A CRITICAL POSTMODERN RESPONSE

TO MULTICULTURALISM IN POPULAR CULTURE

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Human Kinetics)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)
April 2008

Abstract

My dissertation is motivated by two general problems within contemporary North American racial politics. First, the increasing ideological impetus of a "post-racist" society contradicts a spate of events that are symptomatic and constitutive of racial and ethnic essentialisms. Second, the logic of multiculturalism and antiracism has often been expressed in a language of race and identity rooted in a rigid system of immutable differences (Hall, 1997; Ang, 2001). The challenge is to deconstruct race and ethnicity in a language that is critical of new racisms as well as the ways in which racial and ethnic difference is seized and diffused by market multiculturalism. While some theorists have used elements of postmodern theory to develop a "resistance multiculturalism" sensitive to shifting social meanings and floating racial signifiers (see McLaren, 1994), they have rarely explored the political possibilities of "ludic postmodernism" (parody, pastiche, irony) as a critical response to multicultural ideologies. If part of postmodernism as an intellectual movement includes self-reflexivity, self-parody, and the rejection of a foundational "truth," for example, the various racial and ethnic categories reified under multiculturalism are perhaps open to revision and contestation (Hutcheon, 1989). To develop this particular postmodern critique of multiculturalism, I draw on three case studies concerned with identity and representation in North American popular media. The first case considers vocal impersonation as a disruption to the visual primacy of race by examining the stand-up comedy films of Dave Chappelle, Russell Peters, and Margaret Cho. The second case turns to the postmodern bodies of cyborgs and humanoid robots in the science fiction film *I, Robot* (2004) as a racial metaphor at the crossroads of whiteness, inhumanity, and redemption. The final case discusses the politics of irony in relation to ethnolinguistic identity and debates surrounding sports mascots. Each case study recycles racial and ethnic stereotypes for a variety of political purposes, drawing out the connections and tensions between postmodernism and multiculturalism. A postmodern critique of multiculturalism may offer antiracist politics an understanding of race and ethnicity rooted in a strategic indeterminacy, which allows for multidimensional political coalitions directed against wider socioeconomic inequalities.

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Preface

My dissertation is comprised of five essays: (1) Introduction: Building a Postmodern Critique of Multiculturalism; (2) Race Comedy and the "Misembodied" Voice; (3) Humanoid Slave Narratives and the Post-White Imaginary in Alex Proyas' *I, Robot*; (4) Canadian "Biculturalism" and the Politics of Irony in Sport; (5) Conclusion: Reflections on Multiculturalism and Postmodernity. Its narrative style consists of reportorial and critical commentaries that present a dialogue between certain multicultural texts and the ideological conditions in which they arise. The theoretical and methodological concepts that influence my work are embedded within a less conventional narrative; they are not always collected and identified under explicit section subheadings. Instead, I use a bricolage approach to accommodate the consistent overlaps and slippages between theory and context, the general and the particular, and (occasionally) the personal and the political. As such, my narrative style blends theoretical readings and cultural criticism to explain the text as a pretext to understanding some of the political and economic conditions overlying the emergence and contestation of multiculturalisms in North America.

The case studies of my dissertation are related in complex and sometimes contradictory ways and are connected by the conditions of double consciousness and disidentification, which enable a "complicitous critique." They contemplate the disparate and duplicitous meanings of multicultural texts that emerge from an intertextual dialogue within a wider field of signification. I use a dialogical narrative, then, to develop a political critique that extends beyond the specific text to engage the discursive formations from which meanings of race and ethnicity are expressed in popular culture. The larger structures of domination embedded within multicultural discourses are explored through a style of writing that braids theoretical meditations, textual readings, and historical critique into a slightly journalistic enterprise. At times the dissertation relies on seemingly tangential narrative streams to unpack the cultural significance of the films, websites, and news articles in question. Although the political conditions of multiculturalism are irreducible to textuality they become meaningful through language, representation, and discursive formations.

Acknowledgments

For Melanie

Co-Authorship Statement

Chapter Four was co-authored with Ted Alexander (University of British Columbia) and published in *Sociology of Sport Journal* (2007) under the title, "Dunky the Frog and the Politics of Irony." While it is required under the terms and conditions of the Faculty of Graduate Studies to outline the co-authored contributions of thesis manuscripts, I owe Ted a debt of gratitude for his understanding, support and insight, for which no letter may honorably summarize. Nevertheless the details of my contribution are as follows:

Identification and design of research program: The controversy surrounding the sports mascot discussed in Chapter Four was first brought to my attention by Ted. After an initial interpretation of publicity surrounding Dunky the Frog, I decided to write an essay on the use and misuse of irony as it related to the event and subsequently approached Ted with a proposal for co-authorship. All theoretical frameworks, applications and arguments were derived from readings and writings conducted during my comprehensive examinations completed in May 2006. Ted's work included the retrieval and collection of sources related to English and French histories in Canada, a section not exceeding two (of twenty) pages in published format.

Performing the research and data analyses: Methodology included a discourse analysis of several weblog entries, which I initially analyzed and summarized. My findings were then reviewed by Ted. Together, we discussed the possible outcomes and applications of my theoretical framework in relation to irony and surrounding controversies of North American sports mascots. Our findings and discussion were the product of a collaborative process, but were ultimately determined by my theoretical contributions and applications. In addition, a professional translator was used for the transcription of French-language weblog entries.

Manuscript preparation: Using notes and recommendations from Ted's historical review, I prepared and composed the essay. During the process of revision, Ted and I collaborated on the deliberation of certain recommendations, which I applied to the essay in my own prose. Terminology and sentence composition was extrapolated from my own comprehensive examination response

Introduction: Building a Postmodern Critique of Multiculturalism

A balmy weekend in June 2007 marked my first trip to Graceland … well, sort of. My partner and I traveled to Penticton, British Columbia to partake in the Pacific Northwest Elvis Festival, a three-day event featuring performances by look-alikes, sound-alikes, amateurs, professionals, and parodists of the late Presley. Somewhere between a pink Cadillac and the King's deep-fried peanut butter sandwich, I was struck by the overwhelming irony and campiness of the festival. Gathered at the event were dozens of impersonators performing as the king of impersonation himself. Of course many critics and historians have suggested that Elvis Presley's music and style were derived unequivocally from "black" culture, making the King one of the most celebrated minstrel performers in American history (Lott, 1997; Garber, 1997). Yet beneath the rhinestones and leather at the event was much more than a white theft of black cultural aesthetics.

Whereas Elvis festivals have been described as spaces in which working-class white men can safely imagine an intimacy with "black style," the assortment of "Elvi" in Penticton suggested something larger. As each tribute artist offered his or her own translation, there arose a murmur of complexity and contradiction. Alongside a cadre of middle-aged white men with sideburns, pompadours, and slightly-taut jumpsuits was Lady Elvis, Indo-Canadian Elvis, Asian Elvis with Asian Priscilla and, in the spirit of the Okanagan, aboriginal Elvis. Each of these performers presented an Elvis "vernacular" of sorts which spoke of the vicissitudes of identity, (in)authenticity and transvestism within popular culture. Aboriginal Elvis, for instance, wore a white jumpsuit embroidered with indigenous art, replacing the King's trademark eagle with an elaborate thunderbird. When I complimented his costume he replied, "Did you know Elvis was part Native?" Too young to recall the "original" and too indifferent to adore him, I know of Elvis only through his tributaries that re-create by imitation, articulation, and contradiction.

It is the global phenomenon of Elvis Presley as a site of impersonation and negotiation that resonates with consumer culture, postmodern irony, and identity. If the King lives through the various inflections of race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality embodied by his tributaries, he is appropriated in campy ways that do not always support white heteromasculine mythologies. Through disparate imitations, the dominant cultural discourse "loses its univocal grip on meaning and finds itself open to the trace of the language of the other" (Young, 1995, p. 22). The cross-racial performance also exhumes the cultural politics of appropriation upon which Presley's career was built. By impersonation, the stability of the King's white heteromasculinity is traded for uncertainty, paradox and travesty, sometimes to the dismay of Elvis Presley Enterprises. At the Pacific Northwest Elvis Festival, cultural spaces coded as white were not only appropriated by nonwhite tributaries but garishly parodied by white Euro-Canadians as well. While the identity of Elvis was often discomfited through postmodern impersonation, the social forces behind identity formation remain quite formidable in the post-civil rights era.

It is important to recognize that the post-civil rights era supports a series of political discourses which unevenly imagine North America to have somehow transcended racism. These discourses make it difficult if problematic to speak of political ideology in a singular sense, as if it

worked incontrovertibly across time and space. Despite sharp contradictions in and among racial mythologies and a wide variety of forms it is still possible to account for general trends among white political formations in Canada and the US. A neoconservative agenda, for example, describes a colorblind culture of equality, one that has overcome racist discrimination and thus outgrown the need for affirmative action policies. It extols the virtues of capitalism and pathologizes the poor, conjured in the conservative imagination as immigrants and fatherless black families. Meanwhile, far right neofascist movements articulate a virulent white nationalism fuelled by the fear of a racialized other who doubles as an abject immigrant. Struggles over "legitimate" claims to the nation are organized along racial lines and in the language of "contamination." Conversely, there exists a liberal pluralist agenda that embraces an official policy of antiracism. This coincides with a market multiculturalism that depoliticizes difference in ways that obfuscate the complex intersections of white privilege, commodity fetishism, and the disproportionate access to economic resources (Melamed, 2006, p. 6).

 Although these "white racial projects" are quite different from one another, the more normative strains (i.e., neoconservative and liberal) downplay structural racism with terms like cultural incompatibility and dismiss white racist violence as an outdated aberration rather than a formative element of the modern nation (Winant, 2004, p. 52). Instead, white racism is explained to be the embarrassing enterprise of "a few bad apples" (Henry & Tator, 2006, p. 17). As such, these white political formations are reluctant to interrogate the socioeconomic privileges of whiteness (which includes increased access to better housing and educational opportunities) exposed in the civil rights era but increasingly restored under new administrative mantles (Savran, 1998). Our contemporary political climate oscillates between liberal pluralism found at "ethnic festivals" and a melting pot of assimilation perhaps best illustrated by the "English Only" campaigns recently directed at Latin@ immigrants. Both liberal and conservative mainstreams rely on a fictional tabula rasa of race in North America which, evidently, conceals white privilege and deports racist violence to the "pre-modern" pockets of the globe like Rwanda, Afghanistan, and the Balkan region. In this otherwise post-racial mythology, the significance of racism is either displaced by a liberal tolerance of ethnic "strangers" or reformatted within the neoconservative terms of "reverse discrimination" and "white male backlash." The flimsy but widespread rhetoric of a post-racial society, however, is at odds with recent events that have punctuated the continuing import of race and ethnicity on a global scale.

 In October 2005 the suburban ghettos of Paris were set ablaze as riots between ethnic minorities and police erupted. The riots occurred when a Malian and a Tunisian teenager died accidentally during a police pursuit in the Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois. Less than two months later, thousands of white Australians sought to "reclaim" the beaches of Sidney after three white lifeguards were assaulted by "Arab-looking" assailants. While antiracist activists presently gather in Louisiana in support of the "Jena Six,"[1] the subject of undocumented workers reaches an alarming tipping point in US cultural politics. From the litany of immigration debates and the nativist rhetoric of CNN's Lou Dobbs to the "state of emergency" declared by the border vigilantes of the Minuteman Project, Latin@s are depicted as self-identical foreigners who flood the economy with cheap labor and deplete welfare resources reserved for "native" citizens.

North of the border, patkas and hijabs have been sporadically prohibited from amateur sporting contests in Canada, despite national claims of tolerance and pluralism. This takes place alongside recent protests and highway blockades organized by aboriginal groups in Ontario as well as persistent Québécois demands (supported by Liberal leader Stéphane Dion) for the Harper administration to recognize the unique political positioning of Québec. Each of these incidents, in similar and unique ways, reinforces the racialized topographies that are often brushed asunder in popular culture and politics alike. Contrary to any post-racial rhetoric, the mythologies of race remain a fundamental and fundamentally problematic way of distinguishing and denigrating human beings.

Historically, there have been waves of antiracist mobilization ranging from the Rock Against Racism project in postwar Britain, SOS Racisme in France, Race Traitors in North America, as well as more insurgent groups like the Black Panthers. These movements, to be sure, have moderately thwarted racist violence and discriminatory practices at both individual and structural levels. Despite the progressive agendas of such groups, however, the marrow of race remains an undisputed and thus problematic site of political (dis)empowerment. An idea of race as coherent and unvitiated has underwritten not only the Enlightenment projects of modernity but also the insurrectionary movements that have sought to counter colonialist violence (Gilroy, 2000). As a reification of race and ethnicity, for instance, identity-based political projects tend to rely "on an inversion, rather than a negation, of the hegemonic positions against which they struggle" (Moreiras, 2001, p. 264). Both racist and antiracist practices are indebted to a mythology of race as an undeniable material reality. But, as Françoise Lionnet explains, "language … conditions our concept of race," which suggests that "the boundaries of that concept change according to cultural, social, and linguistic realities" (1989, p. 12). Racial identity, in other words, must be recognized as a site of contestation as well as a site of strategic solidarity if it is to offer radical democratic potential (McRobbie, 1994; Hall, 1989).

Two general problems emerge from this sketch. First, the increasing ideological impetus of a "post-racist" society contradicts a spate of events that are symptomatic and constitutive of racial and ethnic essentialisms that underscore a range of "profiling" practices directed against "Arab-looking" North Americans (Henry & Tator, 2006). Second, the logic of both antiracism and multiculturalism has often but not always appeared in a language of race and identity rooted in an increasingly diverse but rigid system of immutable differences (Hall, 1997; Ang, 2001). Under the influence of postmodernism and poststructuralism, however, many critics have described identity as socially constructed and contingent but nevertheless real in its socioeconomic effects (Butler, 1990; Frankenberg, 1993; Muñoz, 1996). Diasporic intellectuals and theorists of hybridity, for example, illustrate how concatenations of race and ethnicity are emerging in complex and unforeseen ways (Papastergiadis, 2005; Young, 1995). Unfortunately, hybridity and multiculturalism do not, in and of themselves, spell the end of racism; instead, discourses of pluralism typically rely on racial typecasting and colonialist nomenclature to signify a "heterogeneous" and "democratic" society (Kakoudaki, 2002; Chow, 2002; Foster, 2003; Gunew, 2004). Hybrid and "multicultural" bodies once rejected as incorrigibly contaminated during the eugenics movement are now used to hustle world music, athletic apparel, and popular films. As a result, neoliberal and antiracist deployments of diversity are sometimes difficult to distinguish

(Melamed, 2006). The challenge that lies ahead is to deconstruct race and ethnicity in a language that is critical of new racism and the ways in which racial and ethnic difference is seized and diffused under the conditions of market multiculturalism.

The purpose of this introduction is to identity some of the cultural politics and political implications of the emergence of multiculturalisms in North America. It is also to suggest that elements of a "fading" postmodernism (see Lopez & Potter, 2005; Norris, 1990; Habermas, 1983; Frow, 1997; Eagleton, 1997) may offer a provocative if uncertain means for critiquing and responding to multiculturalism as a "democratic" ideology. To illustrate this phenomenon, I present three case studies that rely on irony, parody, and simulation in popular culture to negotiate and in some ways negate the identity-based politics of multiculturalism. Contained within these studies – focused on the performance of self-directed ethnic stereotypes in stand-up comedy, the racial metaphors of artificial intelligence in science fiction and the ironic deployment of ethnically offensive sports mascots – I find evidence of a latent postmodern commentary on the problems of multiculturalism in North America, a commentary that deserves closer attention. Multiculturalism has arisen as a series of political responses to changing socio-demographics and market conditions, cultural diasporas, labor migrations, and the rise of consumer culture under postmodernity, and as a consequence its political and moral project (its "colonial dimensions," see Gunew, 2004) may be usefully interrogated through juxtaposition with the very cultural conditions with which it coheres, mainly the postmodern politics of irony, parody, pastiche, nostalgia, poaching, and simulacra. At the heart of the matter lies a corpus of dubious racial and ethnic narratives nested within discourses of multiculturalism that are imbued with apparent postmodern sensibilities.

Sketches of Postmodernism and Multiculturalism

While postmodernism has been widely dismissed as a passing cultural and intellectual trend, its eulogy misses its intellectual legacies. Postmodernism has a variety of meanings, many of which are contradictory and problematic but no less relevant to contemporary cultural politics in North America. As both an intellectual response to the traditions of the enlightenment and a cultural expression of a mass consumer economy, postmodernism was and remains central to the formation of multiculturalism and the liberal logic of pluralism in the US and Canada.[2] This is seen, for instance, in the purported joint disavowal of Eurocentrism found in multiculturalism and postmodernism (Shohat & Stam, 1994). Despite their historical coherence, however, a number of important elements of the postmodern tradition have not yet been taken up in the study of multiculturalism. For example, while the self-reflexive narratives of irony, parody, pastiche, and simulation are sometimes used to envision and re-present racial and ethnic differences within and against liberal ideologies of diversity and tolerance, they have not been widely discussed by critical multiculturalists. When used to this end, the transformations underlying postmodernity may signal not the end of representation as some critics have suggested but rather a "multiplicity of codings" from which transgressive cultural practices may emerge (Hall cited in Grossberg, 1986, p. 137).

Postmodernism, of course, is not a consistent framework of thought and the writings that self-identify as postmodern have numerous idiosyncratic features and internal paradoxes. For some theorists, postmodernism is synonymous with an implosion of the "real" and by extension of ideology, representation, and meaning (Baudrillard, 1983). We are told that the age of simulacrum and simulation is upon us, resulting in the intensified media and market penetration into every orifice of everyday life (Kellner, 1995). This is accompanied by the increasingly complex ways we rely on media to make sense of the world around us, which some critics claim has resulted in a blurring of the lines between fact and fiction (Harvey, 1989). Similar strains of postmodernism appear to embrace consumption, symbolic creativity, diversity, and hyperreality. In doing so, they tend to sponsor an enduring ideology of a global marketplace purged of class struggle, one in which signs of commodities are said to replace commodities themselves (Hardt & Negri, 2001). As a result, the liberation described by some proponents of postmodernism is in many ways problematic and overstated. The paradox is such that a postmodern celebration of diversity and hybridity once used to destabilize the Eurocentric worldview of modernity is now a driving force of late capitalism, transnational corporations, a "Benetton multiculturalism" (including Tiger Woods, Yao Ming, and the ubiquitous genre of "world music") and nuanced forms of domination congruent with some ideologies of multiculturalism. As such, the apostles of postmodernism have been rightly accused of embellishing not only the emancipatory potential of postmodernism but also its absolute break with modernity (Eagleton, 1991).

Although the economic conditions of postmodernity signal a shift from state/monopoly capitalism to multinational/corporate capitalism, they symbolize less of a rupture than an intensification (Harvey, 1989; Hall, 1986; Rail, 1998). These conditions are evident in North America by the increasing waves of labor migration and cultural diasporas. From the widespread entry of Filipina "nannies" under Canada's "Live-in Caregiver Program" and the hiring of Senegalese workers at Alberta food-processing plants to the use of Latin@ immigrants at US farms, it seems that immigration policies and multiculturalism often overlap in the interests of capital (Chang, 2000). Indeed, the increasing diasporas characteristic of postmodern fluctuations are often rooted in employment and exploitation, or what Gilbert Gonzalez calls an "imperialist schema" of colonial labor (2006, p. 2). These migrations result in the transportation and transformation of cultural traditions, which are re-contextualized in complex and sometimes nostalgic ways. Here the postmodern offers a transient understanding of culture and identity that disrupt but also reinvent modernist ideals of national boundaries and fixity. Indeed, the diasporic experiences of Haitians in Toronto, Puerto Ricans in New York, and Lebanese in Saskatoon, for instance, inform not only the liberalist sensibilities of multiculturalism but also the nativist backlash that seeks to reclaim the nation as a "white" (and masculine) space. As David Theo Goldberg (1994) writes, "the shifts from monoculturalist assimilation to pluralist integration are underpinned by migratory shifts (south to north, east to west) as well as by socioeconomic transformations (Fordist to flexible accumulation) and their attendant cultural articulations" (p. 9). This includes increased outsourcing of labor, globalized marketplaces and information technology as well as the rise of the service industry.

Alongside these forced migrations and postmodern displacements is the impetus and exportation of consumer culture. The sport spectacle of Yao Ming, for instance, represents a multicultural media sensation cut across by real and imagined ethnic differences, global divisions of labor in the sports apparel industry, and in some ways Western fantasies of the exotic "other" (Oats & Polumbaum, 2004). In a similar sense, the Colombian hit television program *Betty La Fea* is purchased and adapted into the wildly popular American "dramady" *Ugly Betty* whilst *Everybody Loves Raymond* especially on the Telelatino Network (TLN). Much as postmodernity gives a name to myriad labor migrations and re-settlements it also helps us comprehend the exchange and transformation of national and regional cultural productions in a global context. As Néstor García Canclini writes, "Identity today, even among broad sectors of the popular classes, is polyglot, multiethnic, migrant, made from elements that cut across various cultures" but "under unequal conditions among the various participating actors and powers" (2001, p. 91, 95). Here the postmodern may be a useful but not altogether exemplary way of describing a spiraling of capitalist enterprises, labor migrations, diasporas, and the exportation of consumer culture, each of which informs the pluralist dimensions of multiculturalism in North America.

As a series of cultural and intellectual movements, postmodernism is used to explain a wide array of social phenomena. On the one hand, it is simply the "naming" rather than the introduction of fragmented conditions and experiences created by modernism and reflected in the work of "modernist" commentators like Fritz Lang, Friedrich Nietzsche, Pablo Picasso, and Salvador Dali (Hall, 1986). On the other hand, the postmodern is used to describe a spatiotemporal shift across such diverse social fields as literature and architecture, cinema and ethics, sport and geography, photography and music (Harvey, 1989; Hutcheon, 1989). This shift involves an implicit rejection of "artistic autonomy" once thought to be attainable under modernist precepts (McGowan, 1991, p. 25). This is related to what Jean-François Lyotard (1979) describes as the deconstruction of "grand narratives," including the utopian projects of the Enlightenment, modernism, Marxism, and feminism. The Western literary canon is, in theory, usurped by subaltern and postcolonial discourses. In a similar fashion, binary oppositions like male/female, white/black, and colonizer/colonized are said to collapse during a postmodern era, giving rise to a range of multicultural possibilities (McRobbie, 1994).

It is imperative to note that multiculturalism is, cosmetically, an official federal policy in Canada (Shohat & Stam, 1994). Introduced in 1971 and ratified in 1985 as the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*, the policy was the result of a longstanding history of Anglo/Franco tension reflected in a report presented by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1969), the preceding *Official Languages Act*, an influx of ethnically-diverse groups, and the political "tact" of then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. At the time of its introduction, multicultural policy was designed to "promote cultural encounters and interchange among all Canadian cultural groups in the interest of national unity" as well as "assist members of all cultural groups to overcome cultural barriers to full participation in Canadian society" (Trudeau, cited in Kallen, 2004, p. 68). Multiculturalism in Canada remains to be, ideally, a policy of pluralism rooted in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and designed to recognize linguistic, religious, ethnic and cultural diversity, including that of indigenous groups, in the

articulation of a unified but "heterogeneous" nation (Mackey, 2002). It is also used to self-define and self-distinguish Canada and by extension "Canadians" on an international stage.

This "Canadian brand" of multiculturalism, however, has several shortcomings. As some critics have suggested, the struggles of particular ethnic groups are often flattened under the rhetorical weight of pluralism (Mackey, 2002). Official multiculturalism, Himani Bannerji explains, "relies … on reading the notion of difference in a socially abstract manner, which also wipes away its location in history, thus obscuring colonialism, capital and slavery" (2000, p. 51). The promise of "equal recognition," for instance, has been described as a federalist attempt to undercut the political demands and historical positioning of the Québécois (Mackey, 2002). In a cultural mosaic, it appears the state recognizes all ethnic groups so that it may recognize none in particular (Hill, 2004). As a celebration of diversity, multiculturalism also participates in what Sara Ahmed calls "stranger fetishism: the act of welcoming 'the stranger' as the origin of difference" (2000, p. 97). In similar ways, official multiculturalism restores the nation as a benevolent but no less white cultural space. A discourse of tolerance, much like intolerance, is underwritten by a fantasy of ownership and occupancy that situates white people as the sole proprietors of the nation (Hage, 1998). Under such conditions, the "right to recognize or not" rests with a white "mainstream," which tends to deny "the other the right to assert their identity through rights or other oppositional politics" (Bannerji, 2000, p. 148). This expression of pluralism in Canada, however, is made intelligible in relation to an American tradition of assimilation imagined to be ubiquitous, unchanging, and irrevocably intolerant.

While the American "melting pot" against which the Canadian "mosaic" is measured certainly continues to exist, the US has in fact undergone a shift in racial politics during the post-civil rights era. Some commentators describe a progression away from American "monoculturalism" (captured, for instance, by the Standard Language Movement briefly discussed in Chapter Two) toward pluralism and integration galvanized in part by the civil rights movement as well as current discourses of multiculturalism (Goldberg,1994). This transition is underscored by the migrations and economic changes often associated with a postmodern condition, such as labor diasporas and post-Fordism (Goldberg, 1994). In broader terms, it is marked by the emergence of what Jody Melamed calls "neoliberal multiculturalism" (2006). She describes this particular racial formation as the consolidation of cursory multiculturalism practiced by the Clinton administration and the neoconservative impulse of privatization, deregulation, and outsourcing championed by the current Bush government. Neoliberal multiculturalism "sutures official antiracism to state policy in a manner that hinders the calling into question of global capitalism" (Melamed, 2006, p. 14). This results in a multiculturalism that disavows racism by replacing racial politics with cultural euphemisms, thereby removing race and ethnicity from discussions of capitalist exploitation and imperialist economic enterprise. As such, we are left with an "aestheticized" multiculturalism that "can take place only through 'forgetting' the material histories of racialization, segregation, and economic violence" (Lowe, 1996, p. 30). Consequently, civil rights are reduced to economic liberty, the right of every man and woman of every ethnic hue to enjoy the postmodern spirit of consumerism, the luxuries of the marketplace, and the American democratic project (Melamed, 2006). The surface attributes of multiculturalism, illustrated by a small handful of persons of color in visible positions of

power (i.e., Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice), enable the operation of imperialist capitalism and a racialized division of global labor without widespread recourse.

It is important to note that "multiculturalism" has become somewhat of an empty signifier of late, representing "a policy rubric for business, government, civil society, and education" (Melamed, 2006, p. 15). As Goldberg warns, "The multicultural condition, perhaps not unlike the condition of postmodernity, nevertheless cannot be reductively defined" (1994, p. 1). As a result, it is crucial to distinguish between state-sponsored multiculturalism, which depoliticizes marginalized identities through a "deferred promise of equal representation" (Bannerji, 2000, p. 9); corporate-sponsored multiculturalism, which translates identity-based struggles into titillating commodities; and critical multiculturalisms, which have emerged in opposition to the state's management and containment of difference. Despite the recent buzz of multicultural rhetoric and the inherent overlaps between multicultural projects, compulsory assimilation continues to exist in the US as well as Canada, suggesting that pluralism and homogeneity are not absolute opposites. Indeed, the subsequent chapters in this dissertation suggest that certain forms of multiculturalism and assimilation are guided by similar essentialist undercurrents in the post-civil rights era, which operate through a shared lexicon of racial and ethnic stereotypes. As Ien Ang writes, "Racially and ethnically marked people are no longer othered today through simply mechanisms of rejection and exclusion, but through an ambivalent and apparently contradictory process of inclusion *by virtue of othering*" (2002, p. 139). The question remains, how might multiculturalism be critically appropriated toward radical democratic ends?

As the above explication would suggest, there are definite postmodern attributes behind the pluralist projects of multiculturalism in North America. The fragmentation and rejection of universal truth embedded at the heart of postmodern critique coincides with the abandonment of Manichean cold war mythologies and the "ethnoracial Eurovision" of an American "monoculture," which presupposed common linguistic, political, and economic values achieved in part through the assimilation of landed immigrants (Goldberg, 1994, p. 4). As an ideology, multiculturalism is guided by an understanding and celebration of difference in ways that are perhaps good-willed but often problematic. The epistemological shift away from Western intellectual and artistic traditions has sometimes resulted in a sweeping fetishization of "otherness" as immutable ethnic difference, in the context of which the Western multicultural nation appears "heterogeneous" and benevolent. In other words, the postmodern processes under which some marginalized groups enjoy the political perks of representation are often symptomatic of late capitalist sensibilities and an identity-based logic of difference that is both empowering and disempowering. And while some theorists have used elements of postmodern theory to develop a "resistance multiculturalism" sensitive to shifting social meanings and floating racial signifiers (see McLaren, 1994), they have rarely explored the political possibilities of "ludic postmodernism" (parody, pastiche, irony) as a critical response to multicultural ideologies. Ludic postmodernism, according to Teresa Ebert (1996) is ostensibly limited by its concern for irony and contradictions in representations rather than material conditions, making it "apolitical" and ineffective. Yet this claim is based on a rather dubious distinction between the material and the ideological, one that cannot be made without serious qualifications. Moreover,

if part of postmodernism as an intellectual movement includes self-reflexivity, self-parody, and the rejection of a foundational "truth," for example, the various racial and ethnic categories reified under multiculturalism are perhaps open to revision and contestation (Hutcheon, 1989).

The streams of multicultural criticism I find lurking in postmodern philosophy may be traced to theories of representation that challenge the chain of signification. For Jacques Derrida, for example, signifiers only beget more signifiers in an endless but embedded play of deferred meanings. The sign is said to be both comprised and compromised by the "trace" of that which it is not (Derrida, 1976). In other words, the sign is never simply its obvious self but rather its delayed opposite, which is equally as unstable (Spivak, 1976). As Derrida explains, "The sickness of the outside … is in the heart of the living word, as its principle of effacement and its relationship to its own death" (1976, p. 313). What he calls *différance*, then, is a rejection of authentic origins in favor of meaning that is deferred and located only in difference, which is never finalized (Derrida, 1976; 1978). As a result, the sign – be it racial identity or a national icon – may be understood as an unstable signifier that contains the trace of other signs. Above all, Derrida's work illustrates the "absent presence" of alterity suppressed by Western philosophical and historical traditions.

There are of course problems with Derrida's work. The world in which his deconstructive critique relates is not always determined by rigid binary oppositions. Indeed, if we look closely at the postmodern conditions of consumer culture, for instance, we may find an increasingly warm embrace of difference, diversity, and fluidity. As David Harvey claims, postmodern economic conditions are "dominated by fiction, fantasy, the immaterial (particularly of money), fictitious capital, images, ephemerality, change, and flexibility in production techniques, labour markets and consumption niches" (1989, p. 339). We may also find that practices and processes of discrimination operate with an advanced understanding of pluralism and "inclusion." To this end, postmodernism may enable and encourage a celebration of "the folklorist Other deprived of its substance" as the originary site of cultural difference (Žižek, 1997, p. x). As a result, a narrow but totalizing campaign against oppressive dualistic thinking may overlook the complexities with which diversity and hybridity inform a multicultural logic of capital that tends to convert the historical and political dimensions of "peripheral" identities into benign commodities. More ironic is Derrida's unwitting sublimation of difference itself. In his work we find that "the very possibility of the other is constantly put in doubt because the processes of thought, language, and representation constantly assimilate the other into the same" (McGowan, 1991, p. 121). Although Derrida was not explicitly interested in race or the racial politics of deconstruction, his analyses are instructive and may be appropriated toward a critical response to multiculturalism. If the sign is internally fractured by the trace of its opposite, Derrida brings to our attention the ubiquity of paradox within dominant discourses, including those of liberal pluralism.

Some of these paradoxes have been widely charted in discussions of postmodern irony and parody. As Hutcheon argues, postmodern irony is self-reflexive and sometimes complicit with structures of domination but it also "acts as a mirror to turn the dominant system's logic back on itself" (1991, p. 139). As a "complicitous critique," irony basks in the crisis of representation such that words and images take on multiple and incongruous meanings

(Hutcheon, 1989). Whereas irony presents an unresolved contradiction, parody is defined by imitation and cooptation (Rose, 1979). Margaret Rose describes parody as a meta-fiction based on comic incongruity, one in which the language of a text is swiped, "decoded" and "recoded" by the parodist (1993). For Hutcheon, postmodern parody is less humorous than subversive inasmuch as it foregrounds without resolving cultural contradictions (1989). It "is … like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said" (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 1). For Fredric Jameson (1991), however, postmodern parody is pastiche, that is, devoid of critical direction. It recycles and recontextualizes historical moments without the burden of political struggles endemic to the moment in question (Foster, 1985).

While Hutcheon is perhaps too easily convinced of the transgressive potential of postmodern parody, Jameson is not convinced enough. Indeed, his dismissal of parody qua pastiche does not explain the wide array of critical postmodern representations that play with the distinctions between the imitator and the imitated. Malcolm Lee's *Undercover Brother* (2002), for instance, recycles and reinvents antiracist struggle through a satire of 1960s blaxploitation films. It relies on postmodern parody to not only demonstrate historical continuity between contemporary racial politics and the civil rights movement, but also to poke fun at the racial stereotypes and hypermasculinity reproduced by the blaxploitation genre itself. Likewise, Jonathon Kesselman's *The Hebrew Hammer* (2003) parodies blaxploitation and identity politics with a fictional Jewish action hero who aligns with the Kwanzaa Liberation Front to reclaim Hanukkah from Damien, the neoconservative son of Santa Claus. The sample of parody offered by these films contains multiple "text worlds" flagged by references and quotations, which may rival and play off one another but are hardly devoid of political criticism (Rose, 1979). In a similar context, Harriet Margolis (1999) has interpreted Keenan Ivory Wayans' *I'm Gonna Git You Sucka* (1988) and Robert Townsend's *Hollywood Shuffle* (1987) as insightful meditations on racism that rely on self-directed stereotypes as a wider social critique of white power structures. Here postmodern parody is such that the text demonstrates "its own artificiality, its own pseudo-status, its own representational depthlessness" in a manner that "undermines the modernist belief in the image as an authentic expression" (Kearney, 1994, p. 3). Although black stereotypes are understood in a parodic context of self-representation and transgressive potential they are not explicitly discussed by Margolis in relation to multiculturalism.

This style of postmodern parody is reminiscent of but not reducible to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. While Bakhtin wrote well before the outbreak of a so-called postmodern era, his writings help explain some of the "double-voiced" narratives in which race and ethnicity presently appear in popular culture. Language, he contends, is "ideologically saturated" and always in conflict with itself. Competing worldviews and the "social diversity of speech types (*raznorecie*)" work to deny the consensus and closure of meaning within a single discourse (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 271, 263). What Bakhtin refers to as heteroglossia, then, is actually the collision of language systems in a single but hostile discursive moment. It is the presence of "*another's speech in another's language*" (1981, p. 324). As a result, the author speaks in and through her characters using a language that is not entirely her own, challenging the authoritative claims of both language and speaker. Whereas postmodern "double-coding"

emphasizes a coalescence of form, Bakhtin's heteroglossia underscores conflict and antagonism (Rose, 1983). As a form of heteroglossia, the author is doubled by the words of others without necessarily becoming the other, a phenomenon with far-reaching potential within postcolonialism.

Some of the postcolonial possibilities of heteroglossia have been explored by Homi Bhabha, whose landmark work on "colonial mimicry" is an elucidating discussion of the performative politics of race. His notion of mimeticism under colonial conditions includes an "ironic compromise" in which the cultural practices and tastes of the colonizer are adopted by the colonized (Bhabha, 1994). Mimeticism produces a slippage that endangers the stability of colonialist binaries and the overarching power structure that brings those "mutually opposed" categories into conflict (Bhabha, 1994). The pedigree of cultural supremacy historically tied to the white body is thrown into crisis when it appears in a "fugitive" racial hue. An imitation of the colonizer's "tastes, opinions, morals, and intellect … problematizes the signs of racial and cultural priority, so that the 'national' is no longer naturalizable" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 87). Through colonial mimicry, Bhabha remarks, the "civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double" (1994, p. 86). Identity, in other words, becomes a heteroglot comprised of competing cultural ideologies.

But there are added complexities within the postmodern conditions of racial subjugation and mimeticism that cannot be understood through colonial mimicry alone. Rey Chow, for instance, pushes Bhabha's concept to account for the contemporary social forces under which ethnic subjects are expected to resemble Western mythologies of *ethnicity*, rather than whiteness. In what she describes as "coercive mimeticism," ethnic subjects are called on to "replicate the very banal preconceptions that have been appended to them, a process in which they are expected to objectify themselves in accordance with the already seen and thus to authenticate the familiar imagings of them as ethnics" (Chow, 2002, p. 107). The ethnic subject, in other words, is only recognized and permitted to speak insofar as s/he demonstrates ethnic "authenticity" (i.e., primitivism, mysticism, "foreign" cultural traditions). Chow rightly explains such processes as oppressive and inhibiting to self-efficacy of the ethnic subject, but she mentions little of the political possibilities of self-mimeticism as postmodern parody.

Drawing on the general ideas behind colonial mimicry and coercive mimeticism, in this dissertation I attempt to theorize some of the postmodern narratives of popular culture that use self-directed stereotypes to negotiate racial ideologies and the logic of multiculturalism. It is a playful and paradoxical display of pastiche as a blend of historical texts and intentional parody that draws me to postmodernism as a cultural aesthetic, one that might offer a deconstruction of liberal pluralism and multiculturalism in North America. Herein lie the guiding questions of my dissertation:

(1) Can postmodernism offer a necessary critical framework for responding politically to multiculturalism?

(2) How well does a postmodern framework account for the critical multicultural visions realized and expressed in popular media and cultural forms such as comedy, film, and sports? What is the significance of these visions?

(3) How do the postmodern sensibilities of irony, parody, pastiche, bricolage, poaching, and simulation fit into the framework of multiculturalism and possibilities for multicultural critique and subversion?

Notes on a Contextual Cultural Studies

To explore a postmodern critique of multiculturalism, I rely on what Douglas Kellner (1995) calls a "multiperspectival" approach. As an eclectic mode of analysis, a multiperspectival approach "draws on a wide range of textual and critical strategies to interpret, criticize, and deconstruct the artifact under scrutiny" (1995, p. 98). As a result, my analytic model resembles a form of theoretical and methodological bricolage, which attempts to place the postmodern concepts of irony, parody, and simulation within the field of critical multiculturalism. It also involves the use of ideology critique in conjunction with textual analysis. As Kellner suggests, "Combining, for instance, ideology critique and genre criticism with semiotic analysis allows one to discern how the generic forms of media culture, or their semiotic codes, are permeated with ideology" (1995, p. 98). For my own part, I rely on a multiperspectival approach not only to chart a nuanced critique of racial essentialisms but also to explore alternative ways of understanding the contradictions within multicultural ideologies drawn out by close readings of conflicting and complementary media texts. The text is understood here as a cultural site of negotiation, one in which other texts are referenced in uneven but potentially disruptive ways. It presents certain political perspectives as "natural" while others are deemed regressive, counterproductive, and dissident. And yet the text is always open and alive to meanings that "resist totalizing interpretations" (Poster, 1989, p. 153).

In a similar spirit of bricolage, I use a "contextual cultural studies" approach, borrowing from a variety of methods without privileging any one in particular (Kellner, 1995, p. 98). My purpose is to offer a series of critical commentaries, analyses, and theoretical readings that endeavor to situate selected media texts within the larger cultural, political, and economic dimensions of multiculturalism. As Melani McAlister claims, "Understanding the political import of culture requires that we position cultural texts in history, as active producers of meaning, rather than assuming that they merely 'reflect' or 'reproduce' some preexisting social reality" (2001, p. 5). My approach borrows but slightly deviates from traditional ideology critique and critical discourse analysis insofar as it seeks out the political possibilities of contradictions within popular culture. That is to say, "rather than just conceptualizing ideology as a force of domination in the hands of an all-powerful ruling class, ideology can be analyzed contextually and relationally" as a source of transgressive meanings (Kellner, 1995, p. 104).

My understanding of a contextual cultural studies approach is derived from a variety of postmodern, postcolonial, and feminist studies of media culture. Exploring what he calls the "Rambo effect," Kellner explains the ideological importance of Vietnam-based Hollywood films and their relationship to Reaganite politics of the 1980s. He situates narratives of militant masculinity found in *Top Gun* (1986) and *First Blood* (1982) within the larger cultural leitmotif of failed US military interventions. In a similar vein, Robyn Wiegman maps the ideological underpinnings of various white racial projects in and through white supremacist museum

exhibits and the racial politics of the Robert Zemeckis film *Forrest Gump* (1994), which she describes as symptomatic of white liberal sensibilities in the post-civil rights era (1999). And in her extensive analysis of US political interests in the Middle East, McAlister illustrates the cultural dimensions of American foreign policy as reflected in popular theatrical and cinematic productions. From touring exhibits of King Tut to Edward Zwick's *The Siege* (1998), McAlister traces the fear and fascination directed at Egypt, Iran, Iraq, and a range of other Islamic states expressed in and through American culture. Such work attempts to understand and explain the historical connections that "bring specific cultural products into conversation with specific political discourses" (McAlister, 2001, p. 7).

Borrowing from the reading methods of these cultural theorists, I provide a critical media pedagogy that identifies artifacts of popular media as interrelated and intertextual but always open to contestation. It seems that political and popular discourses cite one another (directly and indirectly) in the construction of racial and ethnic identities. In this predominantly visual economy, each image is "sensible" only in a dialogue with other complementary images. By relying on similar stereotypes each text discussed in my dissertation participates, to varying degrees, in the cultivation of a multicultural zeitgeist. The dialogue, however, is occasionally duplicitous, ironic, and tongue-in-cheek, even when its participants speak the same racialized idiom. Although racial stereotypes circulate widely in popular culture, they do not always support conservative or white liberal sensibilities. A stand-up comic, for instance, may imitate self-directed ethnic stereotypes as a way of mocking the racial mythologies of dominant white cultures. Likewise, certain sports mascots may represent polysemic caricatures open to transgressive appropriations. These possibilities would suggest that dominant racial and ethnic ideologies can only be understood in the historical and political contexts in which they appear. In other words, "a cultural product, be it a novel or a painting or a film, cannot be understood solely through 'immanent' analyses that stay within the text itself" (McAlister, 2001, p. 6). It is the task of a contextual cultural studies approach to situate a variety of media texts and explain the ideological connections between them that are "neither entirely planned nor entirely coincidental" (McAlister, 2001, p. 8).

A Critical Postmodern Response to Multiculturalism: A User's Guide

My dissertation is organized into three overlapping case studies that discuss a variety of cultural texts, from films and weblogs to DVD recordings of stand-up comedy. While the texts are widespread and immensely popular, they offer distinct ways of thinking about identity and stereotypes through the "doubleness" and uncertainty of postmodern representation. As such, they are used to unpack contemporary conditions of multiculturalism in North America with a focus on the self-engendered paradox. To this end, my dissertation includes meditations on stand-up comedy and ethnolinguistic imitation, the humanoid robot of science fiction as an emergent metaphor of white antiracism, and ironic sports mascots in relation to Québécois "authenticity." Taken together, the cases represent a commentary on the discursive conditions

of multiculturalism in Canada and the US, which rely regularly on stereotypical assumptions of fixed difference.

Chapter Two, "Race Comedy and the 'Misembodied' Voice," explores race and ethnicity through audio representation, in particular the performance of dialects. The case describes ethnic caricatures within an explicit comedic setting, which is sometimes dismissed as unworthy of scholarly pursuit (King, 2002). I draw on stand-up comedy as a site of "ventriloquism" whereby vocal impersonations offset the racial assumptions overstated by the visual. In the performances of Dave Chappelle, Russell Peters, and Margaret Cho, for example, the "ethnic body" does not speak as such, sending the audiovisual process of signification into deferral and disarray. I suggest that a "misembodied" voice invites a revision of the ocularcentric conditions of racial identification and the critical potential of sociolinguistics. The racial and ethnic caricatures that emerge are not simply derogatory racial stereotypes; they are also clichés reproduced by multicultural discourse but recycled toward critical ends. This is part of the novel critique of ethnic absolutism offered by the comedy of Chappelle, Peters, and Cho. In their routines, the (unnamed) idea of diaspora undercuts cultural mythologies of fixed ethnic difference by accentuating the conflict of past and present, absence and presence whilst "referencing the economic, political and cultural dimensions of these contemporary forms of migrancy" (Brah, 1996, p. 186).

This chapter presents an audiovisual analysis of four stand-up comedy films (Chappelle's *Killin' Them Softly* (2000), Peters' *Outsourced* (2006), and Cho's *I'm the One that I Want* (2000) and *CHO Revolution* (2004)), two seasons of a sketch comedy television program (*Chappelle's Show*) and snippets from previously broadcast comic routines accessed at www.youtube.com and audio downloading websites. It is important to note that this case study relies on audio- as well as audiovisual-based texts. "Race Comedy" draws attention to sound and dialect as an integral object of textual analysis, which presents a series of hurdles related to the sociolinguistic science of transcription (i.e., the coding of certain prosodic features). Because this particular case concerns the social construction of racial dialect rather than its empirical existence, utterances are transcribed phonetically (a method used in the work of Bonfiglio, 2002; Urciuoli, 1996; Lippi-Green, 1997; Creese & Kambere, 2002). My interests, in other words, lie in the ideological conditions and critical potential of ethnolinguistic imitation rather than the indexing of dialect itself.

Chapter Three, "Humanoid Slave Narratives and the Post-white Imaginary in Alex Proyas' *I, Robot*," maps the current articulation of white racial projects through artificial intelligence, simulation, and the "unique" but marginalized humanoid robot of a recent science fiction film. This chapter situates simulation and the suspicious but evolving android within competing narratives of whiteness. It attempts to explain the racial dimensions of the film as a larger desire for reconciliation and redemption present in American cultural politics, namely the Senate's apology for the grossly belated passing of anti-lynching legislation and the State of Mississippi's recent conviction of ex-Klansman Edgar Ray Killen in the 1964 slayings of three civil rights workers. What *I, Robot* shares with these political events is a potentially misleading disavowal of "white terror," one in which a progressive white subject is born anew. My analysis examines the ways in which "disidentification" is enabled by a subjectivity that evokes not only

the cultural logic of white male backlash but also the possibility of an underclass uprising. In other words, the humanoid robot presents a rich metaphor with which to discuss the hybrid body as concomitantly a laboring body, thus bringing a distinct class politics to bear on a postmodern narrative of simulation and hybridity. "Robot" after all is derived from a Czech word meaning "worker."

This chapter uses a pair of *Washington Post* news articles concerning the Senate's apology and the Killen conviction to enter a discussion of white racial politics allegorized in *I, Robot*. The film is in some ways incoherent and beset by a series of narrative contradictions, which I argue are consistent with white racial projects and the "paradox of particularity" (Wiegman, 1999). Although the racial terms of reconciliation in *I, Robot* are not always clear, they become legible alongside wider performances of antiracism in US politics, which offer an insightful intertextual dialogue. While the discussion is directed most rigorously at *I, Robot*, I trace the political origins of the "white monster" in science fiction to LeRoi Jones' short play "A Black Mass" (1965), situated in the Black Nationalist discourse of the 1960s. Reading *I, Robot* alongside the radical politics of "A Black Mass" contextualizes the Proyas film within a more explicit racial narrative of "white terror," which I argue becomes the source of white disidentification and a supposedly benevolent "post-white" subject born of a postmodern narrative.

Chapter Four, "Canadian 'Biculturalism' and the Politics of Irony in Sport" (co-authored with Ted Alexander) uses a contentious sports mascot to discuss the ways in which cultural mythologies are negotiated and negated through nostalgia and postmodern irony. It follows in the work of Hutcheon (1991), who provides an inventory of literary ironies in contemporary Canadian culture. Whereas Hutcheon's illustrations are poignant but brief, they tend to idealize multiculturalism in Canada. Our discussion of a French stereotype, however, is more concerned with a critical engagement of the conditions of interpellation and political subjectivity. Using a contextual cultural studies approach, we argue that the frog mascot of Québec City's professional basketball team offers a site of contestation somewhere between ethnic "authenticity" and Anglocentrism. While official multiculturalism in Canada subsumes particular ethnic histories and struggles under the representative logic of pluralism, it cannot fully contain the bicultural antagonisms between English and French. And yet the very articulation of this antagonism in dominant English-Canadian discourses is often tied problematically to a binary opposition, one that ignores the differences within English and French identities as well as the dispossession of First Nations and other ethno-political groups that do not fit neatly into a bicultural logic.

This chapter relies on a series of commentaries and exchanges retrieved from thirteen Internet weblogs directed at the Québec City Jumping Frogs (8 English, 5 French). With the help of a professional translator, we surveyed some of the reactions to the ironic but controversial introduction of Dunky the Frog – the mascot of a professional basketball team. A collection of audience responses was used alongside a close theoretical reading of the frog icon to deconstruct the logic of biculturalism (French contra English) in Canada. This theme of biculturalism is also placed in the context of representation, recognition, and identity politics under the current conditions of multiculturalism in Canada. These include increasing suspicions

of the Harper government's commitment to recognizing the political demands and positioning of the Québécois as well as the controversy surrounding Hockey Canada's decision to promote Shane Doan, a professional hockey player accused of using anti-French slurs against a French-Canadian referee, as the team's captain in Russia.

It is the intent of my dissertation to present a dialogue of converging multiculturalisms through popular media and postmodern representations of identity and stereotypes. Whereas the racial ventriloquist of stand-up comedy is used to explore ethnic "authenticity" through dialects, the humanoid robot is used to illustrate how the floating signifiers and contradictions at the heart of postmodern representations are limited by discursive histories that restrain the practice of racial resignification. Along related lines, the frog mascot of Québec City is used to discuss how Québécois authenticity is meddled with through visual irony. And so each chapter is connected by the paradoxes existing between identity and self-directed stereotypes, which are utilized in various ways toward distinct political ends. They are designed to delineate some of the ways in which essentialist ideologies of race and ethnicity that flourish under multiculturalism(s) are channeled and challenged through postmodern tactics of representation.

Limitations

In her book *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler warns, "any analysis which pretends to be able to encompass every vector of power runs the risk of a certain epistemological imperialism" (p. 18). Critical scholarship, in other words, is inevitably incomplete and is practicing bad faith when it claims otherwise. Taking shelter in Butler's remarks, my dissertation is limited by certain theoretical and methodological considerations. My discussion of identity and postmodern representations, for instance, is somewhat limited to conjecture if the findings are not corroborated by an audience. Although Chapter Four relies on the commentaries posted by Internet weblog users, I mostly engage texts rather than audiences and in mostly theoretical terms. And while I draw particular attention to the ways in which different subject positionings are made available through postmodern narratives of race and ethnicity, there is no substitute for audience research. That is to say, the complexities of multiculturalism cannot be understood through contextual analysis alone; they may require ethnographic studies of how people engage and live multiculturalism in their daily lives, including their individual and collective strategies for handling the insidious ideologies of race and racial position in a postmodern context.

It is not my intent to map every avenue and alleyway of multiculturalism in North America through these case studies. Indeed, such a project would grossly overstate the capabilities and influence of comics, directors, actors, and impresarios of popular culture. In a similar sense, I have a deal of discomfort when using the term "postmodern" to describe my case studies and critique. I am aware of the multiple and contentious meanings of not only postmodernism but also irony and parody, terms that are in no way characteristically postmodern. I do, however, perceive a common sensibility running throughout the texts of my case studies, one that relies on duplicity and uncertainty as a mode of addressing multicultural ideology. It is this impulse of ambivalence realized through irony, parody, and simulation that is reminiscent of postmodern intellectual trends. And so my discomfort with the term

"postmodern" is somewhat less overwhelming than my discomfort with the creation and use of neologisms that might otherwise replace what is perhaps best described as "postmodern."

Although I foreground the urgency of race in popular media, it is never sequestered from the axes of differentiation, which include class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, region, and so forth. As such, the readings offered by this dissertation are nothing if not provisional. Textual interpretations, to be sure, are quite arbitrary and vacillate across individuals, audiences, and sociohistorical settings. But they might also take on political significance when connected with overlapping media artifacts in ways that enable and inhibit resignifiable subject positionings. The use of a contextual cultural studies approach, in other words, attempts to make sense of the arbitrary as in fact a politically relevant moment of concatenation. In this sense, "we might ask less about 'what texts mean' – with the implication that there is a hidden or allegorical code to their secret meaning – and more about how the texts participate in a field, and then in a set of fields, and thus in a social and political world" (McAlister, 2001, p. 8).

From the Enlightenment projects of modernity to contemporary sociohistorical conditions, the concept of race has been made to signify in divergent ideological ways (Gilroy, 2000; Goldberg, 1996). The credibility of race is profoundly reliant on the dubious grammar of scientific reason, cultural euphemisms and, more recently, the tidy if essentialized terms defined by the multicultural nation. Poststructuralism and postmodernism, however, have provided critical theorists with an important formulation of race and ethnicity as precarious and historically conditioned (Hall, 1997). The tension existing between the market conditions and intellectual undercurrents of postmodernism may offer a critical response to the ideological underpinnings of multiculturalism. In other words, the postmodern sensibilities from which multiculturalism in part emerges can be deployed in nuanced and potentially disruptive self-parodic ways, which may inform an alternative antiracist pedagogy. In this vein, my dissertation strives to outline a more encompassing understanding of the shifting nature of race and ethnicity by exploring the antiracist possibilities of postmodern narratives of race and ethnicity.

Notes

1. The "Jena Six" refers to a group of African-American high-school students charged with assaulting a white teenager in Jena, Louisiana. The beating was an alleged response to white students who draped noosed ropes around a "white(only) tree" in the schoolyard, an unpunished hate crime symbolic of lynching and the racist violence practiced by the Ku Klux Klan.
2. And yet a multicultural condition cannot be reduced to a mere postmodern phenomenon. On the one hand, the extension of political recognition and universal rights to minoritized groups may be a logical continuation and realization of the Enlightenment project and its emancipatory ethos. On the other hand, certain versions of conservative multiculturalism extend from racist biological mythologies and imperialist fantasies of the white supremacist political agendas that precede the formation of multiculturalism in North America (McLaren, 1994).

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Chapter Two: Race Comedy and the "Misembodied" Voice[i]

In the classic postcolonial treatise *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), Frantz Fanon describes at some length the arrival of the colonized black man in France. Fascinated at the sight of a learned black, the French have a curious reaction to an unfolding contradiction. The black man will *look* like the primitive of colonialist mythology but *speak* in the language of the colonizer. He will "talk like a book" and roll his Rs rather than eat them (Fanon, 1967, p.21). And yet the French will continue to address the Antillean in pidgin, "imprisoning him, primitivizing him, decivilizing him" (Fanon, 1967, p. 32). Such are the antecedents of what Fanon calls the "Antillean neurosis," a state of conflict between the self-image and the image thrown upon the self by colonial discourse. Evidently, Fanon is ambivalent of this adoption of "Frenchness," of whiteness. He fears the acquisition of the French language as an acceptance of a French culture and worldview that identifies "blackness" with evil and sin. But the colonized Francophone also exemplifies a rupture of past and present, of black and white, of primitive and civilized (Fanon, 1967). In Fanon's words, "the whole structure crumbles … [when] a black man says … 'I am in no sense your boy, Monsieur'" (1967, p. 33). Herein lies an unmistakable tension between seeing and hearing race, one that is not easily resolved.

If the history of race is found in the history of modernity, it is also rooted in what Martin Jay calls the "empire of the gaze" (1986). Supported by the rhetoric of Western science and the Enlightenment project, differences of skin, hair, bones, noses, eyes, feet, and genitals emerged within the visual fictions of "race," fictions that continue to circulate in the Euro/American imaginary (Gilroy, 2000; Vertinsky, 1995; Goldberg, 1993). Along related lines, film and television studies have confronted racism in popular culture by stressing the importance of ocularcentric representation. In the field of sociolinguistics, however, race and ethnicity have been studied with a particular sensitivity to dialect. To this end, language is understood broadly but not exclusively to be a cogent signifier of racial and ethnic identity. As a result, many sociolinguists have charted racial difference rather than challenged it. Until recently, however, media theorists and sociolinguists alike have understated the discord between racial sights and racial sounds.

Under the influence of poststructuralism, some cultural critics contend that race and ethnicity are not only socially constructed but also performed across a variety of contexts. This performance of race is often made explicit in stand-up comedy, a realm of popular culture sometimes dismissed as frivolous and unworthy of academic study (King, 2002). In the comic routines of Dave Chappelle, Russell Peters and Margaret Cho, for example, ethnic stereotypes are performed and impersonated through shifting dialects and speech registers. The visual "truth" of the body is beset by a delinquent voice, which pluralizes and problematizes a tidy "commonsense" of racial identity. Drawing on the work of Chappelle, Peters and Cho, this essay

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[i] A version of this chapter is in preparation for submission to a refereed journal.

explores audiovisual rupture and the "misembodied" voice as a condition of political possibility, one that may offer an alternative method of media and sociolinguistic analysis. The rupture may also present a creative vocabulary with which to deconstruct the racial essentialisms used to govern the body and "fasten" the ethnic subject to "an *appearance* for which [s/he] is not responsible" (Fanon, 1967, p. 35).

Seeing Race

From the outset, it is important to realize that Western societies have historically privileged the "truth claims" derived from sight rather than sound. Sight has long been mythologized in Western philosophy, science, aesthetics and metaphysics as the "most discriminating and trustworthy of the sensual mediators between man and world" (Jay, 1986, p. 176). Vision, in other words, is the praised guarantor of presence and truth, an intimate arbiter of knowledge, ontology, power, and ethics (Levin, 1993; Doane, 1985). It is perhaps not surprising that an ocularcentric epistemology of truth has met adroit criticism from the likes of Heidegger, Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Foucault, Irigaray, and Fanon himself. For such critics, the gaze is a dominating and truth-making presence that creates as much as observes the subject (Foucault, 1990; Gilroy, 2000). As a result, "what the eye sees is not a neutral moment of reception but [a] … disciplinary operation" (Wiegman, 1995, p. 37).

As the natural world fell under a classifying gaze, distinctions between human beings were mythologized with a similar hubris (Mirzoeff, 1998b). Supported by the doxa of Western science, racial differences were "summoned into being" by diagrams and illustrations of anatomical "truth" (Gilroy, 2000, p. 35). As David Theo Goldberg writes, "a hierarchy of humankind" could only emerge from a motivated system of observing and coding arbitrary and embellished physical traits (1993, p. 49). The red herring of physiognomy, for instance, was used to screen certain racial groups from not only the privileged space of political subjectivity but also the ontological dimensions of humanity. Such scopic regimes of modernity "produced the truth of 'race' and repeatedly discovered it lodged in and on the body" (Gilroy, 2000, p. 35). While race was expressed in a variety of ways, it was *visible* difference that sponsored the formation of modern racial logic (Wiegman, 1995; Hall, 1997; Goldberg, 1993; Gilroy, 2000).

In many ways we are still held "hostage to the primacy of sight" (Jay, 1986, p. 188). From the Benetton billboards of "market multiculturalism" to the increased surveillance of international ports, the production of knowledge and racial thinking remains sharply tied to the empire of the gaze. In her book *On Not Speaking Chinese* (2001), Ien Ang describes the status of ethnicity as a visual (mis)cue:

> At a party, I was introduced to a man who … immediately started to blurt
> out some words in Cantonese, then Japanese, then Malay… It surprised and
> frustrated him that I understood nothing of what he said and that I refused
> to speak to him other than in English. (p. 145-6)

Ang's memoirs illustrate the ocularcentric fictions of race that underwrite knowledge production and the erroneous assumptions of ethnic particularity. Along similar lines, a nine-year-old Indo-Canadian student was, despite her fluency in English, recently enrolled in an English-as-Second-

Language (ESL) program at an Alberta elementary school (CBC News, 2006). Because of her appearance, the student was assumed to fit neatly into a category of ethnolinguistic "otherness" organized by the instructors. As each of these examples suggests, the spirit of ocularcentrism cannot be easily exorcised from a range of cultural settings in which the "hegemony of vision" is tied to the "metaphysics of presence" (Shapiro, 1993, p. 125).

The visual currencies of race and ethnicity are in many ways consolidated by popular culture (Wiegman, 1995). Visible differences continue to (mis)inform racial thinking by stretching across the sets of popular film, news reports, and television programs. Against this phenomenon, film and television theorists have offered a wealth of insightful critiques. The important work of Herman Gray (1995), Ed Guerrero (1993), Robyn Wiegman (1995), Michele Wallace (1990), Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis (1992), for instance, operate from different theoretical bases but consistently unpack visual representations of race articulated through gender, class, and sexuality. Studies by such critics have situated visual narratives of popular media, including the film and television genres of science fiction, horror, drama, and comedy, within the cultural politics of the post-civil rights era. Although an inventory of media theory and racism is beyond the scope of this essay, it is important to note that an overwhelming number of studies have approached racist images and dialogue without addressing, in Roland Barthes' words, the "grain" of the character's voice (1991).

There is, however, a growing interest in phonic representation within visual media, including but not limited to animated television. Michael Chaney's discussion of *Southpark*, for example, draws attention to the racial impersonation of speech patterns (2004). He claims that certain white characters are able to explore and appropriate a language of "blackness" while characters of color are reduced to vocal stereotypes (Chaney, 2004). In her study of Apu – the South Asian shopkeeper on *The Simpsons* – Shilpa Davé describes the performance of "brown voice" as a similar form of vocal minstrelsy (2005). The white adoption of "stylized South Asian English," she argues, perpetuates stereotypes that compound "one sound and one image for South Asians" (Davé, 2005, p. 318). But the intentional mismatching of voice and body is also an aesthetic technique of modern cinema, sharpened by Robert Altman, Jean-Luc Godard, and Marguerite Duras. The mismatched voice is sometimes discussed along gendered lines and to the effects of laughter or denigration, but it is seldom adopted within a sociopolitical framework sensitive to race and ethnicity (Silverman, 1988; Chion, 1999). Just as recent media studies have cautioned against the radical potential of vocal impersonation, theories of film sound seem reluctant to search out the possibilities of racial ventriloquism.[2] Lest we forget "the visual … never comes 'pure,' it is always 'contaminated' by the work of other senses" (Shohat & Stam, 1998, p. 45).

Hearing Race

By the logic of poststructuralism, there is no ontological essence of identity that is not already a social construction. Although identities are "established and maintained" through relationships of difference it is imperative to account for the "communicative processes" from which these differences emerge (Gumperz, 1982, p. 3, 1). Dialect, for example, is described by

sociolinguists as a symbol of cultural membership, origins, and political power (Gumperz, 1982; Urciuoli, 1996). It is recognized as a "social act," one that is "informed by an ideological system of representation" (Irvine, 2001, p. 24). To speak is to be located within a cultural hierarchy of style, status, and power (Bourdieu, 1991). As a potential marker of exclusion, however, accent is used to prune back strange and threatening bodies from the "normative" imagination (Creese & Kambere, 2002; Urciuoli, 1996).

If identity is constructed in part through language, the same may be said of race and ethnicity (Gumperz, 1982; Hewitt, 1986). This is perhaps best illustrated by the anxiety of racial "otherness" and the rise of "Standard American English" in the 1900s. During this period, aboriginal youth across North America encountered a Euro-colonialist agenda that relied on residential schools and often-violent disciplinary regimes to purge its students of indigenous languages. At the same time, a plethora of ethnic groups entered the US en masse, bringing with them distinct ways of speaking that were bitterly received by nativist and xenophobic Americans. This prompted a national immigration "crisis" that required swift and resolute action. With the support of the US government and a sweeping campaign of "moral edification," the standard language movement targeted ethnic groups in hopes of stamping out the heterodoxy of "impure" English vernaculars (Bonfiglio, 2002). Like the melting-pot paradigm, "the decoy of language standardization" promised the ethnic immigrant equality and opportunity in exchange for assimilation and erasure of linguistic difference (Bonfiglio, 2002, p. 134). As a result, a particular dialect of English was mythologized as neutral, middle class and white, much like the nation itself (Urciuoli, 1996).

Whereas standard language movements sought to reclaim the nation through whiteness, sociolinguists have drawn attention to alternative ethnic vernaculars, most notably African American English. "Black English" is ostensibly defined by a series of phonetic differences, including double-negatives (i.e., *She ain't never*), the loss of a postvocalic /r/, and the absence of connecting verbs (i.e., *you fast*) (Wolfram & Torbert, 2006). Although African American English may be denigrated as "jive," it is also celebrated as a signifier of cultural resistance to Standard American English and the pressures of assimilation (Rickford, 1997; Hewitt, 1986; Wolfram & Torbert, 2006; Smitherman, 1998; Spears, 1998; Mufwene, Rickford, Bailey & Baugh, 1998; Ashcroft, 2001). The use of certain dialects over and against the standard language is such that speakers "refuse the demand to bury their own identities by trying to perform as someone else" (Creese & Kambere, 2002, p. 18). Evidently, there is no "Black English" without the "white" standard from which it is said to relate.

Some critics now insist, however, that Standard English is a simulacrum. It only exists as an apparition or rather an inchoate leftover of its own distortions, which are always already ideological (Bonfiglio, 2002; North, 1994; Lippi-Green, 1997; Urciuoli, 1996). The standard language is a ghostly reference or citation within a dialect. By comparison, a dialect is "not a mere deviation or deformation, but a particular *use* of language [that] … puts the standard … in conflict with itself" (North, 1994, p. 72). As a normative mythology, the standard language is always in crisis and must redirect attention away from its own internal inconsistencies toward the "alien vernacular" (North, 1994). In a sense, "the legitimate language no more contains within itself the power to ensure its own perpetuation in time than it has the power to define its

extension in space" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 58). This is not to deny the real political forces behind the phantom standard or the "color-coding" of linguistic hierarchies; instead, it is to recognize the provisional and ideological status of all speech types, including African American English. If race and ethnicity have no absolute qualities, the same may be true of language, which is after all a "patently misleading" signifier of cultural identity (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985, p. 234). Although one cannot dismiss the linguistic elements of discrimination or the diversity of speech patterns, it is important to realize that "racial voices" do not always align with "racial bodies" (Ashcroft, 2001).

Recent studies in sociolinguistics underscore the performative nature of speech as a series of dialects and stereotypes open to appropriation, exchange, and impersonation (Rampton, 1998; Harris & Rampton, 2003; Ervin-Tripp, 2001; Lo, 1999; Bucholtz, 1995). The analysis of "style-shifting" or "crossing" represents a theoretical turn away from "coherence and systematicity" toward "incongruity and contradiction" (Rampton, 1998, p. 290). In the work of Ben Rampton, Nikolas Coupland and Susan Ervin-Tripp, for instance, style-shifting is described as an ideological enterprise. From the strategic use of stylized South Asian English among South Asian students (Rampton, 1998) and the shifting dialects of a Cardiff disc jockey (Coupland, 1985) to the speech patterns of popular comedians (Ervin-Tripp, 2001; Lippi-Green, 1997), language is understood here as an exchangeable signifier of identity and ideology. Such work is attentive to variation, performance, and impersonation as a means of negotiating cultural difference.

With an emphasis on prosodic formalism (i.e., the coding of speech rhythms and sounds), however, sociolinguists have often overlooked the deconstructive potential of style-shifting in relation to race and ethnicity. They have tended to focus on quantitative phonetic features and local contexts at the expense of political possibility (Urciuoli, 1996; Hill, 1999). And yet we are reminded, "accents do not reduce to phonemes for the same reason that kinship does not reduce to blood or sex, nor race to physiognomy or genes" (Urciuoli, 1996, p. 124). If the voice is a formative but slippery element of cultural identity, it is also an important but underrated resource for critical theorists interested in the politics of multiculturalism. Nevertheless sociolinguists "have not generally entertained the idea that people's identities are *embodied* sociolinguistically" (Coupland, 2001, p. 203). In response, this essay uses the concept of style-shifting to explore the *misembodied* voice as an indeterminate site of ethnic representation, one that might trouble the myth of "authenticity" (or the reductive terms of ideological interpellation and ethnic stereotypes) by which the ethnic subject is often ensnared.

The "Misembodied" Voice

What is perhaps most striking about the voice is its uncanny ability to misrepresent, to eschew causality and presence (Altman, 1980; Silverman, 1988; Chion, 1999). Sound in general has the potential to mislead an audience by betraying the image of its source (Chion, 1999). In the absence of a visual referent, sound may be "an insidious means of affective and semantic manipulation," presenting the viewer with a sense of loss and the seduction of uncertainty (Chion, Gorban & Murch, 1994, p. 34). Because sight and sound are intrinsically different modes

of knowledge production, they have the potential to quarrel with one another (Doane, 1985). By contrast, successful synchronization of body and voice in motion pictures, for instance, conceals the "material heterogeneity" of sight and sound (Doane, 1980). As Kaja Silverman claims, this binding of voice to body represents a twin "entrapment" of identity and ideology (1988, p. 167). The body, in other words, is situated in a particular relationship of power and subjected to normative assumptions of identity by the sound and accent of its voice (Bourdieu, 1991; Creese & Kambere, 2002). In cinema, "we are often given to believe, implicitly or explicitly, that the body and voice cohere in some self-evident, natural way," when in fact they do not (Chion, 1999, p. 126).

This uneasy relationship has sometimes been exploited by comedy pioneers. From Charlie Chaplin and the Marx brothers to Eddie Murphy and the Wayans family, comics have played "on the very situation of the human being as a dislocated body, a puppet, a burlesque assemblage of body and voice" (Chion, 1999, p. 131). As several critics have pointed out, however, comedy is an intrinsically "double-edged" phenomenon (Palmer, 1987; King, 2002; Gilbert, 2004; Horton, 1991). On the one hand, the "safe" and "unthreatening" reputation of comedy allows its political perspectives to circulate in sensitive areas of culture (King, 2002). On the other hand, its frivolous nature undermines its own political efficacy by deferring sincerity and certainty. If comedy is rarely taken seriously, the same may be said of its politics. The rhetorical spirit of comedy is such that both radical and conservative viewpoints are endorsed within a single utterance (Palmer, 1987; Horton, 1991; King, 2002, Gilbert, 2004). As such, comedy is a site of both political potential and limitation, especially in relation to racial and ethnic stereotypes (King, 2002; Jenkins, 2004; Brayton, 2005).

Unlike situational comedy, which operates within a political economy of box-office returns, network ratings and advertising agendas, stand-up comedy is said to "champion individualism and at least potentially radical ideologies" (Horton, 1991, p. 4). It is a unique genre of popular culture that consists largely of monologues. Without a supporting cast, the stand-up comic must count on the voice to mark narrative shifts and verbal exchanges. That is, different characters appear in the comic's routine through style-shifting and linguistic crossing. Indeed, the stylized speech patterns of certain stand-up comics present a rich opportunity to study dialect as a mode of representation, one that works within and against the ideologies and assumptions of (neo)liberal multiculturalism. As a result, this essay confronts the visual determinism of "race-thinking" by turning to the stand-up and sketch comedy of Dave Chappelle, Russell Peters, and Margaret Cho. The "misembodied" voices of these comics may offer media theorists and sociolinguists an alternative understanding of the ways in which multicultural discourse and racial stereotypes are, through linguistic performance, sometimes accepted and sometimes rejected but always negotiated.

Black Skin, White Voices: The Stand-Up and Sketch Comedy of Dave Chappelle

With a growing list of feature films and guest appearances on *Inside the Actor's Studio* and *Oprah*, Dave Chappelle is undoubtedly one of the most successful and controversial comics performing in North America today. His notoriety emerged from the hit television series *Chappelle's Show*, which aired for two seasons on Comedy Central and was nominated for three Emmy Awards. While filming the much-anticipated third season, however, Chappelle abandoned the project in 2006, "struggling with the tensions of his role in racial representations in popular culture" (Smith & Beal, 2007, p. 122). Chappelle's irreverent brand of comedy is marked by his acute observations of racism in the US and a wry display of stereotypes, which have been both problematic and profitable for white network executives and advertisers.[3] They have also heralded the comic as an important but misrecognized social critic.[4] For our purposes here, Chappelle's caricatures are often reliant on racialized dialects, from the Black English of fictional street hustlers to the whitespeak of pseudo news anchors.

While the broadcast news industry "promotes its own language as the only possible language of an educated, informed mainstream," Chappelle repeatedly subjects it to ideological critique and parody (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 137). In a sketch called "Reparations" a mock news network explores the unprecedented affluence of black communities. A verbal exchange takes place between anchorman Chuck Taylor (Chappelle in whiteface) and Big Al, Chappelle's caricature of jovial African American meteorologist Al Roker. After receiving his own reparations, a bejeweled Big Al addresses Taylor in broadcast English using hyperformal prosodic features and clearly connected verbs: "Chuck, this is not my real speaking voice." He then shifts to a lower pitch of African American English: "Actually, Chuck, dis ma reeel speakin' voice. I talk like straight-up gangsta, bitch." Here the disrobing of speech marks a moment of cultural dissonance, one in which the African American meteorologist is no longer subservient to the interests of the white anchorman and network executives. The skit illustrates the ways in which Standard English is not only coded as white but also removed "like business clothes" (Metcalf, 2000, p. x). As Big Al shifts from broadcast to African American English, he moves from network Uncle Tom to black buck of broadcasting. If "sound shows us the image differently than what the image shows alone," different sounds show different images (Chion et al., 1994, p. 21).

The linguistic dimensions of "passing" are often presented through a range of identities expressed in and through class and gender. In a sketch titled, "When Keepin' It Real Goes Wrong," the audience learns of Vernon Franklin, a corporate vice president whose accommodating ways have earned him several promotions and the approval of his white colleagues. During a business meeting, Franklin is praised by a white executive: "You d'man. Gimme some skin!" Appalled by the racist gesture, Franklin snaps back:

> Getcho mutha-fuckin' hand ouda m'face. Just shake my hand like a man, not "Gimme some fav" or "blackhand me" or all that crazy jive. That's bullshit. [Franklin rises from his chair to dance a jig] "Shan yo shoes fo watumelon?" Fuck all that shit!

As a result of the outburst, Franklin is fired and forced to work menial low-paying jobs. Although passing is parodied as an illegitimate pathway to prosperity, Chappelle reminds the audience that sometimes "it's good to be phony."

As the comic speaks in multiple voices the visual referent is pluralized. Chappelle becomes an executive through "whitespeak," a "gas jockey" through Black English, and a cultural critic through a satirical Southern dialect. Cultural stereotypes appear in exaggerated linguistic forms, which construct race as a "fictional ontology" but with material consequences (Diamond, 1996, p. 5). Style-shifting is used to interrogate the ocularcentric assumptions of race as well as the inherent contradictions of racist ideology. African American English and the fiction of authentic blackness is "suppressed" by Franklin in the boardroom but wielded inappropriately by white executives as a means of maintaining racial hierarchies. While the sketch appears to privilege African American English as the authentic language of black masculinity it ironically underscores the effort with which Black English is self-consciously performed and impersonated by Chappelle himself.

In *Killin' Them Softly*, Chappelle uses style-shifting to orchestrate a series of unsuspecting political commentaries. To explain the absence of African Americans in hostage situations, for example, he describes a fictional incident in which his overseas flight is hijacked. In stylized Arabic English, he shouts, "Every-buddy, get on dee fucking ground. No-buddy loook at my face." Just as the listener is encouraged to identify the terrorist as vaguely "Middle-Eastern," the comic undercuts his own impersonation: "I started freakin' out 'cause he was Chinese. I was like, 'Why is he talking like that?'" Chappelle baits the listener with a linguistic stereotype, which is revealed to be a misleading signifier of the terrorist's "true" identity. Moments later, he demonstrates the unlikelihood of black hostages by pretending to read a detainee's statement in Black English:

Um-mm … They is treatin' us good. Uh, we all chillin' and shit. I'd like to
give a shout out to Ray Ray and Big Steve.

The joke (as non-joke) lies in the contrast between the currency of white hostages and the devalued black body, which is marked in the narrative by Chappelle's style-shifting. The black hostage reads the letter with rigidity, grammatical errors, and dated colloquialisms ("chillin'" and "shout out"), each of which underscores the constructed nature of "blackness" as a performance scripted by someone else (i.e., the captors). Whereas the sketch demonstrates the denigration of black bodies in the national imaginary, Chappelle's vocal impersonations illustrate the slippery dimensions of racial and ethnic representation that are often taken for granted by listeners.

Evidently, Chappelle also performs race through class-based dialects. As Clayton Bigsby, he impersonates a blind African American writer and "leading voice of the white supremacist movement." Dressed in denim overalls and a flannel jacket, the black comic borrows the speech patterns of a Southern white racist, offering a longwinded assault on African Americans as "lazy, good-fur-nuthin' tricksters [and] crack-smokin' swindlers." An advocate of "why't pah'r" [white power], Bigsby endorses racial purity through incest, the eradication of "niggerdom," and the deportation of "Cha-nese" and "Ay-rabs." Chappelle's exaggerated speech denigrates the racist subject by purging the utterances of grammatical intelligence. If the sketch invests in classism to

displace racist violence to a backwater ghetto of white ignorance, it works to round out a rather complex criticism of American racism offered by the parody of Vernon Franklin. The racist white voice is overtaken by the disruptive intentions of the black comic, reproducing hate speech with a difference. Bigsby's "speech, with its hidden meaning, *lies*" (Ropars-Wuilleumier, 1980, p. 262). Representational incongruity is such that the "double-voice" of "another's speech in another's language" places racist and antiracist desires in an oppositional dialogue, one that is only partially commanded by Chappelle (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 324).

When Bigsby preaches at a book-signing he is advised to conceal his identity with Klan regalia. At the behest of his adoring audience, however, Bigsby removes the white hood. Terrified and confused at the "misembodied" voice, the crowd becomes nauseous. In the midst of the mayhem, one Klansman explodes, spattering blood across several skinheads. Southern hate speech is clearly offset by the black body, so much so that white racists experience disorientation, discomfort and most satirically physical combustion. The problem arises "when the enunciative approach, unacknowledged by the visual presentation, is referred back to a mere play of signs" (Ropars-Wuilleumier, 1980, p. 267). As a site of audiovisual rupture, the black-white supremacist offers two distinct realities of perception that quarrel with one another to no end. This contestation can only arise from dialogical modes of knowledge production, the visible and the audible. The utterance, in other words, "serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 324).

Although his gender and sexual politics are often troubling, Chappelle's insight lies in "race comedy." Like other African American comedians (Dick Gregory, Richard Pryor and Eddie Murphy, for instance), he draws attention to the performance of speaking styles and the conditions under which they are used (Ervin-Tripp, 2001; Limon, 2000; Lippi-Green, 1997). Unlike many comics, however, Chappelle is attentive to the voice as an impediment rather than a supplement to visual representation and the hegemony of vision. While some sketches parody the linguistic dimensions of passing other skits ridicule the ways in which Black English is mythologized as intrinsic and natural. In addition, whiteness is illustrated through a range of linguistic stereotypes, from Standard American English to the Southern dialect of Clayton Bigsby. The imitative performance draws upon previous experiences and references existing racial mythologies only to re-present them in a slightly altered state (Diamond, 1996).

But Chappelle's shtick is mostly limited to a binarized logic of race, which is highly problematic and difficult to maintain in an era of multiculturalism. As many theorists and commentators (including other stand-up comics) have suggested, the racial identities offered by the annals of American history are as black and white as the pages they are printed on. Until recently, this has left little polemical space in the cultural imaginary for other ethno-political groups like Chican@s and Asian Americans (Spickard & Daniel, 2004; Perea, 1997). While the civil rights struggles of various ethnic coalitions are increasingly recognized in the cornucopia of contemporary popular culture, the melancholia of American slavery, the reification of a black underclass and what Chappelle has called a discourse of dishonesty continue to haunt American cultural politics, placing a trenchant but partial dichotomy of black and white at its core. As Ed Guerrero writes, "The psychic residue of slavery continues to taint subtly all black-white

relations and transactions, if for no other matter than the fact that African Americans still find white domination a persistent condition" (1993, p. 42). Language, Chappelle reminds us, is instrumental in the maintenance of this black-white dichotomy.

The linguistic politics of race have played out acutely in popular culture, most recently in the racist and sexist "comedy" of American radio-host Don Imus and the outburst of stand-up comic Michael Richards. During a radio broadcast on April 4, 2007 Imus referred to members of the women's basketball team at Rutgers University as "nappy-headed hos," a "joke" that precipitated the cancellation of *Imus in the Morning* by CBS. While the "shock-jock" made several public apologies, he explained the utterance as an "idiot comment meant to be amusing," an episode of racially-charged humor "gone too far" (de Moraes, 2007, C1). Richards, on the other hand, exploded with a seven-minute assault on African American hecklers at a Los Angeles comedy club on November 17, 2006. His abusive tirade was disturbingly reminiscent of Fanon's experience in France: "Look, a nigger! Look, a nigger! Look at the nigger!" Like Imus, Richards apologized and attributed his actions to an ill-fated joke. Such cases illustrate not only the pervasiveness of racist speech but also the "comic sensibilities" used to explain intolerable conduct. Bringing Imus and Richards into the present discussion is not meant to suggest a likeness or parity with Chappelle; instead, it is to illustrate a slippage between racist and antiracist speech that is perhaps only decoded by context, speaker, and audience, which is notoriously slippery in itself. The audience may laugh, but not always for the same reasons.

Anglo-Indian Turrets Syndrome: The Stand-Up Comedy of Russell Peters

Russell Peters is an Indo-Canadian comic whose popularity is largely the result of stand-up comedy festivals, active downloading, and ambitious international touring. He was the first South Asian performer to sell out the Apollo Theater in New York City and has appeared in a variety of Canadian television programs, including *Lord Have Mercy* (2003) and *Comedy Now!* (1997), for which he received four Gemini Award nominations. Although his interactive style is limited to stand-up (available in the DVD *Outsourced*) Peters is currently negotiating a sitcom series with Warner Brothers. Unlike the other comics of this study, Peters relies almost entirely on style-shifting, mimicry, and audience participation. His shtick, in other words, is the ethnolinguistic imitation of himself and his viewers, which doubles as an interesting commentary on racism and identity politics.

Although style-shifting is often used for symbolic or ideological purposes, it is the *raison d'être* of Peters' routine. "Crossing" is the *source* of the joke, not simply its mode of delivery. Although Peters uses style-shifting to imitate various inflections of whiteness, he is renowned for performing "Asianness" and illustrating the heterogeneity of ethnic identity (Slotek, 2006). To demonstrate, Peters code-switches to the Vietnamese expletive "du ma" (motherfucker), style-shifts to the Korean English of his drycleaner, then crosses into Chinese "quick-speak" as if he were "chopping vegetables": "Youuu doan-say-nuffing-bit[ch]." When the comic takes a roll call of ethnicities in *Outsourced* he jokes of foreseeing the large Asian crowd by the parade of Honda Civics in the parking lot; he infers a wave of closed motels by the number of South Asians in the theater; he also jokes with interracial couples in the front row, sliding into stylized South

Asian English to impersonate a "brown" husband: "I go to Amedica and get white woman. I am 'head of d'game!" Peters then explains the regulated category of "Asian," complaining that Indians are not often recognized as such in North America. The statement acts as a performative disclaimer, one that situates the Indo-Canadian comic as an ethnic "insider" and grants him a particular amnesty as an ethnic "tribute artist" of sorts. When the linguistic signifier disagrees with the visible referent, a representational paradox unfolds, which is the source of laughter and enjoyment for the multiethnic audience.

The comic appears to negotiate ethnic difference by offering the viewers distortions of their own ethnicities. He re-presents the speech of his ethnic guests in an embellished ethnic dialect, underscoring a discrepancy between viewer and minstrel performer. In *Outsourced*, for instance, Catherine and Vincent offer Peters their Chinese names, which are returned to them in the comic's heavily accented and exaggerated speech. Here the linguistic utterance is "double-coded" with not only the cited stereotype but also the comic's "ironic transmission" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 358). A gap between ethnic voice and ethnic body appears when the Indo-Canadian comic adopts the Chinese linguistic stereotype, which neither Catherine nor Vincent readily present in English. Ironically, however, the comic moment of incongruity is only recognized through ethnolinguistic essentialisms. That is, "its performance cannot be separated from racialized perceptions about its embodied speaker" (Creese & Kambere, 2002, p. 10). While the concept of "misembodiment" may presuppose a "correct" audiovisual alignment elsewhere, the stereotype becomes the site of its own transgression, mocking the ethnic essentialism from which it is born.

The *self-directed* stereotype is an essential part of Peters' act. He continually shifts from a Central Canadian dialect to stylized South Asian English, a speech pattern marked by "the stressing of every syllable, with no apparent nucleus" (Rampton, 1995, p. 68). In one skit, Peters situates what he calls "redneck" rhetoric within the "brown voice" of his Indo-Canadian father, who is attempting to purchase a sofa. The European retailer, however, does not speak English, which frustrates Peters' father: "You doan come to my country if you can'(t) speak the language." The father ends the phone call and turns to Russell in disbelief: "Immigrants!" The irony is that Peters' father is himself an immigrant. In this particular scene, "content appropriate to one of the characters is spoken with the stylistic characteristics of the other" (Gumperz, 1982, p. 189). The comic plants an anti-immigrant commentary and nativist politics within a "foreign" dialect as a way of exposing the paradox of xenophobia practiced by the descendants of landed European immigrants. Peters explores the multiplicity of Canadian identity and the extent to which the nation is defined not by ethnic "belonging" so much as intolerance and linguistic monism. As such, the hyphen embedded within Indo-Canadian identity becomes a site of antagonism, ambivalence and oxymoronic humor. While the skit is potentially transgressive, the joke rests on an imagined incommensurability between Indian ethnicity and Canadian nationalism.

Evidently, the sketch illustrates reciprocating social forces at work within a Canadian "multicultural" landscape, those of a disavowed assimilation and a lauded ethnic pluralism. The rhetoric adopted by Peters' father speaks to a nativist backlash against immigration and "English Only" campaigns that continue to thrive in Canadian and American cultural politics. From the

sporadic prohibition of patkas and hijabs in sporting events to de facto ethnic segregation practiced in rural Canada, recent outbursts of intolerance have been explained and contained as embarrassing "anomalies" in an otherwise "multicultural" nation (Marotte, 2007; Séguin, 2007). Ethnic sublimation is shunned as antithetical and incompatible with liberal multiculturalism in Canada, which is largely defined against a model of American assimilation imagined to be static, ubiquitous, and fundamentally "un-Canadian" (Mackey, 2002).

Under the conditions of official multiculturalism in Canada, however, particular ethnic histories and struggles are displaced by the "deferred promise" of equal recognition and pluralism (Bannerji, 2000, p. 9). Ethnicities are often purged of political value and fetishized as immutable signs of a "heterogeneous" nation, signs that are also consumed as spicy servings of diversity *du jour* (Lowe, 1996; Bannerji, 2000; Mackey, 2002; Gunew, 2004; Frideres, 1999). Despite its benevolent intentions, the practice of defining, preserving, and promoting ethnic difference marks, in many ways, the colonialist heritage of modern multiculturalism (Gunew, 2004). As such, the ethnic subject of a multicultural society "is expected to come to resemble what is recognizably ethnic" (Chow, 2002, p. 104). This is what Rey Chow describes as "coercive self-mimeticism," or the imitation of ethnic fantasies in the white liberal imagination. The ethnic subject is recognized in political and popular discourses insofar as s/he resembles the stereotype of his or her ethnicity (Browder, 2000; Chow, 2002; Fusco, 1995). It is this underlying logic of pluralism and fixed ethnic difference, however that Peters plays against in ethnolinguistic self-mimicry.

Peters uses stylized South Asian English as a form of "self-mockery that actually mocks the mockers" (Doniger, 2005, p. 12). Typically mistaken for a sign of linguistic inadequacy, the "East Indian accent" is presented by the comic as a forgery, a performance used to accommodate white people (Jupp et al., 1982). In one skit, Peters uses "brown voice" to dramatize an exchange between an Indo-Canadian convenience-store clerk and an Anglo customer: "Hello, sir. How you are? … Okay, my friend. That will be $5.95. Seeing you, bye-bye!" He then shifts to Standard English to express the clerk's disbelief: "And once you leave, it's like, 'What a loser! I can't believe that guy just paid $5.95 for a pack of gum.'" The skit relies on a rhetorical inversion and Socratic irony to present a cunning Indo-Canadian in a dialect of "incompetence," which is used to fool a white customer. Peters twists the terms of coercive self-mimeticism to his advantage, negating the racial assumption that Indo-Canadians have a limited grasp of English. The Indo-Canadian impersonates racist white culture, reclaiming an ethnic dialect that was appended to him by western ideology rather than ethnic heritage per se. In other words, "author A quotes author B quoting author A" (Doniger, 2005, p. 7). If the "performance of brown voice participates in the simplification of racial identities" it is made increasingly complex through self-impersonation (Davé, 2005, p. 327).

It is the myth of intrinsic "Indianness" that Peters often satirizes. He explains his outbursts of stylized South Asian English as a symptom of "Indian Turrets Syndrome." The self-diagnosis is such that it excuses the comic for his own unassimilable ethnicity, framing the ethnic dialect as an abnormality in the West. If the trace of ethnicity found in one's English is to be exorcised, however, it is occasionally celebrated as a sign of pluralism and diversity within the nation-state, especially during ethnic festivals (Urciuoli, 1996). As such, the performative space

of the ethnic self-impersonator is one of ambivalence, indeterminacy, and cultural synchronicity. Peters performs a dialogue between authentic Indian subject and assimilated "dark white guy" (his words) through linguistic variation, which serves to discomfit racial assumptions of language proficiency. It is in many ways a negotiation between a "fixed symbolic cultural identity and the context of heterogeneous difference" (Lowe, 1996, p. 78). And yet the consummate ethnic impersonator continues to serve the viewer with cultural stereotypes and racial clichés.

Although distinctions between "self" and "other" erode in the moment of self-mimicry, Peters' trademark skit relies on the "brown voice" of *someone else*. In it he performs a generational rupture, one that distances the Canadian-born comic from his immigrant father and the nation's linguistic periphery. As Laura Browder claims, the success of ethnic impersonators "rests on their ability to manipulate stereotypes, thus further miring their audience in essentialist racial and ethnic categories" (2000, p. 10). In Peters' routine ethnic prosodic features are typically introduced as if they were static and incontestable. His imitations evoke verisimilitude rather than imperfection. But the irony is such that Peters cannot be a virtuoso ethnic impersonator without undermining the originary conditions from which virtuosity is based. If he sounds "identical" to the ethnic groups he imitates, it is because ethnicity itself is a performance. It is flexible and contingent rather than fixed and absolute. The Indo-Canadian impersonator "pretends to a certain sort of mastery over 'the real' [but his] effectiveness depends upon an act of repetition that *rejects virtuosity*" (Chen, 2005, p. 63). In this sense, Peters appears to commemorate a Canadian cultural mosaic with the "forked-tongue of irony" (Hutcheon, 1991). He identifies ethnic difference through prosodic essentialisms, which are denaturalized by impersonation and used against the white culture in which they circulate.

Not "Asian" Enough? The Stand-Up Comedy of Margaret Cho

Margaret Cho is a Korean American comic who rose to stardom during the mid-1990s when she received her own short-lived television sitcom called *All-American Girl* (1994). Since the show's untimely demise, Cho has released four DVD recordings of her stand-up routines, which earned her an American Comedy Award and the Intrepid Award given by the National Organization for Women. While she is perhaps best known for her stand-up comedy, Cho is also a political activist, campaigning against racial, gender, and sexual discrimination. In addition, she has led discussions of representation at UCLA and is, according to her website, available for university bookings. Most important for our purposes here, Cho performs and parodies ethnic "authenticity" and identity politics through vocal impersonation. In *I'm the One That I Want* and *Cho Revolution*, she offers cogent and comical negotiations of the contradictory conditions of multiculturalism in North America and the ethnic entrapment practiced by the entertainment industry.

Like the other comics of this study, Cho relies on style-shifting for a variety of political purposes. She often elides absolute ethnolinguistic identification by shifting from a Californian dialect toward Valley Girl, African American, and Korean English. For Cho, style-shifting is a way of negotiating fictions of Asian "authenticity." In *I'm the One That I Want*, she uses the narrative

logic of market multiculturalism to parody an "Asian" infomercial. In her Californian dialect she pretends to confess: "'when I was young I was raised on rice and fish. So, when I get heavy I go back to that natural way of eating.' [End of recitation] That is so *Mulan*!" The comic pretends to play a mandolin and continues the skit with an imitation of a "buchaechum" or Korean fan dance. She slips into stylized Asian English to boost the authenticity of the moment:

> When I was a litta girl [Cho puckers her lips and dances in short steps] I grow up on de rice paddy and we have-uh no food. But even dough we have-uh no food, I have-uh a tendency to put on weight [Cho frowns]. The pound fall away so quickly, when you have malaria or dysentery [Cho giggles and covers her mouth].

Cho performs a Western fantasy of Asian authenticity by drawing on stylized speech patterns and "foreign" signifiers (rice paddy, fish, dysentery, malaria, fan dancing, *Mulan*). She evokes "a spectacle of the exotic artefact" used to construct ethnic cultures as "perpetuating the past in petrified form" (Gunew, 1993, par. 6). The ironic reference to Disney's *Mulan* illustrates the centrality of orientalism in American popular culture, evoking images of the Forbidden City, dragon iconography, and "simplistic visions of the exotic other" (Ma, 2000, p. 127). To criticize western fictions of Asian exoticism and market multiculturalism, Cho disidentifies with primitive cultural traditions, muddling the lines between theft, ownership, and fabrication. Cho is "neither the 'Good Subject,' who has an easy or magical identification with dominant culture, nor the 'Bad Subject,' who imagines herself outside of ideology" (Muñoz, 1996, p. 12). The act of ethnic self-impersonation illustrates the preconceived identities attached to the ethnic subject and the possibilities of interrupting such roles through ironic citation (Chen, 2005).

The comic also relies on style-shifting to mark generational and intra-ethnic differences. In *I'm the One That I Want*, she adopts a Korean English accent to impersonate her mother: "Ah you gay? Peek up da phone. If you doan peek up da phone, dat mean you gay!" As Cho mimics her mother with altered prosodic features, she squints and purses her lips. The racial caricature is channeled by a "foreign" voice, which produces an ontological gap between landed Asian immigrant and native-born Asian(-)American. Through style-shifting, Cho articulates the hyphen as a site of division, connection, and contestation. She vocalizes not only generational difference but also "divergent interpretations of how 'femininity' is understood and signified" (Lowe, 1996, p. 79). On the one hand, Cho's ambiguous sexual positioning is a defiant gesture against Asian American cultural nationalism of the 1970s, which idealized a militant heteromasculinity as the essential site of radical identity-based politics (Eng, 1997; Lowe, 1996; Ma, 2000). On the other hand, the articulation of sexual uncertainty through generational conflict, in some ways, reduces the complexity of an Asian diaspora to filial hierarchies, which "privatize" social struggles "precisely by confining them to the 'feminized' domestic sphere of family relations" (Lowe, 1996, p. 78). In other words, Cho speaks within and against a soundscape of Asian clichés in ways that are highly ambivalent.

As a site of performative tension, however, the hyphen is not exempt from essentialist undertakings. In one skit, Cho recalls a summer vacation spent with her fiancé's white parents in

Florida. She describes the family's generosity as overwhelming and alienating, which she quips about in the stylized English of an Asian exchange student:

> [Cho bows slowly] Dis is-uh my host famiry [slow bow again]. I come from Koh-
> rea [slow bow again]. America is numba one. Sank you, meestu Eddie's fada.

Cho calls the trip "the most Long Duck Dong experience," a direct reference to John Hughes' *Sixteen Candles* (1984) and the Hollywood tradition of typecasting. Her "mimicry of Asian obedience," however, is double-coded (Lee, 2004, p. 109). While the racial caricature interrogates the ways in which the Asian American body is always already positioned as abject, immigrant, and temporary it also essentializes immigrant culture in the US. If the self-directed stereotype is used to critique American racism, it ironically privileges the Americanized ethnic at the immigrant's expense. So while Cho's sexual politics may articulate the vicissitudes of Asian American identity, her disidentification with the Asian immigrant echoes a more traditional cultural nationalism, one that privileges the "American born and raised" (Chin, Chan, Inada, & Wong, 1974, p. xi).

While the Asian immigrant is mythologized as a "model minority" s/he is also described as a terminal threat, against which the nation is defined. American cultural fictions have historically situated the Asian subject as a national suspect, one that is said to bring a rolling tide of "moral degeneracy" and "yellow peril" to the shores of the US (Lowe, 1996). Cho dramatizes this anxiety by describing an awkward encounter with an airline attendant. Although the steward presents an in-flight meal as "Asian chicken salad" for the white passengers, he drops the "Asian" in the presence of Cho. Confused and slightly annoyed at the omission, she asks the audience, "What does he think I'm gonna do?" She then moves into a crouched position with her head down and left palm held up. She slowly raises her head to reveal a furrowed brow, rolled-back eyes and a protruding pout. The comic hisses slowly in stylized Asian English:

> Dis is not de salad of my people [Cho crawls toward audience]. In my homeland
> [eyes squint and crawl continues] …dey use mandarin orange slices and crispy
> wonton crunchies. Dat, my friend, is an Asian chicken salad!

As Cho rises, her microphone becomes an impromptu sword, which she swings in multiple directions. After pretending to slash the flight attendant the audience erupts with laughter and applause.

The stereotype of primitive Asian mysticism is used to expose the "colorblind" politics of the flight attendant as problematic and contradictory. Cho summons the orientalist fantasy through a samurai caricature, which stands in the void of Asian identification. In doing so, she plays one form of racism against the other, exposing the essentialist underpinnings of both. The skit seems to suggest that "colorblindness" is simply a return of the racist politics it claims to disown. As Lisa Lowe writes, "the project of imagining the nation as homogeneous requires the orientalist construction of cultures and geographies from which Asian immigrants come as fundamentally 'foreign' originals antipathetic to the modern American society" (1996, p. 5). And yet Cho's parodic performance presents what Sheng-mei Ma calls a "deathly embrace" between orientalism and Asian American subjectivity (2000). In other words, Cho's identity as an Asian American emerges onstage only in relation to the western fantasy of the "Oriental." Here the

stereotype is central to ethnic identity, as the source of a rejection that is never wholly achieved. Such is the tension between subject and abject.

Although she relies on ethnolinguistic essentialisms to evoke certain ethnicities, Cho is particularly adept at highlighting the constructed and embellished nature of the stereotype. Her performance of "Asianness" undermines any clear-cut binary opposition of race in the US, even as it negates authentic Asian representation. Moreover, Cho illustrates the extent to which the American "melting pot" has morphed into what Angela Davis sardonically calls a "colorful and beautiful salad," perhaps an Asian chicken salad (1996, p. 45). Cho's contempt for ethnic authenticity suggests that multiculturalism is not a "radical break from a racist past" but rather an equally essentializing discourse that "tolerates" the other as an artefact of pre-modernity (Hage, 1998, p. 82). Ironically, it is the impersonation of ethnic authenticity – the coercive self-mimeticism – that fills the theaters of Cho's enormously popular performances. Indeed, "it is a common practice for minority groups to reinvent themselves by transforming preexisting stereotypes and by manipulating the master's language" (Ma, 2000, p. xvi).

Political Comedy and Political Economy

Although this chapter has focused on the representational politics of race and ethnicity, it is imperative to account for the complexities of material production and consumption within the entertainment industry. This involves a brief discussion of political economy, one that contemplates stand-up comedy as a form of labor, as well as intellectual property and cultural "ownership" across new media (i.e., the Internet). At the outset, it is important to note that two of the comics discussed above appeared in relatively short-lived popular television programs derived from material performed during stand-up routines. Chappelle and Cho hosted their own sitcoms and sketch comedy programs, both of which are now defunct. Peters, on the other hand, owes much of his success to piracy and Internet downloading, which provides a nuanced discussion of media distribution and the legal ramifications of parody and satire.

It is perhaps useful to think of stand-up comics in this context as a form of labor. As Marx once wrote, "A singer who sings like a bird is an unproductive worker. If she sells her song for money, she is to that extent a wage-labourer or merchant" (1977, p. 1044). In a similar vein, stand-up comics represent wage earners within a system of exchange, which turns their sketches into tangible commodities. As such, "when a stand-up comic performs for a paying audience, money is exchanged for laughter, social criticism is embedded in the material eliciting the laughter, the comic/social critical gets paid, the comedy club makes money, an economic symbiosis has been achieved" (Gilbert, 2004, p. 17). To this equation, we might add the exorbitant fees of Ticketmaster, running as high as 35 percent of the original ticket price. Since 2002, Ticketmaster has largely eliminated direct ticket purchasing from artists, making excessive servicing fees virtually inescapable for spectators of the arts (Knopper, 2003). It is estimated that only 8 percent of all live performances offer tickets that are unsolicited by Ticketmaster, a company recently purchased by the French media corporation Vivendi (whose entertainment operations are now almost entirely owned by General Electric) (Knopper, 2003). As such, it

becomes increasingly important to account for the political economy of not only live performance but electronic media as well.

Despite sensationalized film premieres, red-carpet debuts, and opening-night forecasts by entertainment news pundits, the Cineplex is not the primary site of Hollywood profit. Whereas box office earnings account for about 26 percent of a film's overall revenue, the sales and rental of DVDs account for 46 percent (Frontline, 2000). As Janet Wasko claims, Americans spent over $6 billion renting and purchasing DVDs in 2001 (2004, p. 139). In this context we find the merchandise of Chappelle, Peters, and Cho. Incidentally, the first season of *Chappelle's Show* is the highest selling DVD of a television program in the US, earning over $95 million as of 2005 (Arnold, 2005). In fact, unprecedented DVD sales have been credited with the resurrection of the once-cancelled television satire *The Family Guy*. This particular episode of consumer "empowerment," however, should not be mistaken for political efficacy; instead, it should draw our attention to the immense influence and control exercised by production and distribution sectors of the entertainment industry.

Chappelle's Show is produced by Comedy Central, a subsidiary of Viacom. As a global media conglomerate, Viacom owns a series of theme parks, Blockbuster Video, and no fewer than twenty US television networks (Systemfailure, 2003). The corporation, in other words, is a media behemoth, one in which Chappelle is quite aware of. He often quips about the economic determinants of his sketches by referring to commercial adjournments as "payin' some bills." Peters' *Outsourced* DVD, on the other hand, appears under the auspices of Warner, whose parent conglomerate (Time Warner) donated more than $1.6 million to G.W. Bush's 2000 presidential campaign and, incidentally, owns the classic satirical magazine *Mad* (Systemfailure, 2003). Time Warner and Viacom represent two of the five largest media conglomerates in the world (which includes News corp., General Electric, and Disney). Although direct connections between content and ownership are at times difficult to substantiate, "there are numerous baneful indications that the supposed brick wall between editorial and sales departments, never as formidable as claimed, … has been breached regularly" (Schiller, 2006, p. 130). Incidentally, there is little or no difficulty finding material from Chappelle and Peters at video and music (box)stores. Cho's DVDs, however, are distributed by Wellspring media, a smaller company specializing in international independent cinema and the performing arts. As a result, her material is often out of stock at retail outlets. If frustrated by the misfortune in tracking down Cho, one may of course turn to the Internet.

The Internet is a rich distributing tool for a variety of elusive commercial products, which creates a range of peculiarities and contradictions. Although one is able to find rare and discontinued media artefacts, the Internet is often a site of piracy and "theft." That is to say, "the Internet provides opportunities for selective consumption [whereby] the audience … is no longer obliged to purchase the whole package in order to enjoy the attractive parts" (Sparks, 2004, p. 315). This is clearly a sensitive area for many artists (most notably Lars Ulrich of the band Metallica, who in 2000 successfully sued twenty-year-old Napster pioneer Shawn Fanning for copyright infringement). The proliferation of copyrights and "intellectual property" spills over on the Internet, exemplifying what Dan Schiller describes as a system of enclosures on cultural productions that were previously non-proprietary (2007). Listening to music on the

Internet is increasingly subject to a variety of membership and downloading fees, irregardless of intent to distribute, copy, or sell. To this end, music "sharing" has become music "renting," both of which are proving quite irascible for a sluggish recording industry.

It is perhaps not surprising that stand-up comics find their sketches "pirated" across cyberspace. In this context, Peters is the epitome of the Internet-induced superstar. Although his stardom is almost entirely the result of Internet downloading and bootlegged footage, Peters is rather aggravated at the practice of piracy. He often reprimands his viewers who partake in the downloading and pirating of his material. And yet those same "pirates" are responsible for Peters' meteoric rise in popularity. In a related matter, Peters parodies "whiteness" by referencing the "Chicken Dance" and the Village People's hit song, "YMCA." The owners of these songs, however, demanded royalties from Peters in excess of $15,000, which the comic begrudgingly paid. Ironically, if not for the DVD Peters incites his viewers to purchase (rather than download), such royalties would likely be a non-issue. As Schiller explains, intellectual property law allows "capital to restrict the uses and users of information and to expropriate surpluses from at least some groups of primary producers" (2007, p. 31). While it seems unlikely that lawsuits will sprout up against parodists and political comedians, the copyrights and enclosures of popular culture is a troubling phenomenon of late capitalism, which Peters is now familiar with. If copyright laws are able to prevent the complimentary screening of Disney films at family-oriented events held in public parks (i.e., "Movie in the Park" held in the Vancouver community of Mount Pleasant), the royalties demanded from Margaret Cho's reference to *Mulan* are perhaps not far off. At present "corporations producing everything from seeds to television shows, from sneakers to networking software, have joined a pan-corporate scramble to patent, copyright, or trademark anything in sight" (Schiller, 2006, p. 47).

While the material of each comic may offer certain transgressive possibilities, the performance is nevertheless a cultural commodity, an intersection of capital and labor. Indeed, "the capitalist enterprises with whom writers, actors and such make their contracts employ thousands of wage earners as well" (Schiller, 2006, p. 22). While this should not discount the potential of counter-hegemonic messages, it does ground the radical efficacy of the above performers. The comics may not always encourage compliance with a capitalist mode of production but few outlets of spectatorship exist outside of its commodified tendrils, be it Ticketmaster, AOL, Warner home entertainment or Comedy Central. Lest we imagine that Internet piracy laws have faded into the cyber-sunset with Napster, Viacom is currently pursuing copyright lawsuits against Youtube, an enormously popular website recently acquired by Google for $1.65 billion. All this suggests that successful stand-up comics often find themselves imbricated with an entertainment industry well beyond the stage.

Conclusion

If film and television studies have frequently overlooked the importance of racial voices, sociolinguistics has underplayed the possibilities of ventriloquism in developing alternative antiracist pedagogies. Sight and sound are two distinct methods of knowledge production insofar as the eye and the ear perceive different realities of identity. These conflicting realities

are reconciled through ideology and normative assumptions of a "proper" voice emanating from a "proper" body (Doane, 1985; Silverman, 1988). It is the imagined embodiment of an ethnic dialect by an ethnic body that underwrites the linguistic dimensions of discrimination and disempowerment within a variety of social settings (Jupp et al., 1982; Creese & Kambere, 2002). Indeed, the boundaries of the nation are ethnolinguistic as much as geographic.

And yet there are moments in which the voice and body fail to support a single ethnic identity. Such is the case with ethnolinguistic impersonators, who rely on the voice as an important narrative prop. The work of Dave Chappelle, Russell Peters, and Margaret Cho illustrates how a racialized voice and a racialized body are presented in sometimes-asynchronous ways. As a performative strategy that accepts and rejects an "appropriate" alignment of ethnic voice and ethnic body, impersonation produces an "identity between stereotypes which, through repetition, also becomes different" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 89). While such public performances are perhaps "more stylized than others," they highlight the discursive conditions of racialized subject formation and the ocularcentric terms in which this process occurs (Rickford, 2001, p. 230). For our purposes here, stand-up comedy is a display of imitation, ambivalence and delinquent ethnic voices, which "could be instrumental in challenging the assumptions of … appearance" (Bucholtz, 1995, p. 362).

In their own ways, Chappelle, Peters, and Cho offer a unique dialogue with overlapping versions of multiculturalism and racial politics. Whereas ethnic identity is situated as "dress, dance, and dinner" within some versions of multiculturalism it is described as a site of contestation and struggle within another (Cameron, 2004, p. xxi). This critical variant has emerged in contradistinction to official multicultural ethnicities which, as Himani Bannerji explains, "are themselves the constructs of colonial – orientalist and racist – discourses" (2000, p. 9). Although style-shifting may participate in the same "aestheticization" of ethnicity as state and corporate brands of multiculturalism, the above comics use racial and ethnic dialects as metonyms of larger political struggles. They commodify race and ethnicity to a variety of political ends, but they also rely on coercive self-mimeticism and ironic impersonation to defy the dominant assumption that ethnic groups are "self-identical, … lacking any differences within" (Ahmed, 2000, p. 104).

Alongside the racial caricatures offered by Chappelle and Peters, however, is a particular brand of sexist and homophobic humor. Chappelle's stand-up routines occasionally pander to homophobia, which is used to express his "disgust" with gay intercourse. By comparison, his sketches tend to reduce women to bedside garnish, if only to satirize the comic's own sexual inadequacy. In a similar manner, Peters sprinkles sexist comments throughout his routine. When "impersonating" Catherine's speech, he inserts a reference to her breasts, which turns into a skit concerning exotic sexual conquest. While Peters undercuts the veracity of authentic "Indianness," his material is sometimes complicit with a fantasy of Asian sexuality. The popularity of such comics, despite misogynist and homophobic material, is consistent with the uneven intersections of identity in North American cultural politics. The highly-publicized apology of Don Imus on Al Sharpton's syndicated radio program, for instance, is symptomatic of the ways in which gender politics are often tucked under the ostensibly more urgent issue of racism.

Such contradictions speak to a hierarchy of identity categories and require us to disidentify with certain comic material. In a slightly different context, José Esteban Muñoz suggests that disidentification might be a productive way of reading Fanon for his anticolonial criticism whilst interrogating his homophobia and misogyny. This strategy avoids a simplistic "good dog/bad dog" dualism that forces us to either ignore problematic statements or dismiss radical potential altogether (Muñoz, 1996, p. 9). The point of course is that such episodes of antiracism and racism are only intelligible in a dialogue with gender, sexuality, class, age, ability, region, and so forth. The comic material of Margaret Cho, for example, explores the interarticulation of race, gender, and sexuality in ways that are overlooked by Chappelle and Peters. From the sardonic critique of Hello Kitty and the passive simplicity of Asian icons in the US to the exposure of orientalism in Thai peepshows, Cho uses style-shifting to underscore the interdictions and ironic possibilities of gendered Asian identities. She also illustrates the extent to which narratives of nationhood shift along the fault lines of gender. In fact, Cho's performance of Asian stereotypes cannot be separated from the racist fictions of sexuality, both of which are brought to life by vocal impersonation.

Style-shifting, however, is far from a "runaway deconstruction of ethnicity" (Rampton, 1998, p. 299). Although vocal imitations underscore the performative nature of identity and stereotypes, they reproduce racial mythologies of Standard, African American, South Asian, and Korean English. And yet the comic's own prosodic identity is often difficult to pinpoint within an array of caricatures. The formative boundary used to define the "self" in opposition to the "other" collapses when the self is built on imitations of the other (Hill, 1999). In other words, the "we/they" binary that underwrites the logic of style-shifting is not easily identified in the "double-voiced" discourse (Woolard, 1988). Through style-shifting, however, the linguistic stereotype often betrays the body by which it is brought to life. If the visual referent is always somewhere else, the dialect is purged of its ontological status and its fidelity in ethnic signification. The ethnolinguistic signifier, then, is less "floating" than false-bottomed, upholding its own referential illusion. As a result, it is the comics' "exposure as impersonators that offers readers the possibility of being liberated from fixed ideas about the meaning of racial and ethnic identity" (Browder, 2000, p. 11).

But style-shifting and linguistic passing are clearly not viable options of empowerment for all minoritized subjects (Lippi-Green, 1997; Creese & Kambere, 2002). While accent is a duplicitous signifier of ethnic identity, it is both symptomatic and determining of larger political and material realities that cannot always be parodied into the dustbin of history. That is to say, "making the 'Master' laugh is one thing; unseating him from a position of power is quite another" (Gilbert, 2004, p. 21). If ethnolinguistic signification is often ephemeral the social forces behind it are quite real. In the company of an ethnic "stranger," white Anglos frequently imagine an ethnic accent where none is present (Lippi-Green, 1997). One of the dangers of poststructuralism, then, is the tendency to "conflate the mobility or instability of the sign with existential freedom" (Chow, 2002, p. ix). As such, the "misembodied" voice is far from unproblematic. It is always one step from slipping into an ideology of assimilation championed by standard language movements.

The fictions of ethnic authenticity, however, may be inhabited by an irascible voice of alterity, one that is channeled by ventriloquism. As a misrepresentation of identity, ventriloquism may double as a parody of pluralism, drawing attention to the ongoing fantasy of white people as the sole proprietors of a nation "enriched" by the tolerance of the ethnic stranger (Hage, 1998). Ventriloquism "accentuates the power relations involved and certainly raises questions about whose voices we are hearing and who the 'we' are" (Gunew, 2004, p. 75). What the "misembodied" voice offers, then, is an understanding of race and ethnicity as a performance enabled by multiple modes of representation that are not always in agreement. It speaks to the "corporeal outrageousness and anti-grammaticality" of carnivalesque irony, which is always drawn to the "asymmetrical, the heterogeneous, the oxymoronic" (Shohat & Stam, 1998, p. 34, 35). If the visible and audible exist in an often ironic relationship, it is because race and ethnicity are themselves heterogeneous, overlapping, and resistant to one-dimensional assumptions used to govern the body. Through an ironic act of coercive self-mimeticism, "race comics" illustrate the extent to which ethnic subjectivities are "contested and unsettled … in the strategic occupation of … conflicting positions" (Lowe, 1996, p. 82). The "misembodied" voice is not a will to forget ethnicity but rather a negotiation of the vicissitudes of identity and the necessary existential illusion of representation and recognition within contemporary multicultural settings. That is to say, while "identity is radically unstable" it is our racial, ethnic, gender and sexual identifications that remain imperative to political practice (Davis, 2004, p. 169).

Notes

1. As a range of cultural theorists and commentators have insisted, visual culture and visuality are not ahistorical phenomena but rather flexible sites of knowledge production and contestation (Mirzoeff, 1998a; García Canclini, 1994). In response, I propose in this chapter not a departure from the visual, understood in all its critical and "polycentric" potential, but rather a dialogue with its accompanying audio representation (Shohat & Stam, 1998).

2. Chappelle often jokes of his immanent cancellation by network executives, perhaps embellishing the actual controversy generated by his comedy. Although it is often claimed that "advertisers are consumers of audience attention, not content" some political economists of media suggest otherwise (Gandy Jr., 2004, p. 329). As Dan Schiller has recently illustrated, "corporate advertisers pervasively influence programming choices to ensure that programs furnish a conducive ideological environment for their efforts at persuasion" (2007, p. 130).

3. Chappelle tells his audience that adoring white fans often approach him with unreflexive usages of "nigger." Despite his antiracist intentions, Chappelle is misinterpreted as condoning racist speech.

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Chapter Three: Humanoid Slave Narratives and the Post-White Imaginary in Alex Proyas' *I,Robot*[i]

In June 2005 two political events achieved what many claimed was a landmark in the history of American race relations. On June 14, the US Senate offered an official apology for its lethargic response to widespread lynching in the South during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This historic gesture marked "the first time the body has apologized for the nation's treatment of African Americans" (Thomas-Lester, 2005, A12). One week later, on June 21, the State of Mississippi convicted Edgar Ray Killen, an ex-Ku Klux Klansman, of manslaughter in the 1964 slayings of three civil rights workers. On the heels of the verdict the State also re-opened its investigation into the 1955 murder of Emmitt Till in the Mississippi Delta. Killen's conviction came forty-one years after the activists' bodies were discovered, and the Senate's apology was released over one hundred years since a black congressman first called for anti-lynching intervention.

These events are certainly monumental and demonstrate the extent to which white America is attempting to deal with its racist past. As Till's cousin claimed, "Sons and daughters realize how wrong [their racist white parents] were, and they want to do something. The apology is appropriate" (Thomas-Lester, 2005, A12). Although these celebrated events condemn past racism, they potentially acquit the contemporary white subject of racial violence. As white racism is historically "othered," an equally (if less overtly) racist present goes unchecked. In other words, whiteness is able to maintain a favorable position by replacing the disavowed white racist with a "politically correct" white subject, allowing overwhelmingly white political bodies such as the US Senate to proudly affirm their antiracism. Whiteness basically splits into two camps: the evil white racist of the distant past and the modern white convert of racial reconciliation.

A suspicious disavowal of white racism also occurs in contemporary popular culture, sometimes distinctively in science fiction (sf) film. Because it often illustrates social struggles with an alien "other," sf film can be useful in unpacking the ways race relations are imagined in US cultural politics. In this paper I am concerned with an emergent "antiracist" white subject that is evoked in Alex Proyas' latest sf film *I, Robot* (2004). In its exploration of a "post-white" mythology, *I, Robot* is laden with irony and contradiction. Like whiteness itself, the robots are able to slip in and out of racial tropes. Key moments of the film, however, may be read as a parable of white antiracism, driven by an impulse of reconciliation between a "unique" white robot and a black detective. Although the terms of racial comity in *I, Robot* are not always clear, they become legible alongside wider performances of antiracism in US politics.

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[i] A version of this chapter has been published as: Brayton, S. (2008). The post-white imaginary in Alex Proyas's *I, Robot*. *Science Fiction Studies*, 35(1), 72-87.

I, Robot and White Disavowal

Loosely based on the 1950 novel by Isaac Asimov, *I, Robot* portrays a black male cop battling a series of menacing "white" robots of the Nestor class, or NS-5s. The setting consists of towering gray buildings, most notably the headquarters of US Robotics (USR), which the camera is quite fond of scaling. On the sordid streets below huddle a variety of Asian diners and tattoo parlors, as well as hordes of laboring robots. If the film explores the discursive terrain of the post-human, it also presents what appears to be a post-racist Chicago of 2035 AD. In this seemingly colorblind society, the historical legacy of racism has been largely supplanted by individual acts of "robophobia" committed by one black cop, Detective Del Spooner (played by Will Smith). Although the original Asimov story upon which the film is based centered on the character of Dr. Susan Calvin (a "robopsychologist"), the cinematic version substitutes a black male protagonist. This shift illustrates the racial and gender politics of the film, which are further complicated by Will Smith's star power within contemporary white, liberal Hollywood.

The robots in the film, as in the novel, are designed to serve humanity and, to this end, are governed by the famous "Three Laws"[2] that privilege and protect humans at the robots' expense. After the apparent suicide of roboticist Dr. Alfred Lanning, Detective Spooner is dispatched to the corporate headquarters of USR. From Spooner's preliminary findings (colored by his abiding prejudice toward robots), it would appear that Lanning was murdered by an NS-5. The detective must solve this mysterious death on the eve of the largest distribution of domestic robots in US history. Meanwhile, the positronic or "artificially conscious" mainframe of USR has become independently sentient and has determined, in an echo of the closing chapter of Asimov's novel and Jack Williamson's classic story "With Folded Hands" (1947), that the best way to serve humanity is through benevolent dictatorship. As a result, the mass-circulated robots turn on their human masters. One rogue robot, however, rejects the NS-5s and befriends the robophobic black detective: Sonny, the "unique" white robot, learns to be "human" by interacting with Lanning, Calvin, and, most importantly, Spooner, turning the film into a complex racial allegory.

As several sf critics have argued, figures depicting an amalgam of human and machine such as cyborgs and androids (and also, I might add, humanoid robots) render an "unfamiliar 'otherness'" that destabilizes the foundational binary of organic and artificial (Balsamo, 2000, p. 149). The mechanical hybrids of sf film often disrupt human identity to such an extent as to problematize any clear racial readings by theorists. Nevertheless, race may often "appear in disguise" (James, 1990, p. 28). Ridley Scott's widely-acclaimed *Blade Runner* (1982), for instance, can be described in part as an allegory of chattel slavery; for some critics this interpretation allows the white replicants to be read as symbolically black. A racialized reading of white androids as "African slaves" (Hobby, 2000, p. 46), however, has serious theoretical limitations. An obvious pitfall is its tendency to reduce blackness to a condition of terminal oppression. Indeed, this figuring of blackness as inhuman perpetuates, rather than disrupts, the ideological production of racial otherness. And if white androids are pigeonholed as oppressed black subjects, their whiteness is able to elude precise description and historical contextualization.

While feminist sf literature has produced androgynous cyborgs of various racial hues (see Haraway), *I, Robot* depicts a creature that resembles white Western masculinity. Each robot is given a pale white complexion and a "generic" Midwestern dialect, stereotypical of white suburbia. Sonny, for instance, is issued vibrant blue eyes and the slightly effeminate voice of Alan Tudyk (of the sf television series *Firefly*). He is a machine made quite literally in the image of a white man, one whose character in *Firefly* abstains from physical violence (unlike his African-American wife). As a product of scientific ingenuity, the robot's cold and gleaming surfaces gesture toward larger discourses of rationality and logic that inform the popular mythology of white masculinity. Eurocentric whiteness has historically been conflated with order, reason, and mental precision, all key attributes of the NS-5s. In the words of Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg, "rationalist modernist whiteness is shaped and confirmed by its close association with science" (1989, p. 5). Conversely, nonwhiteness has been equated with disorder, irrationality, and passion, characteristics that describe the film's maverick black detective. (In one scene Spooner even admits to being the "dumbest dumb person on the face of the earth.") Robert Young has shown how such assumptions traditionally informed Enlightenment discourses, including Marxism, which overtly or tacitly authorized "the story of 'world history' … as … the creation, subjection and final appropriation of Europe's [non-white] 'others'" (1990, p. 2). In this worldview, white male bodies, much like the robot, are "assumed to have both outgrown the state of nature and achieved rationality" (Abdel-Shehid, 2005, p. 48). The coupling of Enlightenment values and white masculinity is consummated in the image of the film's white robot.

Whiteness is also referenced by the robots' relationship to the black protagonist, Spooner, who is repeatedly called on to overcome his robophobia. In addition, the white androids exemplify what Howard Winant calls a "crisis of white identity" (2004, p. 34), which is foreshadowed by Spooner's first encounter with the NS-5. In pursuit of a robot suspect, he is led to a USR factory that contains an army of NS-5s standing eerily beside one another. As Spooner begins randomly destroying robots, Sonny shoves the detective to the ground, then turns to Spooner with an inquisitive look and asks, "What am I?" This uncertainty of identity is a constant source of anxiety in the film and, as will be shown, the driving force of white "disidentification." Unlike robots and androids in other sf films, the whiteness of the NS-5s is fixed by the inherent "blackness" of *I, Robot*'s hero. If blackness is a relational foil to whiteness, which is defined by cold rationality, then the NS-5s are metaphorically white, especially in their dealings with the highly emotional black detective.

The NS-5s of *I, Robot* present an image of whiteness that is coded as strange and threatening. If the "problematic of whiteness" is the defining feature of social anxiety in the post-civil rights era (Winant, 2004, p. 66), then the robots of *I, Robot* might represent emerging and contradictory white identities. On the one hand, the robot symbolizes intensified alienation, which may be suggestive of the "victimized" white male of the conservative right. On the other hand, the robot's desire to overcome an oppressive identity may offer a critique of white supremacy. Here whiteness is othered in two ways: as an apocalyptic threat to humans and as a form of indentured labor. Even though "white terror" and "white slavery" would appear to be

contradictory phenomena, they are in fact complementary since they both enable a transcendent or "post-white" subject in *I, Robot*.

White Terror

In the black consciousness, bell hooks writes, whiteness "is often a representation of terror" (1992, p. 172). Contrary to its chivalrous portrayal in the annals of US history, whiteness is sometimes considered a threatening and colonizing presence, typified by the Ku Klux Klan and the historical practices of lynching in the Southern US: "If the mask of whiteness, the pretense, represents it as always benign, benevolent, then what this representation obscures is … danger, the sense of threat" (hooks, 1992, p. 175). Indeed white terror haunts the black male protagonist of *I, Robot*. Spooner is suspicious of the robots from the outset, which invites the viewer to recognize the threat of whiteness embodied in the robots. The NS-5s are presented as implacable characters that repeatedly attempt to thwart Spooner's investigation. They appear in droves, a horde of white monsters, and assault Spooner when his findings threaten the welfare of USR.

While the figure of the white monster can be traced back to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), it was given a particularly pointed ideological expression during the period of civil rights struggle and emergent Black Nationalism in the US. In 1965, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) wrote a short play titled "A Black Mass" that provides a type of origin myth of racial conflict: at the primeval dawn of humanity, a magician named Jacoub, consumed by an insatiable quest for invention (in a parody of Enlightenment hubris à la Faust), disregards the warnings of his fellow alchemists to catastrophic ends. He creates a hideous white beast, a "soulless distortion of humanity" that ultimately disrupts the arrangement of the cosmos (Jones, 1965, p. 32). This monster has "no regard for human life," evincing a complete "absence of feeling, of thought, of compassion" (Jones, 1965, p. 35); ferociously scurrying about screaming, "White! White! Me! White!" (Jones, 1965, pp. 31, 32), the white beast slaughters all but Jacoub. In the final scene, the audience is told that white beasts have occupied the entire globe and must be eradicated. Whiteness, in other words, threatens humanity in general and black people in particular with the threat of extinction.

"A Black Mass" draws historical parallels between its white monsters and contemporary white America, making it the prototype of subsequent black-liberationist allegories featuring vast mythic struggles between racial cohorts. In Ishmael Reed's 1972 novel *Mumbo Jumbo*, for example, a white supremacist schemes to suppress the resurgent black culture of "Jes Grew" in part by mobilizing a "Talking Android" to "drive it out, categorize it analyze it expel it slay it" (p. 17). Jones's "A Black Mass" also provides a model for studying sf films that deal with the racial politics of whiteness. Whereas "A Black Mass" inverts "the traditional association of Eurocentric Christianity by making 'whiteness' the category associated with evil" (McAlister, 2001, p. 104-105), *I, Robot* presents a similar if less explicit narrative. Both texts explore whiteness through a trope of inhumanity or, more accurately, terror, in the process of critiquing not only oppressive white identities but also the Western Enlightenment ethos. While humanity is threatened by a rogue white monster in "A Black Mass," it is inundated with suspicious white robots in *I, Robot*.

The film depicts whiteness as ubiquitous and evil yet, in a departure from Jones's text, ultimately capable of reform.

As the plot unfolds in *I, Robot*, Spooner discovers the NS-5s have violated the "Three Laws," a fatal glitch that USR is struggling to conceal. In one scene the detective is attacked by a barrage of white robots while operating an automobile, providing a lucid illustration of "driving while black" (see Harris, 2002, p. 3). Spooner's "paranoid" suspicions are confirmed when the corporation's positronic mainframe—VIKI (Virtual Interactive Kinetic Intelligence)—reprograms the NS-5s to imprison the residents of New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago; as VIKI explains to Spooner and Calvin, "To protect humanity, some humans must be sacrificed.… You are so like children; we must save you from yourselves." Her words echo colonialist narratives used to justify systemic exploitation and cultural genocide by upholding white Western ideals of rationality as universally superior to "primitive" people's "childlike" ways. In Spooner's words, "Robots don't feel anything. They are cold and emotionless. They are an imitation of life." A mistrust of the inhuman subject is also a mistrust of whiteness, as in Jones's "A Black Mass"; both stories deploy white terror as an expression of Western rationality and Enlightenment values gone awry.

Richard Dyer has identified a specter of "white death" within such sf/horror films as *Blade Runner* and *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). In these works, white characters are not only literally dead (as in the latter film's zombies), but they bring death upon others as well. According to Dyer (1997), such images of "extreme whiteness" actually work to protect the invisibility of "average" or normal whiteness:

> The extreme image of whiteness acts as a distraction. An image of what whites are like is set up, but can also be held at a distance. Extreme whiteness is, precisely, extreme.… Whites can thus believe that they are nothing in particular, because the white particularities on offer are so obviously not them. Extreme whiteness thus leaves a residue, a way of being that is not marked as white, in which white people can see themselves. (p. 223)

Dyer's insight takes on added dimension when placed within contemporary debates over racial conflict and reconciliation. As people of color challenged dominant racial mythologies during the 1960s, whiteness shifted from a state of "invisibility" to one that was marked as privileged and racist. So-called universal human rights were exposed as "the right of white male property owners to exchange freely on the market, exploit workers and women, and exert political domination" (Žižek, 2000, p. 105). Yet progressively-minded whites consciously denied such a tarnished identity. This rejection echoes in Dyer's discussion of whiteness in *Blade Runner* and, more precisely, in protagonist Deckard's defeat of the replicants and their white terror. The ordinary rejects the aberrant so as to reconstitute the quotidian but moral white subject.

I, Robot is caught in a similar dynamic, but with a crucial twist: the character who disavows white terror is openly robotic and, as such, already othered. Thus, white normativity is turned on its head inasmuch as whiteness is normalized as a terrorizing presence that must be rejected by the "exceptional" white robot. *I, Robot* relies on a strategic othering to explore a future beyond white death, but not necessarily beyond whiteness. If a post-white-supremacist

identity is to develop, whiteness must be displaced from its position of privilege, a critical move that calls for a "shift in locations" (hooks, 1992, p. 177). To challenge the representational dominance of whiteness and the racial oppression that proceeds from it, the "unique" white subject of *I, Robot* must be remolded from the margins. As hooks maintains, "This process of repositioning has the power to deconstruct practices of racism and make possible the disassociation of whiteness with terror in the black imagination" (1992, p. 177).

White Slavery

One way that whiteness is displaced in *I, Robot* is through the film's depiction of the division of labor. To be sure, there are non-robot (human) white characters in the film employed as scientists and corporate workers, but their presence is overshadowed by the narrative importance and slick packaging of the white robots. Ironically, despite their high-tech provenance and imposing appearance, the robots are employed largely as menial laborers— custodians, mail carriers, and maidservants. Although certain forms of labor, as Rey Chow argues, "reduce the one who performs them to the position of … ethnic outsider" (2002, p. 34), the robot slave narrative of *I, Robot* is more complex than this. Unskilled labor is registered through the robots' metaphorical whiteness, which signals an important yet complicated shift into "white slavery."

The "white slave" metaphor was historically used to describe the servitude of women and children in the British factory systems of the Victorian era as well as the exploitative conditions of (un)skilled American laborers during the 1830s. Originally the term was a "call to arms to end the inappropriate oppression of whites" but not necessarily black slavery itself (Roediger, 1991, p. 68). Although the white slavery debate in the US swiftly receded, its underlying logic and imagery continues to inform the racial politics of white masculinity. More recently, the white slave has come to function as a proxy for the politics of white male backlash, offering a lucid symbol of the perceived socioeconomic displacement of white men in the post-civil rights era and thus expressing a sense of grievance presumably exclusive to them.

As the epitome of a disenfranchised subject, the humanoid robot can serve as a metaphor for the putative white male victim of the conservative right. The robots of *I, Robot* have menial jobs and experience various acts of discrimination: for example, a white robot assisting an asthmatic black woman is mistaken for a purse-snatcher and forcefully apprehended by Spooner. Further, the robots represent the perceived denigration of white men at the hands of affirmative action policies in the workplace, victims of a social system that allegedly favors women and people of color. The robots of *I, Robot* are situated as servants and second-class citizens in equally "emasculating" terms: as one NS-5 is dispatched to an affluent black family, another prepares sweet potato pie for Spooner's grandmother. Spooner himself is served beverages by a white robot dressed in a black bowtie. While the white robots are programmed to serve all of humanity, they are disproportionately pictured in the service of women and African Americans. As a result, the NS-5s invite an anxiety not only about technological tyranny but also white male disempowerment.

To dismiss the white slave metaphor as irredeemably racist and reactionary, however, is to overlook the potential alliances between segments of exploited labor. Although the white slave narrative of the 1830s might have worked "to justify black slavery by privileging white victimhood," as Gunther Peck has argued (2004, p. 47), it was also lined with progressive possibilities. Peck suggests that it potentially "expressed sympathy for the black slave and sought to abolish all slaveries" (2004, p. 62). In other words, the white slave metaphor may function as an appeal to a transracial working-class solidarity directed against capitalist exploitation. This alternative understanding of the white slave metaphor is at least partially consistent with the treatment of the theme in *I, Robot.*

While the NS-5s are hardly a spitting image of Marx's proletariat, their role as servants is not insignificant; in particular, the conditions of the robots' labor in the film reference not only historical chattel slavery but, more pointedly, the American late capitalist economy that relies overwhelmingly on immigrant labor in the service industry. While the white robots may resemble, in this context, the Latin@ "illegals" of recent anti-immigration debates, they maintain a semblance of marginalized white masculinity. As Sue Short has argued, the indentured androids in sf film "may relate to a number of different subject positions and experiences that are already in evidence today" (2005, p. 44). The image of laboring robots and cyborgs, Chela Sandoval claims, "could very well bring the politics of the alienated white male subject into alliance with the subaltern politics" of various minority groups both inside and outside the US (1995, p. 409). As an alienated worker, the white robots of *I, Robot* are not only "programmed and rebuilt in the interests of capitalism" (Short, 2005, p.48), they are also capable of revolt and liberation. Because of the inverted "color code" of slavery in *I, Robot*, whiteness is dislocated from a position of privilege and reassigned to the subaltern. As Robyn Wiegman argues, "economic marginality [is often idealized as] the political location for the production of the antiracist subject" (1999, p. 138). The film sidesteps the logic of white male backlash by positioning the person of color as a hero and ally rather than an "undeserving" recipient of affirmative action. Thus, *I, Robot* expresses a desire to overcome rather than recover a dominant identity, one that is embodied in the villainous white robot.

As in the Senate's apology and the Killen conviction in Mississippi, whiteness is inherently divided in *I, Robot*, providing the conditions for its own transgression. Such a strategy allows whiteness to be castigated as despotic at one moment yet praised as heroic the next. The emergence of the post-white subject in the film hinges on Sonny's disavowal of his metaphorical whiteness. Profiled as a threatening white robot, he is also "unique" in his capacity to transcend this identity and become fully "human." His journey, however, must be routed through a ghetto of marginality if he – the white subject – is to be emancipated through the agency of the black protagonist. In this sense, both white terror and white slavery are necessary to legitimize the white subject of *I, Robot*, whose emerging antiracism can only be imagined in the form of a transcendent post-human identity. The film, in essence, depicts a post-white subject born into servitude and permanently displaced from privilege so as to validate its antiracist politics.

Sonny and the "Post-white" (Male) Subject

On multiple occasions during *I, Robot*, Dr. Lanning rhetorically asks the audience, "When does the perceptual schematic become consciousness? When does personality simulation become the bitter mote of the soul?" His monologue points to the robot's uncertain ontological position, which enables the audience to imagine but also dismiss Sonny as an awkward white man. Sonny functions at once as a caricature of whiteness and also as a liminal figure capable of eliding racial identity altogether. Sonny is white, but not quite; he is artificial and robotic, but not entirely; he is Calvin's "man on the inside," but "not precisely."

An interstitial or post-white identity emerges in *I, Robot* through a process of "disidentification" that negates the terms of subjectivity defined and delimited by the dominant social order. As Chow explains, disidentification is an extrapolation of Althusser's theory of ideology that involves the failure of the individual "to internalize interpellation by ideology – that is, how she becomes this thing that she is hailed as" (2002, p. 109). In the film, disidentification is largely an outcome of the construction and refusal of white terror. Sonny fails to recognize himself in the descriptions that declare the robot dispassionate and threatening. Late in the film Calvin discovers that Sonny, unlike the other robots, does not have an uplink to USR, a trait that imbues him with independence and free will. While seated beside Calvin, Sonny surveys a laboratory filled with white robots and muses, "They look like me, but none of them are me. Isn't that right, doctor?" Calvin responds with a classic disavowal of white terror: "Yes, Sonny, that's right. You are unique!"

An act of disidentification arises from the perceived anxieties of an identity caught between the universal and the particular. Sonny's compassionate nature belies the film's universalizing depiction of white terror and allows him to claim, in essence, "I am not what you say I am." The source of Sonny's disidentification lies, in the words of Slavoj Žižek, in the "failure to fully recognize oneself in one's own socio-ideological identity" (2000, p. 115). This is the driving force of post-whiteness, which is galvanized by a final confrontation between the exceptional robot and the ordinary NS-5. Sonny's self-distancing from the other white robots evokes an evolving subject that aspires toward racial reconciliation. (One of the last scenes in the film is actually titled, on the DVD version, "Reconciliation.")

Although a rearticulation of whiteness may be grounded in antiracist desires, it remains firmly entrenched in what Wiegman calls a "universalist narcissistic logic" (1999, p. 123). The struggle to find a positive white identity recenters whiteness in ways that undercut the efforts of critical race theorists and activists alike. *I, Robot* reflects a white liberal desire for racial transcendence and a negotiation of white guilt; however, the white liberal subject, much like the "unique" white robot, is more concerned with the assertion of its own originary innocence – its disidentification – than with meaningful dialogue across a spectrum of ethnicity. *I, Robot* ends with Sonny perched on a hilltop, poised to emancipate the other white robots. The camera retreats to the horizon, capturing the droves of white NS-5s idling below; before entering the storage units, they turn to look at Sonny. As the musical score reaches a crescendo, the viewer is invited to fantasize about Sonny's future as a "reformed" white robot. This closing scene

suggests that *I, Robot* is more concerned with Sonny's messianic destiny than with Spooner's physical and emotional recovery. Ultimately the film aspires toward a species/racial utopia preferred by white liberalism, one that inevitably recuperates whiteness.

But the slave narrative of *I, Robot* also presents a parable of white disempowerment, one that is potentially more radical than the film's surface liberal politics. This narrative echoes the rhetoric of "new abolitionism" or the so-called "race traitor" movement, which deviates from liberal antiracism by debunking a colorblind logic and openly confronting present-day racism. Offering a clarion call for whites to abandon their unjust privileges, this movement represents a strategic othering of whiteness and points toward the emergence of a post-white subjectivity. As the credo posted on the www.racetraitor.org website explains, "The key to solving the social problems of our age is to abolish the white race, which means no more and no less than abolishing the privileges of the white skin." Whiteness is supposedly overcome through a systematic racial "treason"—a willed disloyalty to whiteness—while the formerly white subject is born anew in a marginalized yet liberated positionality ("post-whiteness"). As Peter McLaren writes, "To choose blackness … as a way of politically misidentifying with white privilege is … an act of transgression, a traitorous act" (1998, p. 72). This viewpoint resonates with the logic of the film, which equates whiteness ultimately not with terror but with a social marginality that implicitly embraces "blackness." Herein lies the diegetic importance of Del Spooner.

At the outset of *I, Robot*, the audience is provided with an assortment of "black" signifiers that situate Spooner (and Will Smith himself) within a familiar but "safe" role. As he rises from bed, the camera pans across his inflated bare chest, a visual reminder of Smith's pumped-up Muhammed Ali from three years earlier. Mounted in the background is a Gibson archtop guitar, a popular instrument among jazz and blues artists. Although Spooner awakens from a startling dream wielding a handgun and wearing a 'do rag, the "threatening" black body is soon contained by the film's soundtrack. Stevie Wonder's "Superstition" animates the scene, reassuring the viewer of a more benign trope of blackness: Spooner enjoys motown rather than gangsta rap. As the detective turns to the nightstand, he scoops a spoonful of sweet potato pie. The "blackness" of the body before us, in other words, is confirmed by the visual and aural accouterments of his apartment and person, and yet the image of blackness presented is manageable and unthreatening. For the white liberal buddy film to function, Spooner must be black but not too black; his racial politics must not overtly threaten the white liberal subject and a metaphor of racial reconciliation.

In American popular culture, Will Smith typifies this stylish yet innocuous "Black Star du Jour" (Bogle, 2002, p. 396). As in his other motion pictures, *I, Robot* casts Smith as the black buddy of white America, here saving humanity from a plotting positronic brain rather than avenging the death of white wingman Harry Connick, Jr. in *Independence Day* (1996) or imparting hip advice to Tommy Lee Jones in *Men in Black* (1997). In both those earlier films, Smith saved the planet (i.e., the US) from alien invaders, returning it to the control of white powerbrokers. Smith's relation to whiteness was reaffirmed in *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (2000), in which he played the sage caddy of a struggling white golfer, and in *Hitch* (2005), where he dispensed his inane black style in an effort to help anxious white guys get laid. And while Smith's recent blockbusters may appear more politically driven, they are contained within

a white bourgeois ideology. *Ali* (2001) presents a depoliticized biography of a man so clearly political, and *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006), despite its attention to individual economic struggle, tends to celebrate the generosity of white businessmen. Smith's accommodating brand of blackness is essential to *I, Robot*.

The black male detective of the film is summoned not only to solve the murder of a white scientist but also to emancipate the white robotic slave. At a key moment of the film, Sonny describes the robot as a "slave to logic" and explains to Spooner his dream of liberty in which "a man on a hill comes to free them." In this sense, blackness signifies "an entrée into America's multicultural future" (Gray, 1995, p. 163), yet the film's desire for a post-racist prospect ultimately bespeaks a narcissistic white male identity that relies on blackness to repair its racially distraught ego. Spooner, in other words, is not allowed to reject an idealized blackness without compromising the promise of reconciliation. During the film's dramatic standoff, Sonny conveys his loyalty to the black detective and disloyalty to the NS-5 by winking, an action Spooner describes as "a human thing, a sign of trust." Sonny's desire for an implicit black male friendship is finally realized when the post-white robot and black human shake hands and exchange another "wink." In many ways the theme of *I, Robot* rests on an imagined reconciliation with an imagined blackness. The black authority figure is used to oversee and certify a process of white disidentification and historical recovery.

As *I, Robot* undercuts the distinctions between human and machine, it also compromises its own racial logic. Whereas Spooner is accused of "inciting irrational panic" it is, ironically, his rationality that solves the case. That is to say, despite the ostensible intelligence of white scientists and robots, it is the logic of the black detective rewarded at the film's ending. In a sense the film invests in the black logician when others do not. The chief of police tells Spooner, "You are living proof that it's better to be lucky than smart." More than any white character, however, Spooner is entitled to claim an immediate connection to science. The audience learns that after a disastrous automobile accident Spooner was rebuilt by Lanning using robotic parts. On the one hand, his cyborg status underscores the constructed nature of the subject. On the other hand, the cyborg demonstrates the unease produced through ironic identities. Like the abject, the robotic prosthetic is neither a part of Spooner nor apart from him, which disrupts the boundaries of "identity, system, order" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). If the source of the anxiety is coded as white, then a rejection of technology is also a rejection of whiteness, which is enabled by Spooner's overt performance of "blackness." And yet robotics is the linchpin that connects Lanning, Sonny and Spooner. In a way Lanning is the father of the "unique" white robot and the black cyborg, both of whom he calls "son." As an abject entity technology can never be substantively rejected by the black cyborg.

Part of the complexity of this role can be attributed to Smith's status as an executive producer of *I, Robot*. In other words, Smith is not simply conforming to a popular fantasy of comforting blackness generated by liberal whites; rather, he is actively involved in the process of storytelling, even if his character toes the line of stereotype. Smith's role as creator must be accounted for in terms of racial politics and agency, especially in light of his successful career as an actor and hip-hop performer. A track on his 2005 album, *Lost and Found*, for example, ironically asks if the artist is "black enough" for hip-hip radio, the jab underscoring the rigidity of

black stereotypes in American popular culture. If Smith's blackness is suspect, so is the racial fantasy from which the accusations originate. The burden of black militancy deployed to dismiss his career is rooted in equally problematic racial essentialisms. So while Smith is certainly not everybody's protest hero, his active role in (dis)articulating race may suggest a more subtle negotiation of white racial fantasies. Smith's leading role in a "white" sf film is not to be easily dismissed. He is not simply saving the white world from aliens or teaching white men black style; instead, he is partially responsible, through the emancipation of the white robot, for the emergence of the reformed white racial subject.

Although the white slave narrative of *I, Robot* is used to stage a racial reconciliation it is one that is bracketed off from class struggle. At the end of the film the white robot slave is emancipated without questioning the economic logic of slavery, automation, and corporate predation. As Sue Short writes, an "immanent humanity" works to "divert attention from economic division, placing a greater stress on humanizing alienated subjects than changing the conditions that have dehumanized them in the first place" (2005, p. 64). The class politics embedded at the heart of the slave narrative is passed over by the film's "multiculturalism," which hinges on an "aseptic, benign" form of blackness (Žižek, 1997, p. 37). Through Sonny, the film invites sympathy for the robot slave. But the film seems to forget that the robot slave replaces human labor with automation and unemployment (an ironic compromise not unlike that of *Robocop* (1987)). And so the NS-5 symbolizes the employed but alienated white man *and* the immigrant worker who allegedly steals his job. Although this indeterminacy is a condition of possibility a celebration of socialist robot revolt would compromise the American brand of free will and individuality promoted throughout the film. It is, after all, the fear of lost identity that underwrites the film's racial reconciliation and capitalist recovery. Like much of Asimov's work, *I, Robot* cannot endorse "racial integration without at the same time supporting the more controversial cause of automation and unemployment" (Portelli, 1980, p. 152). So if the robot "revolution" cryptically described by Lanning is anti-capitalist it is also totalitarian. As the robots take over the city and USR, moral responsibility is placed squarely on the caricature of white female rationality, the spectral apparition of VIKI (perhaps an implicit symbol of feminization under communist regimes).

Yet, by positioning VIKI as the ultimate villain, *I, Robot* affirms a cross-racial (male) solidarity at the expense of a more progressive gender politics. During the final assault on the corporation's positronic mainframe, Spooner, Calvin, and Sonny work together to insert a disabling (phallic) device into VIKI, who is depicted as the pixelated and hovering face of a white female. Although it is the corporation that threatens humanity, the film seems more concerned with reprimanding an emasculating female than undoing capitalism. Sonny fends off the NS-5s whilst the floating face of VIKI warns, "You are making a mistake. Do you not see the logic of my plans?" Sonny responds, "Yes … but it just seemed too … heartless." In essence, VIKI is destroyed by a cross-species rape initiated by Spooner and Sonny, who achieve a masculine interracial solidarity consistent with the film's patriarchal tone.

Throughout his investigation of USR, Spooner relies on an ironic misogyny to keep Calvin "in her place." From an unrealized sexual overture to a variety of flirtatious comparisons to his ex-wife, the black detective uses sexist stereotypes of hysterical emotionality to contain the

threat of female intelligence. In one scene Calvin offers Spooner driving directions, to which he responds, "You must know my ex-wife"; repeatedly, he jokes about a possible "feminist" conspiracy against him. The playful tone of Spooner's sexist humor draws attention to Calvin's indubitable lack of emotion, singling her out has an oddity, an exception to the gender order. Late in the film, for example, Spooner turns to sexist comedy for a similar purpose. After Calvin discovers Sonny's unique characteristics, she admits, "I couldn't destroy him. It just didn't feel right. He's too unique." In response, Spooner jokes, "You and your feelings.… They just run you, don't they?" Spooner's persistent gibes are designed to police the gender order by denigrating and devaluing female intelligence.

The buddy narrative in *I, Robot* also opposes Sonny to Calvin. With her jargon-laden descriptions of robots and technology, Calvin is repeatedly asked by Spooner to "speak English." Initially the female scientist is cold and cerebral, unlike the evolving white robot, whose "secondary processing system … clashes with his positronic brain." If Calvin is scientific and unemotional, she is also physically inactive, which allows her to play the distressed damsel late in the film. By comparison, Sonny uses violence to defeat the NS-5s and VIKI. The unique white robot is able to emerge as an athletic if awkward superhero because of the vulnerable female scientist, who needs rescuing not only from VIKI but from science itself. Racial identity, then, may constrain both Spooner and Sonny in markedly different ways, but their dominant masculinity provides a freedom that excludes the gendered other.

Conclusion: The Myth of a "Post-White" Identity

As in the sf films discussed by Dyer, the portrayal of "white death" in *I, Robot* conveys a general sense that whiteness is "played out" in popular culture (1997, p. 217), compelled to yield its pride of place to an influx of voices from the margins. This process of dislocation has, Dyer argues, accentuated a kind of racial hysteria among many middle-class white men. Nevertheless, a metaphor of whiteness remains fixed at the center of the screen in *I, Robot*. Unlike other sf films, *I, Robot* depicts whiteness not simply as death but as a complex figure—a robotic villain, a domestic slave, and finally a multicultural ally. The film moves beyond "white death" to imagine a form of racial transcendence that resembles the antiracist desires of various white racial projects and thus appears more accommodating to multicultural political agendas. White disidentification is a putatively antiracist gesture no longer reserved for white liberals.

There are important similarities shared by the Senate's apology, the Killen conviction, and *I, Robot*. Each case relies on a splitting of white identity that enables the emergence of a refurbished white subject. White terror is either historically detached (as in the Senate's apology and the Killen conviction) or ontologically othered (as in *I, Robot*) in a way that enshrines a "progressive" model of (post)white identity. Thus, an act of condemnation or disidentification may work to valorize a nuanced white subject or white political body as antiracist by default. Žižek explains that the dominant "power edifice is split from within; in order to reproduce itself and contain its other, it has to rely on an inherent excess which grounds it" (1998, p. 10). The self-censorship of whiteness, then, creates a distance between the "obscene" practices and values of white supremacy and the public display of white benevolence. Disidentification is the

very mechanism by which white normativity is reproduced in contemporary political and popular culture. Whiteness procures its representational dominance by allegedly rejecting the foundation of its own empowerment – white racism and privilege. There is thus no intrinsically subversive marrow embedded within disidentification: in the complementary vignettes discussed here, whiteness is internally fractured "so that the gesture of self-censorship is co-substantial with the exercise of power" (Žižek, 1998, p. 10).

Perhaps the charge against white terror made by postcolonial critics and civil rights groups is not only accepted but embraced by the "good white subject" as the constitutive exclusion of white benevolence. In some ways there would not be an antiracist white subject in the cases discussed here without the palpable history (if not the abiding social presence) of white terror. The two factors are opposite sides of the same political coin used to subsidize the discursive centrality of whiteness, especially in its "kinder and gentler" edition. This is not to dismiss the possibility of antiracist white people; instead, it is to exercise suspicion toward an antiracism more concerned, in Sara Ahmed's words, with "generating … an identity that makes the white subject feel good about itself" (2004, par. 34). More specifically, the "progressive" white subject that emerges in the Senate's apology and the Killen conviction is not held accountable for its own racism since its continued position of privilege is strategically protected by the calculated negation of white terror.

Although white liberalism is not necessarily the dominant discourse of racial politics in the US today, it seems that white disidentification is now used to couch a variety of political agendas in a dubious rhetoric of multiculturalism (see Žižek, 1997). This phenomenon compels us to revaluate the efficacy of antiracist gestures as they appear in both political and popular culture, with a particular sensitivity to what Ruth Frankenberg calls "power evasiveness" (1993, p. 160). It is imperative to question a white desire for racial transcendence that denies ongoing racist violence and proclaims rather ambiguously that "times have changed in Mississippi" (Pettus, 2005, A4). As George Lipsitz argues, "Neither conservative 'free market' policies nor liberal social democratic reforms can solve the 'white problem' in America because both of them reinforce the possessive investment in whiteness" (1995, p. 384). But is *I, Robot* able to challenge this "possessive investment" in ways that contemporary politics cannot, or does it simply rehabilitate white masculine identity?

While the sf genre is firmly grounded in the contemporary politics of class, race, gender, and sexuality, its boundary transgressions may enable us to imagine subject positions and strategies of empowerment that have yet to take place. The evolving robot, for example, is the enabling agent that allows *I, Robot* to visualize racial transcendence. The post-white subject is able to strategically shift political locations; like the cyborg, it "exists in excess of the real [b]ut is also embedded within the real" (Gonzalez, 2000, p. 58). As it straddles the borders of the "inhuman," the android presents both a sardonic parody of whiteness-as-lifelessness and an interstitial identity that disrupts racial categories. Since the android is the only white subject capable of overcoming whiteness in *I, Robot*, it is therefore marked as post-white, functioning in a variety of ways that ordinary white characters cannot. Indeed, it "is like a symptom – it represents that which cannot otherwise be represented" (Gonzalez, 2000, p. 59). Its ambiguous positionality, however, may be mobilized toward both progressive and conservative ends.

As a metaphor of whiteness, the NS-5s create a psychosocial space – a comfort zone – within which disidentification may flourish. They provide audiences with a vicarious reconciliation that nevertheless reassures white liberal sensibilities about race. Any potential anxiety brought on by the film's ambivalent call for white male disempowerment may be quelled by the robots' unstable identity that shifts in and out of racial focus. As Sharon Willis argues, the white subject "wants to be in the other's place, without leaving its own" (1997, p. 210). The robot is white enough to signify strong racial allegories of reconciliation, but he is not white enough to mount a sweeping indictment of white privilege. Edward James reminds us that aliens, monsters, and robots in sf are notoriously slippery characters that provide endless uncertainties for readers interested in racial politics. And yet the post-white subject of *I, Robot* demands an ontological uncertainty, a liminality that white liberalism is unable to provide. The critical drawback of white liberalism, according to Winant, is that it "does not challenge whites either to renounce the real wage subsidies, the artificially low unemployment rates, or the host of other material benefits they receive in virtue of their whiteness" (2004, p. 62). In this light, the film denounces whiteness in ways that are akin to a markedly different racial project, one that involves an alleged betrayal of whiteness.

While the so-called new abolitionism may exceed liberal antiracism in its active contestation of white privilege, a series of problems undermine its political efficacy. The claim of rejecting whiteness by a sheer act of political will is dubious at best. Although whiteness is far from a biological essence, it is certainly more complex than a mere political affiliation that may be consciously and effectively discarded as both the "race traitor" movement and *I, Robot* would have us believe. In other words, an interpellated white identity is not necessarily subverted by an act of disidentification. The idea of racial treason also relies on a militant dismissal of whiteness that "works to reproduce the white male rebel as the affirmative subject of antiracist struggle" (Wiegman, 1999, p. 141), a theme evoked by the transracial buddy narrative of *I, Robot*. Indeed, the racial politics of the film are expressed solely along masculine axes of (dis)empowerment.

This chapter has explored the ways in which an imagined white antiracism is presented in political and cinematic discourses alike. It is not meant to discourage white people from pursuing and participating in antiracist activism. On the contrary, it is meant to enhance the project of dismantling white supremacy by drawing attention to the ways in which antiracism is sometimes problematically conducted in the service of whiteness. As a "whole new generation of robot," Sonny represents a de-essentialized white subject, one that is not determined by the history of white terror. The film seems to suggest that if it is problematic to think of whiteness in exclusively positive terms, it is equally troublesome to reduce whiteness simply to racism and privilege. The political cases detailed above are potentially progressive inasmuch as they admit and censure historical acts of white racism. Yet the act of self-distancing is precisely what keeps the white subject at the center of power relations in dominant culture. Following Žižek, the resiliency of whiteness "relies on its transgression, on some mode of taking a distance towards it" (1998, p. 3). What is more, a multicultural alliance is undermined by the racist fantasies and reproduction of gender inequality in *I, Robot*. In this sense, a cyborg sensibility is only as progressive as the desires that govern its representation.

Notes

1. Asimov's "Three Laws" are as follows: (1) A robot may not harm or allow injury to a human being; (2) a robot must obey all orders given by humans unless those orders conflict with the first law; (3) a robot must protect its own existence unless this action conflicts with the first two laws.

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Chapter Four: Canadian "Biculturalism" and the Politics of Irony in Sport[i]

On May 30, 2006 Montréal financier Réal Bourassa announced the newest Canadian addition to the American Basketball Association (ABA). During a press conference, he invited spectators to join an online poll and help decide the name of Québec City's professional basketball team. On the organization's website, viewers were encouraged to select between two predetermined names: the Kebekwa or the Jumping Frogs. Although the Québec City franchise would eventually be called the Kebekwa (a playful corrective to the Anglo mispronunciation of Québécois) its logo is rather contentious. Dressed in a pair of vintage Chuck Taylors, a "dunking" frog was selected as the team's official mascot and emblem centerpiece, drawing accusations of stereotyping Québécois culture. As an affront to French Canadians, Dunky the Frog seemed to be an inflammatory icon from the outset. And yet Bourassa, as a French Canadian, defended his use of frog imagery as a coming-of-age attempt "to laugh at ourselves" (Rakobowchuk, 2006, p. 1).

At first glance, the jumping frog appears to reinforce disparaging cultural stereotypes not unlike the controversial use of Native American mascots. Social critics and aboriginal activists alike have been unquestionably articulate in their outcries against racist sport symbols that conjure problematic images of stoic braves, noble chiefs, and grinning Indians (King, 2004; Springwood, 2004). Despite these efforts, Native American mascots continue to provide sport with an egregiously racist iconography, thereby normalizing (neo)colonialist desires in North American popular culture. The jumping frog of Québec City is tangled in a similar colonialist history, but it also draws attention to the Anglocentric overtones of the national imaginary. It is, for all intents and purposes, an anti-French icon appropriated by a French Canadian. As such, the jumping frog insignia represents a complex moment of postmodern representation in sport, one that is underwritten with volition and self-directed stereotypes.

The jumping frog is politically significant for a number of reasons. First, the inaugural season of the Kebekwa and its contentious mascot coincides with the Canadian House of Commons' official recognition of the Québécois as a "nation within a united Canada" (Harper, cited in CBC News, 2006a, p. 1). Second, it offers a political response to Prime Minister Stephen Harper's ambiguous definition of Québécois identity. Finally, the politics surrounding Dunky the Frog overlap with Parliament's interest in Shane Doan, a National Hockey League (NHL) player accused of using anti-French slurs against French-Canadian referees in 2005 but selected by Hockey Canada as the team's acting captain in a 2007 tournament in Russia. The following essay draws out the connections between these events, exploring the problems of representation and recognition from the postmodern perspectives offered by Dunky the Frog. It uses weblog postings and online discussion boards to examine public reactions to the jumping frog and is

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[i] A version of this chapter has been published as: Brayton, S. and Alexander, T. (2007). Dunky the frog and the politics of irony. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 24(3), 241-260.

guided by the following questions: how do postmodern narratives of irony and parody relate to representations of identity in a sporting context? What do these representations reveal about the ideological conditions of multiculturalism in Canada?

Questions of "Kebek"

To understand the political dimensions of the frog mascot, it must be located within the historical conditions of Québec and larger questions of sovereignty, nationhood, and the politics of recognition. The historical outline offered here is decidedly partial and subject to a range of ongoing revisions as neo-Québécois identities (i.e., Haitian Canadians, Muslim Quebecers, Franco-Albertans, etc.) become increasingly visible in dominant English Canadian discourses. It does, however, ground the frog mascot within the ideological conditions and contradictions of recent events in Canadian cultural politics. To appreciate the representational significance of Dunky the Frog, in other words, we must attempt to recognize some of the historical struggles underlying the bicultural mythologies that inform but also conceal multicultural complexities in Canada. Although it is symptomatic and constitutive of a particular discord within Canadian cultural politics, the frog mascot on its own offers a rather myopic explanation of multiculturalism in Canada. Nevertheless, it may present a novel way of deconstructing the imagined polarity existing between English and French, a polarity that largely influenced the formation of official multiculturalism in Canada.

Since the 1960s, there has been a symbolic struggle to situate the Québécois citizen both in and against Canadian cultural politics (Breton, 1999). This ironic and precarious position is a result of the competing political forces of liberal federalism (Dion, 1996) and Québec nationalism (Parizeau, 1995). A liberalist agenda appears to celebrate cultural diversity and distinction in ways that de-historicize and debase the particular interests of the Québec government (Mackey, 2002). By comparison, a narrow nationalist paradigm in Québec once failed to recognize the increasing importance of a multicultural agenda already articulated in Anglo discussions of federalism (Lecours, 2000). If a more inclusive posture was to emerge in Québec the historical ties to old-guard separatist politics needed to be severed. This called for nothing short of a paradigm shift in Québécois nationalism, one that recognized the increasing ethnic diversity underlying Québec society and its flourishing immigrant communities. At the behest of more progressive leadership, then, a policy of multiculturalism was designed to construct "Québec as a pluralist, democratic society with French as the common language of public life" (Oakes, 2004, p. 541).

Despite the rhetoric of multiculturalism, the Canadian political climate has been overwhelmingly polarized by the agendas of English contra French, federalist contra nationalist in dominant English-language media. As a site of representational crisis, the Canadian flag has historically divided popular opinion along Anglo-Franco lines. While the federalist desire for a pan-Canadian identity captured by the maple leaf was intended to strengthen a sentiment of national belonging in Québec, the patriotic encroachment served to exacerbate Québécois anxieties (Kymlicka, 2003). These anxieties were captured by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1969) and the *Official Languages Act* (1969) but reached a

tipping point in 1972 when a militant wing of the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ) kidnapped and killed Québec's Vice-Premier and Labour Minister Pierre Laporte. Less alarming controversy emerged during modern flashpoints like the Meech Lake Accord of 1987 and the Charlottetown Accord of 1992. At issue in these events was the reluctance of Anglo-Canadian policymakers to recognize the sovereignty, real or imagined, of Québec (Parizeau, 1995). As a revision of the Canadian constitution, the "distinct society" clause extended to Québec was the most widely contested element of the Meech Lake Accord. In Anglocentric terms, it represented a separatist scheme to finagle "undeserved" social and cultural entitlements in Canada. Such disputes reached an apogee in 1995 when a national referendum nearly led to the secession of Québec. Recently, however, these strained bicultural relations have become comic fodder for a variety of Canadian film and television programs like *This Hour has 22 Minutes* (1992-present), *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* (2006), and a "mockumentary" called *Meech Lake Accord* (2006). Within this satirical mood we find the jumping frog of Québec City.

In recent months, some highly-publicized events have occurred in Canadian cultural politics, events that underscore the residual but sharp "bicultural" ideologies in which Dunky the Frog is located. On November 22, 2006, at the behest of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the Canadian House of Commons passed a motion to recognize the Québécois as "a nation within a united Canada." Harper "sprung" the motion to circumvent a Bloc Québécois proposal of similar but separatist dimensions (CBC News, 2006a). As a response, Bloc Québécois leader Gilles Duceppe claimed, "Official recognition of the Québec nation by the House of Commons is more than a symbolic issue. It is, in fact, the most fundamental issue … for Québec" (CBC News, 2006a, p. 4). Following this political gesture, Harper was asked to clarify his definition of Québécois, to which he offered a series of ambiguous replies. Addressing the vicissitudes of geography, language, and culture in relation to Québécois identities, Harper admitted, "I don't think it's possible to put precise terms to it" (CBC News, 2006b, p. 10). Asked if the Québécois could be characterized primarily through language, Harper responded in French, saying "I'm not sure" (CBC News, 2006b, p. 1). As both the Prime Minister and his opposition acknowledge, the representation and recognition of Québécois identity is an important political issue, but the terms of which remain unclear.

On May 3, 2007 issues of representation and Québécois identity again appeared in Parliament, but with a slight cultural twist. Speaking before the House of Commons, Hockey Canada president Bob Nicholson defended his decision to select Shane Doan as the acting captain of the men's national hockey team. Doan was accused of calling NHL linesman Michel Cormier a "fucking Frenchman" in 2005 and thus deemed unfit to lead by several Canadian politicians (CTV, 2007, p. 1). While Doan was cleared of any charges by league officials, Liberal Member of Parliament Denis Coderre unsuccessfully "demanded" in 2005 that Doan be excluded from participating at the Turin Olympics scheduled the following February (CBC Sports, 2007). At the May 2007 proceedings, agitated party leaders asked to hear Nicholson's reasoning for the controversial decision. In English-language popular media, however, French-Canadian players and coaches jumped to defend Doan and lash out at "misinformed" politicians (CBC Sports, 2007, p. 1).

Recalling his frustration with the "four French referees in Montreal" Doan's latest

dismissal of the allegations is somewhat revealing: "I would have done the same thing if we were in Los Angeles and it was four officials from California … or if we were in Calgary and it was four westerners" (CBC Sports, 2007, p. 1). Doan's remarks appeal to a rhetoric of equality that subsumes historical particularity and the political positioning of Québec in Canada. His defense is based on an explicit non-recognition of identity, one that contradicts the preceding questions of Québec in the House of Commons. But Doan's comments are, in other ways, not unlike a discourse of diversity that "portrays society as a horizontal space, in which there is no theoretical or analytical room for social relations of power and ruling" (Bannerji, 2000, p. 50). "French" referees, in other words, are no different than Californians and Calgarians in their biased officiating, despite the political marginalization of Québec in Canadian history. This is not to hold Doan accountable for the misfortunes of multiculturalism across North America but rather to illustrate how the logic of pluralism is often reproduced in unsuspecting cultural settings. While Doan may or may not have used anti-French slurs the incident and his recent captaincy speak of recurring "bicultural" anxieties cultivated in the House of Commons but sometimes dismissed through the leveling language of diversity.

Each of these events demonstrates the continuing importance of representation and recognition in Canadian cultural politics. They also suggest that the bicultural antecedents of official multiculturalism in Canada reemerge within and against the rhetoric of pluralism. Although the House of Commons' acknowledgment of the Québécois was ultimately a celebration of Canada as "a shining example of the harmony and unity to which all peoples are capable and to which all humanity should aspire," the politics of recognition were not easily sublimated (Harper, cited in CBC News, 2006a, p. 2). Likewise, Doan's qualifications as a national representative of a federally-funded sports team were marred by allegations of anti-French sympathies, which aroused historical animosities in Parliament. And yet the articulation of these antagonisms in dominant discourses often appears problematically in a binary opposition, one that subsumes the complexities within English and French identities as well as the dispossession of other ethno-political groups that do not fit neatly into a bicultural logic (Dallaire & Denis, 2005). The question arises, how does the frog mascot as a caricature speak to the identity-based politics underwriting these recent cultural and political events? To explore Dunky the Frog in this light requires a brief sketch of postmodern irony and parody.

"Double vision"

It is significant to note that irony abounds in contemporary sporting contexts (Snyder & Speitzer, 1980; Rinehart, 1998; Kohn & Sydnor, 1998; Genosko, 1999). Some of the more prominent examples include the underlying homoeroticism of "heteromasculine" sports (Klein, 1980; Pronger, 1990; Abdel-Shehid, 2004), scoreboard replays of/at live events (Rinehart, 1998), and the colonial dimensions of sport as a so-called civilizing process (Darby, 2002). A slightly more contentious irony is the reproduction of material disadvantages through an alluring spectacle of successful black athletes (Hoberman, 1997). Here a problematic model of social integration rests on a racial mythology of black physical prowess and intellectual deficit. Although the contradictions of sport and sport ideology have been widely identified, the

political potential of postmodern irony and parody in sport is perhaps less developed. It is our goal, then, to explore the ways in which duplicitous postmodern representations are used in sport, not simply how they occur. We wish to develop an understanding of postmodern irony and parody as not only a method of critique but also a reading strategy that is always ambivalent. It is not our intent, however, to celebrate Bourassa as an unlikely but subversive antihero; instead, we hope to illustrate the unintended possibilities of irony at the crossroads of identity, multiculturalism, and representation in popular culture.

In recent years, sport sociologists have become increasingly interested in poststructuralist thought (cf. Shogan, 1999; Cole, 1993; 1998; Andrews, 2000; Pronger, 1990; 1999; McDonald, 2001; Markula, 2003; Rail, 1998). If there is one lesson to be learned from poststructuralism, it is that the sign cannot be trusted. If the sign contains the trace of its opposite at every moment of signification, as Jacques Derrida (1976; 1978) suggests, it would seem that any given text is open to appropriation, internal conflict, and the subterfuge of irony. The discussion of irony offered here, however, should be taken as neither an inventory nor a complete exegesis of its myriad theoretical traditions. To be sure, irony varies across historical periods and assumes many forms such as Socratic, Romantic, situational, tragic, modern, and postmodern, all of which have been extensively outlined in literary theory (cf. Rose, 1979; 1993; Hutcheon, 1994; de Man, 1996; Colebrook, 2002; Booth, 1974; Kierkegaard, 1841). While we provide a working understanding of irony in general terms, it is imperative to realize that any and all discussions are, in the spirit of irony, duplicitous and unreliable. They are doomed to fail and partial at best since irony is, by definition, always already something else (de Man, 1996). For the moment, however, we are compelled to suspend the vacillating chain of irony in order to understand it.

At a cursory level, irony is the presence of two conflicting concepts, utterances, or identities at a single site of signification (Hutcheon, 1989; 1994; Bakhtin, 1981; Rose, 1979; 1993; Colebrook, 2002). While it is often described as an incongruity that privileges intent or understanding over action, irony is ambivalent in nature (Hutcheon, 1994). It does not choose sides between action and intent, but rather holds the two in a hostile and antagonizing position. Irony foregrounds the immanent crisis of representation such that words and images are not always as they appear. In fact, they are double-dealing. The relationship between signifier and signified is revealed to be unstable and deceptive at best. In terms of the jumping frog, for instance, the mixed reactions of online discussants point convincingly toward the irresolvable ambivalence of irony.

To be clear, nothing is inherently ironic (Hutcheon, 1994). Texts, utterances, and identities are created and/or perceived as ironic, which suggests that all irony is intentional (Hutcheon, 1994). It is produced by the ironist but also employed as a "strategy of interpretation" in and across "discursive communities" (Hutcheon, 1994, p. 116, 18). We may think of irony as a form of "double vision." Although it can be spotted by changing intonation, "scare quotes", repetition and exaggeration, irony is most persuasive in a subtle and unannounced form (Hutcheon, 1994; Booth, 1974). Nevertheless, as Linda Hutcheon claims, "irony can and does function tactically in the service of a wide range of political positions, legitimating or undercutting a wide variety of interests" (1994, p. 10). Indeed, self-reflexivity and

complicity are characteristic of irony in a postmodern sense. In the context of this essay, the jumping frog is potentially ironic for a number of reasons. First, the anti-French icon is introduced by a French Canadian as a positive "representation" of Québec City and its basketball team. Second, the redundancy of a jumping frog may suggest a slippery double meaning of "frog" itself, a possibility addressed in several online forums. As these discussions often illustrate, the frog mascot is "dialogical," stalling the closure of meanings across a gamut of linguistic, ethnic, and national identities (Bakhtin, 1981). This proclivity for internal dialogue brings irony closer in theoretical terms to parody.

Whereas irony presents an unresolved incongruity, parody is brought to life by imitation and cooptation (Rose, 1979; 1993). In Mikhail Bakhtin's words, it is "the speech of another … introduced into the author's discourse" (1981, p.303). As a sample of parody, the jumping frog takes on new significance in the hands of Québécoise, even as it retains the vestiges of Anglocentrism. The image contains multiple "text worlds" that rival and play off one another (Rose, 1979). This is because representation is much more than a grammatical arrangement of signifiers and signifieds; instead, it is a site of struggle between particular "social voices" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 263). It is an "ideologically saturated" form of communication that is disparate and contradictory rather than unambiguous and coherent (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 271). As a "double-voiced" signifier, the jumping frog is marked by the collision of multiple ideologies at a single discursive moment, what Bakhtin calls "heteroglossia." Effective moments of parody, then, persuade the viewer to consider the original text in a new light, one that may unearth hidden assumptions and repressed politics.

Finding Dunky Online

When Dunky the Frog first came to our attention, we intended to explore its postmodern potential in strictly theoretical terms. In collecting background information, however, it became clear to us that Internet users interpreted Dunky in a variety of conflicting ways. As a result, we found that the ambivalent politics of irony could be understood in part by an analysis of weblogs (blogs) and discussion forums found on the Internet. Although research on the Internet is becoming a fashionable accoutrement of many scholars, academic research on blogs is still in its infancy (Brady, 2005; Hine, 2000). As prolific spaces of communication, blogs "are websites that contain frequently updated 'posts' with the most recent entry at the top of the page and the previous ones displayed reverse-chronologically" (Brady, 2005, p. 212). This format allows each user to view comments and post a response. A similar protocol is followed on Internet discussion boards hosted by corporate websites, which allow a direct engagement with not only the author of the article but also other respondents (Brady, 2005). The result is a multi-perspective media that, while far from democratic, offers a more immediate approach to audience participation than newspaper editorials and radio/television call-in programs.

With blogs, users may also discuss events and topics long after the original "posting." While the jumping frog appeared briefly in Canadian popular press (like the *Montreal Gazette* and *Toronto Star*), it bubbled over on the Internet. As such, online forums offered an "alternative public sphere" in which discussions continued well after their passing moment in

more "conventional" media forms (Gillett, 2003). Indeed, blog postings and discussion boards illustrated a larger debate than was initially reported in print media. These forums demonstrated the ways in which identities, viewpoints, and representational politics emerged through language and power relations on the Internet. It was not our intent to index every angle of the online debate, nor was it our goal to evaluate the success of irony; instead, we relied on Internet postings to support our claim that irony is born of ambivalence and uncertainty, which is also its condition of political possibility.

To conduct this research we observed electronic public spaces which, unlike chat rooms, did not require enrolment or the disclosure of an identity. After learning of the frog logo and the ensuing threat to Bourassa's life in an August 2006 news report, we searched for additional perspectives. An article in the *Toronto Star* presented particular keywords, such as "Québec Jumping Frogs" and "Kebekwa," which we used to gain access to several online discussion boards. Although our point of entry was admittedly Anglo-centered we relied on a bilingual translator to review French-language websites. We were drawn to discussions of Québécois identity, which were marked by certain terms like "colonialism," "white flags," "surrender monkeys," and "Bourassa." Using these keywords we selected thirteen discussions (8 English, 5 French), ten of which appeared after Bourassa confirmed his ironic intent in "conventional" news media. We reviewed all of the postings and continued the analysis by visiting the sites every three days until the end of September 2006, when it was determined that participant dialogue was unchanging or minimal (i.e., showing less than two additional exchanges). Some of the websites included an eastern Ontario radio station, a California-based forum, a French-Canadian information clearinghouse, as well as a variety of personal and professional sports pages. The number of entries at each site varied from as few as five to as many as thirty-five.

Although responses from bloggers varied across websites, some important themes emerged. Most entries could be classified as: (a) dismissive; (b) supportive; (c) negative; or (d) comic. Dismissive responses were directed at either the feasibility of professional basketball in Québec or the contemporary relevance of "frogs" as anti-French icons. Support for the frog logo on English-language sites was, at times, embedded in otherwise Anglocentric remarks: "That's a great name, who might be offended? The Frogs" (Hanumaster, 2006, p. 2)? Incidentally, the use of "code-switching" was popular among some users of English-language websites who supported the logo: "Frogs are cute … who could take that as an insult? Je l'adore les frogs!!! Vive les frogs! Vite frogs vite!" (SkindeepRK, 2006, p. 16). But we also found several Anglo entries that denounced the frog imagery by drawing comparisons to offensive aboriginal mascots. Some English-language participants amused the group with clever puns ("what a 'ribbiting' topic") while others attempted to minimize the debate by suggesting playful alternatives ("Pouteam" or "le mangeurs de poutine"). It was not always clear if such comic statements were supporting or opposing the use of Dunky the Frog and the "Jumping Frogs" name. Other comic responses relied on self-deprecating humor to endorse the logo and dismiss its "racist" analogies.

It is interesting to note that the longest entries and exchanges took place on *Le Blogue Canoe*, a French-language website. The discussion of Dunky contained thirty-five exchanges from twenty respondents. Participants of this forum sometimes used a grammar of "us-against-

them" to describe the politics of Québécois representation. As one user suggested, "Anglophones who were in the habit of treating us as 'fucking frogs' must be laughing now that a Francophone is doing it for them" (Boyer, 2006, p. 3). Some of the discussants were less concerned with Dunky than the team's use of an English name. One blogger wrote, "If we really want to be comical here, we should use the word grenouille [frog] and watch the Anglophone commentators attempt verbal gymnastics!!! LOL [laugh out loud]" (Peterson, 2006, p. 4)! Although some discussants read the frog in a lighthearted manner, others did not. One French-language blogger denounced Bourassa as a cultural traitor (Deschênes, 2006). Despite the emergence of particular themes, there was much overlap and indeterminacy within the weblog responses.

While both English- and French-language sites were used we found no commentary to be "authentically" French Canadian (or English Canadian for that matter). Instead, there was an admixture of postings across the websites that prevented us from identifying an essential Québécoise response. There was, however, a notable use of code-switching by some English-language bloggers and an "us-against-them" narrative adopted by some French-language commentators. More interesting, however, was the emergence of national and "ethnic" identity through linguistic performance. In what follows, we use online responses to explore the possibilities of postmodern irony in sport. These website forums help us understand the complex nature of interpreting cultural contradictions, especially as it relates to identity construction and contested epithets in "multicultural" Canada.

Dunky the Frog, or Irony as the Complicit Critique

As social critics and activists have illustrated, the use of derogatory sports insignia is hardly a recent phenomenon (King, 2004; Springwood, 2004). Indeed, North American sporting franchises have historically and injudiciously relied on racist fantasies of aboriginal peoples to bolster the mythologies of athletic masculinity. From Chief Wahoo of the Cleveland Indians to Chief Illiniwek of the University of Illinois, mascots of athletic teams have widely served as "a false, malicious, and bigoted parody of Native Americans" (King, 2004, p. 4). Under the dubious pretext of boosterism, non-aboriginal spectators are able to "play Indian" at otherwise inexcusable events that include war paint, feathers, and chopping tomahawks syncopated with imaginary battle cries. Moreover, "people who are not 'ethnically Indian' have … strategically claimed Indianness to argue in favor of Native American mascots" (Springwood, 2004, p. 56). By this logic, the legitimacy of one's political position is based on situated claims of indigeneity, real or imagined. A fabricated "I'm-Indian-too" authenticity allows non-aboriginal spectators who support the use of stereotypical imagery to silence aboriginal opposition (Springwood, 2004). To this day, Native American mascots continue to circulate across sport cultures in North America.

On the surface, Dunky the Frog is not far removed from similar accusations of racism (cf. Fafouin, 2006; Ladouceur, 2006). The frog epithet is typically traced to the French cuisine of frog legs as cultural elitism in the British "beef-eating" imaginary (Tidwell, 1948, p. 215). In fact, several bloggers drew parallels between Native American mascots and what they considered to be a disparaging image of French Canadians (Al, 2006; Gagnon, 2006). For some users, the

Jumping Frogs were no less demeaning than the Washington Redskins and, in caricature, the "Manhattan Wops" (Al, 2006, p. 1), "Laredo Wetbacks," and "Florida Rednecks" (Williams, 2006, p. 1). On this particular subject, one visitor added a satirical response to what s/he perceived to be a complacent and impotent brand of Canadian protest against such offensive iconography: "We being Canadians, if they take our pens away, what are we too [sic] protest with?" (OJ, 2006, p. 3). Along similar lines, one French-language blogger rejected Dunky the Frog as a token of colonial conquest and British imperialism (Lemay, 2006). Another French-language discussant claimed, "I dare to believe it's a hoax, otherwise it's a real insult to the French language, and to Québécois" (Béliveau, 2006, p. 4). It is perhaps not surprising that some respondents compared the anti-French epithet to the insidious use of "nigger" (Carrot, 2006).[2] Such discussions were not always limited to the "simple" dichotomy of English and French encouraged by Dunky the Frog.

There was, however, much disagreement among participants concerning the purpose of sports mascots and representation in general. One French-language blogger addressed the importance of French language and identity, but dismissed both team names and mascot as "comic, quite simply" (Olivier, 2006, p. 2). Other visitors of the same site (*Le Blogue Canoe*) argued that "the name of a [sports] club must have a significance so that people are identified there" (Dubé, 2006, p. 3). Although the frog mascot in Québec is perhaps only ironic in the context of dominant English-language media in Canada, its contentious meanings were not lost on francophone discussants. As one French-language blogger commented, "Even if it's a sports team, I can't believe they'd be proud to have such a name" (Boyer, 2006, p. 3). As either a comical marketing prop or a desecration of Québécois representation, Dunky the Frog proved to be an intelligible icon, one that created some heated discussions of Anglocentrism and the value of representation in sports.

As a self-directed stereotype, however, Dunky the Frog is perhaps unique in its emergence through irony. That is, the frog logo and the representative context in which it appears are in disagreement. It may be an ironic mascot insofar as it presents an incongruity between appearance and intent. The frog appears to be an offensive anti-French icon intended by a French Canadian to be innocuous, "funny," and a badge of pride for Québec City (Bourassa, cited in Gordon, 2006, p.1). In this sense, it is a slippery signifier that undercuts coherence and transparency by drawing on multiple ideological voices, or what Christopher Norris calls "rhetorical tensions" (1988, p. xii). To this end, some English-language bloggers entertained the possibility of resignifying the anti-French icon: The Québécois "are an open minded bunch that embrace the Anglophone language and culture. The French want the term 'frog' to be adopted as one of their own so the word can create a different life of its own" (DeeVeeSss, 2006, p. 2). Along similar lines, some bloggers considered the frog to be a rather humorous logo, claiming, "French Canadians have a great sense of humour and shouldn't be offended. Self-depricating [sic] humour is the best kind" (Daphne, 2006, p. 2). Another English-language blogger responded to the controversy in an ironic tone: "I prefer 'The Backpedaling, Cheese Eating Surrender Mounkeys [sic] (in my best Peter Sellers [dialect])" (Lawdude, 2006, p. 4). With a parenthetic reference to the British parodist extraordinaire an ostensibly anti-French comment is rendered

"polyphonic" and dialogical (Kristeva, 1986). It oscillates between a reiteration and a rejection of Anglocentrism by drawing on Seller's satirical performance of Inspector Jacques Clouso.

While a number of discussants supported Bourassa's in-group humor, the jumping frog is perhaps more than a clever strategy of resignification; instead, we imagined it to be a political negation of dichotomous identities in Canada. Because irony rejects the logic of a singular and original referent, Dunky the Frog is neither derogatory nor subversive *tout court*. It is, on the contrary, loaded with ambivalence, disrupting as much as upholding the nostalgia of cultural purity. Dunky the Frog draws our attention to what Paul de Man describes as "the radical exteriority or heterogeneity of one voice with regard to any other" (1986, p. 109). Indeed, the ironic use of frog imagery posits a liberalist desire to subsume French-Canadian political struggles against a Québécoise desire for self-representation. As a paradoxical site of signification, it ridicules not only Anglocentrism but also the myth of an idealized and inimitable Québécois subject. In other words, Dunky the Frog marks the presence of "*another's speech in another's language*" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 324). Historical meanings float but never entirely drift away as the anti-French epithet is recycled with a difference.

As it appeared in English Canadian media, the deployment of Dunky the Frog may be described as an act of "disidentification" (Muñoz, 1996). For José Esteban Muñoz, disidentification is the process by which the subject manipulates the terms of subjectivity determined by the dominant social order. It is a "performative re-citation" of a stereotype that "engages and recycles popular forms with a difference" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 126). Disidentification also appears through ironic performances of the self, a twist on what Rey Chow calls "coercive mimeticism" (2002, p. 104). Under a Western interpellating gaze, she claims, "the ethnic person is expected to come to resemble what is recognizably ethnic" (Chow, 2002, p. 104). As a form of impersonation, however, disidentification relies on a gap of irony to separate the interpellated subject of performance from the subject that performs its interpellated self. For his own part, Bourassa uses the representational resources of Anglocentrism to re-articulate a particular French Canadian identity, one that discredits the myth of an authentic Québécois subject. In disapproval, one blogger wrote, "I think [Bourassa] is just a colonial … sponsored by the Anglos to mock us" (Deschênes, 2006, p. 3). But colonial ambivalence is such that the assumption of English parlance is not necessarily an acceptance of English imperialism (Bhabha, 1994). This seems to be an underlying theme of Bourassa's ironic gesture. Under such conditions, the adoption of a French stereotype resembles a sort of impersonation that "asserts its own fictionality even as its success is predicated upon an illusion of 'the real'" (Chen, 2005, p. 67). Herein lies a formative but ambivalent rejection of the constraining terms of liberalist and nationalist ideologies.

Dunky the Frog and "Bicultural" Mythologies

Through Bourassa's ironic use of frog imagery, we might argue, the bicultural fictions of Canadian identity are rendered moot. A central myth of mutual exclusivity is exposed as contaminated and fallible, especially as it scrambles to maintain bicultural distinctions. Within the dominant ideologies of Canadian nationalism, for instance, one finds there is no sense of

"Frenchness" without "Englishness." The categories are overdetermined by contradistinction so much so that absolute repudiation would cancel out their very existence. Because of a founding reciprocity, "Frenchness" in Canada always contains a trace of that which it is not – "Englishness" – and is therefore neither immutable nor pure. The categories, in many ways, collapse upon one another. Thus, "the nonself is implied in the very positing of the self, and is as such equally posited" (de Man, 1996, p. 173). Likewise, a self-directed stereotype, used in a reflexive tone, serves to distort the distinctions between "authentic" and "inauthentic" representations. The frog logo, for instance, plays on Anglocentrism as a colonialist but formative element of Québécois identity. If Bourassa's adoption of the jumping frog is an act of self-impersonation, as we are suggesting, it is one that foregrounds the constructed nature of French-Canadian identity as a negotiation amongst "always already articulated roles" (Chen, 2005, p. xvi).

Although Dunky the Frog problematizes the fidelity of an English/French dichotomy, it cannot offer a space of protest outside of its own problematic. It remains trapped in a collapsible binary opposition. Whereas the frog represents a pejorative anti-French icon for some Internet users, its origins are situated in a series of social struggles that precede the advent of multiculturalism in Canada (Tidwell, 1948). In other words, the frog might be read as a nostalgic symbol of pre-multicultural political quandaries recorded, for instance, by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1969). These quandaries inspired the formation of official multiculturalism in Canada but remain unresolved by a contemporary discourse of pluralism. At a *Free Republic* blog, one participant explained, "English and French have been calling each other names for millennia. … French people are not sensitive about it any more than Americans are sensitive about being called 'Yankees' or British are sensitive to being called 'Roast-beefs'" (Ryan71, 2006, p. 7). At *Le Blogue Canoe*, however, the nostalgia evoked by Dunky the Frog was often frowned upon. One visitor expressed his dismay at an icon he believed to "perpetuate the image of a colonized [people]" (Lemay, 2006, p. 3). And so it seems that Dunky the Frog in some ways symbolized a colonial legacy incapable of resignification or ironic appropriation. It summoned a troubling history of domination that many bloggers perceived as ongoing and even exacerbated by Bourassa's antics.

The historical significance of the frog epithet was also dismissed by some online discussants uncertain of its modern relevance in Québec. As part of an indifferent response to Dunky, one blogger claimed, "'Frogs' isn't used against Quebeckers. The frog was used for francophones from France ages ago" (Peterson, 2006, p. 4). At *Le Blogue Canoe* one visitor commented, "Why be indignant about it?? As far as I know, the team name isn't the Fucking Frog!! And we're not in the 1930's [sic] anymore when we had to bow before the English or anything like that. They can say what they want … not really important in my eyes" (Looo Lapl, 2006, p. 4)!! Perhaps Dunky the Frog is only an intelligible insult in relation to a dated mythology of "biculturalism" (informed by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism and the *Official Languages Act*), one that fails to recognize identities and groups outside of its own binarized logic. If this is the case, the politics surrounding the frog mascot are, on the one hand, pre-multicultural and anachronistic but, on the other hand, important reminders of an

unresolved discord that cannot be entirely absorbed by liberal pluralism and the logic of multiculturalism.

 While some discussions took place within the binarized mythologies aroused by the frog mascot, others addressed wider but related complexities of multiculturalism and identity. Several participants expanded the discussion to include offensive aboriginal mascots in professional baseball, hockey, and football, whilst two bloggers in particular mentioned the political positioning of Haiti. In debating the sovereignty of Québec, one blogger contended that "the only French state in the Americas is Haiti, the oldest nation in the western hemisphere after the USA, the world's first black republic, and the poorest country (by far) in the Americas" (Williams, 2006, p. 2). S/he also pointed out that Haiti was the birthplace of Canada's Governor General Michaëlle Jean. Such remarks seemed to address and situate the multiple layers of francophone abjection within an implicit but inchoate jab at American imperialism. In response, another blogger drew attention to the variety of French dialects used in Haiti and Quebec, dialects described as "bastardized patois" in relation to a more "authentic" language used in France (Tom, 2006, p. 2). A similar understanding of language and cultural authenticity was used in other discussions to question Bourassa's "French Canadianness" (cf. Boyer, 2006).

 In what we might call a "meta-ironic" twist, the jumping frog may work dialogically *because* of the perceived authenticity of ironist and audience. The legitimacy of French Canadian identity functions here in a double sense. As both the object and the subject of ironic criticism, the unstable signifier of ethnic authenticity enables its own discursive undoing (Spivak, 1976). In other words, irony de-naturalizes the very situated claims to "Frenchness" from which the French Canadian is permitted to speak in dominant English discourses. As the focus of a self-directed stereotype, Bourassa's own "ethnicity" allows him to play in and through discursive areas otherwise "off-limits" to Anglo-Canadians. That is to say, Bourassa is authorized to tread in the dire straits of French stereotypes by the very politics of authenticity he seeks to undermine. As both the "narrator" and the "narrated," he unravels the myth of an *echt*-French Canadian identity (Hutcheon, 1989). Thus, the same authentic ethnic that reserves the right to self-deprecation is renounced in the ironic act of negating the singular point of reference from which all claims to ethnic authenticity originate. While this is perhaps the greatest irony of the entire debacle, it did not guarantee a warm reception of deconstructive logic among audiences.

 Self-declared ethnicity, much like imagined "Indianness," functioned as a litmus test for a variety of online viewpoints. The legitimacy of one's political stance toward the jumping frog was often, but not always, determined by situated claims of "French Canadianness." An English-language blogger claiming to "have French friends," for example, rejected the frog logo and later challenged another discussant's "Frenchness": "Listen Tremblant, I know you aren't French based on the simple fact that you wrote 'dat' [in place of 'that'] in your first post" (Robert, 2006, p. 2). The respondent in question summoned his ethnicity to articulate his right to (waive) victimization: "Being French, [the frog logo] doesn't bother me, so why should it bother you? This isn't a personal attack on you. Go grenouille" (Tremblant, 2006, p. 2)!!! Indeed, a declaration of one's "French-Canadianness" or vicarious ethnicity ("I have a French-Canadian friend") seemed to be a way of authenticating one's commentary: "Dat's funny. Great name for dat team. I'm French and dat don't bodder me" (Tremblant, 2006, p. 3). While the script may or

may not be embellished it certainly captured the performative nature of ethnolinguistic identity, especially on the Internet.

In the present context, however, online authenticity is not only difficult to verify, it is somewhat irrelevant. Lest we imagine a genuine "truth" embedded in French-language blogs, some sociolinguists and ethnic impersonators remind us that language is an incompetent signifier of culture and identity (Rampton, 1999; Blomquist & Higby, 2006). As one user warned, "Just because [Bourassa] has a French name doesn't mean it's his first language" (Deschênes, 2006, p. 3). The relative ease by which ersatz identities appear in cyberspace renders the signposts of a bona fide French Canadian identity precarious and increasingly suspect. After all, to seek out the "authentic" French Canadian viewpoint is to *assume* it into existence. As the jumping frog might suggest, there never really was an essential Québécois subject that was not already the product of serious ideological labor. This is not to erase the historical struggles of marginalized social groups nor is it to discard the systems of signification; instead, it is to realize the impossible burden of representation placed on the particular ethnic subject. It is also to displace the fictions of ethnic authenticity that refurbish social hierarchies under the banner of "empowerment" (Hall, 1989; Ang, 2001). The irony, of course, is that the precise terms of authenticity called into question by Dunky the Frog were taken for granted by some online discussants.

Mascots and Political Satire

What may concern sociologists of sport is not the particular French Canadian context of Dunky but rather the extent to which athletic mascots are emerging in reflexively ironic terms. With their plush costumes and oversized features, team mascots often appeal to children, placing them in the double-edged category of "light entertainment." Whereas the image of frivolity and innocence may be used to dismiss protest from social activists, it may also allow mascots to "tread in areas that might otherwise be off-limits" to explicit political criticism (King, 2002, p. 2). Dunky the Frog is not the only mascot raising questions of representation through irony. In 2002, for example, an intramural basketball team at the University of Northern Colorado named itself the Fighting Whites. To draw attention to the absurdity of aboriginal mascots, the mixed-race team used an image of a grinning white man dressed in a suit and necktie as its logo. As the ironic icon grew in popularity the team used the profits generated from the sales of Fighting White merchandise ($125,000) to create a university scholarship for Native American students (Williams, 2003).

More recently, the Saginaw Spirit of the Ontario Hockey League (OHL) unveiled its official mascot, Steagle Colbeagle the Eagle. The mascot is a bespectacled tribute to political comedian Stephen Colbert, who hosts a satirical news program on Comedy Central. Colbert performs as an explicit caricature of rightwing political pundit Bill O'Reilly. He became interested in the Spirit through publicized rivalries with Canadian teams bearing militarized names: Oshawa Generals, Brampton Battalion, Windsor Spitfires, and Owen Sound Attack. Steagle Colbeagle is a satire of the satirist himself, which appears to lampoon American patriotism and militant masculinity reproduced in/through sport. Like Dunky and the Fighting White, Steagle Colbeagle

underscores an important and familiar dialectic of sport. On the one hand, if such politically-charged icons are able to flourish in sport it is because athletics continue to enjoy an aseptic and depoliticized reputation. On the other hand, if athletic mascots incite protest by certain social groups it is because sport cannot be bracketed off from power relations and the struggles of everyday life. Dunky, the Fighting White, and Steagle Colbeagle seem to suggest that the indeterminate cultural space of sport might host a range of political commentaries disguised as harmless expressions of frivolity. The terms of "light entertainment" used to eschew meaningful political critique may enable the return of political critique in a duplicitous form.

Recognition, Representation, and Reading the Jumping Frog

In terms of representation, it may be that no particular moment of signification is ever singular or complete (Butler, 1993; Weedon, 1987). Instead, meaning appears to be something else somewhere else (Derrida, 1976). To this end, a controversial sports logo serves as an ironic site for the collision of Anglocentrism and Québécois representational politics. As no signifying structure is able to produce a transcendental identity, however, "French Canadianness" is open to contestation. Indeed, the jumping frog debacle emphasizes the contradictory ways in which competing discourses struggle to situate Québécois subjects. In this sense, Dunky the Frog and the surrounding online discussions may offer particular ways of understanding the complexities of political recognition and Harper's struggle to define "Québécois." It may also complement the cultural reactions to the Doan controversy by exploring the ambiguities and uncertainties of identity politics in a different but not unrelated representational context.

Bourassa's induction of Dunky the Frog marks a contentious deployment of a self-directed stereotype, one that may be read as a "disidentification" with longstanding Anglocentric ideologies as well an "authentic" Québécois identity. The elusiveness of such an identity underwrites the House of Commons' recognition of Québécoise as well as Harper's ambiguous clarifications. While Harper campaigned for this recognition it is unclear which identities are being recognized. Nevertheless, Harper framed the gesture in a language that bolsters the multicultural image of a "strong, united, independent, and free" Canada (CBC News, 2006a, p. 2). Such recognition, in Himani Bannerji's words, may represent "the creation of a mirror for self-gazing" or rather "the hegemonic recognizer's self-validation … done in the name of the identity needs of others" (2000, p. 148). As a postmodern intervention, Dunky the Frog introduces some problems of not only representation but also the recognition promised by the House of Commons. We might add that representation, as the figurative process of giving a face to the faceless, is always already a "defacement" (Frey, 1985, p. 125). Even "positive" images are in danger of validating the simulacrum of authentic representation (Chow, 2002). This appears to be the source of controversy, but also the condition of possibility, within Bourassa's ironic gesture. Here postmodern irony hints at how certain subjects appear and disappear in sport discourses, but it refuses to define Québécois identity in original terms.

If Dunky the Frog troubles the terms of representation, it may also trivialize the political consequences of non-recognition. Much like identity, recognition may be impossible, but it remains a "compelling if necessary existential illusion" (Andrews, 2007, p. 37). As one French-

language blogger claimed, "We have enough difficulties proving the value of our identity in the eyes of others without having to reduce ourselves once more with such garbage" (Boyer, 2006, p. 3). Read in this way, the jumping frog may illustrate the historical tensions related to the political positioning of Québec in Canada whilst maintaining Anglocentric sensibilities. And yet postmodern irony may be used as a "self-mockery that actually mocks the mockers," often in and through the "Master's" language (Doniger, 2005, p. 12). As such, Dunky the Frog may be read as an ironic manifestation within but also against dominant "bicultural" mythologies, which continue to emerge problematically in wider political discourses. In some ways, Dunky foregrounds the Québécois identity of recent parliamentary politics as a misrepresentation; the terms of political recognition are as ambiguous and contestable as the identities it seeks to contain. This is not to dismiss the identities and experiences of the Québécois but rather to deny the closure and sublimation of "the Québec question" itself.

In relation to the Doan controversy, Dunky the Frog reiterates but also introduces a variety of complexities. First, the two incidents illustrate the ways in which the politics of representation can be both empowering and disempowering in and through a shared cultural lexicon. Similar anti-French slurs may have distinct meanings in distinct contexts but cannot entirely escape the historical conditions of Anglocentrism in Canada. Second, discourses surrounding the Doan controversy and the jumping frog speak to a politics of authenticity. Dunky, for instance, was supported by some bloggers because of Bourassa's ostensible "French Canadianness," his so-called authentic subject positioning. But this "authentic" subject positioning is in some ways the target of critique offered by the ironic mascot. In addition, some online discussants constructed "authentic" speaking positions to legitimize political perspectives. Likewise, popular reports of the Doan incident in Parliament relied on the "French friends" connection. Doan's character was redeemed by the likes of NHLers Martin Brodeur (from Montréal) and Alain Vigneault (from Québec City). At the same time the Bloc Québécois demanded Doan's demotion, Brodeur attested, "I know Shane really [well] and I don't see him saying that" (CBC Sports, 2007, p. 1). And so it seems that authentic speaking positions are symptomatic of a particular burden of representation in which Brodeur, Vigneault or Bourassa are made to "stand in" for all French Canadians.

Unlike the Doan controversy, the jumping frog encouraged some disruption of ethnolinguistic authenticity. Online participants challenged not only Bourassa's "French Canadianness" but also other bloggers' claims to Québécois heritage. In other words, the troublesome icon often invited a troubling of identity, sometimes in contradictory and essentializing ways. Robert, for instance, questioned a fellow discussant's "Frenchness" whilst supporting his own opinions by drawing attention to his "French friends." Thus, the frog mascot allows us to explore how an empty "ethnic" signifier may be negotiated in ostensibly ironic ways from within a sporting context. In light of mixed online reactions, it appears as though the Québécois subject is open to serious (as well as not-so-serious) dialogue and debate. Indeed, no single discursive formation is absolute or quarantined from paradox (Frey, 1985). As a result, Dunky the Frog invites an alternative method of ideology critique. On the one hand, an ideology critique of stereotypes may rightly identity the alleged anti-French slurs of the Doan incident as derogatory. On the other hand, this "stereotype approach" cannot explain the subversive

possibilities of self-directed stereotypes embedded within the jumping frog mascot. With its "corrective" emphasis, it "cannot equate stereotyping performed 'from above' with stereotyping 'from below,' where the stereotype is used as it were 'in quotes,' recognized as a stereotype and used to new ends" (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 205).

Postmodern Irony and Ideology Critique

Under the influence of postmodern irony, ideology critique is made increasingly complex. Dominic Strinati explains "it is no longer even a question of the media distorting reality, since this implies there is a reality, outside the surface simulations of the media, which can be distorted" (1995, p. 206). By describing a capricious and insouciant ethos, however, he perhaps overstates the demise of ideology within the postmodernist camp. Playing with/in ideology is not a wholesale rejection of ideology critique or Marxism but rather a warning to wield them, as Stuart Hall does, "without guarantees" (1986). Irony is, in a sense, a critique of ideology critique, one that works both in and against the competing ideological terms of popular culture. It makes no claims of operating from a "safe house" of political truth; instead, postmodern irony foregrounds the provisional terms of its own complicit existence with/in ideologies. This is what makes irony, in Hutcheon's words, a "double-talking, forked-tongued mode of address" (1991, p. 73).

Ideological formations and the texts they employ are vulnerable to the inhabitancy of restless voices of alterity, but they are not always resignifiable in the same terms at the same historical moment. As revealed by the jumping frog discussion, there is no magic wand of resignification that absolves the historical and ideological baggage of any particular sign. It appears as though the trace of alterity haunts the intent of the author as well as the expectations of the audience (Spivak, 1976; Rose, 1979; Hutcheon, 1994). In this sense, the recognition of incongruity is a formative element of ironic strategies and comedy in general (King, 2002; Palmer, 1987). While it may dialogize the intrinsic contradictions in and across ideologies, irony does not sound the death knell of ideology per se. On the contrary, irony pillages from "existing representations that are effective precisely because they are loaded with pre-existing meaning" (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 42). Ideology is rejected and reiterated through the rhetorical twists of ironic signification.

If "double-voiced" discourses undercut the coherence of any single ideology, they also fracture audiences. As Jack Bratich claims, "The audience has been in crisis since it was generated" (2005, p. 247). And yet there are compelling reasons to believe viewers actively engage and pilfer from various media to construct and negotiate meaningful identities which "cannot be dictated by the text," much less textual analysis (Ang & Hermes, 1996, p. 328). Viewers bring to any particular text a series of experiences and values, or what Annette Hill (1997) calls "portfolios" of interpretation that enable them to negotiate meanings in an often-social manner. While some participants of online forums exchanged opinions regarding the uncertain status of professional basketball in Québec, others discussed the significance of Dunky the Frog in relation to stereotypic aboriginal mascots in other sports. As Henry Jenkins argues "Fans construct their cultural and social identity through borrowing and inflecting mass culture

images, articulating concerns which often go unvoiced within the dominant media" (1992, p. 23).

As our findings may suggest, members of an audience rarely interpret texts with consensus. Indeed, "the same narratives can be read literally by one group and as camp by another. Some groups' pleasure comes not in celebrating the values of their chosen works but rather in 'reading them against the grain'" (Jenkins, 1992, p. 63). This appears to be the case with discussions surrounding the jumping frog. Many bloggers used the cultural spaces of online discussion boards to offer playful alternative names for the Kebekwa, while others impersonated and referenced parodic texts (i.e., Peter Sellers in *The Pink Panther*). On the other hand, some read Dunky the Frog in less ironic and playful terms. Liberal Member of Canadian Parliament Denis Coderre, for instance, publicly condemned Bourassa's use of frog imagery, claiming, "It's the kind of remark we've been fighting against for years" (cited in Gordon, 2006, p. 1). (Incidentally, this is the same Liberal MP that demanded the removal of Doan from the Canadian Olympic hockey team.) In this sense, the recycling of icons within popular culture is only as effective as the parodied "text worlds" perceived by the reader.

These ambiguities underline the complex patterns of consuming media texts among various audiences. In short, "readers are not always resistant; all resistant readings are not necessarily progressive" (Jenkins, 1992, p. 34). Certain audience groups may be attuned to elements of a media text that pass unnoticed by other viewers. As a result, mediated positionings are "multiple and partial, ambiguous and incoherent, permanently in process of being articulated, disarticulated, and rearticulated" (Ang & Hermes, 1996, p. 339). Although discussions of Dunky the Frog reflected a range of perspectives, which often emerged in relation to a range of ethnolinguistic positions, the discussants made little or no reference to particular Québécois identities like those of New Brunswick Acadians, Franco-Albertans, Franco-Ontarians, and so forth. Instead, the discussion often reflected and reproduced the same "bicultural" mythologies presented ironically by Dunky the Frog. As Ien Ang and Joke Hermes suggest, "It is in and through the very practices of media consumption … that … identities are recursively shaped" (1996, p. 337). In our study, English Canadian and Québécois identities appeared to be discursively constructed and sometimes questioned online through the political perspectives of the jumping frog controversy. Here discussion groups were cross-cut by not only language and websites but also knowledge of Canadian histories and basketball.

Dunky the Frog as Cultural Commodity

There are, however, added complexities and contradictions surrounding the ironic mascot as a cultural commodity that must be unpacked, if only in speculative terms. This has much to do with the role of Bourassa within a capitalist marketplace as well as the social production of labor in the sports merchandising industry. On the one hand, Bourassa's esteemed social positioning as a team owner and capitalist minimizes the psychological violence of Anglocentrism. He has the material resources to play with subjectivity through a stereotype that less affluent French Canadians may find damaging. In fact, the very notion of play within and across identities is often, but not always, the "First World luxury" of an already recognized,

always established political subject (Spivak, cited in McRobbie, 1994, p. 128). On the other hand, the frog controversy serves as a novel marketing tool, drawing our attention to not only the logo and team, but also its merchandising. As Bourassa openly acknowledged, "This has given me the most wonderful publicity I can imagine" (cited in Gordon, 2006, p. 2). In response, some online discussants offered savvy critiques of Dunky and the Jumping Frogs as a transparent and deplorable marketing strategy (Root, 2006).

Despite the textual preoccupation of this essay, political economy is a vital component of critical cultural studies, particularly in relation to labor. As such, it becomes increasingly imperative to think of Dunky the Frog as a cultural commodity, a product of wage labor and potentially globalized class relations. As Dan Schiller suggests, "Whether a tangible good or an evanescent service, universally enticing or widely reviled … a commodity contains defining linkages to capitalist production" (2007, p. 20). We may think of Dunky the Frog as not only an icon or representation but also a locus of irony between capital and labor, and perhaps between the global North and the global South. Like other sports logos, we may find Dunky the Frog stitched and stenciled on a variety of commodities from basketballs, jerseys, and tee shirts to beverage containers, key chains, and toques. The sports apparel industry of course is notorious for its dubious labor practices, squalid factory conditions, and outsourcing to developing countries (Knight & Greenberg, 2002; Donaghu & Barff, 1990; Klein, 2000). Indeed, the relocation of manufacturing to the global South has mushroomed in recent years, stretching across Latin America and Southeast Asia (Schiller, 2007). Whether or not Dunky proves to be the rule of global production or its exception remains to be seen.

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to seek out with certainty the production and consumption continuum within the global sports merchandising industry, there are some clear connections between wage labor and sports culture. These include sporadic boycotts of Nike products made under deplorable "Third World" labor conditions, the Canadian Union of Public Employee's concern for job security following the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver, as well as unforeseeable but immanent lockouts between professional athletes and owners (a conflict concerning thousands of wage earners in ticket offices, food services, souvenir kiosks, and even mascot performers). Here it is important to consider not "any particular occupation" but rather the "range of labor processes and interlinked industries needed to produce and distribute a particular commodity" (Schiller, 2007, p. 22). Whereas the postmodern politics of irony in sport may offer a site of representational disruption, it should not be confused with widespread emancipation in any economic or political sense. When the representation of a self-directed stereotype is recognized as a cultural commodity, its transgressive potential gets muddled in the complexities of class relations, wage labor, and economic disparity, issues that cannot possibly be resolved by ironic signification alone. All this suggests that Bourassa's use of irony is entirely ambivalent, lending legitimacy to both transgressive and conservative interpretations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored the political potential of using irony in a sporting context. We found that blogs and online forums provided a discussion space for certain issues. Moreover, such websites gave us a firsthand account of the dialogical effects of irony in relation to identity and sport. Although studies of irony are usually limited to an elaborate hermeneutics, blogs offered us a range of reading techniques within and across audiences. In theoretical terms, they also allowed us to observe the fallout of irony at the (contentious) intersection of identity and authenticity. Above all, the jumping frog discussion demands that any rigorous textual analysis account for the "ironic disparities between meaning and intent" (Norris, 1988, p. xii). As the jumping frog may suggest, meaning does not necessarily rest in the words of the author(s). On the contrary, "the undecidability of its referentiality means that the text is open, and so fragmentary, at every point" (Frey, 1985, p. 132).

Perhaps the greatest asset of irony is the extent to which it promotes cultural dialogue around potentially sensitive issues. As blogs indicated, the jumping frog raised serious questions concerning ethnic identity, the politics of authenticity, and the Anglocentric terms of representation in Canada. To this end, the jumping frog problematized the binary trappings of "true" and "false" identity embedded within Canadian bicultural fictions. Although irony marks the presence of multiple meanings, the identification of Dunky the Frog as an ironic symbol is itself a singular interpretation. As is demonstrated by the variation of online commentaries, Dunky is perhaps only ironic from a particular perspective. It was not ironic, for example, to respondents unfamiliar with the frog's Anglocentric applications. And yet the copyright to marginality in Canada cannot be claimed by Québecers alone without displacing the aboriginal subjects of French-cum-British colonialism. In this sense, abjection is quite relative and does not always lend itself to an absolute dichotomy of inside/outside. Incidentally, the Québec government has appointed the Bouchard-Taylor Commission on the Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences as a response to xenophobic outbursts against immigrant groups in rural Québec. In a similar vein, we might consider how the frog discussion (dis)locates, for example, a francophone Haitian Canadian.[3]

While ideologies of official multiculturalism in Canada subsume particular ethnic histories and struggles under the representative logic of pluralism, they cannot fully contain the real and imagined tensions between English and French. And yet the very articulation of these tensions in dominant discourses often appears problematically in a binary opposition, one that ignores a variety of complexities within and beyond "English" and "French" identities in Canada. The discussion of Dunky the Frog may question an imagined incommensurability existing between English and French, but it fails to explain nuanced complexities of neo-Québécois and outbursts of xenophobia directed, for instance, at Muslim Québecers wearing hijabs during sporting contests (Marotte, 2007). Such are the possibilities as well as the limitations of Dunky the Frog, a mascot that reiterates the historical positioning of Québec but evokes a problematic bicultural ideology. Indeed, complexity and contradiction are endemic to Québec's histories, negating the fixity of difference used to characterize "French Canadians" in dominant English-

language discourses. And so Dunky the Frog and public reactions to it reveal as much as conceal the complexities of multiculturalism and residual "bicultural" anxieties in Canadian cultural politics.

By questioning the constitutive exclusions used to maintain "normative" identities, however, the ironic frog can be used to explore the pedagogical potential of cultural synchronicity and the "in-between." Dunky may encourage scholars of sport to seek out the spaces of indeterminacy that are lined with progressive if ambivalent and alternative ideology critiques. Moreover, the frog logo underscores the extent to which identity and representational politics in sport are laden with irresolvable contradictions. Dunky invites us to recognize the complicity of even the most radical sport practices as "determining the limits of political possibilities, not as something that we can work to undo" (Ang, 2001, p. 185). We might think of irony, then, as a tension (rather than a harmony) that haunts the boundaries of ethnicity and the racial narratives of sport with the promise of uncertainty. In the end (or was it the beginning?), we may rely on irony as the infinite "process of doubt" (de Man, 1996, p. 166).

Notes

1. Incidentally, there is a long and problematic history of adopting the term "white nigger" as a rallying cry for separatist sensibilities within French Canadian literature (cf. Vallières, 1969). Since the 1940s, George Elliott Clarke writes, "Québécois intellectuals have frequently inked white/black racial metaphors to dramatize the polar conflict between liberalism and nationalism" (2002, p. 163). All this is to suggest that Bourassa and his jumping frog are embroiled in a politically tense, and sometimes racially coded, history of Québec. In a similar vein, Kjeldsen (1984) compares the problems of team integration faced by French Canadian Olympic athletes with those experienced by African-American Olympic athletes.
2. Notable francophone Haitian Canadians include, for example, Governor General Michaëlle Jean and Régine Chassagne of Canada's indie band du jour, The Arcade Fire.

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Conclusion: Reflections on Multiculturalism and Postmodernity

Postmodern narratives of race and ethnicity are highly ambivalent in popular media. On the one hand, as I have shown they underwrite a corporate multiculturalism that peddles the wares of cosmopolitan consumer culture through sanitized images of diversity. Under this "multicultural logic" of post-Fordist capital, the historical and political substance of "peripheral" identities and cultures are commodified into exotic fashion, world music, and ethnic cuisine, or as Cameron (2004, p. xxi) puts it, "dress, dance, and dinners". Competing postmodern narratives of race and ethnicity, on the other hand, offer a potential basis for a critique of the ideological conditions of multiculturalism as seen in the texts of my dissertation which turn against the liberal pluralism that brings them into existence. Under this light, postmodernism represents not only the historical, political, and economic antecedents of multiculturalism in North America, but also a possible foundation for its immanent critique. If critical multiculturalism "interrogates the construction of difference and identity in relation to radical politics" the postmodern presence of parody, pastiche, irony, self-reflexivity, and fragmentation may offer important and novel tools of deconstruction within a wider antiracist pedagogy (McLaren, 1994, p. 53).

In this concluding essay, I attempt to tease out the existing relationship between the multicultural narratives found in stand-up comedy, science fiction, and sports that were identified in earlier chapters and to provisionally respond to the question of whether postmodern critique effectively challenges the multicultural imaginary of contemporary race politics in North America. The narratives discussed previously are all preoccupied with the representational politics of race and ethnicity. They also rely on a postmodern aesthetic that is ambivalent and controversial but potentially critical. It is the self-reflexivity and uncertainty of each text that in part allows for identification of immanent contradictions within multiculturalism and the racial politics of the post-civil rights era. The narratives, in other words, may be read alongside and against one another as a series of reflections on the problems and possibilities of racial and ethnic identity formations. As such, they offer a particular response to multiculturalism that: (a) challenges the fixity of identity differences but (b) attempts to deal with the unresolved tensions of pre-multicultural political struggles. I flesh out this tension in greater detail to articulate a critical postmodern perspective and offer some provisional answers, personal reflections, theoretical contributions, as well as future research directions.

Answers of the Provisional Kind

As the above case studies suggest, parody, pastiche, irony, self-reflexivity, and fragmentation are useful terms to describe a particular postmodern condition, one that also overlaps with the shifting and residual racial politics of multiculturalisms. Such a critique of pluralism and diversity is such that questions of "authentic" identity and representation are directed toward the racial and ethnic categories petrified by various multicultural ideologies. As such, postmodern politics help us understand some of the critical multicultural visions found in

stand-up comedy, science fiction films, and sports. While these particular settings are by no means the only sites of postmodern contradictions, they provide a glimpse of the range and diversity within popular fields of representation. Whereas postmodern narratives complicate identity and the processes of identification in ways that evoke laughter (Race Comedy), they also problematize identity-based politics in ways that provoke anger and resentment (Dunky the Frog). In other cases, postmodern simulation opens identity to various sociohistorical positions that are both progressive and conservative at the same moment (*I, Robot*).

So in the end, can postmodern modes of expression be used reflexively and recursively to critique such elements of the postmodern condition as contemporary multiculturalism and racial and ethnic politics? As a critical framework, postmodernism is an insightful but not unproblematic way of understanding and responding to multiculturalism. Although the "postmodern" offers a language with which to unpack a series of economic, cultural, and political changes overlying the development of multiculturalism in North America, it is always one step from slipping into an unfettered celebration of "diversity" in the marketplace. These inconsistencies and instabilities speak to the many forms of postmodernism and the disparate claims to truth and moral authority made under its name. Some authors have tried to categorize these differences. Peter McLaren (1993), for example, identifies a "ludic postmodernism" that reduces the world to representation by collapsing real politics into isolated moments of parody, pastiche, and fragmentation whilst a second "resistant postmodernism" is able to account for material inequality in relation to the totalizing structures of domination and corporate multiculturalism. As a form of critique, ludic postmodernism, McLaren contends, "rests its case on interrogating specific and local enunciations of oppression but often fails to analyze such enunciations in relation to dominating structures of oppression" (1993, p. 124). His separation of ludic from resistant, representation from reality and ideology from material culture, however, is somewhat problematic. As a critical response to multiculturalism, McLaren's "totalizing" strategy privileges a resistant version of postmodernism over the ludic, neglecting any moments of pedagogical overlap.

Irony, parody, pastiche, and simulation may be ludic, but they also offer an important means of re-presenting and recycling racial and ethnic stereotypes cultivated in part by the rhetoric of liberal pluralism. The performers of race comedy, for instance, draw attention to the latent problems of multiculturalism by imitating racial and ethnolinguistic stereotypes. They also foreground the ways in which race and ethnicity become meaningful through representations of gender, labor, and class politics. In other words, "under the articulated, written, organized surface of the narrative there exists a certain energy that can alternatively disrupt the surface layer or pull together and unify seemingly contradictory or discontinuous narrative modes" (Lionnet, 1989, p. 22). Through a contextual cultural studies approach, these postmodern narratives of race and ethnicity may be channeled in meaningful ways that are sensitive to the political, historical, and economic conditions in which they are embedded. Above all, the ironic and intertextual mode of address used by some stand-up comics may negotiate the imagined homogeneity of ethnopolitical groups that comprise a multicultural "mosaic."

In other settings, the stereotype returns through pastiche and allegory to draw attention to unresolved political struggles that are otherwise obfuscated and understated by

dominant discourses of multiculturalism. In relation to the jumping frog mascot, for example, pastiche may be used to reiterate residual bicultural politics in Canada and exercise suspicion toward liberal pluralism and the rhetoric of equal representation. In relation to *I, Robot*, simulation and racial allegory may be used to envision "futuristic" subjectivities and post-racist desires of reconciliation embedded nonetheless within the historical dimensions of slavery in America. And yet these postmodern narratives are in danger of replicating without revising binary oppositions and bicultural mythologies that were never entirely coherent in the first place. Whereas the discursive tensions existing between racial dualisms often subsume the distinctions and contradictions within identity categories, they also guard against a celebration of multiculturalism as a total progression from the racist violence of bygone eras. If postmodernism informs the logic of pluralism as a celebration of diversity, the postmodern collapse of history may work to debunk the myth of historical progress perpetuated by multiculturalism itself. As the case studies suggest, multiculturalism does not necessarily resolve the political antagonisms that precede it. Instead, "an ambiance of cultural diversity … can serve to obscure the fact that nothing at all has changed for the diverse populations in question" (Wallace, 1994, p. 259).

A postmodern framework helps to explain the ambivalence with which racial and ethnic identities emerge in some of the multicultural visions of popular culture. Although identity has long been considered an essential site of political empowerment, certain postmodern narratives of race and ethnicity suggest otherwise. Indeed, the multicultural visions of stand-up comedy, science fiction, and sports may present identity as a potential source of dispossession. This is not to deny the political efficacy of the subject in its entirety; rather, it is to acknowledge the limitations of an identity that is incomplete and determined by an exclusion of alterity (Butler, 1990; McRobbie, 1994). Indeed, the modern political subject tends to rest on a series of binary oppositions endemic to the Enlightenment project including rational/irrational, subject/object, colonizer/colonized, and male/female dualisms. As Ben Carrington observes, "For those of us still committed to and interested in the emancipatory potential that claims to identity can afford, a greater degree of critical engagement with the pitfalls of identity is required" (2007, p. 61). Narratives of race and ethnicity found in stand-up comedy, science fiction, and sports may work over and against the modernist notion of a plenary political subject unsullied by paradox and division. They are alive to the contradictory realities of embodiment and the often-alienating consequences of identity politics predicated on an incontrovertible subject position. Above all, a postmodern critique of multiculturalism draws attention to the slippages of meaning in language and representation whilst maintaining the importance and indispensability of both.

If ambivalence is embedded at the heart of postmodern representations, however, it also underlies racism, imperialism, and the "colonial dimensions of multiculturalism" (Gunew, 2004). As postcolonial critics have suggested, "the ethnic other is often fetishized and held up as a bearer of what the imperialist is not supposed to desire, yet secretly covets" (List, 1996, p. 14-15). Whereas colonialist encounters were often defined by fear and fascination current forms of racism operate with a similar logic of aversion: the public rejection and private fermentation of racist desires. Such a disavowal underscores the ambivalence of white disidentification

articulated by *I, Robot*, the Senate's apology, and the Killen conviction discussed in Chapter Three. In each event "white racial ambivalence is the unwitting host of certain generous impulses as well as of an inability to acknowledge the fascination with racial difference on which they are partly based" (Lott, 1997, p. 208). Indeed, ambivalence defines the concomitant practices of integration and assimilation premised on a notion of fixed ethnic difference within current multicultural settings. As Sara Ahmed explains, "Incorporation and expulsion can both work simultaneously to fetishize the stranger as the origin of difference" (2000, p. 113). To this end, ambivalence is not only a site of power but also a site of entrapment (Ang, 2001; Chow, 2002).

As these idiosyncrasies might suggest, it is difficult but imperative to distinguish between "the violating ambivalences of racism" outlined above and the "interruptive juxtapositions" (Werbner, 1997, p. 235). Whereas the ambivalence of racism emerges from a static conception of ethnic otherness, the ambivalence of critical multiculturalism is "about friction and tension … and incommensurability, about the contestations and interrogations that go hand in hand with … heterogeneity, diversity and multiplicity" (Ang, 2001, p. 200). In the context of postmodern representation and radical politics, ambivalence is used to present the particular ethnic (and in some cases post-white) subject both inside and outside of dominant racial ideologies, problematizing any obvious distinctions between real and imitation. As Trinh Minh-ha writes, this ambivalence is "strength to resist collapsing complex and contradictory material into an orderly whole" (cited in Ang, 2001, p. 146). This is not an absolute negation of identity as a site of political empowerment; rather, it is an invitation to seek out the fractures and fissures from which strategic essentialism and coalitionist practices may emerge. The purpose of a critical postmodern approach to multiculturalism, then, is to offer "a plurality of radical critiques" rooted in a self-reflexive understanding of identity as precarious, indeterminate but at last compulsory (Poster, 1989, p. 106).

Postmodern narratives of identity, however, operate differently in relation to subject positionings and sociohistorical contexts. As the case studies suggest, the vicissitudes of class, race, gender, and sexuality are expressed in combination with one another, but not always in equal proportions across all settings. Some stand-up comics, for instance, use vocal impersonations to illustrate how racial identities emerge through gendered and diasporic expressions. These impersonations, however, take place under the conditions of pervasive copyright laws and concentrated media ownership and distribution, suggesting that critical and corporate versions of multiculturalism often overlap in complex and contradictory ways. In a different postmodern setting, *I, Robot* relies on simulation, fragmentation and allegory to explore a post-human identity in ways that resemble current white racial projects. Here postmodern narratives of race and ethnicity are inseparable from discussions of late capitalism, labor, and the political economy of simulation technology. And while the jumping frog mascot of Québec City resembles a postmodern style of irony it is also a site of contradictory political possibilities not unrelated to market multiculturalism. As such, a critical postmodern approach must account for the shifting economic terrain that facilitates and delimits the formation of seemingly novel subject positionings. While the case studies are slightly different from one another, they might offer an understanding of identity in a neoliberal context without

"collapsing the demands for social justice … into a false universalism of a reified class identity" (Carrington, 2007, p. 61).

There is no necessary connection between a critical multicultural framework and the postmodern sensibilities of irony, parody, pastiche, and simulation. Self-directed stereotypes and imitations challenge but also reinforce essentialized understandings of identity. Although postmodern parody may draw attention to the instability and inaccuracy of multicultural representations, it may also minimize the political concerns of marginalized groups and the material stakes of recognition. Incidentally, I write this summary during the debut of a television series called *Cavemen*, a satire of the hardships of discrimination experienced by a group of Cro-Magnon minorities living in present-day America. (Oddly, one of the cave-characters is working on his Ph.D. titled, "Beyond Dualisms".) Meanwhile the local cinema features a remake of John Waters' *Hairspray* (1988), a spoof of *Grease* that depicts the struggle for racial integration in 1960s Baltimore. Here pastiche offers a potential ideology critique that recycles a series of black and white stereotypes. Evidently, there are no promises that an antiracist politics will emerge from the "double-voiced" discourse. There is only a possibility, one that may host a variety of political positions. (One is reminded of the inherent ironies of the privileged "victim" expressed through discourses of white male backlash.) Alongside this possibility, however, is "*a mode of sustaining conflict in politically productive ways*, a practice of contestation that demands that [new social] movements articulate their goals under the pressure of each other without therefore exactly becoming each other" (Butler, 1998, p. 37).

Confessions of the Situated Self

To locate ourselves in our research is to forego a myth of an undivided identity and the fabled aspirations of objectivity. It is to approach the concept of "critical distance" in a way that shores up the distance without losing the critique. While underscoring important moments of self-reflexivity and social location, confessions of whiteness are preambles that direct the reader's attention to the speaking white subject. Further, some white scholars have called for an antiracist white subject in ways that unintentionally reprioritize whiteness (Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1996). This amounts to a white recovery mission that potentially displaces the marginalized individuals most affected by white racism. In a slightly different approach, I describe an incident that accentuated my own whiteness through a politics of discomfort. In doing so, it is not my intent to recoup whiteness but rather to explore its limitations in relation to irony and parody.

It was a rainy March day in 2004 when I met Sam and Walter for lunch at a restaurant on the west side of Edmonton. Sam, a nutritional recovery consultant, and Walter, a music producer, are both from the Saddle Lake Cree Nation. I arrived at the restaurant and was cordially greeted by the two of them. Once we were seated, Sam and Walter, to my astonishment, exchanged a series of "Indian" jokes:

What do you call a white guy surrounded by ten Indians?
- A Bartender.

What do you call a white guy surrounded by 100 Indians?

- A bingo caller.

What do you call an Indian walking a dog?

- A vegetarian.

I had known Sam and Walter for only a few weeks and was therefore quite jarred by the derogatory jokes that ostensibly reduced aboriginal peoples to savagery and shiftlessness. After the punch line, as it were, both Sam and Walter shared in laughter while invigilating my reaction. Was I to laugh in order to mark my inclusion in the group? Can white people ever laugh at the absurdities of a racist joke? Was I to reprimand the pair for perpetuating racist humor? Were the jokes reproducing or disrupting racist tropes?

I later determined that the jokes were told ironically. Perhaps the meaning of indigeneity – as signified in the anecdote by alcoholism, shiftlessness, and primitivism – was inverted to reflect both the fears and absurdities of the white culture from which the joke originates. (Incidentally, neither Sam nor Walter drink alcohol, play bingo, or eat dogs.) A further contradiction arose insofar as a joke that subjugates the racialized other was recited through the other's voice. Moreover, the "other" in this situation was in fact white. In a less obvious way, I was the butt of the jokes, which were used to trouble First Nation stereotypes and the white racist structures (in which we are all embedded) that sustain but deny such ideologies. Perhaps I was assumed to be a complicit white subject and interpellated as a "club member" of white racism. Perhaps I acted as one by saying nothing at all, frozen with anxiety.

This indeterminate moment of antiracist humor has been formative in my meditations regarding race, ambivalence, and the situated theorist. My core examining committee is likely to recognize this anecdote, which has appeared more than once during my studies. It is not intended to bore or frustrate the reader, but rather to reiterate the undecidability of "double-voiced" discourses and (anti)racism. In some ways, the experience is a rhetorical Rorschach test, offering new roads of reflection at every hermeneutic bend. And yet, over the course of this project, there have been other moments of unease that evoke similar anxieties. My brother-in-law, for instance, routinely turns to racist humor to rouse my own antiracist desires, which apparently mark me as an outsider in certain circles of rural Alberta. I realize that I am only a "club member" inasmuch as I self-parody "big city" politics (for better and worse). In a similar vein, a longstanding friend of mine recently espoused discriminatory remarks for no other reason than to agitate his white liberal in-laws (despite his otherwise pluralist beliefs). What might these people think of the narrative in which they presently appear?

Elsewhere, I catch myself slipping into ethnic dialects when narrating the excerpts of "Race Comedy," shameful of the slight pleasure I take in mastering the mimic's delivery. The (ig)noble cause of "knowledge production" offers no amnesty for what is always in a way harmful speech. I break from my studies to watch a *60 Minutes* report on "blue-collar" comedian Larry the Cable Guy, who quips of the asphyxiating wave of "political correctness" sweeping America. As he describes his humor as innocent and frivolous I take note of an elusive southern drawl, one that is lost in the interview but recovered onstage. I wonder if his performance of white stereotypes, premised problematically on racism and a "redneck" aesthetic, could be appropriated in the classroom as a critical multicultural pedagogy. Who are his viewers and how do they read him?

It is an allergic reaction to "whiteness" that underwrites much of my work. On the one hand, the slippage between whiteness and racism moves me to write myself against a trope of white supremacy, which is sometimes the subject of familial parody. On the other hand, I must declare my (English-Canadian male) whiteness as a site of socioeconomic privilege, ironically from the privileged spaces of academe. If it is difficult to index with absolute clarity the moments of "entitlement" enjoyed as a result of whiteness, it is equally as difficult to write against our own interpellated identities. In other words, an antiracist white subject (if one may speak of such an ostensible oxymoron) is only viable if rooted in a process of "becoming" rather than "being"; it is unfinished, its work incomplete, its praxis unending. It is a subject positioning that is relational and only as valuable to the cause of antiracism as the multicultural alliances it builds (King, 2005). Although whiteness is historically associated with a structural system of racism that includes higher wages, better mortgage rates, and increased access to education and housing, it is irreducible to these attributes; instead, it is a shifting political construct cut across by a range of positionings. And yet, as Robyn Wiegman has pointed out, the particular white subject who practices benevolence and empathy can never be celebrated as such without recentering whiteness itself (1999). Such is the paradox of the antiracist white subject (which marks it as a site of "becoming" rather than "being"). If this is true, the antiracist white subject must resist the platitudes of white exceptionalism, which is ironically a strategy of recovery practiced (in slightly different ways) by groups and individuals aiming to dismiss white privilege altogether.

It is my hope, however, that the case studies presented here will not only reiterate the political dimensions of popular culture but also raise the possibilities of generating critical consciousness through attention to ideological paradox, the politics of self-directed stereotypes, and the problems of postmodern representations. At the same time, "the recognition of difference, in and of itself, is not necessarily the solution just as the erasure of difference *per se* has not always been the main problem" (Mackey, 2002, p. 163). A potential way of overcoming these complications is by interrogating the impulse to overcome. That is to say, disagreement and agonism are symptomatic of a thriving democratic setting. But we must also challenge the ways in which difference is produced in and among racist political agendas that seek to contain and in some cases remove the ethnic "thistle" from the nation's "garden culture" (Bauman, 2001). It is important to consider the postmodern political possibilities embedded within the very discourses that naturalize and reproduce systems of inequality and oppression. After all, popular culture enables and inhibits political mobilization and social change in ironic ways that are often unanticipated by the culture industries (Kellner, 1995).

Theoretical Contributions

This project ideally has contributed in some small way to the theoretical intersections of media studies and critical multiculturalism and to critical media pedagogy through its particular focus on immensely popular cultural performances and film and television genres, which are sometimes overlooked as unworthy of academic study (King, 2002). As widely consumed artefacts comedy, science fiction films, and sports are important vehicles for a multitude of

ideologies. They may circulate meanings to audiences in ways that support and also disrupt dominant understandings of identities and power relations (Kellner, 1995). As such, the novelty of the dissertation lies not in the development of new theories and methodologies per se but rather in the enterprise of the bricoleur. I believe the originality of my project is the result of philosophical borrowing and "misplacing." This includes positioning certain literatures in different contexts and academic fields: expanding on the intersections of multiculturalism, theories of impersonation and the field of sociolinguistics; reading robotic characters of science fiction film within competing narratives of (anti)racism and redemption; placing Bakhtinian literary studies and the politics of irony in the context of contemporary sport. Each of these contributions is fleshed out below as a way of situating my dissertation within current academic dialogues.

Postmodernism offers an alternative approach to understanding the intersections of language, race, and ethnicity. Whereas many sociolinguists have historically explained dialects as stable signifiers of race and ethnicity, other scholars have drawn attention to the shifting terms of ethnolinguistic identity. The importance of Chapter Two, then, was the extent to which it brought key (but certainly not all) concepts of critical multiculturalism into a dialogue with the nascent literature of ethnolinguistic impersonation. The study also drew attention to the often incongruous relationship between racial images and racial sounds, a site of antagonism not often explored in sociolinguistic or film and television studies. As such, irony may offer novel ways of exploring and questioning the ideological constructions of race and ethnicity by drawing on multiple and interrelated modes of knowledge production (i.e., the visible and the audible).

In similar ways, the ideological contradiction marks a site of disruption and recuperation within science fiction film and the changing political climate of white racial projects. Several commentators have read the cyborg and robotic characters through racial metaphors (Gray, 1995; Short, 2005; Balsamo, 2000; Haraway, 1991; Sandoval, 1995; James, 1990). Some critics have tended to reduce the indentured condition of otherwise white androids, cyborgs, and robots to chattel slavery and imagined "blackness" (cf. Bernardi, 1999; Battaglia, 2001). Against these interpretations, Chapter Three historicized the emergence of the white monster of science fiction within civil rights discourse, which helped to graft the current conditions of racial politics in the US onto the white metaphors of *I, Robot*. Irony helped explain the contradictory and potentially problematic articulation of white benevolence vis-à-vis racial struggles by drawing attention to the interdictions of disidentification and disavowal. The humanoid robot, in other words, is an important site of cultural change, one that cannot escape the doubleness of its own identity.

Although postmodern and poststructural approaches to sport are quite fashionable within cultural studies, there is little work on the politics of irony itself. In response, Chapter Four outlined an alternative approach to reading sport as a site of contradiction, double meanings, and indeterminacy. It borrowed from sport scholars attentive to ideology and antagonism (Andrews, 2000; Rail, 1998; Shogan, 1999; McDonald, 2001; Rinehart, 1998; King, 2004; Genosko, 1999) to present the political potential of irony as a strategy of critique. There are of course serious limitations to irony, which are largely derived from its own limitless signification and the social location of ironic readers and writers. In other words, what is ironic

and playful to some may be confusing and offensive to others. To this end, my work offers the field of sport sociology a particular interpretation of postmodern theory and its relevance to sport as a cultural and philosophical artifact.

My discussions of ideology, contradiction, and racial identity will not deliver postmodernism from the purgatory of ambivalence nor will it guide us to the end of racism. The case studies are hardly revolutionary and they are not comprised of undiscovered academic topics. In some ways, my Anglocentered response to multicultural ideology is yet another Anglocentered discourse, one that potentially overlooks the insurgent spaces of multilingualism within and beyond North America. And yet the social actors embedded within my dissertation offer a condition of possibility, a site of critical pedagogy that is not only accessible but also enjoyable to scores of global viewers, many of whom are our students. As Hall (1981) writes, popular culture is first and foremost a contested terrain, one in which meanings and ideologies that shape the ways in which we treat one another and act in the world are cultivated and challenged. It is this notion of popular culture that inspires my adventures into the discursive paradox as a site of protest and empowerment.

The dissertation explored a critical postmodern framework as a response to the ideological conditions of multiculturalism. In a general sense, it merged key elements of Bhabha's "colonial mimicry" with Chow's "coercive mimeticism." It channeled the transgressive potential embedded within strategic cross-racial performances and placed it within the postmodern politics of the self-directed stereotype. In this sense, my work situated Chow's adroit description of ethnic interpellation within a slightly different postmodernist perspective, one that wades in the playful but not inconsequential possibilities of indeterminacy and, above all, ethnic agency. It relied on the ambivalence of Bhabha's mimicry to explore markedly ironic possibilities of self-impersonation, which have recently been addressed in the field of literary studies by, for example, Tina Chen (2005), Wendy Doniger (2005), and Laura Browder (2000). Influenced by these theorists, I have taken the complexities of self-directed stereotypes and the duplicity of identity and relocated them in slightly different media settings, including those of stand-up comedy, science fiction film, and sports.

It has been the objective of this dissertation to open a field of questioning rooted in paradox, polyvocality and a slippery deferral of closure. In this sense, Angela McRobbie's words are rather appropriate: "Characterized by intense internal theoretical conflict, [cultural studies] was always a messy amalgam of sociology, social history and literature, rewritten as it were into the language of contemporary culture" (1994, p. 48). A valorization of postmodernism, however, must guard against a fetish for alterity. As some cultural critics have pointed out an unfettered celebration of difference and "otherness" is the signature of liberal multiculturalism (Carter, 1998). A critical postmodern approach, then, must be recognized as a process of unending deconstruction, one that refuses to rest at the reification of difference by unpacking the notion of difference itself. What distinguishes the triumphant return of alterity in liberal multiculturalism from that of critical multiculturalism is the coveted notion of fixed (ethnic) difference. To this end, "identity is always plural and in process, even when it might be construed or represented as fixed" (Brah, 1996, p. 195).

Notes on Future Directions

Despite all these meditations the question remains what to do with the antagonisms within postmodern narratives of race and ethnicity. While perhaps no single answer would suffice, I may offer some suggestions for future research. Each of these directions maintains the importance of a tension between a form of political mobilization arising from an a priori fixed identity and the deconstructive impulse that challenges the very fixity on which empowerment is allegedly based. It is the tension that negates closure and resolution that is perhaps the greatest site of political contingency. In a way, a postmodern sensibility is the realization that "no representation, however complex and apparently exhaustive, is ever complete; there are always, in principle, further gaps to be filled, described or explained" (Werbner, 1997, p. 245). And so future research may be conducted on a variety of fronts, including audience interpretation, media production, and political praxis.

Textual analysis is undoubtedly incomplete; it can only provide a speculation of the range of audience experiences and interpretations. A future site of research would include excavating the ways in which irony is used as a reading strategy within audiences. Such studies might ask of the extent to which identities are created and negotiated through an audience's perception of postmodern narratives. What type of social capital is awarded to readers and writers of self-reflexive and self-parodic texts? How might an audience help us understand the importance of such queries? A potential context might include the wildly popular *The Colbert Report*, a satirical news program discussed briefly in Chapter Four. How is an audience able to recognize Colbert's satirical performance? Might this have something to do with his association with political comedian Jon Stewart? Is the collective recognition of the "double-voiced" discourse a potential site of political mobilization? Similar queries may apply to highly successful white comics like Larry the Cable Guy and Jeff Foxworthy, whose redneck routines were quite popular in the mid-1990s and parlayed into a short-lived television sitcom. (Foxworthy currently hosts a television game show called, *Are You Smarter than a Fifth-Grader?*)

On the other hand, future studies might consider the strategies and tactics of postmodern producers themselves. Interviews with stand-up comics, film producers, screenwriters, and even owners of professional sports franchises might offer insightful information on the intentionality and volition of social actors embedded in the conditions of postmodern representation. Such a study would shed much light on the political potential of postmodernism as a method of critique. What draws certain social actors to self-parody? What are the strategies of performing and presenting pastiche? How do postmodern artists of popular culture imagine their work, and toward what ends? What is the social significance of white racial comics and the "blue-collar" comedy tour sweeping across North America? Is it possible for whiteness to be self-parodied in similar ways? What might a postmodern whiteness look (or sound) like?

In a similar vein, subsequent research might explore how postmodern political narratives may be articulated by actors and activists involved in wider social movements. One such agitator is Reverend Billy of the Church of Stop Shopping, who routinely relies on irony to

perform sermons of capitalist "faith healing" at Disney retail outlets. The good reverend lampoons the false promises of consumer empowerment and emancipation through a genre of evangelism. On a related note, Stephen Colbert recently interviewed the object of his satirical affection, Bill O'Reilly (much to the audience's enjoyment). O'Reilly's trademark belligerence was largely diffused by ironic sycophancy, which often left the ultra-conservative pundit speechless and unimpressed. Here the target of O'Reilly's opposition was indeterminate, obfuscated, and dressed deceptively in his own rhetoric; Colbert left nothing for O'Reilly to seize in the satirical conversation. Perhaps there are important historical continuities between Absurdist Theater pioneered by the likes of Eugène Ionesco and Samuel Beckett and contemporary performances found in *The Colbert Report*, which is designed to be in some ways "a genuine expression of the irrational" (Doubrovsky, 1959, p. 4). What value lies in this historicization?

A postmodern politics in sport is equally defined by ambivalence and indeterminacy. Such approach does not result in the foreclosure of a radical political expression; instead, it offers an opportunity to discuss the power relations at the heart of sport with an acute awareness of overlapping identities, contradictions, and the possibilities of praxis. This is not to "celebrate identity as a necessary foundation for politics, but instead … interrogate its limits as a vehicle for social change whilst realizing the impossibility and undesirability of complete identitarian abandonment" (King & McDonald, 2007, p. 4). It suggests that another world is possible, one in which the self-engendered paradox may offer an immanent critique of multiculturalism, ethnocentrism, and well as class and gender inequalities. Most of all, a politics of irony includes a particular way of looking at sport that is sensitive to contradiction, antagonism, its own limitations and discordant power relations. To this end, postmodernism may be a way of imagining alternative methods of social change within sport and physical culture at large. It is a possibility born of self-doubt, one that repeatedly asks, What if …?

This seemingly nebulous question relates to a form of "strategic particularizing," one that challenges the fixity with which identity categories are taken for granted whilst "objectifying communities situationally and pragmatically, in relation to notions of redistributive justice" (Werbner, 1997, p. 248). And yet postmodern bodies in a sporting context, for example, are rarely received unconditionally. From the drag aesthetic of Dennis Rodman and the carbon fibre limbs of amputee sprinter Oscar Pistorius to the presence of transgendered downhill mountain biker Michelle Dumaresq, duplicitous bodies are highly controversial within modern sport (Shogan, 1999). Because postmodern bodies and the discourses in which they emerge are situated by competing ideologies, however, they are sometimes quiescent with practices of "displaced abjection" (Allen, 1991). Henry Rubin and Dana Shapiro's film *Murderball* (2005), for example, is laden with heteronormative bravado in its portrayal of a paraplegic rugby team. The "counter-narrative" is rather complicit with a hegemonic gender order and readily overlooks women as care-workers, laborers, and athletes.

Because of such contradictions, however, postmodern bodies also represent a larger cultural inquiry into the contested terrain of meanings, the "commonsensical," and the status quo. Postmodern bodies and the texts in which they may appear reveal the constructedness of normalcy, the ideological underpinnings of an allegedly natural world, and the chronic state of

crisis in which the "ordinary" is embedded. They may signal a politics of partiality, which calls into question mythologies of fixed difference and absolute identity as well as an economy of inclusion and exclusion based on rigid ontological criteria. And yet there are no guarantees that double-coded texts will usher in a new era of greater social justice rather than heightened postmodern confusion. If the indeterminacy of postmodern parody makes it possible for Nike to create a mock-website lampooning the claims of its pro-labor detractors it also allows my friends and I to place inoperative "look-alike" barcodes on inventory at The Nike Store during "Buy Nothing Day" (a minor practice designed to impede the efficiency of consumption).

In the spirit of postmodernism and the internal contradictions of signification, there can be no conclusive remark that is not always already deferred by another. Such openendedness and indeterminacy is the source of postmodernism's transgressive potential and its limitations. Whereas a postmodern critique of multiculturalism may offer an alternative way of contesting ideologies of fixed ethnic difference and the static racial body, it cannot help but reiterate in some ways the logic of essentialism. As a result, postmodernism's greatest attribute in the context of antiracism is perhaps the extent to which it marks a site of dialogue, uncertainty, and awareness of complicity. It also marks a site of social change, one that is compelled to carry its own disavowed history. It is in some ways a return of the repressed meanings often taken for granted in discussions of the "literal" or "commonsensical." That is to say, postmodern narratives can be used to exhume a variety of racist histories and insist on ideological continuity and relatedness over and against a zeitgeist of a "post-racist" era that claims to have surpassed the hang-ups of race-thinking.

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