in new ways and with new potentials and meanings. In what Jones and Stallybrass call their mnemonic function, clothes, like objects, carried in them histories and memories which, in the wearing of them, became written into the body. But clothes also began to circulate as currency, as a form of money. Literally fragmented, cut apart and sold in pieces to pawnbrokers to be reassembled in different ways on different bodies, clothes, or pieces of clothes, became a means by which identities could be in a continual process of construction and deconstruction.

This making of identity is both derived from conceptualizations of the body that were commonplace and illicit conceptions of making. In the first case, the body was conceptualized as both its biological components and as "bodice."²⁷ Bodice referred to the way in which the socially constructed body is fabricated--by being stitched together from multiple pieces of material. This made body was thought to precede the biological body. But the second, and more illicit form of constructing identity was identified through the

²⁷ Ibid., 85.

idea of "facio" or making.²⁸ Facio is the root of fashion, and fashion was, in some cases, a feared sort of making. Witches, for instance, were charged with a malevolent form of fashioning, maleficium. Jones and Stallybrass write that "witchcraft involved injury, doing harm; but my emphasis here is on the etymological force of the word, its root in the verb *facio*, to make, construct, fashion, frame, build, erect, produce, compose. The fashioning of such images at once suggests the power and danger of mimesis."²⁹ Implicit in the theft by Pierre Pathelin, a master of dissimulation and disguise, is the expectation that the cloth he steals will become a costume with which with this mimetic magic he will stitch together yet another protean shape. Fashion is the form that the commodity is destined to take on, a labile, shifting, becoming like, which unsettles the categories traditionally used for fixing subjectivity. Just as actors in the Renaissance were attacked for their license with liveries, clothes and shapeshifting, so the threat of Pathelin's theft is also that the cloth will enable him to continue to flaunt identity as known through liveried, socially located placement. The cloth, produced as a commodity, in a sense produces this possibility, produces the theatrical play of identity.

According to Jones and Stallybrass, most theatre professionals in the Renaissance had ties to the cloth business,³⁰ and they claim, further, that "the theatre was a new and spectacular development of the clothing trade."³¹ Extensive documentation exists, for instance, of the theatrical producer Philip Henslowe's pawnbroking business. Because the

²⁸ Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, "Rugges of London and the Diuell's Ban& Irish Mantles and Yellow Starch as Hybrid London Fashion," in *Material London*, 142.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 179.

³¹ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 176.

theatre depended upon the sumptuousness of its clothes, it was tremendously dependent upon pawnbrokers, who thus stood to make considerable profit. The speed with which fashions began to change (with fashion a new social category) guaranteed a constant stream of clothes to the pawnbroker. The theatre was an important market for pawnbrokers who, because of sumptuary laws, would otherwise have had a hard time liquidating their stock of luxury items. But, as Stallybrass and Jones point out, "the professional theaters were founded upon the flouting of the sumptuary laws and upon the circulation of clothes from aristocrats to commoners."³² The theatre also provided a social space in which, because it was too hard to enforce sumptuary laws, audience members could also appear in fashions which exceeded the boundaries of their position and thus play at alternate identities.

It is important to keep in mind that the theatre was not a cultural space which simply enacted the developments of an emerging economy. The commercial theatre of the Renaissance was centrally important in the all-important clothing trade, buying, dealing, exchanging, but also making and remaking identity, "fashioning" people, while undoing, cutting up, re-fashioning former identities. As Douglas Bruster stresses, the theatre was centrally located not geographically but in the cash nexus of the emerging economy.³³

Master Pierre Pathelin, while pre-dating these developments, nevertheless anticipates the theatre, the fashioning of identity, as a marketplace alliance with the commodified

³² Ibid., 187.

³³ Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 26-27.

industry in cloth, clothes and fashion.

The Alchemical Commodity

I began the preceding section with ingestion, the idea that the commodity becomes bodily substance, stitching exterior and interior together and rendering them specious categories. I finished with fashion, facio, the making of self, the stitching together of the fashion, the clothes into that which becomes the body. In this next section, I look briefly at a few examples from the sixteenth century theatre, looking for the ways that it continued to stage the ingestion and display of capital as bodily substance, and rehearsed the potentials of multiple identities, facilitated through clothes, for loss and gain in the market.

Gail Kern Paster, writing on the moment in early capitalism that medical procedures were made public in moving from in-home ministrations to the purchased services of doctors, argues that subjecting the body to the purgative and exposing practices of medicine becomes a "freely willed act of rational consumption akin to the purchase of other goods and services."³⁴ Moreover, this move into the market, she says, created the interaction with the medical commodity as "a socially visible performance which engaged the body's internal habitus, both directly and symbolically, as the subject

³⁴ Gail Kern Paster, "Purgation as the Allure of Mastery: Early Modern Medicine and the Technology of Self," in *Material London*, 195.

of an emergent practice of early capitalist consumption."³⁵ Paster's assertion trades in the tension between formulations of inner and outer which accompany the development of capital. Here there is an inner system of organization and habits which, through performance, is shaped into the subject of consumption. Paster's theory, along with Stallybrass' and Jones', provides ways to imagine how it is that the body is, or feels itself to be, changed by its interaction with the commodity, sometimes to the extent of wanting to be the commodity.

In Machiavelli's Mandragola, a story rife with dissimulation of identity enacted for sexual and financial gain, Lucrezia, the young wife of the Pantalone-like merchant Licia, is desired by a young man, Callimaco, whose parasitical friend Ligurgio hatches a scheme by which to procure her. Her husband, who is concerned by their childless state, will be duped into the purchase of a medical commodity which she will be forced to take. Her husband is told that she will definitely conceive but that her inseminator will die due to the effects of the drug. Thus, a young man is to be kidnapped off the street and brought to her bed. That young man, of course, ends up being Callimaco in disguise. In his subsequent account of the event he describes what amounts to an initial rape of Lucrezia, followed by his seduction of her such that she learns to desire him.

The play exposes the violence with which capital began to change the body. Through the mediation and ingestion of a commodity, the mandrake root, Lucrezia moves out of the chaste, interior, domestic space of her home and confessional. Even the private

³⁵ Ibid., 195.

space of her body is made public as her urine, more or less forcibly extracted from her, is brought out into the public square for inspection. She enters the market as a sexual commodity; Callimaco has, in effect purchased her. He acquires her only through the intercession of the market and, notably, the impersonations it requires. Licia's pursuit and purchase of a medical commodity expels her from an inner life of faith which is held separate from the market, into a public life in which she herself dissimulates in order to consume sexually, disavowing her former identifications.

Ben Jonson's The Alchemist, is a later Renaissance text which continues to rehearse market space performance, facilitated especially by the appropriation and ingestion of substances keyed to market demand, and guaranteed to transfigure the customer. The titular alchemist, Subtle, performs a kind of alchemy by turning the gullibility of his customers into capital accumulation. He is selling the the philosopher's stone, the ultimate commodity because, like money, it can be used to reproduce itself. It can buy anything, including health. Subtle indeed markets the stone according to the desires of those who want it. None of Subtle's products ever makes an actual appearance, but all of them are nevertheless ingested as promises. For Mammon, Subtle's major "client," the stone will allow him to increase his wealth, including wealth in women, exponentially. In a pitched vision of the phenomenology of the market he imagines that, through the properties of the stone, gold itself will be ingested to become the bodily substance of himself and the fine woman he desires, Dol (who is really a prostitute

working with Subtle and Face). He fantasizes that "[Dol] shall feel gold, taste gold, hear gold, sleep gold: Nay, we will concumbere [copulate] gold."³⁶ Here capital continues its long process of slipping into the flesh, as the flesh.

For Tribulation, the Puritan, Subtle's sales pitch is that the stone will be the ultimate remedy for all the diseases and pestilence in the world, and, as such, by bringing him into favor with his missionary subjects, will facilitate the production of ever more colonial wealth.

SUBTLE: Have I discoursed so unto you of our stone,
 And of the good that it shall bring your cause?
 That even the medicinal use shall make you a faction
 and party in the realm? As, put the case,
 That some great man in state, he have the gout,
 Why, you but send three drops of your elixer,
 You help him straight: there you have made a friend.
 Another has the palsy or the dropsy,
 He takes of your incombustible stuff,
 He's young again: there you have made a friend.
 A lady that is past the feat of body,
 Though not of mind, and hath her face decayed
 Beyond all cure of paintings, you restore

³⁶ Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, in *Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques*, ed. Robert M. Adams (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 234.

With the oil of talc: there you have made a friend.³⁷

Subtle's operation is a sort of multi-faceted retail outlet providing goods and services, and which includes medical commodities among its wares. In this sense it is not unlike the barber-surgeon businesses which proliferated in Elizabethan England. The barber-surgeons were business men who set themselves up to treat disease, especially venereal disease. They made wigs for people whose hair had fallen out from syphilis, removed lice and worms, devised cover-ups for pox and syphilitic blemishes, and they used remedies derived from alchemy. Pelling notes that "sixteenth century surgeons were notable for their adoption of the new metallic or alchemical remedies; [alchemy] provided the intellectual underpinning of their effectual monopoly over the treatment of venereal disease."³⁸ Barber-surgeons plied a kind of illegitimate commodity medicine, in which disease's inscriptions on the body is covered with the "bodice," the stitching together of a new person--like alchemy's transformation of what is base into a shimmering substance.

Subtle is also a broker of bodices, skills and impersonations, the absorptions necessary to successful negotiations of the new market. Customers who come to Subtle require a divination of their pasts and futures as if the ways of the market were too enigmatic to negotiate without such a guide. Subtle is supposedly making a "familiar," or spirit guide, to help Dapper, the gambler, at the gaming tables, and Drugger, the would-be druggist, magical runes to attract customers to his apothecary. These promised

³⁷ Ibid., 220.

³⁸ Margaret Pelling, "Appearance and Reality: Barber-Surgeons, the Body and Disease," in *The Making of the Metropolis*, ed. A.L. Beier and Roger Finlay (New York and London: Longman, 1986), 103.

commodities are mysterious transformative substances or objects. Subtle's customers desire a transformation, a new state of being and this desire, like the desire for health, is now addressed in public, through market transactions. In this model, medicine, previously more the private interiority of bodily women's work, is submitted to the same valuation as any other commodity and commodities are themselves medicines; they have miraculous restorative properties. They along, with medical remedies, prepare the body/person for a new kind of subjectivity.

Mammon, for instance, is under the impression that the money he's given to Subtle (ostensibly for materials for the philosopher's stone) is an investment which will return to him when the finished alchemical miracle becomes his property. In the meantime, his identity is structured on the fantasies which mobilize this expenditure: when his investment in the stone pays off he will have for his own luxuries acquired from across the world. In a speech which flaunts the wealth increasingly available for consumption in the Renaissance, he brings various images of himself into being, and imagines as medicine the stone which will procure all these things for him. In fact, consumption is medicine. The objects of consumption cover the body, enter the body, gratify the body, flatter the body and in so doing construct a person whose full health is a reflection of an imperialist, commodity based society: "I'll have my glasses cut in more subtle angles, to disperse/And multiply the figures, as I walk/Naked between my succubae. My meat shall all come in, in Indian shells, Dishes of agate set in gold, and

studded/With emeralds, sapphires, hyacinths, and rubies. And my flatterers/Shall be the
 pure and gravest of divines,/That I can get for money. Puff, now we have the medicine.
 My gloves of fishes and bird skins perfumed/With gums of paradise and eastern air.³⁹

Of course, Subtle's transactions in imaginary goods are set into motion by the fluid identities of himself, Face and Dol. A trio of hucksters, they are each able to adopt any identity necessary at any particular moment. As in Volpone, their greed eventually defeats them, but not before this piece of theatre has summoned into being the practices of a commodity culture. Douglas Bruster argues against the nomenclature of city comedy to name this genre of play. He points out that really they occur in the placeless anywhere of the market and to designate them with the geographical specificity of the term "city" is to obscure some of their key relationships to emerging consumer culture.⁴⁰ And, indeed, only with the return from the country of the owner of the house Subtle has appropriated for his business operation, is a sense of place restored to the play. The play in general is dominated by the dizzying accumulation of transactions and the identities needed to conduct them, which, by their natures, seem antithetical to place. When the owner returns, Face is returned to his "real" status as housekeeper. The cartwheeling, ludic space of the market is spun back into the square shape of a specific place, a specific house, in a specific city, in which people are confined to their proper roles. For Jonson, this is the restoration of justice, but not before his play has let the cat out of the bag--the market escapes onto the stage which is itself a market, and the commodity form is ingested, either

³⁹ Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, 198-199.

⁴⁰ Bruster, 30-36.

in reality or in fantasy. The habitus of the market becomes the habitus of subjectivity so that people see themselves, and other human beings, as commodities. As John Wheeler wrote in 1601,

All the world choppeth and changeth, runneth and raveth after Mars,
Markets and Merchandising, so that all things come into Commerce, and
pass into traffic in all times, and in all places: not only that which nature
brings forth but further also, this man maketh merchandise of the works of
his own hands, this man of another man's labor, one selleth words, another
maketh traffic of the skins and blood of other men, yea there are some
found so subtle and cunning merchants, that they persuade and induce men
to suffer themselves to be bought and sold.⁴¹

The Consolidation of the Merchant Class and the Commodification of Women

My concentration thus far has been on establishing the historicity of the fluidity and interchangeability of commodities and the human identities that commodity culture brings into being, particularly and often through clothing and fashion. One of the ways that those identities come into being is through a construction of subjectivity as a continuous exchange between interior and exterior, body and self. Capital is, after all, a bodily practice, a process of ingestion to which the body is indispensable. As the decades

⁴¹ Quoted in Bruster, 41.

and centuries proceed, new practices are added to commodity culture, new imperatives.

Yet these additions are a palimpsest over what has come before. Any one instance of a corporate performance may bring into focus one or another of its historical precedents.

The focus of this section is a constellation of women, consumption, imperialism and prostitution, but this constellation is both implicitly and explicitly caught up in clothing, fashion, fluid identities and the body.

In 1609 Ben Jonson wrote an entertainment for the opening of the New Exchange, a retail shopping center for luxury goods. Notwithstanding that in The Alchemist he puts lists of merchandise into the mouth of a fatuous, self-deluded and monstrously greedy character, in this *Entertainment for Britain's Bourse* [Royal Exchange] he has a young shop boy, in morally neutral tones, list the commodities that English trade and imperialism has made available to its citizens of means. The list is addressed to James I and Queen Anne, with the intention of stressing the importance of trade and of the merchant class.

What doe you lacke? What is't you buy? Veary fine China stuffes, of all
kinds and qualities? China Chaynes, China Braceletts, China scarfes,
China fannes, China girdles, china knives, China boxes, China Cabinetts.
Hower glasses, lookinge glasses, Buminge glasses, Concave glasses,
Triangular glasses, Convexe glasses, Christall globes, Waxen pictures,
Estrich Eggs, Birds of Paradise, Muskads, Indian Mice, Indian ratts, China

dogges and China cattes? See what you lack."⁴²

This new century and, of course, its civil war, is marked by the emerging social force of the capitalist class. By the beginning of the Restoration period, the guilds were sponsoring more and more entertainments like Ben Jonson's secularized pageants called Lord Mayor's Shows. These pageants celebrated commerce and underscored the developing tension around the issue of royal support for trade, particularly in the form of the royal navy. As such, the grocer's pageant, for instance, "represented the four parts of the world from which the grocer's commodities came."⁴³ A speech during the pageant for Charles' coronation went as follows: "Exporting Yours, Importing Foreign Goods/Now with full Joy she welcomes your Return;/Your blest Return! by which she is restor'd/To all the Wealth remotest Lands afford."⁴⁴ These speeches skirted direct expression of the tension developing between merchant interests and the king. The royal navy was only one issue. Others included the king's availing himself of the coffers of the city with little or no notice, and without payment of his debt. For instance, even though his marriage to Catherine of Braganza guaranteed, in the form of her dowry, free trade with the East Indies and Brazil, merchants were resentful when Charles ordered the city to mount an extravaganza of a royal entry which had to be funded from their pockets.

It is striking that even though the patents for the city's theatres were held by two men of whose royalist sympathies Charles was certain, and even though the dramatic fare

⁴² Ian W. Archer, "Material Londoners?," in *Material London*, 174.

⁴³ Paula R. Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 38.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Backscheider, 39.

at those theatres flattered the aristocracy, the new bourgeoisie appropriated both the Medieval pageant and the Jacobean masque as performance forms through which it could make its own claims and its own veiled threats. Through these highly visible, citywide, civic events, the bourgeoisie accomplished the public construction through performance of a social self invested in commerce, trade and the commodity rather than in the monarchy.

Interestingly, this construction of white, bourgeois masculinity seems to have involved, at least to a certain extent, shunting the incontinence, the excess, of capitalism onto the bodies of women, especially the newly professional actresses. Women dealt in commodities, performed the spectacle of commodity accumulation, and became the same as commodities. In some cases, women were relied upon to exhibit capital as their bodies, to live the imperialist logic, to embody the triumph of capital. Other women, like Millwood in The London Merchant were relied upon to enact, as if they were the source of it, the avarice inherent in commodity transactions, the multiple performances of identity deployed to ensure success in the market, unalloyed consumption, particularly of fashion, and the selling of the body as a commodity. In contrast to her person, the male bourgeoisie could fashion himself as the standard of morality and even fiscal responsibility, conservatism, and stability. He could stand as the rationale for the triumph of capitalism even as he formulated as its female underbelly those characteristics which are actually systemic.

But it was not only women who were tied to the commodity form. In fact

affiliation seems to have been produced through a triangular circuit between women, slaves, and the transatlantic trade. As the slave trade kicked into high gear during this second half of the seventeenth century, bodies sold as merchandise, bodies as investments, and submissive bodies as the performance of domination, became the stock in trade of the merchant class. And with the slave trade came the goods, and with the goods came the women wearing the goods and, like slaves, identified as goods. As Joseph Roach says,

[In] the circum-Atlantic world entire populations existed as actual or potential commodities and the triangular trade in human flesh, manufactured goods and raw materials rapidly produced a superabundance unprecedented in both extent and maldistribution. The enduring affects of this superimposition still operate in the fiercely laminating adhesion of bodies and objects, in which the exchange of human flesh signifies the prolific availability of all commodities.⁴⁵

Ingestion, the phrase I used earlier in the chapter to describe the way that capital becomes bodily substance, might be replaced now by the word appetite. The excess of commodity production and importation produces appetite; the desire to possess, ingest, all things. Women's bodies and slave's bodies are the means with which to satisfy appetites, even as they are each used up in the process. By this time fashion begins to take on its contemporary meaning of the ceaseless production of the new, as a palimpsest on its Renaissance meaning of making an object or a subjectivity. As such, the desire for

⁴⁵ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 124.

the fashionable object and for getting and spending fashionable objects, means a ruthless using up and discarding of objects as they fall out of fashion. J.S. Peters remarks that women were priced and discarded at accelerated rates even as they also were figured as excessive consumers; they bought the silks, the fashions, the spices, the sensual profit of capitalism. He quotes a passage from Southern's Oroonoko in which Welldon says to Lucy: "Women in London are like the rich silks; they are out of fashion a great while before they wear out. You may tumble [women and fashions] over and over at their first coming up and never disparage their price; but they fall upon wearing immediately, lower and lower in their value, till they come to the broker at last."⁴⁶

Peters argues that the Restoration theatre focuses on the Caribbean as the source of inexhaustibly new commodities, as "the place where commerce and sensuality meet...at once a site for the kind of trade on which are founded modern credit systems and an exotic locus of sensual pleasures. 'The Indies,' or the house of 'the Indian woman,' allow a kind of compression in offering a location for the more pervasive meeting of sexual and commodity consumption."⁴⁷ The compression to which Peters refers forces together women, sex, and slavery and then allows these three to circulate in a variety of performances, including those by actresses in the theatre, which together help to define for the white bourgeois male his own relationship to capital—how he will visualize and continue to produce excess, how he will distance the sins of excess, of appetite, from his

⁴⁶ J. S. Peters, "The Novelty; or, Print, Money, Fashion, Getting, Spending and Glut," in *Cultural Reading of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theatre*, ed. J. Douglas Canfield and Deborah C. Payne (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 176.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

self.

In Roach's analysis of Aphra Behn's The Widow Ranter, and an engraving of the famed Restoration actress Ann Bracegirdle as "an Indian Queen," he makes the compelling case that the only response by white colonialists to the excess represented in the engraving and in the person of the Indian Queen in the play is to eradicate it. Written onto the bodies of women, in this case the body of a white women performing an American Indian woman in the midst of a sexual excess which has produced the union of Indians and slaves (exemplified by the children in the engraving), and dressed in profligate arrays of feathered headresses and clothers, excess is feared; it must be measured, kept in check, even as it must also be continually produced. Women and slaves become the symbolic medium through which it is regulated, their used bodies cast out, like worn fashions, for second-hand resale or onto the slave-broker's coffer.

The bulk of Deborah Payne's essay on Restoration actresses is an attempt to refute the notion that they were solely objectified as sexual commodities. She argues that they were also professionals and that, as professionals, and as sexual commodities, they were both objectified and amplified.* In a similar way, women were becoming "professionals" in the New Exchange, establishing shops and working as shop keepers. Known as "exchange women," they enticed customers to their venues by their fashionable dress and their shop door behaviors. James Grantham Turner says,

The seamstress-saleswomen were regarded as fashion models who would

* Deborah C. Payne, "Reified Object or Emergent Professional? Rethorizing the Restoration Actress," in Canfield and Payne.

stimulate consumption by flirtatious exchanges with their customers; in this commercial theatre they acquire some of the contradictory associations of the actress. In The Man of Mode for example, Etherege constitutes the New Exchange as a place of labile identity and female initiative.⁴⁹

In other words, like actresses, women were professionals, but the way in which they plied their profession was through a theatrical deployment of costumed identities, suited to a variety of customers. As first appears in the early modern period, success in the market demands proteanism, the ability to answer different forms of desire. But during the Restoration, this proteanism, which is itself an excess of identities and performances, is gendered, performed by women, both in the theatre and in other public settings. And, further, it is attached to the sexual excess of prostitution. Payne does show that there is little doubt that Restoration actresses were sexually harassed, regarded as sexual prey and ultimately potential possessions, who might be cast off at the first falling out of favor or fashion. They were the butt of titillating anecdotes, and the wearers of titillating costumes.

Elin Diamond, writing about Aphra Behn's The Rover, suggests that Behn's dramatization of Willmore's first encounter with the prostitute Angellica, in the form of appropriating her portrait which hangs as an advertisement outside her house, indicates the Restoration theatre's presumption to own its actresses. She writes,

⁴⁹ James Grantham Turner, "The New Exchange: Female Entrepreneurs," in *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 422.

Willmore removes Angellica's portrait the way a theater manager might lift off a piece of the set--because without buying her, he already owns her. Her paintings are materially linked to the painted Scenes, which were, of course owned, through the theatrical hierarchy, by patentee and king. The answer to the question, "Who is selling Angellica?" is, then, the theatre itself, which, like Willmore, operates with the king's patent and authorization.⁵⁰

But in a dialectical tendency, ultimately productive of white bourgeois femininity through the domestic space, the female body could perform the rationalization and ordering of the superabundance of the transatlantic as well as Asian trade. Roach, commenting on a portrait of the duchess of Portsmouth, from 1682, argues that the black girl child encircled by the white arm of the duchess, who gazes up adoringly at her white face, is representative of the way that Africans were featured "as infantilized, feminized objects of domestic luxury and consumption."⁵¹ Here the black body (literally) held in the correctly controlled pose by a woman whose self-possessed poise as she exhibits her costume, composed of elements extracted from across the globe, holds no threat of either unbridled consumption or sexuality or identity.

Similarly, James Peck provides a detailed description of the clothes Anne Oldfield wore. If Ann Bracegirdle had performed one version of the conflation of bodies,

⁵⁰ Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theatre* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 77.

⁵¹ Roach, 127.

commodities and excess, as the ornately feathered Indian Queen who must be destroyed because her person is an embodied conflagration of trade, Anne Oldfield performs another, in which she was relied upon to order consumption into stabilizing forms of expenditure. Oldfield was known especially for her gifted modeling of splendid clothes. Her specialty was the petticoat. Like the clothes of privileged women in general, the clothes and accessories she modeled were explicitly read as the end result of the glories of English global trade. This was even more true of the petticoat which, as an aggregate of global raw materials, Peck says, was "an exemplary instance of trade in action."⁵² The bulk of Peck's essay analyzes Oldfield's performance as Lady Townly, "the apotheosis of her career-long development of the Lady of Quality as a commodified consumer."⁵³ As Townly, Oldfield enacts the anxieties of an economy increasingly dependent upon credit in the form of her addictive gambling. In the person of this gambler who has become out of control and desperate, without further resources, the dangers and excesses of a credit economy are, again, performed into and as femaleness. But by the end of the play, after a rousing scene with her husband, she repents her vice and promises to become a respectable wife confined to the domestic sphere. So, Peck concludes, "As Prime Minister Robert Walpole was skillfully at work restoring public faith in the credit-based society, Anne Oldfield was skillfully at work performing its most terrifying aspects in a fictive domestic space removed from the scenes of exchange where the terrors of credit might do

⁵² James Peck, "Anne Oldfield's Lady Townly: Consumption, Credit, and the Whig Hegemony of the 1720's," *Theatre Journal* 49, no.4 (December, 1997): 407.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 407.

the market real harm."⁵⁴

So as the English money men negotiated the perils and rewards of the economy they were making, they relied upon the performances of women in consumption-based spaces including the theatre and the New Exchange. They relied on women to be commodities, to consume, to assume the characteristics and penalties of excess and overabundance, and to help place consumption in a rational space where, fictively, it could seem to be a manageable and natural apparatus for the production of wealth by those equipped to deserve it.

There were other ways in which the male bourgeoisie was actively constructing both a discourse and a space of rationality, morality, and internal discipline which would separate this class from the masses. In what Stallybrass and White called Addison and Steele's "totalizing project of moral education,"⁵⁵ the refined bourgeois class could position itself as intellectual rather than visceral, the enlightened observers, rather than the observed, in control of passions and bodily drives. The key public space in which these new bourgeois subjectivities took form was the coffee-house. The coffee house, trading in the concentration-abetting drug, caffeine, as opposed to the libidinous drug, alcohol, was a place where these men gathered for rational, mannerly conversation, for financial wheeling and dealing.

George Lillo's The London Merchant is the apotheosis of the preferred vision of

⁵⁴ Ibid., 415.

⁵⁵ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 83.

itself that the merchant class wished to bring into being. Gone are the court wits of Restoration comedy, the cynicism and sexuality; in its place a maudlin sincerity without irony where the merchant is named Thorowgood and his best apprentice named Trueman. The play preserves the innocent woman who does not leave the true goodness of the domestic sphere, Lucy, while displacing onto the body of the powerful temptress Millwood all the excess and commodification of the capitalist economy. Not only is she acquisitive and amoral, skilled at performing whatever identity will get her what she wants, she directly allies herself with slaves and American Indians (both South and North American) in making an explicit critique of the exploitation upon which the wealth of merchants is based. While Lillo voices this critique on the stage, he places it in the mouth of a woman his audience is to understand as a vile, theatrical creature, ruled by sensuous pleasure and consumption. The play is a study of those who fall prey to these influences and thus helps to construct the discourse of the enlightened bourgeois male whose traffic in slaves can be "disavowed as the vital business of the nation."⁵⁶ Ingesting chocolate, ingesting coffee, weeping at the sight of women dressed in goods that they've successfully extracted from peoples and environments around the world,⁵⁷ these men embody the accrued history during which the material groundwork for the full identification of humans with the commodity has been laid.

Exhibitions and the Slave Trade

⁵⁶ Roach, 128.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 87.

In the century-long defining of the Enlightenment gaze, in exhibitions of Africans, and in the slave trade, performance was practiced in such a way that, as Roach rightfully accuses, it "created by its synergy a behavioral vortex in which human relationships could be drained of sympathetic imagination and shaped to the purposes of consumption and exchange."⁵⁸ Because my argument is ultimately that the commodity is performed in the postmodern period primarily outside the space of the theatre, I want to discuss some particularly revealing ways that this begins to happen through the eighteenth century and then, more specifically, throughout the nineteenth.

During the course of the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment which it housed, the relationship between the exteriority and interiority of subjectivity was newly interrogated. As we've seen, the early modern and Renaissance formulation of inner and outer was built on a model whereby depth and surface were not so much opposed to one another as existing in a kind of circulatory system in which surface sinks into depth, depth conforms to the inscriptions of the surface, the biological body is pieced together, made, fashioned. During the Enlightenment, however, philosophers reconceptualized the body as withholding from logos its deep secrets. Body is completely obscured from the knowing self. The task of philosophy, medicine, art is to find out how to recover those secrets, lay the interior open to observation and quantification. In this construction, logos, the organizing principle of the logical mind, takes upon itself the task of governing the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 213.

somatic phenomena, the obscure symptoms of bodily life. Once opened to the observer, the interior was subjected, as part of this governance, to principles of classification and organization which sought to prove that what had heretofore been inalienably secret has become knowable. The soul is not at risk of exposure, because, so differently from the theology of the Middle Ages that I've referred to, the soul is supra-somatic, prior to the body, independent of it.

Those who were able to trade in the discourse of rationalist philosophy established themselves as authorities over those whose stakes were in the body. As such, that discourse of the dissector, the quantifier, the classifier was the discourse of power. The body is monitored, gauged, measured, in the interest of a form of knowing which entailed what Barbara Maria Stafford calls the "draining of substance through schematization."⁵⁹ In this new language of power, an earlier paradigm of the totality of being or subjectivity disintegrates as organisms are dissected into fragments. For Stafford, these schematization of the interior, the cutting open, cutting up, the classifications, create a sense that all forms of organization, or possible compositions of subjectivity, are labile. They also create a sense of depth splayed out into surface, the bones and muscle flayed outward into the same dimension, "the 'inside' and 'outside' of things cast simultaneously on an artificial surface."⁶⁰ Stafford believes that this movement to the surface is the precursor of the postmodern trade in surfaces.

⁵⁹ Barbara Maria Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1991), 12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 475.

The schematized body, transposed into a subject whose depth can be read on the surface, also becomes a body whose surface is bared for the inscriptions which will identify it as, or like, a commodity. In the course of the eighteenth century the insidious implementations of otherness which had been underway since the early modern period became more and more important as the means by which people in capitalist environments would come to live through, as, or as the animators of, the commodity. The person, laid open in one lateral image which exposed the "interior" to scrutiny and classification, was made spectatorial during the eighteenth century. As Stafford points out, "The illustrative drive to turn elusive information into riveting spectacle, or into palpable demonstration, was one of the chief educational tools for attaining enlightenment."⁶¹ But in the nineteenth century, the slave market and the exhibition of Africans as a for-profit entertainment institutionalized the elaboration of humans as commodities through spectacle.

Writing about the slave trade, as opposed to slave auctions, Walter Johnson records the conditions under which this trade was conducted. Traders purchased slaves from slave owners who, for one reason or another, needed to liquidate this "property." Usually, the traders headed into the deep south, the nightmare that all slaves dreaded. In New Orleans, the traders kept the slaves in pens, in a courtyard behind a storefront which would typically be marked with a sign, like any other retail sign, saying "Slaves for Sale."

Once they had gathered the slaves in the pens, the traders set about preparing this

⁶¹ Stafford, 17.

"merchandise" for sale. That is, they turned the slaves loose from their shackles and allowed them to rest and heal. They were fed a fattening diet, made to exercise and dance to improve muscle tone. Their gray hairs were blackened with dyes, skin testifying to ill health or exhaustion was burnished with oil or grease. They were visited by doctors for superficial medical care. In a reprise of the role of clothing in the relation between subjectivity and commodity, the traders bought clothing to function as costumes for the slaves to wear in the showrooms. The costumes provided by the traders were carefully chosen to imbue the slaves with a look of cleanliness and decency but also all the male slaves were commonly costumed identically. This, the traders hoped, would eliminate the details of each individual so that deficiencies might be less apparent to buyers, or disqualifying idiosyncrasies less likely to occur as possibilities in the mind of the buyers. Also, because the slaves had been disassociated from any of their history, there was often little verifiable evidence of their condition, their capabilities, or their temperament. As a result, the traders categorized them according to an established set of criteria, which yoked the slaves together as abstract categories of displayed merchandise. The slaves were grouped according to their relative prime, in Prime, No. 1, 2, etc. They were grouped in racial categories according to skin color: Negro, Mulatto, Quadroon, etc. Then they were arranged for inspection by buyers according to height, with women on one side of the display room and men on the other.

However, once these abstract qualities intended to facilitate market exchange had

been assigned, buyers added to them with sales pitches which represented the slaves as people with a history. But, as Johnson indicates, the pitch was not generated by a belief in an underlying self, but on the necessity to layer on to the surface image the appearance of differentiated selfhood.

The traders had to make a pitch. In the slave pens, the traders pitched their slaves by telling stories that seemed to individualize and even humanize the depersonalized slaves. They breathed the life of the market into the bodies, histories, and identities of the people they were trying to sell, by using a simulacrum of human singularity to do the work of product differentiation.⁴²

More even than these sales pitches, though, the traders directed the slaves in performances which would also facilitate their own sale. They might be instructed to dance, to act happy while playing cards, to talk in a certain way about their history. In a way that will be reiterated throughout this dissertation, particularly in the chapter on The Lion King, these slave marketing techniques produced a paradigm in which the ideological or felt category of "human" becomes useful primarily for writing the alibi, or simulation, of vitality, soul, character, onto the surface of the commodity. What is human, like the old concept of interiority, is splayed out as a performance which is, as Johnson says about the slaves, "fully fungible."⁴³ We begin to ask for the appearance of the human in the

⁴² Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1999), 124.

⁴³ Ibid., 58.

commodity, for the human to perform with and as the surfaces of the commodity.

So it is not only that slavery was the commodification of human beings, of human beings bought and sold like objects, as Harry Elam figures the process in the following descriptions. "The language of slavery places humans and inanimate objects in the same 'grammatical series.' In legal documents of slave ownership and maintenance, the nomination 'slave' occurs in the same context as other animate and inanimate items."⁶⁴ It was also that the slaves were forced to produce interiority, whether invented or real, as the persona of the commodity. In this delicate distinction, I'm suggesting that the idea that in slavery humans were commodities preserves a social construction of "human" which was already past its prime by the nineteenth century. The "human" begins to exist only to the extent that it can be used to give the commodity exchange value by imbuing the commodity with the appearance of unique form, even as it remains universally exchangeable.

The dissecting gaze of the Enlightenment, the labile play of surfaces, especially through performance, all help to create the basis for the next 200 years of commodity culture. In an argument which parallels mine about slavery, Veit Erlmann suggests that the late 19th century exhibitions of otherness were not so much produced as a display of colonial power as a way to reorganize knowledge in the face of the late 19th century crisis in Enlightenment positivism. He argues that the kind of knowledge produced during displays of imperialism in the fairs was organized around the commodity and a

⁶⁴ Harry Elam, Jr., "The Dialectics of Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*," *Theatre Journal* 52, no.3 (October, 2000): 369.

restructuring of seeing the world that the commodity induced. Specifically, he says, the "real" recedes in importance and representation begins to take its place. What was to be rendered in them was the idea of the "world-as-exhibition,"⁶⁵ so that, ultimately, what characterizes consumer culture is "how objects come to occupy social life in such a way that the whole society is turned into a stage for the fictions it has created for its commodities."⁶⁶ In other words, what is important is not loyalty to "reality" but the specific production in people of a preference for what is not real, a literacy in appearance and representation which derives from the pleasure of bodily immersion in it.

In his discussion of the performances of The African Choir, brought to tour England from South Africa from 1891-93 as a fundraising venture for a Cape Colony industrial school, and directed by two white men, Erlmann looks in particular at the way in which the costumes of the group situated them within this historical moment during which the commodity--and the enactment of its fictions--is displacing the gaze of conquest and possession with the gaze of enchantment, of simulation, of the "really made up."

The clothes of the group met with criticisms because, as bricolage, they were a mixture of modern, post-colonial and traditional cloth and clothing. Just as this chapter began with Stallybrass' and Jones' work on the pre-capitalist relationship between object and subject, and the way in which cloth and clothing carried memory, and as a second

⁶⁵ Veit Erlmann, "Spectatorial Lust: The African Choir in England, 1891-1893," in *Africans on Stage Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 124.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

skin, could "fashion" the wearer, so Erlmann points out that in traditional African societies, that which covered the body was not thought of as something distinct from the person it covered. Rather, the clothing absorbed the person into a whole field of roots, memory and social relations, without either person or cloth being the primary maker of meaning. However, starting with capitalist production, which separated producers from any reference to nature, and from their homes, the body becomes thinglike, disconnected, and homeless. As such (and here the story converges with that of the American slaves dressing in the ready-made costumes purchased for their performance by the trader), it became available for the inscription of images created in and for a commodity culture, particularly those created by clothes. He writes,

Disconnected from the web of echoes, traces and similarities that made up the pre-industrial world, the body acquired significance. It became the object of a new regime of signs that were contained, ordered, and codified in the commodities used to clothe it . . . the body becomes a mere referent for the commodified image of itself . . . What emerged from the mid-nineteenth century, then, was a consolidated regime of spectacular signs in which clothes, signs taken for wonders, were to conjure up total visions of being itself.⁶⁷

On the other hand, Barbara Stafford argues that the spectacularization of social forms into a play of surfaces began to create anxiety. In a resurgence of the anxieties over

⁶⁷ Erlmann, 128.

the flaunting of codes of investiture in the Renaissance, and the fear of pretense, by the late nineteenth century people began question how it would be possible to verify anyone's "real" identity. How could the interior be made visible if it was hidden behind a constant flux of disguises passing across the exterior surface? According to Stafford, even in the eighteenth century there was "the frightening possibility that no gold standard guaranteed inflated or deflated currency; no original preexisted the copy; no durable skeleton shored up the frail anatomy. Fashion, masquerade, theater, cross-dressing emphasized the total disagreement between seeming and being, the deliberately fabricated incongruity between exterior and interior."⁴⁸ This crisis was met with the rise of the "science" of physiognomy. Practitioners claimed to be able to "read" the surface of a person in such a way as to be able to see past appearance into the interior. In one sense this claim might seem to reinstate a depth model of subjectivity. On the other, like the Enlightenment scientist, the physiognomist is drawing the depths to the surface where it can be exposed.

In the slave pens, buyers similarly had to negotiate the difference between being and seeming. Fully aware of the techniques of the traders and the performances they induced in the slaves, buyers were experienced "physiognomists," employing a scrutinizing gaze which could see through the details of costume to an emaciated chest, which might then be verified through touch. Buyers, hoping to see through enactment and sales pitch, put the slaves through movements, felt their joints, gums, checked especially

⁴⁸ Stafford, 86.

the size and agility of fingers, read off skin color and size for the "likeness" of the slave, how good a worker he or she might be. Most important were the scars from whipping. Allowed, if necessary, to remove a slave off to a cell at the side of the pens and to ask him or her to remove a portion of her costume to better investigate and measure what lay underneath, the buyer could size up the characteristics of the scarification. As such, both physiognomists and slave buyers attempted to secure a foundation of truth in the face of a commodity culture which in its very nature was manifesting more and more as a play of appearance and performance.

Fashioned as the Commodity Self: The Twentieth Century

Fashion and the retail and performance venues in which it is enacted are a clear way to trace the development, from the late nineteenth century into the twentieth, of Erlmann's thesis that "the world has turned into a stage for the fictions it has created for its commodities."⁶⁹ Clothing, that second skin which begins to stand in for the body, is the peculiar medium through which the really made up is crafted as the preferred space of a consuming public.

As we have seen, as consumer culture moves into full swing in the middle of the eighteenth century, it is through and on the bodies of women in particular that the commodity finds its expression most clearly. The category of woman became a social

⁶⁹ Erlmann, 117.

configuration where multiple ambivalences and anxieties about the uncertainties of capital were amassed. Also, by laminating the figure of the prostitute onto that of woman, women were conflated with the commodity itself. By the end of the nineteenth century, with its department stores, and into the twentieth, with its cinemas, fashion houses and stores, they were increasingly adorned with clothing whose fiction they enacted.

Jane Gaines, in her work on the costuming of movie stars, builds on the idea that the star system in the early heyday of Hollywood features and musicals depended upon the "fiction of a person."⁷⁰ Her argument in this essay is especially interesting in that it seems to recover the early modern sense described by Stallybrass and Jones of the clothes fashioning the person. As Gaines describes it, the work of the costume designer is to deploy clothing excess so that it fashions the star as a marketable entity. However, in Hollywood costuming, the clothes were not saturated with memory, meanings, connections as in the Renaissance. Rather, they were hollow, shells that star actresses stepped into. As Charlotte Herzog remarks, women modeling clothes move according to the shape of the clothes; "High fashion clothes dictate a particular behavior and comportment."⁷¹ Women, then, animate the clothes according to the shape of the clothes. In the case of the star, this creates persona, which Gaines defines as "the marketable character which takes material form in the star designer's costuming."⁷² The clothes fashion not a person, but a commodity, which is neither the woman, nor the clothing,

⁷⁰ Jane Gaines, "Costume and Narrative: How Dress Tells the Woman's Story," in *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, ed. Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 199.

⁷¹ Charlotte Herzog, "Powder Puff Promotion: The Fashion Show-in-the-Film," in *Fabrications*, 150.

⁷² Gaines, "Costume and Narrative," 198.

exactly. It (the female star) is a fungible good which moves out into the marketplace, somehow beyond the reach of attachment, but provoking longing for it.

Thus, as in slavery, women too moved past the historical moment which defined humans (i.e. woman and slaves) as commodities. The implementation of women in an evolving fashion and consumption system layered onto that moment and that identification the fragmentation of the human into the sign system of the commodity and the commodity's subsequent appropriation of the "human" as its own "character." As Erlmann points out in his discussion of the African Choir, cloth unmoored from its social and historical definition becomes part of a new system of social signification. Cloth and clothing become a way to order and codify the body into fragments which only become intelligible as commodity forms.

While the allure of the star commodity depended upon creating the impression that she was one of a kind, Gaines cites Richard Dyer's important assertion that, in fact, the star always circulates as a type.⁷³ So, even though the fashion model was by no means a star, the two types shared a similar relationship to the commodity.

"Mannequins," as the first models were called, probably were used first around 1857. But the French couturier known as Lucille (hired by Florenz Ziegfeld in 1915 to do costumes for his Follies), was the first to deploy them in startling new marketing strategies which seemed to appropriate from the underlying human "person" those fragments which would best animate the commodity. When most stores were still displaying clothes in their

⁷³ Ibid., 200.

windows by draping them over chairs or inanimate figures, Lucille set the cloth into motion, draped over the bodies of living women who, in turn, surfaced only in the fluid identifications with the commodity they inhabited.

Traditionally, in displays featuring new fashions, each gown was assigned a number. Lucille, instead, gave each gown a whole sentence which evoked a compelling emotional state. Some of these names, for instance, were "Do you love me?," "A Frenzied Song of Amorous Things," and "Passion's Thrall."⁷⁴ Eventually, Lucille developed elaborate pageants like Seven Ages of Woman (1909), in which the dresses worn by a society woman enact her life's course. Each age was identified by the names given to the gowns which were featured in it, for instance, "The Schoolgirl," or "The Hostess."⁷⁵ The gowns have identity, emotional and psychic resonance, transposed from the characteristically "human" traits which might otherwise have belonged to the mannequin, to the commodity. The moving body of the mannequin underneath the gown served merely to set into motion the gown's meanings.

Nancy Troy, likewise, describes the close connections between the fluid identities and spectacularizations of the theatre and the commercial interests of the fashion industry. Often the haute couturiers cultivated close relationships with actresses, giving them gifts of street clothes and perfumes from their personal design lines. Troy cites one instance in which the designer Poiret gave the actress Spinelli the gift of redoing her

⁷⁴ Joel H. Kaplan and Sheila Stowell, *Theatre and Fashion: Oscar Wilde to the Suffragettes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 119.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.

apartment with the themes of his perfume, "Le Fruit defendu." In a subsequent photo of Spinelli, she is standing, in an exquisitely posed skirt and hairstyle, with her stomach pressed against a mural on the wall of her apartment, her mouth posed to eat of what must be the "forbidden fruit" that the tree offers. In Troy's reading of this scene, "the interior [of her apartment] became a theatrical space in which she, an actress dressed provocatively in a halter-top and skirt designed by Poiret, enacted the erotic emplotment of his fruit-scented perfume."⁷⁶ The actress animates the plot which the commodity narrates as the conditions of its sale.

The Ziegfeld Follies went even further in using the female performer principally as a means to "breath the life of the market into the commodity."⁷⁷ Linda Mizejewski tells us that, in what she calls the "Ziegfeld stage-as-department-store,"⁷⁸

Another unique mark of the Ziegfeld mise-en-scene was the costume that represented another commodity . . . In some of their best-known production numbers, Ziegfeld showgirls formed lines of Cartier jewelry, posed as fashion accessories and brand-name drinks . . . Showgirls represented lingerie, corsets, jewels, furs . . . In the Frolics of 1919, they paraded as gems in the "Beautiful Jewels" number and as items in a bridal trousseau in "Laceland." The Ziegfeld girl . . . was an influential early

⁷⁶ Nancy J. Troy, "The Theatre of Fashion: Staging Haute Couture in Early 20th-Century France," *Theatre Journal* 53, no. 1 (March, 2001): 5.

⁷⁷ Johnson, 62.

⁷⁸ Linda Mizejewski, *Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 91.

version of the exchange of self for commodity.⁷⁹

Nor was this spectacularization of the female as the breath and motion of the commodity confined to the cutting edge of the closely knit constellation of marketing/theatre/fashion in New York city. William Leach reports on a street festival conducted by city merchants in a town in South Dakota in the 1890s. Live mannequins were displayed in booths and "wore the goods being sold, some women covered with strawberries, oranges, and nuts and crackers, others adorned with diamonds, silks, and satins, Haviland china, and even miniature typewriters."⁸⁰

Not only couturier designers but also department stores, restaurants and pleasure gardens seemed to rely on the theatre as a prototype for the labile identity, and investment in the body which fashion and marketing began to use and use very well. As retail barons sought innovative means to secure a profit on a vast array of consumer goods, the theatre began to lend their environments its own changing spectacle. The leading theatre designers of the early period of the twentieth century, Joseph Urban (the principle designer for Ziegfeld), Lee Simonson and Norman Bel Geddes all designed enthusiastically for consumer interiors; themed environments extravagantly akin to the entertainment retail environments described in this dissertation.

Urban declared his intentions for both theatre and retail design as creating spaces that people "could vicariously inhabit."⁸¹ Unlike the painted backdrops which had

⁷⁹ Mizejewski, 2, 96.

⁸⁰ William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 58.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 144.

characterized theatre design, Urban and others worked for a new kind of absorbing three dimensionality. For instance, in a "scene" which anticipates the Reinholder mansion Ralph Lauren store, the "House Palatial" at Wanamaker's, opened in 1908, was a "real," two-story, twenty-four-room dwelling set right into the middle of the store. Leach comments that

It could have been lifted right off a Belasco or Mackaye stage. It held-- among other features--staircases, a butler's pantry, a servant's dining quarters, an Elizabethan library decorated with tiger skins, a Jacobean dining room, a Louis XIV salon, and even a large Italian garden off the dining room. The set was decoratively lighted and looked lived in, with books tossed about and golf clubs propped against the walls. Complete assemblings of furniture, drapery, and art taken from departments throughout the store were set up in every room.²²

In themed environments like the Paradise Room of the Reisenweber Hotel's Restaurant, the commodity could become spectacular, a spectacle which, like a great cave of glittering slagmites and stalactites, welcomed consumers deep into its hollow interior.

I remarked at the beginning of the chapter that, in tracing this history, I found not the end of one cultural formation and the beginning of another but, rather, echoes, partial erasures, palimpsests, returns. These last examples of the twentieth century's developments of the collaboration between performance and capital are especially

²² Leach, 80.

evocative of the ways which, in the preceding four hundred years, capital developed spectacle, and taught people to see and feel with the heart of the commodity.

Leach describes a fashion show in the store theatre in Wannamaker's in 1908 called "Fashion Fete de Paris." Designed to evoke the court of Napoleon and Josephine, the walls were lined with huge picture frames. Inside each frame was a posed mannequin wearing the latest Parisian fashion. When the spotlight shone on a frame, the mannequin inside came to life, stepping out of the frame and onto a runway while the impresario, Mary Wall, narrated a sales pitch for the gown worn by that mannequin. Stephen Orgel has made the important point that the picture frame

comes into being when paintings become commodities, objects to be bought and collected. Thus paintings are framed in gold not because gold has anything to do with the particular picture, but because paintings are valuable; the frame objectifies and symbolizes the investment. A framed painting is possessed, limited, defined; and what it depicts becomes an epitome, life in miniature and under control.⁴³

The mannequin in the frame, like Angellica, the prostitute in Behn's *The Rover*, the actress on the stage, is property. The frame, or the proscenium arch, or the framing scenery on the Restoration stage, all signify that the contents have exchange value and can be circulated on the marketplace for the right price. All this is part of the content of the show at Wanamaker's. But there is also a difference. Stepping out of the picture frame,

⁴³ Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1991), 21.

the twentieth century mannequins are literally performing the movement of the commodity out into the marketplace, showing its curves, its drape, its emotional qualities. The excess, the sexuality, the gross acquisitiveness and proteanism attributed to women throughout the growth of capitalism is here receiving its ultimate management. The woman no longer exists. All that she is has been redirected into the clothes, the commodity, where it is aesthetized, narrated, and choreographed.

In another show at Wanamaker's, in 1917, a fashion show was staged based on the theme of Mayan culture, which was the hot fashion at the time. All through the theatre, glass cases exhibited products culled from Indian "motifs." There were "purses with Mayan embroidery, cushions made from Indian blankets, parasols copied from Indian ponchos."⁴⁴ And further, the show exhibited "authentic" Mayan women, placed throughout the theatre in front of photographs of their home, and enacting different aspects of Mayan culture. Similarly, in the many department store theatre extravaganzas based on the hit book and Broadway show, The Garden of Allah, groups of Arab men who had been recruited for the Broadway show were now recruited to walk through the "Oriental" environments of the store theatre, conferring upon the spectacle and its commodities their authenticity. Museums were also part of the trend toward employing the "exotic," hoping in a simultaneous move to civilize it, manage it, categorize it and also to breathe its strangeness into products. Stewart Culin, the curator of the Brooklyn Museum in 1925 took, as Leach says, "the unusual step of bringing the dream life of

⁴⁴ Leach, 103.

capitalism into the Brooklyn Museum."⁴⁵ He took a part of the museum and created the "Rainbow House" in which he exhibited objects and clothing from across the world. Simultaneously designing the "Palace of Fashion" in Philadelphia with an "oriental" theme, he borrowed the immersive design techniques from the commercial world and applied them to his museum. Each part of the world represented in the museum was lit in different colorful tones, by means of which he hoped to "bring the objects to life."⁴⁶

Leach compares the two as

accessorized spaces [which] play out some of Culin's favorite themes--his desire to expose Americans to the "vitality" of the "primitive" and the "childlike," and to find refuge from the "deadly grind" in preindustrial dreams and fantasies. Both spaces revealed the cultural power of the commercial world. In the Rainbow House commercial methods were enlisted to exhibit the primitive; in the Palace of Fashion the primitive was exhibited to enhance the appeal of the commercial.⁴⁷

Culin's desire to "bring the objects to life" resonates with Stallybrass' and Jones' powerful argument that our materialistic culture is not material enough. The essence of capitalism is that objects (including, of course, clothing), are exchangeable, and dispensable. They are separated from the meanings, roots, the deep associations that cultures in pre-capitalist societies gave them. What Culin does is the essence of

⁴⁵ Ibid., 324.

⁴⁶ Leach, 324.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 326.

fetishization, the relation people in advanced capitalism have to objects. He takes objects which have no place, which are truly homeless, merely fragments whose original matrix is long disappeared, and, by moving them into the marketplace with its techniques for spectacle and display, makes them appear to "live."

We have seen in the earlier section on the exhibition of Africans and also of slavery that the development of capital was dependent upon, first, a sense of ownership of the other attained by looking at him, making him perform. The other is layed out into a surface, the interior displayed, colonized, but then reinvested with the saleable qualities which have been extracted from her. In the world-as exhibition, which capital develops with a constancy and a sophistication that does not lapse, the real becomes a superfluous category. We come to see as the market sees. Mayan women, Arab men, the clothes which imitate the traditional clothing of Mayan women and manifest them in a commodity form which will be discarded when the next fashion arrives, the Zuni or African artifacts, mute and dull but reinvested with the traits about their past which the forces of the market, of fashion, imagine; in all of these there is the "human," but only as alibi, as the story the market whispers in our ears.

From 1917, 1925 to 1999 is not such a big leap. The story of The Lion King and the Disney store covered in the next chapter reiterates all these themes. But all the chapters detail what is perhaps the key innovation of the late twentieth century partnership between performance and the market: that is, the absorption of the consumer

herself as animator of the commodity, the one who steps into the fiction, the one who succumbs bodily to the pleasures of the imagination. For, as we shall see, in the late twentieth century, the imagination of the consumer is key. It is important, as I will argue, that we not dismiss the imagination as a secondary occupation for leisure time. It has come to be constitutive of capitalist social organization, and this has and is occurring in the interstices of performance and the market. But the history of performance and capitalism shows that proteanism--the agreement to play with multiple selves--the circulation of people and objects as commodities, the changing relationship between interiority and exteriority, the Enlightenment refiguring of subjectivity into surface, the refiguring of the human not so much as commodity but as that which enlivens the commodity, the carapace into which the human disappears; all of this shifts and moves and bubbles to the surface in the scenes I will examine next.

Chapter Three

The Lion King: Retail Theatre for the 1990s

An ad in the program for the The Lion King, Julie Taymor's stage version of the original Disney film, which opened in November, 1997 at the New Amsterdam Theatre in New York, reads, "Enjoy your audience with the King. And remember, even in the jungle, American Express helps you do more."¹ What is so striking about this ad is not only its blatant construction of the mutually beneficial relationship between theatre and the market, but also that it places audience members bodily inside the fiction of the musical. They are not merely an audience watching the lion king Mufasa on a stage, they are in the play, enjoying his audience. The market, in the form of American Express, has a clear commercial interest in encouraging consumers to slide from their actual location as spectators of a show to fictional participant in the stage drama, which, in this case, is a multi-million dollar commodity.

The Lion King and its relationship to the adjacent Disney store² is an excellent study of the ways in which capital has further developed its centuries long relationship to performance, mimesis, and the body. In the postmodern period, it is not enough to encourage consumers to possess a commodity; we must be compelled to merge into the commodity as its life force. The market depends on the commodity's kinesthetic claim on the mimetic imagination of consumers; we desire to be bodily like the commodity. It waits for us to bring it to life.

¹ Stagebill, The Lion King, The New Amsterdam Theatre, New York, November, 1997, 28.

² Since this chapter was written, massive construction has been underway at the site which was formerly the Disney Store. Therefore, the formation of store into theatre which I've described in this chapter does not currently exist.

The "new Times Square:" Global Placelessness and Cartoon Mimesis

The "new Times Square" is an area between 42nd street, Broadway, and 7th Avenue in New York. It is "new" because it replaces what was seen as a deteriorated neighborhood, overtaken by X-rated businesses. The "new Times Square" is envisioned by corporate interests and the city of New York as prime model of that conjunction of the theatrical resonance of an environment with its value as a marketplace which is increasingly common in postmodern geographies of consumption and known as "entertainment retail."³ After an earlier plan to revitalize the area by making it an mecca for office towers failed, the 42nd St. Development Corporation was formed and "redefined the project by emphasizing Times Square's historic connection to entertainment and retailing."⁴ Christine Boyer describes this connection as follows: "Once Times Square [the Great White Way] was celebrated around the world as a vibrant theater district bathed in a flood of electric lights. A vital crossroads, it combined a communications and media center with a theater and movie district, hotels, restaurants and bars, office towers, and nearby garment showrooms and factories."⁵

The current plan moves this historical resonance of pleasure, leisure and spectacle into a corporate key, deftly merging entertainment with retail at this site treasured for the advertising revenues it earns from the millions of tourists who visit it each year. The director for real estate at the Shubert Theatre Organization says, "The office market had died in the 1990s, but retail was doing great. We had the Broadway theaters. There were 16 million people a year--the same number of

³ See especially *Architectural Record*, March 1997, 90-115.

⁴ Charles V. Bagli and Randy Kennedy, "Disney Wished Upon Times Square and Rescued a Stalled Dream," *New York Times*, 5 April 1998, sec. 1, p. 1.

⁵ Christine Boyer, "Cities for Sale," in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 195.

people who went to Disney World--going through Times Square. All the elements of what became known as urban entertainment were here."⁶

The Disney Corporation became the cornerstone of the Times Square vision of the mutual profitability of the theatre and the market. Disney was courted by New York city's mayor, Rudolph Guiliani, and the corporation's agreement to renovate the New Amsterdam theatre and open its store was contingent, among other things, on considerable tax breaks, low interest loans, and contracts guaranteeing other corporate presences in the area, among them an American Madame Tussauds and the AMC theatre chain.⁷

The perceived decay of the Times Square theatre district formed the central justifying logic of its rehabilitation by corporate interests and provided the figure of an empty body which was to be reinhabited and redefined. On an early foray into the area with a video camera, a Disney executive said of the location, "It wasn't so much that it was scary, it was dead. It was this odd street in the center of the city where there was almost no life."⁸ To figure a city street in such a way is to prepare the ideological grounding for its colonization. Steve Nelson points out that the Disney occupation of The New Amsterdam may be only the first instance of a long ranging Disney plan to reoccupy old theatres across America in order to re-issue them as venues which attract consumers in the same ways as do Disney theme parks. Nelson writes,

This shift from commercial development to street-level entertainment zone provides the perfect climate for Disney's version of 42nd Street: a formerly indigenous theatrical district transformed into a romantically idealized tourist version of its

⁶ Bagli and Kennedy, 38.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

former self. The enterprise fits perfectly with Disney's usual practice of taking architecture, costumes, and other trappings of different eras and cultures and melding them into theme park and movie entertainments that are safe and accessible, yet still enticing, to a mass audience.⁹

The old, decayed body of Times Square is reinvigorated by Disney but, importantly, those who will consume this new environment are not local New Yorkers but tourists. As Nelson points out, "Disney's approach is to exploit theater as another option on the tourist agenda, expanding on a fact that Broadway producers have known for years--locals don't go, tourists do."¹⁰ As in the quote above from Robertson of the Shubert Theatre Organization, the target consumer is the traveler to, across and through this "global crossroads."¹¹ The square is strategized as a key global advertising site where "20 million visitors a year take pictures with signs as a backdrop."¹² Jeffrey Katz of Sherwood Equities says, "The theme is there are very few global formats. There are no global magazines or television. But Times Square is a global image format."¹³ Comments from Mayor Gulianni, defending his relationship with Disney as invaluable, world-wide public relations, highlight the presence in Times Square, not of native New Yorkers, but of the global tourist: "You can't buy this kind of advertising. This says to people all over the world, 'Come to New York. It's a friendly place.'"¹⁴

The construction of Times Square as a global crossroads, populated by transglobal corporations catering to visitors on the move, begins the process of severing Times Square from its geographical, social and historical coordinates. This

⁹ Steve Nelson, "Broadway and the Beast: Disney Comes to Times Square," *The Drama Review* 39 (T146): Summer, 1995, 83.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹¹ *New York Times*, 29 October 1997, sec. B, p.10.

¹² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴ *New York Times*, 15 June 1997, sec. 1, p. 27.

process, enhanced by the representation of the city through interchangeable corporate imagery, creates what Michael Sorkin calls "antigeographical space."¹⁵ In an antigeographical space it becomes possible for a corporate entity like Disney to transcend the cultural and geographical specificities of a location. As a result, the vision of the corporation overwhelms the materiality of place. As Sorkin says, "[The corporation's] aura is all pervasive."¹⁶

This alchemy, which produces multiple locations in the image of a corporation, produces a worldwide equivalence of place which creates what Sorkin calls "universal placelessness."¹⁷ Sorkin argues that the traditional city is being colonized by a multinational pathway along which a perpetually moving consumer travels, and along which each place becomes much the same as any other, undifferentiated by the corporate aura which each shares, and, he adds, "It's also true that there's probably no more acquiescent subject than the postindustrial tourist."¹⁸

An environment like Times Square, then, re-made in the image of a few powerful corporations, constructs a consumer who, by virtue of separation from the particularities of geography and cultural location, is ready to acquiesce to and absorb a kind of omnipresent corporate culture, which finds its material form in the equally omnipresent and interchangeable bodies of the commodities it sets forth. The postindustrial tourist, in other words, is figured as a consumer ready for an experiential relationship to capital grounded in the array of commodities and the aura of the corporation rather than in the old-fashioned seduction of unknown geographies. The "new Times Square" flaunts the absorption of a city into the fictions of the corporate entertainment conglomerates, located both here and

¹⁵ Michael Sorkin, "See You in Disneyland, " in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 208.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 217.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 230.

everywhere. To come here, to New York, is only to travel to the fictive elsewhere and anywhere of the global corporation.

The "new Times Square" as a global crossroads is a place where internationally recognized corporations converge in a display of dazzling entertainment retail, where the old theatres and the sex trade dissolve into the shimmer of the Disney and Warner Bros. aura. The area, still under construction as the Conde Nast building rises on the corner of Broadway and 7th Avenue, is relatively small and focused on the corner of 42nd street, 7th Avenue and Broadway. What it lacks in geographical breadth, it makes up for in height, knockout images, the brightness of neon and its flash. Standing on the corner of 42nd and 7th Avenue, a tourist has the massive Disney store complex, including the New Amsterdam theatre, to her left while across the street, the Warner Bros. store takes up the entire space between 7th Avenue and Broadway. It is situated in a 25-story building once known as the Times Tower and prized for its excellent position for advertising. Its north face can be seen all the way from Central Park at 59th Street. The images which tower everywhere above this visitor refer to the corporate anywhere of the global entertainment industry as signified by Disney and Warner Bros. To stand here is to suffer the perceptual collapse of the old New York into a kinetically sculptural assemblage of cartoon and entertainment iconography.

The specific form of translation from cultural and geographical specificity to corporate aura which occurs in the "new Times Square" is one which changes the material characteristics of New York city into universally recognizable cartoon images. For instance, Times Square has been renamed by the Warner Bros. Corporation as "Toons Square" with the address of its own building being "1 Toons Square." A bas relief sculpture built into the 42nd Street side of the Warner Bros. store shows the entrance to the "Toons Square Subway" (across the street

from the actual 42nd Street IRT stop) spilling forth its commuters, who have taken the shape of Warner Bros. cartoon characters. Just like the human commuters they have replaced, they carry lunchboxes, newspapers, and exuberantly elbow each other through the crowded passageway. Inside both the Warner Bros. store and the Disney store the icons of New York have been transformed into cartoon characters. Stacks and stacks of Mickie Mouses as the Statue of Liberty, for instance, greet visitors to the Disney Store.

The morphing of the city into a cartoon makes it possible for the commodity to spin a fiction that is to be enacted through the presence of the consumer. This mimetic operation, by which the city is absorbed into and re-rendered as an internationally recognizable commodity, does not stop at the city, but is also a method by which consumer/tourists are absorbed into the commodity, and begin, thereby, to give the commodity life. An advertisement prominently featured both inside and outside of the Warner Bros. store illustrates both the cartoon morphing of Times Square and cartoons as the globally recognizable commodities into which visitors can be absorbed and which they can animate. In one such ad, for instance, the head of Tweetybird fills the billboard on one side and, on the other side, a young girl is wearing a shirt emblazoned with the head of Tweetybird. Above the shirt her face mimics the expression that Tweetybird characteristically wears. It is as if by costuming herself as, or becoming like Tweetybird, she is infused with the life of Tweetybird, who is, after all, a commodity. Her expression is the expressiveness of the commodity. The words "Show your character" are written on a blank blue area between the two images. The ad plays on the meanings of character as both the unique properties belonging to the individual, and a persona that is adopted through theatrical (mimetic) play. The girl's character, her individuality, morphs into the theatrical character(istics) of a commodity by which she is therefore animated. Her character

is Tweetybird's. Inside the store itself, the images differ, but the message is the same. In another ad, for instance, a girl "shows her character" by wearing a baseball cap which is decorated by Tweetybird's eyes. The cap is pulled down so that instead of seeing her eyes, we see Tweetybird's eyes taking their place. To have "character," it seems, you must perform the life of the commodity.

In entertainment retail environments, exemplified in the "new Times Square," the emphasis is not so much on the organization of commodities for visual display as on the suggestion that the consumer, like the city, can become one with the commodity, join her identity to its, in a fabulous play of bodily mimesis. As Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto writes,

The rise of Disneyland and other theme parks is inseparable from the inadequacy of the cinema as the image apparatus fulfilling the demand of newly emerging consumer audiences. In the age of high consumerism, the image is transformed into the commodity-image, which is not merely the object of perception but that of tactile experiences. The consumption of the commodity-image is realized not just by passively seeing it but by actively participating in the interactive play of perception and consumption. And in the age of transnational capitalism and economic blocks in which we not live, [there is the] desire to simulate the fantasy as the object of comprehensive experience.¹⁹

In this new three-dimensional, post-filmic marketplace, it is not through the commodity, but *as* the commodity that experience is possible.

If traditional mass market capitalism banked on commodities which allowed consumers to fantasize that through the use of the commodity they could fulfill some image of themselves, then this newer, postmodern capitalism banks on

¹⁹ Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, "Images of Empire," in *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom*, ed. Eric Smoodin (New York: Routledge, 1994), 188.

positioning the commodity as a gap, an absence, a costume. Animated when a person steps into the gap, or the costume, the commodity then appears to take on a life of its own, and fill the person who inhabits it with its energies, its exuberance. This mimetic interchange between person and commodity is key to some expressions of post-modern capitalism and is clear in the new Times Square, where it is facilitated by the erasure of geographical specificity in favor of corporate placelessness and the morphing of space. The global tourist in Toon Square, then, encounters capital as a mimetic thing, capable of many shapes, capable of remaking material culture in its own image. This experience extends itself into The Lion King, which offers its own reprise of the global crossroads, sung in the key of cultural production--world beat and Afrophile images. It offers its own formulation of how the theatre and the market work together in the new universal placelessness of global culture and how the tourist visiting this site is drawn into a mimetic relationship with the commodities on parade here.

Laying the Groundwork for Retail Theatre: High Art and The Lion King

Taymor's stage production of The Lion King, which opened in November, 1997, translated the flat, broad surfaces of the animated film into intricately detailed costumes, extravagant and complex color patterns, and breathtakingly impressive stage design. The main characters are all played by humans carrying elaborate carapaces, the skeletal outlines or shapes of the animals they are to represent. In the first moment of the show, the animals of the savannah, the subjects of the lion king Mufasa, move through the audience to gather on stage at Pride Rock, the center of Mufasa's empire. Each animal is a marvel of puppetry. The giraffes are people who wear stilts on all fours with their faces just visible below the giraffe's long neck and head, which is worn like a hat by the actor. The

gazelles are mounted, three to one actor, on the head and both arms, while the actor at the center is painted in their shades and patterns. The actor leaps, gazelle-like. The earth and the air is filled with huge moving puppets, all exquisitely beautiful. The main characters, the lion family, wear masks mounted above their human faces and are dressed in the textiles and designs of Africa. The stage on which all the animals assemble is beautiful and mutates throughout the remaining show into moving savannah grasslands, a stampede of wildebeests, an exotic jungle of flowers come to life, an elephant graveyard.

The musical tells the story of a young lion, Simba, the son of the king, Mufasa. A mischievous cub, he continually gets into trouble. His uncle, the villain Scar, takes advantage of the cub's disobedient curiosity to lead him astray. He offers to show him the elephant graveyard and, once there, sets his minions, the hyenas, in pursuit of Simba. Simba is lost and gets caught in a wildebeest stampede. His father finds out, goes to rescue him, and Scar kills Mufasa just as Mufasa is about to save Simba. In the second half, Simba, in the company of his two comic cohorts, Timon and Pumbaa, a meerkat and warthog, grows to young manhood. He is only occasionally haunted by the memory of the events of his childhood as he plays with his companions and sings, "Hakuna Mutata," or "no worries." Eventually the young lioness Nala, his childhood playmate, who has been victimized by Scar, comes in search of him to bring him home to the starving Pridelands, desperate under Scar's rule. Simba comes back with her, defeats Scar, takes his rightful place as ruler of the Pridelands, and produces, with Nala, a new little lion heir, thus completing the reproductive circle, known in the production as "the circle of life."

Taymor, who has a long-standing reputation as an experimental theatre artist, is at pains to separate her work from the film. She says, "I wanted audiences to be released from their memories of the film right from the start, to

take a leap of faith and imagination. At every turn I was looking for that which would make this Lion King a live theater event and not a duplication of the film onstage."²⁰ The production does achieve a distinctly theatrical identity and it achieves this through its mimetic beauty: before the very eyes of the audience people become savannahs of waving grasses, fantastic insects, flying dancers, dancing gazelles. But even this mimesis, as I will argue, is ultimately implicated in the reproduction of Disney's commodity driven logic.

Structurally the stage production tends to follow the film, which is itself a musical and tends to copy conventional tropes of the generic Broadway musical. For instance, the production, like the film, tends to foreclose on any approaching emotional complexity, ambiguity, or pain by causing characters to burst into a song and dance number which ends in a roar of audience applause. When Simba goes into exile, for instance, his moment of loneliness is quickly dissipated by his encounter with the two comics who seem to miraculously dispel his gloom by drawing him into "Hakuna Mutata," the song and dance number which elucidates their carefree philosophy. The experience of exile, for both Simba and Nala, is only skimmed, never explored in any depth. But in her program notes, Taymor speaks in a much more profound rhetoric of prodigal sons, natural cycles, exile, spirituality. Here, in just one example, she reveals some of the emotional complexities she believes herself to be infusing into The Lion King: "In the film, Nala leaves home to search for food and everyone expects her to return. In the musical, she goes into exile, a departure that evokes deep sadness, loneliness, and permanence." ²¹

Taymor's emphasis on the theatre as a medium for artistry, complexity and depth, regardless of the actual effects of the production, sets the stage, so to

²⁰ Stagebill, The Lion King, The New Amsterdam Theatre, New York, November, 1997, 30.

²¹ Ibid., 30.

speak, for Disney's incorporation of the theatre as another aspect of its marketplace. Those characteristics of the theatre which are Taymor's vision for her production become an advertisement for a new Disney-with-depth, even as conventional structures of both Disney's film product and the Broadway show are reproduced. This rhetoric of complexity and artistry, and the mimetic beauty of the production, then, become a kind of alibi for the commodified Disney context in which the production takes place. It establishes a circulatory system between cultural products which are thought to be above commodification, in the Modernist tradition, and the commodity.

This rhetoric is strengthened materially by the architecture and design of both the theatre and the adjacent Disney store. The restored decor of the theatre repeats the elements of Disney design. Like the Disney store, the theatre is saturated in the kind of fanciful, mythical sculptural detail in bold color schemes which tends to characterize retail environments, including Disney stores, which seek to achieve an immersive effect whereby all sensual impressions are designed and directed with a great deal of skill to lead the consumer ever more deeply into the world of the store.

The link between the art object and the commodity is also elaborated by the fact that the Disney store is directly connected to the theatre. Before the show and at intermission, a set of double doors at the back of the orchestra lobby opens directly into the Disney store. At the opening of the production, when the animals file toward the stage from the back of the theatre, they appear to be coming from the store, which is filled with various kinds of reproductions of Mufasa and the animals in his kingdom. It is as if the commodities in the store came to life and paraded into the theatre, morphing along the way from mass produced products into modernist art objects, magic in motion. As critic Linda Winer says about the stage version of The Lion King, "Don't worry. All the animals from the 75 minute

animated film are present and identifiable—though most of the cute little cartoon friends have been wildly reimagined in intentionally clashing styles."²² In the course of this procession, which seems to move from store to theatre, the commodity both dramatizes its life-like-ness, and assumes the patina of art. Art, as I have said, is the alibi for the exhibition of the living, mutable commodity. This is The Lion King's key accomplishment for the Disney Corporation.

Critical discourse around the production also helps to facilitate this transmutation of high art into commodity and vice versa. Comparing the other Disney produced Broadway show, Beauty and the Beast, to The Lion King, Winer argues that Beauty and the Beast is a mere commodity while The Lion King combines both theatre as high art and "Disneyfication" to the mutual benefit of each.

When Disney made its first assault on Broadway with "Beauty and the Beast" we were dispirited by the laziness of sprawling corporate-culture ambition. Instead of some state-of-the-art Hollywood wizardry or even ordinary modern Broadway know-how, the best we got from the legendary entertainment giant was a tracing paper blow-up of a cartoon hit—just creaky old children's theater at Broadway prices. That show is in its fourth year now, with cash-happy clones around the planet, and Disney would seem to have no possible reason to change the formula. With the world flattened into one big sanitized theme park the theater district must be just a few real-estate deals from being one more pre-fab ride. But time out. Hold on to your Mickey souvenirs. Disney opened "The Lion King" and both the show and the playhouse are enchanting. If this is the dreaded Disneyfication, well, come on down. Disney has

²² Linda Winer, "Lion King Leads a Magical, Rich Jungle Parade," *New York Newsday*, 17 November 1997, B3.

taken a huge risk and dug far into the theatre's parallel universe to hire the unlikely Julie Taymor, visionary director-designer of rarefied folkloric extravaganzas. If this is Disney's idea of a theme park, however, we are delighted to report that the theme is quality.²³

Winer's description of Beauty and the Beast as one aspect of a spreading, corporate theme park which is about to infect Broadway positions her well inside the modernist camp whose adherents, as opposed to many postmodernists, vilify commodity culture as the enemy of art. But she reworks that modernist position, not by reneging on her loyalty to art, but by arguing that if commodification is suffused by real artistry, here in the form of "visionary" Julie Taymor, commodification is not only okay, but maybe offers the best of both worlds; we can experience visionary art while at the same time clutching our Mickey souvenirs.

The use of art as an alibi for the reproduction of the commodity, while fully developed and expressed through Taymor's production, is a theme which Disney explores elsewhere as well. In the Disney store on Staten Island, for example, a generic store in a generic suburban mall, there is a kind of inner sanctum. This room, like the New Amsterdam theatre, has a domed ceiling with a mural and is distinguished by the gilt framed video monitor which echoes the gilt frame of the New Amsterdam's proscenium. The dome in the store evokes cathedral paintings, with the Mickey dressed as a wizard taking God's place, and prancing minotaurs replacing the angels. The entrance itself is flanked by faux Medieval stone architecture and coat-of-arms. Both of these metaphors, royalty and theology, confer an aura of distinction to the room, which, it turns out, is supposed to be a kind of art gallery. This is the room where limited editions are

²³ Ibid.

sold. Images of cartoon characters, here recast in expensive porcelain or limited edition animation cells, are displayed in cases or on walls. Just as in an art gallery, binders holding information on the animation artists are laid out on the stands. The space seems intended to produce an authentic and original Disney product. The gilt framed video monitor introduces us to Walt, the originating "artist."

The Disney store on 42nd Street has a similar room, and it is in this room that memorabilia from the production are sold. When I first saw the production, in previews in November of 1997, the memorabilia were limited to tee shirts, mugs and programs emblazoned with the image of Mufasa as a kind of golden cut-out which has become the signature image of the production. Since then, however, the room has changed. It now functions partially as an art gallery, exhibiting some of Taymor's original models for the characters in The Lion King. Next to the cases which hold these originals are stacked hundreds of four types of beanie-babies. These are not exactly from the show but recall the show. A \$10 souvenir, they echo the production's primitivist motif; they are whimsical and extremely attractive versions of made-up African trickster characters named Tricksters 1, 2, 3 and 4. They sport the same kind of brilliantly colored and extravagantly designed mask and body costume as the bodies on stage. Mixed in with these "original" reproductions are the usual stuffed animals, playsuits replicated from the film version, and tee shirts for children which sport a little Lion Cub and the words, "My first Broadway show."

This room preserves the image of "art" in the form of the original models, but eases visitors through the transition from singular art object to reproduced commodity and back again. The room neither confirms nor denies the ascendancy of the art object, but preserves the commodity alongside the original. The commodity which, after all, must retain enough allure to be purchased, receives that allure from the original.

When the double doors in the store open so that members of the audience can circulate between the theatre and the store, it is the theatre which becomes the inner sanctum of the store. It is in the theatre that the Disney commodity fully re-assumes the aura of the art object and the two become seamlessly identified. Inside the theatre, a one-of-a-kind visionary, in this case not Walt but Julie Taymor, confers an artistic valuation upon the stage objects which are, at the same time, transposed into the commodified meanings with which they circulate, as they move back into the store and out into the world in the form of reproduced commodities.

Mimesis, Primitivism and Children: How The Lion King "Moves" Commodities

When the parade of puppets enters the theatre from the area of the Disney store, they are, as I have said, dramatizing the life-like-ness of commodities; they seem to make the commodities in the store come alive. They dramatize the circulatory system which forms the Disney marketplace; store into theatre, theatre into store. For Taymor, however, her puppets are neither related to Disney commodities, nor do they subsume the human performer. On the contrary, one of the ways in which Taymor differentiates her production from the Disney film is that in the stage version, the humans who are animating the puppets are visible. She says, "Audiences relish the artifice behind the theater. When we see a person actually manipulating an inanimate object like a puppet and making it come alive, the duality moves us. Hidden special effects can lack humanity, but when the human spirit visibly animates an object, we experience a special, almost life-giving connection."²⁴ When Taymor stakes her claim in the presence of the

²⁴ Stagebill, The Lion King, The New Amsterdam Theatre, New York, November, 1997, 31.

human body as against the special effects used in the medium of film, it might be argued that she is recognizing and resisting the extent to which film, and in particular animation, has contributed to the fetishization of objects, the sense that things have a life of their own.²⁵ She insists upon the visibility of a specific form of human production or labor, which is precisely what is obfuscated by the commodity form.

In The Lion King, however, the theatre is so thoroughly saturated with market forces that it is already overdetermined by the market's meanings. Regardless of the alibi that their status as art objects has constructed for them, the puppets who are to provide "life-giving connection" are already Disney commodities, in the form of their film parents whose images are very nearly ubiquitous, and in the form of their reproductions in the Disney store. To the extent that the puppets are already commodities, the human beings who make them move are, far from representing the spiritual force of humanity, subsumed by the commodity just as are the humans who animate Tweetybird. The commodity becomes the dominant image, the more vital and life-like image, the fetish which has absorbed the productive power of the human. In order to achieve this translation of human productive capacity into the apparently independent "spirit" of the commodity--the fetish--the production performs an elaborate representation of what might be called a "primitive" mimesis.

Taymor's assertion of the human agency which animates her puppets must be placed within the context of two opposed and contradictory understandings of fetishism and mimesis, one belonging to "primitive" cultures and the other belonging to capitalist cultures.²⁶ It is through an understanding of this context

²⁵ See Kline's discussion of the emergence of "product-tie-in animation," in Stephen Kline, *Out of the Garden: Toys and Children's Culture in the Age of TV* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), 138-139.

²⁶ I use the slippery and politically reprehensible term "primitive" here intentionally in order to elicit from it a critical productiveness. I want to preserve the critique that the characterization of

that it becomes clear how the production follows a key modernist tendency; the fetish of the "primitive" is appropriated, along with the mimetic processes which animate it, while at the same time, the fetish is translated into a commodity.

The interplay between human and animal in The Lion King, the human body glimpsed even as it disappears into the gazelle's leap, is certainly a representation of the "primitive" mimesis which Michael Taussig attempts to recuperate as a radically rejuvenative practice. As I've outlined in the introductory chapter, for Taussig, mimesis is "an ineffable plasticity in the face of the world's form and forms of life . . . A protean self with multiple images of itself set in a natural environment whose animals, plants, and elements are spiritualized to the point that nature 'speaks back' to humans."²⁷ This mimesis can be theorized as an antidote to what he calls "the banking mode of perception,"²⁸ whereby sensory experience in capitalism is stored up and squirreled away in the form of private property. Mimesis is a way of relating to objects by entering into them rather than by dominating and accumulating them. As such, mimesis is far more than an act of copying. It is also an experience of contact, and mutual inter-identification between two beings, whether animate or inanimate.

But Taussig simultaneously notes the very different construction of fetishism in capitalism, a construction which appropriates mimesis in the interest of the commodity. He draws on Marx, who, early in his career, also used the practice of fetishism to help develop a materialist theory of sensuous

some cultures as "primitive" is an imperialist assignation, but also to preserve the category of the "primitive," as Taussig seems to, for the purposes of teasing out difference. Hal Foster also attempts to redeem the category of the "primitive," by using it as a term with which to create a critical difference from the discourse of "primitivism." This he characterizes as follows: "Primitivism not only absorbs the potential disruption of the tribal objects into western forms, ideas and commodities; it also symptomatically manages the ideological nightmare of a great art inspired by spoils." in Hal Foster, *Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985), 199.

²⁷ Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular history of the Senses* (New York, London: Routledge, 1993), 99.

²⁸ Ibid., 99.

relationships to objects, whereby a certain animateness of all things suggests their mutual interrelationship, relation rather than domination, and then went on to use the figure obversley to describe how the capitalist becomes alienated from capital and believes it to be operating of its own volition, outside of human social relations. In this passage, which contrasts the two approaches to fetishism, he writes,

Under capitalism the animate quality of objects is a result of the radical estrangement of the economy from the person. Post-capitalist animism means that although the socioeconomic exploitative function of fetishism will supposedly disappear with the overcoming of capitalism, fetishism as an active social force inherent in objects will remain. Indeed it must not disappear, for it is the animate quality of things in post-capitalist society that ensures what the young Marx envisaged as the humanization of the world.²⁹

According to William Pietz, Marx preserves the "savage subject of religious fetishism"³⁰ as a sort of judge or measure of capitalist fetishism. Pietz writes, "The materialist subject of this radically human ground is located by Marx in the maximally alien perspective of the primitive fetishist, a cultural other for whom material conditions are themselves spiritual values."³¹ The primitive fetishist (along with the proletariat) is able to identify capitalist fetishism because for the primitive fetishist, objects and other forms of life are animate but, unlike the apparently animate commodity, are available for relationships, interchange, a kind of radical intersubjectivity. In the preceding chapter, I've shown how

²⁹ Taussig, 99.

³⁰ William Pietz, "Fetishism and Materialism: The Limits of Theory in Marx," in *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, ed. Emily Apter and William Pietz (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1993), 143.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

Stallybrass and White, also drawing on Marx, likewise posit a pre-capitalist interconnectedness between objects and humans. This "primitive" fetishism, or true materialism, is very different from the possessing relationship to other beings and to objects which characterizes capitalism.

Taymor's production comes enticingly close to representing the post-capitalist utopia that Taussig describes. Her marvelous scenic devices, which in a single sweep transform a group of humans into a savannah of waving grasses, certainly describe a "yielding relation to nature." Her human bodies placed in an almost inextricable interplay with the animal bodies they inhabit are certainly "organized around a playful exchange of difference." The problem is that this utopia is performed, as I have already mentioned, within a system of economic and cultural circulation which mandates the mutation of the "primitive" fetish animated through a radical mimesis into the capitalist commodity. The onstage Mufasa, that marvelous interplay between human and animal body, is a representation of the life-like-ness of its commodity form, the children's playsuit, endlessly replicated on the shelves of the adjacent Disney store. The child who is seduced by the evocation of "primitive" mimesis on stage is directed to copy that mimesis by the presentation of the playsuit, but can only do so through the purchase of an object, a commodity, which she then animates, in a performance of the fetishism of commodities, the belief that commodities have a life of their own. Taymor's mimetic vision becomes, at least in part, an operation of commodity fetishism which receives its vitality from the conjuring of the "primitive."

This evocation of the "primitive" in modernity comes at great cost to those peoples modernity has represented as "primitive." Alarming, when considered from this perspective, all the members of the chorus are black. It is the chorus which performs the most wondrous mimetic feats of the production. In its use of black bodies, Disney apparently hopes to evoke some alleged "primitive-ness" of

Africa and the animals and humans who inhabit it. It is not just any bodies, but black bodies who morph into extravagant foliage, undulating grasslands, the animals of the savannah. These "primitives," the production seems to suggest, are capable of the wonder of mimesis, a beautiful interchange between diverse forms.

But for all the mimetic allure of these bodies appearing with the swaying grasslands of Africa on their heads, they are also the stage machinery. They are the labor which is making the stage picture appear. Here, mimesis is conjured while at the same time subjected to control and domination. The yielding of these bodies into the grasslands of Africa is actually re-creating a trope wherein black bodies labor to produce wealth, extravagance and beauty in the lives of the rulers (in this case both the lions and the members of the audience). The end result is that the bodies are available as commodities for \$75 dollars per ticket.

This simultaneous evocation and erasure of the "primitive" echoes similar practices which have been ongoing in the west at least since imperialist voyages began to "discover" the "savage" at the advent of modernity. Steven Mullaney, for example, tells the story of Henry II's entry into the city of Rouen in 1550. In preparation for this entry a meadow on the Seine was transformed into a Brazilian forest, replete with life-like details, including villages with "primitive" inhabitants, both native Brazilians and costumed Frenchmen. Although the attention to detail and the expense devoted to this "production" were both immense, the environment was burned down in a fiction involving a battle between two competing villages. As Mullaney points out, the ultimate point of this installation was not to understand the "primitive" or to affirm it, but to erase it.³² As the brilliant, beautiful and unimaginably expensive extravagance of Taymor's production devolves into the Simba playsuits hanging in endless reproduction in the adjacent Disney store, it is easy to see the another version of the scene in

³² Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988).

Rouen. But rather than literally burning the "primitive" up, the "primitive" is converted to a mass-produced commodity which sells itself by whispering echoes of the primitive, promising that the commodity is an animist object, alive, enterable, capable of animating the consumer with its living energies.

Hal Foster's analysis of the modernist appropriation of African art in the Picasso exhibition at MOMA can illuminate the relationship between mimetic allure and commodification. He says,

Meanwhile, the tribal object with its ritual/symbolic exchange value was put on display, reinscribed in terms of exhibition/sign exchange value. In this way, the potential disruption posed by the tribal work--that art might reclaim a ritual function, that it might retain an ambivalence of the sacred object or gift and not be reduced to the equivalence of the commodity--was blocked. And the African fetish, which represents a different social exchange, became another kind of fetish: the "magical" commodity.³³

As in the Picasso exhibit, in Taymor's production, the African trope is summoned in order to evoke the original allure of the "primitive" fetish; its suggestion of the "palpable, sensuous connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived."³⁴ But just as in the MOMA exhibition, the African is positioned as a commodity with exchange value, thereby erasing the promise of its "primitivism." The beanie babies in the store are mock-ups of the "primitive" fetish object. They both evoke, and literally mock, the "primitive" which is their inspiration. As puppets, animated by human beings and parading up to the stage of the New Amsterdam theatre, they become "magical," commodities which move on their own, saturated with the aura of the natural "primitive" world and the animals who are situated as part of that world. Taussig might be describing these

³³ Hal Foster, *Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985), 193.

³⁴ Taussig, 21.

puppets when he writes, "Truly, the commodity economy has displaced persons, if not into things, then into copies of things flaring with a life of their own, briefly animated (as Disney has taught us) by animal life stirring in the thickets of an ever-receding lost nature."³⁵

Any visit to a Disney store confirms the infusion of the principles of animism and mimesis into objects which can only be approached as commodities. Everywhere there is an invitation to an interchangeability of forms which ultimately serves to animate commodities. The toys in any Disney store invite enactment. The child consumer is seduced with the notion that he or she might act as Pocohantus, the "primitive" in a pristine natural setting just on the cusp of a benign white invasion, or a baby lion, heir to mastery of the natural world. The costumes hanging everywhere in the stores invite children to perform as the commodified cartoon characters, both animal and human. At the Staten Island Disney store, I asked a little girl who was trying on a Snow White costume why she wanted to wear the costume and she said, "To try and try and try to be a princess."

The convergence of the "primitive," mimesis, animals, and the address to the child consumer has long been central to the Disney corporation. In fact, Disney has built its corporate empire on the child and a configuration of the child as a mimetic creature with affinities for the animal and the primitive. As Stephen Kline documents in his book Out of the Garden, a world based on the mimetic capacities of transformation and fluidity of form, where humans can be objects and animals can be human and vice versa, served as the basis for the 20th century toy industry and its marketing strategies, with Disney as an industry leader.³⁶ In the Mickie Mouse clubs which it spearheaded in the 1930's, Disney established

³⁵ Taussig, 231.

³⁶ Kline, *Out of the Garden*.

the precedent for the use of a mimesis as a relationship between human and commodity.

The Mickie Mouse clubs were a plan for movie houses whereby Saturday matinees, planned especially for children, were organized around a film and the character of Mickie Mouse. These clubs initiated the concept of the "backstory," which has since become central to marketing to children. The backstory is the enabling fiction which informs the "life" of any toy. The backstory is key to the mimetic relationship between consumer and commodity because it is designed so that, upon purchase of the toy, it can be entered into and enacted bodily by the child consumer. The American Express ad which I quoted at the beginning of the chapter functions, similarly, as a backstory for the audience. Richard deCordova observes that it is at this juncture in the development of capitalist culture that a conflation of having and *being* occurs.³⁷ That is, to have the commodity implies also acting as, or being, the commodity. The film provides the backstory for the commodities which are then enacted by the consumers. Cordova writes,

It is clear that a sort of intertwining occurs in children's address by Mickey Mouse films and toys. This is illustrated most vividly in the widespread popularity of Mickey Mouse playsuits, which allowed children to dress up as Mickey or Minnie Mouse. Photos of Mickey Mouse Club activities typically show the officers dressed in such costumes. Members, in fact, were instructed to greet one another by saying 'Hi Mickey!' or 'Hi Minnie!'³⁸

Since the 30s, toy marketing perfected the art of the backstory which children could act out. By the TV marketing of the 1980s, advertisements focused not so much on the toy as a utilitarian object, on its use-value, but showed, rather,

³⁷ Richard deCordova, "The Mickey in Macy's Window," in *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom*, ed. Eric Smoodin (New York, London: Routledge, 1994), 211.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.

children engaged in an imaginative, mimetic relationship with the toy, whereby they became an actor in the fantasy from which the toy had apparently emerged. Kline writes, "Children's advertisers never lectured their audiences on selling points or merely demonstrated the product. Instead they dramatized the product using a mini-plot, demonstrating the product's attributes in a specific fantasy location. Fantasy play required not only a troupe of characters but a proscenium, a site for the production of fantasy."³⁹ Rather than simply showing the ways a toy can be played with, a demonstration of how the product works, advertisements now exhort the involvement of the child in enacting the backstory of a toy which is already embedded in a narrative, which already has a life of its own. Kline cites many examples of this, all of which echo the exhortations on Disney's packaging. GI Joe commercials, for instance, "Link real children at play with the backstory by telling a little story that explains the narrative transition. The announcer says to the boy, 'Imagine being aboard,' and later exhorts him to 'Live the G.I. Joe adventure.'"⁴⁰

In contemporary television advertising then, children are not spectators of toy-based dramas but are actively engaged. When a boy in a Rambo commercial says with gleeful pride, "Got 'im!" his subjective participation in the victory derives from the fact that he is "identified" with the Rambo character. Identification demands a transformation of the child's whole sense of self, an act visualized in one Transformer commercial where a boy is shown in animation gradually becoming a robot warrior. His voice changes, too. The essential act of pretending is therefore a relocation of the subject totally within the imaginarium of the toy.⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid., 240.

⁴⁰ Kline, 256.

⁴¹ Ibid., 253.

As the Mickey Mouse clubs, as well as its continual use of animal protagonists demonstrates, the Disney Corporation has constructed its version of this imaginary with particular emphasis on anthropomorphized animal characters. deCordova traces this tendency through the turn of the century idealization of the child as deeply connected with the innocence of the natural world and through the theories of a pivotal turn-of-the century social scientist, G. Stanley Hall. Hall was convinced that in the early stages of human development, the human race was very close to animals and each individual human needed to reenact this relationship as a child. He wrote, "To the young child, there is no gap between his soul and the soul of animals."⁴² The tendency toward anthropomorphization of animals is, in part, a result of Hall's theory. In order to nurture this relationship to animals and, hence, the child's innate innocence and "natural" selves, Hall called for animals, even stuffed ones, to be present in schools, and every conceivable public space. Animals became an other, which linked children not only to an othered form of being, but also to another, more innocent, time. This construction of animals, children and a more innocent time formed a constellation of the "primitive" which the toy industry fed upon. As deCordova writes, during the burgeoning toy industry of the 1930's, "The world of toys was built around this primitivist impulse. It was a world of animals, racial others, and figures from the near or distant past. The playsuits available during the period -- the Indian, Cowboy, Scout, and Mickey Mouse suits -- all depend upon this impulse."⁴³ Even as these "primitive" figures--the Indian, the natural world, the animals which populate it--disappear, the toy industry recovers their allure in the form of the commodity.

The Lion King, then, follows the precedents set by Modernism and elaborated in both Modernist art practices and the children's toy industry in

⁴² deCordova, 212.

⁴³ Ibid., 213.

evoking mimesis as a beautiful plasticity of form, as a relationship of mutual exchange between humans, animals and nature. At the same time, and also following those precedents, it disavows mimesis in favor of an ideology of domination and of re-directing mimetic affinities toward the enactment of commodities, their characters and backstories. Capitalism has not exterminated the mimetic compulsion, so much as domesticated it to serve its own purposes.⁴⁴

Staged magic vs. Mimesis

There is yet another angle from which to describe the simultaneous production of a primitivist trope and the domination of that trope. The character of Rafiki in The Lion King functions as the "primitive" magician, the shaman. She is another stand-in, along with the transforming bodies of the chorus, for "primitive" mimesis, made available through the African body. In her one moment of magic in the production, however, she is more of a latter day magician than a practitioner of mimetic healing. This is the moment at which Simba's image appears on her tree window and alerts her to the fact that he is not dead. Her "magic" occurs through stage technology, rather than through the use of fetishism and mimesis as a sensuous yielding into the natural world. Stage magic, staged magic, is Disney's version of mimesis. It is mimesis coerced into instrumentality. Discussing the way in which Adorno and Horkheimer view the very existence of the Enlightenment as dependent upon the alteration of "primitive" mimesis, Taussig writes, "For Adorno and Horkheimer, the early magician signifies the threshold of history where mimesis as a practice for living with nature blurs with the transformation of mimesis into an instrument for dominating nature, the

⁴⁴ The domestication of mimesis by Enlightenment rationality and its investment in the domination of nature is a central theme of Adorno and Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1972).

'organization of mimesis' necessary to that long march culminating in Enlightenment civilization."⁴⁵ Stage magic is part of the apparatus through which Disney turns mimesis from primitive fetishism to capitalist fetishism, from an exploration of similarity with nature to domination of it. The human being is not transformed but is only the agent of the transformation of the commodity into a life-like being.

The word magic is constantly used in Disney product copy and advertising. The corporation literally banks on the associations produced by the idea of magic; fluidity of form, mimetic transformation, the way in which one thing can appear to be filled with the life of another. I have already described the inner sanctum at the Disney store on Staten Island. Standing on a shelf positioned over the door to this room stands Mickey Mouse, made up as his character of the wizard from Fantasia. His book of magic is open before him. His gaze is direct. He looks straight at the shoppers. He is casting his spell. We are to be enchanted, the beneficiaries of Disney's "magic." Inside this sanctuary there is an interactive video display with several choices of subjects. Each features the dead Walt presiding over some aspect of his empire. On one of the sections a voice-over croons, "Disney's illusion of life has touched our life with magic. At the heart of the Disney imagination are hundreds of characters so real and believable you'll remember them for the rest of your life. There's a lot of knowledge we have about how to entertain people by bringing *things* to life."

Why, then, does Walt, in the next section of this video, de-mystify his own magic by showing how it is produced? He seems to have no reservations about revealing the workings behind his elaborate systems of "stage magic." This occurs in a section on audioanimatronics, in which Walt introduces his unique audioanimatronic system. After clips which show spectators how robots are

⁴⁵ Taussig, 46.

made, an electronic skeleton fleshed out by life-like skin, the robot performs on stage. It is an amazing achievement and Walt is just as proud as he can be. In the next frames, we are shown the source of the robot's "life." This is a human man strapped into a device which looks eerily like an electric chair. His head, back and limbs are attached to an assemblage of rods which animate the automaton. He looks more like a robot than the robot. The source of the stage magic, it would appear, is the diversion of human energies into the production of a life-like commodity which subsumes those energies into its own appearance. Walt never addresses the human worker, but chats agreeably with the automata. The apparatus of stage magic, the human body, is made visible only to show how the commodity is more life-like than the human. Encased in a detailed gilt frame, these video images differ very little from Taymor's humans, encased in their animal skeletons, "primitives" performing their own erasure into commodities, parading across a detailed gilt proscenium frame into a culture saturated with the mimetic compulsion to become as life-like as the commodity, or to assume life through enactment of the commodity.

The Puppet as Commodity

Taymor's puppets, then, operate well within the Disney corporation's larger strategies by which "things" are brought to life. Taymor calls upon the art of puppetry to enact the beauty of doubleness, the ambiguity of mimesis, which renders uncertain which is the animate one, the puppeteer or the puppet. But Scott Shershow shows how the puppet is historically related to the market as precisely a point at which animism is dominated and rendered safe for the marketplace. Shershow provides an analysis which situates puppets historically as instrumental in the production of this mimetic magic as a selling point of the

commodity. He shows how, as in the Rouen example, the play between alterity and the domination of alterity is not new but rather appears to be both a historical and ongoing strategy of the capitalist marketplace.

As Shershow's study documents, the history of puppetry in the west has, since Plato, been a history of the repression of the puppet's transformative or mimetic connotations. Shershow suggests that the "histrionic unity of spectator and spectacle, subject and object,"⁴⁶ especially as occurring in the use of puppets, was the basis of Plato's condemnation of representation. As Michael Taussig points out, much of the purpose of mimesis used in shamanistic rites is for the copy to acquire power over the original, so that the representation is what shimmers with power and agency. For Plato, this was precisely the sticking point. For him, the original, the truth, must maintain its power against all attempts to represent it. He also needed to replace a "magical" system of fetishes whereby images, puppets, dolls, were believed to have power over their originals with a system in which all representation was suspect. As Shershow says, "Here Plato reverses what seems to have been his culture's intuitive belief in the possible efficacy of the magical image."⁴⁷ It is Plato who originates the trope of the puppet as a passive being manipulated by a superior being, a trope which continues in general usage to the present day. We see the puppet as a dead object, hardly something shimmering with a magical capacity to exceed the original on which they are based, to dissolve the distinction between subject and object.

At the same time, puppets were a popular commodity, marketed at the fairs of the Renaissance and the Interregnum period. Those who hawked the puppet invoked precisely its alterity, its long association with "image magic,"⁴⁸ as Shershow calls the "primitive" mimesis which Taussig tries to articulate. The

⁴⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁷ Scott Cutler Shershow, *Puppets and Popular Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 18.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 18.

puppet, brought home to the bourgeois interior, was depended upon to suggest the unattainable allure of alterity while at the same time remaining clearly a commodity, its objectified content well within the control and power of the consumer. Shershow writes,

By the seventeenth century the ancient cultural associations of magic or ritual efficacy that clings to dolls, puppets, and iconic images were in effect being repackaged for bourgeois consumption . . . Throughout the seventeenth century and well beyond, the performing object would continue to evoke its ancient associations of the magical and the monstrous, even as it also descended into the nostalgic comfort of bourgeois domesticity.⁴⁹

Like the trickster Beanie Babies in the Disney store, the puppet is reduced to a commodity which sells mimesis on its own terms; the evocation of the wonder of mimesis in a containable form which serves the marketplace. As in her vision of the complexity of her work, Taymor evokes her puppetry as if the magic of puppetry could exist outside the history of the marketplace. Instead, the puppet has functioned as a site at which precisely the battle for the domestication of mimesis has been fought.

Theme Park Animal Bodies and Taymor's Beautiful Heads

A final example of the corporate appropriation of mimesis accomplished by Taymor and Disney is embedded in the use of gloriously beautiful, sculpted animal "heads" in the production. Worn by members of the chorus, Taymor's heads derive again from modernism's tendency to appropriate the "primitive." Taymor's image onstage is resonant of the "tribal" dances we really know little

⁴⁹ Ibid., 48.

about but have been served up as a kind of exotic, gourmet fare by modernist art, especially as it has been marketed and distributed through tourist networks selling the "authentic" masks, headdresses, fetishes of the "primitive" cultures whose shapes and movements were reified in the shapes of Picasso, the dream paintings of Rousseau, Gauguin.⁵⁰

As stunning and artistic as Taymor's heads are, they are really not so different from a key feature of Disney's popular entertainment--the huge, exaggerated cartoon body costumes which populate Disney theme parks. Taymor offers little variation from the Disney habit of encasing the human form in an image which circulates as a commodity, and subsuming its energies into the animation of that commodity. It is possible to critique her use of these heads in this much celebrated production by placing them within the theme park context of which Jane Kuentz has done an alarming study.

Kuentz's study reveals the extent to which Disney-style performance must be directed toward the production of a commodity fetishism in which the human labors animating the commodity are not be revealed. The rules about performance in the cartoon heads are extremely strict. Because the "heads" are heavy and the Florida heat is extreme, and although workers are allowed out only 20 minutes at a time, many still vomit or pass out inside their character heads while "onstage," as the public areas are called. This happens because no matter how sick a performer becomes, she will lose her job if she removes her head for any reason before reaching a "backstage" area. Corporate policy states that if a child were to witness a "head-less" character, her faith in "magic" would be ruined for life. Without the erasure of labor, the policy implies, corporate mimesis ceases to be effective. One man Kuentz interviews describes his job, which is to drive

⁵⁰ See Foster, *Recodings*; and Bennetta Jules-Rosette, "Simulations of Postmodernity: Images of Technology in African Tourist and Popular Art," in *Visualizing Theory*, ed. Lucien Taylor (New York: London, 1994).

around in a little cart and retrieve the unconscious bodies of passed-out performers. He says, "One day I picked up three at one stop, Donald, Mickey, and Goofy. It's frightening because you can die on your own regurgitation when you can't keep out of it. I'll never forget Dumbo—it was coming out of the mouth during the parade. You have a little screen over the mouth. It was horrible."⁵¹

Disney uses the language of the theatre to encourage the mimetic features of this character labor, just as the Warner Bros. sign exhorting consumers to "show your character" does. There is an onstage and an offstage and workers are cast members. Workers are, apparently, unfazed by their conditions of employment because their personal investment in the transformative powers of Disney are extreme. Disney workers often describe themselves as unable to stop being their characters after work. In their interviews with Kuentz, they go in and out of speaking as a character, seemingly without noticing. Kuentz writes,

Disney's metaphoric translation of workplace, worker, and labor into theatre, cast and performance is crucial to understanding how Disney workers make sense of themselves on the job. This is a place where an entire work force shows up each day, not in uniform, but in costume. Most have internalized this distinction; they never say uniform just as they always say cast, on stage, and backstage...Apparently this transformation to Disney product is what many of them want when they apply to the park in the first place. [They came here] to be part of the magic, familiar and reproducible.⁵²

Disney, then, trades in the mimetic participation of its workers to create a "magic" in which the human must at all times remain effaced by the commodity.

⁵¹ Quoted in The Project on Disney, *Inside the Mouse: Work and Play at Disney World* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 135.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 112, 137.

Despite her rhetoric to the contrary, Julie Taymor nevertheless ends up repeating fundamental Disney strategies in an artistic key.

Conclusion

As Times Square is morphed into cartoonland, a complicated relationship between animation, fetishization, mimesis and the human body is being created in this theatrical marketing tool which is Taymor's production of The Lion King. The end result of this process is the absorption of the theatrical consumer into the Lion King backstory. American Express card held at the ready, the theatrical spectator can buy his way into an experience by which he will be transformed into the magical essence of the commodity, which he recognizes in the form of his perfect fantasy. This experience is perfectly articulated by Ben Brantley, the leading theatre critic of the New York Times, as he articulates unwittingly the key Disney figurations of the animal, the child and primitivist magic. Brantley writes;

Suddenly you're four years old again, and you've been taken to the circus for the first time. You can only marvel at the exotic procession of animals before you: the giraffes and the elephants and the hippopotamuses and all those birds in balletic flight. Where are you, really, anyway? The location is supposed to be a theater on 42nd Street, a thoroughfare that has never been thought of as a gateway to Eden. Yet somehow you have fallen into what appears to be a primal paradise. And even the exquisitely restored New Amsterdam Theater, a former Ziegfeld palace, disappears before the spectacle within it. Such is the transporting magic wrought by the opening 10 minutes of "The Lion King."⁵³

⁵³ Ben Brantley, "Cub Comes of Age: A Twice-Told Cosmic Tale," *The New York Times*, 14 November, 1997, B1.

The slides in The Lion King from "magic" transformativeness to stage magic, from mimetic identification to commodity fetishism, from the language of performance to the performance of the commodity, facilitate the way in which, in the "new Times Square," the theatrical, the mimetic, the make-believe is morphed into the marketplace. The alliance between art and commerce becomes stronger and more naturalized than ever. Describing how she felt after completing the masks of Scar and Mufasa Taymor says, "I felt delighted and relieved. I saw Disney, I saw Africa, and I saw my own aesthetic."⁵⁴ In the end, Taymor and The Lion King complete a successful coup by which the market as determined by Disney, the global crossroads and the theatre are brought together as a unified operation.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 32.

Chapter Four

I've Got Nike Pounding in My Blood

The Nike corporation's flagship store on 57th Street in Manhattan, and the Ralph Lauren store located in the old Reinholder family mansion on Madison Avenue are exemplary cases of contemporary marketing strategies. Journalist Naomi Klein, in her book No Logo, calls such flagship stores "three-dimensional advertisements for the brand,"¹ spaces where consumers can crawl inside the brand and "fully experience [its] meaning."² In this chapter I use a theory of use value derived from Baudrillard, Haug, and Willis, a theory of habitus from Bourdieu, and my working understanding of mimesis and corporate theatricality to confirm Klein's observation, but also to extend it. Klein identifies precisely what I have called a mimetic desire to disappear into the commodity, or corporate performance.³ But as in the dissertation as a whole, my goal here is not only to point out that corporations deploy theatrical tools in stores (as Klein does), but to identify a range of techniques, the variety of the hooks corporations use to appeal to mimetic desire, and how, exactly, the theatrical is instrumental to capital in this particular phase of its development.

What follows is in two parts. Use value is the primary critical term in the first section and habitus in the second. Each of these categories, use and habitus, operates in each of the stores, Niketown and Ralph Lauren, but I have separated them to make each more clear. I will use brief descriptions of each store to help

¹ Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at Brand Bullies* (New York: Picador, 2000), 132.

² *Ibid.*, 146.

³ "Almost everyone in the corporate world now recognizes that the urge to disappear into the cross-promotional tie-ins of cherished consumer products does not magically disappear when children outgrow sugar cereal. It is this insistent desire to become one with your favorite pop-culture products that every one of the superbrands is trying to harness and expand upon." Klein, 146.

explicate my main theoretical points. I will begin with a short review of the concept of use value since my own use of the term is very specific.

For Marx, use value was that objective property of an object which makes it useful to human beings based on their needs.⁴ In order to have any value of any kind, an object must first have utility, which he describes as its "plain, homely, bodily form."⁵ But to this "bodily form" he added a second type of value and hypothesized that objects "have the form of commodities only in so far as they have two forms, a physical or natural form, and a value form." Marx called this second value exchange value and the analysis of exchange value, much more than of use value, forms the underpinnings of his theory of the commodity and ultimately of capital. Exchange value is a concept used repeatedly throughout this dissertation, but I want to review it here—the exchange value of a product is determined when labor is abstracted from its specific identities into one universal labor and quantifying it in units which Marx called socially necessary labor time. Since these units can fluctuate because they are dependent upon the conditions of production (technology and changes in technology, etc), the value of a product can also fluctuate. Whereas use value is a kind of "natural" property of an object, its material truth, exchange value is socially determined, and it is this quality of exchange value that makes Marx favor it over use value as a tool for the analysis of capital. In a curiously binary construction, Marx identifies this invented, or man-made, quality of exchange value as the very opposite of the materiality of objects. The value of commodities has, he says, "a purely social reality" which is "the very opposite of the course materiality of their substance, not an atom of matter enters into its composition."⁶

⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. I* (New York: International Publishers, 1979), 36.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

Modern scholars have taken a second look at use value, finding it a productive category especially for an analysis of consumption. Whereas for Marx in the 19th century and prior to mass consumption and mass marketing, the means of production held the key to understanding the fundamental processes of capitalism, more contemporary theorists have begun to include consumption in the ongoing work of keeping tabs on capital and identifying ways to resist it. In most of this work use value has come to resemble exchange value in the sense that too is a "social reality," rather than a "natural" form.

To a certain extent, this conceptualization of use value depends upon the theorization of discursive fields which rival economic fields in their effects. That is, the value of objects may depend as much (or more) on the way in which they are perceived, labeled or circulated, especially through language and image, as it does on their position vis-à-vis the relations of production. In this formulation, use value may be, for instance, the socially constructed and freely circulating potential *meanings* of a product.

John Fiske, who in his work follows Stuart Hall and Michel De Certeau, identifies two different kinds of use values. There is the utilitarian or "material" use of, say, a pair of jeans--warmth, covering the body, etc. Then there is what Fiske calls the "cultural" use. Cultural use implies the ideological system which a commodity reproduces if the consumer passively accepts the product. But it also implies the possibility for what Fisk calls "excorporation."⁷ Excorporation is a process in which consumers engage in a struggle over the meanings of commodities, often using the commodities in ways that work against the ideological meanings which those commodities would otherwise tend to reproduce. So, for example, instead of buying jeans and wearing them to attain a culturally and ideologically defined version of a sexy body, consumers might rip and tear at

⁷ John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (London, NY: Routledge 1989), 15.

the jeans, or wear very baggy jeans, or in other ways resist the dominant meaning/use of the jeans. In this discursive space, which he calls a "cultural economy," Fiske claims that "there are no consumers, only circulators of meanings."⁸

My own preference is for Jean Baudrillard and the way in which he reformulates and reappropriates use value for a political critique. When Baudrillard talks about use value, it has little resemblance to the homely materiality described by Marx. But neither is it similar to Fiske's excorporation, use value made resistant in a discursive space of free-floating meanings. While Baudrillard invented a theory of the ultimate in discursive spaces, the simulation, in which the real is a cultural production based on an endless system of copies without originals, he does not detach discursive space, that whorl of signification, from the relations of production. For Baudrillard, there is no such space where it is possible to resist the inscriptions of capital in the commodity form. His radical reworking of use value shows how use value is as essential to political economy as is exchange value. Use value, he says, conjures from the commodity form the assurance that it will be translated out of the abstracted, alienated, fetishized marketplace in which exchange value is the key term. It is the way that consumers can imagine the commodity as if it might exist outside this marketplace, and cohere somehow with a space that is more "real." "[Use values] provide [exchange values] with the guarantee of the real, the lived, the concrete; they are the guarantee of an objective reality for which, however, in the same moment, these systems qua systems substitute their own total logic . . . Use value . . . [does]not constitute an *elsewhere* with respect to the systems of [exchange]; [it] is only their alibi."⁹ If in Marx use value is the objective, the material, the real property of a thing, in

⁸ Fiske, 27.

⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1981), 137.

Baudrillard it is merely the appearance of the real. It promises a real which will materialize in the shape of the consumer's desire.

Similarly, the German Marxist Wolfgang Haug theorizes how use value is deployed to sell commodities. Haug retains Marx's description of use value as the utilitarian function of objects which derives from their material qualities, but adds to it that objects also have "the appearance of use value."¹⁰ Haug, who works from a more determinist model of capitalism than most scholars do now, uses his concept of the appearance of use value to try to account for the seductive appeal of commodities. Ahead of his times in this analysis, he argues that the appearance of use value is apprehended sensually. That is, consumers grasp the meaning of commodities with the sensual apparatus of their bodies, which is very different from earlier marketing strategies which appealed to reason and the consumer's ability to rationally weigh the relative merits of competing goods. Haug's term for the kind of marketing that he identifies is "commodity aesthetics." He uses the word aesthetics, he points out, because in its earliest manifestations it referred to an epistemology of the senses.¹¹ He seemed to grasp that capital was moving toward the imbrication of the body and its sensual organization into the structure of the commodity and the brand. And, indeed, thirty years after Haug wrote his book on the aesthetization of use value in advertising, marketing gurus Bernd Schmitt and Alex Simonson are selling what they too call "aesthetics." In their book, a kind of self-help guide for marketing managers, they emphasize the importance of sensory "experience" in contemporary marketing. In fact, in their estimation, aesthetics marks a new phase of capital and the wane of branding:

¹⁰ Wolfgang Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1986), 16.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

"The branding phase is losing its vitality and is being replaced by the marketing of sensory experiences, i.e., by marketing aesthetics."¹²

My experience of Niketown is shaped by these ideas: that while for Marx use value resided in the material qualities of objects it has, at least since the onset of mass marketing, become instrumental in the form of an intangible quality or assemblage of qualities in comparison to which the commodity itself seems incidental. It is what the corporation stands for, its interior, illuminated. Disassociated from the material properties of the commodity, this use value appears like an apparition, like an ether, to offer itself as a scent, a touch, a feeling, an environment. In this commodity aesthetic, the experience of use value is an end in itself.

Niketown

In the atrium where I stand dwarfed, awed by this hollowed vertical space and trying to get my bearings, I'm alarmed by an extraordinary whoosh sound and the sudden dark which accompanies it. In the gloom, and like a giant blank automata, a two and a half story screen rolls itself relentlessly downward, spilling into the center of the store. After I've spent more time in this, Nike's flagship store on East 57th Street, New York, NY, I've become no less inured to this recurrent event even though I've watched the video which occasions it, and listened to the pulsating techno pop songs which accompany it, many times and from many angles. The screen event is the techno-heart of this space, pumping its blood on a rhythmic schedule, pumping *my* blood, making *my* heart pound, making me feel like *I'm* running, not like the athletes on the screen but in the same spirit,

¹² Bernd Schmitt and Alex Simonson, *Marketing Aesthetics: The Strategic Management of Brands, Identity and Image* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 18.

my own muscles throbbing, making me feel like I'm inside this beautiful excess, the soul of Nike.

Niketown on East 57th Street, New York, NY is housed in designer Gordon Thompson's version of an old New York City public school (PS) building. The structure replaced the high-rise that housed the Bonwit Teller Department store because, as Thompson comments, "the first floor of a skyscraper would never say what we wanted it to say."¹³ It's easier to begin understanding what he means when I go through the doors and the grainy beige facade, as understated as that of any ordinary city school, yields to an interior stunning in its scope and aesthetic. Each floor of the five story atrium is ringed with steel railings and cable, and linked with escalators, like balconies for a giant science fiction theatre in the round, where the ground floor I'm standing on is the stage. It is also the starting line, the boxing ring, the rink, the field, the court. It's the point of departure. It's the beginning of what can be imagined as opposed to what has been. This is something like what Nike "wants to say." To say it, Nike needs height, somewhere to go and the technology to get there, somewhere where the sky is the limit.

At the center of this ground floor "stage" there is an opening covered in glass, a trapdoor to the past. About three feet below there's an old gym floor and a battered basketball. At the right side, tucked away in the dimly lit margins of the store's ground floor, the wall of an old high school gym materializes like the theatre's back wall, the wall usually concealed by the drops, rear projections, illusions. The floor of the store is cut away from this wall and curves gracefully away back into the store, so that more of the floor of the gym shows. Railings

¹³ Virginia Kent Dorris, "Niketown New York City," *Architectural Record*, March, 1997, 100.

guard against the drop. The viewing position from behind the rails is touristic, archeological, like being on the brink of a dig, or the Grand Canyon.

Nadie Serementakis, the Greek anthropologist, writes that nostalgia is from a Greek word which means to journey toward the past. She writes that the sense of journeying backward is triggered by the senses—by a taste or a smell, the sound of the rain. Modernity renders the world taste-less and smell-less. The locally grown peach with its distinct flavor disappears under the pressure of the World Trade Organization and imported fruits grown on factory farms. In this context nostalgia gets a bad name. When we use the word nostalgia, we mean to patronize our selves for the feeling we are having. We refer to the desire to feel again what is known to be unrecoverable or what seems now never existed.

Like the World Trade Organization, Niketown makes a return to the locally experienced "flavors" of the past, nostalgia, impossible. As at the site of an archeological dig, the view from the railings in Niketown re-opens the past to our gaze, but positions our gaze so that it is dispassionate. The view is of dust. Niketown fakes this view of a fake past to make a point: the brand's use value is the way that it inspires people to understand that the only goal is in what lies ahead, not behind. The past and its "flavors," Niketown tells us, is only of passing interest, only a checkpoint by which we may measure our position. We can't smell it, hear it, or touch it. There is no danger of a return. There is only this glimpse from above, my body held in check by cold, hard railings.

The glimpse of the gym from the ground floor is the most extensive, but there are other glimpses in different places in the store. There are places where the wall of the store is cut-away in small windows that show the gym's wall. There is the small, obscurely located balcony wedged in between the store and the "old" wall. The store, cocooned inside the gym, hangs from cables and a massive infrastructure of steel girders that are visible from here. The "old" gym is the flat

hard back wall of the "real." It has no resonance. Like many of the productions of modernity, it has no taste, no sound, no feel, no smell to characterize it uniquely.

The store, though, is different. In the store, as my body moves ever forward and upward, my body succumbs to heart wrenching memories, which feel "as if" they were my own, or may at least be linked to my own. The store permits nostalgia in the sense that Serementakis means it; to long for the retrieval of sensual experience, of the palate of the senses with which we hope to make the "self." The store creates the sensation of memory, of nostalgia, of the desire to journey back. The desire to experience the pleasures of the senses then, is rerouted into a nostalgia that is poignantly pleasurable like the "real" kind, but is simultaneously a Nike production, an obvious fiction which has joyously separated itself from the "real" past.

We are permitted the chance to enter the dry skeleton of the high school gym, and recover the sensations which we may yet, in Nike's rich surround, feel. Nike gives me the chance to play "as if" I remember, personally, the joy of physical sensation. In the store I begin to produce the longing for the feeling of running--heart pounding, sweating, pain, euphoria of being at a physical peak. In the store, I feel as if this is recoverable. In the store, I can feel it. In the store, I imagine I feel. In the store, I am more attached to what I imagine than to what ever really was. I know that what I feel is imaginary. I know it's not "real." But the architecture of the store lets me know that this is a space for the imagination to fly, as opposed to that hard, flat, "real" gym of the past. This suspended bubble is a space where I can act "as if" the imaginary were real, including the imagination of the past, faked nostalgia. This is my first lesson in the use value of the Nike brand.

I'm on the ground floor, at the starting line, looking up. The digital clock is marking off the seconds. The screen descends again, lights dim, the mood shifts,

the stakes are higher, there's tension, anticipation, adrenalin. The song lyrics pound into my body; "Seize the chance to see the limits stretched. Never stop. Get to the finish line. Anything less is to sacrifice your gifts." My longing for my retrieval of my own (imaginary) body is triggered. Longing and hope converge; the essence of true nostalgia, the materialization of the longed for sensual experience, the language of the body, Nike.

Marketing

What I experience at Nike town is the result of significant changes corporations have made in the last thirty years in the ways they address consumers. In 1970 Judith Williamson, in her important critical study of advertising, Decoding Advertising, wrote that "instead of being identified with what they produce, people are made to identify themselves with what they consume. We are made to feel that we can rise or fall in society through what we are able to buy."¹⁴ In this passage she points out the extremely important shift from locating personal identity in what one makes or does to locating it in what one buys. This, of course, is a shift essential to all subsequent developments in consumption because it makes consumption indispensable. Disassociated from their productive or creative capacities, people, quite literally, must consume in order to be. What exactly we consume defines even more specifically who we are. We come into our being through these choices. Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson refer to this as "classic commodity realism,"¹⁵ in which "the ad as commodity mirror asks that we collapse our ego ideal with commodity

¹⁴ Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertising: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978), 13.

¹⁵ Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson, *Sign Wars: The Cluttered Landscape of Advertising* (New York, London: The Guilford Press, 1996), 66.

abstraction."¹⁶ That is, the commodity seems to offer, in the abstract, a quality that becomes indistinguishable from our self-conception. The commodity's quality and our being are experienced almost as ontologically simultaneous, such that it is hard to distinguish which came first.

But by the 1980s, this model of consumption began to change. By this time, of course, what Jameson calls the "death of the subject--the end of the autonomous bourgeois monad or ego or individual"¹⁷ had occurred. Jameson, who by his own account tends toward what he calls the historicist explanation for this "death,"¹⁸ stresses that "our insertion as individual subjects into a multidimensional set of radically discontinuous realities . . . makes itself felt in the fragmented and schizophrenic decentering of the [subject]."¹⁹ It's not surprising that marketing experts had to, as Jackson and Thrift argue "rethink conventional approaches to 'identity,' emphasizing its fluid and dynamic nature rather than assuming identities to be in any way fixed or singular."²⁰ Corporations began to try to determine how, as Jackson and Thrift write, "to position their products in order to take advantage of the ambiguous and shifting boundaries of people's identities."²¹ While the older form of relationship between commodity and consumer still has not completely disappeared, cutting edge marketing strategies like those of Nike and Ralph Lauren in their flagship stores are distinctive

¹⁶ Ibid., 68.

¹⁷ Frederick Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 15.

¹⁸ The "historicist" approach theorizes that a coherent self did exist even as recently as the period of classical capitalism but has since dissolved under the developments of late capitalism. Jameson presents the alternative explanation, provided, he says, by the poststructuralists, as the theory that there never was a "self" in the first place. In this account, the "self" was only ever an ideological constellation. Jameson, 15.

¹⁹ Jameson, 413.

²⁰ Peter Jackson and Nigel Thrift, "Geographies of Consumption," in *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies*, ed. Daniel Miller (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), 227.

²¹ Ibid., 227.

especially in the way they implement a very different idea of the self or identity in the consumer

The second change in marketing was precipitated by mounting evidence that television viewers, in particular, were weary of the way they were being positioned by television advertising in the "realism" described above. Goldman and Papson outline how consumers were increasingly aware that they were being asked to accept as "real" a doctored reality which had little to do with their material world, full of dissonance and contradiction. They were being asked to accept as true the equivalence that the advertising images projected between products and the fulfillment of desire. This "realist" approach, which Williamson identified in 1970, was no longer working. The manipulation through images of an unrealistic world and unrealizable promises increasingly alienated consumers.²²

Advertisers have come up with various ways to make print and television advertising effective in this period of consumer alienation and the deconstruction of "self" as a coherent entity. These include the inclusion of real-life situations in ads, the exposure of the artifice involved in making ads, discontinuous and de-centered images, graininess, substituting parts of images for the whole, and removing the commodity from the image altogether, all of which is intended to either highlight the advertisers's awareness of the fakeness of ads and thus to ally themselves with consumers against media manipulation, or to create an image of the commodity which makes its allure seem to be derived from reality itself, rather than from highly manipulated media production.²³ The subtext of these kinds of advertisements, and sometimes the overt text, is the promise by the advertiser that

²² Goldman and Papson, 60.

²³ Although it is outside the scope of this study, advertising is moving ever further in this direction. An article in the *New York Times* on April 30, 2001 reports that the newest reality TV show, called "The Runner," will literally be situated within advertisements. That is, a contestant crossing the country will complete tasks, all of which are using the products of corporations who have paid for the placement. The contestant, for instance, will be directed to buy a Big Mac, or go to Starbucks for a latte. See Bill Carter, "New Reality Show Planning To Put Ads Between the Ads," *New York Times*, Monday, 30 April 2001, sec. A, p.1.

they will no longer attempt to fool consumers who are, at any rate, too smart and savvy to be fooled into any identifications with the obviously fake promises of commodities.²⁴

Nike, in particular, began to fill its ads with overt references to consumer alienation. Goldman and Papson argue, "The approach pursued by firms such as Nike seeks to engage the spectator in a candid discourse of reflexivity: reflexivity about ads and their underlying assumptions, reflexivity about commodity fetishism and the norms of consumption, and reflexivity about the arbitrary character of commodity signs."²⁵ As examples, Goldman and Papson cite ads which explicitly sever the connections which earlier advertising relied on—the assumption that the (fetishized) product transfers its powers to the consumer. The voice-over in one ad featuring Michael Jordan dunking a ball, but beginning with a shot of Jordan's shoes, reads as follows: "[shows shoes] This is something you can buy. This is a patented, vicious, high-flying 360 slam-dunk. This is something you cannot do. Let me repeat myself. This you can buy [shows shoes]. You cannot do this [shows Jordan dunk]. Can. Can't." ²⁶ In another ad, superstar athlete Charles Barkley warns viewers about buying Nike shoes: "They won't make you rich like me. They won't make you rebound like me. They definitely won't make you handsome like me. It'll only make you have shoes like me. Period."²⁷ Nike draws attention to itself as a brand which is no longer attempting to seduce consumers into the belief that buying a product will transform them into being whatever the product represents to them. Nike customers, the new marketing implies, are savvy to the cheap tricks of consumerism. They are hipper and wiser.

²⁴ Goldman and Papson, 55-82.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

²⁶ Quoted in Goldman and Papson, 90.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

The transition from an emphasis on product to an emphasis on brand is the third major development which has resulted in environments like Niketown. In the mid-1980s, according to Naomi Klein, cutting edge companies like Nike began to free themselves from the manufacturing base which, up to then, had been the *raison d'être* of corporate entities. There was at the time a widespread perception that companies were bogging down in too many things, too many goods, too much of the machinery and negotiations required to produce them. Nike led the way in turning over the responsibility for production to subcontractors in overseas factories. The resulting savings in labor and other manufacturing costs could then be turned to the more significant work of creating the brand image, variously thought of as the soul or inner meaning of a corporation, or the lifestyle or type of consciousness it embodies.²⁸ The "soul" of the corporation, its brand, has to be disseminated. This is what people will consume, not products. As Goldman and Papson point out, "Nike isn't a shoe anymore, or even a collection of superstar athletes, it's an attitude--it's an ironic awareness."²⁹ Corporations therefore spend the better part of their resources not only creating the brand images but in a continual search for new images for the brand, and new venues in which to spread it.

The network of venues for the distribution of the brand is called, in marketing parlance, synergy. The phenomenon of stores like Niketown, called "entertainment retail" or, as Nike CEO Phil Knight calls his stores, "inspirational retail,"³⁰ (Klein calls them "branded superstores"), are the cornerstones for

²⁸ Klein, 195-198. This tendency has produced its opposite in a prototypical dialectic; well-publicized and widespread opposition to Nike's manufacturing practices has developed in recent years. Stories of its sub-minimum wage factories whose workers live in subhuman conditions have spurred activists to attack Nike and to force it, in fact, to make changes, however cosmetic. One of the ways in which Nike has attempted to weasel out from under accusations about its labor practices has been to say that the corporation is not responsible for manufacturing: All the manufacturing is done by sub-contractors.

²⁹ Goldman and Papson, 112.

³⁰ Klein, 150.

successful synergy in the postmodern period. Under one roof, as it were, corporations can address all three of the changes I've described: changes in conceptualizations of identity, consumer alienation from manipulative advertising, and the transition from production to branding.

The idea of synergy has been around since the entrepreneurial spirit of capitalism found a home in men like B.T. Barnum, who created his American Museum as a linked network of artifacts, performances and commodities. Disney pioneered synergy for the 20th century, creating the Mickie Mouse clubs in which children "became" Minnie or Mickie Mouse, donning mouse ears and calling each other Minnie or Mickie. The idea of providing ways for people to feel like they and the product were the same was Disney's innovation and is key to the processes at work in today's branded superstores. Entertainment retail designer Michael Rubin says that the stores are intended "to immerse people in the product itself"³¹ and Naomi Klein writes, "It is this insistent desire to become one with your favorite pop-culture products that every one of the superbrands—from Nike to Viacom to the Gap to Martha Stewart—is trying to harness and expand upon."³² When companies work to harness this desire, they come up with environments which are the "highest feat of branding [where] companies provide their consumers with opportunities not merely to shop but to experience fully the meaning of their brand."³³

I would argue that the "meaning" of a brand is synonymous with use value as it is understood by Baudrillard and Haug; as an apparition, a constructed truth about a brand which facilitates the materialization of its exchange value. It is a truth which evaporates just as quickly as the packaging of a product which so

³¹ James S. Russell, "Entertainment Retail: Theming vs. Design," *Architectural Record* March 1997, 91.

³² Klein, 148.

³³ Russell, 146.

often, as Susan Willis points out, is the ways that products promise their "use" to consumers. But if products themselves are no longer key to the postmodern economy, and the "meanings" of the brand are, how is it possible to make this meaning, this corporate soul, tangible and therefore consumable?

Corporate meaning becomes tangible through the body and, as Klein suggests, its splendid capacity for "becoming one with" something outside of itself. The creators of the branded superstores seem to have figured out that the body can materialize the immaterial, the imaginary, and when this happens, the imaginary is experienced as if it were real. Consumers do not have to believe that the imaginary corporate meanings that are materialized in their bodies are really real. That is not the point of the stores. The point is the theatrical experience of the intangible meanings or "character" of the brand as if it were real. In this way, the stores resolve the contradiction between consumers who easily detect manipulation through false claims and seductive imagery and the ongoing need to produce use value, itself a "false" claim, as the justification for exchange value. The intangible meaning of the brand replaces the product itself as the focus of the retail experience and this intangible meaning is materialized in the body of the consumer who takes pleasure in the theatrical sense that identity can be manufactured differently at different locations through mimetic immersion in the souls of brands.

Although the address of the stores is to the body and its kinesthetic, emotional responsiveness, this body is not conceived of as an essentialized "self." Any one store manages to assemble a provisional self which resonates with the attributes of its brand. As the differences between Nike and Ralph Lauren will attest, selves are assembled quite differently by different brands. Entertainment retail depends upon chameleon-like consumers who have surrendered any attachment to an original color and look instead for the pleasures of moving between multiple camouflages or mimetic disappearances.

At the branded superstores, mimesis functions in a form that has little resemblance to the mimesis of classical theory. If classical mimesis is an imitation by a copy of the authentic or more truthful original, at the branded superstores mimesis releases consumers from the deeply ingrained positivist injunction to look for the "truth." The distinction between the representer and the represented disappears. The distinction between the consumer and the meaning of the brand disappears in such a way that truth becomes a superfluous category. In this context, the real is thoroughly sutured to the really made up, as Taussig might say. Sutured, the flesh bonds back together so that the fissure that formerly dermarcated the two sides disappears. The store illustrates how the consumer can be implicated to the point of disappearance in a made-up (like the use value or meaning of the brand) which simultaneously is or becomes real as a function of the consumer's experience. Through mimetic suturing, Taussig writes, "imagined worlds become not only theatricalized but factualized. Illusions thus serve the cause of belief, if not truth, thanks to the magical series of transfers between theatre and reality held in place by mimetic art." If this process is applied to branded retail, then imagined worlds and illusions are the use values or meanings of the brand. The stores theatricalize these imagined worlds, these illusions, by transferring them into the body of the consumer who then recognizes them as his own beliefs about himself. As in the example of the N'sync parody that I included in my introduction, Niketown makes it possible to believe something while simultaneously knowing it isn't true. It is entirely possible to give the make-up a materiality that lends to it the possibility of believability.

Stanislavski's key phrase "as if" is not so different from Taussig's "really made up." Both describe a mimetic convergence in which the embodiment of a fiction is experienced as if it were real while the enactor simultaneously knows it is not. The convergence is a kind of limbo which can produce intense pleasure;

people in this limbo are freed from the imperative of truth particularly the truth of self. For even as theorists of the postmodern like Jameson, and theorists of marketing alike point to the ways that the bourgeois self can no longer exist and identity must be and is understood instead as a fluid and constructed process, it seems to be the case that most people still use their "self" as a lens through which to measure the world and their own experience. The self seems still to function as a bottom line truth, a truth which is continually reproduced in contradiction to the proteanism which, as we have seen develop in the Renaissance, is simultaneously a pre-requisite for success in the market. So the mimetic process at Niketown and other stores facilitates a pleasurable release from the bonds of self-hood. But there is a caveat associated with this pleasure, which functions as a reassurance, a guarantee that the proteanism offered by the stores will not spiral out of control, into a radical mimetic fluidity which might unmake the category of identity itself. The guarantee lies in the reassembly of the sensation of a self. I enter into the spirit of Nike and in a process that is imperceptible to me, I begin to recognize "myself." I enter the store a tired, stressed person with all the history and experience that I believe constitutes myself. But gradually, at Niketown "I" begin to recognize "myself" as sensually vibrant, a winner, a determined, glowing, achiever.

Taussig's utopic projection of the radical possibilities of mimesis is that it might enable "an ineffable plasticity in the face of the world and its forms of life." This plasticity would be motivated by and result in a passive, yielding relationship between forms--the opposite of the domination of forms which is the underlying strategy of Western imperialism and capitalist development. As I note in my chapter on Disney, this mimetic plasticity is exactly what is exploited by Disney in The Lion King and the Disney store. But, as is the case with The Lion King, "inspirational retail" also curbs the radical potentials of mimesis. The

pleasure of plasticity can only be the pleasure of moving from the embodiment of brand, to the embodiment of another brand. Mimesis is put into the service of use value, which itself is the servant of exchange value.

Naomi Klein, who does an excellent job of reporting on corporate consolidation, offers little by way of explaining the attraction and pleasures of the branded superstores. However, she does offer one fascinating theory. She speculates that to members of the post World War II generations who never experienced the utopic excitement of the great urban planning experiments, the innovations in public space, these retail environments function similarly as the most innovative and exciting aesthetic experience available. While this may certainly be true, the pleasure is located at the much deeper and more complex level that I've described; in the sense that identity can be fluid but also in the comforting reassurance of the experience of the self reemerging, strangely recognizable as if it had always been an embodiment of the brand. As the commodity in all its forms and, increasingly, the intangible ether of brands, have displaced human interaction, shared uses of public space, community cohesion and traditional spiritual practices, meaning is something that is recognizable or accessible only through commodities or brands. If this is so, then the chance to embody those meanings, to recognize the self as a form of those meanings, becomes an important source of pleasure. The pleasure is the pleasure of mimesis, of fluid identity, but also the pleasure of inscription into the sustaining soul of the corporate brand. In a similar vein, shopping and consumption become more and more the centerpiece of living, while, as I've described, marketing experts have had to work desperately to keep ahead of consumer disenchantment and alienation from the obvious manipulation of advertisements. If shopping is "all there is" then what a relief that the new branded retail offers a space where people no longer are set at a distance from the consumption that currently makes the world go around.

Instead, the truth of the brand's meanings is no longer an issue because the stores allow consumers to release their attachment to truth through the mimetic collapse of the real into the "as if," or the suturing of the "real to the really made up."

Niketown

Circling upward, floor by floor, in the circular pattern, around the track, I am gradually wrapping Nike around myself, breathing heavily, breathing Nike into me with each labored breath. Bones and musculature are everywhere I look--exhibits of biology technologically enhanced through the precise application of advanced scientific principles studied by experts. The shoe at first resembles the human foot and gradually, frame by frame, becomes recognizable as the sports shoe. The biological human body morphs into a more perfect version of itself through the intercession of the Nike brand. Keep going, round and round, up and up, whoosh!, step to the rhythm of a song whose lyrics I hear in fragments; "no more jealousy, hate, anger, loneliness, fear." The beat, the kinetics, are infectious. I am being reassembled to recognize myself as a stockholder in this branded utopia.

Just as the store itself is an inset in the brick "real" of the old gym, so the discourses of technological and scientific accomplishment create a space abstracted from the real or the historical. Inherent in technology are all the promises, expectations, hopes and dreams, many of them utopic, which have yet to be made real. Technology applied to the human body is what will enable it to move past its current limits. A sign in the store: "Athletes are dedicating themselves to training like never before. Armed with the knowledge of sports science, they are discovering new strength, speed and stamina. For the bar forever rises, and these are five athletes who continue to push it higher." Large chrome capsules move up and down around me. Shoes are delivered by high tech capsules shot up from

some invisible region. The word engineered is everywhere. My body is wrapped into a digital sizing machine. At some level even I, a critic of the environment, begin to feel the hope of perfectability.

Each floor of my ascent is layered into the self that I will recognize as my own. Each floor a different sport, with shrines to the athletes whose "values" made their achievement possible. On the second floor, for instance, there is a set of lockers. Each locker is filled with the personal effects of an athlete including his shoes and his personal photos. Sign: "Definition of an athlete: One who counts the challenge of commitment. He who overcomes the certainty of failure in pursuit of victory. She who believes the reward is in the doing. We who play for the love of the game." I feel imperceptibly, gradually, the more floors I climb, that this is true of me.

On the floor for all-terrain sports, I try on a pair of what might in the past have been hiking boots. This contemporary construction of footwear is something I fail to recognize. I find that I want it anyway. I want it because it is high tech, because on my foot it makes me into a person I would have failed to recognize. It makes me nostalgic, not for the mountains which I actually visit but for mountains which I can feel through a Nike skin. They are mountains which are symbolic, while at the same time, with my adrenalin pumping, my physical relationship to them seems tangible. They are mountains I have the strength to succeed in surmounting. I place my foot over the glass inset in the wooden floor. Just below the glass are beautiful stones, like those I would walk on crossing a thin, wide stretch of water far above timber line. I'm at Niketown, and the fantasy I'm having is more important than any mountain I might someday climb, clad in Nike all-terrains or not. I'm seeing my feet in Nike's image, feeling my potential strength as Nike's strength.

Finally, I reach the top, the fifth floor, the floor devoted to high risk sports. The high tech bubble opens here onto a brick and mortar, low ceilinged, air duct adorned space. A pair of old fashioned, used sneakers hangs by its joined laces from a duct, cast-offs from an archaic world. I am delivered at the very end of my journey of self-assemblage into the old gym. The bubble is gone. But I don't need it any more. A protected space of the store, in which the real could effectively be sutured to the really made up, has produced me in the image of Nike. I am rewarded by the sign that dominates this space. It casts its eyes right toward me, its approving gaze. "Courage. The person on top of the mountain didn't fall there." I can see that the stained canvas sneakers are the mark of a past which has little to do with the new really made up branded me.

Naomi Klein notes that marketing experts who work for corporations like Nike are concerned about how quickly the effects of immersive, mimetic experiences will disappear once consumers leave retail environments. Because of this, corporations are branching out into ever more inclusive and long lasting experiences during which the meanings of the brands can be ever more effectively sutured to consumers, to be perceived and experienced as their own identity. Branded towns (like Celebration), branded cruises, and branded vacation destinations are among projects both realized and under development.³⁴

The Body: A Reprise

Mimesis as I am using it in this dissertation is a thoroughly bodily affair. I have described some of the bodily effects through which mimetic suturing occurs so that consumers in branded retail environments embody the use values of the brand. I have argued that it is this materialization of the use values in the body

³⁴ Klein, 152-156.

that achieves the theatrical "as if" effect. That is, if consumers experience use values bodily, mimetically, truth becomes a spurious category. When Haug uses the word "appearance" in his phrase "the appearance of use value," he invoked the categories of the authentic (the original) and the imitation (the appearance) used in classical mimesis. So even as his language continues to depend upon the categories of surface vs. deeper being, he pushes past this binary into a more radical understanding of what happens in the mimetic moment: "By gaining a new face, one simultaneously loses one's own. The body shares a similar fate; the commercialization of its surface appearance does not leave the sensual being unaffected. When capital chooses to profit from bodycare [for instance], there is no way that the existing relationship of the individual to his body can withstand this avaricious power."³⁵ Following his own insight into the increasingly dependent relationship between consumer and commodity which is effected as capital targets the body, he observes that ultimately the commodity offers itself not as a way for the consumer to package herself in order to resemble the commodity (or brand) but as a way for the consumer to become the commodity (or brand): "If the [consumer] is lured by its promise into buying the commodity, he buys not merely to be packaged as one, but actually to be one. The commodity's illusion promises its being."³⁶

While this statement too trades in the language of appearance vs. being (the real), it simultaneously theorizes the mimetic function of the brand environment in which, through the body and the senses, the distinction between appearance and being disappears into the magic of the commodity form. Even though we know from studies of consumer alienation that the consumer almost certainly knows

³⁵ Haug, 75.

³⁶ Ibid., 85.

that use values are alibis concocted by the corporations, in the store they feel/are real.

Corporations who produce these stores hope that this suturing of the real to the really made-up will last for at least awhile outside the store. Embedded in the body, the experience has a better chance of lingering, in the face of its inevitable disappearance. Susan Willis, in her discussion of use value, points out how quickly the appearance of use value can evaporate. Her focus, in this case, is on packaging. She refers to packaging as a plastic skin which makes its promises appear to be a part of the product itself. But when the skin's torn off, the use values of the product disappear. Willis argues that people on some level have come to know this, and so postpone that moment of inevitable disappearance as they linger over the still packaged commodity. The naked product is, after all, only its material self, capable of producing none of the magical effects it seemed to promise when it was encased in its glittering skin.³⁷

"Entertainment retail" is a step on the way to erasing this problem, a way to postpone that inevitable moment when use values evaporate. By producing use value as a bodily experience, corporations hope to embed the alibi in the body and in so doing to change the body. The body leaves the environment still resonating with the newly constructed sense of itself, and corporations like Nike hope that these consumers will continue to perceive the brand as part of the self wherever they see it. As James Russell writes, "Brand mavens have discovered that stores, uniquely, could immerse patrons in an experience—one that offers a powerful means to imprint a brand name."³⁸

The relationship between the brand environment and the actual purchase of the branded product is ambiguous. In the following statement, Gordon

³⁷ Susan Willis, *A Primer for Daily Life* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 3-6.

³⁸ James S. Russell, "Entertainment Retail: Theming vs. Design," *Architectural Record* March 1997, 91.

Thompson, a Nike vice president who headed the design team for Niketown, is very clear about the function of Niketown as a way to communicate a brand, but less clear about its purpose as a retail venue: "We need Niketown stores to carry the Nike story. If the customer buys a product at the Niketown store or goes down the street to buy it at Foot Locker, either way, we win."³⁹ As Naomi Klein points out in a section of her book called "Superstores: Stepping Inside the Brand," corporations are spending a disproportionate amount to establish costly immersive stores on the priciest of real estate without any expectation of profit at these locations.⁴⁰ Of course, profits can only materialize through sales of products (manufactured by sub-contractors in third world bordertowns and subsequently branded by the corporations we recognize). But the mimetic, bodily address to consumers made in these stores raises the question not exactly of whether the purchase of products will eventually become obsolete in the "first world," although this is imaginable: The United State's corporate empire could extend to ever more markets across the globe and it might be that the citizens of the "first world" will function increasingly as the brand's image more than its primary consumers. But the question these environments do raise is whether they may radically redefine the context of consumption and the role consumers believe it to play in their lives. Up to now, consumption has clearly been almost the defining characteristic of American culture. It has been inspired by the desire to have the characteristics of commodities mystically conferred on us, even as we know that our desires are manipulated and created for the purpose of profit, and even though the product, we know, will inevitably disappoint. But under the reign of the superstores, commodities will no longer have to serve the function of offering a

³⁹ Virginia Kent Dorris, "Niketown New York City," *Architectural Record* March 1997, 103.

⁴⁰ Klein, 148.

use value. Instead, they will be accessories to branded life. That is, what we are really consuming is ourselves as the brand.

If corporations can imprint their meanings into the human body, then it may be possible to mask for the long term the fact that those meanings are only alibis. The human body and its sensory, mimetic capacities (which enable it to live inside the "as if"), is a much more permanent repository for "meanings" than are ephemeral and quickly obsolete inanimate objects. We will continue to buy (our life will have to be accessorized, supported by "things"), but those things will no longer have to bear the weight of carrying messages that inevitably disappoint. We ourselves will carry the message. We will be living in the "as if."

Echoing Niketown's lead designer, Michael Wolf, in his book on entertainment retail, says that branded retail "imprint[s] an experience on you as surely as the farmer's wife imprints good feelings in a clutch of baby geese when she feeds them a handful of grain every day."⁴¹ This is a remarkable passage. Not only does it connect consumers to the helpless and passive image of baby geese, and not only does it second the description of branded superstores as imprinting themselves on consumers through the body, but that brand imprinting is described as like swallowing food, and swallowing that food repeatedly. And it is food, as we tell children, which makes us, which constitutes the cellular structure of our ever changing bodies, which makes us "who we are."

Class and the Body

In order to deepen a study of how identity is mimetically reassembled by different theatricalized shopping experiences, some of the analytic tools which sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has introduced into cultural studies may be helpful.

⁴¹ Ibid., 152.

Not unlike Walter Benjamin, he argues that the body is an epistemological tool: "We learn bodily. The social order inscribes itself in bodies through permanent confrontation [which is] always largely marked by affectivity and, more precisely, by affective transactions with the environment." ⁴² In other words, social relations are objectified in commodities and in the cultural environment as a whole. The body is influenced, affected and changed by both. Thus, the body absorbs and expresses social relations. We learn our place through the medium of the body. We recognize as our self what is, in fact, a prescribed set of social relations. The qualities of objects are absorbed into people through bodily experience, or "affective" interactions in particular spaces and with particular objects. Ugly linoleum or lovely plush carpeting, for instance, the smell of cooking or the smell of perfumes; each lingers in the body, or is ingested, as the incorporation of class. As Bourdieu points out when he discusses food and sports, even the shapes of bodies themselves, or the effort to reshape them, are the embodiment of social relations.

Bourdieu's central terms, "class dispositions," "class fractions," "cultural and economic capital" and the "habitus," should all be understood as linked to the body. As such, they are all applicable to an effort to understand the power of branded retail. America may be the country where class and the race relations which are often inseparable from it are rarely mentioned. But class and race, as well as the way these are embedded in the body through sensual experience, have not escaped the attention of the designers of branded retail or their corporate employers. Rather, class "identities," embedded in the body, as well as the ways these bodily identities may be experienced as fluid, are key to the mimetic

⁴² Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 141.

connection consumers make with brands during their immersive experiences in the stores.

For Bourdieu, class consists of layers and various forms of the organization of class identities. All of these can be understood through the body and its preferences, identifications, and expressions. The two main classes, which Bourdieu calls “dominating” and “dominated and the class fractions each contains, are continually defining and redefining themselves in terms of “dispositions” which distinguish them from the members of other classes or class fractions. Dispositions are the tendencies among members of classes or class fractions to prefer some objects over others, some forms of entertainment over others, some foods over others, etc. These preferences are naturalized in what is commonly referred to as taste. The consumption choices people make on the basis of what they understand to be their “taste,” tend to reproduce the class distinctions. If I am wealthy and purchase expensive French wines which I allow to age in my cellar before serving it at elegant dinner parties, for instance, I almost certainly will understand myself as separated by a wide divide from people who buy Coors beer and drink a few “brews” while watching the game. Each group will, most likely, vouch for its own “taste,” viewing these “tastes” as something inherent to them, rather than something which is continually produced and reproduced through consumption itself. Bourdieu’s analysis helps to make clear that taste is not innate or natural but the product of a constant social struggle through which existing class relations are reproduced. Bourdieu’s analysis shows how, like the farmer’s wife feeding the goslings, the body is the site of this reproduction.

Bourdieu calls the combination of dispositions that create any one group the habitus of that group. Bourdieu works the idea of habitus over and over, providing multiple productive definitions. In the following definition, he thinks of habitus as the faculty imbedded in the various social tendencies, proclivities and

identities which unifies them into what appears, consequently, as a lifestyle or, in current lingo, a lifestyle choice: "The theoretical space of habitus [is] the generative formulae which underlie each of the classes of practices and properties, that is, the transformation into a distinct and distinctive life-style of the necessities and facilities characteristic of a condition and a position."⁴³ The habitus is a way to account for the apparent coherency of an individual's choices while revealing that coherency to be a product of class relations. For the habitus is not a natural faculty. It is as Bourdieu also says, "the internalized form of class condition and of the conditionings it entails."⁴⁴

If these formulations by Bourdieu seem circular, they are. Habitus, understood as both as created by class dispositions and creating them, is a way to account for the feeling people have that they are naturally attracted to one lifestyle more than another, and the feeling that they themselves are active in the choices which create the lifestyle. As an internalized form of class, the habitus is the imperceptible way in which consumption choices reproduce class relations while at the same time those choices do express the individual agency of the consumer. Bourdieu writes,

The function of the notion of habitus, [is to] restore to the agent a generating, unifying, constructing, classifying power, while recalling that this capacity to construct social reality, itself socially constructed, is not that of a transcendent subject but of a socialized body, investing in its practice socially constructed organizing principles that are acquired in the course of a situated and dated social experience.⁴⁵

⁴³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 126.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁴⁵ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 136.

Habitus, then, is a space which is both determined by the choices consumers have made and simultaneously determines those choices. It is always a social space because consumption and "lifestyle" choices, whether perceived as such or not, are always part of a larger network of social relations.

I am taking from Bourdieu his use of the word "space," but it is hard to be clear what he means by this term, or whether he means, deliberately, for the word "space" to be shifting and ambiguous. It is my choice, then, to understand the idea that habitus is a space in two different ways: it can be a perceived space of social identification, or it can be an actual space which reiterates the perceived identifications of a consumer through the objects and spatial arrangements which constitute it. Either way, it is a generative space, producing the terms for consumption or for the reproduction of social allegiances. Because of Bourdieu's emphasis on the body as the way we learn social relations, I want to suggest that the habitus also be thought of as a space which is inflected with the sensual cues which are both produced by social relations and which the consumer produces as a guarantee of identity.

Bourdieu, however, in yet another take on the habitus, says that the habitus is a fixed identification. He claims that the body is attached on a gut level to the set of social relations which constitute it and that this gut level connection is a loyalty that can't be undone: "The habitus is the site of durable solidarities, loyalties that cannot be coerced, the visceral attachment of a socialized body to the social body that has made it and with which it is bound up."⁴⁶ While this may be so I would suggest that some branded retail environments offer an artificially constructed habitus where consumers have the opportunity to transgress against the habitus to which they are bound, to betray their social loyalties. For consumers, habitus takes on the liberating potential of being playable. The "as if"

⁴⁶ Ibid., 145.

of mimesis offers corporations precisely this ability to dislodge consumers from the social identifications to which they may formerly have been bound and hence move them around into different branded niches, or habitus. The construction of habitus in the form of an immersive environment is the feature of branded retail that allows the use values, or alibis, or the corporate brand to be embodied and, thus, to feel real.

While people may not be aware of their habitus, the "visceral" attachment that people have to the social relations which have produced them has historically tended to make social relations, at least to some extent, visible. For instance, some people are "viscerally" attached to an upper class habitus and, as such, differentiate themselves from the vulgar working classes who could never afford Lauren. Others, understanding themselves by means of a working class habitus, might identify the inequity of a social system which produces a Lauren class at the expense of the majority of others. If the habitus is fixed, built into people, then class antagonisms tend to become visible. The rich stay rich or get richer, and the poor stay poor.

The recent trends in corporate marketing, and specifically the use of branded retail, tend to obscure class identities. Class relations⁴⁷ continue to determine and shape the very real injustices, both domestic and foreign, which capital perpetuates. But consumers, offered multiple, distinctly characterized habitus when they go shopping, can experience habitus as playable. The brand, offered up on a sensual palate of lived, felt experience, and thus transformed into a

⁴⁷ I am continually aware, as I write, of the omission of race from my theorizations. While I discuss it specifically in a later passage on Niketown, for the most part I am subsuming it in the category of class. It is also true that my own understanding of race is grounded in class. I do think that, most often, class and race are inseparable terms in racial struggle and in the racialized categories constructed by an unjust society. That is, for instance, while Ralph Lauren is an explicitly white product, a person of color who has accrued the requisite forms of capital (economic, cultural, etc.) might adopt Lauren as a sign of class distinction which transcends racial identity, or transform race identity into class identity. At any rate, a whole analysis of race can and should be made of these stores, even if I am editing such an analysis from my own discussion.

habitus, allows us to be anything we want, to experience a branded habitus "as if" it were really ours. What is at risk here are the class identifications which have formerly been the basis of acting against the grain of power. almost illegibly, or in invisible ink, the corporations are able, by offering multiple understandings of "self" and "identity," to write into us their own brands, as a part of the very fabric of our sensual beings. Brands can confirm a habitus or contradict it. But the bottom line is that they make it playable. The brand feels real, and the need for social struggle feels like a figment of our imagination. The fluid, "deconstructed" self, that oft decried symptom of postmodernity, may be the preferred understanding of identity in a corporate culture, produced in the best interests of a corporate future. Barefaced and undisguised, class surfaces in the maquiadores, the "export processing zones" or EPZs, of the third world, where young Phillipino women work for less than subsistence wages to make shoes for Nike and clothes for Ralph Lauren.⁴⁸ Corporations hope to displace, bury, disappear the creation of surplus value, the material impoverishment of all but the ruling few, in the bodies and faces of people who will never leave their habitus. They have not been altogether successful in this attempt, especially since young activists are focusing their energies on the corporate rise to global power and have made the faces of the poor on the other side of the world visible. But, for the most part, here in prosperous America corporations increasingly strategize the mimetic "as if." The playable habitus ensures that we can feel the alibis, or use values, of corporations as if they were real, so that, imprinted into our bodies, like feed into goslings, the brand lives on.

Ralph Lauren

⁴⁸ Klein, 202-229 and Andrew Hsiao, "Standing Up To the Swoosh," *Village Voice*, 10 October, 2000, 41.

The urgent forward movement of the city sidewalk stops when I pass through these doors. When I move, I feel myself moving forward in a walk that feels like gliding, in the cooled air and hushed space. I feel a strange physical relief in the luxurious environment, as though the rushing, demanding cares of life outside this place have been lifted from me and I can wander, at my own pace, and at ease, maybe stroking the smooth wood of a table, bending to smell flowers, resting for a moment in a beautiful old chair while my eyes drift over paintings, and, after awhile, floating movie star style up the lush staircase, feeling as if the train of my long and elegant dress were draped over the steps behind my languid and elegant body, watched over by the progenitors whose portraits in oils adorn the walls. After the second floor, I will ascend to the third and then the fourth by the inner staircases, darkened and softened with plush, sound absorbing carpeting, the scent of age and memory, and the scenes of violence and dominion, made benign by their stillness, which comfort and name the people associated with this home; paintings of men on horses, riding crops in hand, hunting dogs with bloody birds in their jaws, more progenitors, fishing scenes, fish hung by hooks, western landscapes, captured. I move through the most interior domesticity, and feel the dark, quiet heart of the home.

Upstairs, each floor of the mansion is an elegant interior, with carved white ceilings, crystal chandeliers, and small rooms opening off a grand center hallway. The second floor is for men, the third for women and children, and the fourth for linens. I go all the way to the top, to the bedroom, to a four poster bed lavishly dressed in pink linens. Next to the bed is a night table with a tray with champagne, champagne glasses and pistachio nuts. Ballerinas in pink and gray sepia tones dance across the wall, frozen in artful photographs. Other tables are strewn with art and photography books: Cartier, Bresson, Picasso. I love these books. I could

sink into one of these pink chairs and stay forever. I hate pink. Here I find it tasteful. Across from the bedroom there is a small sitting room with a round table for two in white linens, two chairs, pink peonies and a plate of pink meringues. I love meringues. Behind, a glorious spray of white dogwood blossoms, one of my favorite of all the spectacles of spring. A life is already being lived here. I step into it. I recognize myself in it. My grandparents, the working poor, did not know Bresson, never tried meringues, decorated their house with plastic flowers, ate pies made from apples from the tree in their backyard, slept under quilts handmade from bits of old clothes, everything recycled, made to serve again, nothing thrown away. They would not have known what to do with themselves in this corporate home. I breath deep, inhaling the smell of lilies, the fresh, cooled air. The feel of the heavy wool of a handmade, homemade quilt, embedded in me, shifts, and maybe evaporates, as I stroke the smooth surfaces of Ralph Lauren; the pink bed, the velvet chair. Ralph Lauren; it's here. It's real. I'm in it as if I belonged here. Lauren is luxury, Lauren is freedom from care, Lauren is the assurance of enclaves protected from the world, Lauren is retreat and refreshment, Lauren is eternal spring. I don't see anything for sale.

I'm soothed by the hush of the place, the dark, aged, lustrous mahogany of doors and trim, the purity of white walls, the subtlety and clarity of the lighting and how it softens everything, including my own reflection in the numerous mirrors and reflective surfaces. I am soothed by walking on the floors traversed for more than a century by the slippered feet of the rich, the noiseless steps of the servants. It is all startlingly contemporary and yet I can almost hear the subtle clink of china, the subdued voices of women and men, history's entitled ones. Here I am, in their private interior, my postmodern "self" behaving "as if" I could be one of them, in a "real" house of the kind I would never, ordinarily, be invited to. Ralph Lauren offers to me a loosening of my habitus; it opens its doors to me.

The hall leads me into another room, much larger than the smaller sitting rooms of the home. It is a bedroom and dining room which materializes me in a fantasy of a life of ease. I have walked into a fantasy, which at this moment seems to be my own, and it is the Ralph Lauren brand. The rooms are a combination of all my favorites: Mediterranean, French Provincial and the American Southwest. Into the scene are spectacularly layered wooden beams, tile floors, adobe walls, cast iron chandeliers, dried bunches of lavender and flax, worn and frayed straw mats on the floor, four poster canopy beds covered in Indian cloth with a tray of half-eaten red pears and wine, potted palms, dark wooden shutters closed (against the harsh sun), fireplace, stacks of firewood with dried flowers of all kinds, peeling plaster, hemp rope, beautiful old baskets, pottery and ceramics, antique French Provincial furniture, a dried hornet's nest, encrusted shells, Tom Waits over the speaker, mysterious and fragmented black and white photographs, huge old books on esoteric subjects in faded and torn yellowish covers, and, on the table and sideboard, an extravagance of food--more red pears, cheeses, artichokes, dates, French wine (in bottles and huge flasks marked generically "Vin du Provence," fresh breads. This world-beat room is attached to an unspecified colonial history; the shuttered, floor to ceiling windows, the potted palm, the frayed hemp rugs evoke the Carribean, Central America, or Africa. The place simultaneously produces the signs of where the wealth has come from (imperialism and colonialism) and what can be gotten with that wealth. The sugar cane fields run on near slave labor, for instance, might be just on the other side of those shutters, as I luxuriate with what those fields bring to those who live in this habitus: the artichokes, the wine, the fine cheeses, the beauty of the age in the furniture. I am surrounded with the effects of inheritance; money materialized in the antique books, the artworks. I soak in these luxurious sensations "as if," like the men and women who lived here, I too could travel, I too could collect all the

effects of the world and aesthetize them, using them to express my style, my taste. I feel that the room defines how far I am from the sweating workers outside those shuttered windows, how distant from the violent sharpness of cane that cuts the flesh, or the violent noisy city. Ralph Lauren is at once travel and insularity, at once the natural world and the containment, control and aesthetization of the outdoors, it is a European taste, a self which has been enriched, figuratively and actually, by imperialist contact across the globe. It is the entitlement of wealth. It is the claim to wealth. It is the unabashed assertion of privilege. These are the alibis. This room, this house, ensures their imprint; like a gosling, I have been fed.

Bourdieu and the Playable Habitus

Two of the most obvious features of the store—its location in a home and the age of the home and certain of its decorative details—are very important to an analysis of the system of distinctions which becomes the use value of Lauren and the store. Age is everywhere in the store, coexisting with the contemporary, as though itself serving as an alibi, an excuse for what is new in the store, perhaps to help dissolve the tension between old and new money, crass commodification and the gradually acquired capital of the landed, historic, and cultured gentry who may be as appalled at commodity culture as the left-wing critic. Especially on the first floor, at entrance level, where shopper/actors first come into contact with the environment, the signs of age are made glaringly obvious, but in objects of very high quality. Leather armchairs are cracked and peeling, the slivering of lovely mirrors is so deteriorated they reflect nothing, battered old umbrellas are crammed into old brass stands, threadbare kilim rugs partially cover the shining parquet floors.

The personal effects of the imaginary occupants are antique; valises and suitcases, straw hats, maps, globes, even the shells that are placed throughout the store (presumably a theme for the summer months) are encrusted with the effects of age. Of course, all these objects in and of themselves are objects which confer distinction on their owners. They are the signs of having the wealth to travel, to explore, to collect. They evoke not only the pleasures of the wealthy but also their violent history as the dominating forces of colonialism and imperialism, traversing the globe in the interests of the accumulation of capital. But their age distances the imaginary occupants, insulates them from any responsibility. Antique valises, skins collected on safari, all that is merely the decor, the evocation of world domination in the past, translated into something else in the present. If the association is raised, and it is a necessary one because world domination is after all a distinguishing act for those it serves, it is at the same time made benign and translated into a language of nature love, rustic simplicity, simple luxury, and the quaintness and evocative power of the antique object.

For Bourdieu, age and the domestic scene are linked in the development of distinction. He breaks down what he calls the "mode of acquisition" of either economic or cultural capital into two primary forms: inherited and acquired. Inherited acquisition, just as it implies, refers to capital gained by birth and this is always a more legitimate form of capital than any gained by acquisition, as through education. Both the family and the home it inhabits, complete with objects, is the preferred site for the acquisition of cultural capital. If the objects in the home are old or old heirlooms, this is even better since their age is proof of a kind of mastery over time belonging to the dominant class. That is, members of this family have been members of the dominant class over time. As such they have either passed objects down to heirs, or are able to recognize the value objectified in historical or aged goods. They have, therefore, the most legitimate claim to capital.

Noting once again the body as the site of most significant absorption of class distinction, Bourdieu writes:

[Inherited] capital is enhanced by the advantages which precocious acquisition of legitimate culture gives in learning cultural skills, whether table manners or the art of conversation, musical culture or the sense of propriety, playing tennis or pronunciation. The embodied cultural capital of previous generations functions as a sort of advance . . . which, by providing from the outset the example of culture incarnated in familiar models, enables the newcomer to start acquiring the basic elements of the legitimate culture from the beginning, in the most unconscious and impalpable way . . .

Legitimate manners owe their value to the fact that they manifest the rarest conditions of acquisition, that is, a social power over time which is tacitly recognized as the supreme excellence: to possess things from the past, i.e. accumulated, crystallized history, aristocratic names and titles, chateaux or stately homes, paintings and collections, vintage wines and antique furniture, is to master time, through all those things whose common feature is that they can only be acquired in the course of time, by means of time, against time.⁴⁹

Bourdieu also notes that the early, imperceptible learning within the family is also the source of the self-confidence and ease that marks the members of the dominant class.⁵⁰ By locating the store in a home, an old home, an inherited, family home, and saturating it with not only antiques but worn antiques, Lauren attaches to itself the sense of ultimate legitimacy, of the very best kind of people,

⁴⁹ Bourdieu, *Distinctions*, 70.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 66.

created by the most refined, inherited capital, whose birthright is luxury. One of the use values which the store allows shopper/actors to embody, however briefly, is how it might feel to be born to privilege.

One of the key marks of this privileged class is what Bourdieu calls the "aesthetic disposition." The precondition for an aesthetic disposition is a distance from the world of economic necessity. This distancing allows the person with an aesthetic disposition to be equally distanced from any ethical response to works of art; rather, works of art are regarded as assemblages of form and style, disassociated from any social or political urgency. This disposition, Bourdieu says, can only be cultivated and developed in the kind of home or environment the Ralph Lauren store recreates; surrounded by inherited capital, in settings which invite the contemplation of art or the absorption of books and learning, without any sense of having to do so for any particular purpose other than one's own personal cultivation of self. The books which are everywhere in the store, and the art which is everywhere, and the collectible antiques, and the flowers; all of this creates the scene of acquisition for the aesthetic disposition. There is no reference to an outside world driven by necessity, urgent in its need to feed, or house, or cloth, or medicate human beings. Inside the store, shoppers are lulled by an overwhelming aesthetization, the reassuring feeling that they have an aesthetic disposition. They are among the class of people who lounge on luxurious beds and read art books for no other reason than pure pleasure, who read Walt Whitman or Bob Dylan lyrics because they can, because they have all the time in the world. This is another use value of the store, or rather another layer of one use value--ease, inherited capital, sensual luxury, and the aesthetic disposition are tasteable here in this store.

My hypothesis is that, taken as a whole, the seduction of branded retail is that it provides people the opportunity to act "as if" habitus were playable.

However, some brands, like Ralph Lauren, may want to create a habitus which can only be played by people whose "real" habitus are within the dominant class but who may enjoy the "as if" of the store because it allows them to experience an aspect of the dominant class which they are not ordinarily privy to. The designers of the store have clearly included space for different fractions of the dominant class within the store. Bourdieu reminds us that these class fractions are often so antagonistic that the fact that they each have the same relationship to the world of necessity is forgotten and a class fraction can appear to be resistant to the dominant fraction. Artists make up a significant class fraction of the dominant class and they tend to support artistic innovation which is made as a reaction to the aesthetic distancing of the dominant class fractions. Artists of this kind tend to reject decorative corporate art and to support art which engages with the social world. The Lauren store clarifies the way in which both class fractions are part of the same dominant social structure. A book about the Sex Pistols and a book of Mapplethorpe photography occupy the same social space in this store with the close-up of Michelangelo's David, the books on Picasso, the volume of Dryden's poetry. What matters is the acquisition of culture and the way that acquisition takes place.

Pulled toward the exotic foods, caressed by scents, invited to sit and read and belong, to soak in works of art and the artifacts of an aesthetized natural world, to quietly climb the same stairway once climbed daily by the members of a powerful family, to feel the same wooden banister, to emerge into a bedroom with the bed's coverlet pulled down, a tray with a half-eaten piece of chocolate cake, to lie and listen to the music--these are the incorporations which take place in the store. The incorporations, in turn, facilitate the corporeal experience of self which, as a member of a dominant class, can afford to shut the doors on a harsh summer day, and a demanding and violent city, and glide up the shining mahogany

stairway to some cool refreshment in a soft chair with maybe some Charlie Parker on the CD player.

As at Niketown, it hardly matters if I buy Lauren products now. In fact, I don't even remember anything for sale in the store. When I return, I do notice stacks of sheets, or shirts, or socks, stacked so aesthetically, by color, on the mahogany built-ins that I can understand why I didn't see them the first time through the store. The Mediterranean room, however, has no products in it at all, and Ralph Lauren, with the exception of a few small items like the bed covering, sells nothing in it—except itself as a brand, as use value, as habitat. That's what my body will remember: the sensations, the luxury, the artistic associations, the pull to the natural world, to the exotic worlds I've never visited. From the moment I entered the door, I was changed bodily, as my manners changed instantly, quieted, refined, performed (after all, the place swarms with perfectly groomed clerks who seem to be watching for correct deportment). As Bourdieu notes, "The emphasis on manners gives the recognized possessors of the legitimate manner an absolute, arbitrary power to recognize or exclude."⁵¹ Hushed by the very air, I feel what it would feel like if I had those manners, if I was one of *them*, included, and excluding those trapped by necessity.

Niketown: A Reprise

The use values of the Ralph Lauren brand are derived from the feeling of distinction, the privileges of exclusion and insularity, of being one of the privileged few, of health and well-being derived from wealth, exclusive foods, and outdoor activities focused on hunting and horseback riding, the domination of nature. The use value of Niketown is quite different. Niketown seems based on the opposite

⁵¹ Ibid., 95.

of distinction, inclusion. Race, gender and different types of sports are co-mingled without regard to how each might function in the processes of distinction. Part of the intended effect of the store, in fact, seems to be to make distinctions seem ephemeral, as though we are all made equal through equal amounts of spirit, courage, effort and stamina, not only in sports, but in all of life's endeavors. While Ralph Lauren trades in distinction and the outward signs of successfully dominated worlds, from its animal skin rugs and ottomans to its total naturalization of whiteness, Niketown is designed around inner qualities, qualities that are accessible, seemingly, regardless of the amount of any of the forms of capital (cultural or economic, etc.) one might possess. Part of the brand's use value is this utopic masking of social realities. That Nike has been singled out for its demeaning labor practices (as a kind of figurehead for the damages America's global corporations are wreaking on the world) doesn't prevent, or perhaps makes even more necessary, the use value in the store; that Nike produces a human, and democratically distributed investment in achievement, will power, and courage, fair play, and love of playing. Rather than a single habitus, Niketown creates the experience of all the possible habitus mingled in a joyful celebration of what is possible given the right amount of determination, fortitude and right-minded spirituality.

While different shopper/actors may gravitate toward the section of the store which most expresses their previous class disposition, the layout of the store invites them to a kinesthetic experience which seems determined to defy these dispositions. At Niketown, the black, working class basketball star on the 2 1/2 story video screen, moving in slow motion toward a breathtaking physical feat while the music pumps the blood of shopper/actors into a participatory frenzy of excitement as if it were they in action, is made of the same physical matter as us, and that physical matter can be driven toward the same goals, motivated by the

same action, as any other body, regardless of class, race or gender. While the Ralph Lauren store, located as it is in an actual home, and a home which so clearly delineates class distinction, materializes the space of habitus in a very literal form, Niketown naturalizes the body into a thing seemingly beyond distinctions, a world freed of habitus. In another irony of Nike, this world without distinctions is a use value attached to products which have been developed through Nike's exploitation of race and class markers. Nike led the way in mining the "cool" culture of poor, urban, black youth for the styles and trends to shape products which would then be perceived as the most hip on the market. In a doubly exploitive circle, styles are taken from the youth, "blown up," either by hip hop bands who like brands or by musicians paid to do so, and sold back to them for a 100% profit. So, as Naomi Klein reports, Nike is so intent "on borrowing style, attitude and imagery from black urban youth that the company has its own word for the practice: bro-ing. That's when Nike marketers and designers bring their prototypes to inner city neighborhoods in New York, Philadelphia, or Chicago and say, 'Hey, bro, check out the shoes,' to gauge the reaction to new styles and to build up a buzz."⁵²

As the Nike corporation obviously knows, sports and sports products are well marked by class dispositions and class habitus. Because of this, Bourdieu has devoted considerable analytic energy to sports. Like any other cultural practice, sport is the site of struggle between the dominated and dominating classes as well as the class fractions. Bourdieu locates differing sports practices as dependent upon different orientations to or understandings of the body which originate in class. The whole idea of sport, he argues, begins as a result of class differentiation; physical exercises, associated with a strict set of rules, and performed solely as an end in themselves, were developed within private schools and functioned to

⁵² Klein, 75.

differentiate the students at those schools from lower class people who still played games associated with community and folk culture. Like the aesthetic disposition, the sporting disposition develops as an activity for its own sake, willfully separated from a world of necessity. Sport in this sense is also, according to Bourdieu, heavily gendered, with sports considered a training ground for manliness and character formation.

While sports have obviously spread across class lines, certain sports like golf, horseback riding, tennis or sailing, have continued as markers of class distinction. There is also a distinguishing effect in whether one participates in or merely consumes sports. Statistics show that a greater number of the dominant class actually participate in a sport than do members of the dominated class.⁵³ Likewise, choice of sport is also determined by the attitude toward one's body, and what one hopes for one's body, which is an effect of class disposition. Working class people tend to choose sports which involve a lot of effort and physical duress while members of the dominating classes choose sports activities which are aimed toward greater health or beauty. They tend to be more invested in what Bourdieu calls a rationalized belief in the body's capacities. Even if they can't see the results of what they are doing, they believe that there is a payoff. The most exclusive choices are sports which are financially inaccessible to the majority and which, like mountaineering, leave the majority far behind and permit the participant to emerge into a rarified and purifying atmosphere.

Finally, there is the distinguishing sense in which, in most cases, sports are a consumer spectacle, big business, rather than something in which most people participate. That is, members of the elite often do still participate, playing golf, tennis, swimming, doing aerobics, yoga, or lifting weights at an exclusive

⁵³ Pierre Bourdieu, "How Can One be a Sports Fan?" in *The Cultural Studies Reader* ed. Simon During (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 346.

Manhattan gym before a long day as an investment banker. The working class majority, driven by necessity and therefore handicapped by lack of time and energy, tends to consume sports as passive observers and are thus distinguished physically from members of the upper classes who tend to have rigorously maintained physiques. As Bourdieu says, the struggle between classes in the area of sports is a struggle over the legitimate body.⁵⁴ Chances are that the trim body of the upper class banker, fed on low-fat, high quality, high nutrition foods, and disciplined by a strict schedule of work-outs and tennis matches will be more socially legitimate (reproducing its own entitlement) than the overweight body of an underpaid childcare worker who goes home to care for her own children. Still, more democratically inclined health centers and health outreach facilities struggle to find ways to attract members of the dominated class and class fractions into body maintenance and sports programs which attempt to disseminate the distinguishing markers of the dominant class to the dominated, even as the sports industry ups the ante by developing more and more rarified forms of sports.

The kinesthetic, sensory affect of Niketown confers the distinguishing "as if" of a well tended body on all of the shopper/actors who visit the store by including them in the heart pounding, visceral experience of sports. This sense of participation is a mechanism for masking the ongoing class struggle represented in sporting practices. The mega-business of professional sports depends upon a watching public who is willing to consume sports and sports artifacts (clothes, shoes, equipment) without demanding more equitable distribution of sports opportunities and facilities, or the creation of community events rather than big business spectacle, without actively criticizing the huge amounts of capital which flow into this single industry and nowhere else, etc. So when Niketown offers the Nike use value, part of that value is to mask momentarily for the majority of

⁵⁴ Ibid., 344.

shopping/actors their passive consumption of sports and replace it with what it feels like to be a competitor, someone with the courage to aim for their own personal best, someone with willpower, self-definition and wings. As such, the store also momentarily distinguishes those shopper/actors from the vast hordes out there who are merely passive spectators and consumers of sports.

If it creates a habitus-less "as if," the store is not without reference to habitus. Nike presents all of what in any other environment would be the distinguishing, habitus generated, characteristics of certain sports. The body is freed of habitus through the circulatory system of the store; as visitors move around the "track," moving simultaneously ever upwards toward the achievement of their full potential, they pass through all the types of sports without regard to whether that sport is practiced by dominant or dominated classes, everyone passes through basketball [dominated], everyone through hiking and jogging and golf [dominating], everyone reaches the rarified atmosphere at the top of the store.

And in a process which is made contingent to its democratization, the body is rationalized and instrumentalized. This rationalization of the body becomes a new habitus to which we may all belong. Emerging from the foggy days of memory (the high school gym) bodies become equally measurable and quantifiable, regardless of what sports they are engaged in. It doesn't matter who you are, you can measure your foot in the high tech scale, try your foot in the shoe originally scientifically designed for an athlete different from you in race and class. Science creates all bodies as the same body. According to Nike, what makes that body legitimate has nothing to do with cultural or economic capital. What makes it legitimate is if it feels like Nike. Nike is not a sports product producer, but a producer of spiritual values. The body which, like the athletes it sponsors, associates itself with Nike because it feels the throb and pulse of the brand's values, is the body which can make a claim to social legitimacy. The store is a

place you can come to let your body do that, whether you are a couch potato, a schoolyard basketball player, or a baseball fanatic. Niketown legitimates bodies, for the moment of their branded performance in the store, and to the extent that it masks ongoing class struggles outside its doors.

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that use value, far from being inherent to material objects, is produced as an alibi for exchange value. It is important to recognize and understand this form in which capital instrumentalizes consumers. Entertainment-retail environments create spaces in which the consumer produces use value as a "truth" through the material, kinesthetic, sensory apparatus of her body. The consumer is put to work by the corporation to "prove" use value, as the system of meaning which the corporation uses to identify itself. In the process, the consumer also, on a contingent basis, recognizes herself as the corporate brand. The embodiment of use calls forth a self which is recognized and even enjoyed as temporary, shifting, moving freely to structure itself with different corporate meanings. Because the body is the location of the deepest forms of learning and remembering, corporations seem to be deploying this kind of bodily participation at high profile locations without emphasis on consumption itself. Rather, they are banking on remembering bodies to bring the after-glow of use value with them into the world, making purchases, re-iterating the meanings sunk below their skin.

But even as consumers are entertained by environments specifically designed to enhance their own sense that their identities do not have to be fixed, that the soul of corporate brands is a space inside of which all is possible, women and children in the Philippines work for less than one dollar a day to sew those

swoosh emblazoned clothes, and in the urban centers of America, ketchup and rice is supper to small children who will ever only dream of becoming athletic stars and making it out of the stranglehold of the class based identity which is at the dark center of capitalism.

Chapter Five

In the Body of the Commodity We Shall Triumph Over Ruin: Performance at the Forum Shops, Las Vegas

The ancient allegory of the *theatrum mundi*, or all the world's a stage, is at the heart of this chapter about the Forum Shops at Caesar's Palace casino in Las Vegas. In the Forum Shops mall, consumers are immersed in a Roman scene in which they participate and from which they witness the ruin of the fabled city of Atlantis. I use the trope of the *theatrum mundi* because I have found that it's a way of seeing how the evocation of the theatrical, and the associated simultaneity of the real and the not real, are used to develop empathy with the commodity, which, in this setting, replaces deity. In the course of translating this very old idea into this most postmodern of places, I begin with an overview of changes in Las Vegas itself and the imaginative possibilities that result. This is followed by a description of the history of the *theatrum mundi* and then of the mall itself. After this, the essay moves more deeply into the argument, using theories of surrogation, mediatization, aura and allegory.

Las Vegas and the Real Not Real

The recent history of Las Vegas is the history of transition from the neon signs which were for many years the signature feature of Las Vegas, to fantasy hotels in which signage was replaced by all encompassing environments. Hints of this transformation were present as early as the 1970s, when Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour wrote their classic book on architecture,

Learning from Las Vegas. In this book they suggest that popular culture could be a rich source in reimagining architecture.

The city which Venturi, Brown and Izenour encountered was a city in which the casinos were low, flat, brown buildings distinguished from the surrounding Mojave desert by the size, texture and placement of their identifying signs. The buildings were meant to be approached by car, so signs were positioned according to the best sightlines from the road. The signs also functioned to mark the buildings across the vast parking lots which surrounded the casinos. According to Venturi, Brown and Izenour, "The sign is more important than the architecture."¹ Nevertheless, they were also able to identify the emergence of a new kind of place, a place where, "essential to the imagery of the pleasure zone is the ability to engulf the visitor in a new role—for three days he may imagine himself a centurion at Caesar's Palace, a ranger at the frontier, or a jet-setting playboy at the Riviera."²

The introduction of the port cocheres to the hotels, in the late 1960s, marked the beginning of the "engulfment of the visitor in a new role" as the dominant tendency of a new Las Vegas. These drive-up entryways, which reconfigured the visitor's arrival as an aspect of a narrated fantasy, were the beginning of competition for who could create the most thoroughly elaborated fantasy through which visitors could begin to reimagine their economic and social classification, the translation of everyman into king. Rather than parking your car and walking across the parking lot to the casino, the port cochere allowed visitors to drive right into the ostentatious environment of the hotel's entrance. Caesar's Palace, for instance, sported a series of fountains which lined an entry drive along

¹ R. Venturi, D.S. Brown, S. Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1972). 12.

² *Ibid.*, 58.

which limousines pulled up to costumed doormen. Alan Hess remarks that Sarno, the architect of Caesar's Palace, though he borrowed his plan from the designs of Baroque cities, "emphasized that anyone in the mass market could be a Caesar with this as his palace. Sarno's dream enveloped visitors in a total environment intended to transport them from reality to fantasy. Psychologically, the fantastic resorts distanced customers from the everyday world and the concerns which might put a break on their gambling."³

Following Sarno's lead, the old casinos were demolished, the signs sent to the Las Vegas sign graveyard, and Las Vegas materialized in the general outline of its current form. It is now an assemblage of themed buildings, a kind of geographical and historical hit parade, ransacked from across the globe. The Luxor casino, for instance, is built as a Pyramid with an Egyptian theme throughout. Adjacent to the Luxor is Excalibur, done in cotton candy pastel shades and themed around knights and princesses and court jesters and tournaments and other secular attractions of the Middle Ages. Significantly, the thematic structures are designed to be experienced by pedestrians rather than by motorists. As Paul Goldberger remarks in his article on Las Vegas in *The New Yorker*, "While the big hotels are brilliantly designed to swallow and disgorge hundreds of cars an hour--each of them has also become a kind of node in the new urban experience of Las Vegas, one of the stations along the Via Striperosa. The Strip is full of people walking."⁴ While some of the casinos, especially the older ones like Excalibur, are still surrounded by parking lots, it is clear that the function of the available space along the strip has been radically reconceptualized. The car has disappeared as the central element of lifestyles in Las Vegas so that the symbolic and actual space once devoted to it is reworked as a space for the imaginative possibilities of

³ Alan Hess, *Viva Las Vegas: After Hours Architecture* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993), 85.

⁴ Paul Goldberger, "Casinos Royale," *The New Yorker*, 14 September 1998, 76.

narrative and fantasy. Space now appears in Las Vegas as a real unreal; real space and real structures designed so that in their scripted movement through them visitors experience them as stages.

But these imaginative fields are neither benign or neutral. Sarno uses the word "fantasy" when he describes the Las Vegas environments but fantasy is an adjectival category which tends to invite cultural observations which gloss over the underlying productiveness of the imagination. Fantasy is often evoked as a kind of "false" idea which tourists or consumers can enjoy on a temporary basis and which has no lasting or real impact. Fantasy is perceived as just an escape, with return to the real inevitable. Consumption theorist Arjun Appadurai, however, offers a very different version of fantasy. He identifies the superficial definitions of fantasy and proposes, instead, that we must take the social role of the imagination quite seriously because it is through the imagination that people both act and are acted upon. The imagination can no longer be thought of as merely the idiosyncratic property of individuals but must rather be regarded as one of the places where power is organized, structured, and distributed. The imagination empowers people to move about social fields but also subordinates them to the prerogatives of those fields. He writes;

The image, the imagined, the imaginary--these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: *the imagination as social practice*. No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people), and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a

form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. This unleashing of the imagination links the play of pastiche (in some settings) to the terror and coercion of states and their competitors. The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order.⁵

Appadurai makes quite clear that the idea of fantasy is inadequate as a way to describe what it is that the imagination does. Imagination is not a means to escape social structures, but is instead a primary resource through which those structures can be maintained or produced.

Joseph Roach also paints a vivid picture of the material, social significance of the imagination in his idea of the "kinesthetic imagination." With this term, Roach is referring to memory that is stored in the body and recovered and/or remade throughout the gestures, movements and habits of the body. It is one of the three aspects of Roach's triangular definition of performance, which includes also "vortices of behavior," and "displaced transmission."⁶ Kinesthetic imagination, which manifests in the movements of bodies, "inhabits the realm of the virtual. Its truth is the truth of simulation, of fantasy, or of daydreams, but its effect on human action may have material consequences of the most tangible sort and of the widest scope. This faculty . . . is a way of thinking through movements—at once remembered and reinvented—the otherwise unthinkable."⁷

⁵ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 31.

⁶ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

The concept of the kinesthetic imagination reinforces Appadurai's conviction about the social consequences of the imagination and adds to it a material site, the body. In Appadurai's description the imagination is an abstract space. It is unclear how the processes he describes take shape in the physical world. Roach's definition makes it possible to see at least one way that the imagination brings what occurs in fantasy (and memory) into the material world; through bodily performances.

The kind of attention that Appadurai and Roach bring to the way that imaginative processes are instrumental to the production and reproduction of social and economic systems can be augmented by the observation that the not real and the real, the imagination and its material consequences, actually coexist in slippery, inventive and innovative relationships which themselves facilitate various formations of power relations. That is, the imagination does not disappear in its social productions, but ghosts them, teases them, creating a pleasurable doubleness. Las Vegas brings this doubleness into ineffaceable focus.

Architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable, whose article on Las Vegas appeared in The New York Times, identifies the ambiguous relationship between the real and the unreal, which she sees materialized in the architectural forms of Las Vegas, as one which threatens the historical and cultural function of architecture. Huxtable believes architecture is "the most immediate, expressive and lasting art to ever record the human condition. Cities are the containers and generators of our history and culture. We are what we build. Stone and steel do not lie."⁸

Las Vegas, on the other hand, represents to Huxtable a kind of "synthetic" setting whose function is, precisely, to "lie." In the course of making this

⁸ Ada Louise Huxtable, "Living with the Fake and Liking It," *New York Times*, Sunday, 30 March 1997, sec. 2, p. 1.

argument, Huxtable laments the loss of aura, understood since Walter Benjamin's use of the term as the singularity of an original object. In the simultaneity of the real and the "fake," with the fake as the product of the non-auratic, reproduction based ethos of capitalist popular culture, aura may be understood as the quality of those "original" buildings which "record the human condition" truthfully.

Not untouched by the pleasure such settings elicit she writes, "The real fake reaches its apogee in places like Las Vegas, where it has been developed into an art form. The purpose is clear and the solution is dazzling; the result is completely and sublimely itself. The outrageously fake fake has developed its own indigenous style and lifestyle to become a real place. This is an urban design frontier where extraordinary things are happening."⁹ But Huxtable quickly returns from this acknowledgement of the fake as simultaneously the site of the real, and hence a site of pleasure, to her insistence on a more fundamental truth which cannot be faked. She repeatedly argues that the architecture of Las Vegas it is an attempt to imitate and, as such, it is merely a sham. Like the theatre, she says, Las Vegas is an evasion of deeper truths and the fake is the imagination gone bad, producing offensive copies of a deeper reality. She says, "Architecture and the environment as packaging or playacting, as disengagement from reality, is a notion whose time, alas, seems to have come. Environment is entertainment and artifice."¹⁰

Huxtable's use of the theatre to frame her analysis is a ready choice because the theatricalization of Las Vegas is so blatant. In a later passage, for instance, she describes Freemont St., the old downtown of Las Vegas, as "linear urban theatre." But her inflection on "playacting," and performance is familiar

⁹ Ibid., 1.

¹⁰ Ibid., 1.

from Plato and a variety of anti-theatrical polemicists who followed him.¹¹ This inflection is in stark contrast to Roach's description of performance as an act whose source is fantasy, but which has very definite (real) material consequences. The body, performing, remembers social habits, political and cultural scripts and brings them into the world, reiterating and revising them. For Huxtable performance is fakery, the deceptive, flamboyant outward trappings of a vacant interior.

Huxtable does not conform to the legacy of Plato exactly, however. She is not against representation, *per se*. She is against representation which gleefully celebrates its freedom from the limitations of what is real. Embedded in the centuries of antagonism toward the deception of performance is the suspicion that through this deception (performance of what you are not) the theatre is able to exceed the boundaries of the real. It is precisely the uniqueness of theatre that in it human beings can show themselves able to exceed what has been determined as the real, and through the sheer force of their embodied imaginations bring what just a moment before did not exist into the real world. The theatre is an exhibition of the social power of the imagination, and for this it has been managed, coerced, distrusted and despised. Huxtable would prefer that the imagination were managed in such a way as to preserve it from the effects of history. She writes in a fuller version of the quote I've already cited,

I do not know just when we lost our sense of reality or our interest in it, but at some point it was decided that reality was not the only option. It was possible, permissible and even desirable to improve on it; one could substitute a more agreeable product. Architecture and the environment as packaging or playacting, as disengagement

¹¹ For an extensive treatment of this subject see especially Jonas Barish, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981).

from reality, is a notion whose time, alas, seems to have come. Give or take demolition and natural disasters, architecture is the most immediate, expressive and lasting art to ever record the human condition. We are what we build; stone and steel do not lie. But there has been a radical change in the way we perceive and understand this physical reality. Surrogate experience and synthetic settings have become the preferred American way of life.¹²

Stone and steel, because it lasts, because it is more or less untouched by history, is a window onto the human condition which, in this figuration is unchanging and can therefore only be expressed by something equally unchanging. This and only this, this permanence, is real. The ultimate sin, from Huxtable's point of view, is the theatricalization of architecture and environment, where the environment itself is "playacting."

In addition to theatre's ability to exceed the real, it also destabilizes the very notion of permanence. The theatre shows humans (and human nature), as well as the environments which surround them, to be continually in flux and changeable. It shows identity to be performable. It reduces human nature to a contingent, historical and performable thing, just as it reduces architecture to a series of canvas flats, rear projections, or light scapes which refuse to testify to permanence but only to the continual social productivity of the imagination. It teases the real with its opposite, and refuses to let either exist as an absolute or unmediated category.

Huxtable is, in a sense, anti-corporate—objecting to the tendency of corporate environments, like the casinos in Las Vegas, to become false, theatrical, to become more than the original that they represent, to exceed the meanings of that original. Those corporate environments, however, are no more interested in

¹² Huxtable, 1.

the excess and potential unmanageability of theatre than Huxtable is. Quite the contrary; the forms in which theatricalization occurs in retail or entertainment environments are scripted and managed to produce the pleasurable affects of the kinesthetic imagination without risk. Theatre and the imaginative practices it implies are evoked precisely because the kinesthetic imagination is a bodily technique, and the body is an important site for the production of social meanings, categories and relationships, hence, also for coercions and control.

The Theatrum Mundi

The theatrum mundi is a particular form which the evocation of the theatrical can take. As an allegory for human existence, and regardless of the moral positioning of its various conceptualizations, it characterizes life as a performance in which identity might overflow its boundaries but simultaneously offers itself as a way to manage and coerce that overflow. While for Roach, the kinesthetic imagination is linked not only to cultural production but to cultural memory, and as such is an intrinsic part of any society, Huxtable and Appadurai, for different reasons, seem to think that the socially productive function of the imagination is new. I would suggest that the immensely durable nature of the perception that the world is a stage and our lives performances is evidence that the imagination has for a very long time been suspected of being tangled up in the very real social relations by which the world is structured and its peoples coerced or rewarded. A summary of some of the figurations of the trope at different historical moments should show the extent to which the relationships between the real and the not real, the truth and the imaginary, the authentic and the artifice, have been and continue to be at stake in the reproduction and distribution of the practices of power. Traces

of many of these historical configurations are at play in The Forum Shops, even as the mall translates the *theatrum mundi* into the language of the commodity.

Plato is probably the earliest known philosopher to use the image of the *theatrum mundi*. True to his characteristic ambivalence toward representation, Plato argues that real life is the true drama and that actors' or tragedians' dramas are only falsifications of this more profound theatre. As Lynda Christian writes, "Athenians make of life a play of high seriousness, are artisans of life. Tragedians merely imitate life, and in so doing they can falsify it—to act is to be hypocritical."¹³ Delicately negotiating the close affinity between the theatrical and the false, Plato nevertheless introduces one of the first images of God as playwright. The real life drama (as opposed to staged drama) is directed and spectated by God.

Similarly, the Roman Stoics, exemplified particularly by the playwright Seneca, thought of the performance of life as organized by a deity or logos, the ultimate pattern. But for the Stoics, the metaphor was entrusted with the task of producing a self-disciplinary reflexivity. People, understanding their life merely as a performance, therefore had the conceptual means by which to withdraw from attachment to life. They could watch their life, the play, dispassionately. People's focus should be on playing their assigned parts well; a poor person must not suffer from poverty, but rather attend to her performance. If and only if each person attends to her own performance can God's script materialize as a coherent play which, in turn, will give significance to her own part. Even death is configured as part of the performance—it is nothing more than the last act of the play, after which there is nothing more.

¹³ Lynda G. Christian, *Theatrum Mundi: The History of an Idea* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1987), 6.

Certain strands of the Stoic metaphor of the *theatrum mundi* were picked up by the early Christians and implemented as premises in a developing Christian theology. Most significantly, the Christians adopted the idea that life is a performance created and watched by God. However, the trope began a subtle shift whereby it became a way to enforce Christian ideology. If in the Roman or Stoic world even the ultimate coherence which lives take on is still only a performance, the Christians begin to theorize a real by which earthly (fake) performances are measured. The *theatrum mundi* becomes a strategy for constructing the difference between the fake and the true, the mask and the real self underneath. Death, and the God who will judge people after their death, is the standard by which earthly lives are valued. Christians were to understand that the seductions of the earthly world were merely part of a performance, and therefore would jeopardize their true selves, which would be experienced after death in their life with God. St. Augustine (350–430), for example, writes that "for the whole life of temptation in the human race is a stage play; for it is said: Every man living is altogether vanity."¹⁴

Those who do become enmeshed in earthly performance, unable or unwilling to know it as artifice, those whose interests are material or corporeal are the buffoons, the fools. They play the comic roles, buffeted about by their greed and desires. In order to get what they want, the greedy are disingenuous.¹⁵ They disguise what they want, playing different roles to mask their intentions. While the *theatrum mundi* metaphor seems to have fallen into disuse for much of the Middle Ages, this identification of hypocrisy as a complication of the idea of

¹⁴ Quoted in Christian, 39.

¹⁵ The New Comedy, of course, organized these characteristics into the comic types which were transmitted into the Renaissance and beyond. Similarly, the early belief that each man must strive to conform to his part and only his part materialized in the theatre itself as the doctrine of decorum; in a play, the behavior of each character must not deviate from the assumed qualities and actions of the real life corollary of the character. Thus, kings must behave like kings, peasants like peasant, and so forth. (See Christian, 24 and Christian, 21.)

earthly performance is fundamental to the development of the trope in its secular form, when it reemerges in the Renaissance. At this point the multiple faces required of the player in the marketplace becomes an important and troubling development which challenged the church's orthodoxy, and its use of the trope for its particular disciplinary ends.

But the devout person of the early Christian period remains detached from the earthly show. The only spectacle worthy of praise is the spectacle of Judgment Day and beyond, and people's days were to be spent in preparation for the witnessing of this spectacle. This view was articulated especially by Terullian: "The spectacle of life is now purely transcendental. It is the spectacle of redemption, the spectacle of the Last Judgment, the spectacle of Christ crucified. The stage of the world has collapsed and the stage of the sky has opened up before the suffering Christian."¹⁶ Thus, the Stoic, Cynic, Patristic (early Christian "fathers") and the Hermetic comprised the dominant currents of the *theatrum mundi* trope in the Roman and early Christian period.

When the trope did resurface in the fifteenth century, a radically different view of human beings and their life on earth was advanced through a body of writing known as the Corpus Hermeticum. Written roughly around the mid-second century, the writings were widely translated and circulated during the humanist movement of the fifteenth century and known well into the Renaissance. Most significantly, the Hermetic angle on the *theatrum mundi* endowed human beings with a creative ability akin to God's, and expressed in a protean capacity to play many different roles. As Lynda Christian articulates the Hermetic position, "Man has been plucked from the hierarchical ladder of the Great Chain of Being and has been given an infinite possibility of roles to play as a microcosm of the

¹⁶ Quoted in Christian, 37.

divinely created universe."¹⁷ In Pico della Mirandola's Oration on the Dignity of Man, God expects that humans will use the agency he's given them to make their own choices about what or who they wish to become, and what parts they wish to play on life's stage. In this excerpt from his Oration, God is speaking to man: "We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honor, as though the maker and molder of thyself, though mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer."¹⁸ In other words, here the ontological status of the human being is indeterminate. If anything, humans are fundamentally mimetic beings who have the agency to shape themselves according to their own desires; the trope is thus being used to begin to situate humans in a place free from the coercions of the church, and, perhaps, ready for the coercions of the market. The world becomes a wide open field where humans adopt for themselves multiple faces. Far from being a sin against God, the path to evil, this proteanism is an image of God's own creativity, a shape shifting performance which God very much enjoys.

In Juan-Luis Vives The Fable about Man, written in 1518, Juno requests for her birthday that Jupiter stage a play with new characters. Jupiter brings forth the whole world as a stage. Jupiter himself is director, commanding the appearance of each actor and ordering each to strictly adhere to Jupiter's direction. But then the audience of gods notices how much the actors resemble them. Like them, the humans seem to be able to assume any shape, even a god's. One actor even impersonates Jupiter himself and does it so successfully that the other gods are upset that Jupiter has lowered himself to participation in the theatre. Man the actor is led to the auditorium where he takes his place as one of the gods while the

¹⁷ Christian, 79.

¹⁸ Quoted in Christian, 80.

gods marvel at what they call his costume; the five senses through which he achieves his protean enactments.

If these Renaissance humanists prepare the ground for the emergence of capitalism, conservative theologians like John Calvin struggle to thwart a social tendency toward fluid identities. For Calvin, the seduction of this theatrical play leads people away from God. Distracted and misled by his protean will which directs him into errant performances different from those God intends and left to his own conscience without the intercession of the apparatus of the church, the Calvinistic believer could never know whether God or the devil was guiding his choices, his enactments. Calvin's anxiety intuits or identifies the new social problematic in which increasingly people are uprooted from traditional ties to identity most often concentrated in kinship and fuedal ties and in the church. Free to play the market, this new "unaccommodated man" ¹⁹ has nothing to guide his performances. In the secularized theatrum mundi, if there is any God at all, he is only playing right along.

As Jean-Christophe Agnew argues, the metaphor endures into a secularized and capitalized world because through the metaphor it becomes possible to conceptualize a performing self, a constructed self, whose acting is scripted not by God but by the imperatives of the market. As Agnew says,

The same theatrical metaphor that had for so long served churchmen to wean the faithful from their attachments to the secular world became over time a symbolic representation of attachments and moorings already lost, and lost not through some putatively divine intervention in the world or some voluntary, personal withdrawal from the world, but rather through the radically defamiliarizing effects of commodity exchange. What

¹⁹ Christian, 18.

made the theatrical metaphor so resilient was no doubt its capacity to evoke the sense of a lived abstraction of distinctively human contrivance, a "second nature" whose facticity was best represented by a theatre that was itself increasingly detached from any ritual relation to God.²⁰

The *theatrum mundi* was no longer particularly useful as a prescriptive metaphor directed by divine power, but it was useful because, like the Renaissance theatre itself, it problematized performance in an environment in which traditional structures of identity and meaning had ceased to have coherence or validity. The product of labor floated into the market independent of its producer, was translated into the abstract and faceless form of equivalence, money, and was realized by another faceless and unknown individual. People began to conceptualize their own participation in the market as a performance; that is, changeable identities could be produced depending upon the particular transaction at hand.

Agnew retrieves the metaphor from its relative obscurity in contemporary life as a correction to the work of mainstream political economists who analyze and represent the market in a way that, according to Agnew, "reduces the complexity of feeling and meaning associated with commodity exchange."²¹ Because conflicts and antagonisms that lie at the heart of market relations are usually obscured by ideology, the market can appear benign, natural, unquestionable. As a result, the market is not studied in terms of the effect it has on people's senses, the ways that it weaves its way into the physiognomic structures of experience, the way that it structures meaning and perception. It is

²⁰ Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 16.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

necessary, Agnew says, to move through these ideological suppositions to a field of affective structures and responses, the anxieties, problems and ruptures initiated by the commodity form and the money form, to see how, in fact, it was made possible for people to "see themselves in the likeness of the commodity."²² The metaphor of the *theatrum mundi* provides a way to access or restore the problematic of performance as a fundamental feature of the capitalist marketplace and thus to reopen the market to investigations of how it works its way into human bodies, and organizes perception of self and agency. In a complex interaction with the market, involving secularized variants on the problems of agency (free will), greed, loss, ruin, and imagination, which have traditionally been brokered through the *theatrum mundi* metaphor, we are produced and produce ourselves.

Following Agnew's suggestion, I want to link performance to the market specifically by means of the *theatrum mundi* to explore the potential of the trope to unravel and break apart the smooth ideological packaging which, in this case, decorates gambling and consumption with tones of morality and the feel of divine ordination. As in the Renaissance, at the Forum Shops the *theatrum mundi* is useful as a descriptive paradigm (humans perform identities), but it is also present in the structural, affective, and spatial organization of the shopping center itself. It provides a stage for the enactment of a script and it provides a specific script with specific effects; that consumers should experience loss, and the greed that causes it, as states of being which are redeemable through the commodity form. In the following section, I want to present some brief vignettes of scenes from the Forum Shops in preparation for a more detailed analysis.

²² Agnew, 12.

The Forum Shops at Caesar's Palace

We are carried into the mall on a long moving walkway suspended over impossibly blue water. The blue is complemented by the pristine white of the Romanesque architecture which supports the walkway and the perfect green of palm trees and topiaries. The effect is remarkable; the rationalized, coordinated design in its calming colors, white, green and blue, is a passageway out of Las Vegas—across and into a watery world. Here are the cooling pleasures of a fantastical Rome amidst the American desert heat. Here we begin to play. Our protean tendencies are tickled; we won't believe ourselves to have become Roman, but we will play as if we were somewhere and someone else.

The choice of Rome as the theme for this environment is in itself a way to suggest a theatricalized experience. The theatrical culture of Rome was, in a sense, the last significant exploration of the meanings of performance prior to the Christian censorship and denunciation of theatre. The early Christians repudiated theatre, Dionysus (the Greek Bacchus), and the ways that Christ had been linked to Dionysus; androgyny, effeminacy, cult followings, ritual worship.²³ Laurence Senelick quotes a document from the Council of Constantinople in 691 which attempts to distance the church from all pagan practices, including those of theatre:

Moreover, we forbid dances and initiation rites of the "gods," as they are falsely called among the Greeks, since, whether by men or women, they are done according to an ancient custom contrary to the Christian way of life and we decree that no man shall put on a woman's dress nor a woman's clothes that belong to men, nor shall

²³ Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 59-60.

any disguise themselves with comic, satyr, or tragic masks, nor call out the name of disgusting Dionysus while pressing grapes in the press or pouring wine in vats, thus ignorantly and vainly committing insane errors.²⁴

Caesar's Palace and the Forum Shops suggest a return (in fantasy, in impersonation) to a place prior to and thus outside of Christian censorship; a place which welcomes wine, impersonation and, significantly, the pleasures of the body. Richard Sennett notes that an early Christian intellectual, Origen, differentiated Christ from the pagan gods like Bacchus by pointing out that whereas the pagan gods are ruled by bodily desires and passions, Christ has no bodily sensations, he is not of the body.²⁵ The choice of Rome as the prototype for Caesar's Palace and the Forum Shops bypasses Christian anti-corporeal philosophy in favor of a model which legitimates the pleasures of the body, its passions, and its drive to be sated. In other words, it legitimates and foregrounds those characteristics which are necessary for consumption, over and against Christian and Judeo-Christian tendencies toward asceticism, altruism, and managing bodily drives.

Similarly, as Sennett also points out, Christianity attempted to separate the individual from worldly power and from the edifices which testify to it. The early Christians, following the old testament tradition, believed that faith was an unfolding in time, and that its unfolding depended on remaining rootless, unmoored from wealth, and the structures, social and architectural, which perform it. Certainly, Christianity has strayed far from this early model and injunctions to a life of faith and altruism rather than wealth tend to receive only lip service. But by evoking Rome, the designers and producers of Caesar's Palace are definitively

²⁴ Quoted in Senelick, 59.

²⁵ Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996), 87-101.

associating their creation with a period and a place notorious for spectacle, consumption, and the wielding of power, and in which deity is linked to the triumph of empire. Any period after that is complicated by the presence of Christianity and the echo of its asceticism, its reminders of the poor and the oppressed. The walls of Caesar's Palace are, so to speak, padded by the choice of Rome as its theme; visitors, consumers and gamblers are protected from the whisperings of the guilty conscience (and the anti-theatricality) of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The Romans attempted to parse the significance of the real and the not real, not only through the *theatrum mundi*, but also in the Roman amphitheater and in Roman pantomime. Romans loved to watch the real being made into performance and then back into the real. As such, Roman spectacles were staged negotiations between performance, the real, power and subjugation.²⁶ Performances in the amphitheater were real actions, with gladiators fighting until someone was really dead, not just a stage death. Criminals were burned alive for the enjoyment of the crowds. But also these "real" consequences were arrived at through impersonation. Sennett provides examples in which actors were forced to impersonate gods or mythical characters who suffered some awful punishment. For instance, Tertullian wrote of an actor playing Atys who was castrated in the amphitheater since that is what happens to Atys in the myth. Sennett makes an interesting argument based on the idea that Romans feared "the flouting of social conventions, the dismantling of hierarchy, the confusion of categories, the unleashing of chaos."²⁷ He says that because of these fears, Romans treated performance as something which could make belief literal. In other words, performance, architecture, visual signs, were synonymous with reality. Things do

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.

²⁷ Sennett, 90.

not seem to be what they are not, but are what they seem to be.²⁸ Significantly, this collapse of being and appearing was instrumental in the maintenance of imperial power. Sennett writes,

[At the Pantheon] a circular wall contained niches for statues of gods; the gathering of gods were thought to sponsor in mutual harmony Rome's quest for world domination. The Romans indeed came close to worshipping them as idols possessed of life. The Pantheon celebrated, in the words of the modern historian Frank Brown, "the imperial idea and all the gods of the Empire who stood for it."²⁹

The Pantheon is echoed in the Forum Shops, where we find ourselves on the streets of a Roman city. Statuary of mythical characters or deities are grouped in the plazas and in niches in the walls. White statues in Roman style, presumably gods, nude or semi-nude, draped and graceful, are spaced at regular intervals on the top of the buildings. Like the gods of the *theatrum mundi*, they seem to be watching our performance. Their richly enhanced setting two stories above the series of high end boutiques on the ground level is a literalization of commodity culture in god-like form, a confluence which reads as power and domination all the more inescapable for being beautiful and performative.

The environment, then, is a staging of a particularly theatrical location from antiquity, a location bound up also with power and indulgence. But this staging is contradicted by another, the environment is also surreal, as if lost, a city which could not really exist. All the windows are illuminated (anachronistically)

²⁸ Lope de Vega, situates his play *Acting is Believing* in Rome in order to build on this Roman literalism. Lope de Vega also wants to suggest that performance can bring into actuality what at first it only pretended. In the play, a pagan playwright, famous for the believability with which he plays Christian martyr roles, actually is converted during one such performance and then suffers the fate of a Christian in Rome.

²⁹ Sennett, 88-89.

from within, as are the equally anachronistic street light fixtures, while overhead a sky filled with shifting and fluffy white cumulous clouds stretches a concave blueness over the space. The "city" feels subterranean, drowned. The watery entryway, the ubiquitous fountains and sound of water, and the estranging juxtaposition of night and day, make the place feel like an undersea palace from a fairy tale, down so deep that it has to be illuminated while overhead the cosmos still stretches itself.

This spatial resonance is most fully developed when we encounter a huge circular glass walled fish tank, perhaps two and a half times as tall as an average person. Benches abut the tank and, because of the size of the tank and the way it dwarfs the people around it, seeming almost to engulf them, it is as if we are simultaneously witnesses to and participants in this alluring oceanic world. Inside, rare, colorful tropical fish swim among huge blocks of stone not unlike that used in the architecture of the mall. The blocks lie in careless heaps, clearly the remnants of some devastation. Great white statues in Roman-esque armor lie askew, as if toppled from the heights, just as the statues in the mall would look if they fell. Stone columns, ceramic jugs, jewelry and other detritus from a ruined civilization sprinkle this watery exhibit. This tank layers the environment; we are in a surreal world, perhaps itself a sunken one, or at least imperiled, spying on the remains of a destroyed world, a world unreachable at the bottom of the ocean.

The statues which decorate three of the fountains in the mall are audioanimatronic. Two identical "Fountain of the Gods" are set at opposite ends of the mall. In the "Festival Fountain Show," Bacchus, Apollo and Venus, fashioned identically as blank, white reproductions of marble sculptures, come alive every half hour. Bacchus is the master of ceremonies. This little god, predictably rotund and olive-leaf festooned, bends and tilts stiffly, turning his blind head from one side to another in acknowledging his audience, leering with his

robotic mouth. "Step forward," he urges us, "great pleasures await, step forward one and all into the mall, let the festivities begin." Waiting for us, he says, are "wonders of pageantry." He invokes the magic and pageantry which await us and gestures to Apollo, who now jerks roughly into motion, his stiff fingers strumming mechanically over his lute. "Apollo," he gushes, "come join my guests. Favor our friends with a magical melody, music to enchant and inspire." Then he calls to Venus, "goddess of love, whose beauty dazzles and delights," who also comes to "life."

Midpoint through this display, the music moves to an ominous key and the lights change to a darker tint. Now we are introduced to the prevailing thematic of the Forum Shops. The watery touches, the fishy ruins are all part of an accumulating network of references to the myth of Atlantis. In this myth, originating with Plato, a utopian island city, originally given to Poseidon as his share of the world, sinks beneath the weight of the greed of the many descendants of Poseidon, all of who hope to gain the city's wealth for themselves. So, Bacchus warns, notwithstanding the pleasure, the pageantry, the consumption available in the mall, "All is not well in the Forum shops. Greed and envy have brought down the city of Atlantis. But you, my dear guests, will experience how the story of Atlantis continues through the forum of the great hall and perhaps by witnessing the downfall of the city of Atlantis, you will leave here a little wiser. " In this little speech, the robot Bacchus does not exactly conflate the mall with Atlantis, but he implies that the two are connected. The downfall of Atlantis darkens the Forum mall. Its story of greed somehow darkens the shopping environment. Unless, that is, shoppers get wise to the pitfalls of avarice. He finishes by issuing us forth into his script: "Go forth, and enter the magic. I raise my goblet to wish you well on your journey."

We witness the downfall of the city in the "Roman Great Hall," where the third audioanimatronic fountain is located, during the "Lost City of Atlantis Show." At periodic intervals a set of non-audioanimatronic statuary sinks into the floor in voluminous clouds of fog and loud music and thunder and changing lights while a formidable audioanimatronic threesome rises (from the depths of the sea?) in their place. The king, the father, sits up stage center on a throne. Downstage of him on either side are his two children. The daughter is the queen of ice, the son the prince of fire. These statues, unlike the blank marble reproductions, are costumed in colorful outfits which signify their rank and wealth. The trio enacts the consequences of greed as the children battle over who will inherit the father's city--Atlantis. The two sibling robots cry out to the audience asking for support. "Who will support me?" each screams. Spectators cry out in response, choosing sides. In the end, the king is overcome by his children's greed and dissonance and takes them and his city with him in a massive act of destruction. Sunk to the bottom of the sea, Atlantis is irretrievable.

This performance is staged at the entrance to a virtual reality ride called "The Search for Atlantis." Having followed through the mall's narrative to the cumulative point at which Atlantis descends to the depths, we are now ready to enact, in virtual reality, a scenario in which we'll be able to discover and retrieve the lost city. Because I visited Las Vegas in the eighth month of pregnancy and with a severe back problem, I was unable to participate in the ride. (Signs at the entrance warned people with these as well as other physical conditions not to go in). But even without this participation, it was clear that the ride was set up to provide people, as most virtual rides do, with the sense that they are actually in the midst of a fictional experience. The rides typically provide all the sensual clues necessary to convince our bodies of the "reality" of the experience. In this case, the participant is hurtled through the depths of the ocean, past threatening

monsters and other dangers, toward the lost city and its recovery. An ad at the entrance from Time Magazine reads: "Your mission from the Gods, should you choose to accept it, is to fly a hurtling chariot past crashing boulders and evil goblins to win the Race for Atlantis."

Here a myth (Atlantis) is deployed as an allegory (a warning against greed and envy). In a feat of entertainment retail design, a shopping mall is turned into a three-dimensional allegorical emblem. In a feat of ironic calculation, the mall is themed around an allegory of greed, spatially organized so that the bodies of visitors travel the illustrative patterns of an emblem warning against it. But together these forms of allegory and emblem combine to form the substance of an entertainment designed to draw ever larger crowds to the mall and seduce those crowds into ever increasing consumption. The next sections of this chapter elaborate on the performances of these consumers as they are scripted by the commodity.

Excess

The organizing principles of the *theatrum mundi* are deeply embedded in the scene which the audioanimatronic Bacchus sets for us. In its simplest aspect, there is a deity who admonishes us to play our life here in a particular way, while we recognize all around us an illusory, fake, theatrical, ephemeral environment. The message we carry away, the moral of the play, the lesson about the havoc wreaked by greed, is the spiritual result of our correct enactment of the guidelines established for our behavior by the deity who is both playwright and audience.

But even more than this, the mall is structured by the *theatrum mundi* in the sense that it summons the theatre and the power of its histrionic or kinesthetic form of imaginative enactment but also contains and manages that power. In most

of the early formations of the *theatrum mundi* which I have described, humans are exhorted to imagine their lives as performance, the reality of self surrendered to the unreality of make-believe, while at the same time that performance is to be understood as something which must either be dutifully cast off when earthly life is done to move on to the true reality of god, or the performance is to be subjected to the script outlines ordered by a watching god, or organized by logos (as with the Stoics).

The robot Bacchus in the Forum Shops invites us to perform in a script which is not of our own choosing, but belongs to the mandates of the shopping mall environment, a world which is, overtly, a stage setting. This god (robot) wants to seduce us into entering the world (the mall) to begin our performance. We know it's fake. The allure of this world is, as he describes it, its festivities, its magic and its pageantry--in other words, its intrinsic theatricality. But this is no stern Christian God who, at best, appreciates the protean creativity of his creation but reigns in that creativity and, at worst, surrenders humans to an illusory and cruel earthly existence to test their fitness for life in heaven. This is, instead, Dionysus, Bacchus, the god of celebration, trance, altered states, theatre itself. He is the incarnation of the joy of transformative enactments. He is imaginative excess, the way that humans can, through performance, "magically" become more than the shapes to which the real would confine them. Who among us would turn this down? Who among us would hesitate to step onto this stage, *especially because* we know it is not real but, rather, will pleasurably exceed the limitations of the real?

But this picture, like the little robot's narrative, darkens. To begin with, the excess of magic and pageantry, two transformational genres, is also what commodities seem to offer. Commodities promise a release from confinement into something greater than or different from the familiar, the familiarity of limitations,

or, at the very least, something which enhances or enlarges the known. This environment is a case study for the way in which the allure of imagining our lives as something which can be played, played with, transformed, enacted rather than fixed, is linked, by a kind of emotional, kinesthetic hypertext, to the imaginative, kinesthetic excess of the theatre, but as it is controlled by and articulated through the commodity form. In the form of the robot, there is a process of surrogation which performs the link between theatre and control of theatre as an effect of the commodity. Bacchus stands in for the commodity, showing how the commodity is itself theatrical, summons theatricality, but controls, shapes and extinguishes the bacchic fire of transformative excess. It is this surrogation which ultimately is the source of limiting, coercing, shaping the possibilities for our actions, enactments, and performances within this world and ultimately, outside it also. I would suggest that in the largest sense, the commodity is the god who is scripting our earthly performances, forming the boundaries and shapes of our enactments, suggesting to us that our lives are enactments, multiple enactments, facilitated by the rich possibilities and choices provided by an array of goods and services. In the next section I want to explore some of the complex ways that we might think about this process of surrogation, and how it links Bacchus to the commodity form.

Bacchus the Commodity

According to Joseph Roach, surrogation may be the most defining process involved in performance. He remarks that different descriptions of the hard to define act of performance all "commonly assume that performance offers a substitute for something else that preexists it. Performance, in other words, stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody

and replace."³⁰ Performances, Roach says, create effigies, a word he wants to use especially in its verb form. In this form, effigy, almost like performance itself, is the act of manifesting, bringing into being something that was absent. This is especially the case in the sense of recovering something from the past. It is not so much the fabricated image of someone, a thing, as it is a "series of actions which hold open a place in memory."³¹ The function of the effigy is to provide societies with a way to perpetuate themselves because the effigy holds open this "place in memory" into which a number of surrogates, stand-ins for the original, can step.

The Fountain of Gods is an effigy which recovers from the past the theatrical conditions, disciplinary warnings, and rewarding promises of the *theatrum mundi*. The effigy makes it possible for surrogates to move into place, Roman gods of pleasure who are, in turn, surrogated by robots. The effigy and the surrogates recall the *theatrum mundi* but do not reproduce it in anything like its original form. The shell, the defining shape of the trope is there, a space saved for surrogations relevant to consumer capitalism. Bacchus, as the surrogate for the divine presence of the *theatrum mundi*, provides the storyboard for our acts of consumption in the Forum Shops, and sets up that consumption as part of a larger performance. The robot, as the surrogate, in turn, for Bacchus, is the link between the deity of the *theatrum mundi* and the commodity. Through the robot's surrogacy, divinity is collapsed with commodity so that, at the deepest level, what the Fountain of the Gods performs is the commodity as the author of our actions, the commodity that defines the parameters of what is and is not possible, the commodity which will deliver us, that which we long for, search for, hope to touch and be part of. The commodity offers a kind of divine blessing by

³⁰ Roach, 3.

³¹ Roach, 36.

exonerating shoppers and gamblers from the sin of greed to encourage and perpetuate the expenditure so welcome within a casino environment.

The robotic performers, if not exactly commodities (for surrogation never recovers the original), are almost exactly like commodities. Their performances are reliably reproducible, and inextricable from technological means of production. Philip Auslander's work on "liveness" and "mediatization," and Walter Benjamin's famous deconstruction of aura, are helpful here to see why the robot may be effective as a surrogate for the commodity in that it reiterates the values of technological reproduction and makes them equivalent to performance. Auslander's claim in his book, *Liveness*, is that the proliferation of technologically reproduced performance has so substantially shaped our sensual apparatus that we can feel close to a live performance only through a mediated form. That is, performance doesn't feel live unless it is reproduced through technological means. In some of Auslander's examples, for instance, even the most intimate of performance art events often use video images of the performers. Broadway productions are "live" versions of movies. People bring along radios to listen to the same concert or sport event which they are attending "live."³²

Auslander takes his cue from Walter Benjamin when he claims that our senses, how we perceive and absorb, are historically contingent. In his foundational and complex essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin argues that because our senses and perceptions are not "natural," but changeable according to modes of production, changes in those modes of production have the potential to create new and revolutionary perceptual habits. Mass or mechanical reproduction of works of art (including performances) is just such a change in production. For Benjamin, this change in

³² Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 31-35.

production is significant because it dissolves the aura of objects. By aura he means the perception that an object is utterly unique, embedded in a tradition (and a traditional way of seeing), and thus fixed, immutable. In the precis to his essay he frames his work within Marxist analysis, but with the caveat that, more important than hypothesis about the kind of art which might be made in a classless society, is an analysis about how modes of production of art are changing in progressive ways in existing class-based societies. He writes,

Theses about the art of the proletariat after its assumption of power or about the art of a classless society would have less bearing on these demands than theses about the developmental tendencies of art under present conditions of production. [These theses] brush aside a number of outmoded concepts, such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery--concepts whose uncontrolled . . . application would lead to a processing of data in the Fascist sense. The concepts . . . in what follows . . . are completely useless for the purposes of Fascism. They are, on the other hand, useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art.³³

Reproduction, then, by sweeping away the privileging constructions of genius, etc., by showing that an object can be multiplied indefinitely, and can travel and be used in many different ways, alters the perception of objects, and potentially of social organization in general. If the masses were once to be enthralled from a distance by art objects and the traditions in which they were embedded (when they had access to them at all), in the age of mechanical reproduction the masses can take hold of those objects and bring them right up

³³ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 218.

close. This can result in a new kind of sense perception which creates the conditions for an understanding of social relations as transient, adaptable, and equalizing. Benjamin attributes to the masses of the early 20th century the desire to expose uniqueness, presence, authenticity, as ideologies of inequality, and to replace those ideologies with a sensual grasp of reality as something which can be copied, and circulated, valued equally:

The desire of contemporary masses to bring things "closer" spatially and humanly . . . is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction . . . To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose "sense of the universal equality of things" has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction.³⁴

This analysis, focused on the political necessity to critique aura and recognize positively the signs and means of its decline, finishes, however, with an ambivalence, an indication of the dialectic present in mass reproduction. The sense, theoretically produced in the proletariat, of "the universal equality of things," points not only to possibility of justice rather than exclusion, but also to the nature of the commodity form. In capitalism commodities are valued according to a universal standard of exchangeability. They are, in effect, denuded of their use-value, or particularity, and made equivalent or equal in the process of exchange. Indeed, at the tail end of his discussion of film acting, Benjamin acknowledges the flip side of reproduced and non-auratic objects when he acknowledges their appearance as products. He begins by saying that the film actor's performance,

³⁴ Ibid., 223.

unlike the live actor's, has no aura, "because aura depends on live presence and cannot be replicated."³⁵ But then he goes on to point out how the film actor is aware that his image is transportable—that it will come before "the consumers who constitute the market."³⁶ He says that as live performance is displaced, the industry "preserves not the unique aura of the person but the 'spell of the personality,' the phony spell of a commodity."³⁷

With this observation, he opens the essay to applications to commodity culture in a larger sense, and to environments like the Forum Shops and a robotic performance in particular. He opens the possibility that as aura disappears through reproduction, what will replace it is not a revolutionary equality among objects and people, but the appropriation of any reproduction as a product to be placed on the market, whose only equality with any other object will be in the form of exchange value.

This anticipation of equality only through exchange value informs Benjamin's sense of what he calls "empathy with the commodity," a dystopic alternative to the intimacy possible through the reproduction. He uses the word empathy to describe a mimetic relationship of both being like and being by which commodity and human being become undifferentiated. He uses the prostitute, for instance, as a figure for the human as commodity, not only in the sense that the seller and the object for sale are the same, but also in the sense that in the streets of Paris, prostitution was so common that the women appeared almost as reproductions, identical, like the chorus line dancers he also wrote about.³⁸ He

³⁵ Benjamin, "Work of Art," 229.

³⁶ Ibid., 231.

³⁷ Ibid., 231.

³⁸ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 346. "In the form taken by prostitution in the big cities, the woman appears not only as commodity but, in a precise sense, as mass-produced article. This is indicated by the masking of individual expression in favor of a professional appearance, such as

writes, "Love for the prostitute is the apotheosis of empathy for the commodity."³⁹

In one fragment which is particularly relevant to the argument about mediatization, Benjamin bases his comments on the idea of exchange value, as expressed in price. In Marxist economic analysis, the value of a particular commodity is not based in the uses it may have, but instead on the objectively quantifiable amount of labor time expended in its production. Commodities brought to market meet each other as quantities of exchange value—measured in equal and equally exchangeable units. In this fragment from Benjamin, humans empathize with the commodity because their labor corresponds to the absolute invariance of the units by which exchange value is measured. Both the underlying terms by which the value of a commodity is assessed, and the labor time which produces the value are invariable and invariably the same. Benjamin writes,

It is only as the commodity that the thing has the effect of alienating human beings from one another. It produces this effect through its price. What is decisive is the empathy with the exchange value of the commodity, with its equalizing substrate. (The absolute qualitative invariance of the time in which labor that generates exchange value runs its course—such absolute equality is the grayish background against which the gaudy colors of sensation stand out).⁴⁰

There is, then, is a kinship, a likeness, grounded in the relations of production, in particular, mass production or reproduction. We can feel closer, perhaps, to the mass produced object, because of this substrata of gray,

makeup provides. The point is made still more emphatically later on, by the uniformed girls of the music-hall review."

³⁹ Ibid., 375.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 386.

exchangeable time, then we can to a unique, unreproducible object. Alienated from other human beings by the commodity which differentiates consumers by virtue of its price, as Benjamin points out, we turn to our kinship with the commodity. The commodity, as mass reproduction, feels more like us.

It is with this more dystopic take on the effects of mass reproduction in mind that I review Benjamin's emphasis on corporeality in people's relationships to reproductions. Benjamin says that the auratic art object was designed for contemplation. The spectator was to stand before it, allowing his thoughts to wander freely, and unfold in time at his own pace. By contrast, to describe reception of the reproduction (film), Benjamin uses adjectives and phrases such as "It hit the spectator like a bullet, it happened to him," "primarily tactile," "shock effect," "assails the viewer."⁴¹ Clearly, film no longer hits us in this way. But the tenets of Benjamin's argument still hold true; the senses have been changed so that the spectator/consumer expects the reproduction (commodity) to immerse her in a tactile world, a world of kinesthetic affectivity which is continually altering focus and replacing thought with scenes, affinities, identifications. Environments like the Forum Shops are built around this kinesthetic imagination.

Benjamin notes that contemplation was replaced with distraction as a pejorative term used by his contemporaries as a description of the typical reception by the masses. He turns the word around and uses it in a positive sense as a new kind of perceptual receptivity, corresponding to the swiftly changing and manipulated frames of a film image. If it is possible to say that we are at a turning point in history, with both production and consumption moving into new phases and new locations, then we might listen with special attention to Benjamin. In the following passage he argues that historical changes in human sensory organization, here "perception," are achieved not only through passive looking

⁴¹ Benjamin, "Work of Art," 238.

("contemplation"), but through the bodily adoption of new sensations which become habitual, the characteristic sensory response of a period, our own form of distraction: "For the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation."⁴²

The robot Bacchus occupies a contemporary space bounded on one side by the live actor and on the other by film. The robot, whose ontology as reproduction it shares with the commodity, also negotiates a position for the commodity in which it replaces the human performer but also does not resort to the film image. It can be more than film, and also more than human. It is more than film because film remains a one-dimensional medium and on the three-dimensional stage of the Forum Shops, we experience the robot as bodily sharing the playing space with us. The robot is more than human because it has no aura (like the live performer) and it is the lack of aura which allows us to feel close to a performer or object in a culture characterized by mediation. A live actor as Bacchus would not only create unintended meanings but also reintroduce aura, the distancing characteristics of presence. In a shopping environment, the point is to feel close to the commodity, not to contemplate or encounter the presence of something unique. The robot is consistent with the commodity and does not interrupt the potential power of an empathetic connection.

Auslander points out that even some forms of live performance deliberately design themselves as reproductions, as if spectators will feel closer, empathize more fully with performances which are reproducible commodities. He points, in particular to *Tony 'n Tina's Wedding* and *Tamara*, two interactive performances. He says, "Producers of the genre known as 'interactive plays'

⁴² Ibid., 240.

envision live performances as franchisable commodities."⁴³ What interests me about this idea of franchisable performance is that in it performance, though live, is subjected to a template which doesn't vary, "making the same text available simultaneously to a large number of participants distributed widely in space."⁴⁴ Ironically, Auslander points out, these performances produced according to a template (making them fundamentally identical), are marketed on the basis that they will be different each time, so as to encourage people to buy them over and over.

Certainly the robotic performances in the two identical "Fountain of the Gods" placed at opposite ends of the mall fall into the category of franchised performances. And I would argue that they too straddle liveness and reproduction in a way which guarantees a payoff for their producers, in this case the owners of Caesar's Palace. The live performances in the Forum Shops are by the spectators. The variety of potential spectatorial responses to the performances, given the ever shifting population of the mall, time of day, etc., are the corollary to the unpredictability of live performances and the reason they can be enjoyed (purchased) over and over. At the same time, the reliability of the robotic performances themselves guarantees that they will in fact be able to be widely distributed and viewed without risk of veering from the intentions of the producers. The robotic performance helps us to resolve our role within the shopping mall, which must, as must life in general in consumer culture, be a negotiation between liveness and mediatization. We live in "live," kinesthetic, emotional and sensual bodies, albeit produced within specific historical realities. But to be functioning citizens of a for-profit world, we need to empathize with the commodity, which is an inanimate, reproducible object.

⁴³ Auslander, 47.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 48.

I want to quote Elinor Fuchs at length here, as she talks about "shopping" theatre like *Tony 'n Tina's Wedding*, an experience which she describes as an immersion in a performance environment which reproduces the affective bodily responses which are present in consumption. I would suggest that if the robot performance is substituted for the actors in *Tony 'n Tina's Wedding*, the experience she describes is very like the resolution of the contradiction between our own live aura and our empathy with the commodity through the imaginative play of the marketplace.

[The actors] proclaim their inauthenticity, their artificiality, exhibiting themselves as a series of ever-changing, and not necessarily connected, impressions and surfaces. The actors in effect invite me to model myself as a series of reflecting surfaces, moving in and out of the changing environment in a playful, half-immersed, half-detached state of simulacry, an instant, every-shifting simulation in which I "try on" the physical and imaginative conditions imposed by the surrounding space. The heavy burden of "auracity" has been lifted not only from the actors but from me as well. I am pleasantly suspended in what might be thought of as authentic artificiality.⁴⁵

This "authentic artificiality" is a precise description of how consumer spectators can resolve the paradox between liveness and reproduction; the mimetic process through which consumers get from their own live bodies into an empathetic closeness to the commodity.

The characteristics Fuchs describes are also characteristics I have been linking to the *theatrum mundi* and which seem to be so key to contemporary

⁴⁵ Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 140.

consumption environments: First, there is the sense of play through the kinesthetic imagination in a three-dimensional environment in which closeness to the commodity is possible because aura has been removed. Then there is the template restricting these imaginative possibilities. My kinesthetic imagination will be delimited by the commodity's designs for me, just as in the older model of the *theatrum mundi* my performance proceeds according to God's design. What we experience as our agency becomes the mirror of the commodity and what it wants for us; to have us merge as fully as possible with it so that we no longer distance ourselves from it, see ourselves as ontologically separate from it, so that we are on the same side.

Yet another way to describe this is to say that the other surrogation by the robot, that of deity, in particular the god of excess and theatre, is subjected to the template that the robotic form imposes on it. The template controls that excess, the risks of performance. Just as in Fuch's observations, she can try-on (multiple identities), but her choices are always commodities, and thus already part of a circulating system of the exchange of equivalences. In Euripides' play, *The Bacchae*, the Greek predecessor of Bacchus, Dionysus, produces trance states, unknowable, unapproachable, and ungovernable ways of being and ways of seeing. Pentheus' attempts to, in effect, stamp them with his power, the template of his authority, result only in his own death at the hands of his mother who is in the grip of a profound otherness. In the robot Bacchus, by contrast, the Dionysian original becomes its opposite: a template which stamps upon performance the shape of the commodity.

Thus, performance is produced to control performance--the three-dimensional, experiential, kinesthetics of the theatre are deployed to script our experience into a series of franchised performances. We will experience them as real, because they come through our senses. As in Roman spectacle when the

imperatives of empire were enacted "for real" on the bodies of performers, here, through our bodies, capital's imperatives feel real. Our performances make the agendas of the gods tangible, readable, knowable—in this case the gods are the logic of capital accumulation. By using a theatrical frame (the *theatrum mundi*) to understand this environment, we avail ourselves of the theatre's ancient methods by which to theorize how the driving forces of a culture become meaningful and knowable and, most importantly, how we come to not only sympathize with them but feel ourselves, bodily, to be a part of them. It is a way to understand, as Agnew suggests, how the market, so often accepted as benign and unquestionable, actually comes to be woven into our perceptions, our bodies, and our constructions of meaning.

The analysis of the environment as a *theatrum mundi* can be extended by looking at its allegorical content. The *theatrum mundi* is itself an allegory and was often expressed pictorially as an emblem.⁴⁶ Here I turn again to Walter Benjamin, whose work on allegory is germane to the Forum Shops.

The Commodity's Allegory

Walter Benjamin was attracted to the work of the 19th century poet, Charles Baudelaire, because Baudelaire had revived the long out-of-fashion convention of allegory to describe his reactions to a Paris undergoing a prosperous transition to consumer capitalism. If, as in the Baroque period he'd studied, allegory seems to surface during times of social violence and disruption, Benjamin wondered, why had Baudelaire adopted it?

Benjamin concluded that the allegory and the commodity shared a very important characteristic; each uses form only as a shell into which a limitless

⁴⁶ See Christian, 120-144.

series of meanings can be poured. Allegory takes an object, an image or a story, and empties it out so that its signification has little to do with the signifier. The corollary to this in the commodity is that it too is a signifier to which any number of arbitrary meanings can be assigned, in the form of prices. Its value isn't in what it is, but is rather in what it is worth, based on arbitrary configurations of market determinates. Benjamin writes, "The key to the allegorical form in Baudelaire is bound up with the specific signification which the commodity acquires by virtue of its price. The singular debasement of things through their signification, something characteristic of seventeenth-century allegory, corresponds to the singular debasement of things through their price as commodity."⁴⁷

Commodities and allegories, then, are complementary since both are hollow. Theodore Adorno describe the process through which commodity becomes allegory as occurring when the hollow form of the object (commodity) pulls into itself the longings of consumers: "The alienated objects become hollowed out and draw in meanings as ciphers. Subjectivity takes control of them by loading them with intentions of wish and anxiety."⁴⁸ The virtue of placing the commodity in an allegorical narrative and dressed in allegorical roles is that neither the commodity nor the allegorical form in which it appears is tied to any permanent meaning and thus can be continually responsive, as a "ciphers," to that which most concerns and inspires consumers in a particular environment. The commodity expressed allegorically links the commodity decisively to performance. Like Fuch's artificiality, the self as reflecting surfaces, meaning is unanchored. The commodity can try on any allegorical garment in a mutual production of provisional meaning. The very performativity of the union of

⁴⁷ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 22.

⁴⁸ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1989), 182.

allegory and the commodity guarantees that the commodity can always change its garment, its meaning, to maintain its exchange value.

During the Baroque period, as Benjamin saw it, allegorical objects and emblems were used to express sadness over the ephemeral nature of all things. Baroque allegory mourned the way that objects and civilizations passed inevitably into ruin, that history seemed always to produce devastation. He identified the commodity as exemplifying the tendency to ruin. He saw that the commodity was disposable and valueless, thrown off the minute the fashion for it had passed. But, for him, the commodity's discardability does not elicit the Baroque poet's allegorical lament. Rather, Benjamin sees the commodity's ephemerality as proof that no historical situation is permanent. The ruin of ancient structures, too, is proof of historical transiency. Thus, ephemerality, far from being something to be mourned, is politically useful; the allegory that the commodity tells is of its own impermanence as the dominant feature of social relations.

I would suggest that, at the Forum Shops, the commodity has pulled into its hollowness a quite different set of meanings which it performs for consumers in the three robotic shows and in the virtual reality ride. The argument here rests, of course, on the assumption I have made earlier that the robotic figures are commodities. The allegory that the commodity in the Forum Shops tells refers not the commodity's transience, but its historical permanence.

This allegory saturates the whole environment of the mall. Whereas Roman ruins might have once been figured allegorically as emblematic of the inevitable fall of great civilizations, here a spiffy new fake Rome forms the imagery for the three-dimensional emblem that the mall is. What does this resurrection of Roman civilization, through the obvious ministrations of capital in a consumer environment, signify? What allegory does it tell? The points I have already made about the choice of Rome as the theme for this environment are relevant to this

part of my argument also. I have said that to evoke Rome is to evoke a period and place known for its immersion in spectacle, consumption and power. I have also said that performance in Rome was an instant in world history in which performance was believed to produce the real; the imagination brought forth real social effects. In collapsing itself allegorically into Rome, the commodity signifies that it is not dependent on history because it is such a theatrical thing. It evades ruin because it can always fill itself with fresh meanings. The commodity can recoup Rome, in this theatrical fake form, and appropriate its meanings as a template for contemporary, consumption-driven performance. By virtue of the fact that it can performatively try on any culture, any meanings, the commodity flaunts itself as an apriori form, a substratum of all things, like God.

The Forum Shops literalize Benjamin's description of the hollowness shared by the allegory and the commodity. The mall itself is a hollow cavity; domed by the blue sky and filled with a stage setting. As such, from the very first, theatricality is one of the evocations which fill this emptiness. This hollowness is also the defining characteristic of the robots with their fiberglass shells, and the virtual ride, which welcomes consumers into its very interior. This hollowness is the commodity's historical necessity; what makes it essential to capital. Without the hollowness, the performance of itself as a transhistorical antidote to civilization's evils cannot work. Its very hollowness is the guarantee that it will always be able to save the day because it can take on any form, any meaning; in this it is like the Greek and Roman deities who could appear in whatever avatar was required to adjudicate a situation and rescue a favored person.

Furthermore, when the commodity is filled with the "wishes and anxieties" of consumers, like God it is entrusted to sort these out. The virtual ride in particular is an example of how, by allowing itself to be filled with the wishes and anxieties of consumers, the commodity comes to be regarded not as the source of

those emotions but as an ally in dealing with them. This is, perhaps, the most important feat of the allegorical magic performed by the commodity in the Forum Shops. In an environment which is saturated with personal and financial ruin, through addiction, loss and consumption, the hollow body of the commodity in the form of a virtual ride is for sale as a weapon against these evils, made allegorical through the myth of Atlantis. Here again, the kinesthetic imagination, exemplified by the sensations produced in a virtual reality ride—it is my body feeling these very real things here in this fiction which is also not a fiction because I am really feeling these things--has real effects in the social world. The commodity, as a surrogate of deity, becomes the eternal form which supplies answers to disruptive and anxiety-producing questions such as how do we cope with fears of loss and our own greed in a society which depends upon the production of both greed and continual loss.

But it's not only in the ride that the commodity sells itself as that which will continue in the face of ruin and despair. The robotic fountains perform the continuity of the commodity through the spectacle of its inevitable and ongoing repetition, reiteration and reproduction; every half hour two identical sets of statuary sink to the bottom of a fountain and are replaced by robots, the ontological equivalent of the commodity. The commodity will always, reliably, return. Every hour on the hour, another set of statuary in another fountain sinks into the floor of the fountain and the robotic representations of the King of Atlantis and his son and daughter rise in their place, accompanied by a shower of fire and lighting effects which are also identical with each performance. Here the commodity, the robot as the underlying real, performs devastating loss, seeming, as part of the performance, to disappear under the waves. But these robot commodities also return, reliably, every hour. It is not they who will disappear, but a culture of greed (Atlantis), to which the commodity does not belong and

from which it distances itself through its eternal return. This message is echoed in the design of the mall as a whole. As I have said, it seems itself to be watery, submerged, and is perhaps Atlantis. But it does not sink. This reproduction of Atlantis, this fake, mocks the eternal architecture of Huxtable's dreams, the testaments to enduring human nature. Here, the original architecture (so to speak), lies in ruins in a big fish tank. The fake, the reproduction of Atlantis, is what survives in flawless form. This fake, hollow commodity is permanent in the face of ruin. Ironically, performance is what lasts; continual surrogation in which the original disappears into an unrecoverable past.

Conclusion

The commodity appears eternal, then, precisely because of its theatrical suggestiveness; the continual trying-on, the disassociation from essence or aura, its ability to allegorize itself and thus continually shift its meanings. The commodity seems to foreground, through the obvious fakery of its stylistic costuming at the Forum Shops, its alliance with the hollowness of the actor who is both nothing and can become anything. What grows old, will inevitably disappear. The commodity, because it escapes age through performance, through a hollowness which can always be refilled anew, will last. Our empathy with the commodity is possible because, like the theatre, it provides the opportunity to produce from made-up, contingent meanings, the real appearances which will allow us to sell ourselves in the marketplace. Like the commodity, we too circulate for sale. Like the commodity, we must continually create new meanings for ourselves to remain viable.

At the Forum Shops, Rome is a kind of uber-commodity, a hollowed out environment which pulls loosely from the historical Rome to fill itself with

meanings that have little to do with the reality of Roman society. We accept with pleasure the mimetic opportunity to move into this empty space, this commodified fiction. Through the allegory, we side with the commodity--we are pleasure, shopping, music. The allegory creates a severe rupture between the greed of the ancients and ourselves. We can recover from the past invented meanings of our own choosing which we can use to fill the hollows of our performances. We can witness, in the glass of the huge fish tank holding the "ruins" of the city, the boundary, the absoluteness of the separation between us and the radically different reality of water. The glass marks our safety from, literally, drowning. In the hollow body of the mall we are safe.

The *theatrum mundi*, as an allegory for the life of humans in relation to a divine essence, is itself made hollow just as the mall, the stage for its enactment, is hollow. As such, its traditional meanings are discarded in favor of new ones, and its leading characters performed by surrogates who, as I have discussed, do not recover original meanings, but refer to them in the process of replacing them. Performance, as kinesthetic imagination, is essential in this environment which seeks to comprehensively replace the abiding and guiding logic and wisdom of divine presence with the reproducible and non-auratic intimacies of a commodity which watches us and scripts our movements upon its stage. Finally, the commodity imposes its ontological status as reproduction on the potential excessiveness of performance. Onto the unruly body it stamps the production of the same-- whether of the obedient and fearful Christian or the postmodern consumer.

Conclusion

I am writing these concluding remarks in the week following the attack on the World Trade Center. There is a hole ripped in our hearts. And, for me, there is an edge of guilt because I hope that this can be a time during which questions can be brought, not only to the terrorists, but to the capitalist world, which has also caused great devastation.

I offer this dissertation, then, in this terrible time, as a question. It probes the crevices of ideology, of habitus, of the imagination, of the act of consumption, in an attempt to pry open and expose the social formations which comprise our subjectivity. It is a rescue attempt.

In the course of writing this dissertation, I have struggled with the issue of whether an evolving theory matches the material, observable world. This, in essence, was a struggle within myself over the meaning of subjectivity. People, I would say to myself, do not really experience themselves in the way that I am describing. They do not feel themselves absorbed into the commodity. They have lives, feelings, agency which has nothing to do with the social and economic structures that I am describing.

As I began to formulate my theory more clearly and more precisely, though, I became more and more convinced that it is an accurate description of some of the processes of capital in the postmodern period. I do believe that at this moment subjectivity is produced as the bodily apparition of capital itself. That is, the self is an infinitely playable thing and it is the commodity form that capital offers as a stage for the enactment of self. We play bodily in the forms that the commodity offers. We play “as if” its promises were real. We have agreed, without ever really knowing it, to forfeit the

boundaries that we once understood as defining “self” for the pleasure of being absorbed into the commodity’s “as if.” We are having so much fun that we don’t see that this is perhaps the deepest stage yet of reification, the objectification of a living thing.

At the end of this writing, then, I see, as Bourdieu suggests with his theory of the habitus, that it may be true that almost all of our actions are defined by the ways in which we have bodily absorbed the social relations that capitalism has created. Capital is implicit in our behavior—it is built in. And, as in the slave market that I discussed in Chapter Two, the “human” that we once understood ourselves to be becomes becomes useful only to the extent that it can become an alibi for the commodity. We lend “ourselves” to bring the commodity to life. In postmodern capitalism, this is a key source of pleasure.

Although this dissertation focuses on only a moment in the history of capitalism and the subject, it is clear to me now that capitalism since its inception has indeed depended upon the theatre, on producing the “self” through performance, on the uncanny mix of the real and the not-real which Taussig calls the “really made-up.” The strategies through which capital maintains itself and continues to accumulate need to constantly change. But the history of capital and performance would seem to testify to capital’s need for our body, for the pleasure we take in the “as if,” and so it seems certain that we will continue to be imbricated bodily into the structures of consumption, even as the forms that process takes will change.

In her book on performance, Peggy Phelan suggests that the nature of performance is that it becomes invisible. It disappears, and thus cannot be recirculated or reproduced as a commodity. Scholars, and most notably Philip Auslander, have contested

Phelan's argument, claiming that performance is indeed inseparable from a technological and commodified world in which reproduction of some kind is certain. My argument in this dissertation, though very different from that of Auslander's, would also seem to contest Phelan's thesis. After all, I am making the case that capital uses performance in ways that produce the commodity as something to which we lend our "selves" so that it can circulate and reproduce its meanings into our body. Absorbed into our very tissue, expressed through our gestures and affinities, they will hardly disappear but will instead become "common sense," that which feels so natural we would never dream of questioning it. As such, we continue to reproduce the use value or alibi of the commodity form.

But, at the end of this dissertation I return to performance scholar Peggy Phelan, as I so often have, for hope, for an alternative. Might the idea of disappearance, performance which retreats from the realm of the visible in order to avoid reproducing its processes, not be an alternative form of social action which might begin to bodily sever our connection from the commodity? What if we were to attach ourselves, as Phelan says, to "disappearance and loss," as the alternative to performance which becomes a tool of "acquisition and control." ¹As I write, I keep seeing the photographs of performance artist Angelica Fest which are included in Phelan's book *Unmarked*. They are performances of disappearance, of the need to retreat from sight. Even in our simple wearing of Gap, or J.Crew, or Nike we are fully participating in a performance (meant to be seen) of the brand. We are making its meanings or use-value (alibi) visible through performing

¹ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the politics of performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 173.

ourselves as Gap. Fest instead wraps herself in white cloth and refuses to make, with her body, a reference to anything. She removes her body from the realm of the visible.

The World Trade Center, by its name alone, was the ultimate reference to the power of capitalism. Now it is a gap, a disappearance. The bodies of thousands are simply gone. Our nation rushes to hang flags, to speak tired rhetorical passages, to lend to the idea of nation a passion which hopes to secure “nation” and the economic structure which it shelters. In essence, it rushes to replace that gap. The flags on houses, car antenna, bridges are the attempt to hide the tremendous absence, to secure the realm of the visible, knowable and possessable. Surely all this cannot ease the aching hearts, at least for long. Perhaps, rather, the promise of this gap is that through it we can begin to grasp a different kind of value. If the collapse of the towers into an empty space heavy with meaning was a performance, as it most certainly was, and one reproduced again and again, it was a performance which halted capital in its tracks. It performed the disappearance of capital. The bodies inside were returned to the humanity which may, after all, be foundational—the love of others inside of which they lived. And so, as Phelan writes, “The promise evoked by this performance then is to learn to value what is lost, to learn not the meaning but the value of what cannot be reproduced or seen (again). It begins with the knowledge of its own failure, that it cannot *be* achieved.”² In this tremendous performance in the history of capital there may be a crack, a rupture, through which we may glimpse ourselves outside the habitus created by capital, and the performances we do on its behalf.

² Ibid., 152.

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