EIGHTIES PEOPLE

Kevin L. Ferguson

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New Lives in the American Imagination

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Preface

This book presents a seemingly simple idea: in the 1980s, new kinds of people were invented in order to both contain and disseminate larger cultural anxieties. While the complex roots of these anxieties (whether social, racial, political, or technological) existed in earlier decades, in the 1980s a unique set of figures were named, defined, and discussed widely in mass media in order to shape cultural knowledge of the period. Thus, the surrogate mother, the crack baby, the PWA (or person with AIDS), the yuppie, and the brat packer each exemplify 1980s versions of the nineteenth-century figures that Michel Foucault called "object of knowledges": particularly defined bodies and ways of being that became the focus of cultural, medical, legal, philosophical, and fictional discourse so that they could serve a moral warning to others or offer a positive example of appropriate ethical behavior.

These objects of knowledge are in some sense a trick of language, a phantom that becomes real only when a new type of person is named and discussed. Fredric Jameson, humorously reflecting on the sudden popularity of the word "postmodernism" offers that word as an example of the decade's mysterious series of "lexical neoevents, in which the coinage of a neologism has all the reality impact of a corporate merger."[1] The newly named figures I consider had the same curious "reality impact": they seemed to give tangible shape to otherwise latent issues of race, class, and gender, whereas they really disguised cultural issues as media-ready figures who could more easily be understood as villains or victims. Recovering the reality of these stereotyped figures poses a challenge. My book is tangled in many different versions of the decade: the historical version which tracks the chronology of genuinely novel events, today's nostalgic version of the 1980s as a discrete cultural artifact to be revisited, and the self-periodizing version of postmodernism which tried to capture the current moment while it was still happening. The prevailing postmodern self-description of the 1980s as a time of play, surface, and waning of affect has continued to resonate in a current view of the decade as a lighthearted, superficial, pop cultural artifact. While a theoretical account of culture as being bored, ahistoric, schizophrenic, or superficial may have fit aesthetic movements in

art, architecture, or poetry at the time, I challenge whether this genuinely described the commonplace experience of life in the 1980s. The starting point for my narrative, then, is how the new, mediated "reality impact" of cultural ideas had significant ethical effects on real people removed from academic debate.

Thus, one aim of my book is to take well-known stereotypes from the 1980s as a basic starting point for the analysis of more disguised ideological discourse. By using these figures as organizing fictions, I take a wide, cross-disciplinary look at the 1980s that includes arguments over public health policy and inner-city drug use, Hollywood teen films, the publishing industry's invention of the "yuppieback," medical and legal intervention in the reproductive lives of women, and representations of AIDS and sexuality in comic books. In this way, my book not only tells individual stories about new types of bodies in the 1980s, but also reflects more broadly on what *U.S. News & World Report* identified in 1985 as America's "love affair with labels" and the ensuing value placed on self-definition during the decade.

While the focus of my book is the American 1980s, particularly as it is represented in popular accounts of urban space, readers will also be able to see how the cultural figures I discuss mark a larger conflict over the place of the United States in a global cultural network or, more specifically, how a sense of globalization raised for Americans questions of identity and self-definition. As I describe in the Introduction, eclecticism was the byword for cultural style in the decade, and this eclecticism often appears in exotic, foreign, and futuristic iconography. Considering the apocalyptic associations built into postmodernism's narrative of sudden historical change, the popularity of time travel narratives in films like *The Terminator* (1984), *Back to the Future* (1985), and *Peggy Sue Got Married* (1986) suggests a recuperation of the present by a return to the past. At the same time, the postapocalyptic theme in futuristic cyberpunk science fiction literature and films like *Neuromancer* (William Gibson, 1984), *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* (George Miller, 1981), *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), and *Akira* (Katsuhiro Otomo, 1987) foreground multiple, eclectic cities and landscapes with a bewildering array of alliances and hierarchies, suggesting a "future present" of accumulated eclecticism that reappears in new wave, postpunk, and even Walkman-toting yuppie fashion.

Many of these labels suggest another focus of my book: the notion of growing up in the eighties and the emphasis on cultural phenomena related to childhood, teen culture, parenting, and early adulthood. This theme ranges from serious political and legal issues, such as the advocacy of fetal rights and redefinitions of motherhood in light of surrogacy and "crack mothers," to more strange and popular depictions of childishness,

such as *Pee-wee's Playhouse*'s deft manipulation of the conventions of child behavior or the scare tactics used in antidrug public service announcements. Continuing a trend that began with the teenager's invention at the end of the Second World War, age differences are an important organizing category and social tool, and in the 1980s we see a special attention in labeling children and their relationships with parents. What new labels like yuppie, brat pack, surrogate mother, crack baby, and PWA offer is a narrative of lifestyle choice predicated on belonging to a particular group; put alongside each other they tell a story of the diverse experiences of growing up in the 1980s. Exploring the increase in more narrowly defined options of ethical behavior in the 1980s, and looking at figures who resist these labels, this book challenges readers to reconsider their own entanglements with the process of cultural self-definition. The Me Generation is the epitome of neoliberalism, and so I invite readers to consider whether these cultural figures could ever operate as subjects rather than only as objects. I also invite readers to consider how other cultural stereotypes in the American 1980s and beyond work similarly as objects of knowledge; I will no doubt disappoint each reader at least once for failing to include his or her favorite eighties text, but I chose the figures in this book because each was only first explicitly named in the decade and together they represent a new set of cultural options that were mediated in a particular eighties context of self-description and linguistic invention.

My book's introduction begins right around the fall 1984 when postmodernism burst onto the academic scene with the synchronous publication of a large number of special journal issues on the subject, by critics such as Fredric Jameson, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jürgen Habermas. Taking the suddenness of postmodern theory as more prescriptive than descriptive, I propose that by characterizing the present as a choice between the catastrophic and the redemptive, postmodernism creates the sense of a radical new moment of change. This sudden self-interest is reflected in the new vocabulary used in the 1980s to characterize the present moment. Hundreds of new words entered the dictionary during the decade, giving shape to shifting attitudes toward race, technology, and business. Of particular interest is the register of words invented to describe new types of eclectic individuals with novel relationships to class and race, such as "foodie," "shopaholic," "wannabe," and "wigger." This chapter concludes by presenting my book's organizing model, Foucault's notion of "objects of knowledge," which are new bodies that served as anchorage points for cultural knowledge.

In Chapter One, I tell the story of the new reproductive technologies of the 1980s, which for the first time in human history allowed for extracorporeal fertilization and the implantation of fertilized ova into so-called

gestational mothers. These new medical technologies were introduced alongside an "infertility scare," which falsely warned that there was a widespread decrease in the male population's sperm count and that single women faced increasingly dire prospects for romance. With pressure on women to be successful both in a career and as nurturing mothers, the new reproductive technologies promised a way to save these women by surrogacy. Here, the strange figure of the "surrogate mother" was born and debated upon either as a progressive validation of a woman's right over her body or as a disgusting example of contracted slavery. In the most famous story of surrogate motherhood, the case of "Baby M," a surrogate mother refused to relinquish her child after birth, sparking a custody struggle over who Baby M's "real" parents were. As a result, Baby M was placed in the midst of a public renegotiation of the basic definition of what being a mother meant—was it genetic, gestational, or rearing?

Chapter Two focuses on the "crack baby," an object of knowledge that ostensibly warned against the dangers to the fetus of pregnant mothers who used drugs, especially the newly discovered crack cocaine, yet ultimately came to delineate the racial boundaries surrounding women's rights to control their bodies. Focusing on the unborn fetus, a symbol of innocent victimhood, made it easy to demonize mothers as abusive and obscured the actual issues of drug use and women's procreative rights. The women accused in national news reports of violating child endangerment statutes were invariably black and lower class, and the concern over protecting unborn children from drugs turns out, in truth, to be a story of controlling black female bodies. After discussing the media myth of crack babies, I turn to responses by educators and advertisers, particularly the Partnership for a Drug-Free America's numerous public service announcements (PSAs) that tried to deglamorize drug use, "unselling" drugs by using the same marketing techniques that might influence drug use in the first place. PSAs like the "This Is Your Brain on Drugs" campaign are high-concept, marketing-savvy productions; yet, they ultimately suggest more about cultural fears regarding drug use than address actual facts.

Chapter Three begins with the linguistic abbreviations that both center and obscure the conversation about AIDS. The history of AIDS is a history of negotiations with the medical community in trying to be simultaneously descriptive and sensitive in labeling disease. "Person with AIDS" is an unwieldy expression that does not match the catchy simplicity of the other objects of knowledge. Even with the gentler abbreviation, "PWA," we are still stuck with a remarkable amount of acronymic condensation. Who is this new individual that he or she must be so carefully veiled behind a thicket of abbreviated letters? This issue is a particular problem in a less-discussed visual medium representing AIDS: comic books. Safer sex education had

been exclusively textual until 1985, when Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) began distributing sex-positive pamphlets that imitated "Tijuana Bibles." Ironically, Republican Senator Jesse Helms brought these publications to wider attention in 1987 when he used them to support an amendment that would prohibit positive depictions of homosexuality in AIDS education material. The parodic nature of these comics is a far cry from the documentary photographs that were criticized for victimizing PWAs. Ironically, though, the figurative nature of the cartoon image made them adaptable by both activists organizing to fight the spread of AIDS *and* conservatives seeking to stop a supposed "homosexual agenda." I conclude this chapter with a close reading of two collections of comics—*Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (1988) and *AARGH!: Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia* (1988)—which challenge visual conventions of representing AIDS.

In Chapter Four, I examine the most independent and selfish of the eighties objects of knowledge: the yuppie. After its introduction in 1984, the yuppie rapidly ascended as a significant demographic and political category. But the yuppie label was contested; not all yuppies agreed with the association made between the yuppie's seemingly frivolous lifestyle and the amoral "greed is good" point of view that fueled it. As a symbol of success and promise to other middle-class baby boomers who wanted to get ahead, the American media rapidly tired of yuppies, and before long yuppies were vilified as a symbol of corporate greed and blandly homogenous gentrification. A number of films and novels at the end of the 1980s illustrate this rapid transition by conflating the yuppie trope with the newly popular serial killer, first labeled in the mid-1970s. The most famous literary example of this is Bret Easton Ellis's novel *American Psycho* (1991) that follows earlier, archetypal versions of yuppie killers, or "yuckies," in the films *Vampire's Kiss* (1989) and *Blue Steel* (1990), which places the image of yuppie power and desire alongside a postfeminist narrative of violence and mastery.

Chapter Five continues to look at changing relationships between parents and children, focusing on literary descriptions of "brats" and "Mommies." The success of the "Hollywood Brat Pack" label bled over from films into the literary sphere with precocious novelists like Ellis, Tama Janowitz, and Jay McInerney. The Literary Brat Pack's phenomenal publishing success was built in part on the authors' high-living public image and appearance in Page Six gossip columns and in part on Vintage Contemporaries' invention of slickly marketed trade "yuppiebacks." A case in point is McInerney's best-selling *Bright Lights, Big City*, a quintessentially eighties novel whose real core is the narrator's mysterious relationship to his mother. The similarity of maternal themes in so many Brat Pack texts suggests an emotional content to the Literary Brat Pack that

other accounts, focused on the superficial aspects, deny. But while fiction by the Literary Brat Pack helped to create a new model of self-sustained, assertive "brattiness," this only came about by turning a prior generation's "Mothers" into eighties "Mommies."

In Coda, I return to the ethical issue of engagement raised in my introduction and propose that in the 1980s, the era of lifestyle, our objects of knowledge also start to become subjects. As with the sudden appearance of postmodernism, there is a seeming inevitability to occupying a lifestyle. Were the eighties the beginnings of the slacker's shrug to European, post-1968 ideas of political activity, or is Generation X's attitude a product of the failure of the American eighties to engage successfully with earlier political activity? Two different figures in the 1980s landed upon a similar solution to this problem: novelist Kathy Acker's *Great Expectations* (1982) and comedian Paul Reubens's television show *Pee-wee's Playhouse* (1986–1990). Both of these perform what Carla Harryman calls a "ventriloquy of childhood," which I use to explain an imitation of childhood that also calls attention to itself as a performance. In both Acker's and Reubens's works one sees a mimicry of childhood and adult behavior that seeks simultaneously to engage constructions of age as well as to navigate outside of such limitations by calling attention to the performed aspects of childhood roles.

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Introduction: The Love Affair with Labels: New Subjects in the Eighties

To update Virginia Woolf's account of modernism, on or about the fall of 1984, human character changed. Yet unlike Woolf, who did not see modernism as a sudden definite change, the mid-1980s arrival of "postmodernism" appeared as a radical break, materializing in the remarkably synchronized publication of a number of scholarly essays by important cultural critics and philosophers, including Fredric Jameson, Jean-François Lyotard, Jürgen Habermas, Hal Foster, and Andreas Huyssen. Along with the two most significant publishing events of the season, Jameson's *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* and the translation into English of Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, a number of significant academic journals published special issues on the topic: a Fall 1984 *Diacritics* devoted to Lyotard, a Fall 1984 *Minnesota Review* on "The Politics of Postmodernism," a Spring/Fall 1984 *Enclitic* double issue called "Postmodernism, History, Cultural Politics," a Winter 1984–1985 *Telos* about "Debates in Contemporary Culture," a Spring/Summer 1984 *Salmagundi*, and, the most influential, the Fall 1984 *New German Critique* on "Modernity and Postmodernity," with essays by Jameson, Huyssen, Foster, Habermas, Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser, and Gérard Raulet. Those interested in cultural criticism around fall 1984 could scarcely fail to notice the sudden new fad of postmodernism—a lexical neoevent that instantly dominated critical discourse.

The sudden emergence of postmodernism was not limited to academic audiences; even the popular publication *Newsweek* readily embraced it, using the word on six occasions in 1984 alone. That may not sound like much, but a survey of major American newspapers found that in 1980 only 21 articles used the word "postmodern." In 1984, 116 did, and by 1987, the number went up to 287.[1] So, while the idea of postmodernism first took root in academic journals around fall 1984, the term had a remarkable

presence in more widely read popular publications. Indeed, this sudden emergence reflects one supposed aspect of the new postmodernism: that it collapsed distinctions between formerly distinct cultures of highbrow academic journals and lowbrow popular media, leading Jameson to joke that the word's success story "demands to be written, no doubt in best-seller format."[2] Postmodernism was the hot new topic for the season, and yet, as thrilled as they were to be on the cusp of a new cultural moment, many commentators also wondered how the debate came to be so important. After all, the problem of modernity had been around for a century without provoking nearly as much committed, simultaneous excitement. Furthermore, commentators failed to reach any agreement about what the word actually meant. Was postmodernism the "cultural dominant" of a new form of capitalism (as Jameson had it), an "incredulity toward meta-narratives" (Lyotard's definition), a misguided term for the still "incomplete project" of modernity (Habermas), a new movement in architecture (Charles Jencks), a "mutation in Western humanism" (Ihab Hassan), new "ways in which we experience space and time" (David Harvey), a renegotiation of high art with mass culture (Andreas Huyssen), "a fantastic and grisly implosion of experience" (Arthur Kroker and David Cook), "the smooth operational surface of communication" (Jean Baudrillard), a "complicitous critique" in art (Linda Hutcheon), or merely "an exercise in gobbledygook" (*Newsweek*).[3]

With such a wide range of options, the new word easily offered something to everyone. As such, on the one hand, it signaled a new, universally shared zeitgeist; on the other, its Zelig-like range of possibilities pointed to a vagueness in this new spirit of the times. In truth, postmodernism was not so much description as it was prescription. While presented as a paradigm-shifting idea that, in hindsight, everyone was just waiting for, in reality, postmodernism was a historical category formed before its history had even run its course. It described the present as it happened and thus is as strange a thought as the idea that sixth-century European peasants might have conceived of themselves as living in the Middle Ages. Thus, the theoretical texts around fall 1984 which pretended to describe a radically changed, flat, affectless, bored, playful, ahistoric, ironic, dispersed, indeterminate, and superficial eighties culture were in fact responsible for creating this culture of feeling. Such sudden and compulsory acculturation to the postmodern anticipates more recent self-periodizing claims, such as the ones after September 11 that flatly asserted there was, overnight, a new, universal "age of terror" or an "end of the age of irony."[4] Thus, postmodernism's emergence demanded that individuals see themselves in new ways and in new relationships with the past. Just as the nineteenth century saw the beginning of a new mode of confessional, self-analytic writing, so too

has the approach of the twenty-first century created ever more specific examples of cultural selves for individuals to embrace or reject. For the eighties, this new kind of self-analysis and self-description came with a pressing immediacy.

In many ways, the word "eighties" poses an equal problem. As with the popularity of the word "postmodernism," the idea of the "eighties" offers a nice, neat container of historical ideas, promising a tidy ten-year span of thematically consistent material. Yet the ways in which we can organize the decade vary as much as the definitions of postmodernism do. To mark the beginning of the eighties, for example, one may point to Ronald Reagan's election (1980), the introduction of MTV (1981), the first space shuttle mission (1981), IBM's personal computer (1981), the VCR "format wars" and studio court battles (early 1980s), or AIDS (1981). And, if decades can ever be said to properly end (rather than merely be replaced by a new one), one might mark the end of the eighties by such historical facts as the "Black Monday" Wall Street crash (1987), the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), the Tiananmen Square protests (1989), or Bill Clinton's election (1992). One could end up with a historical dating of something like 1982 to 1992 (American politics), or 1978 to 1989 (international politics), or, with unusual and humorous specificity, *Newsweek*'s fiscal calculation of "six years, 11 months, and 15 days," running from Election Day on November 4, 1980, to the Dow Jones collapse of October 19, 1987.[5]

This last example is humorous but also reflects a larger pattern of seeing historical periods as discrete entities, easily demarcated by breaks: a desire for an "event," such as an election or a disaster, to mark off a significant change in the world. Recent cultural historians of the eighties, such as Bradford Martin (*The Other Eighties: A Secret History of America in the Age of Reagan*), Philip Jenkins (*Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America*), and Daniel T. Rodgers (*Age of Fracture*) all critique this logic, particularly the idea that Reagan's presidency sharply defined a transition from the 1970s. For example, Martin wants to move beyond "a profound Reaganocentrism [which], though partially justified, displaces many important actors, events, and movements" in the decade.[6] Likewise, Jenkins traces a longer political continuity in American culture by arguing that while "Reagan gave form and direction to powerful social currents . . . he did not initiate them."[7] And Rodgers warns how "too sharp a sense of break at Reagan's 1980 election simplifies and distorts" the historical record, "interrupt[ing] the effort to map out longer narratives."[8] However, while agreeing with the contemporary historian's warning against relying too much on breaks to make sense of the culture of the past, I argue at the same time that the sense of a historical rupture was a central feature of the postmodern 1980s.

Presenting itself as offering a brand new start in history, postmodernism, from the outset, evoked the end of history, with a choice among lifestyles that seemed to reflect either a doomed, catastrophic frame of mind or an ecstatic, redemptive one. The stark polarity of optimism or pessimism points on the one hand to yuppies, indulgent excess, and a new Roaring Twenties zeitgeist, and on the other hand to a Wall Street crash, double-digit unemployment rates, and sexual anxiety in the age of AIDS. How can a decade with such radical discontinuities be seen as a coherent historical subject? How can a postmodern anxiety over the end of history also be taken as a sign for the beginning of a new time in American culture? How did Americans in the eighties come to think about themselves, organize bodies of knowledge, invent new ways of living, and discredit old ones? The answer is in the struggle for self-definition in the 1980s, found beneath the limited options given to individuals to engage themselves and their culture. Postmodernism was one way in which the eighties looked at itself in reflection, yet there are other more specific models of an individual's engagement with his or her times, such as the media inventions of "crack babies" and "brat packs" and the medical events of surrogate mothers and PWAs (persons with AIDS). In hindsight, such new kinds of people might seem merely characteristic of the period, but these examples of cultural labeling tell a profound story about the ways individuals engage their culture.

Thus, if there is a way to engage the eighties outside of the two postmodern options of catastrophe or redemption, then it is found in the explosion of stylistic possibilities that took hold in the decade. No less a figure than Jean-François Lyotard, known in the 1970s for sober works of philosophy, could be found exhorting his reader in the 1980s that "eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary culture":

> [Y]ou listen to reggae; you watch a western; you eat McDonald's at midday and local cuisine at night; you wear Paris perfume in Tokyo and dress retro in Hong Kong; knowledge is the stuff of TV game shows.[9]

Lyotard's use of the second-person pronoun makes the issue clear: contemporary culture is *your* culture, and thus who *you* are is marked mainly by your particular brand of eclecticism, your particular intersection with popular forms of knowledge. Lyotard's description of the new postmodern subject echoes in fiction of the 1980s, as with Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985), whose precocious Middle American children are defined by how they juxtapose a global variety of consumer goods; for example, one seventh-grade daughter "took taxis to school, made phone calls to friends in Seoul and Tokyo. Abroad she'd wanted to eat ketchup sandwiches with

Trix Sticks. Now she cooked fierce sizzling meals of scallion bushes and baby shrimp."[10] Such accounts of eighties eclecticism raise a real question of ethical style; to borrow Lyotard's pronoun, "What should you do, and how should you do it?" From an educational context, philosopher Allan Bloom, in *The Closing of the American Mind*, lamented over how the embrace of heterogeneous eclecticism resulted in an overemphasis on lifestyle rather than ethics: unfortunately now "the respectable and accessible nobility of man is to be found not in the quest for or discovery of the good life, but in creating one's own 'life-style,' of which there is not just one but many possible, none comparable to another."[11] By imagining that the material fluidity of global cultural exchange could provide a wide range of new liberating possibilities for its eclectic subject, commentators of the period treat the eighties as if there was no longer a question of interrogating cultural self-descriptions but rather only one of selecting and choosing which of the many heterogeneous aspects of culture to adapt. Wear Paris perfume in Tokyo and dress retro in Hong Kong? Eat ketchup sandwiches with Trix Sticks in Seoul? The appearance of these choices falsely promises a freedom to remake the self in new ways, distracting from an older mode of self-inquiry.

"Read My Lips": Revising the Dictionary

But these new cultural possibilities first had to be named in order to be disseminated. Thousands of new words appeared in print during the decade; indeed, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), after publishing its monumental second edition in 1989, only two years later needed to publish an additional dictionary devoted to new "high profile" words from the previous decade.[12] Many of these words are colloquial expressions which now sound humorously dated, such as "dis" (1980), "high-five" (1980), "chill pill" (1981), "gaydar" (1982), "my bad" (1986), and the many slang words used to describe excellence, such as "def" (1981), "dope" (1981), and "rad" (1982). Other words with more serious historical resonances, such as "Reaganomics" (1980), "AIDS" (1982), "crack [cocaine]" (1985), and "glasnost" (1986), remain today linguistic semaphores for a whole host of larger social issues that lie outside of the word's denotation. Two other burgeoning categories of words new to the eighties are those referring to technology and computers, such as "download" (1980), "cyberphobia" (1981), "uninstall" (1981), "cyberspace" (1982), "future-proof" (1983), "double click" (1985), "channel surf" (1986), and "hyperlink" (1988), and those words relating to business and new forms of economic wealth, such as "outsourcing" (1981), "megastore" (1982), "spreadsheet" (1982), "multitask" (1986),

"McJob" (1986), "gazillionaire" (1980), and "bazillionaire" (1987). These last two words point to the excessive quality of the eighties and the one-upmanship of the corporate world; the dictionary holds many other similar examples of linguistic exaggeration.

For example, one register of words plays with the new "mega-rich" (1980) ideal of the desire for more "ka-ching" (1980) by appending the modifier "power" to familiar types of activities or accessories. In the eighties, one could be a "power dresser" (1980) by putting on a "power tie" (1984) as one headed to a "power breakfast" or "power lunch" (both 1980), of course "power walking" (1982) on the way while listening to a "power ballad" (1985), followed perhaps by taking a "power nap" (1986) or eating a "power bar" (1988) before a little "power shopping" (1985). These numerous compounds do more than merely describe a new type of eighties lifestyle; they work to create and sustain it. "Power shopping," for instance, which the *OED* defines as "shopping in a determined, extravagant, or aggressive manner, esp[ecially] when intended as an expression of one's wealth or social status,"[13] is first cited in an advertisement from the September 27, 1985, *New York Times*. The advertisement shows a Manhattan high-rise building with the large caption "Power Tower" at the top; surrounding the image are other smaller captions such as "Power Lunches" (listing local restaurants), "Power Shopping" (local stores), "Power Plays" (local clubs), and "Power Views" (listing scenic views from the building). Such an advertisement entices prospective buyers by having them imagine an entire world centered upon the value of power as a lifestyle. Indeed, the ad urges buyers: because powerful people "tend to their careers from early morning to late night, [i]t is a necessity, not a luxury, to have their homes within a block or two of their offices."[14] Those powerful individuals to whom the ad speaks naturally must do everything in their lives in a powerful manner, and the condominium logically promises them, with double meaning, "the true reward of power."[15] There should be no confusion whether "power" is the reward or is what is being rewarded; clearly the two are one and the same, linked in the total manner of living performed by the powerful individual. In the context of the *OED*'s definition, this kind of power is clearly "determined, extravagant, or aggressive," all interdependent qualities that need to be sustained collectively. That is, one who shops in a powerful manner must also eat powerfully, socialize powerfully, and observe scenery powerfully.

Along these lines, the most fascinating of the new words are the nouns coined to explicitly describe new types of individuals, or, in the case of "Zelig" (1984), the eclectic individual who contains many new types. Many of these have class overtones and the suggestion of an elevated status, as with "foodie" (1982), "shopaholic" (1984), "yuppie" (1984), and "brat pack"

(1985). Others clearly express social contempt, as with "poindexter" (1981) and "dweeb" (1982). Others have more intricate connotations, as with the many new words involving race: "b-boy" (1981), "wannabe" (1981), "hip-hop" (1982), "ghetto blaster" (a large portable stereo, 1983), "N-word" (1985), "basehead" (a habitual crack cocaine user, 1986), "gangsta" (1988), and "wigger" (1988). The large number of this last group of words reveals anxieties over race that are almost always contrasted with other words that evoke a mainstream perception of the affluent eighties. "Wigger" and "wannabe," for instance, explicitly invoke a white fear of commingling with imagined forms of urban blackness; linguist Sara Tulloch reports that "wannabe" "refer[s] to White youths in the US who dressed and behaved like members of Black gangs, but were actually relatively harmless."[16] Likewise, "wigger" is an even more derogatory term applied to nonblacks who appear to "act" black or who more generally "identif[y] with aspects of urban African-American culture."[17] "Wigger" and "wannabe" operate as warning words rather than as descriptive terms; they give a name to an ineffable cultural fear by flirting with attitudes of political correctness and the self-determinacy of individuals.

The best example of how the dictionary foregrounds the complex relations between ranges of cultural expression (music, fashion, diction) which are stereotypically identified with racial and ethnic groups is the creation of the dodging "N-word," an oblique metaword that directly gestures to the word "nigger" while outwardly avoiding taboo offensiveness. The "N-word," rhetorically shifting the word's racist referent into code, is a formation that tries to avoid racism at the same time as it acknowledges it. This is a word for people as afraid of language as they are sensitive to it. As with the case of "N-word," clearly the acceptance and use of such new language in the eighties, while giving voice to a wider range of styles of being, also obscures the relationships between individuals. Some of this is of necessity: it is not surprising that new words were invented to describe new things; for instance, "email" and "snail mail" (both 1982) are genuinely necessary to distinguish between new forms of communication in the decade. Yet do the "wannabe" or the "shopaholic" actually account for a new cultural body, or rather the desire from some other quarter to rearrange older modes of behavior?

Eclectic Subjects: A New Genealogy for the 1980s

One effect of all this linguistic invention and play is the suggestion that we think of culture itself as broadly eclectic in new ways. Lyotard's description of a heterogeneously eclectic subject was soon overshadowed by an

individual emphasis on belonging to one particular type of group and understanding others as they likewise fit into discrete identities. For instance, historian Haynes Johnson offers the "yuppie" as the best example of how "the American penchant for pop-culture definitions to characterize groups of citizens became a feature of the eighties."[18] The naming of types of people or social groups was such a fad that in 1985 *U.S. News & World Report* highlighted America's "Love Affair with Labels." Providing minidef-initions of types like "valley girls," "punkers," and "yuppies," the sidebar article accompanies a larger discussion of what is termed the "new-collar class," a supposedly new demographic group "up for grabs" by a "nation that loves to put its people in niches."[19] The article traces this explosion of labels to the large number of baby boomers entering adulthood. Because of the baby boomers' need to differentiate among themselves, "sticking labels on this generation has been intensifying ever since people realized their numbers—and then tried to figure out what to do with them."[20] Later, in *Fear of Falling*, Barbara Ehrenreich points to this particular article in decrying the "polarization of America" along class lines. She demonstrates how "in the mass media, class often appeared to be a way of life, even a set of options adding color and texture to an otherwise increasingly homoge-nous America."[21] The dread of homogenization, and the middle-class "fear of falling" that the *U.S. News & World Report* piece contributes to, shows how an individual's style of "color and texture" is a survival strategy as much as it is a personal aesthetic.[22] For the growing baby-boom cohort, such cultural labels were crucial alternatives to the peril of sameness.

Fiction and film of the period reflect this anxiety. In Philip Roth's *The Counterlife* (1986), protagonist Nathan Zuckerman longingly thinks of "America . . . where people claim and disown 'identities' as easily as they slap on bumper stickers."[23] Woody Allen's mock documentary *Zelig* (1983) has this American mutability of identity take shape in a man's physiologi-cal, chameleon-like response to the mere presence of others, as he uncon-sciously changes his physical appearance and clothing, transforming from a Jew to a Nazi to a Catholic, from a Greek to a Scot to a Chinese man. In Jay McInerney's popular novel *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984), the narra-tor continually describes his isolation in terms of a lack of a recognizable identity. Noticing a group of Rastafarians, he thinks, "[S]ometimes [I] feel like the only man in the city without group affiliation," and fancifully con-siders starting his own group in order to find a sense of belongingness: "the Brotherhood of Unfulfilled Early Promise."[24] Finally, college professor Jack Gladney, from DeLillo's *White Noise*, worries that he will lose his place unless he imitates what he imagines to be a college professor's features— beard, build, dark glasses, and initials for a first name. In each of these examples, the question of which style to adopt or what group to affiliate with is treated as an ethical one. That is, as identities become increasingly

easy to own and discard, it becomes more challenging to act ethically in the absence of a sense of self-consistency or a feeling of belongingness to something larger.

The stakes of an American emphasis on defining identity through labels are highest in teen films of the decade, especially in the work of the best director of this subject, John Hughes. Hughes uses teenagers to draw attention to the failures of parents and teachers, and while his young characters are often initially pitted against each other, they ultimately share a common problem in being raised in a time and place that overemphasizes labels as forms of identity. Hughes's exclusive subject in the first half of the decade—the suburban teenager with a dysfunctional family—captures a youth culture dealing with the fragmentation of the middle class. In films like *Sixteen Candles* (1984), *The Breakfast Club* (1985), *Pretty in Pink* (1986),[25] and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), adolescents enter a world complicated by a series of contradictions they must navigate. They generally do so by mimicking adult social structures, before ultimately recognizing common belongingness as members of an embattled group.

In particular, *The Breakfast Club* and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* fracture the idea of contemporary eclecticism by positioning characters against each other based on rigidly defined stereotypes. In *The Breakfast Club*, students from five recognizable high school social groups—a brain, an athlete, a basket case, a princess, and a criminal[26]—are each asked to write an essay on who they think they are. Instead of completing the assignment, however, they realize that they each embody some of the traits of their peers and that they had only been brainwashed to think of themselves as representative of rigidly defined, stereotypical roles. Hughes's next film, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, offers a more iconoclastic version of this basic setup, where high school senior Ferris Bueller is popular with a bewildering range of characters: the sportos, the motorheads, geeks, sluts, bloods, wastoids, dweebies, dickheads; they all adore him. One can only assume that the intricacies of these social groups are recognizable to the cognoscenti, like Bueller, and that fictional Shermer High School, where *The Breakfast Club* was also set, is seeing an increasingly heterogeneous and complex set of stylistic options for its students. Thus, Ferris Bueller's particular heroism comes from his ability to cut across multiple social groupings and an exploded network of relationships.

Michel Foucault on How to Behave

The figure who offers the most promise for understanding the eighties individual's relationship to society is Michel Foucault, who died in June 1984. Reimagining his dormant project of "a history of the experience

of sexuality" (there was an eight-year lapse following the 1976 French publication of the first introductory volume of *The History of Sexuality*), Foucault in 1984 turns to what he saw as the key problem of Greco-Roman civilization, labeled *epimeleia heautou* in Greek, *souci de soi* in French, or "care of the self" in English.[27] *Epimeleia heautou* is an injunction that is not only central to an individual's daily self-management, but which also precedes one's ability to master social relations with others. It thus connects ethical behavior to a larger relation between the individual and society. Around this concept of the "care of the self" springs a whole host of "techniques of the self," which humans have used to work on their "ethical substance," aiming to transform their lives into a "work of art."[28] The focus throughout all of *The History of Sexuality*, but made most apparent in the second and third volumes, is on the type of work that one can do in order to transform one's self.[29] Paul Rabinow, one of Foucault's American supporters, discusses the complexity of this idea:

> [T]he mode of being to which Foucault was committed is captured in his ambiguous formula "to release oneself from one self" (*se déprendre de soi-même*). . . . Foucault is pointing to a certain self-distancing, and he advocated an exercise of detaching and examining parts that need to be cared for and ultimately repaired or replaced. Thus, the most adequate (or least inadequate) rendering might well be "to disassemble the self, oneself"—a phrasing that highlights the material and relational aspects of this exercise, and introduces a notion of the self as a form-giving practice that operates with and upon heterogeneous parts and forms available at a given point in history.[30]

To clarify, then, the "self" is something one continually works on, rather than something that is predetermined. Furthermore, one can work on the self differently during different points in history. Thought of this way, analyzing "the self" is not purely a historical exercise (what forms of self-relationship existed in the past?), but rather an ethical question with implications for the eighties (what forms of the self have been recently created and how have they been used?).

What changes through different periods of time are the "techniques" that are available for individuals to use in creating their selves. For Foucault, these techniques are subtle, and tend to reveal what would at first seem to be a contradiction. As an example, Foucault discusses how Greek culture codified a paradoxical attitude toward sexual conduct by "stylizing" dietetic regimen. Claiming that the Greeks "never imagined that pleasure was in itself an evil," Foucault notes how nonetheless "their doctors worried over the relationship between sexual activity and health."[31] But rather than develop religious or legal prohibitions against certain

sexual practices, the Greeks focused on creating models for how to care for one's body that were "more 'dietetic' than 'therapeutic,'" for example, the advice to eat warm foods in the winter to achieve balance.[32] In other words, instead of a proscribed *moral* response, the Greeks created a lived *ethical* one. In demonstrating this, Foucault wants us to notice that Greek culture solved a problem of sexual behavior not by struggling to eliminate "pathological" forms of sexuality, but rather by "integrating" sexuality "into the life of the body."[33] As a result, we are able to see how an individual's behavior is less a product of rules and regulations that oppress them, and more a result of the cultural advice and "style" that individuals might be made to willingly adopt.

There is, of course, a catch, and that is that one cannot study one's own ethical "techniques" unless one is first created as an "object of knowledge"—something that can be studied, outlined, understood, and fixed into place.[34] Because he works with history, Foucault is especially suspicious of arguments that draw distinct boundaries between historical periods and types of people. "One of the most destructive habits of contemporary thought," he says in an interview with Gérard Raulet, is "that the moment of the present is considered in history as the break, the climax, the fulfillment, the return of youth, etc.,"[35] and that is why one should "not seek to detect, starting from various signs, the unitary spirit of an epoch, the general form of its conscience: something like a *Weltanschauung*."[36] For Foucault, the problem with much popular history is that it works hard to draw clear distinctions, positioning the present against an outdated and obsolete past. Likewise, Foucault emphasizes that "we have been taught throughout the 20th century that one can do nothing if one knows nothing about oneself."[37] His solution to this problem is to look beyond the basic imperative to "know oneself" and to ask instead

> What should one do with oneself? What work should be carried out on the self? How should one "govern oneself" by performing actions in which one is oneself the objective of those actions, the domain in which they are brought to bear, the instrument they employ, and the subject that acts?[38]

In this passage, Foucault recenters a general, philosophical subject onto one's specific, cultured body, bringing artistic and technological questions—at heart, questions of style—to bear upon an entire range of actions, practices, thoughts, speech, and behaviors. By telling us that "classical language had a term for designating . . . an 'attitude' which was necessary to the ethics of pleasures[:] *enkrateia*,"[39] Foucault invites contemporary readers to ask what term they might use to describe their own

relationship to the self, their own attitudes toward pleasure, their own sense of belonging to new social groups; perhaps such terms as postmodernist, future-proofed, new-wave, new-collar, eclectic, transhuman, post-futurist, posthuman?

Emphasizing the "techniques" and "attitudes" by which individuals manage their ethical lives (and as a result demonstrate larger cultural and moral concerns), Foucault's work suggests another genealogy for periodizing the eighties. Rather than simply propose a new list of postmodern "techniques of the self" or a comprehensive new mode of subjectivity, I want to investigate the contradictions I see in the eighties eclectic splitting of forms of identity into the new linguistic, pseudodemographic groups discussed in the following chapters. To get to this, I borrow Foucault's phrase "objects of knowledge," by which he refers to figures that "were privileged objects of knowledge, which were also targets and anchorage points for the ventures of knowledge."[40] In other words, these "objects of knowledge" were literally new types of people named in order to demonstrate new cultural knowledge. Foucault had in mind four specific nineteenth-century figures: "the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult," each of whom served as a sort of vessel for new medical, cultural, legal, political, and social attitudes toward sexuality.[41] In this book, I adopt a similar methodological approach. Investigating not sex but the perverse love affair with labels, I focus, in the following chapters, on the five objects of knowledge new to the eighties: the surrogate mother, the crack baby, the PWA, the yuppie, and the brat packer. The critical and cultural strategies for fashioning self-knowledge in the American 1980s depend on these new labels. Through a range of texts—journalism, popular novels, literary theory, cinema and television, autobiography, comic art, legal discourse, and medical and scientific practices—new types of individuals were created, labeled, and then used to convey knowledge about cultural anxieties during the decade. In this way, the decade's discursive formulation of seemingly simple cultural stereotypes in fact conceals other changes in how Americans perceived social issues, especially those relating to race, class, and gender. Rather than see one new mode of postmodern subjectivity for the 1980s, there were literally new types of people named in order to demonstrate new cultural knowledge. Thus, each of these new types of individuals tells a complex story of American culture's self-conscious efforts to create, promote, or warn against techniques of ethical behavior. Examining these figures brings to light how the commonplace reading of the 1980s as a superficial period of little importance disguises the decade's real imperative: a struggle for self-definition outside of the limited set of suggested options given by recent postmodern theorizing.

1

The Surrogate Mother:
Sed mater certissima?

This chapter tells the story of the new reproductive technologies of the 1980s, which, for the first time in human history, allowed for extracorporeal fertilization—the implantation of fertilized ova into so-called gestational mothers—and significant advances in gamete cryopreservation. These new medical technologies were introduced alongside an "infertility scare," which warned, falsely, that there was a widespread decrease in the male population's sperm count and that single women faced increasingly dire prospects for romance. With pressure on women to be successful both in their careers and as nurturing mothers, the new reproductive technologies promised a way to save these women through surrogacy. Thus, the 1980s saw a revival of what was in fact a biblical-era technology: surrogate parenting. Margaret Atwood's science fiction novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986) is one work that made the connection between science and tradition clear; and while the supposedly new parental relationships were in truth nothing different from what had been imagined millennia ago, the science fiction trappings of in vitro fertilization (IVF) and the legal issues raised in paternity cases were. Here, the strange figure of the "surrogate mother" was born and debated upon either as a progressive validation of a woman's right over her body or as a disgusting example of contracted slavery. This chapter offers a close reading of the most famous story of surrogate motherhood, the case of "Baby M," where surrogate mother Mary Beth Whitehead refused to relinquish her child after birth, sparking a custody struggle over who Baby M's "real" parents were. In 1986, the New Jersey Supreme Court's hearing of the case brought larger attention, and the court was asked to determine the legal validity of surrogacy contracts, the confusing rights and responsibilities of each of the parties involved, and whether the state had an interest in regulating reproduction.

As a result, Baby M was placed in the midst of a public renegotiation of the basic definition of what being a mother meant—was it something genetic, gestational, or in the rearing?

New scientific and legal techniques allowed for a rethinking of the meaning of motherhood in the 1980s by creating a new type of object of knowledge: the surrogate mother. Following Foucault, this new type of person is a result of not only material scientific advances that are new to the eighties, but also new discursive legal, social, and cultural techniques of dealing with this technological novelty. Since reproduction[1] requires unequal investments of labor and time, one-half of the reproductive pair historically has been treated unequally outside of the reproductive paradigm. Feminist historians of science take this as a starting point to show a history of women's oppression that stems from a biological inequality in reproductive roles. Thus, an increased use of technologically mediated reproductive techniques aimed at women's bodies strongly "reinforces the already near-compulsory cultural bias toward maternity."[2] The result is a further ambivalence in late seventies and early eighties feminist discourse about America's entrenched pronatalism, charted in Nancy J. Chodorow and Susan Contratto's "The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother," which argues that even positive feminist writers such as Nancy Friday, Judith Arcana, Dorothy Dinnerstein, and Adrienne Rich share a negative "belief in the all-powerful mother [which] spawns a recurrent tendency to blame the mother on the one hand, and a fantasy of maternal perfectibility on the other."[3] It is against this early eighties version of the all-powerful yet marginalized mother that new scientific techniques measure themselves.

One example of earlier feminist ambivalence regarding reproductive technologies is the response to the introduction of oral contraception in the 1950s.[4] The reproductive choice that the pill allows women profoundly advanced thinking about bodily rights. Like the pill, the new reproductive technologies of the 1980s threatened to upset traditional reproductive roles and resulted in similar social anxieties, such as an increase in female promiscuity, destruction of the family, and a lessening of the population. In the case of the later reproductive technologies, however, the pill's meaning is reversed: while the pill allowed women in the sixties to have sex without reproduction, the new reproductive techniques of the eighties allowed reproduction without sex. The new theme of surrogacy thus especially tweaked the anxieties of conservative social norms having to do with "family values" during the decade.

The simplest way that public discourse shaped the themes of surrogacy was as a question of women's rights. On the one hand, if science can erase sexual difference in the reproductive roles, then women should embrace such science as a way to restore equality. On the other hand, the scientific

erasure of biological difference, controlled by male scientists and legislators, takes away a woman's fundamental right to her own body. Further, while a new technology might enable a woman, for instance, to make money selling reproductive material, it might also result in another group of women from whom these products are exploited. Balancing motherhood as something more than an "activity" without falling into a biological determinist model is thorny because, as Valerie Hartouni observes, "particularly during the 1980s, public discourse and debate have been obsessively preoccupied with women and fetuses. The 1980s began, need we remind ourselves, in a flurry of antiabortion, antigay, anti-ERA [Equal Rights Amendment], profamily, prolife, pro-American rhetoric."[5] This flurry of rhetoric continued throughout the decade, matched by feminist interrogations of traditional notions of mothering and the feeling that "we are now faced in the 1980s with a situation in which all aspects of reproduction have come under the command of science."[6] The sad result is that in redefining the possibilities of women's bodies, the new reproductive techniques reinforced the limited identification of women with only either infertile or fecund bodies.

We thus might be surprised to find that these new reproductive techniques turn out to not be "new" at all.[7] While there were some new scientific achievements, the majority of the "new reproductive technologies" that captured public attention were in fact just new ways to describe old things. For example, as everyone who writes about surrogate motherhood is quick to point out that surrogacy has biblical precedents in the story of Abraham, whose infertile wife Sarah offered her handmaid Hagar to Abraham in order to bear him a child.[8] Fictionalizing that tale in the near future, Margaret Atwood's 1986 novel *The Handmaid's Tale* has been called a "speculative ethnography of the present."[9] While the biblical tale might at first sound strange to modern ears, Atwood shows how quickly a chauvinistic society would fall back on it. A more fantastic version of surrogacy is in Octavia Butler's 1987 novel *Dawn*, where alien genetic engineers mediate in human reproduction. This novel overlaps futuristic technology with the historical framework of slavery to address similar feminist issues as Atwood. Discussing the fascination with the Genesis story, E. Ann Kaplan suggests that surrogacy may be appealing not because it seems futuristic, but rather because it "is old and does not actually require any medical sophistication."[10] The surrogate narratives Kaplan examines each have strong ritualistic aspects and a decided lack of medical sophistication, such as the one involving a Thanksgiving turkey baster. A legal critic argues more bluntly of an important surrogacy case that "the common assertion that surrogacy involves new science and medical technology is nonsense. . . . The novelty in the method is legal."[11] Likewise, the federal

government decided that "surrogate motherhood is more a social solution to infertility than it is a medical technology"; it is "more a reproductive arrangement than a reproductive technology."[12] Or, as sociologist Barbara Katz Rothman cynically puts it, "the business of 'surrogacy' has nothing to do with scientific progress, and everything to do with marketing."[13] After the shock of novelty wears off and the confusion between sociolegal arrangements and scientific promise is clarified, we clearly see that the futuristic aspects of surrogacy are an easy distraction from the deeper-rooted discursive legal, social, and cultural issues that surrogacy disguises.

A Novel Uncertainty: Rumpelstiltskin and Family Romances

Mary Beth Whitehead, the surrogate mother in the landmark "Baby M" case, reprints in her authorized narrative a sympathetic letter to the editor of the *New York Times*. The letter uses the fairy tale of Rumpelstiltskin to make a moral comparison between the "compassionate" Rumpelstiltskin (who allowed the Queen to keep the child promised to him) and the "harsh and unrelenting" evil judge in the Baby M case (who wanted to take the child away from its mother).[14] However, this letter writer's attempt to use the Rumpelstiltskin tale to point out a simple moral ignores many details of the original version. In the Grimm Brothers' "Rumpelstiltskin," for example, the manikin does not willingly give the child to the Queen, but rather is so angry at being tricked by her that he stamps his right leg so far into the ground that he tears himself in two when he pulls on his left one.[15] The letter also omits the detail that the Queen was originally but a poor miller's daughter, and that her marriage to the King only came about when she was able to show, with Rumpelstiltskin's help, her economic magic in turning straw into gold. When Rumpelstiltskin returns a year later to claim his child, the Queen tries to bribe him, but he refuses, holding "something alive" dearer than riches. When he gives her a second chance to keep the child by guessing his true name, it is only by means of her messenger that the Queen is able to do so. To be able to read a happy ending into Rumpelstiltskin's gruesome fate is a product of our sympathy with the mother–child bond. While this letter writer gets the story all wrong, she does see the clear analogue in the thematic conflict between the adoptive, promised father and the true, birth mother.

In offering to trade his secret name for the child, Rumpelstiltskin illustrates the role that naming plays in both fairy and family tales. This emphasis on fantasy and naming also informs how the new legal and scientific techniques impacted the psychological life of eighties surrogate families. For example, Gena Corea reports that women recipients of IVF "have fantasies

about the man whose baby they are carrying. They feel that sperm vendors are supermen—studs chosen for their superior intelligence and strength."[16] In consequence of such fantasies, infertile husbands are supposed to have a jealous hostility toward the child. Phyllis Chesler writes about mothers who give children up for adoption, describing how "birth mothers often have recurring dreams of their lost children, and they may even follow children on the street whom they fantasize may be their own. . . . Birth mothers often imagine that their children are either already dead or still alive but suffering."[17] The narrative exuberance of the fantasies of these eighties' mothers was evidence of a shift in feminist analysis of family structures, which had earlier focused on more on children than on mothers.

Especially important to this effort is Marianne Hirsch's *The Mother/ Daughter Plot*, which emphasizes what she calls the "family romance," which "describes the experience of familial structures as discursive: the family romance is the story we tell ourselves about the social and psychological reality of the family in which we find ourselves and about the patterns of desire that motivate the interaction among its members."[18] Hirsch's idea is borrowed, in part, from Sigmund Freud's 1909 short article "Der Familienroman der Neurotiker," translated simply as "Family Romances." There, Freud describes how a child becomes disillusioned with the idea of his parents being "the only authority and the source of all belief."[19] As the child grows, so does his disillusion: he discovers other parents, perhaps becomes jealous of siblings, or begins to experience sexual rivalry. "His sense that his own affection is not being fully reciprocated then finds a vent in the idea . . . of being a step-child or an adopted child."[20] The child fantasizes that his "true parents" are of higher social standing, and thereby escapes both his own lowly birth as well as his low opinion of his parents. Freud postulates that this all occurs during the time of a child's sexual innocence, but

> when presently the child comes to know the difference in the parts played by fathers and mothers in their sexual relations, and realizes that "*pater semper incertus est*," while the mother is "*certissima*," the family romance undergoes a curious curtailment: it contents itself with exalting the child's father, but no longer casts any doubts on his maternal origin, which is regarded as something unalterable.[21]

Now, having learnt the facts of life at last, the child's imaginative possibilities are cut off, in particular, the imaginative possibilities about his mother, who comes to represent unalterable "certainty." In this, Freud suggests that families narrate themselves by first establishing a gendered certainty around the fact of parentage.

By focusing solely on the child's discovery of sexual difference, Freud avoids considering how *pater semper incertus est* might also inform the mother and father's experience of the family as parents. In particular is the coy, Latinate way Freud describes the "difference in the parts played by fathers and mothers," which makes sexual relations the province of the law. *Pater semper incertus est*—"the father is always uncertain"—would seem naturally to describe a man's anxiety about the true paternity of his wife's children, yet here the tag is twisted to become a tool to help the child come to a certainty about the mother. In other words, the father's fear of the mother's faithlessness is displaced by the son's knowledge of the mother's faithfulness. However, in the newly technologized eighties, Gena Corea argues, "woman's claim to maternity is being loosened; man's claim to paternity is strengthened."[22] That is, paternity begins to be experienced in a tangible way, while maternity becomes more potentially abstract. Corea sees this abstraction as part of a larger patriarchal movement to recover men's claim to paternity, which had been weakened by artificial insemination practices and restrengthened by attempts to control women's surrogate motherhood.[23]

Now that a "true" mother is no longer *certissima*, maternity necessitates laws like the ones that govern genetic paternity.[24] Making things more complicated, different maternal relationships can be decided upon ahead of time in legal arrangements, a process that radically changes the concept of parenthood.[25] The idea of a contract for maternity represents a major blow to thinking of motherhood outside of a biological paradigm; indeed, the very fact that parties felt the need to protect themselves with legal contracts in early surrogacy negotiations points to the fundamental problem of surrogacy. In surrogacy, there are two figures who must decide how to split the task of mothering: the genetic mother who does not gestate, and the gestating mother who has no genetic link. The former is figured as taking advantage of the latter, while the heroines of surrogacy arrangements tend to be the latter. Under the new contracted surrogacy arrangements, men get what they want most (what they have always been denied: *certus*). In the case of gestational surrogate mothers, though, a woman's presumption of motherhood and consequent right to her child rests, ironically, on little more than her *certissima*. While this is enough to satisfy a nurse in the delivery room, as dramatic court cases evinced, new laws would need to be configured to resolve disagreements in these family romances.

Seeking to establish a framework for understanding the legal and social issues of the new family romances, the federal government's Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) published a 1988 report on *Infertility: Medical and Social Choices*.[26] This report sought to clarify the many misconceptions about infertility. One challenge was that excitement over

the new reproductive solutions made it seem like an infertility problem was also new, which might in turn have led to legal, medical, and moral permissiveness for the sake of dealing with a supposedly new problem. Another challenge was that the new reproductive techniques altered the obvious "certainty" of childbirth and parentage, and older paternity laws that addressed fathers would need to be reconceived to take mothers into account.[27] For example, previously, a genetic connection between a man and a child made the man legally responsible for the care of his genetic child (whether he intended or desired the child). In this way, a 1954 Illinois court could rule that inseminating a married woman constitutes adultery, even given the husband's consent. Nevertheless, this genetic rule poses problems for newer cases of artificial insemination, and the Uniform Parentage Act of 1973 (also the year of *Roe v. Wade* and of the first IVF pregnancy [which did not result in a birth]) made a crucial exception to the genetic paternity rule. The new rule of "presumptive paternity" holds that a child born to a married woman is also to be legally considered the child of the husband, regardless of whether he is or is not the genetic father. So, if a wife is artificially inseminated with her husband's consent, then the husband is considered by the law to be the father, and the sperm donor is not considered to be the legal father of a child conceived of his sperm.[28] Since common law makes it difficult to challenge paternity, adultery is encouraged under this new rule, since men can take biological advantage of the laws to beget offspring without legal (and financial) consequence. In the case of genetic inheritance, this is getting something for nothing. While the advantage of gender is clear in these kinds of cases, the new reproductive techniques of the eighties began to allow the same possibility to women.

As with Freud, the courts were very interested in the interests of the child or future child. In the case of anonymous sperm donation (the most extreme example of *pater semper incertus est*), for example, the courts had to weigh a child's right to knowledge of paternity with a donor's right to privacy. The decision is straightforward with something like a child's right to be informed of inheritable diseases, but the ethical dimensions are much more difficult when they involve the intangibles of family narratives and fantasies. OTA, for example, could easily argue that "if children were genuinely harmed [psychologically or physically] by the fact of their non-coital conception," then there is Constitutional reason to regulate IVF.[29] But OTA has a much more difficult time dealing with questions of the family narrative:

> should a child be told that his or her rearing parent is not the child's genetic and/or gestational parent, and also how he or she was conceived? Should information about a child's biological origin be kept on file? Should a child

who is not living with his or her father or mother be entitled to at least some information about this genetic parent? Should a child be entitled to know the identity of the genetic father or mother and thus be afforded the opportunity to contact this parent?

To these questions, OTA is unable to come up with any more acceptable an answer than to quote, of all people, Hegel: "children are potentially free and their life directly embodies nothing save potential freedom. Consequently they are not things and cannot be the property of their parents or others."[30] Unlike the apparently straightforward medical issue of inheritable diseases, OTA's philosophical questions about familial relationships reflect a concern with the child's moment of discovery, emphasizing the importance of a child's understanding of her genetic parentage.

Thus, we see how the new reproductive techniques must use a fiction, a narrative, to create kinship or relationships that were previously "natural." In this, the dilemma over the new reproductive techniques connects with a more general concern over the nature of authority, certainty, and legitimation in the postmodern eighties. Jean-François Lyotard's formulation of postmodernism saw it as a "crisis of legitimacy," like the legitimacy of certain cultures over others, of certain forms of knowledge, or of different strategies of representation. Anthropologist Sarah Franklin, examining "postmodern procreation," extends his argument to describe "the process whereby certain foundational distinctions or boundaries are breached, leading to a crisis of legitimacy: this process is occurring, for example, in traditional beliefs about parenthood, procreation, and kinship."[31] By connecting the crisis of legitimacy to procreation, Franklin shows how in the eighties, the question of authenticity, whether referring to something seemingly abstract like "information" or to something supposedly practical like "motherhood," is always narrated. Using fairy tales or biblical stories or Hegel to account for, explain, and ultimately legitimate new family structures shows how they are all, at heart, new reproductive stories.

Sci-Fi Sex: The Development of IVF

If the much older technology of surrogacy did become, in the eighties, a suddenly popular way of arranging new relationships,[32] then it was as a result of what was indeed a new technology: IVF, where "for the first time in human history, babies are being born following extracorporeal fertilization."[33] IVF is the broad term for medical interventions where fertilization of an egg (i.e., when male and female gametes form a zygote) takes place outside the human body. There are a few variations: the original genetic material can be from a couple (who can be married or unmarried), or

either or both sets of genetic material can be from donors (who can be known or anonymous). Furthermore, after fertilization, the embryo can be implanted into a married woman, into an unmarried woman, into a known surrogate, into an unknown surrogate,[34] or (speculatively) into an artificial womb ("ectogenesis" or extrauterine gestation). During the 1930s, artificial insemination and the freezing of human sperm were both first successfully performed, and the concept of IVF was first put forward in a 1937 anonymous editorial in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, "Conception in a Watch Glass."[35] IVF practice began seriously in the 1960s, despite initially seeming a scientific impossibility. At that time, "very few living human eggs had ever been seen before, the first probably being flushed from the oviducts and photographed alive by phase-contrast microscopy in 1966."[36] Here are some landmarks of IVF: the first IVF pregnancy occurred in Australia in 1973, ending in early embryo death. The first successful IVF baby born in England was Louise Brown, on July 25, 1978; the first IVF baby born in the United States was Elizabeth Jordan Carr, on December 28, 1981. Economics had already entered the picture; Noel Keane arranged the first surrogate motherhood contract in 1976 (his Infertility Center of New York would later play a role in the Baby M case), and the patenting of an embryo transfer procedure began the practice of patenting bodily products in 1987.

Throughout, warned one critic, these technologies dangerously "extend the possibility of a medical and scientific practice that outreaches human understanding and public control."[37] We can see this limited understanding of IVF reading the different stories of male and female gamete cryopreservation. Artificial insemination with frozen sperm had been imagined in 1866, in the case of soldiers going to battle,[38] but was not successfully accomplished until 1953.[39] Soon, freezing sperm became a regular practice and, today, sperm is commonly sold by sperm banks under FDA regulation. At first, however, the selling of human sperm was unrelated to artificial insemination or reproductive demand on the part of women. Rather, early sperm banks had, as their focus, the storage of sperm for men about to undergo sterilization or who were concerned about losing their fertility in a postatomic, environmentally hazardous world. The popularity of buying sperm, on the other hand, only comes much later; in 1988, OTA hazards the guess that "sperm selling seems to be socially acceptable."[40]

Contrary to the early success with freezing sperm, oocyte preservation (oocytes are cells that form ova) is more difficult and only occurred in practice much later. While one might see this tardiness as a gender bias that kept male scientists from seriously studying a woman's body, Gena Corea reads it differently, cynically noting that while sperm cryopreservation took some hundred years to develop, "there has been no comparable

hesitancy on . . . the conception of babies in laboratory dishes."[41] There are two scientific problems associated with oocyte cryopreservation, both reflecting a scientifically constructed notion of the "fragile woman." First is that eggs are thought of as more delicate than sperm, since sperm is compact and supposedly more focused. While complications with all forms of cryopreservation occur during freezing and thawing (not in storage), apparently female gametes are unable to undergo this process as safely as male gametes. Second, unlike sperm donation, ova donation is medically risky; retrieving eggs requires surgery, which entails additional risks and ethical concerns for women. For these reasons, egg cryopreservation was not at all common during the eighties. Yet, ironically, the same reasons against the freezing of unfertilized eggs led to the replacement practice of embryo cryopreservation (i.e., of freezing *in vitro* fertilized eggs). Since fertilized embryos are hardier than unfertilized eggs, it made more sense to freeze them; yet, in order to minimize medical risks, doctors would chemically induce ovulation to be able to "harvest" many eggs per surgical procedure. These eggs would then need to be fertilized while they are viable, leading to an ever-increasing number of embryos stored in embryo banks worldwide. The status of these frozen embryos, the potential liability of storage sites, and the moral and religious challenges to define embryos as living beings meant that oocyte and embryo cryopreservation had more fraught overtones than the relatively straightforward sperm cryopreservation. Furthermore, unlike with sperm banks, there were numerous challenges to ovum and embryo sales.[42] Part of the problem was a gender bias in the law; state statutes historically have not used the neutral word "gamete" to describe the materials of reproduction, but have instead used either "sperm" or "semen."[43] For this reason we see—concomitant with the attempted opening of the storehouse of the woman's body by means of IVF—a renewed interest in the story of sperm, following a more general social trend of what was labeled in the eighties as a "man shortage," "infertility epidemic," or "birth dearth."[44]

Saved by Surrogacy: The Infertility Scare

In 1929, the first "sperm count" was undertaken by two scientists, who found a normal sperm count to be 100 million sperm per milliliter of semen; this would provoke anxiety some 50 years later, when studies began to show smaller sperm counts—one as low as 20 million/ml.[45] A 1981 *New York Times* piece juxtaposes an alarmist report (Dr. Dougherty puts the average sperm count at a damagingly low 60 million/ml) with a dismissive one (Dr. MacLeod is certain that there has not been "any serious change

in potential fertility"), but after reading this, who would take a risk?[46] The next year, the Sperm Bank of California became the first sperm bank established for the use of single and lesbian women, a spermatic literalization of a theme sounded by sociological trend spotters: that a dearth of available men was leading to increased competition and diminished chances for romance or marriage. The most often-repeated statistic, according to a 1986 *Newsweek* article, was that "forty-year-olds are more likely to be killed by a terrorist [than to marry]: they have a miniscule 2.6 percent probability of tying the knot."[47] Anxiety over a decreased sperm count rewrites the medical story of mothers in the eighties as not a problem of access to oocytes, but rather one of access to sperm.

The "new" social problem of infertility compellingly figures in this anxiety. OTA reports that, in fact, "the overall incidence of infertility remained relatively unchanged between 1965 and 1982," which in 1982 was around 8.5 percent.[48] And yet, "although there has been no increase in either the number of infertile couples or the overall incidence of infertility in the population, the number of office visits to physicians for infertility services rose from about 600,000 in 1968 to about 1.6 million in 1984."[49] OTA does not provide statistics on infertility in women versus men; they view infertility, regardless of the cause, as the problem of a couple, not an individual, furthermore cautioning that "it is important to note that infertility is not only a personal medical problem but also in some ways a social construct."[50] Rothman puts this social construct into some perspective, noting that a new acceptance of single parenthood and of abortion also contributed indirectly toward the social construction of infertility: "infertile couples can no longer benefit, no matter how innocently, from the tragedies of young mothers."[51] Fewer undesired births due to contraception, abortion, or the acceptance of single parenting, coupled with the media's excitement over IVF success stories (such as the rare headline cases of quadruplets or quintuplets), resulted in an even keener sense that infertile couples did in fact have a new problem.

Yet, despite the supposed diminished sperm count, and perhaps because of the increase of sperm banks, infertility was figured in the eighties as mainly a female problem. Thus, the new social problem of infertility was both provoked by the publicity of new reproductive technologies such as IVF and in turn cured by these same techniques. In "curing" infertility, IVF complicates the meaning of surrogacy, since in addition to traditional, artificially inseminated surrogates, there are now "gestational surrogate mothers" who are not genetically related to the child they bear. This situation was first reported in the United States in 1985, nine years after the first "traditional" surrogacy contract.[52] The problem the new gestational surrogate mothers pose is twofold. First is a legal challenge based

on competing juridical, social, and scientific ways of defining of what a mother is: since motherhood now "can entail a gestational relationship as well as one based on genetics," it was not always possible to apply existing laws that had been developed to account for the uncertain issue of male paternity.[53] This situation was first dramatized in the case of Anna Johnson, a black single mother who delivered a white baby not genetically related to her, and refused to surrender her child to the genetic parents.[54] In a situation like this, OTA counts "five 'parents'—three types of mothers (genetic, gestational, and rearing) and two types of fathers (genetic and rearing)."[55] We can also add two more distinctions—"legal" mothers and "legal" fathers, who need not be the same as the "rearing" parents. In their efforts to decipher legal parental relationships, courts and legislatures have turned increasingly to the science that has provoked these problems. But a focus on genetics, according to prosurrogacy lawyer Carmel Shalev, leads to a "masculine ethic of 'right' that stresses a parent's biological tie to his or her offspring [which] should be rejected in favor of the feminine ethic of 'responsibility' that emphasizes a person's intention to take care of a child."[56] Rothman says more about the pitfalls of the "ethic of right," noting that the manner in which feminists "capitalize[d] on the value of ownership to gain certain rights for women" had unintentional effects as it created an "owned body," which in turn could create an "owned child."[57] By moving away from a masculine focus on the genetic rights of the body, it may be possible to find in gestational surrogate mothers a new ethic of responsibility that is still informed by the body.

The second problem is that gestational surrogate mothers introduce a new, distinctly feminine "service" to the formerly simple distinction between reproductive gamete types (sperm vs. ova). In other words, in reproduction, the vague concept of "fertility" is replaced by the simpler physical object "womb" as a woman's natural asset. In legal contracts and court documents, such new terms as "human incubator" and "third-party gestator" depict a woman's function in reproduction as "a surrogate uterus and not a surrogate mother."[58] But what exactly constitutes the kind of "service" that a woman provides as a mother? A mandatory "term of service"? Simply "babysitting"?[59] Rothman finds these notions becoming a part of the new rhetoric of motherhood: "we are in the process of redefining motherhood, of changing the meaning of that basic, essential relationship. . . . The old definitions saw motherhood as a status . . . the new language sees mothering as an activity."[60] As the status of "motherhood" turns into the activity of "mothering," many looking at surrogacy become troubled by the emphasis on wombs; if gestation is seen as merely a service in the larger process of procreation, then gestational surrogacy in particular appears to resemble another bodily activity: prostitution.

On one important court decision, a critic finds that "in viewing a woman's body as a commodity that could be bought and sold, the court equated by assumption all surrogacy with prostitution."[61] Later legislation sought to get around this by disallowing commercial surrogacy but allowing altruistic surrogacy, which hints that the commodification of motherhood is the real problem, since the ability to make money and be a good mother are seen as mutually exclusive. One critic argues that "recognition of a special mother–child bond in reproductive law defines women as rooted in their biological capacities and impedes their economic and political progress,"[62] and the problem is that if one disallows surrogate mothers because one does not believe that a woman has a natural right to the fruits of her labor, then one falls into "a tradition of paternalistic protectionist legislation" that keeps women "out of full participation in economic life."[63] Critic Sharyn Roach Anleu argues that "the distinction between commercial and altruistic surrogacy is neither self-evident nor natural but is based on powerful gender norms that pervade everyday life" and that "agreeing to become pregnant *for money* violates norms specifying that women should become pregnant *for love*."[64] Altruistic surrogacy is suspicious, since it is hard to believe a woman can genuinely turn herself into a "mother machine"[65] for purely selfless reasons; however, the kind of common sense that commercial surrogacy makes is seen as incompatible with the gender norms surrounding motherhood. There are some things that have no price tag, and yet nothing is free.

The case of gestational surrogate mothers pokes a hole at the old economic logic that "you can't get something for nothing." Unacceptably, surrogacy contracts threaten to violate this principle by making it possible for women to become legal (rearing or genetic) mothers without having to be physical (gestational) mothers. One judge of a surrogacy case puts it plainly, noting that "the whole purpose and effect of the surrogacy contract was to give the father the exclusive right to the child by destroying the rights of the mother."[66] Likewise, another critic sees this kind of exchange as being a component of all surrogacy cases: "this method of reproduction can help one family only at the expense of another[;] the 'surrogate mother' arrangement creates a family bond only by destroying a family bond."[67] The economic theme is common in critiques of surrogacy, as if the idea of a free ticket were so repugnant that it is necessary to remind us of the price paid. Katha Pollitt uses a more direct metaphor: "so-called surrogacy agreements are so unprecedented that the resulting human arrangements bear no resemblance to adoption, illegitimacy, custody after divorce, or any other relationship involving parents and children, yet, at the same time, bear an uncanny resemblance to the all-sales-final style of a used-car lot."[68] In arguing against using existing familial relationships as

analogies for surrogacy, Pollitt is left with the crassness of the used-car lot as our best model.

A Battle between Two Mothers: "In the Matter of Baby 'M'"

The landmark case to galvanize public opinion about surrogacy and new definitions of motherhood was "In the Matter of Baby 'M,' a Pseudonym for an Actual Person." On January 5, 1987, William Stern brought suit against Mary Beth Whitehead for failing to fulfill her obligations in a surrogacy contract, a legal instrument not new, but not yet tested in the court system. Stern, Whitehead, and her husband Richard had signed an agreement in February 1985, brokered by Noel Keane's Infertility Center of New York, which stipulated that Mrs. Whitehead would surrender a live infant to the Sterns; the infant would be created by means of artificial insemination (i.e., Mr. Stern's sperm and Mrs. Whitehead's egg, and so *not* IVF), and for this service she would be paid $10,000, plus ancillary medical costs not covered by her insurance.[69] Also in the contract were stipulations regarding Richard Whitehead (he would relinquish legal right to be considered the father of the child born to his wife), the event of miscarriage or stillbirth (if occurring after the fourth month, then Mrs. Whitehead would receive a nominal $1,000), and payment to the infertility center (Mr. Stern would pay $7,500 for its services). Mrs. Whitehead was delivered of a girl on March 27, 1986, but she apparently had doubts signing the birth certificate "Sara Elizabeth Whitehead" instead of the agreed upon "Melissa Elizabeth Stern."

What happened next is complicated, but in short Whitehead refused both the $10,000 and to surrender the child. After the Sterns responded with a police-enforced court order, the Whiteheads fled New Jersey and began what the trial judge in the case, Hon. Harvey R. Sorkow, described as an 87-day "fugitive existence" "hegira" in Florida.[70] Although he had reservations about applying the available adoption laws to the new surrogacy contracts, ultimately, Sorkow ruled that the contract must be enforced.[71] Additionally, and somewhat extraordinarily, Sorkow terminated Mary Beth Whitehead's parental rights, and Mr. Stern was adjudged to be the legal father and given permanent custody of the child, thereby allowing his wife Elizabeth to adopt the child (becoming the legal mother). Judge Sorkow needed to go to some lengths to terminate Whitehead's parental rights and admitted that such termination is "an extraordinary judicial remedy which is to be granted only after intensive consideration of parental conduct and the needs of the child."[72] In fact, New Jersey state statutes specifically required evidence of actual abuse or abandonment by

a parent in order to legally terminate parental rights, but Sorkow invoked the doctrine of *parens patriae* to get around these.[73] On appeal, the Supreme Court of New Jersey ultimately overturned that part of Sorkow's decision; that court's opinion, by Chief Justice Robert Wilentz, invalidated the surrogacy contract and ruled that such contracts were unenforceable (except perhaps in cases where no compensation is given and the mother has the opportunity to revoke the contract after giving birth).[74] Additionally, Chief Justice Wilentz restored Whitehead's parental rights and annulled Mrs. Stern's adoption of the baby (although Mr. Stern would retain custody of the child).

The media had been interested in the case since the baby was dramatically taken from Mary Beth Whitehead in Florida (she in the hospital, her older daughter beating the police with a hairbrush as they knocked the maternal grandmother to the ground), but it was the termination of her parental rights that outraged and rallied public commentary. There was a soap opera quality to the proceedings, as the court battle was primarily configured as one between the Stern household and the Whitehead household, and, in particular, between the figured couple—Mr. Stern and Mrs. Whitehead. Commentators and the public first tried to make sense of the arrangement as they knew how—to see it as a custody dispute, as a lover's squabble, or as an argument between parents. Even Judge Sorkow had to remind himself that "Mrs. Whitehead and Mr. Stern were never a family unit";[75] "these people are not former spouses. They are strangers to each other."[76] But despite the fact that the case centered on a narrow question of contract law, for lack of precedence, "Baby M" was played out as if it were a complicated adoption case. Seen in this light, public sympathy was initially on the side of the Sterns, since they better represented what parents should be. Yet, once Judge Sorkow said that Whitehead was not a mother, doing so in a particularly cruel way that blurred her biological position with her social position, Whitehead's "natural" claim to the child became more persuasive.

Public sympathies shift with progressive revelations: first, we learn that Mr. Stern's wife Elizabeth was infertile due to her multiple sclerosis. However, Mrs. Stern, or rather Dr. Stern (she holds both an MD and a PhD in Human Genetics, working professionally as a pediatrician), turns out to have self-diagnosed her multiple sclerosis in 1979, a suspicious diagnosis not definitively confirmed[77] and made when the effect of pregnancy in exacerbating multiple sclerosis was unknown.[78] Judge Sorkow is willing to accept that Mrs. Stern had "a fixed . . . understanding that she could not carry a child without great risk to her physical well-being,"[79] although a cynical view sees her as using multiple sclerosis as an excuse. Next, we learn that Mr. Stern holds a PhD in Biochemistry and "ran a

genetics laboratory,"[80] which raises the question of how two well-educated genetic scientists would so naïvely enter into such an arrangement with a partly employed high school dropout and "former barroom dancer" (Mary Beth) and an alcoholic garbage man (Richard).[81] With this suspicious evidence, some saw the Baby M case as "baby-selling, pure and simple."[82] Pregnancy contracts, especially those involving gestation of a woman's own ovum, as in Whitehead's case, "might as usefully be compared to contracts for consensual slavery as to other kinds of employment contracts."[83] Even if it looks like freedom to do so, legal scholar Mary Lyndon Shanley explains, one cannot freely give up future freedom or contract away constitutional rights.

On the other hand, another detail about Mr. Stern turns our sympathies back to him: he was born in Berlin in January 1946 to "parents who were the sole surviving members of his family to escape the Holocaust."[84] His father died when he was 12, and "with the death of his mother in 1983, Mr. Stern became the only surviving member of all branches in his family."[85] Whitehead was artificially impregnated 13 months after Stern's mother's death; he is reported to have said Kaddish each day for the year of mourning. Stern's mother's death becomes a specific motive against adoption and in favor of surrogacy (and gives our narrative another absent mother). Commenting later on the Sterns' intentions, Chief Justice Wilentz also sympathizes with Mr. Stern's past: "the decision had special significance for Mr. Stern. Most of his family had been destroyed in the Holocaust. As the family's only survivor, he very much wanted to continue his bloodline."[86] The maternal loss, figured here as a material "bloodline" loss, becomes an obsessive purpose. What is important to the Sterns is not their child, but his bloodline. Yet some were not persuaded by this. Psychologist David Brodzinsky, called by the court-appointed guardian *ad litem*, offers commentary on Mr. Stern appropriate for a juvenile delinquent's rap sheet: "the ambivalent relationship with his mother through his formative years [has] left [its] mark on Mr. Stern."[87] Phyllis Chesler, critical of the Sterns, likewise suggests that the media overemphasized the Holocaust angle to make Stern look more sympathetic. She even suggests that Stern's Jewishness is confused, as he picks a Catholic woman to be his surrogate, knowing surely that, under Jewish law, his child would be Jewish only if the mother was.[88]

On the other side, both Judge Sorkow and the Sterns' expert witnesses savaged Mary Beth Whitehead's character. The court heard a tape recording Stern made of Whitehead threatening to falsely accuse him of sexually abusing her 10-year-old daughter.[89] It also heard another of Whitehead's threats to Stern: "'I'd rather see me and her [Baby M] dead before you get her,' and 'I gave her life, I can take her life away.'"[90] Sorkow in particular seemed patently unfair toward Whitehead, as when he dismissed her

as "a woman without empathy"[91] because she brought "her older daughter to court where the child was terrorized by the crush of media and [Whitehead's] fawning use of the media to her own narcissistic ends."[92] One expert witness, Dr. Schechter, further worked to paint Whitehead as an unfit parent because of her "impulsivity, manipulative behavior, a sense of self-importance, exploitiveness, lack of sympathy and justification through provocation."[93] Most outlandish are the three issues Schechter cited to support his diagnosis of "mixed personality disorder": (1) she dyes her hair, (2) she brought stuffed panda bears for Baby M to play with instead of pots and pans, and (3) she said "hooray" instead of "patty cake" when Baby M was playing the game of the same name.[94] Critics had a field day with this; a letter, "We Are All Unfit Mothers," signed by 129 women including Gloria Steinem, Andrea Dworkin, Susan Sontag, Betty Friedan, and Meryl Streep, showed how incoherent the specialist's depiction of maternal fitness was. By quoting statements used by the court to demonstrate Whitehead's unfitness, such as "Mrs. Whitehead feels . . . that her role as a biological mother enables her to understand her children better than anyone else," the "Unfit Mothers" letter showed how these indications of unfitness are also in fact culturally valued qualities of motherhood. In this way, a surrogate mother is in a double bind: she is deviant for bearing a child for money, but also deviant for refusing to honor a contract. In Whitehead's case, her refusal to give up her child can thus be taken as contradictory evidence of either her fitness or unfitness as a mother. In his decision, Sorkow finds that although "she is a good mother for and to her older children[, s]he would not be a good custodian for Baby M,"[95] which is both contradictory and coherent. Is she a good "custodian" for her older children? Even if she were to not be a good "custodian" to Baby M, could she be a "good mother"?

Chief Justice Wilentz, finally standing up for Whiteheads, clearly saw the contradiction: "we do not know of, and cannot conceive of, any other case where a perfectly fit mother was expected to surrender her newly born infant, perhaps forever, and was then told she was a bad mother because she did not."[96] And yet, Mr. Stern tried just this tack in the initial trial, saying that unless he were given sole custody, he would not want any custody or to even take advantage of visitation rights.[97] While Whitehead would rather have no child than give one to Stern, Stern would rather give Whitehead the child than share it. For this selflessness, the court saw him as a better parent, which is shown again when it is recounted how he gave Baby M to a distraught, suicidal Whitehead; Judge Sorkow saw this is as demonstrating not flawed parenting (giving your child to a supposedly suicidal woman), but rather "immense concern for Mrs. Whitehead."[98] Possessing the Wisdom of Solomon, Mr. Stern is able to "subordinate his

wishes for his daughter and give up visitation,"[99] while Mrs. Whitehead is "self-important" for refusing to give up her claim to her child. In order to rightfully claim it, Stern must first demonstrate that he is able to give up the child, while Whitehead's mistake lies in making a direct claim for the child itself, and thus appearing selfish.

The problem with the courts' framing of this as a dispute between Mr. Stern and Mrs. Whitehead is that it ignores the most important relationship in this case: the one between the two battling mothers, Mary Beth Whitehead and Elizabeth Stern. Forced to approach the issue as a more complex adoption case, the courts overlook the way that women talk to women in these negotiations. In particular, Elizabeth Stern's name is explicitly written out of the Baby M case. First is the contract where she is not named, presumably in order to avoid violating state baby-selling statutes (leaving three men as signatories to a contract for a female child). Rothman also points out that it is Mrs. Stern who quit work in order to care for Baby M, although Mr. Stern is the one photographed while carrying Baby M to and from court—visibly parenting away.[100] One effaced in the court documents, the other overdetermined by scores of shrinks and media pundits, the two together pose problems for how women can negotiate their own relationships in light of the new reproductive technologies.

It is easy to see Elizabeth Stern as the villain of the case. Portrayed as uptight, repressed, put-together, Betsy Stern most of all appears to be trying to get something for nothing—a baby without labor. This distinction is most apparent in the inequality of her social standing and appearance in relation to Mary Beth: a doctor versus a former stripper. Indeed, most critics figured the two of them collectively. For example, Phyllis Chesler, a direct participant in the case who befriended the Whiteheads and organized press conferences and demonstrations for them, notes how the two women seem to express a binary nature, even physically resembling each other: they are "two sides of the same coin, the Janus head."[101] Another commentator, Merle Hoffman, simply gives us the following pairs: Whitehead versus Stern; passion versus mind; blood, tissue, guts, need, sex versus intellect, control and alienation; mother versus career; bad girl versus good girl; whore versus virgin and immaculate conception; Elizabeth I versus Mary, Queen of Scots; Athena versus Venus.[102] With these distinctions in place, public admiration of Betsy Stern is really admiration of a woman acting like a man, not only in refusing pregnancy, but also in adopting a rational, intelligent sense of entitlement that disavows the bad, sexual body in favor of a new kind of feminine–masculine parenting. The public's question—who is a better mother—is answerable by a far simpler question—who is better, mother or father?

Chesler reads Betsy as a man in women's clothing: she is "pale, gaunt, accomplished, incredibly narrow at the wrist, waist, pelvis, and ankle, the most 'masculine' (i.e., the least emotionally expressive) of Baby M's four parents."[103] Chesler asks, "did Betsy really want a baby—as much as Bill did? Bill is quoted everywhere, ad nauseam, on his feelings about having a child. It is surprising how few public statements Betsy seems to have made on the subject."[104] Betsy's public quietude, rather than being read as feminine meekness, is used against her in keeping with her overly masculine nature; in Chesler's eyes, she is so much of a man in comparison to the other principals that her maternal desire becomes suspect. Yet, Chesler also makes the opposing claim that "Betsy is hardly an emancipated woman. Betsy moves in the same patriarchal trance or fugue state that moves Mary Beth."[105] Picking out some of Betsy's testimony to demonstrate how she parroted Bill's testimony of the previous day, Chesler finds Betsy both subservient to Bill's patriarchal desires (she never questions his wishes) at the same time as she is the model of patriarchy (having a male career, she would never become pregnant).[106] Who is the real mother? The maternally grief-stricken Bill Stern. Who is the real father? The maternally masculine Betsy Stern.

In her own narrative, *A Mother's Story: The Truth About the Baby M Case*, published a year after the Supreme Court decision, Mary Beth Whitehead presents a bitter portrait of Betsy Stern that is still strangely loving. Strangely, the text's most dramatic moments—Mary Beth admitting to the Sterns that she is keeping the baby, being assaulted in her home and fainting, being thrown bloody into the back of a police car—are filtered not through the judge, the infertility center, nor even through Mr. Stern, but rather always through Betsy. In each case, these narrative events are addressed from one mother's point-of-view to another. For example, Mary Beth first called Betsy to tell her she was pregnant; she first told Betsy, over the phone, that she did not want payment; when offered more money, Mary Beth addresses Betsy in an interior monologue; it is Betsy whom she calls the morning after giving the baby to the Sterns; next Betsy telephones her to try to retrieve the baby; she is physically assaulted by Betsy; it is Betsy who "instructs" the police to take the child away; and Betsy is the one who later attacks Mary Beth's character in court.[107] If Betsy Stern was effaced in the surrogacy contract and court opinions, she is writ large in Whitehead's imagination. On the other hand, Bill Stern is, like the minimal procreative role he played, practically nonexistent during this time; "during the seven months that I was regularly inseminated with Bill Stern's sperm, we remained intimate strangers. I learned very little about the man whose child I bear."[108] In passages like these, it is clear that, for Whitehead, surrogacy was a gift not to Mr. Stern, but to fellow mother Mrs. Stern.

The seeming affection that Mary Beth held toward Betsy did not last long. Whitehead's narrative blames this entirely on Stern, and accuses her of betraying a maternal partnership. When Mary Beth finally tells the Sterns she is keeping the baby, "first, the color drained from Betsy's face. Then she became violently angry. It was my first taste of Betsy Stern when she didn't get her way."[109] "I had said yes to her over and over, but it wasn't until now, when I said no, that her true colors came out."[110] According to Whitehead, Betsy violently attacks Mary Beth, whose uterus begins to contract, doubling her over. "Give that baby to Bill" or "Give Bill that baby" Betsy shouts over and over, and Bill is too paralyzed, crying, to do anything. Betsy "stuns" Mary Beth by her behavior, by the expression of her "adamant," violent desire for Bill to have the baby. This scene is far too melodramatic to be taken seriously; Betsy becomes Bill's foot soldier, while Bill is reduced to whimpering on the periphery. Mary Beth's uterine contractions, causing her to almost black out, remind us of how recently she gave birth, and of the new resolve that experience gave her. In this scene, Mary Beth "wins" by virtue of her suffering—the Sterns suddenly, "unexpectedly," change their tone and manner, leaving peacefully.

When the Sterns show up some weeks later with a police order and escort, Betsy is again the source of aggression, "give me that baby" she "demanded," adamantly grasping for the child, trying to snatch it from Mary Beth.[111] Next, audaciously, "Betsy began to instruct the police."[112] Whitehead, in maternal disarray and shock, runs to their car, imploring them not to take the child, upon which plea "Betsy took the side of [Bill's] face and whipped it around toward her. 'Don't look at her, Bill. Don't look at her.'"[113] "As [she] stood there barefoot, in a pink and white nightshirt, with [menstrual] blood all over [her] legs," Mary Beth unsuccessfully implores Bill to "look at me" before she is handcuffed and thrown in a police car.[114] This manic public scene, in view of the neighbors and witnessed by Whitehead's daughter Tuesday, is shocking in its gruesomeness.[115] The second of two "fluid" scenes,[116] Whitehead describes how, in her panic over having her baby taken from her, she had "soaked right through the sanitary napkin."[117] Just like the last scene where Betsy attacked Mary Beth, the maternal injury that the Sterns here attempt to inflict on Mary Beth is literalized; "I still hadn't healed from the baby's delivery and I felt like an open wound."[118] Despite Mary Beth's physical display, because of her masculine infertility, Betsy is unable to read Mary Beth's distress. Whitehead's leaky, messy body, representing everything that is opposite to Betsy's, offers the familiar image of the grief-torn woman. If a reader is meant to sympathize with Whitehead, it is clearly not because she manages publicly to represent herself as a "good" woman and mother, but rather because she

is so stricken by being a mother—so publicly falling to pieces—that it is impossible for anyone to justify keeping her and her child apart.

Whitehead continually uses reflective phrases such as "looking back" or "I now know," but the first moment where Whitehead learns for herself the truth of the matter "wasn't until the day I delivered my daughter."[119] After Noel Keane, the surrogate broker, suggests Whitehead go to counseling, she angrily refuses him, explaining, "I *know* what I'm doing. The girls who give away their babies are simply in a deeper state of denial."[120] In other words, what made her realize that she could not part with the child was having the child in the first place. Early in her narrative, Whitehead soliloquizes Betsy Stern. Whitehead is still recuperating in the hospital after delivery, having decided to keep the child, when the Sterns arrive and offer her more money. Whitehead writes,

> I looked at Betsy Stern and thought to myself, "Betsy I'm not selling this child. I started this when I actually believed it *wasn't* my child. Everyone had convinced me that it was your child, but going through the pregnancy and the pain of labor . . . has made me realize that this is *my* baby, not yours, mine." But I didn't say anything. I just burst into tears.[121]

Here, Mary Beth views her recurrent inability to speak her own mind as a problem of communication between mothers.[122] Initially, Mary Beth literally believed that "it *wasn't* my child," and she writes elsewhere that she believed, until the day of delivery, that the baby was in fact genetically related to both Sterns and that her role was similar to one she had seen in a film where a gestational surrogate mother, after some conflict, happily gives her child away.[123] Whitehead explains her confusion: "the concept of an egg remained a meaningless abstraction. I didn't think of it as the genetic substance of my child. *No one* ever said to me, 'It's your baby.'"[124] While recognizing that she had some part to play in the matter, Whitehead confused her eggs with her womb. Thus, for her, the activity of birth was more "real" than the legal status of motherhood or the scientific one of maternity.

Discussing surrogacy narratives, E. Ann Kaplan is surprised that they so often end acrimoniously, and that both women seem so naïve throughout:

> neither woman is self-consciously aware of the discursive forces shaping her experience and of how the stories are linked. The [surrogate mother's] violent desire to keep the child may be provoked precisely by the adoptive mother's urgent desire to *claim* the child.[125]

Struggling to resolve this process, Kaplan suggests we might blame media representations of women—the "positions of women fighting women so

common in film melodrama and TV soaps"[126] which suggest to women that they become surrogates in the first place by stressing that "the self-sacrificial mother is what mothering is all about."[127] However, the "desire for this self-sacrifice wills into being its opposite binary, the jealous, competitive mother, who wants to possess the child."[128] Consider again Chief Justice Wilentz's surprise at the Sorkow decision: "We do not know of, and cannot conceive of, any other case where a perfectly fit mother was expected to surrender her newly born infant, perhaps forever, and was then told she was a bad mother because she did not."[129] Whitehead's jealousy and possessiveness bring about her selfsame sense of sacrificial motherhood, just as Whitehead's narrative in turn calls forth Betsy Stern as the image of the jealous, competitive mother. Mrs. Whitehead claimed during the second trial that her erratic behavior, used against her in the first hearings, was caused by legal and judicial mistakes, and that her response did not indicate her future mothering abilities; Judge Wilentz agrees that "any mother who truly loved her child might so respond and that it is . . . unfair to judge her on the basis of her reaction to an extreme situation rarely faced by any mother."[130] Whitehead has both to disavow and to justify her erratic behavior in order to be seen as a good mother, while that same behavior can also be used as evidence of the strength of her maternal attachment to her child.

What could possibly make someone in the eighties think it was acceptable to sell a baby? What could possibly make someone in the eighties think it was acceptable to purchase a baby? And why are people actually surprised when these new arrangements fail to meet some prearranged outcome? "Hasn't she seen *Kramer vs. Kramer*? Doesn't she know the revolution happened?"[131] The "Baby M" case centers on the argument that informed consent is impossible in the case of pregnancy—that something happens to impair a pregnant woman's ability to make a truly informed decision. Rothman defines this "intent" by juxtaposing it with "love": "Stern, her father, claims intent: he *planned* on that child. Whitehead, her mother, claims love: she had *not* planned on loving that child."[132] Referring to a report prepared by the Infertility Center suggesting that Whitehead would have difficulty separating from a child, Whitehead says, "I now believe that even if Betsy had read the report, I would have remained incomprehensible to her. We were such different kinds of women."[133] Here is another example of *A Mother's Story* offering itself as a tale of self-revelation. Humble, ignorant, Mary Beth in retrospect has learned a great deal, especially about someone like Betsy Stern. While she may be "incomprehensible" to Betsy, presumably Betsy is comprehensible to Mary Beth. Yet, she also says that she and Mrs. Stern "were" such different people, leaving open the possibility that they at present are not. In the calling forth of their split social

selves—two different mothers created in their struggle over one child—Whitehead and Stern become, at least in Whitehead's mind, compatibly similar. So, perhaps Mrs. Stern and Mrs. Whitehead call each other's social being into existence. If so, motherhood—thought in this case to be determined by a relationship with a child—is actually one involving a relationship with another mother. If they "were" such different people, it seems that now Mary Beth, with her new knowledge, has become a bit more like Betsy. In the next chapter, we will see the other side of this reinvention of maternal relationships, focusing on the myth of the crack baby.

2

The Crack Baby: Children Fight the War on Drugs

This chapter focuses on the "crack baby"—an object of knowledge that ostensibly warned against the evil of pregnant women who used drugs, in particular, the newly created crack cocaine. The panic over large numbers of pregnant women using crack ultimately came to delineate the racial boundaries surrounding women's rights to control their bodies. By pitting pregnant women's drug use against the notion of a fetus's right to be born free of birth defects, prosecutors of cocaine-using mothers created a situation where a woman's right to procreative freedom was incompatible with a choice to use drugs. Presented in this way, these women had only two options: discontinue their drug use (by entering a treatment program or being sent to jail), or have an abortion. The constitutional protections recently established in *Roe v. Wade* were already under virulent attack from ascendant prolife forces. In this, the crack baby scare was part of a larger conservative cultural offensive against the permissiveness of the 1960s and 1970s, of which drug experimentation was a major part.

Since the mid-1970s, a number of feminist critics commented on a trend privileging the health of an unborn fetus at the expense of the mother.[1] But what made the crack baby unique in this regard was how the media represented the problem as an epidemic of unprecedented proportions. The most repeated scare statistic was that some 11 percent of newborns in 1988 had been prenatally exposed to drugs;[2] this was taken to mean that before long, a whole generation of crack-addicted children would enter public schools and cause nationwide problems, filling special education programs, juvenile delinquent centers, and prisons. The subtext, of course, for white middle-class taxpayers was that they would end up "paying for them & their programs."[3] Focusing on the unborn fetus, a symbol of innocent victimhood, made it even easier to demonize these mothers

as abusive, although this obscured actual issues of drug use—such as how the Drug Enforcement Agency oriented most of its efforts and resources toward interdiction rather than community-based treatment. Since the women accused in national news reports of violating child endangerment statutes were invariably black and lower class, the concern over protecting unborn children from drugs turns out truly to be a story of controlling black female bodies.

After discussing the media myth of crack babies, I turn to responses by educators and advertisers. As a part of Reagan's "War on Drugs,"[4] drugs were brought vividly into the nation's homes by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America's (PDFA) numerous public service announcements (PSAs) that tried to change perceived attitudes held by American youth toward drugs. The Partnership was founded in 1986, the same year Reagan promoted extensive federal antidrug legislation. The strategy of these PSAs was to deglamorize drug use—"unselling" drugs by means of the same marketing techniques that might influence people toward drug use in the first place. PSAs like the "This Is Your Brain on Drugs" campaign are high-concept, marketing-savvy productions, yet they ultimately suggest more about cultural fears regarding drug use than address actual facts.

Media Panic and Black Motherhood

The only thing that was truly novel about drug use in the decade was the new drug crack cocaine. There was no increase neither in the number of drug users during the decade (illicit drug use had dropped from 25.4 million to 13.5 million users between 1979 and 1990),[5] nor in the amount of drugs consumed or a significant change in the type of user (rate of use dropped from 14.1% to 6.7% between 1979 and 1990).[6] What was new in crack cocaine was simply its newness. In this respect, crack was a marketing invention ready to be seized upon by journalists, politicians, and concerned parents. Here are some of the results of what could be done due to the invention of crack: there was an increase in the Federal antidrug budget (from $2.8 billion to $9.8 billion between 1985 and 1990),[7] there was the introduction of new legislation and initiatives targeting drug traffickers and users and creating drug-free workplaces and schools (especially the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools & Communities Act), there was the creation of numerous new school programs (such as "Drug Abuse Resistance Education" [D.A.R.E.] and "Just Say No" clubs), and there was new spending on television programs and advertising to spread antidrug messages. Comparing the excessive media attention focused on crack cocaine to the actual declining statistics of drug

use in the decade, sociologists Craig Reinarman and Harry J. Levine saw the decade's crack scare as little more than a "marketing invention." But marketed by whom, to whom, and why?

Crack cocaine is derived from powder cocaine. Crack is easy to manufacture and much less expensive than powder cocaine, and it became more widely available in the United States in 1984, and was seen to reach epidemic proportions in 1985. In pharmacological terms, powder and crack cocaine are equivalent, so there must be a more pervasive social meaning at work behind differing legislative and moral responses to the two drugs.[8] The relatively cheap cost is one of the reasons crack cocaine is more associated with inner-city drug users, compared to middle-class and suburban users of powder cocaine. The racial and class difference between the typical crack and powder cocaine user's profile was solidified in 1986, when Congress passed comprehensive antidrug laws that created radically different sentencing guidelines for those caught selling crack versus powder cocaine. For crack cocaine, the mandatory minimum sentence was five years in prison for the sale of 5 grams; for powder cocaine, it was five years in prison for the sale of 500 grams.[9] This "100-to-1 ratio" has been criticized for targeting poor, inner-city, black neighborhoods and exacerbating social problems there.[10] Sociologist Drew Humphries sees this as another example of how "drug scares are not about drugs; rather, drug scares are about lower-class drug use"[11] and, in particular, how drug scares like crack cocaine "have historically played on racial fears."[12] Likewise, Philip Jenkins argues that "the conservative coalition that has enjoyed such power since the late 1970s has used a politics of substitution . . . [c]omplaints about welfare cheats, welfare queens, and freeloaders disguise the older rhetoric of black laziness and fecklessness."[13] Legal scholar Laura Gómez also has "no doubt that the media's contrasting characterizations of powder and crack cocaine mapped preexisting racial and class stereotypes about drug users: the media's typical 1970s cocaine user was affluent and white and used drugs at private parties, while the typical 1980s crack cocaine user was poor and Black and smoked on street corners or in abandoned buildings."[14] In addition to the punitive discrepancy in crack cocaine sentencing, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 also legislated mandatory minimum sentences for drug-related crimes. This resulted in an increased prison population and revealing statistics about new differences between drug-related sentences for whites versus people of color. A 1997 review of the effects of drug laws in the eighties reports that, in 1993 "blacks accounted for 88.3% of federal crack distribution convictions; 4.1% were white."[15] In contrast, only 5 percent more whites than blacks were sentenced for powder cocaine distribution. Thus, "federal cocaine laws clearly have a large disproportionate impact on black defendants."[16]

What is odd is that while "crack never became a popular or widely used drug in the United States, or anywhere else in the world,"[17] it nonetheless had a premier reputation as a drug of the eighties, defining new images of pleasure and criminality. In George Bush's first major primetime television address to the nation on September 5, 1989, he announced his strategy for escalating the War on Drugs. Holding up a large bag of crack cocaine that he said was purchased across the street from the White House, Bush positioned himself in the nation's eyes as a leader living among vice. If one could buy illegal drugs in front of the White House, then certainly they could be found anywhere; all of America was in grave peril from the threat of drugs. In an embarrassing admission, it was revealed after a few weeks that the specific location of the sale was in fact set up by Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and White House officials. There was actually very little drug activity in the neighborhood surrounding the White House, but Bush's speechwriters wanted to manufacture the drug deal to strengthen the speech.[18] The President needed the reality of the drug trade to match the rhetorical purposes of his speech—that the nation was under attack and that the War on Drugs needed to be escalated. In making this argument, he and others helped market crack cocaine to America.

Holding up a bag of crack was one way for Bush to identify the enemy in the War on Drugs, but a far more successful image was the "crack baby." The term "crack baby" was used to describe children born to women who used crack cocaine while pregnant; it first appeared and achieved widespread use in popular print and television journalism in 1985.[19] However, the crack baby was not just a drugged baby that would soon sober up; it was taken for granted that crack babies were fundamentally damaged and would always be so. The most prominent voice behind the crack baby was Ira J. Chasnoff, director of the National Association for Perinatal Addiction Research and Educations (NAPARE). Chasnoff had been publishing on the effects of cocaine on pregnant women since 1985,[20] but it was a 1988 study of babies born to cocaine-addicted mothers that really stirred the debate. It estimated that 375,000 babies born every year were exposed to drugs in the womb.[21] Along with the statistic that "at least 1 in 10 new mothers has used illegal drugs during pregnancy,"[22] this was a shockingly large number of drug-exposed infants. Chasnoff was reported as being even more pessimistic: "the research suggests that a single cocaine 'hit' during pregnancy can cause lasting fetal damage. While a single dose of cocaine and its metabolites clear out of an adult body within 48 hours, an unborn baby is exposed for four or five days."[23] While Chasnoff did not intend for his research to be taken as conclusive (it only looked at 36 hospitals, and took into consideration other drugs such as heroin and PCP [phencyclidine]), the notion of a new wave of "crack babies" damaged from birth proved extremely

compelling to media outlets. Just like that, "crack babies were poster children for the War on Drugs."[24] *Time* (which along with *Newsweek* "each ran seventy-four stories about crack cocaine in six months")[25] labeled crack the "Issue of the Year"[26] and "America's Crusade" in 1986.

Many of the journalists who quoted Chasnoff's initial research misinterpreted his results (good science requires statistically relevant results that can be replicated; journalists did not wait for this research to happen). To demonstrate the evil effects of cocaine to the lay reader, journalists seized on the more exaggerated statistics, which they then illustrated with anecdotal comparisons between "crack" babies and "normal" babies. In so doing, they both helped create the cultural object of the crack baby and reinforced perceptions of what a normal infancy and childhood are. The most common way of describing crack babies was as dehumanized, affectless, robots—not unlike the descriptions of postmodern subjects discussed in an earlier chapter. Judy Howard, a UCLA pediatric researcher prominent in the crack baby story (along with Chasnoff, she was the other expert most often cited), said of crack babies simply that "they're like automatons."[27] Elsewhere, she is quoted as saying: "it's as if the part of the brain that 'makes us human beings, capable of discussion or reflection,' has been 'wiped out.'"[28] Another journalist writing about Howard's research compared crack babies to "children with mild autism or those with personality disorders, conditions characterized by withdrawal and lack of emotion."[29] Unlike the supposed jitteriness of babies prenatally exposed to the drug PCP, the crack baby's withdrawal and lack of emotion is the strongest evidence to show how damaged they were. It is not just that these babies are slightly altered by their mother's drug use; they are fundamentally inhuman; they "have serious difficulty relating to their world, making friends, playing like normal children and feeling love for their mothers or primary caretakers."[30] One of the scariest quotations comes from research psychologist Coryl Jones (of the National Institute of Drug Abuse), who claimed that prenatal exposure to crack cocaine "interfer[es] with the central core of what it is to be human."[31] Adding the pieces together, it is clear that "being human" really means "loving a mother." Without that relationship, crack babies might as well be robots. Anna Quindlen offered a medieval simile to show how thoroughly incomprehensible these new inhuman babies were: "A baby who does not like to be held. It is like hearing that the world is flat."[32]

Here are some initial print descriptions of what the new crack babies were like: "Crack babies aren't all that fond of faces."[33] They are "smaller, shorter and ha[ve] a smaller head circumference than most children."[34] They are "lethargic" when playing.[35] "Their faces are joyless."[36] "Crack babies sweat a lot even if they are not hot. . . . They are foul smelling, and a

mother will often tell me her baby sounds like he is snorting, like he always has a cold."[37] They "have an array of symptoms that include hyperactivity, sudden mood swings, extreme passivity, apparent lack of emotion, slow language acquisition or mild speech impairment. Many are overwhelmed by stimuli like noise or piles of toys, have trouble interpreting nonverbal signals, are easily frustrated, find it hard to concentrate, and learn something one day only to forget it the next."[38] They "suffer from constant fine tremors and irritability."[39] "They may be either extremely irritable or very lethargic, have poor sucking abilities that hamper feeding and irregular sleep patterns. As they grow older, they may be hyperactive, slow in learning to talk and have trouble relating to other people."[40] "If they did play with an object, they would walk away from it long before most children would, their faces dispassionate, joyless."[41] They "seemed less attached to their caretakers."[42] None of these things, however, is true.

In fact, this is a rather diverse list of problems, and almost entirely subjective; what baby from time to time is not irritable, does not have mood swings, or sleep in irregular patterns? In other words, the negative qualities seen in crack babies are not particularly new things; they are just seen as extreme forms of typical bad behavior. What makes the discourse around the crack baby so troubling is that these new problems are given a medical explanation. That is, we are looking not so much at a "behavioral problem" on the part of children as much as a medical problem on the part of parents.

The medicalized distinction between crack and normal babies is seen clearest in stories focused on adopting "boarder babies"—crack babies who were abandoned by their mothers and left in hospitals. These kinds of stories alternate between feel-good profiles of heroic adoptive parents fighting against the odds and warning exposés of adoption and welfare agencies' duplicity in telling the supposed truth about crack babies. For example, a *New York Times* special report on "Adopting Drug Babies," warns readers that drug-exposed babies "appear to have suffered brain damage that cuts into their ability to make friends, know right from wrong, understand cause and effect, control their impulses, gain insight, concentrate on tasks, and feel and return love."[43] These human traits are not visible at first in adopted babies; it is only later that the hidden damage supposedly becomes apparent. Another journalist sums up the challenges for adoptive parents: "In short, these babies lack just about everything that makes adults coo."[44]

Which brings us to the adults. One curious fact about the "crack baby" was that it was practically invisible. Despite rhetorical panic surrounding the rise of crack babies, fetal syndromes, and boarder babies, it was the crack mother who was made the most visible target for anxieties

surrounding children, race, and drugs. First, scholar Cynthia R. Daniels argues that "'crack babies' have been treated as *filius nullius*—as if they had no biological fathers."[45] Instead, argues legal scholar Dorothy L. Roberts, the focus was on the pregnant crack addict, who was

> portrayed as an irresponsible and selfish woman who put her love for crack above her love for her children. In news stories she was often represented by a prostitute, who sometimes traded sex for crack, violating every conceivable quality of a good mother. The chemical properties of crack were said to destroy the natural impulse to mother. . . . The pregnant crack addict, then, was the exact opposite of a mother: she was promiscuous, uncaring, and self-indulgent.[46]

This line of thought complements the earlier idea that crack babies show no love for their parents. If crack babies are unlovable and crack mothers are unloving, then crack cocaine threatens what was seen as an essential defining bond of humanity. Another scholar notes further the narrative possibilities of crack babies: "the problem of 'crack babies' and their mothers would seem to provide the perfect cautionary tale: a particular subset of women engaged in a behavior . . . broad consensus about the harm caused by the maternal action . . . and a good fit with ideas about bad mothers."[47] If illegal drug use itself was not a sufficiently dangerous social problem, then a threat to the very bonds of family certainly was. The newly conceived "promiscuous, uncaring, and self-indulgent" crack mother was the perfect reflection of this threat. In fact, one 1989 article's title says just that: "Crack Babies: the Worst Threat is Mom Herself."[48]

However, when put alongside other threatening targets in the War on Drugs—such as armed drug traffickers or foreign narco-terrorists—the crack mother makes a surprising enemy. Sociologist Drew Humphries's book *Crack Mothers: Pregnancy, Drugs, and the Media* asks how "an unusually powerless category of women emerge[d] as a threatening symbol of disorder, the unenviable enemy in the domestic war on drugs"?[49] Laura Gómez offers one answer, arguing that "women's problems (or, those associated more with women than with men) are more likely to be medicalized than criminalized."[50] This is certainly true of crack, where the medicalized focus on crack mothers was often seen in simple chemical terms. For example, one common theme in reporting during the time is the idea that women were simply more attracted to crack cocaine than to other drugs like heroin. One doctor said, "Heroin was a man's drug and we just didn't see as much of it in pregnant women. Many more women are on crack than ever were on heroin"; Senator Daniel Moynihan repeated this wisdom in arguing for more treatment programs for women.[51] Heroin use

was starting to decline in the eighties,[52] but was often invoked to offer a comparison to a pattern of drug use that experts had already come to terms with. At the height of the crack panic in 1986, one journalist quoted Dr. Eric Waugh of Harlem Hospital, who elaborates on the difference between crack- and heroin-using mothers: "the heroin mother usually cares about her baby and sees the child as giving her new hope to kick the habit. The crack mother is so addicted that she is beyond caring for her baby and doesn't want to know. Crack becomes their entire life. They'll rob, steal, even kill, sell their bodies—anything for more crack."[53] As irresponsible as these kinds of comments are, we can see how supposed behavioral differences in crack versus heroin users are figured primarily as an effect of crack's addictive properties; this idea of a medicalized maternal problem is especially reinforced when voiced by medical professionals.[54] In this way, some members of the "unusually powerless category of women" were deftly transformed by their crack addiction into dangerous criminals, thieves, murderers, and prostitutes.

Ideas about how to respond to the new crack crisis were divided between punishment and treatment. Since crack was such a powerfully addictive drug, perhaps the only way to stop pregnant women from harming their unborn children with drugs would be to scare them with criminal deterrents like incarceration. Alternatively, since these were pregnant women, future mothers who were struggling already, perhaps it would be better to show compassion toward them and make extra efforts at treatment and rehabilitation. In the debate on which of these two options would best reduce drug use by pregnant women, two very different depictions of motherhood arise. There were a few reports of successful treatment programs, like Clara Hale's Home in Harlem,[55] which took in infants while their mothers sought treatment, and Mabon (Mothers and Babies Off Narcotics), which housed a residential program for mothers and their children on New York City's Wards Island.[56] What really grabbed the headlines, though, were prosecutions of pregnant drug users, involving novel interpretations of drug statutes to try women on drug selling, child abuse, assault, and murder charges. In examining the kinds of punishments discussed for crack-using pregnant women, we can more clearly comprehend Gómez's argument that women's issues tend to be medicalized, even in this case—when they are being criminalized.

One defining example of medicalizing criminal motherhood is the case of Jennifer Johnson, who, in 1989, was the "first woman in the United States to be criminally convicted for exposing her baby to drugs while pregnant."[57] Johnson was a 23-year-old black woman living in Florida with two of her children who had tested positive for cocaine at birth, one born in 1987, and one in 1989. Johnson had admitted to using crack cocaine

prior to delivering, but instead of charging her with a crime related to her own purchase, possession, or use of the drug, prosecutors focused on making a case that she had forced her children to use drugs as well; that essentially, she was a drug dealer to her own children while they were in her womb. The basic problem with this line of argument is that fetuses are not recognized as legal persons, and are thus not afforded any constitutional protections under the law. Thus, because narcotics laws could not apply to fetuses, prosecutors instead staked their case on the 60 seconds after the babies were born but while they were still attached to their mother by the umbilical cord. During this time, it was argued, the mother had exposed her children to drugs through the maternal blood that passes through the umbilical cord. Because they were considered legal persons at the moment of birth, prosecutors argued that during the time between birth and the severing of the umbilical cord, Johnson delivered drugs to her children and thus had committed a crime.

The contortions prosecutors went through to apply the law to drug-using pregnant women speak to the sense of urgency they felt to punish women and protect children. Yet in doing so, prosecutors furthered the growing adversarial relationship between mothers and children, and gave reason for other pregnant women addicted to drugs to avoid prenatal treatment out of fear of being arrested. When confronted with the argument that a mother's constitutional rights were being infringed upon with these unique kinds of charges, prosecutors like Jeffrey Deen (the prosecutor in Johnson's case) responded with rhetorical questions about fetal rights: "Does a baby have a right to be born without cocaine in its system? I think that's fundamental."[58] Seeing the two sides—maternal rights and fetal rights—as being opposed to each other furthers a trend growing since the US Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*: the debate over what to do with crack mothers overlapped in many ways with the larger debate over abortion. In the case of crack cocaine, balancing maternal and fetal rights also conflates two different kinds of relationships: mothers with children and drug dealers with users. In comparing mothers to drug dealers and children with potential users, these kinds of prosecutions raised the paternalistic question of how else pregnant women might be harming their innocent children: smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, driving without seatbelts, and so on.

In addition to punishment and treatment, the two traditional alternatives for dealing with social ills like drug use, drug-using pregnant women faced a third possibility—confinement. In a 1989 op-ed piece, commentator Charles Krauthammer argues for what he euphemistically calls "custody," asking rhetorically, "Indeed can we really do anything about women so controlled by cocaine that they risk horrible damage to their babies by

doing crack during pregnancy?"[59] The obvious answer—no—leads him to the idea that pregnant women be put into custody for their own good. Surely, Krauthammer had in mind a case that had happened the year before, when a Washington, DC, judge had sentenced Brenda Vaughan, who was seven months pregnant and had failed a drug test, to jail until she delivered. This caused a bit of an uproar, since Vaughan was only convicted of passing bad checks, not for any drug-related charges. Judge Peter Wolf's punishment was, at the least, a creative interpretation of the purpose of the law, and he felt compelled to write a memorandum explaining his decision, part of which was reprinted as a *Washington Post* editorial. In more candid remarks to journalists, Judge Wolf said of Vaughan's situation, "I'm going to keep her locked up until the baby is born because she tested positive for cocaine when she came before me. . . . She's apparently an addictive per-sonality and I'll be darned if I'll have the baby born that way."[60] "That way" must mean "drug-addicted," and clearly, it is not difficult to decide between protecting a selfish, drug-using woman and protecting what Wolf called "society's most precious resource—a helpless child-to-be."[61] In explaining his decision, Judge Wolf "wishe[d] there were some other answer besides jail for Vaughan until the baby is born."[62] Having to settle for this third option shows the difficulty of negotiating drug use by pregnant women. Wolf was called "Solomon-like and compassionate"[63] for the way in which he solved the problem of what to do with Vaughan, but this is clearly a seat-of-the-pants decision that did not reflect a reasoned public policy.[64] But what else could he have done? As Drew Humphries pointed out, "if ever there was a case that justified extending the criminal law to enforce motherhood, maternal crack use seemed to be it."[65] Because of the sud-denness of crack and the supposed inhuman addiction it caused, doctors, legislators, and judges felt compelled to invent novel solutions to a seem-ingly novel problem.

The new hard line on drugs taken by prosecutions of pregnant drug users was in keeping with remarks made by Reagan when signing the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986. Reagan also spoke of the drug problem in medical terms, calling it an "epidemic" and saying that "the vaccine that's going to end the epidemic is a combination of tough laws—like the one we sign today—and a dramatic change in public attitude."[66] Expanding on the "toughness" required to bring about such a dramatic change, Reagan speaks of a new intolerance that is required: "we must be intolerant of drugs use and drug sellers. We must be intolerant of drug use on the cam-pus and at the workplace. We must be intolerant of drugs not because we want to punish drug users, but because we care about them and want to help them."[67] We can see that Reagan makes a point of at least mention-ing the humanitarian side of the legislation, but it is clear for him that, as

with any other epidemic, drug use needs to be harshly confronted with an intolerant vaccine in order to safely inoculate the public. Sadly, Reagan was only speaking metaphorically of a vaccine, and there was not much room for actual treatment or science in any of his drug policies. Only recently have scientists and doctors begun to understand drug and other addictions as diseases rather than personality failings or criminal choices. With this research, rather than having to distinguish between maternal and fetal rights, or be intolerant of pregnant drug addicts, one might imagine a public policy that equally represents the interests of all family members.

When They Grow Up: Preparing for the Crack Baby Boom

As in the case of Brenda Vaughan, the most compelling justification for intolerance toward drug-using mothers was the innocent image of "society's most precious resource—a helpless child-to-be."[68] Thus the most effective arguments against drug use in general showed how drugs did not just hurt the user, they also hurt others. Focusing on children as those harmed most by other people's drug use does a number of things. First, it rejuvenates a traditional notion of childhood, stressing an idyllic, peaceful, and optimistic view of children that ignores racial, class, and sexual differences, where any child truly can grow up to be a president or astronaut. Second (as we saw above), a focus on children redefines mothers, who can now "choose" to use drugs despite knowing the consequences, and who can be then vilified as thieving, murdering prostitutes if they do become addicted. Third, it creates a new class of adolescents, who are represented as having Manichean qualities—partly innocent, partly criminal.

To emphasize how little the mother's welfare was at stake in the panic over crack babies: the message of victimization, once it extended past the "tiniest victims,"[69] focused not on parents, but on future educators who would have to teach these incorrigible, damaged children. It was as if these drug-using mothers had in their selfishness not only harmed their children, but also the nurses, teachers, administrators, and everyone else who would have to spend extra resources to manage the unnatural children that crack mothers had selfishly created. Presented as a collective problem for the whole country, caused by a selfish few, it was easy to demonize black crack mothers especially; in biblical-sounding language, one commentator lamented that "the country now must confront a whole new facet of the crack epidemic: an entire generation that may never be free of the scourge."[70] Douglas Besharov, a scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, offers only the most extreme example of how this new generation is racialized when he bluntly says "this is permanent brain

damage. Whether it is 5 percent or 15 percent of the black community, it is there. And for those children it is irrevocable."[71] The idea that 5–15 percent of the black community would without a doubt grow up irrevocably damaged and dangerous is one that panders to racial fears and puts even more pressure on black mothers. Scholar Harriet Washington confirms this anecdotally, noting that "during eighteen years as a news and science editor at metropolitan dailies and national magazines, I have never seen a published photograph of a white crack baby."[72]

The speculative panic over how these black crack babies would end up was portrayed as not only an individual problem for the teachers and social workers who would quickly have to develop new management strategies for them, but also a major social problem that would soon affect entire hospital, school, and even prison systems. One pundit sounded the dire warning: "in short, the United States is being invaded from within by a large group of young citizens who will further strain health and education resources, and who give every indication of one day adding to the burdens of juvenile and adult detention centers."[73] This kind of "time bomb"[74] anxiety over the innocent crack babies turning into an invasion of felons was repeatedly invoked in warnings about crack cocaine. A *New York Times* editorial warns of the cost of "lifetime care for the irrevocably damaged. America pays a terrible price for cocaine addiction."[75] These warnings fueled a fundamental aspect of thinking about crack-exposed newborns: that negative behavior displayed by infants and toddlers would continue to persist as the children got older. This way of thinking about the effects of drug use seemed to suggest that exposure to drugs irreparably, "irrevocably," changes individuals, and that this change will be consistent throughout an individual's lifestyle. An infant who shows no love or affection at 8 months would be expected to still be lethargic in school at 8 years and on the path to antisocial criminality at 18 years. By extrapolating from the supposed symptoms of crack-exposed infants, educators expected that children entering the first grade would create a terrible burden indeed.

What turned this problem into a public health crisis was the thought that these children were going to grow up at the same time and enter the school system all at once. This "first class" of crack babies was an immediate threat; the sense of sadness and pity over these helpless infants would soon turn to disgust and hatred once they grew up enough to cause damage. In thinking about these children's educational futures, commentators described crack children in pseudomedical terms that sound like something from a horror movie; to wit, the first sentence of Krauthammer's editorial: "the inner-city crack epidemic is now giving birth to the newest horror: a bio-underclass, a generation of physically damaged cocaine

babies whose biological inferiority is stamped at birth."[76] The "underclass" idea (attributed to Besharov, who also gave the 5–15% statistic of black crack children) was repeated numerous times—"the United States is giving birth to a new underclass of disadvantaged youth like none seen before"[77]—leading many pessimists to believe that "this is truly a lost generation, and neither love nor money is ever going to change that."[78] These attitudes were stoked by a 1990 federal report on "Crack Babies" which regurgitated all the bad science and anecdotes of the supposed crack baby epidemic, particularly in quotations from interviewees like this one: "even if we stopped crack use right now, we would still be dealing with its effects in some way for the next 50 to 75 years. The ramifications are forever . . . it's a horrible cycle!"[79]

This pessimism was particularly apparent near the end of the decade, when, as one newspaper article's title put it, "Crack Babies Turn 5, and Schools Brace." A 1990 article in *Education Digest* addressed educators, warning them that "the first 'crack babies' . . . could be enrolling in your kindergarten classes next fall. The arrival of those first afflicted youngsters will mark the beginning of a struggle that will leave your resources depleted and your compassion tested."[80] Perhaps because of the foregone nature of the struggle, there was very little substantive discussion of what new educational techniques needed to be adopted. One of the most repeated truisms was that crack babies were overstimulated, and that they should be exposed to only one stimulus at a time. One advisor to New Jersey schools explained: "It's opposite everything [teachers have] learned. . . . Like take everything off the walls, no stimuli in the room, lots of structure."[81] The resultant picture is of little time bombs with short fuses—almost anything, it seems, could trigger an explosion.

In the absence of a clear and rational response, panic set in. Across newspaper reports, the message of impending failure became increasingly dire. Dr. Charlie Kelley Knight, superintendent of public schools in East Palo Alto, California, warned dramatically that "the public still hasn't grasped the fact that these sweet, developmentally delayed children aren't going to stay sweet and little and harmless. These are the kids who one fine day bring guns to school."[82] As late as 1998, the lead paragraph of an article in *ABA Journal* (American Bar Association) on crack babies spoke further of "a new breed of juvenile delinquent. Some scream incessantly for hours. Others smear feces over the walls of their rooms. Some just stare into space, absorbing little of what goes on around them."[83] The risk of ultimate failure was made clear by Washington, DC, child psychiatrist Alberta Vallis, who said of drug-exposed babies in 1989: "This is the next generation, and so many will grow up not adhering to any value system that you won't be able to build enough prisons to house them."[84] The rhetoric about crack

babies made them truly sound like the single greatest threat to American society, and all because their mothers could not say "no" to drugs.

After more time had been spent studying crack babies and the drug-exposed children who started public schools, it became clear that the panic over crack babies was exaggerated. Because of the seeming obviousness of the crack baby epidemic, the reality of the situation surprised many people. Discussing researchers who in 2001 published a meta-analysis on research into the effect of prenatal cocaine exposure, scholars Ana Teresa Ortiz and Laura Briggs noted how the "conclusions [of the meta-analysis] are literally incredible to most people: they found virtually no evidence that cocaine use during pregnancy had any negative effects on offspring."[85] There may be some subtle effects, and certainly, there are negative economic and social consequences to crack use, but medical researchers agree now that there is no significant physiological damage to a child from prenatal cocaine exposure.[86] Deborah Frank, the Boston pediatrician who led the meta-analysis, explains how it could be that the medical reality of prenatal cocaine use was so at odds with common sense presumptions: "society's expectations of the children . . . and reaction to the mothers are completely guided not by the toxicity, but by the social meaning" of crack cocaine.[87] This social meaning of crack was a product of law enforcement efforts aimed at inner-city and poor drug users (i.e., those without the resources to use drugs and also maintain a middle-class lifestyle) and of media reporting of stories that demonized black crack-using women in particular and celebrated heroic figures like foster parents and educators in general. The crack baby was not even real, and yet it seemed so obviously true that it was an easy object for politicians to use in demanding the country get tough on drugs, and especially on black pregnant women who were compounding the nation's problem.

"This Is Your Brain on Drugs": Reading PSAs

Moving beyond the overblown panic of doctors and educators, I conclude by looking at how antidrug messages were aimed at children during the decade. Whether or not these antidrug messages were successful in reducing drug use by youth, they were certainly popular and have become a recognizable part of the cultural landscape. One question, though, is how the perceived drug epidemic became focused on children more than villainous traffickers, dealers, or users. While Reagan trumpeted the enforcement policies that took "down the surrender flag and raise[d] the battle flag" on drug traffickers,[88] he was also careful to explicitly enlist children in his fight. In a 1986 radio address, he spoke directly to school-age youth,

saying, "Everyone will have to get involved. But most importantly, beating drugs will require the courage and conviction of our young people themselves."[89] Despite publicized police crackdowns, confiscations, and international intrigues involving guns and contras, children were the real center of America's antidrug campaign.

Child antidrug education programs had been in place before crack cocaine existed. The popular D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program was started in Los Angeles in 1983, aimed at fifth and sixth graders.[90] D.A.R.E. brings police officers into schools to deliver a program of antidrug messages. Discussing D.A.R.E., sociologist Earl Wysong notes that "schools quickly became the focus of such efforts due in part to the requirement that schools receiving federal funds include drug education programs in their curricula."[91] This is one reason children became target points for discourse about drugs. Certainly, Foucault would have pointed out the complex sites of institutional power as it relates to drugs in this example: with this institutionalized program, police officers were occupying an educational role in public schools, and enlisting young children in the detection of drug-related crime. In D.A.R.E. programs, not only were children taught to refuse drugs, they were also taught to report suspicions of drug use; Wysong notes how "the program has received some negative national publicity as a kind of 'Big Brother' spy operation resulting from cases where D.A.R.E. students reported their drug-using parents to the police."[92]

The message from the White House was not only that drug use would not be tolerated, but also that efforts must be taken to prevent new users from trying drugs. In a televised address to the nation outlining the components of his Campaign Against Drug Abuse, Ronald Reagan, with Nancy at his side, explained this twofold approach, saying "Your government will continue to act aggressively [against 'drug criminals'], but nothing would be more effective than for Americans simply to quit using illegal drugs."[93] I will say more in a moment on the "simplicity" of the "Just Say No" approach, but already we can see how one arm of this campaign was aimed at drug traffickers and small-time users; the second arm turned toward children.

Reagan's address was a well-scripted, intimate one. He and Nancy appeared seated together on a divan "in the West Hall of the White House, and around us are the rooms in which we live," and they speak to each other as the camera zooms in and out and cuts to them individually.[94] The backdrop and their first few lines—"from our family to yours, from our home to yours"—establish a domestic setting to the drug problem, a strategy that Bush later used when claiming that crack was being sold outside of the White House. Near the end of the address, Reagan makes reference

to his and Nancy's past career as Hollywood actors, noting that media out-
lets "have a special opportunity with [their] enormous influence to send
alarm signals across the Nation."[95] His call was clearly answered; two years
later, he was applauding media executives for their efforts in "revealing
the deadly truth about drugs and why each of us must take a stand."[96] He
offered some numbers to show how the media answered his call to take
part in the War on Drugs, noting, for example, that "ABC contributed 482
commercials, half in prime time, to media-advertising partnership spots in
the past 9 months" (i.e., up until March 1988), adding to the PDFA's $1.5
billion in donated media time.[97]

Network television news in particular was paying a great deal of
attention to drug issues. The three major networks ABC, NBC, and CBS
together ran 74 major stories about crack cocaine during six months of
1986.[98] "NBC alone offered four hundred separate stories on crack and
cocaine in the seven months preceding the 1986 elections."[99] CBS's highly
rated documentary *48 Hours on Crack Street* was watched by 15 million
viewers in August 1986;[100] that same week NBC aired its own documentary
Cocaine Country. All of this televisual focus on drugs had a strong effect on
how drugs were perceived by American families; Laura Gómez argues that
"the sheer volume of reportage about the crack cocaine 'epidemic' [was
what] laid the foundation for introducing the specific crisis involving chil-
dren."[101] In hindsight, there was an excess of public attention toward drugs,
and this attention was soon focused on a readily available object: children.
In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault described how adult anxieties over
sexuality were targeted toward children, in particular, the creation of the
masturbating child, a new threat that medical science and parental obser-
vation worked upon. Likewise, in the mid-1980s, burdensome anxieties
over race and adults' responsibility toward future generations were shifted
onto children's associations with drugs. Moving from the helpless crack
baby, a victim of maternal drug use that would threaten future society,
adolescent youth were next targeted as the site of drug fears. As television
brought drug images and information into the household, this became
easier to do. However, in this case, rather than only be the target for adult
anxieties over drugs, youths themselves are made to become responsible
for managing their own relation to drugs. The twofold message from the
influx of drug-related television programming was (1) that parents needed
to speak to their kids more directly and (2) that kids needed to start being
more responsible, like their parents.

The second part of this message—that youth need to become more
responsible for their choices—was made most consistently by Nancy
Reagan's "Just Say No" campaign. This was the First Lady's own initiative,
which the President adopted while promoting the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of

1986. During their shared televised address, Nancy Reagan tells America an anecdote about how the campaign started: "Our young people are helping us lead the way. Not long ago, in Oakland, California, I was asked by a group of children what to do if they were offered drugs, and I answered, 'Just say no.'"[102] This version of the story, repeated other times by her husband, is both genuine and naïve.[103] On the one hand, the First Lady positions the campaign as something that supports what children already want: America's youth are "helping us lead the way," their "participation and their courage in saying 'no' needs our encouragement," and "we can help by using every opportunity to force the issue of not using drugs to the point of making others uncomfortable, even if it means making ourselves unpopular."[104] This helps paint a picture of children as innocent, naturally desirous of a drug-free life, and a national resource that must be protected: "Drugs take away the dream from every child's heart and replace it with a nightmare, and it's time we in America stand up and replace those dreams."[105]

On the other hand, Nancy Reagan's impromptu response to the schoolgirl in Oakland is lacking in any real utility. The advice to "just say no" ignores every aspect of what could be an informed drug policy and instead presents the choice to use drugs or not as so self-evident that it only needs a monosyllabic answer. This strategy of oversimplifying the decision about drugs underpins the commercial antidrug messages of the late 1980s. Rather than tangle with the complexities of the question the little girl asked Nancy Reagan (and the more complex ones older children might raise), antidrug messages simply presented the decision about drugs as self-obviously simple, and put on an exasperated, ridiculing tone toward anyone who might think that whether or not to use drugs was a serious question.

Nancy Reagan also took her antidrug message to popular television shows like *Diff'rent Strokes* (1983) and *Dynasty* (1983), and she even appeared in a 1986 music video "Stop the Madness" ("her First Rock Video") that featured numerous musicians and celebrities like Whitney Houston, Herb Alpert, and Arnold Schwarzenegger. The First Lady's sitcom appearances and the zero-tolerance surveillance mode introduced by D.A.R.E. make it worth emphasizing the visual aspects of this antidrug discourse, which happened primarily through television. Daytime talk shows and nightly news reports promoted graphic images of poor, black, crack-abusing mothers. Television also served a later function in trying to educate and scare children away from illegal drugs. In part because the negative effects of illegal drug abuse can be hidden or long term, the harmful effects of illegal drug use worked best by visualization and metaphor. To reinforce the message that drugs like cocaine are bad, advertisers used catchy images, such as an early print ad that showed a woman pointing a

revolver into one nostril. The word "cocaine," printed in large block letters, completed the metaphor that doing cocaine is like committing suicide. Another ad used the metaphor of a cardiograph, comparing a "line" of cocaine to the line shown on a cardiograph machine, again using a simple metaphor to equate cocaine with death.

The "Cocaine Gun" ads were some of the first produced under the aegis of the PDFA, which was created by advertising executives in March 1987. The initial idea was that the tools and techniques of the advertising trade could be used to "unsell" drugs to children. The PDFA would serve as a clearinghouse, bringing together advertising agencies and media outlets. They found immediate success, and by 1988 had received $1.2 billion worth of donated broadcast time and print space.[106] Print ads appeared in major American news publications and on billboards, and television PSAs appeared on the major networks and their affiliates. One piece in an industry paper *Back Stage* breathlessly compared the opportunities to "a pro-bono campaign the likes of which the country hasn't experienced since the war bond drives of World War II."[107] Cynthia Cotts, critical of the effectiveness of PDFA ads, suggests the real motive behind these contributions: "creative directors get to show off [and submit ads] for industry awards. The actors involved get exposure, and the media outlets can pat themselves on the back for contributing to a good cause."[108] In other words, this was not just charity on the part of creative talent; rather, it was another way for the advertising industry to market itself.

The first and most well-known antidrug PSA produced by the PDFA was "Fried Egg," shown on ABC in 1987; *Forbes* reported that 92 percent of American teenagers were familiar with the ad in 1990.[109] One version of "Fried Egg" is set in a kitchen: a man speaks to the camera "is there anyone out there who still isn't clear about what doing drugs does? OK, last time"; he displays an egg while saying "this is your brain"; he points to a hot skillet and says "this is drugs"; cracking the egg into sizzling skillet he concludes "this is your brain on drugs. Any questions?" A shorter version simply shows a close-up of a skillet with a cracked egg sizzling in it. As with the "Cocaine Gun" print ads, early antidrug PSAs favored a single visual metaphor to demonstrate the negative effects of drug use. The message here is obvious: your brain is fragile like an egg; taking drugs will harm your brain as much as frying it would. Critics of antidrug PSAs point to the lack of discrimination between legal and illegal drugs, and between drug use and drug abuse; these PSAs seem to suggest that crack or heroin is as harmful as tobacco or marijuana, and that the amount of drugs taken is irrelevant.[110] This argument especially applies to the "Fried Egg" PSA, where the Humpty Dumpty logic of the super-fragile human brain does not accord with a real-world scientific understanding of how the brain

works. Another PSA, "Experiment," directed by Dickson Sorenson, likens smoking marijuana to a terrifying medical experiment that alters your brain.[111] A third 1987 PSA claimed to show the brainwaves of a 14-year-old smoking pot; it was lambasted when it was later reported that the brainwaves were actually of a coma patient.[112] While revelation of these inaccuracies might undermine the ads on an intellectual level, the emphasis on the brain, the seat of reason and personhood, successfully preys on deep-seated adolescent fears of failing to be normal. Thus, we see that as part of the strategy of "unselling" drugs to adolescents, early PSAs often emphasized the brain as a stand-in for the drug user. This is how the metaphor is completed in "Fried Egg": you are your brain. This logic also invokes anxieties over the wave of brain-damaged crack babies that were supposed to invade American society.

In addition to the primary antidrug message, the second implicit rhetorical message of all these commercials is "it's simple." In "Fried Egg," the man is almost exasperated that he has to explain the effect of illegal drug use in the first place, and while his domestic setting and appearance mark him as a father figure, he has a condescending tone toward his audience. Rather than engage in a nuanced moral discussion or teach a life lesson in the manner of classic television dads, this man's no-nonsense approach makes drug use a domestic issue on par with not brushing one's teeth or doing household chores. Simply put, there is an appeal to authority in these PSAs that operates on a very simple level. Likewise, a number of other PSAs were centered on domestic relationships between fathers and children, and support the idea that stopping drug use need not be a complex, intellectual process. One, "Like Father" directed by Michael Cuesta, reverses the logic of "Fried Egg." A father aggressively questions his son about drug use and where he picked up this dangerous habit, until his son responds with the kicker "I learned it by watching you." In the world of these antidrug PSAs, culpability is simple, and so is the solution: "just say no." Interestingly, these two messages are at odds: on the one hand, the brain represents personhood and is a major reason to avoid drugs; on the other hand, avoiding drugs is something "brainless," something youths should not even need to think about. Similar to Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" campaign, the "Fried Egg" spots position the conversation about drugs as extremely simple and exceedingly obvious.

There is a great deal of argument over how effective PSAs and print ads were in deterring drug use. The PDFA points to research showing a significant decrease in marijuana and crack/cocaine use from 1987 to 1990,[113] while others argue that these ads increase curiosity about drugs and undermine their authority by overstating the dangers of drug use.[114] Perhaps recognizing these problems, today, the PDFA has since shifted

its focus away from trying to convince youth that drugs are bad, toward educating parents in how to have conversations with their children. The anxiety over drugs represented in some of these ads is simply made up, but rather than see that as a reason to dismiss these ads entirely, it is useful to see how the imagination of youthful drug use reveals a parental fantasy of innocent childhood. Scholar Michael J. Ludwig agrees with Humphries and Gómez that "illegal drugs are often used to articulate issues of race and class."[115] Discussing PSAs that the PDFA labeled "as part of their 'inner-city initiative,'" Ludwig notes "however, [that] the PSAs are broadcast over network television and included as part of the previews on video cassettes. This means that anyone in the United States with a television and a video cassette player is able to see them. This serves to spread the image of the drug user and abuser as being mainly minority groups—a gross distortion of the truth."[116] In imagining the worst things that could happen to kids who use drugs, adults alternated between a nostalgic vision of innocent childhood and a depraved and frightening vision. In antidrug messages, this nostalgic vision is white, and the depraved one is black.[117]

Ultimately, the new "crack baby" was a marketing invention designed to further Reagan's War on Drugs, which itself was less about drugs and more about reasserting norms of appropriate domestic childhood and childrearing. In an effort to show how dangerous drugs could be, social commentators turned their attention from drug users to other supposed victims, like innocent children. This social presentation of drugs, and particularly the drama of a crack cocaine epidemic, was overwhelmingly presented as a racial issue.

The Person with AIDS: Graphic Humor and Graphic Illness

"Person with AIDS" is an unwieldy expression that does not match the catchy simplicity of the other 1980s objects of knowledge. Even the media-friendly abbreviation "PWA," putting an acronym inside another acronym, leaves us with a confusing amount of condensation. In fact, acronyms abound in AIDS discourse during the decade: HTLV-III, GRID, AIDS, LAV, ARC, AZT, HIV, ARV, IDAV, ACIDS, CAID, WOG, ACT UP, GMHC, KS, PCP, CDC.[1] Who is this new individual that he or she must be so carefully veiled behind a thicket of abbreviated letters? Even this central figure "AIDS" is not, as Susan Sontag points out, the name of one univocal disease, but rather an acronym that represents a spectrum of unnaturally bordered illnesses, the "condition called AIDS."[2] I begin this chapter with the linguistic abbreviations that both center and obscure the conversation about AIDS and PWAs. The history of AIDS acronyms is a history of negotiations between the medical, media, and activist communities, each of which must balance the need to be descriptive with sensitivity in labeling new individuals. This is evident in discourse around photographs of PWAs that appeared in news media, which scholars and activists criticized for mainly focusing on tropes of victimization. After examining this history, I turn to a less-discussed medium of visually representing AIDS—comics art. Historians of AIDS have shown that safer sex education in response to the AIDS crisis had been exclusively textual before 1985, until Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) began distributing safe sex pamphlets in comic form that imitated the pornographic "Tijuana Bibles" or "eight-pagers" popular in the 1920s. Ironically, it was homophobic Republican senator Jesse Helms who brought these publications to a much wider audience in 1987, when he used them as an object lesson to garner support for a spending bill amendment that would prohibit positive depictions

of homosexuality in AIDS-education material distributed by groups that received federal money. In a dramatic version of the tale, Helms took examples of the pornographic GMHC comics to the Oval Office, where Reagan pounded his fist on his desk in anger after looking at the first few pages.[3] The parodic, sex-positive nature of these comics, which use humor and eroticism to help convey up-to-date information about safer sex, was a far cry from the documentary photographs that were criticized for victimizing PWAs. Ironically, though, the figurative nature of the cartoon image made these comics adaptable by both activists organizing to fight the spread of AIDS and conservatives seeking to stop a supposed "homosexual agenda." I conclude this chapter with a reading of three collections of AIDS-related comics—*Strip AIDS* (1987), *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (1988), and *AARGH!: Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia* (1988)—which introduce and challenge visual conventions of representing AIDS, producing a conflicted understanding of how best to show the PWA.

Abbreviating Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

Acquired immune deficiency syndrome, or AIDS, is the name for a disease of the immune system that leaves the body susceptible to various opportunistic infections or rare cancers; it is fatal without treatment. AIDS has often been confused and conflated with HIV, or human immunodeficiency virus, which is the virus that causes AIDS. Researchers now know that AIDS appeared in the United States as early as 1981, although at that time there was uncertainty over exactly what the new disease was and what it should be called. While, says researcher Jean L. Marx, "disputes over viral nomenclature do not ordinarily command much attention beyond the individuals immediately involved in the fray," in the case of AIDS, the battle for nomination was politically and financially charged.[4] On the one hand was a rivalry between French and American researchers who offered differing names for the proposed virus that causes AIDS, LAV versus HTLV-III. LAV stands for "lymphadenopathy-associated virus" and HTLV stands for "human T-lymphotropic virus Type III." (A third possibility, ARV for "AIDS-related virus," was suggested later and was not as often used.) What the media was calling simply the "AIDS virus" was problematic for a few reasons: it too pessimistically suggested that the virus would inevitably lead to AIDS, and it mistakenly implied that AIDS itself could be transmitted virally. Rather, testing positive for the virus that causes AIDS did not mean one would necessarily develop AIDS, nor can AIDS itself be transmitted—only the virus that causes AIDS can be. In 1986, the international medical community agreed that LAV and HTLV-III were the same thing,

and that the new name HIV should be used for the virus that causes AIDS. But this seemingly simple decision over a name was in fact part of a medical soap opera that had effects on the early direction of AIDS treatment. In commentary on an open letter in the journal *Science* that announced the new name, Marx fills readers in on the story, noting that two of the thirteen-member naming committee dramatically withheld their signatures (one of whom was behind the name HTLV-III), and that the real source of the dispute was "patent rights to the potentially very lucrative test kits for the AIDS virus that grew out of the original discoveries."[5] When another scientist (who was behind the name LAV) prematurely announced the new name during a lecture at the rival scientist's home institution, a minor crisis was on hand, leading a *Washington Post* reporter to note that "while concern about the virus' name may seem trivial in the worldwide war against acquired immune deficiency syndrome, it is an important symbol in the medical research community."[6] The symbolic nature of these alternative acronyms was indeed extremely important to the first AIDS researchers, since the chosen name would not only legitimize a lab's research work, but also determine its economic success. The result, however, was that AIDS researchers were distracted by the fight over an acronym.

On the other hand was the earlier battle over what to call the spectrum of illnesses that came to be known as AIDS. The acronym AIDS was settled upon by medical researchers in 1982.[7] An early suggestion, GRID, standing for "gay-related immune deficiency," was criticized for falsely suggesting that the disease was confined to the gay community. The label GRID is one example of how the initial response to the disease was hampered by acronymic innuendo. While one of the first published news stories on GRID duly notes that cases have also been found in heterosexual men and heterosexual women, the author nonetheless uses the acronym throughout and even concludes with a doctor's warning that "gay people whose life style consists of anonymous sexual encounters are going to have to do some serious rethinking."[8] To the list of initially suggested acronyms, scholar Jan Zita Grover adds CAID, "community acquired immune deficiency," and WOG, "a gay black-humor term: wrath of god."[9] CAID seems simply to euphemistically substitute the idea of "community" for "gay" in order to suggest a gentler etiology for the disease. On the other hand, the offensive WOG uses racist humor to suggest a feeling of apocalypse around the disease.

But why the initialization in the first place? All of these early suggestions for AIDS reduce to easy shorthand acronyms, which were obviously taken into consideration when trying to decide what to call the new disease. It is common for the medical community to abbreviate illnesses that involve complicated or long formal names, such as *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia, shortened to PCP, one of the formerly rare infections whose

sudden outbreak helped researchers realize there was a new disease. But "acquired immune deficiency syndrome" is not all that hard to say. Do we just like to shorten the names of diseases, like influenza to flu? Is there a perverse, wishful logic in using an acronym for the disease AIDS that literally means "helps"? Or perhaps it is not more simply a way to obscure disease by abbreviation?

David B. Feinberg humorously discusses the logic of abbreviation in his 1989 AIDS novel *Eighty-Sixed*. The protagonist, pointedly named B. J. Rosenthal, decodes his best friend's name: "D.K., those initials are apt, aren't they? . . . Decay. Here you are, trying to tempt me, trying to break my resolve."[10] In Feinberg's world, people's initials are secret, appropriate signs of their being. When looking for codes—anything meaningful in a crisis time of anxiety—even innocuous linguistic signs such as names expand into symbols of meaningful obscurity. Scholar Paula Treichler likewise notes ways that the initials AIDS can be culturally reread. For example, one new meaning ascribed to the acronym AIDS was "America's Ideal Death Sentence," and she relates "the French joke that the acronym for AIDS, SIDA in French, stands for *Syndrome Imaginaire pour Décourager les Amoureux*."[11] In a 1988 Kurt Erichsen comic strip, characters worry about a terrible new brain fever, HIDS, which humorously stands for "Homophobic Intelligence Deficiency Syndrome."[12] And journalist David Black recounts the crude joke that "gay" really stands for "Got AIDS Yet?"[13] Treichler's larger argument about these inventions is that "in the construction of scientific facts, the existence of a name plays a crucial role in providing a coherent and unified signifier—a shorthand way of signifying what may be a complex, inchoate, or little-understood concept."[14] While this is undoubtedly apparent in the medical community's dispute over what to call HIV, novel backronyms for AIDS actually reveal a desire for less coherence, or indeed multiple coherences ("DS" for "death sentence" seems to be common, with other variants having the "A" made to stand for "ass" or "anus"). What does it mean that AIDS can "stand for" something? That there can in fact be multiple ways to decode these four letters?

Another way to understand the abbreviation of AIDS is to see it not as rendering the patient's situation more obscure, but rather more accessible. As part of the ownership of AIDS, activists began to use the expression PWA. This was in direct response to media characterizations of PWAs as AIDS "victims" or "patients." Rather than allow AIDS to be seen as something that determines the course of a life toward victimhood or patienthood, the alternative formulation PWA suggests that having AIDS is only one part of a life. Whereas an AIDS "patient" or "victim" was waiting to die, inside, and helpless, a PWA was active, outside, and involved. The activist group National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA) strongly made

this case in its 1983 founding manifesto known as the "Denver Principles," delivered at the Second National AIDS Forum. They begin a list of recommendations about confronting AIDS with these two sentences: "We condemn attempts to label us as 'victims,' a term which implies defeat, and we are only occasionally 'patients,' a term which implies passivity, helplessness, and dependence upon the care of others. We are 'People with AIDS.'"[15] It is evident from the opening statement that this document was reactionary, prompted by what were felt to be thoughtless and negative labels. In particular, NAPWA here attempts to craft the terminology of PWAs to avoid the connotations of passive victimization. In fact, the Denver Principles does not offer a counter-definition of the qualities of "People with AIDS," instead focusing only on what a PWA is not. This is, no doubt, because defining PWA would suggest there is only one mode of living with AIDS. PWA, then, provides an affirming label of identity, but does so in a way that recognizes a variety of individuals' right to self-determination.

Today, NAPWA makes a point to compare the meaning of an AIDS diagnosis in 1983 to the same diagnosis in the present: "in 1983, an AIDS diagnosis was a death sentence," whereas "today, HIV/AIDS is a manageable chronic disease—for most, not all."[16] Faced at the time with certain death, there was even more of an urgency to contest definitions of illness, and the remarkable story of PWAs in 1983 is that they fought for the right to linguistic self-representation even though they believed they would soon die. These early PWAs, however, resisted a representation of their experience only in the binary terms of living or dead. For instance, Grover claims that "the PWA's insistence upon naming as a key to identity . . . is primarily an act of self-acclaim."[17] This "act of self-acclaim" opposes the viewpoint of "victim" or "sufferer" just waiting to die, and is a kind of linguistic activism. As an example of "self-acclaim," Grover recounts how "at the October 1987 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, PWAs from all over the US took the naming of their condition one step further, announcing that they are 'people living with AIDS,'" or PLWAs, further separating the name of illness from the identity of the body.[18]

As a 1980s object of knowledge, the PWA is unique in that it sprang from self-acclaim and managed to keep that status. That is, unlike the other objects of knowledge that described new types of people in the decade, the PWA was self-generated and self-owned. Furthermore, unlike the yuppie, the only other label to be embraced by some, the PWA did not have negative connotations or a later shift in the value of its meaning. Rather, as a label of self-acclaim, "PWA" was simply ignored by those who were not describing themselves, and it never gained the derogatory meaning that "AIDS victim" or "AIDS patient" had. As Grover puts it, "it is a measure of the need of the press—left, center, and right—to distance itself from

AIDS that few of its journalists have chosen to employ" the term PWA.[19] A LEXIS-NEXIS search through the databases of American newspapers from 1982 to 1992 for the phrase PWA resulted in 108 articles.[20] In contrast, a search for the phrase "AIDS victim" resulted in more than 3,000. Of the news reports that did use the term PWA, many were specifically about PWA activist groups or were otherwise presenting PWAs in a positive light. A large number were editorials or letters to the editor either criticizing news sources for not using the desired term PWA, or criticizing the expression PWA as being overly politically correct.

Well-known journalist Randy Shilts was one who took exception to what he called "AIDSpeak," noting that "in no medical crisis has the politics of language become such a central issue, leaving journalists and researchers to tiptoe their way through a mine field of linguistic sensibilities."[21] It is easy for Shilts to mock some of the more tortured expressions, such as the "burst of gobbledygook that would make Pentagon word twisters proud" when the World Health Organization "suggested that AIDS dementia should be referred to as 'HIV-related Organic Brain Disease.' Or, if you prefer, just OBD."[22] He exaggerates his point by recounting writer David Israel's joking suggestion that "those who have died from HIV be referred to as 'bodies resting from AIDS.'"[23] But Shilts also has a problem with the expression PWA and its offspring PLWA: "in well-intentioned eagerness to use the language to bend the public mind, the politically committed sometimes make language more a tool of manipulation than illumination."[24] Part of Shilts's criticism is that there was a continually confusing shift in the lexicon of AIDS; no sooner did one adopt the PWA as an object of knowledge than one was asked to use a new term. Not many would disagree with Shilts's assessment that PWA is a "tool of manipulation"; PWAs were obviously trying to manipulate public opinion to the best advantage. Shilts did not object to the idea of manipulation, but rather that this manipulation might ultimately be confusing and work to diminish the shock value of the horrible consequences of HIV's spread. In rejecting the "victim" label, PWAs showed their growing political power, but at the cost of being seen as too "normal" and not deserving of the compassion shown to suffering "victims." As an object of knowledge, then, "PWA" strikes an uneasy balance between "normal" and "unique."

"On the Verge of Revolt": GMHC's Safer Sex Comix

What does a PWA look like? Unlike the easily caricatured yuppie, the PWA resisted being visualized as much as it resisted being labeled. Jan Zita Grover has drawn the history of photographic representations of AIDS,

which she first traces to medical and basic research journals. These photographic images "were not concerned with humanizing AIDS; they were largely close-ups of affected organs or microphotographs of cells, tissue, virus."[25] In discussing these early AIDS images, Grover is hesitant about exactly what is being shown, using scare quotes in the phrase "photographs 'of AIDS'" to point to the difficulty of representing disease itself.[26] Even the seemingly objective, scientific representations of illness that appear in medical journals can only point toward images of the symptoms of a disease; this is especially true of AIDS, which is a syndrome of numerous symptoms and a spectrum of illnesses. The alternative—to show microphotographs or artistic renderings of the HIV virus—leads to the problem of dehumanizing the illness or aestheticizing otherwise unseen parts of the body. AIDS, like any disease, is experienced as much more than a breakdown of organic material, and yet the public dissemination of early scientific images had the unintended effect of turning AIDS into a strange biological landscape.

In response, a second place that PWAs were made visible was in distributed material and news reports from AIDS activist groups such as the most prominent one ACT UP, the "AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power."[27] ACT UP made a name for itself with confrontational activism, staging public protests in front of government, pharmaceutical, and church buildings, and courting the media with publicity stunts like a disruption of the New York Stock Exchange.[28] The PWAs who joined ACT UP demonstrations showed whole bodies on the street, a community holding hands, eschewing medicalized images of diseased cells and hospital beds. Journalistic photographs of PWAs participating in ACT UP's public events oscillate between normalcy and shock. Part of the message is that PWAs look no different from anyone else, and that they can march, sing, cry, and leaflet as well as anyone. The other part of the message is calculated to make a spectacle in order to draw the public's attention toward AIDS-related social issues. The ambivalence of these two messages—there is nothing special to see; pay special attention to us—resulted in a polarized impression of PWA activist events. Depending on one's attitudes toward sexuality, these were either important public events that helped normalize PWAs or scandalous examples of the wicked lifestyle that PWAs led.

In a review of Douglas Crimp and Adam Rolston's book *AIDS Demo graphics*, a visual history of ACT UP, Daniel Harris makes a similar criticism, arguing that "there is an eerie identity of purpose between the way both the left and the right have scripted AIDS, encouraged the American public to interpret it in moral terms and endowed it with their own damning partisan legends."[29] Harris's point is that there is a contradiction between two general ways of seeing AIDS: a scientific approach (it is simply an

organic disease caused by a microscopic virus) versus a cultural approach (it is the result of an improper lifestyle, or it has been exacerbated by an uncaring federal government). The PWA faces the problem of which approach to take: if the disease is an organic, scientific problem, then there is little need to focus on the lived experience of PWAs; on the other hand, if PWAs need to be shown as human beings in order to promote treatment, then moral experience should be brought into the discussion. This moral experience of AIDS comes from the way public events were shaped in order to make AIDS (and AIDS activism) more visible to the general public. That is, whether or not one was working to demonize or to humanize PWAs, the primary strategy was to render these PWAs visual, and this visual strategy was more often moral than documentary.

Noting the "image-centricity that [is] the hallmark of ACT UP's activism,"[30] Harris argues that ACT UP is working in line with the more general postmodern "means by which our knowledge of events is mediated by those who control the information industry."[31] Essentially, Harris argues, the way ACT UP presents PWAs does not spring from medical research or documentary, but primarily from media theory and information technology. He concludes that ACT UP's "image-centricity is thus not so much one of its major concerns as it is its very modus operandi."[32] This is a twist on the PWAs "self-acclaim," as visual images become particularly important to knowledge and information in a postmodern, media-saturated 1980s world. Ultimately, Harris criticizes this "message over issues" approach, concluding that "ACT UP is too in love with the act of demonstrating as an end in itself, with gazing fondly at its own reflection in the mirror the media conveniently provide."[33] Whether or not Harris misunderstands ACT UP's intentions, his point is that images of PWAs have a special kind of importance outside of scientific reality: these images are literally "countercultural." ACT UP's presentation of PWAs complicates the categories of "medical" versus "moral" images.

Along these lines, but looking at seemingly positive images of PWAs, another criticism of AIDS "image-centricity" is made by Mark Donovan, who examines the passage of the 1990 Ryan White Care Act, the first federal legislation to provide funds for AIDS treatment. Donovan finds that lawmakers working to pass the legislation were successful mainly because they were able to create a positive image of PWAs by focusing on women and children, rather than the intravenous drug users and gays who represented the largest segment of PWAs. The problem, however, is that "by promoting images of 'deserving victims of AIDS,' this rhetorical strategy also served to reinforce the negative constructions of the majority of PWAs."[34] In other words, making a distinction between "innocent victims" like women and children and "guilty PWAs" like drug users, gay men, and prostitutes

widened the disparity between how these groups of people were perceived in moral terms, even though from a medical point of view all were equally in need of AIDS treatment.

This discourse was especially motivated by photographs of the guilty dying of AIDS, in particular a 1988 exhibition and book of photographs of PWAs by Nicholas Nixon at New York City's Museum of Modern Art. While I had suggested earlier that images of PWAs were more often moral than documentary, Nixon might be presented as a counter-example to that claim. Nixon's PWA photographs are intimate portraits of PWAs in their homes, in beds, and with family. They certainly present themselves as documentary, i.e. "objective," real images with a focus on details. Yet, Nixon's photographs have been criticized (and protested, at the time, by ACT UP) for their singular presentation of PWAs as dying or near death. Scholar Bethany Ogdon summarizes a number of critics' positions when she writes that "the rigid equation that Nixon's PWA project proposed, AIDS = death, transformed his photographic subjects from distinct and distinguishable social beings into interchangeable examples of that equation."[35] The "equation" "AIDS = death" is of course an inverse of ACT UP's well-known 1987 slogan "silence = death." In comparing the two slogans, we see how these photographs, despite showing Americans images of PWAs they would not otherwise see, are also "silent," since they do not allow PWAs to live, much less speak.[36]

Grover also raises a larger criticism of Nixon's work, along with other photographic and televisual representations of PWAs. Discussing culturally developed techniques for representing shame, Grover discusses television "conventions for depicting persons whose identity needs to be guarded [whether criminals or witnesses to crimes]—heavy backlighting, isolation of the subject in deep shadow. These have most commonly been used with felons or potential felons."[37] When these same techniques were used to protect the identities of PWAs, the consequence was that they too appeared "guilty." Grover's analysis perfectly explains the "moral terms" of representing PWAs. In this case, two opposing ideas—PWAs are endangered and PWAs are guilty—are connected by one set of representational strategies. Attacking these representational strategies, and replacing them with new ones, was part of ACT UP's project, and part of the public negotiation over what a PWA looks like.

Grover identifies one shift in this negotiation by examining material about safe sex, a novel concept for the decade of AIDS, before which the safe/unsafe distinction was not particularly important to make in terms of sex. The concept of "safe sex" was created in response to the AIDS pandemic, and informational material was produced to educate about sexual practices that reduced or eliminated the risk of contracting the HIV virus.

As a result of an emphasis on safe sex, sexual discourse proliferated in mainstream newspapers, to the surprise of many. Take for example the word "condom," which cartoonist Jules Feiffer mentions as one example of how "AIDS has liberated the language": "newspapers can now print almost anything and get away with it!"[38] Being able to "get away with" scandalous print is one of the linguistic effects of AIDS. Grover notes that "safer sex publications before 1985 had been exclusively textual. In 1985–1986, GMHC, the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, and other AIDS service organizations began producing lively, graphically illustrated safer-sex materials."[39] Grover argues that the eroticization of safer sex material after 1985 was in direct response to the panic of AIDS, where "gay institutions chose visibly to reassert the plurality and plenitude of their sexual pleasure and sexual practices *if carried out safely*. Thus the eroticized videotapes, films, and photographs that circulated increasingly after 1985 in AIDS education must be seen as a counter-discourse to the dominant messages of science, medicine, and mainstream media."[40] As part of the fight against the spread of AIDS, it was important to represent sexual practices in a candid way that would have been considered overly explicit before.

The visual eroticization of gay sexual life did not pass without comment. Most notorious was Republican senator Jesse Helms's attack on funding for AIDS research, especially in an amendment he wanted attached to a 1987 spending bill. His amendment "prohibit[ed] the use of any funds provided under this Act to the Centers for Disease Control from being used to provide AIDS education, information, or prevention materials and activities that promote, encourage, or condone homosexual sexual activities or the intravenous use of illegal drugs."[41] Critics noted how this amendment would have the effect of silencing AIDS education for those who needed it most; by one reading, any description of homosexual activity or drug use could be seen as "condoning" such activity. Despite protest, this amendment was passed with the spending bill, due in part to Helms's calculated outrage and political attack on homosexuality in general. It is easy to read Jesse Helms as a bigoted homophobe who worked hard to restrict federal aid for PWAs in service to a radical, science-rejecting ideology (e.g., he claimed to believe that the only "clear choice" to avoid "being killed by AIDS" is to "reject sodomy and practice morality"[42]). The way he made his argument, however, hints at the problem of representing PWAs and AIDS in general: that seeing either first necessitates making sexual activity more visible.

The central objects in Helms's attack on AIDS funding were short comic books produced by GMHC that depicted safe sex practices. "Safer Sex Comix" were modern versions of the eight-page pornographic "Tijuana Bibles" that were popular in the 1920s. These early underground comics,

cheaply printed and distributed, featured parodies of famous cartoon characters in pornographic situations. GMHC's version did not parody copyrighted characters, but did feature short narratives focused on promoting safe sex and AIDS information, usually with one image per page. These comics briefly became notorious when Helms distributed them to members of Congress "in a brown envelope marked 'Personal and Confidential, for Senator's Eyes Only,'"[43] and then discussed them on the Senate floor. The *Los Angeles Times* reported some of Helms's more visceral quotations from the Congressional Record: "this subject matter is so obscene, so revolting, it is difficult for me to stand here and talk about it. . . . I may throw up."[44] So as to refute any claims that he simply has a weak constitution, Helms characterized himself by saying "this senator is not a goody-goody two shoes"[45] and telling the story of when he "showed the comic book to President Reagan at the White House and the President 'opened the book, shook his head and slammed his fist.'"[46] In its coverage of the amendment, the *New York Times* also quoted Helms as saying that "if the American people saw these books, they would be on the verge of revolt."[47] A different kind of "revolt," though, might have been exactly what GMHC wanted with these comics.

GMHC produced eight Safer Sex Comix between 1986 and 1987. There has been little scholarly attention paid to these comics, which were intended as ephemera and have not been reprinted, so I will spend some time here describing them in detail. While there is some variation between the eight issues, each follows a standard pattern and they are more similar to each other than different. Physically, the objects all look the same—each is 3.5 inches by 5 inches with the seam on the short edge, has eight pages, features the same typeset "Safer Sex Comix" logo in the same location, and has the same extratextual information (copyright information, artist information, a phone number, and GMHC's mailing address) in the same place on the same pages. Only one (#6) has a separate cover panel, while the rest begin the narrative on the first page (in fact, only #5, #6, and #7 have titles that are different from the issue number). Only one (#7) is in portrait format with the seam at the top, while the rest are drawn in landscape orientation. Seven different artists contributed artwork to the series (Richard A. White, Bill Bodenschatz, Matt, Donelan, Alexander, Aries, and Burton Clarke); two of the stories (#6 and #8) are credited to P. J. Anvil and the rest are credited to Greg. All of the comics are printed in black and white, and have either one or two panels per page. While the artistic styles vary somewhat, all are more or less representational and depict natural environments, except for depictions of genitals or body parts, which are enlarged or stylized in a pornographic manner. Taken as a whole, these comics clearly were designed and produced with the intention of creating

an identifiable brand object; even with different artists drawing in different styles, these comics recognizably belong together as part of a series because of both the issue numbering and the visual packaging.

Narratively, there are also a number of similarities throughout the issues: a male couple is introduced on the first page, at least one specific safe sex practice is described and illustrated in the next few pages, there is a "money shot," or a graphically represented image of ejaculation, on page 7, and the last page shows the couple embracing or holding hands.[48] Taken as a whole, the men in these comics represent a range of ethnic and class types; there are laborers and princes; blacks, whites, and Hispanics. Only one comic (#8) shows more than two men. There are a variety of explicit sexual acts shown including striptease, oral sex, mutual masturbation, anal sex, and urolagnia. While the theme and setting of each varies, they all involve fantasy or role-playing: two are set in a gym, one features a plumber, one a wrestling coach, one a lifeguard, one a leather-clad man, and one a fairy-tale sleeping beauty. Starting with the fifth issue, each comic has a character who wears a safety pin—a symbol indicating that the wearer is only interested in safer sex practices. This iconic display of safe sexual practice furthers the erotic role-play in these narratives. These elements of fantasy fit the conventions of traditional pornography and are made to be part of the new atmosphere of safer sex. That is, while all of the characters engage in explicit sexual activity, the focus of these comics is on the role fantasy and dialogue play in safer sex. Thus, while some of the pornographic dialogue the characters engage in seems disjointed in relation to the images, we can see that this dialogue is meant to offer readers suggestions for how to talk about safer sex with their partners. In other words, these comics not only educate about specific safe sex practices such as the use of condoms, outercourse, and mutual masturbation, but they also provide models of discourse for encouraging partners to agree to these safer sex practices.

As a specific example, one panel of "Safer Sex Comix #2" depicts a dark-haired man masturbating and performing oral sex on his blond partner. There are two speech balloons that relate the men's dialogue. The dark-haired man asks "How 'bout if I go down on you?" to which we read the other respond "Ooo . . . Yeah!! But only on the shaft and balls . . . I'm real HOT!!"[49] On this page, one safer sex activity is shown visually (masturbation) and another is described in speech (oral sex that avoids contact with bodily fluids). The cartoon image shows the dark-haired man's mouth near the shaft of the blond's penis, but the blond's instructions "only on the shaft and balls" reinforce the point that the performer of oral sex needs to avoid ingesting his or her partner's bodily fluids. That brief line of dialogue about safe sex practice is surrounded by conventional pornographic

sound effects and "dirty talk"; the result is that readers can learn one way to encourage safer sex practices in an erotic manner. This strategy is repeated in all of the comics: the artists visually depict safer sex practices, but they also have their characters talk about their sex practices in a direct and erotic way, offering a model for readers to imitate. This is a clear component of the controlled safer sex message GMHC wanted to distribute. Along with the visual tropes that connect the packaging of the "Safer Sex Comix," each also ends with a narrative image that joins the series together: the couple embracing on the last page. Whether it is postcoital, holding hands, or walking down the street, the final visual message is one of friendship and mutual respect.

Peter L. Allen discusses Helms's furor over GMHC's "Safer Sex Comix" and identifies the one that so bothered Helms as issue #6, "After the Gym."[50] "After the Gym" is different from the others since it features type-set text presented in a way that descriptively comments upon the images, rather than emanates from them. Written in the third person, it is also filled with more pornographic euphemism than the other issues: "throbbing tool," "rock hard manpleaser," "pulsing fuckpole," "bursting shaft." I mention these differences not to suggest that Helms had happened to pick up (or be given) a particularly eroticized issue of "Safer Sex Comix," but because this issue is the most obviously pornographic in a familiar sense. It is the most text-heavy of all of the issues, and this excess of pornographic discourse verges on being over-the-top: "for nearly an hour, two muscular bodies taunt and tease, grinding and wrestling against each other. They talk dirty. They talk sex. Ed slowly and seductively unrolls a rubber down the length of Julio's hard eight inches."[51] The sexual descriptions are confused and at times do not match with the drawings. Scholar Matthew P. McAllister, in "Comic Books and AIDS," finds it curious that Helms chose a comic book to make his stand against homosexuality, rather than one of the many safe sex brochures with photographs that were being distributed. The reason for this is that "Helms plugged into subconscious, or even conscious, stories about children, gays and the mass media."[52] In other words, it seems that AIDS was less a problem to Helms than the idea that AIDS had liberated the language, and was now encroaching upon comics. In a newspaper editorial, New York City mayor Ed Koch points out the flaw in Helms's logic attacking "Safer Sex Comix": "Gay Men's Health Crisis materials, complains Senator Helms, use blunt words and sexually graphic illustration that 'perpetuate the AIDS problem.' But those the materials reach aren't innocents who'll be shocked by such literature. They already practice sex; they want to know how to practice it more safely."[53] It was not the sexuality that was the real issue for those like Helms, it was the sexuality in comic form; it was the conflation of pornography and cartoon art,

the mixing of two kinds of "graphic" images. Even more so than images of marching PWA activists, representations of gay sex in comics form threatened to normalize homosexuality by making it more accessible.

Graphic Images in *AARGH!* and *Strip AIDS*

Unlike the "Safer Sex Comix" produced by GMHC, the three collections of AIDS-related comics I conclude with did not primarily have an educational motive, but were produced as fund-raising objects in conjunction with art shows and auctions. This is an important distinction to keep in mind, as the introduction of AIDS-related themes in comics could serve a number of different purposes. McAllister identifies three of these: newly created individual comics that specifically educated about AIDS-related subjects (such as the "Safer Sex Comix"), already established comic series that used AIDS or PWAs as a topical storyline (such as popular Marvel and DC comics), and published standalone collections of comics that raised money for AIDS causes (such as those I am about to discuss).[54] In looking at the last category, I want to examine how AIDS in general and PWAs specifically are represented outside of educational object lessons or smaller plotlines in larger ongoing narratives. I am particularly interested in the research Grover reports that begins this section—that media messages might not have as much to do with preventing HIV transmission as was expected. Her research focuses on publicly broadcast media messages, but I wonder if comic art in the collections I will look at has a similar intention, and whether or not the comic medium is able to be more effective.

To state this inquiry differently, questions of motive are particularly important when considering these edited collections of AIDS-related comic art. What is the point of visually representing PWAs in comics? Is it to teach about the medical experience of AIDS (to medical researchers, doctors, concerned family, or friends)? Is it to educate about the cultural experience (that PWAs can lead normal lives, to illustrate the emotional response to diagnosis)? Is it to dramatize the effect on society (PWAs are ghoulish and should be feared, PWAs are in pain and should be loved)? Is it to scare (have unsafe sex and this is what will happen to you)? Is it to raise awareness (elicit sympathy for funding or political voice)? While some of these motives are stated explicitly in the volumes' introductions, and other motives left implicit, the nature of these collections necessitates a fragmented, occasionally incoherent voice. Rather than see this as problematic, however, I think this is very much in keeping with the trope of PWAs as abbreviated figures; the acronymic, collected presentation of PWAs allows us to read them in multiple ways.

Three gay-themed comic collections were published between 1987 and 1988; they each featured donated art and gave the proceeds to a specific charity. Two were called *Strip AIDS*, the first published in Britain in 1987 and the second, an American version (*Strip AIDS U.S.A.*) published in 1988. That same year, the third book, *AARGH!: Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia*,[55] was published in Britain in response to Clause 28 of the British Local Government Act of 1988, which created a Helms-like "prohibition on promoting homosexuality by teaching or by publishing material."[56] So, while not addressed at AIDS, *AARGH!* clearly relates to the problem Americans were having of government inaction in the face of AIDS and political attacks on safer sex education.

None of the comics in *AARGH!* explicitly feature PWAs, but since *AARGH!* does offer a good cross-section of the differing strategies comic artists took when writing about AIDS, it is worth a brief discussion. Some of the strategies that recur are comics that take a dystopian view of a future where homosexuality is outlawed, comics that feature a sympathetic narrative of discrimination, and comics that use sarcasm and irony to lampoon antigay views or laws. For example, Kevin O'Neill's "Clause for Concern" and Frank Miller's "The Future of Law Enforcement" feature sci-fi police with futuristic, Robocop-like devices that test for and punish homosexuality. Next, Dave Thorpe and Lin Jammet's "I Was a Teenage Target" features a college student being attacked for suspected homosexuality, while Jamie Delano and Shane Oakley's "Growing Out of It" describes one man's adolescence and coming out in college. Last, Groc's "Promote and Survive" and Tony Reeves's "Appeal" are mock advice comics, respectively, about how to avoid homosexuality ("stay at home," "brick up all the windows," "put on blindfolds, earplugs and chastity belts"[57]) and how to promote homophobia ("in order to put down roots and thrive, homophobia needs ignorance"[58]). So, while the comics in *AARGH!* are not unified in tone, there are consistent values depicted, which require readers to properly interpret contradictory, humorous, and parodic messages. In other words, the rhetorical position of the majority of the comics in *AARGH!* is the exact opposite of the straightforward, educational "Safer Sex Comix." Whereas GMHC's "Safer Sex Comix" were speaking to the uninformed and uninitiated, these comics speak primarily to the cognoscenti and like-minded. The result of addressing an already sympathetic audience, however, is that the comics do not need to work very hard to make a moral point, and they can get away with the defense of good intentions.

Alan Moore, Steve Bissette, and Rick Veitch's contribution, "The Mirror of Love," is the longest comic in *AARGH!* and demonstrates one of the problems of self-acclaim when addressed to an already sympathetic audience. Narratively, "The Mirror of Love" presents a history of homosexuality

that oscillates between acceptance and rejection. Graphically, each of the eight pages is organized so that four evenly spaced panels occupy the upper third, while a circular panel dominates the bottom; the top portion contains a historical narrative and realistic images, while the bottom circle shows two angels in changing but symmetrical poses. Beginning with the angels, Moore tells the story through the first-person plural, speaking for same-sex desire throughout history as well as to contemporary gays.[59] The historical narrative begins way back with the claim that "blind desire made pond-slime [into] fish"[60] and continues through Greek and Roman civilization, the rise of Christianity, sixteenth-century Europe, the First and Second World Wars, and the sixties; these first seven pages are then summarized: "that was before the virus."[61] Having outlined a cyclical history where repression of homosexuality is then followed by (at least tolerant) acceptance, Moore sees the present moment as uniquely different, since "AIDS changed everything."[62] He concludes on the final, eighth page by asking whether or not AIDS will be the ultimate end of homosexuality—a "scapegoat" to rid the world of "all gay relationships, even the abstract concept"[63]—or whether instead AIDS would force a recognition of the dangers of modern sexual life for homosexuals and heterosexuals alike. On the one hand, this is presented as a practical, political question, and suggests that the government's response to the AIDS pandemic will simply be a measure of how much AIDS is perceived as a threat to heterosexual populations. But, in addressing this question to a friendly audience, Moore uses the same logic of catastrophe or redemption that underpins postmodernism, as when he poetically writes, "As we approach the future, will utopia's spires hove into view, or death-camp chimney stacks?"[64] These words appear in a panel with the iconic image from the film *The Wizard of Oz* where the heroes are walking down the yellow brick road toward Emerald City; on the preceding page, Moore had inquired whether it was not the funeral of Judy Garland (who starred in *The Wizard of Oz*) that sparked the Stonewall Riots. The limitation is that Moore can only offer readers the two extreme possibilities of utopia or death, a strategy that many PWAs would see as unnecessarily polarizing.

The British version of *Strip AIDS*, edited by Don Melia and Lionel Gracey-Whitman, is the least cohesive of the three; many of the strips are not even about AIDS, and some do not even feature homosexuality or political themes. Clearly, the project was put together quickly, and some artists contributed quick doodles or donated previous work from their syndicated daily strips. In fact, in the book's 56 pages, there are only 4 comics that are longer than 1 page, and only 20 that are printed on 1 full page (out of 88 contributors). Of the comics that do focus on AIDS, the overall tone is breezy or humorous. This is clear, for example, in the two dozen

contributions about condoms, most of which show condoms humorously placed on heads, noses, limbs, or other incongruous places. Considering the year this collection was produced, so soon after AIDS appeared in Britain, it is appropriate that many comics emphasized the concept of safe sex. On the other hand, there is a noticeable lack of political or activist voices. Because these are mainly quick, short, gag comics, the contributors are hampered from making any nuanced argument about AIDS in British society. However, while the quality varies widely, *Strip AIDS* does offer an opportunity to glimpse the historical moment of AIDS, whose meaning rapidly changed in response to evolving medical information and journalistic reporting.

American cartoonist Trina Robbins, inspired by Melia and Gracey-Whitman, decided she could do an even better collection in the United States. In a recent interview, she explained her motive, noting that the "British *Strip AIDS* was comics by various cartoonists with the money going for AIDS, but the comics weren't necessarily about AIDS. They were about all sorts of subjects, and I knew, No, no, no, that's not it. The comics themselves have to be about AIDS, so I did them one better."[65] A contemporary account of the project in *The Comics Journal* amplifies this direction, mentioning "a letter to prospective contributors [which] asked them to produce work relating to the disease, but asked them to bear in mind that the topic is 'living with AIDS, not dying of it.'"[66] Interestingly, despite this focused strategy and her own comics experience and connections, Robbins felt she could not do the book by herself because of her identity as a heterosexual woman. She thought, "This was too big a topic, and a straight woman could not do this alone, so I asked Robert Triptow, who was editing *Gay Comics*, if he would coedit it with me. He was delighted, and he got all the gay cartoonists."[67] Bill Sienkiewicz "handle[d] the mainstream guys in New York,"[68] and the final result was a collaboration of pluralistic gender and sexual identities.

Creating this pluralistic group of voices became a badge of honor, but as with *AARGH!* and the British *Strip AIDS*, it also posed problems in terms of judging artistic quality and raised criticisms of editorial policies. One reader of *AARGH!* pointed out that "apart from the two editors to whom all credit is due, of more than 50 contributors to ARRGH! [*sic*], there are only five women."[69] At a 1988 conference on comics, Trina Robbins directly challenged Debbie Delano, the copublisher of *AARGH!*, on her selection of cartoonists: "in the American contributions to *AARGH!*, you have one gay cartoonist and all the others are heterosexual males. Can you explain this?"[70] Delano's response is interesting: "It just so happened that many of them were white, heterosexual men. I don't think that is necessarily a bad thing. In fact, in some ways I think it's a good thing that so many

white heterosexual men wanted to say something about how they felt about homophobia."[71] Beyond the self-conscious addition of a race-based criticism about her contributors, Delano presents her choices as both accidental ("it just so happened") and enlightening ("it's a good thing"). Undiscussed here is a broader question of cultural authority: When dealing with PWAs or AIDS-related themes, should there be some limit of experience that qualifies one to speak?

Robbins's second criticism was that Delano also missed an opportunity to introduce nonmainstream comics to a wider audience. She recounts her own editorial practice as abashedly inclusive: we "had every woman I could get hold of, every gay cartoonist I could get hold of, and they're reaching a huge audience."[72] Because of this inclusiveness, there are over 100 contributors to *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* Of the ones that are explicitly AIDS-related, some use synecdoche to anthropomorphize HIV/AIDS as little microbes fighting superheroic battles,[73] while others use similes: AIDS is like cooties, consumption, a medieval plague, a futuristic plague, or like Poe's "Masque of the Red Death."[74] Of the subset of AIDS-related comics that are also about PWAs, 11 comics reminisce about deceased PWAs. Some are public figures like musician Klaus Nomi, theater director Charles Ludlam, or choreographer Joah Lowe,[75] while others are just regular people like "Steve," Mike, and Joey, or a nameless man whose belongings are part of an eerie estate sale.[76]

As with *AARGH!* and the British *Strip AIDS*, the collaborative nature of *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* does not demonstrate one shared vision. Indeed, taken collectively, there are a number of places where contradictory messages about AIDS or PWAs appear. For example, the back cover, given to Will Eisner, certainly the most well known of the artists, violates the newly established linguistic norm of not referring to PWAs as "victims"; in fact, Eisner's character The Spirit is shown exhorting readers that "victims of AIDS need help not rejection!!" Elsewhere, Eisner, who was criticized in other contexts for not doing enough to support AIDS-related comics, responded that "the book's function is to shake up the public, develop interest," not to promote a specific agenda.[77] Similarly, a number of comics in *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* speak of "AIDS victims" or represent AIDS in ways that have been criticized elsewhere, and none of the comics use the term PWA. Considering PWAs specifically, one notices that many of the PWAs in the book are not actual characters, but off-screen ghosts that reveal a moral lesson or reflective opportunity for the drawn characters. For example, we do not see Chuck, whose death makes a gay couple realize life goes on, little Tommy, who cannot play with anyone because he has AIDS, or an entire AIDS ward, whose presence occasions nurses to confront their fears.[78] Two other comics do show innocent-looking schoolchildren identified as

PWAs, but only briefly and in order to make a point about the cruelty of society rather than the lived experience of PWAs.[79] A third comic is a dramatic one-page spread showing a child's silhouetted profile as he begs not to die alone, singing a childish rhyme drawn in scratchy handwriting.[80] This comic does not allow for an identification with the PWA (in fact, it does not identify the character as such), but rather is meant to shock and frighten, or as Eisner put it, "to shake up the public." While I would not expect every comic about AIDS to show a PWA, the way PWAs are *not* represented in these cases is telling: these are really comics for the person living without AIDS, and thus they speak mainly to the experience of the non-PWA who must confront PWAs.

In *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* there are, however, seven PWA comics for the living. Six of these make explicit reference to an AIDS diagnosis, having AIDS, or an AIDS treatment, while an untitled contribution by Peter Gross relies instead on an iconography of illness to allow readers to interpret the narrative in the context of AIDS.[81] This is not the only ambiguity in Gross's comic; in fact, it is difficult to make moral sense of because of our expectations of the "victimhood" of PWAs. The words of Gross's comic run parallel to the images, recounting a fable about a King who learns a lesson for coping with life, expressed in the phrase "this too shall pass." The images, 12 differently sized panels over 2 pages, show a man sitting on the ledge of a tall building's roof. He is unshaven, with hollow cheeks, and wears only a striped bathrobe and slippers. He looks contemplative as he reads a card (that ends with the phrase) and blows bubbles into the air. In the final panel, we see again the roof ledge with bubble container, but the man is not there and readers assume he has either gone back inside or has jumped. There is one linguistic and visual detail that leads us to think he has committed suicide: in the penultimate panel a series of bubbles are floating through the air, until we see a "Pop!" where one should be. But the metaphoric visual connection—the body is fragile like a soap bubble—is difficult to read alongside the phrase "this too shall pass." Are we to understand that suicide is the appropriate response to AIDS? Or that AIDS is a useful object lesson for the impermanence of the body? Gross's wistful tone mixes a pessimistic suicide narrative with a counter-narrative about acceptance. In the context of a PWA comic, it suggests that PWAs have agency in their lives at the same time as this agency is death-directed.

In contrast is Lloyd Dangle's "A New Cost of Living," which shows a man robbing bank after bank; the final panel reveals that he was robbing banks in order to purchase an antiviral AIDS drug: "now I have enough AZT for the weekend!"[82] While very different in tone, what Dangle's and Gross's comics share is the lesson that being a PWA means being extreme; it is the point of these two comics that there is little nuance in responding to AIDS.

Clearly, Dangle's comic is meant to be taken humorously, but the underlying implication of both Dangle's and Gross's comic is that PWAs have no recourse but to violate norms of behavior. Another humorously exaggerated version of this idea is found in Brad Parker's "The Experimental Cure," where a man diagnosed with AIDS visits an underground doctor in Chinatown seeking a cure; the doctor reluctantly gives him a mystical formula, which is really a "lycanthropic extract" that turns the man into a werewolf.[83] The conclusion of this comic again expresses the ambivalence of an extreme response to AIDS—the man leaves the doctor having been given the instructions to "spread the 'cure' just as AIDS was spread."[84] The final panel shows the werewolf poised to attack the reader, and we are left wondering if the horror of the "cure" is not just as bad as the horror of the disease. In representing AIDS as demanding an extreme response, these three comics try to show the seriousness of the disease, but at the cost of making it difficult to identify with any of the characters or choices.

The most surprising PWA character, with whom no one would identify, is Ronald Reagan, as shown in Geoff Darrow's untitled contribution.[85] Darrow's one-page comic has four equal rows of seven panels taking up the top two-thirds of the page; each panel shows a close-up of a person's face looking ahead with a caption underneath giving the person's name and the words "AIDS Victim" with a year (either 1987 or 1988). None of these is a real person; there is a wide variety of races, names, ages, and even a superhero, an army general, a scuba diver, and a cat. The final of the 28 portraits is of Ronald Reagan, and the bottom third of the page has two larger panels showing Reagan waking up from a "nightmare," self-righteously secure in his mistaken belief that "that darned disease only affects sexual deviates and drug addicts."[86] While Darrow's comic does not offer any real insight into PWA experience, it does give a literal face to the pluralistic conception of PWAs. He draws an extremely diverse series of people, and it is impossible to find in their faces any connecting thread that would allow one to read the sign of AIDS.

The last three PWA comics in *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* are naturalistic portraits of PWAs in the context of their relationships with others. Rather than imagine a response to AIDS that takes the form of an extreme behavior, these three comics focus instead on the lived experience of AIDS, reflecting on the emotions and daily details of the PWA. In Gilbert Hernandez's "Tony," these details are mundane.[87] A character visits his PWA friend, who expects to live only eight months more. They watch television together, discuss popular music, and share a cigarette. The PWA absentmindedly hands his friend the cigarette, and is suddenly anxious that his friend not smoke from it and contact his saliva. His friend, though, calms the PWA and tells him not to worry; the final panel shows the cigarette being passed between

hands. This mundane moment between friends emphasizes the point that PWAs are like others. In fact, Hernandez's comic shows an acceptance of PWAs that is most important precisely because it is so insignificant.

Robert Triptow's "Needs" continues the theme of acceptance, in this case, in the face of repeated rejection.[88] Joe continually spurns a man who is attracted to him. Over the course of four panels, we see this happen at a disco, a protest, a march, a sporting event, until in the last two panels the two come together, and it is discovered that Joe has AIDS. The final panel shows them together, but Joe is sick and lying in bed. In the prior panels, Joe had been shown as selfish and arrogant, oblivious to the faithful attentions of the other man. At the end, it seems right that the other man would continue to remain by his side; the retrospective lesson of friendship here is that PWAs are worth pursuing, that love and affection are more important than disease. The theme of friendship in death, despite an ambivalence in life, is also in Arn Saba's "Pages," the best and last of the comics in *Strip AIDS U.S.A.*[89] Like Triptow's "Needs," Saba's "Pages" is two pages long with each page divided into thirds. Each of the six panel sections is half filled with a different kind of "page"—a typewritten letter, a journal entry, a postcard, or a handwritten note; a related image occupies the other half. These pages are dated, so we see that the events range from February of one year to May of the next year. Katie discovers that her former lover Dennis has AIDS, and she becomes increasingly drawn to him despite being unsure of the reason for her sudden new attachment. This ambivalence is not the extreme type that we saw in the comics by Gross, Dangle, and Parker. Rather, "Pages" ends with a question, and Saba avoids giving us the neat message we see in Triptow's comic. At the end, Katie starts to feel as if she has lost her "own" life, although she sees this as a positive thing. Her final thought about Dennis's impending death is, "Soon I will be back to my regular life. What was it?"[90]

To conclude, I return to the issue of pluralism among the contributors. The true issue is not a question of authenticity—should only PWAs draw comics about PWAs—but rather legibility—who is the audience for these comics and what motive might they see? Jason Tougaw, speaking of AIDS memoirs in general, notes that while they "hope to set such communities [of seropositive gay men] in motion, [they] require a conversion to be read by 'outsiders.' They require readers to look at AIDS, and at the world in general, through a gay male lens."[91] Is *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* fragmented as much as any collection, or is it more so because of the multiple conversions of straight artists, gay artists, men, women, straight readers, gay readers, and PWAs—straight and gay, men and women? Tougaw presents this as an equal challenge for memoirists and memoir readers, but in the case of the three AIDS-related comic collections, the necessary "gay male lens" is fractured

from the outset. Robert Rodi harshly criticized *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* and *AARGH!* in a *Comics Journal* review that invokes that very problem of the gay male lens. The title of his review summarizes what he sees as the main tonal problem of the collections; what we read is mostly "bigot-bashing": "preaching to the converted . . . seems to be the easy way out—rather than analyze AIDS hysteria, rather than deal with members of high-risk groups as individuals, rather than examining society's responses to the epidemic, so many of the cartoonists choose merely to make fun of people who are afraid of public toilet seats."[92] This may be one way to generate public interest, book sales, charity donations, or to "shake up the public," but this interest happens at the expense of thoughtful analysis.

This section began with a dispiriting statistical fact about the efficacy of media messages to reduce new HIV infections in San Francisco: that media messages were not responsible for declining HIV infections, but that death was. While the impact of cultural expressions is notoriously difficult to quantify, I cannot help but put Grover's observations alongside another dispiriting historical fact: "the Cartoon Art Museum of San Francisco—the city with the highest per capita percentage of AIDS victims (18.8 per 10,000)—last May [1988] rejected as 'inappropriate' a fundraising, silent auction exhibit of original contributions to *Strip AIDS U.S.A.*"[93] The PWAs fight for self-acclaim is made more challenging when messages about safe sex and treatment are stifled. Susan Sontag observed how AIDS "has been a creator of community as well as an experience that isolates the ill and exposes them to harassment and persecution."[94] The PWA was an object of knowledge that was self-acclaimed, unlike pejorative labels like "the crack baby," which were applied to others without consent. But this self-nomination was never used negatively, as with a shifting label like "the yuppie." Thus, the PWA is a unique figure in the decade: an object of knowledge that fought to define itself, and did so in a way that resisted negative connotations. The price of this small victory, however, was an acronymic sense of obfuscation, and a necessarily vague definition of how much AIDS does or does not define one's identity.

4

The Yuppies and the Yuckies: Anxieties of Affluence

In this chapter, I examine the most independent and selfishly suggestive of the eighties objects of knowledge—the yuppie. After its introduction in 1984, the yuppie rapidly ascended as a significant demographic and political category, and was identified by pundits as an especially important target of the American political scene during the 1984 election season. Politicians and businesses alike courted yuppies and, in return, they transformed aspects of society that catered to their power-driven aesthetic—a taste for expensive cars, living in condominiums, and imported salad dressings. However, the yuppie label was soon contested by its members, particularly the association made between the yuppie's seemingly frivolous lifestyle and the amoral "greed is good" point of view that fueled it. Some wholeheartedly embraced the corporate elitist ethic, while others struggled with the cynicism suggested by such an outlook. Thus, the stereotyped yuppie we are familiar with today fails to consider how the aspirant middle class negotiated the terms of their self-definition.

As a symbol of success and promise to other middle-class baby boomers wanting to get ahead, the yuppie was doomed to fall as quickly as he rose. The American media rapidly tired of yuppies and, before long, yuppies were vilified as a symbol of corporate greed and blandly homogenous gentrification. The graffiti slogans "Die Yuppie Scum" and "Mug a Yuppie" became more visible, and it was not long before the yuppie, once the symbol of Reagan-era economic promise, became instead a symbol of pure evil. Illustrating this rapid transition are a number of films and novels at the end of the 1980s, which conflated the yuppie trope with the newly popular serial killer, first labeled in the mid-1970s. I introduce the fusion of these two types by way of the most famous literary example, Bret Easton Ellis's novel *American Psycho* (1991), before turning to longer readings of

earlier versions of yuppie killers, or "yuckies," in the films *Vampire's Kiss* (1989) and *Blue Steel* (1990). *Blue Steel* is a crucial example, as its yuppie villain is characterized by his romantic relationship with a tough, female police officer. In this film, the image of yuppie power and desire is placed alongside a postfeminist narrative of violence and mastery.

Certainly, the most recognizable object of knowledge in the eighties was the yuppie. The yuppie look was so well defined that he or she appears, almost undifferentiated, in scores of film, television, and print media from the period. Because it is a simple character to get—self-obsessed, pampered, snobbish—the yuppie often provided a comic foil to saner ways of living. On the popular television program *Family Ties* (1982–1989), Michael J. Fox stole the show by portraying Alex P. Keaton as a tie-wearing young Republican humorously out of step with his hippie parents' values. In middle class, everyman comedies like *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* (Jeremiah S. Chechik, 1989), Chevy Chase and Beverly D'Angelo play characters scorned by their yuppie next-door neighbors, whose perfect lifestyle, indicated by an elaborate stereo system, chic bedroom decor, and jogging routine, is turned upside down by the simple-hearted Griswolds. Likewise, in *Beetlejuice* (Tim Burton, 1988) yuppie urbanites remodel a charmingly old house with gaudy "postmodern" art and sculpture. Played for laughs, these yuppies are ridiculed for their image obsessions, illustrating to middle-class audiences the frivolity of pretentious aspirations and asking us to sympathize with the frustrated aims of the everyman.

But not everyone found the joke funny. In *Fear of Falling*, her study of middle-class life in the 1980s, Barbara Ehrenreich points out how yuppies served as a marker for middle-class anxieties: "they were also the very worst children, the apotheosis of middle-class forebodings about the corrupting effects of affluence."[1] She argues that

> the very frivolity of yuppies—and hence of the very *subject* of yuppies— was a distraction from the deeper changes their appearance signaled. In the eighties, the class contours of American society were undergoing a seismic shift. The extremes of wealth and poverty moved further apart.[2]

The yuppies' apparent insouciance in light of economic and social change and the media's humorous cultivation of this frivolity began to bring about some of the worst cultural overtones of yuppies. A "new 'hostility' [was] attached to the word," as the phrase "Die Yuppie Scum" intaglioed its way across cities.[3] Criminals were encouraged to "mug a yuppie," and the fight against yuppie gentrification had some residents vandalizing yuppie front doors, gourmet stores, and parked BMWs or other luxury

cars. One can see how quickly this fear set in by comparing the yuppie's high-powered rise to the top in Oliver Stone's 1987 film *Wall Street* with the equally rapid fall to the bottom in Brian de Palma's 1990 film *Bonfire of the Vanities*. Film critic Barry Keith Grant was even able to classify a subgenre "yuppie horror," focusing on yuppie anxieties.[4] Looking at films like *After Hours* (Martin Scorsese, 1985), *Desperately Seeking Susan* (Susan Seidelman, 1985), *Something Wild* (Jonathan Demme, US, 1986), and *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987), Grant shows how the "yuppie horror" genre "specifically addresses the anxieties of an affluent culture in an era of prolonged recession";[5] one such anxiety is the yuppie's fear of losing what they have worked so hard to get. I imagine the ideal audience for such visions of "yuppie horror" as being the characters in the yuppie drama *The Big Chill* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1983), who struggle to break out of their self-absorbed lives while mourning a friend's death. As a gloss on the decline of 1960s idealism and radical values, *The Big Chill* is one of the rare films to suggest that yuppies did not spring sui generis from the new decade (although this may be more a result of how *The Big Chill* borrows from John Sayles's 1980 *Return of the Secaucus 7*). Interestingly, what films like *The Big Chill*, *Wall Street*, and *The Bonfire of the Vanities* demonstrate is that the difficulty of the yuppie's hard-won success in turn made the yuppie lifestyle seem especially fragile. Ehrenreich explains that since one segment of the middle class "seemed to have a clear strategy for success" and "because that strategy involved such a betrayal of traditional middle-class values . . . the media [may have] turned so quickly against those who followed" the yuppie lifestyle.[6] While it was argued at that time that a backlash against the yuppie would "lead to more social concern,"[7] this did not seem to happen, as the reviled yuppies of the 1980s escaped only in order to return in today's hated image of the corporate executives behind Enron, hedge funds, and subprime mortgages. The dangers of unregulated economic gain, resulting from laissez-faire Reaganomics and symbolized by yuppies like *Wall Street*'s Gordon Gekko, may have first been illustrated in eighties cinema, but Gekko's mantra that "greed is good" seems not to have lost any of its allure in today's corporate climate.

The term "yuppie" was initially used as a demographic label to describe baby boomers "aged 29 to 35 who live in metropolitan areas, work in professional or managerial occupations, and have an income of at least $30,000 if they live alone."[8] Soon, though, "yuppie" became a pejorative description of a lifestyle, and yuppies were identified with a culture of wealth, conspicuous consumption, and conservative politics. Driving a BMW, working on Wall Street, exercising constantly, living in an expensively renovated loft in a gentrified neighborhood, purchasing imported

tarragon vinaigrette from an upscale gourmet store—any of these things made one a yuppie, and the backlash against the expensive, self-absorbed frivolity of the yuppie's designer lifestyle quickly set in. By the end of the 1980s, the valueless yuppie was a ready signifier for the selfish evil born of capitalism, and villains in films like *Vampire's Kiss* (Robert Bierman, 1989), *Blue Steel* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1990), *Internal Affairs* (Mike Figgis, 1990), and *Bad Influence* (Curtis Hanson, 1990) could rely on this signification to scare audiences.

Part of the reason for the backlash against the yuppie at the end of the decade is the speed with which "yuppie culture" appeared to take over. Even as they were being lampooned, yuppies were also portrayed sensitively in film and television. Following Woody Allen's yuppie film *avant la lettre*, *Annie Hall* (1977), Lawrence Kasdan's *The Big Chill* (1983) was the touchstone film for the prototypical yuppie coming-of-age narrative. Focusing on a group of former sixties radicals, Kasdan's film shows yuppie introspection, guilt, and envy as the eight friends alternately deny and justify their new lifestyles. While *The Big Chill* is in many ways simply a yuppified version of the generational narrative explored in more depth by John Sayles's *The Return of the Secaucus 7* (1980), *The Big Chill* was very successful since it captured the essence of this new type of individual. While later satiric representations of yuppies addressed themselves to an audience trying to make by without leather goods, silk ties, and imported food, a film like *The Big Chill* is unabashedly a yuppie film made for yuppie consumption. Instead of pitting the yuppie against the rest of the middle class, these kinds of films pit yuppies against yuppies, showing that yuppies too can have emotion, can experience failure, and can learn life lessons. The shared yuppie lifestyle seen in *The Big Chill* is also seen in such quintessentially yuppie television shows as *Moonlighting* (1985–1989), *thirtysomething* (1987–1991), and *L.A. Law* (1986–1994). Ehrenreich once again points out the contradiction, arguing that the middle class—those most susceptible to the yuppie message—"fancies itself a set of self-determining individuals" rather than a sociological group with shared motives and concerns.[9] For the middle class, there is no shock of recognition with these popular portrayals of yuppies; "probably very few people read about yuppies and thought, 'Oh my god, that's me!'"[10] Nonetheless, as yuppie culture was increasingly disseminated,

> many in the middle class could see some part of themselves, some emerging constellation of tastes (for coarse-grain mustard, linen suits, or frequent workouts), and realize that they themselves had been labeled, caricatured, and fingered as part of some larger conformity emanating from beyond their individual will and judgment.[11]

Today it is a challenge not to partake innocently in what were in the mid-eighties snobbish yuppie pleasures. Even then, though, as imported luxury foods began to fill supermarket aisles, the items that once set the yuppie apart seemed to lose their significance. "Yuppies keep trying to find avenues out of yuppiedom but they end up just starting a new trend that catches up with them," notes a journalist in 1985.[12] Or, as Richard Chevat humorously put it, "you think it's easy trying to keep in step with 30 million individualists?"[13] As the yuppie became a stale site of discourse about American mores and values, it also became the premier object of knowledge for the eighties.

What makes the yuppie especially fruitful for analysis occurs in the period immediately after its heyday, when the yuppie was conflated with another newly fashionable American object of knowledge: the serial killer. Hendrik Hertzberg suggests of the yuppie that "what we are dealing with here is something that began as a demographic category with cultural overtones and ended up as a moral category."[14] What we are left with from the "short life, untimely death, and general inaccuracy of the media's image of the yuppie"[15] is an unanchored cultural object with diverse and contradictory aims. This cultural object in a film like *The Big Chill* leads to a new kind of community to replace failed 1960s radicalism, while in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* it is a ridiculed and silly cliché. However, in "yuppie devil" films like *Blue Steel* and *Vampire's Kiss*, and novels like *American Psycho* (Bret Easton Ellis, 1991), the yuppie becomes much more sinister as it is associated with the serial killer. Suddenly, the yuppie was no longer a humorously maladjusted, but otherwise benign, citizen; instead, he was a homicidal maniac. Impeccably groomed on the outside, inside he was ravenous and wounded, psychotic and dangerous. In this final transformation, the yuppie went from being a conventional public figure representing a foolish American lifestyle to a horror trope serving a severe moral warning about the consequences of money, of privilege and social status, and of trust in the image of perfection.

"A Creature for Our Age": The Young Urban Professional

At first, the yuppie had a simpler life. The year 1984 was proclaimed the "Year of the Yuppie" by *Newsweek*, since it was when "all these people finally learned who they were."[16] Finally "learning who you are" reminds me of the sudden appearance of "postmodernism" and America's "love affair with labels," as the yuppies share the feeling that by just finding the right label, they might be able to explain their existence. The simplest explanation for this new term is that "yuppie" is a diminutive of YUP, an acronym formed

by the initial letters of "young urban professional." The demographic-sounding "young urban professional" was most commonly marked as a particular subset of the baby boomers,[17] although the word began with a political component. While it appeared slightly earlier, Steven Roberts first used the word "yuppie" in the *New York Times* in a March 18, 1984 piece on Democrat Gary Hart's presidential campaign, calling it "the newest creature on the political scene this year and one of the most important."[18] This short piece quotes a number of yuppies who identify with Hart's campaign because he appeals to a new, independent "Me Generation" ethic. This attitude is expressed clearly by one yuppie's explanation that "people don't want to take on the titles [of Democrat or Republican] others have . . . and being independent sounds a lot cooler."[19] "If there is one word to describe most 'yuppies' it is 'independent,'" agrees Roberts, noting that many of them "grew up in traditional communities with traditional ideas, but severed their roots when they went off to college."[20] In Roberts's piece, "yuppies" actually seem to be Democrats in spirit (one says "my primary interest is defeating Reagan"[21]) but just not, for reasons of taste, in name. Clearly, the idea of a political affiliation based on the "coolness" of a party's name is disheartening, but Hart's recognition of the cultural force behind political "cool" rhymes with the desire for a "severed," "independent" identity that young baby boomers sought to establish for themselves. This kind of self-invention mixes political motives with the yuppies' self-stated efforts to distinguish themselves from their parents as well as their peers.

Thus the yuppie label, while first denoting a new political group, did not have any coherent politics behind it, just a vaguely contrarian, dissatisfied attitude. While it may, in its first uses, seem to have represented a Democratic bloc in practice, uses of the term "yuppie" continued to be so avowedly ambivalent about specific political affiliations that they soon became sinister. Self-identified yuppie Brett Duval Fromson, writing in 1984 about "Reaganomics's Lure for the Yuppies," is downright cynical about himself and his peers. On the one hand, he writes,

> we viewed the recession as medicine necessary to relieve the ills of stagflation caught during the Carter administration. . . . Most of us assumed we would make it on our own even during a recession—and didn't give much thought to those who wouldn't.[22]

On the other hand, though, the yuppies have not been "drawn to the Republicans' ideological appeals. . . . We are no more or less conservative than the young of the 1960s and early 1970s."[23] Explaining the ambivalence shown toward the two political parties, Fromson suggests that yuppies are "essentially pre-ideological. . . . Most of us slosh soupily in the middle

of the ideological spectrum without giving it much thought."[24] With his admittedly selfish tone, it is hard to tell how sincere Fromson is being. While he seems to agree with other journalists that yuppies are issue oriented, and not prone to empty-headed political affiliations, what exactly he means by calling them "pre-ideological" is hard to say. Fromson ends his piece with the "lure" of the title—"Yuppies, if we do anything at all, respect those who deliver the goods. How else are we going to afford our Ferragamo pumps, Brooks Brothers suits, country houses, European cars and California chardonnays?"[25] Needless to say, these final remarks brought fire from other indignant young urban professionals, who objected that not all of them were "chardonnay-sipping elitists."[26] But perhaps the disgustingly simple crass materialism that characterized one part of the yuppie plan is just what Fromson meant by pre-ideological: for the yuppies, no thoughtful politics, just the goods, plain and simple?

"Reaganomics' lure" of delivering the goods to the yuppies turned out to be a lure for both political parties; whatever it was, the yuppie in 1984 was the new "political creature" to be courted. Reflecting on Reagan's victory in the 1980 presidential election, political analysts Gordon Rayfield and Julian Baim offered the same "warning to the Republicans" as "advice to the Democrats": "don't take yuppies for granted." Repeating a familiar theme, they saw the election, with its many yuppie "Reagan Democrats," as "having thus demonstrated our independence."[27] This libertarian "independence" from "ideological prescription" is the overriding quality shared by the early, politically defined yuppies. Sociologist John L. Hammond agrees with this assessment, but for very different reasons. Analyzing the media claim that yuppies are paradoxically more conservative on economic issues ("social spending and government responsibility for economic welfare") but more liberal on social "lifestyle" issues ("broadly, sexual and gender liberation"), Hammond debunks the myth that yuppies constitute a new, independently conservative social group that suddenly appeared overnight: "yuppies are as liberal, or more so, as the rest of the population on both lifestyle and economic issues."[28] Seeking to explain why the yuppies nonetheless had a conservative reputation, Hammond focuses on their conspicuous consumption and how they conspicuously abandoned a social obligation in favor of personal self-fulfillment. Yuppies, by their sheer numbers, "visibly transformed the American cityscape with health clubs, gourmet delis and remodeled houses."[29] For this reason more than any, Hammond argues, yuppies became a marketing target for advertisers and politicians, and thus media outlets catered, supported, and wrote about them.

Hammond saw the yuppie story as the very paradigm of journalistic models: "the arrival of the yuppies qualified as an event; it could be

dramatized and visualized."[30] A *Time* magazine piece later shows how "the fascination with charting the tastes of this subgroup was easily explainable: 'Yuppies live in the fashionable neighborhoods of large urban areas. . . . That's also precisely where editors and TV producers live.'"[31] And, if the yuppies appeared to be more conservative politically, then it was because the whole country was becoming more conservative; yuppies simply did so more noticeably. Finally, Hammond concludes that "the rapid spread of the yuppie story and its equally rapid disappearance are themselves grounds for suspecting that its diffusion was due to a social process rather than a process of verification."[32] In other words, "no social group adopts, or abandons, a common culture overnight."[33] The fact that they did appear to do so in media accounts suggests a concerted effort to support this new creature. In this way, critic Jane Feuer sees yuppies simply as a "marketing icon" that "seized the imagination."[34] Indeed, Feuer finds it plausible that since "the whole tone of yuppie culture was self-mocking," that an "unself-conscious yuppie was truly a media myth created by yuppie journalists."[35] In other words, yuppies who knew they were yuppies were unable to admit it, and instead ridiculed other yuppies for their shared values.

A good example of this self-mockery is Marissa Piesman and Marilee Hartley's best-selling *The Yuppie Handbook: The State-of-the-Art Manual for Young Urban Professionals*, published in January of 1984. *The Yuppie Handbook*, with only one or two possible prior print citations, nailed the yuppie lifestyle, clearly portraying it as a joke and establishing the visual iconography of the yuppie look.[36] The front cover of *The Yuppie Handbook* shows a couple, drawn in the style of a visual dictionary or foreign language textbook, with lines and captions pointing to such accessories as Cross Pen, Cartier Tank Watch, Squash Racquet, Co-op Offering Prospectus, Burberry Trench Coat, and Fresh Pasta. Inside are chapters testing "Your Yuppie I.Q.," defining "Yupification," suggesting which dog to get (an Akita—"State of the Arf"), and explaining "Mail Order Mania." The "handbook" is illustrated throughout with diagrams and drawings, and the short chapters are mostly boxed lists of things to do or not do in order to be or to identify a yuppie. The authors' strategy is to take the yuppie mock-seriously, and so they detail all aspects of the yuppie lifestyle: eating habits, relationships, car buying, apparel, religion, hobbies. In this, the yuppie label is seen less as an optional style to adopt and more as a coherent, encompassing lifestyle to live.

The Yuppie Handbook's first section, "Beyond the Preppies," points to the earlier text and lifestyle it imitates, Lisa Birnbach's *The Official Preppy Handbook* (1980). Like those forebears, yuppies inhabit a total style of living that reflects more than just income. Yuppies do all of the same things that nonyuppies do—have jobs, go to restaurants, work for a living, throw

barbecues, own pets, go to the movies, do drugs—they just do these things in a particularly different manner. For this reason, the yuppie lifestyle is so easy to parody: "Michael and Jennifer drink their coffee while donning their respective single-vented navy blue suits. Jennifer puts on Adidas over her stockings and tucks her pumps into her briefcase. Michael wears his wingtips."[37] "When they're pressed for time, they frequent the local gourmet take-out store, buying expensive, esoteric versions of chicken salad."[38] This style of life, not so much different as skewed, overwhelmed these earlier images of yuppies as "political creatures."

Particularly thorny for some was the "u" in yuppies. A few initially read it not as "urban" but as "upwardly-mobile," an etymology that led to the competing phrase "Yumpies." As conceived by the media, which of these two features—being urban or being upwardly mobile—was more integral to the authentic yuppie lifestyle? In the same *New York Times* that had that paper's first use of the word "yuppie," an editorial discussed the "small peripheral fight [that] has bubbled up over a name."[39] Some synonyms suggested were "the brie-and-chablis set," "the Big Chill generation," "the Y.P.'s," "Yumpies," and "Yumpys" (too much like "lumpy"),[40] before the author finally votes for "Yuppies, with its apt echo of hippies and Yippies, labels that some of them once embraced."[41] Clearly, this semiserious "small peripheral fight" has less to do with the actual qualifications for being a member of this set, and more to do with the right to label this group.

But even in this *New York Times* editor's humorous vote for "Yuppies" is a serious reference to the "apt echo" of the 1960s. In the following week's *New York Times*, the editorial "The Year of the Yuppies" takes issue, arguing that "to think of today's Yuppies as politically akin to yesterday's hippies is to be as mistaken now as Charles Reich was then," referring to the author of *The Greening of America* who wrote hopefully of a coming youthful revolution in attitudes toward the self and the environment.[42] The author of "The Year of the Yuppies" saw a very different relationship between the potential political power of today's yuppies and 1960s radical culture. Yuppies "possess atypical affluence and influence: These are the people who created the counterculture," and thus, by rights, should also have the privilege to recreate it as mainstream culture.[43] "The Year of the Yuppies," like the other articles, works to present the yuppie as politically sui generis; their levelheaded, rootless independence is established mainly by disavowing any perceived similarities with a radical past. Many yuppies did so strenuously, arguing not only against labels like Democrat or Republican, but also against any "apt echoes" of hippies and Yippies.[44] In response to this editorial, one reader wrote, "I can understand your fascination with the emergence of a new political generation. Moreover, as with most stereotypes, there may be some truth to this one. Even so, the 'yuppie'

label is offensive and patronizing."[45] The letter continues, "our views—once rejected as too radical—can now be rejected as a product of our culture."[46] This writer's complaint highlights a similarity between Yippies and yuppies by finding common ground in society's shared rejection of them. Ironically, there may be no contradiction between the conservative yuppie and the countercultural Yippie's political life.

The etymological niceties in the similarities between hippie, Yippie, and yuppie are compelling, and suggest an alternate origin story for the yuppies. Which is more important: being young, urban, and professional, or being a reformed Yippie? Are the yuppies simply Yippies who have gotten haircuts and jobs and gone straight? While at once a way of dismissing yuppies as being just like those crazy Yippies, tracing yuppies from Yippies also rescues the yuppie from negative political connotations. They are not all evil Reaganites opposed to liberal values, they are just modern, savvy radicals, as Bret Easton Ellis indicates when he writes that "this generation, it seems, wants to be *Wall Street*'s Gordon Gekko with the conscience of Abbie Hoffman."[47] Ellis was referring to a series of debates in 1985 between former Yippies Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin. Hoffman, representing his "Youth International Party" of the sixties, debated his former Yippie cofounder Rubin. Rubin, who remade himself into a successful yuppie in the 1980s, argued that yuppie values need not be seen as conservative. One popular portrayal of Rubin saw him as personifying the shift between the 1960s and the 1980s, with the once-politicized hippies now reentering the system in order to use it to their own ends. Some were skeptical about this, however; Barbara Ehrenreich puts it plainly: "it was possible in fact to have been a radical in the first decade and a self-centered hustler in the second, as Jerry Rubin's transformation from rebel to networking impresario illustrates."[48] Critics like Ehrenreich saw through yuppies' portrayals of themselves as being motivated by political concern. Thus, one reason the yuppie began to be viewed as distasteful was that they seemed to have sold out their former political selves.

The Yuppie Psycho Killer Backlash: *American Psycho* and *Vampire's Kiss*

"When Mephistopheles shows up wearing a gold Rolex he's truly a creature for our age": film critic Janet Maslin must call forth the devil himself to explain the curious appeal of the yuppie to late 1980s filmgoers.[49] The yuppie devil at the end of the decade, though, is more a crafty Mephistopheles than a fearsome Lucifer. A sly character with a keen sense for bargain and an eye for economy, this devil wears his gold Rolex in fashionable display

and makes his pacts in public. No more magical, smoke-filled entrances, the eighties devil confidently takes his seat at the head of the yuppie bargaining table. The devil's public appearance as a yuppie points up the heartless greed of that decade, and so Mephistopheles's gold watch indicates not only his proper place at the yuppie's table, but also the culpability of those seated across from him, with their own Rolexes, Mont Blanc pens, and Ferragamos. Maslin's article focuses on two films, *Internal Affairs* and *Bad Influence*, to demonstrate this new trend in late 1980s Hollywood cinema, where the formerly successful yuppie was conflated with the newly fashionable serial killer to create the hybrid character of the psychotic, villainous yuppie devil.

The term "young urban professional" was meant to help explain (and, surely, to exploit) the dramatic surge in this population, but calling someone a "yuppie" allows a second, figurative use. As Hertzberg suggested, the yuppie "began as a demographic category with cultural overtones and ended up as a moral category."[50] Similarly, Barbara Ehrenreich notes that "what started out as a neutral demographic category evolved with alarming speed into a social slur,"[51] and even Fredric Jameson notes how the label "smuggl[ed] in a little surplus of concrete social representation along with itself."[52] Part of this process was a public negotiation over the right to be a yuppie and the opposite anger over being so categorized. Even in 1984, commentators remarked upon the tangible elusiveness of the yuppie. Cheryl Russell, writing in *American Demographics*, humorously notes that "the funny thing is, no one has ever found a yuppie. Not even the people who look and sound like yuppies will admit to being yuppies."[53] Russell concludes that "the yuppie is a mythological demographic beast."[54] Rising to the defense, Michael Kinsley saw the beastly yuppie as more a creature to be pitied; what he finds

> especially unconvincing is the attempt to cast the details of yuppy culture in a Gibbonesque light, as the beginning of the end of America. What, after all, is so terrible about quiche? Are jogging and spinach salad really more decadent than golf and sirloin?[55]

As the "moral category" grew larger and larger, "yuppie" was rendered less precise as a descriptive, and more useful as a derogative.

The 1980s yuppie theme was supposed to be one of equal opportunity, and this was part of the yuppie's scorn of those who were not successful: "get a job," they sneered. As an initial political and demographic category, "yuppie" was a label attached to both men and women; in this view, money was more important than sex. Early representations of the yuppie in fact strived to be desexed, pointedly sublimating sexual activity

to the greater good of economic activity and personal achievement. This often takes the form of jokes about the absence of sexuality in the yuppie lifestyle. *The Yuppie Handbook* is one example that repeats the joke about yuppies needing to consult their calendars before scheduling sex with their spouses. This apparent de-emphasis on sexuality may of course be a cover, but as best as they could be, initial representations of the yuppie are remarkably unsexed. The yuppie's asexuality is also found in the curious language of initial descriptions of the yuppie. It is a mark of the early journalist's uncertainty about the yuppie that the word "creature" was often quizzically used to describe the yuppie and the yuppie's desire. As in Janet Maslin's terms at the beginning of this essay, the yuppie was at first presented as a strange animal—it is a "creature for our age," "a mythological demographic beast," or the "newest political creature," which belongs "on the endangered-species list."[56] More taxonomic than demographic, the yuppie was rarely portrayed as a human. Nor was the "creature for our age" a friendly one.

Ultimately, as Lee Eisenberg, the editor-in-chief of *Esquire* put it, by "the summer of '87—it had become all too plain that America's favorite cartoon character was ready to take his place on the endangered-species list. Nobody, but nobody, liked the Y-word anymore, for it had grown tired and meaningless from its virulent overuse."[57] The yuppie, by the end of the decade, was a free-floating sign of disgust, and was thus ripe to be associated with the newly fashionable serial killer. From 1989 to 1991, yuppies turned into Yuckies: Young Urban Killers.

Literary critic Mark Seltzer identifies America's interest in serial killers as part of a larger "wound culture" that he locates in the mid-1980s, right at the time the yuppie was also making front-page news. While he begins with turn-of-the-century figures such as Jack the Ripper, Seltzer spends most of his time on what we have only recently come to call "serial killers," a term coined in the mid-1970s by FBI profilers, who in the 1980s became as well known as their quarry.[58] After a 1983 Senate hearing on "Serial Murders"[59] and a 1984 HBO special *Murder: No Apparent Motive*, a large number of nonfiction books were published on serial killers, including historian Philip Jenkins's *Using Murder: The Social Construction of Serial Homicide*, which argued that "in the 1980s, serial murder came to symbolize the worst manifestations of human behavior."[60] Public shootings—Reagan (1981), Pope John Paul II (1981), and John Lennon (1980)—began the decade, and public interest continued with the postal killing sprees that first occurred in 1986. The court cases of personalities such as Richard Chambers ("The Preppie Killer," 1986) and the executions of notorious figures like Ted Bundy (1989) also focused public attention on the acts of what *Time* magazine labeled in 1983, "a new breed of killer,"[61] literally

expressed in 1991 with the introduction of the cable network Court TV, and embodied by cultural villain–heroes such as Freddy Krueger, who made his way from horror cinema to syndicated television and toy store shelves during the "media-borne 'serial killer panic of 1983 to 1985.'"[62]

The new public anxiety over the issue of unmotivated violence in American society, defined by the spectral threat of a solitary, lurking serial killer, parallels the yuppie's later representation as an elusive, "mythological" beast. Both of these character types had come to be represented less as specific individuals with unique characteristics, and more as empty signifiers defined by their superficial blandness and inner emptiness. That the yuppie and the serial killer are so similar in their superficiality is part of the reason why these types seem to fit naturally together. In particular, two films, Robert Bierman's *Vampire's Kiss* and Kathryn Bigelow's *Blue Steel*, offer prototypical treatments that are later fully realized in Bret Easton Ellis's novel *American Psycho*.[63] These three texts introduce a blurred set of discourses; what would otherwise be a conventional cop thriller, vampire film, or slasher novel is instead contaminated by the newly vilified yuppie. The result is an uncertain critique of the social relation of power, where the yuppie's privileged power status fits uneasily against mainstream cinema's insistence that slasher and horror plots feature destabilized, paradoxical gender relations.[64] For feminist audiences, the stakes of turning back to these male yuppie villains may not immediately be clear. While in the latter part of the "Reagan 1980s" the yuppie became a symbol of the amorality of unmitigated economic success, I argue that the yuppie's promise of a lifestyle of wealth proved impossible not because of the falsity of Reaganomics, but rather because the instant success of the yuppie did not provide an imaginative space in which to place women, particularly in the portrayals of yuppies in feature films.

It is a striking indication of how threatening the yuppie and the serial killer tropes are that as recently as 2000, when Mary Harron filmed *American Psycho*, the yuppie devil was still an object of criticism and anxiety. Harron's *American Psycho* was attacked just as Ellis's novel was, even though both were pointedly made as period piece fantasies. The film might have touched a cultural nerve, however, since it dramatized the evil of a capitalist-centered existence, a theme present during Reagan's presidency as well as the terms of both Bushes. Peter Bowen, in an interview with Harron, suggests that the film's "mix of identity crisis and abrupt violence seem[s] oddly more in tune with the tenor of *our* times" than of the novel's eighties setting, and that "its fable of a fractured identity in a post-capitalist, hyper-mediated world seems now a mirror of our culture rather than a warning about it."[65] Bowen hints that while the yuppie devil emerged briefly in 1989–1991, those representations unsuccessfully

resolved whatever it was about the yuppie devil that was so bothersome; in this respect, Harron's film was less a period piece about a dated issue than it was a contemporary analysis of an ongoing problem. Explaining the negative critical response Harron received, could it be, as Pagan Kennedy pointed out about Ellis's "Frankenstein monster of a book," that "just as in the horror flicks, the mob, armed with pitchforks and torches, is chasing down the beast . . . rather than its true creator"?[66]

Of course, much of the reaction to Harron's film was in fact a lingering response to Ellis's *American Psycho*, whose portrayal of the yuppie psycho has been critically dismissed and defended at great length. Initial response to the novel was sensationalist.[67] Simon & Schuster dropped the novel three months prior to publication under pressure from groups like the National Organization of Women. This then led to complaints of censorship from the Authors Guild and the American Civil Liberties Union. The novel's subject, the inner life of yuppie Patrick Bateman, whose multiple murders are described in explicit detail, overwhelmed the novel's style in the mind of early reviewers. Unable to get beyond the plot, many failed to take into account the irony of the novel's flat, distanced tone and first-person narration; the gruesome murders, for instance, are described in the same precise detail as a business card's shade of ivory or the proper width of a pinstripe. As Jane Feuer pointed out, "the whole tone of yuppie culture was self-mocking," and this is apparent in Ellis's version of yuppie devil culture, which mocks self-mockery.[68]

One reading of the novel connects the jarring scenes of murder and cannibalism with the boring period details and minute description of the yuppie, finding a metaphor in Bateman for the kind of conspicuous consumption and selfish hedonism epitomized by the Reagan 1980s.[69] Critic Linda S. Kauffman, discussing Harron's film, refers back to her reading of Ellis's novel, in which the cannibalism in particular (an element only alluded to in the film), serves as "a metaphor for the conspicuous consumption of Ronald Reagan's America in the 1980s."[70] Kauffman herself extends the metaphor; discussing the film's credit sequence, which takes place in a restaurant where gourmet cuisine is covered with rich, blood-dark sauces, she declares that "consumption is a portmanteau pun; it signals the excesses of crass materialism and simultaneously transforms 'good taste' literally into a matter of life or death."[71] Kauffman's focus on the visual elements of consumption leads her to compare Ellis's novel to Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, calling *American Psycho* "another tale about self-fashioning in a gilded age of greed."[72] Seeing the yuppie devil as embodying a "convergence of consumerism and psychosis"[73] is a popular reading. James Gardner, reviewing Ellis's book, focuses on this logic, arguing that "it is a main conceit of the novel to suggest that yuppie-dom,

with its arrogant egomania, is one step on the way to serial murder."[74] However, while acknowledging the metaphoric implications of cannibalism in *American Psycho*, to simply say that late 1980s America got tired of a culture of wealth would oversimplify the novel's relationship to its period and suggest that the Reagan 80s "caused" yuppie psychosis, without considering the ways in which the Reagan 80s is also in turn constructed by these very depictions. In other words, while it is easy to argue that yuppie killers were created by this culture, we might also consider how cultural constructions such as "yuppie killers" in turn affect our reading of what it meant to be a yuppie in the 1980s.

This is an argument Ellis referred to in his novel; in the beginning of *American Psycho*, yuppie Timothy Price tells Patrick Bateman

> There's this theory out now that if you can catch the AIDS virus through having *sex* with someone who *is* infected then you can also catch *any*thing, whether it's a virus per se or not—Alzheimer's, muscular dystrophy, hemophilia, leukemia, anorexia, diabetes, cancer, multiple sclerosis, cystic fibrosis, cerebral palsy, dyslexia, for Christ sakes.[75]

This ridiculous "theory" exemplifies the yuppie's anxiety over contagion; to have a yuppie seriously imagine that they could "catch" dyslexia from someone suggests an exaggerated worry about the boundaries between the private and the public. The yuppie is challenged in keeping the two separate since it is a boundary under constant threat from the virus of the middle class: Ehrenreich's "fear of falling" or Chevat's "trying to keep in step with 30 million individualists." This theory likewise suggests that the yuppie's self-absorbed outlook could predispose him to "catch" the serial killer lifestyle.

If "catching" psychosis is a way to understand the impact of the yuppie devil trope, we can see in this viral model a mixture of innocence and guilt. Robert Bierman's underexamined first film *Vampire's Kiss* inaugurates the yuppie devil trope with just such a narrative of lost innocence. Nicolas Cage stars as yuppie literary agent Peter Loew, who may or not be turning into a vampire after he picks up a strange woman in a bar. Soon, Loew is so far gone that he hides behind sunglasses, sleeps under his overturned couch, shrinks in horror from mirrors, and wears plastic vampire fangs. Spurned by love interest Rachel after he bites his first victim, Loew vents his frustrations on his meek secretary Alva. Insane, talking to walls and dragging a big wooden stake through New York City's Lower East Side, Loew finally meets his end at the hands of Alva's brother. What makes *Vampire's Kiss* so difficult to read is that while Loew follows a conventional vampire transformation narrative, at some point the audience

suspects that he may not have actually been bitten.[76] The film leaves open the possibility that everything he does as a vampire is merely a product of his fantasy yuppie identity.

Critics hated *Vampire's Kiss*, attacking Cage's performance as indulgent and the script, by Joseph Minion,[77] as directionless. Cage's physical approach to his surroundings was seen as only so much scenery chewing; "this is scorched-earth acting," says one reviewer,[78] although this excessive behavior might rather be read as an exaggeration of the aimless, superficial yuppie lifestyle. While *Vampire's Kiss* was not popular with audiences or critics, it deserves more attention for being the first of the new yuppie devil films. In this, it is an anomaly, since it more nakedly shows the yuppie psycho trope that is concealed in other texts. Unlike *Blue Steel* or *American Psycho*, whose villains are easily read from the beginning as "psychos," the highly mannered style of *Vampire's Kiss* does not really allow viewers to understand Loew. This is registered in the film by abrupt shifts of tone. There are many humorous elements: the film satirizes Loew's lifestyle and relationship with his psychiatrist, Cage uses a hilariously shifting accent which is meant to sound pretentious, and he puts on a wildly over-the-top, scenery- (and cockroach-) chewing performance that veers toward Keatonesque slapstick. At the same time, though, the film can be exceedingly grim and unfunny, as when Loew, after twice attempting to shoot himself in the mouth, rapes his unconscious secretary, or when, after murdering a woman at a club, he attempts to impale himself with a makeshift stake.

The bandage that covers Peter's neck throughout raises interpretive problems—does it hide bite marks, or just a shaving cut? (One secretary, trying to read the mixed signals, simply says "he's so eccentric.") As with *American Psycho*, *Vampire's Kiss* puts the viewer in the difficult position of having to decide which is worse: a crazy yuppie who imagines he is a vampire, or a crazy yuppie who is a vampire (or in the case of *American Psycho*: a crazy yuppie who gets away with murder, or one who only imagines that he does)? If Peter is truly a vampire, then we can accept the film as metaphorizing the relationship that yuppies have with society—they are just like bloodsucking vampires.[79] But if Peter only thinks he is a vampire, then does that mean that he is not really as evil as he appears? Is the murderous yuppie simply misunderstood, lonely, in need of analysis?

Lost in the Supermarket: *Blue Steel* at the End of the Eighties

Kathryn Bigelow's *Blue Steel* fits between *Vampire's Kiss* and *American Psycho*, simultaneously sustaining and critiquing the new trope of the yuppie devil. *Blue Steel* generated puzzled responses that allow us to see the

ambivalent attitudes late 1980s spectators held toward this new kind of yuppie villain. For example, even Maslin, in pointing out how yuppie devil films reveal the dangerous effects of "a decade of relative conscience-free complacency," nonetheless mirrors this complacency by implicitly accepting the merging of the yuppie and the psycho tropes: "when [*Blue Steel*] assumes that [its villain] automatically has the makings of a psychotic killer, it doesn't imagine itself to be making any kind of leap."[80] The self-evident "obviousness" of *Blue Steel*'s yuppie devil makes the film worth revisiting, since this ideological obviousness hides more complex cultural negotiations in the 1980s between economic power and filmic evil. Finally, since *Blue Steel* features a female heroine who must face the male yuppie devil, the film further questions the obviousness of assumed gender roles in late 1980s imaginings of the yuppie lifestyle. As Maslin suggested, yuppie devil films like *Blue Steel* rely on a shared understanding of what the yuppie would signify to a late 1980s audience.

Blue Steel stars Jamie Lee Curtis as Megan Turner, a newly graduated recruit of New York City's Police Academy who leads an otherwise quiet and lonely life. One night Turner is witness to a holdup in a supermarket. After a tense standoff with the thug, she blasts him through the storefront window with six bullets from her service revolver. The thug's .44 Magnum falls in front of yuppie commodities trader Eugene Hunt (Ron Silver), who secretly takes it and flees the scene. With the gun missing and no witness able to corroborate her story, Turner is suspended for having shot an unarmed man. Soon, her name is found carved on bullets recovered from a series of murdered bodies, and little does she suspect that the man she has begun to date, Eugene Hunt, is responsible for these random killings. As Hunt and Turner become romantically involved, Turner begins working with tough-guy homicide detective Nick Mann (Clancy Brown) in order to solve the case with her name on it. Even after Megan discovers what Eugene has done, she is constrained from stopping him by her department's disbelief, the yuppie's crack lawyer, and fear for the safety of her family. Nevertheless, when Eugene murders her best friend Tracy and rapes Turner, Megan is forced to violate the law in order to exact revenge on the now-psychotic Hunt.

The majority of *Blue Steel*'s reviewers flatly dismissed the film based on its yuppie villain. David Denby wrote Hunt off as simply "a schizophrenic commodities trader."[81] Likewise, Roger Ebert agreed, suggesting that Hunt is "a customer who hit the deck long before the shooting started. He is already a deeply troubled man."[82] Maslin argued that "*Blue Steel* reveals almost nothing else about [Eugene], yet it counts on audiences to greet him with instinctive mistrust."[83] Continuing the recurring surface/depth model, Maslin elsewhere claimed "it is the film's contention that just

beneath his high-gloss yuppie surface there lurks a deranged, psychotic killer yearning to break free."[84] While it is certainly in keeping with yuppie iconography to focus on Hunt's "high-gloss" superficial qualities, it is contradictory to also assert that underneath this is a "depth" that can be so simply described (and ignored) as "deeply troubled," "schizophrenic," "deranged," or "psychotic." It is against these kinds of readings of Hunt, which mask any depth in his yuppie persona in favor of an ill-defined, one-dimensional reading of "schizophrenia" or "psychosis," that I situate my own analysis. The "customer who hits the deck"—a literal euphemism for "yuppie psycho"—is a construction that works to contain contradiction and nuance by appealing to the vague category of mental illness. The difference with *Blue Steel*'s killer lies in the coding of his psychosis as a yuppie one.

Sympathetic critics initially marked *Blue Steel* as "postfeminist," later drawing fruitful comparisons to *The Silence of Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), not only since both share iconography—female investigators, difficult training sequences, mentorship relationships with men, psychosexual villains, and knowledgeable references to specularity and the cinematic apparatus—but also since both are unusual in depicting a postfeminist female detective: rookie, ambiguously sexed, occupying the troubling identificatory space between female victims and female detectives. Cora Kaplan labels *Blue Steel* part of the "Dirty Harriet" genre, which features "fantasies of female omnipotence" that "rehearse . . . the uneasy positioning of women, and by implication feminism, in postfeminist dystopia."[85] Kaplan emphasizes Bigelow's film theory training in order to draw out the self-reflexive relationship Bigelow establishes between her scripts and her direction. *Blue Steel*'s suspenseful precredit training sequence, its association of the gun with the film camera, and its constant invocation of the theme of vision, all invoke theoretical questions about the cinematic apparatus and the extent to which film audiences participate in the narrative, as well as questions about how well cinema can represent cultural experiences.

From a feminist perspective, Bigelow's self-conscious narrative use of film theory ideas such as the cinematic apparatus marks one way in which we can read the film's plot against its execution. Rather than dumbly absorb the violence of *Blue Steel*'s conclusion, viewers might read the film's closing in light of feminist film theory's ability to read film texts heterogeneously, so that we need not trace one uniform meaning onto Hunt's or Turner's character. For Kaplan, then, *Blue Steel* takes up the "synthesized popular feminism" of this period to interrogate how theory in particular "concerns the construction of contemporary sexuality and sexual difference in—and by—the field of vision."[86] *Blue Steel* is literally concerned with one result of

the acceptance of feminism since the late 1970s—the gradual admittance of women into traditionally male occupations. *Blue Steel* and *The Silence of the Lambs* both center on law enforcement occupations that require a high level of specular knowledge. Ironically, as it becomes possible for characters such as Megan Turner to be seen in traditional male roles, it becomes more difficult to explicitly identify these advances with academic feminist thinking. For this reason, I think, Bigelow has made an especially knowing and subversive film that simultaneously presents and parodies conventional wisdom about both men and feminism in popular culture.

However, as with *The Silence of the Lambs*, Bigelow's film may be a contradictory project if the "fantasies of female omnipotence" found in "Dirty Harriet" films give way either to misogynistic readings of violent women or to a complacent comfort with these heroines' dehumanizing violence. Since the clichéd narrative conditions of the cop film ostensibly frustrate feminist aims, these "Dirty Harriet" films are of necessity always parodic, ironic, or incomplete. Thus I do not fault *Blue Steel* for not presenting a coherent female subject, but enjoy Megan Turner as an example of what Linda Mizejewski punningly terms the "female dick," a sort of hybrid gender performance that takes into account both her sexed body and her unusual career as a police officer.[87] Pointing out that the female investigators in *Blue Steel* and *The Silence of the Lambs* are positioned both within and against legitimating patriarchal institutions of justice, Mizejewski illustrates how the female dick, with her professionalized violence, "poses a substantial threat to heterosexuality as organized by mainstream cinema."[88] Like Kaplan, Mizejewski focuses on the self-reflexive intertextuality of Bigelow and Demme's films, particularly the cinematic metacommentary, and also how both directors position their female characters against gendered career roles as well as against class and economic markers.

While the issues of sexuality and gender tend to dominate feminist readings of *Blue Steel* and *The Silence of the Lambs*, both films also significantly interrogate class groupings. Economic class is especially important in late 1980s Hollywood cinema, since it marks another category against which the female dicks are constructed—Reagan-era economic policy and the icon of the yuppie. Both *Blue Steel* and *The Silence of the Lambs* have protagonists specifically marked as from a lower class than the antagonists. For *Blue Steel*, part of the danger Megan Turner faces is succumbing to the allure of Eugene Hunt's lavish yuppie lifestyle; he takes her to expensive dinners and romances her high above the Manhattan skyline in a helicopter. Megan is trapped between the yuppie's newly minted wealth and the depressing familiarity of her father, a dour, alcoholic, working-class man who physically and mentally abuses his wife and is scornful of his daughter's desire to become a police officer. From her family's perspective, Megan

is a progressive character, and viewers are sympathetic with her intention to better herself. The same is true of Clarice Starling in *The Silence of the Lambs*, and both films' heroines share this double burden of escaping their class origins and occupying masculine professions. Yet, while *The Silence of the Lambs* invokes the "white trash" trend in 1990s serial killer films,[89] *Blue Steel*'s yuppie devil villain is a problem, for he is the logical extension of Turner's own class-jumping impulse toward economic betterment. As Mann dryly comments of Hunt, he is an ideal mate for someone like Turner; he's got "nice suits, a good salary—your mother would approve."

Looking at the villains in these two films, comparisons with *The Silence of the Lambs* make it further clear how easily the yuppie devil trope has been accepted. Work on Demme's film has doubly focused on the female detective and her positioning between two male villains—the psychosexual Jame Gumb and the cannibal psychiatrist Hannibal Lecter. Curiously, though, no such comparable work has been done with *Blue Steel*'s yuppie Eugene Hunt. As did Maslin, most reviewers of *Blue Steel* hastily accepted Hunt's yuppie devil characterization, paradoxically finding this devil simultaneously self-possessed and raving mad. This is an effect of Ron Silver's performance, which presents Hunt as a classic film psychopath, "stereotypically nuts and then some."[90] Yet, this is a characterization that Silver only fully employs in the film's end. Earlier, Silver played Hunt as a mix of contradicting thriller tropes: he is predatory and cunning, he charms his way into the heroine's heart and family, and he knows how to cover his tracks and stay one step ahead. These qualities, though, also align with models for a yuppie's behavior; in the 1980s, it was good to be cunning and charming, good to try to get ahead. It is only in the latter part of *Blue Steel*, where Hunt displays cinematically "psycho" behavior—killing a prostitute, hearing voices from God, and overconfidently taunting his victims—that Silver really comes across as "stereotypically nuts."

The problem of reading *Blue Steel* lies in its ending, which is especially cruel toward the heroine; she is disowned by her department, she witnesses her best friend's murder and her lover's attempted murder, she is raped, shot, held under guard, and worst of all is herself finally driven to commit murder to stop Hunt. To accept the violent pleasures of the ending, it seems we would need to enjoy *Blue Steel* as a masochistic, misogynistic film. Or, to rescue the film from such a negative reading, we would need to dismiss the ending as succumbing to the conventions of the thriller genre. Yet, both of these readings rely on a vision of the yuppie Hunt as already damaged from the outset. If this were the case, then Turner's heroic task is also from the beginning an impossible one. So while dismissing Hunt as a merely psychotic yuppie devil may seem to rescue the film for feminist audiences (just look at the male evil a female cop faces these days), such dismissals

actually make it harder to accept the narrative burden placed on Turner's character; as a rookie policewoman, it becomes her sole responsibility to rise above the evil that men do, for which the merely psycho male has no moral culpability. When she fails to do so, the heroine becomes as evil as the villain. Focusing solely on Turner forces audiences to ask whether she acted justly in the end in committing murder, but this is an unfair question; *Blue Steel* punishes and puts a shell-shocked Turner in her place, but it is a place created by her relationship with Hunt. It is imperative, then, to reexamine *Blue Steel*'s yuppie devil for, ironically, only in saving him can we rescue Megan Turner.

The first place where viewers might see Hunt as more than a merely psycho yuppie devil is when he steals the thug's dropped gun. Hunt is introduced as just one of a number of shoppers, and we are uncertain about the role this well-dressed, unknown man will play. We see his cufflinks, his manicured beard, his expensive suit, and his bright eyes, and so his concealing of the gun is surprising, at first suggesting either some hidden need (maybe he's in money trouble or he has some illness or other plot contrivance?) or an example of yuppie opportunism (an illegal, untraceable gun would have a certain economic value, after all). Neither of these readings quite makes sense, though; in fact, the film's narrative never offers an explicit reason for Hunt's theft. Instead, the thug's .44 Magnum exists as an object of desire outside of the film's narrative logic, working symbolically in Hunt's and the film's imaginative landscape.[91]

The foregrounding of this gun as a visually symbolic object and its fetishized presence in the characters' imagination are established in *Blue Steel*'s opening credits, which show tracking shots across a strange blue landscape that turns out to be extreme close-ups of Turner's service revolver, a .38 Smith & Wesson. The microscopic focus, geometric framing, and cool palette and soundtrack all serve to eroticize the gun, but in *Blue Steel* the generally phallic gun is contoured feminine. Christina Lane points out that "rather than impart the point of view of the bullets going into the chamber from the outside in, [Bigelow] presents the insertion 'from within,' perhaps suggesting a point of view that is gendered female."[92] This slowly moving landscape of blue steel next cuts to a close-up of a stomach being buttoned inside a blue shirt. As the camera moves upward to reveal a lacy bra and then Jamie Lee Curtis's face, we understand that the blue steel of the title refers punningly to both the gun and to the steely female officer who wields it. The title credits emphasize the performative aspects of Megan's tough-cop persona, which she only lets down as she is drawn sexually toward Hunt and Mann. For instance, the film is bracketed by two scenes where we see Megan perform a kind of drag, first when she dons her dress blues in the opening credits and last when she steals an

oversized uniform to escape for her final confrontation with Eugene. Jamie Lee Curtis's short, butch haircut and tough demeanor also become part of this police drag, and are vital to her performance as a female police officer in a dangerous, traditionally male occupation.

Yet there is another layer to the opening credits, and that is Bigelow's projection of the cinematic apparatus onto the gun-feminine dialectic, using images of the film camera to adjudicate between the blue feminine and the phallic steel. As the Smith & Wesson's chamber turns, it remarkably resembles a spinning film reel, enlivening the familiar pun between camera shot and gunshot. This is one of *Blue Steel*'s many references to the cinematic apparatus, and the connection between the cinematic apparatus and Turner's gun is notably repeated at the film's midway point, where she shoots at a blindingly white paper target that looks like a film screen, which she then moves with a camera-like hand crank. These images link the possession of a gun with the possession of cinematic power and, in doing so, Bigelow provides a second layer to Hunt's theft. Once the opening shots identify the contours of the gun with cinematic knowledge, it is this struggle that viewers are asked to follow, rather than the normal pas de deux between hunter and hunted. By placing the cinematic apparatus in between the ironically linked blue feminine and phallic steel, Bigelow suggests an ambivalence about the use of guns in *Blue Steel*; they become less easily associated with either masculine violence or female masochism, and the film's narrative struggle over possession of the thug's gun represents a larger thematic struggle over the cinematic representation of violence by and toward women.

These cinematic references also highlight the role that vision will play in organizing Megan and Eugene's relationship. *Blue Steel* is triply focused on complicating the audience's vision of the phallic gun, on exploring Eugene's witnessing of authorized female violence, and on training Megan's police vision. These are all collapsed in Eugene's unexplained theft. His reaction to Turner's shooting was an instantly visual, visceral one. That scene cut noticeably between Megan, the cashier, the thug, and two bystanders: Eugene and an old lady. Unlike the old lady and the cashier, Eugene's eyes were not down-turned; rather, he was actively watching the exchange between Turner and the thug, and the editing pattern relied on Eugene's eye movements to bridge these shots. Eugene later tells Megan how much he enjoyed watching that scene and how significant it became for him: "you shot him without blinking an eye. I knew . . . you're the only one who is capable of understanding." As his stolen, fetishized gun becomes increasingly symbolic, *Blue Steel* suggests that Hunt takes the gun as a ritualistic token or memorial prop that stands in for a greater "understanding" between him and Megan. Interestingly, Eugene describes his witnessing of

authorized female violence in terms of feminist film theory's discussion of the male gaze. Eugene is not excited to see a frail woman shoot a powerful man; he is excited to see a woman unblinkingly see a man be shot. Likewise, viewers have a complex time seeing through the levels of perception: we see Eugene see Megan see the thug.

This idea of reflected gazes is also picked up narratively, as Megan must acquire a new kind of vision herself. Since Megan and Eugene are the only two who saw the thug's gun, she at the beginning makes a double mistake by not seeing where either the gun or the yuppie witness went. This is a mistake in Megan's rookie police vision, and the holdup scene recalls the film's precredit sequence, where Turner responds to an emergency with a man holding a gun to a woman's head (the first of a number of such images in the film). Megan successfully shoots the man and rescues the woman, but ultimately fails her test when she does not notice the man's "wife" pull a gun from her purse and "shoot" Turner. At this, Megan rolls her eyes and curses, and the viewer realizes that what she has seen is actually only a training scenario. Megan's instructor admonishes her with the supernatural wisdom: "in the field you've got to have eyes in the back of your head," a warning that Turner fails to remember in the supermarket when she does not see Hunt take the thug's gun.[93] After Turner graduates and this scenario plays for real in the supermarket holdup, the film slots Megan back into the student role, explicitly connecting the faked reality of the training sequence with the true reality of "the field" of New York City. Since the holdup precipitates Megan's mentored relationship with homicide detective Nick Mann, it is striking that from the outset *Blue Steel* so carefully equates faked, "educational" violence with real, "field" violence. This is a trick also played upon the viewer in the precredit sequence, and so *Blue Steel* asks us again to question the easy visual identifications we might make with regard to male visual desire, feminine violence, and yuppie devilry.

After the holdup, Megan is introduced to Detective Nick Mann, whose suggestive name sets off a series of male characters that question the acuity of Megan's vision. After she identifies the make of the thug's gun, Mann questions how Turner could have known that from the forty feet distance between her and the thug. Megan's unequivocal response, "I saw it. It was there. I saw it. I saw the metal glint," is unsatisfactory for Mann, who performs another version of the earlier training scenario. Asking her to recreate the standoff, he quickly reaches into his coat, and when she draws her gun reveals himself merely to be holding a comb. For Mann and their boss Chief Hoyt, this serves as proof of Megan's "overreaction" in the supermarket, and destabilizes again the relationship between reality and training. Like the earlier test scenario, Megan fails here because her eyes are not yet

keen enough. Ironically, she has a quick draw and possesses good aim, but the men identify her as a washout since her eyes are not as fast as her gun. As Mann leaves, Megan shows she is beginning to understand this, pointedly saying to him, "I'll be seeing you."

"Are you seeing anybody," Megan's best friend Tracy asks early in the film. Tracy introduces Megan to potential suitor Howard, who provides one version of a repeated scene where Megan is asked why she chose to become a cop. In each case, Megan gives a jokingly violent answer, and someone is told to "lighten up" their visibly horrified look. In this case, Howard noticeably blanches when he finds out she is a police officer, and she calls attention to this: "you look bad." Before asking her, "why would you want to become a cop," he questions her looks: "you're a good looking woman; I mean, beautiful, in fact." For Howard, as for others, the incongruity of Megan's beautiful "look" with the violent seriousness of her job is confusing. She gives Howard one joking answer—"I like to slam people's heads up against walls," echoing what she earlier told her partner, who, moments before the holdup, asked the same question. There, she responded, "I wanted to shoot people." However, these defensive, joking answers drop away when she is later asked a third time by Mann, to whom she replies with one word: "him." The most obvious referent for this is Megan's alcoholic father, whom she has just threatened to arrest for spousal abuse. Yet since Eugene is another possible "him," we can see Megan as only realizing her fate after the fact, after she has met "him" in her new conflicting role as a beautiful female police officer unafraid to use her gun.[94]

This conflict between Megan's good looks and her ability to look is exacerbated by further sexual punning in the scene in Chief Hoyt's office. Hoyt characterizes Megan's shooting as masturbatory, criticizing her for how she "emptied an entire load" into the thug. The comb Mann pulls from his pocket is a further detail in his character's feminization; his long curly hair stands in contrast to Turner's short, masculine cut. Doing so, Mann adds another layer to Turner's mistake, suggesting that not only did she misrecognize the thug's dangerous potential, but also that she is unable to recognize friendly images of femininity. The relationship between Mann and Turner involves a double training; he will teach her both how to solve a homicide and how to be a heterosexual woman, as he improbably beds her near the film's conclusion. Mann and Turner's relationship is also based exclusively around the theme of vision, and mirrors the one of reflected gazes that Hunt develops for Turner. Mann wants to use Megan as bait to lure the unknown killer, telling Chief Hoyt, "I gotta position her with high visibility." After the next killing, with the media looking on, Mann begins training Megan, instructing her to examine the crime scene and to read the forensic evidence there. From the position of the body, she decides that

"maybe [the killer] likes them to see it coming," a reading reinforced when Megan does discover who the killer is, and his fascination with reflected gazes. Megan also must "like to see it"; since she is the only lead the police have, Mann has her looking at the file cards of past criminals. "Keep looking," he demands, to which she wearily replies, "only 600,000 more faces to look at." Later, when she is abandoned by her department, Megan begins to pursue Hunt on her own, staking out his apartment and following him. Since there is no concrete evidence on Hunt, Mann tells her to "just watch" and, interestingly, Mann too begins to pursue and follow Megan. Naturally, when Turner discovers that Mann has been following her as she follows Hunt, she is upset, asking, "didn't think I could handle it?" Mann's response is identical to one Eugene would give: "I wanted to *watch* you handle it."

For Eugene, too, looking is a crucial part of his obsession with Megan, and the film refers often to the attention or inattention he devotes to his surroundings. Directly before the first murder, Eugene walks aimlessly through a "Don't Walk" sign; the driver of the car that almost hits him shouts, "hey what are you, fucking blind!" He next does not see a crack in the sidewalk; when he trips over it, his gun falls out and he shoots the accidental onlooker. Later, walking aimlessly, he is startled, as if by a ghost, when a prostitute comes on to him. Mirrors in particular make up an important part of his mental world. After work at the New York Stock Exchange, we see him staring at a mirror, pointing the stolen gun at himself and mimicking a "pow!," his eyes darting between himself and the door, recalling the way his eyes darted between Turner and the thug during the holdup. Later, Eugene sits on his exercise machine, watching a television report about "The .44 Magnum Killer's" fourth victim. Facing the camera, he looks at the television on the lower right of the screen, whose reflection we can see in a mirror to the left of the screen. Finally, at the film's climax, Eugene pulls one of Megan's bullets out of his arm, staring into her bathroom mirror. In these instances, it is not that Eugene is portrayed as unseeing or engrossed by his own image, rather it is the case that he has only one image in mind—Megan using her gun during the holdup.

Thus, the complexity of *Blue Steel*'s visual theme is another reason we need to look more closely at Hunt. Unlike a traditional thriller, the yuppie villain is not attempting to hide from the police or escape detection; in fact, Hunt is desperately trying to get Turner to truly see him. As Megan develops eyes in the back of her head, and as Eugene strives to get Megan to see him better, Bigelow links both sides of the spectator's role—as gazing subject and as subject to the gaze. In *Blue Steel*, these two ambivalent readings of cinematic vision are linked to the possession of the gun. Since there are two guns in *Blue Steel*, a legal one, properly owned by the improper female police officer, and an illegal one, passed on from a street thug to a

male yuppie, we see again how neutral of meanings objects like the gun or the cinema are on their own. Rather, it is in their use or misuse that viewers can locate significance. Both Eugene and Megan are novices at gunplay, and both must work to sort out the proper and improper uses of their guns. Hunt, we realize, steals the gun not to repeat the thug's male violence, but rather to take part in the spectacle of feminine, authorized violence he has just witnessed. It is significant that this first shooting occurs in the economic sphere of the supermarket; the gun represents for Hunt the possible tool for a reconstruction of the supermarket scene, where an authorized act of violence replaces and becomes symbolic of public power. His practice on strangers or in the mirror unsuccessfully replicates that initial scene, and it becomes increasingly clear that what the yuppie devil wants is not Megan, or the gun, or more power, but rather all of these contained in one cinematic scene: watching Megan unblinkingly shoot the thug.

The thug's gun, then, is primarily a tool to help Eugene recreate the original supermarket scene. He thus fetishizes the gun as a privileged object, and he soon puts it to ceremonial use. In one ritualistic gesture, Hunt engraves Megan Turner's name on the bullets he uses to shoot his random victims. This inscription not only develops and literally marks the gun's libidinal economy, but also, at the same time, seems pathetically shallow. If Hunt has no clear reason for taking the gun or for shooting his random victims, then the laborious name carving seems to be but a simple cinematic signifier of "psycho" behavior. Yet, as we saw, *Blue Steel*'s credit sequence worked to connect Megan's uniformed body with her gun's blue steel. Eugene complicates this image by assigning Megan's name to the bullets, thereby associating her with his killing spree. Doing so, he both names his bullets for Megan as well as threateningly addresses them toward her. This is a complex gesture, and I read Eugene's inscribed bullets as another literalized reproduction of the supermarket scene. We see again that what Eugene wants is more complex than masculine violence or authorized feminine violence, and that it involves compulsively replaying the spectacle he witnessed earlier.

Eugene's idea to inscribe these bullets is contained in a detail from the holdup, when the thug twice says to the cashier, "what, do you want it engraved?" With the pronoun "it," the thug refers both to a joking invitation and to the waiting bullet. It is not far-fetched to later hear the thug's words in Eugene's imagination as he carves his bullets. This provides another example of the overlapping of faked violence and real field violence, suggesting to Eugene that engraved bullets would offer a suitably formal invitation to Megan. But Eugene's romantic inscription of "Megan Turner" on the bullets backfires slightly, since the misaddressed bullets arrive at the police department, setting up two competing relationships—Megan and

Eugene's, and Megan and Mann's. With the mystery of the carved bullets, Megan and Mann become much closer. Even though she does not "think of myself as the kind of girl who gets her name on a bullet," Mann reads the engraved bullets as a threat to Megan and wants to protect her. Just as Mann positions Turner with "high visibility" in order to attract Hunt, it seems that Hunt likewise uses Megan's name to attract Mann. The triangular sexual relationship that develops among Megan, Eugene, and Mann is bridged by their exchange of looks and bullets, and the inscribing of names on bullets is matched at the end of the film by the inscription of bullets on skin when Megan and Eugene are shot in the same place on their upper left arm. But, oddly enough, Eugene never takes any of the many opportunities he has to shoot Megan until the closing moments, and there only after she first shoots him. Indeed, we strangely see Eugene soliciting Megan to shoot him, pulling her gun lovingly to his forehead.

Blue Steel offers another mini-narrative to illustrate the engraved bullet's significance in representing the exchange of sexuality in the film. Bursting in on Megan's meeting with Chief Hoyt just after the holdup, the film introduces Mann as he tells Hoyt a sensational "true crime" anecdote. Mann, oblivious to Turner's presence, describes a man from New Jersey who, receiving oral sex from a prostitute in a cab, had his penis bitten off when the cab hit a pothole. The punch line of the story is that while "she's still got a dick in her mouth," the man "don't want to go to a hospital because he's somebody," and so "the hooker pulls out a needle and thread [and] sews his dick on backwards." Turner, disgusted, interrupts by saying "I wonder what he's gonna say to his wife," at which point Mann notices her and turns professional, critiquing her handling of the holdup. This is an important scene, since the story that Mann tells demonstrates a model for structuring sexual relationships that is charged with both economic and patriarchal power. The john ("he's somebody," just like the yuppie Eugene) cannot go to the proper authorities, and thus is a sympathetically comic figure to the police, who can relate, as men, to the difficulties in regulating their sexual life with their social life. Nevertheless, while the john is the butt (or the dick) of the joke, Mann makes the hooker's stupidity the point of his telling. Intended as a bonding moment between male buddies, Mann's story pointedly reveals Megan's uneasy role in her new job. Mann, speaking exclusively to the other male, Hoyt ("you gotta hear this, you'll piss yourself"), effectively excludes Megan from police life. Although he will, in partial redemption, become her mentor, we must wonder how Turner, already forced to defend her actions in the supermarket, could possibly mount a defense against this kind of world.

Not only does Mann's story exclude Megan from the force, but the detail of the hooker's well-intentioned misplacement of the man's penis

also appropriately captures the film's construction and critique of women's roles in men's affairs. The cabbie—the other accessible male—was only upset about the blood in his car, and so, having lost his penis because of a woman (and in an illicit relationship he must hide in order to protect the privileged status which allows such women in the first place), the john has no recourse but to turn to this hooker in order to help him put it back on. The hooker's ever-ready needle and thread and her expected skill at sewing recall the familiar feminine tropes of the weaving woman and male desire for the domesticated whore. Her getting it backwards, though, and then being laughed at later by two men, demonstrates a troubling confusion between the sexes. The passing back and forth of "somebody's" penis, signaling the appropriate and inappropriate use of phallic authority and referring to the loss of the thug's gun, points out *Blue Steel*'s anxiety over women taking part in homosocial relationships. But this lesson is entirely lost on Mann and Hoyt, who share the story between themselves. Unwittingly leaving Turner out, they simply recirculate their own masculine anxiety. The point, which the men miss but which Megan relies on from the start, is that the phallus is mobile. The film's exchanges make this clear: the passing back and forth of guns in the first half of the film (Eugene taking the thug's, Chief Hoyt taking Megan's) is matched by the passing back and forth of bullets at the end. The passing back and forth of the guns, the passing back and forth of bullets, and the passing back and forth of the penis all represent the same thing: the inaccessible economies operating between genders, and the use and care men and women should have for their phalluses. I wonder here if *Blue Steel* does not set Megan up to be the hooker with the penis in her mouth or, if it is possible, that she is rather, in Hunt's eyes, the john with the penis on backwards.

Eugene, in naming the detached bullets after Megan, asks a related question, as did the thug, when he dismissed Turner as a hooker by saying "I didn't come here to fuck with you bitch." If we reread the holdup scene with Mann's joke in mind, we would conclude that Megan is the castrating hooker, but one who loses the phallus due to her inexperience or due to the fact that she has no interest in sewing it back on anyways. *Blue Steel* elsewhere pointedly demonstrates that Megan is very undomestic. Early in the film, Mann criticizes her for not having food in her apartment, saying "you want to keep secrets, do me a favor: go shopping." Later, in a scene with Tracy just before she is murdered, Megan mock-proudly tends Tracy's stove, saying, "there, I boiled water." So, reading Mann's joke in light of Megan's domesticity, the film's plot presents her with another challenge; in recovering the thug's stolen gun, she is also asked to successfully restore the phallus to its proper place. We are again confronted with ambivalent readings—is Megan foolishly ignorant of the authority invested in the gun

and its bullets, or is she intentionally working against patriarchal significa-
tion here? Eugene's inscription of the bullets avoids answering these ques-
tions directly. His lovingly aggressive behavior toward Megan suggests that
the phallic gun is not the condition of authority, but rather the repeated,
ritualistic expression of authority; if anything, Hunt wants to give the
phallic gun back to Megan, not so she can have it, but so that she can sew
it back on in order to bite it off again.

Ultimately, however, the reading of the heroine cop as vengeful femi-
nist castrator does not take into account the complexity of Megan Turner's
characterization, who is the only well-rounded subject in the film. The
film's spectacularly violent ending, generated by Hunt's unstoppable pur-
suit of Megan,[95] covers over the complexity of the yuppie devil's desire and
makes coherent readings of *Blue Steel* difficult. We might believe that Hunt
was already insane before he entered the supermarket, and this would pro-
vide an easy solution to the film's problem. In this case, we would read the
film as a straightforward thriller, and understand the film's coding of Hunt
as a yuppie as simply metaphoric for the kind of lonely, pointless, and
crazy-making existence yuppies lead. Yet, that reading would ignore the
interrelated complexity of Eugene and Megan's relationship. The problem
with reading Eugene as a metaphor for how Reagan-era excess and 1980s
greed can make one crazy is that we may then be tempted to read Megan
metaphorically as well—for how feminism, for example, can make guys go
crazy or turn women into castrating vigilantes. While the film relies some-
what on the concept of a purely evil, obsessive psycho for the dramatic heft
of its conclusion, more suggestive is a reading of the first three-fourths of
Blue Steel as a parable of yuppie desire. Watching a woman shoot a man
turned Hunt on, and especially so in the field of the supermarket. Rather
than read his later psychotic break as a symptom of his yuppie lifestyle, his
behavior seems to indicate the limited forms of yuppie sociability that he
was already engaged in. An isolated figure, he is unable to make sense of
Megan Turner, and finds in her a set of incompatible problems, a beautiful
woman capable of public violence. What fuels the yuppie devil's ambi-
tion, paradoxically, is an overrecognition; Hunt tells Turner "I know you
better than you know yourself," and "we're two halves of one person, you
and I," and this strange identification demonstrates how reliant on others
the yuppie devil is for his identity. By looking at Hunt, I suggest that his
yuppie devil character is not unproblematically evil or psychotic from the
outset, but rather, that such yuppie devil characters are constructed only in
a gendered relation to feminine heroines.

Jane Feuer suggests that the yuppie, like Reagan, "was a nonexistent
phantom figure whose effect as image was nevertheless real."[96] Likewise,
Bateman, in Ellis's *American Psycho*, finally realizes that "there is an idea of

a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory. . . . *I simply am not there*."[97] Peter Loew, too, literally loses himself in the mirror. And Eugene Hunt was also "simply not there," as he only saw his identity as being one-half of Megan Turner's. *American Demographics* noted that "the funny thing is, no one has ever found a yuppie. Not even the people who look and sound like yuppies will admit to being yuppies."[98] The elusive nature of the yuppie is of course evidence that the yuppie never truly existed in the first place but, instead, was only one of the series of objects of knowledge invented in discourse, in this case, as a way for the growing number of baby boomers to escape the peril of middle-class sameness. As this strategy seemed less and less likely to work, the yuppie's subsequent association with the serial killer in popular narratives emphasized the dehumanizing price for upward mobility, warning audiences of the impossibility of finding a place at the table and encouraging a conservative sense of middle-class belongingness. Thus, the devils of *American Psycho*, *Vampire's Kiss*, and *Blue Steel* are less an argument that yuppie desire is inherently evil, and more a warning that becoming a yuppie is not a path to an independent, individual lifestyle after all: to be a unique yuppie means being a serial killer. The yuppie devil thus became an instantly recognizable symbol in late 1980s cinema, not because he was a marked outsider, but because he made audiences recognize their own pervasive, inner emptiness.

The Brat Pack and Its Mommy: Motherhood in the Age of Yuppiebacks

This chapter continues to look at the changing relationships between parents and children, focusing on literary descriptions of "brats" and "Mommies." Unlike the fictional "crack baby," which served as a symbol of racial fears, the "brat" was a childish object of knowledge that offered a model for youth behavior: the brat was something for adults to bemoan and children to become. A special kind of child running amok in an adult landscape, the brat continues the tradition of moral panic over postadolescents that has operated in American culture since the rebellious teen was first invented in the 1950s. It began with the success of the Hollywood Brat Pack, a shifting collective of young actors and actresses who appeared in ensemble films, and next bled over into the literary sphere with precocious novelists like Bret Easton Ellis, Tama Janowitz, and Jay McInerney. The Literary Brat Pack's phenomenal publishing success was built in part on the authors' high-living public image and appearance in Page Six gossip columns and in part on Vintage Contemporaries' invention of slickly marketed trade "yuppiebacks." In particular, McInerney's best-selling *Bright Lights, Big City* found huge success as a quintessentially eighties novel whose hidden core is the narrator's mysterious relationship with his mother. Indeed, despite their assertive precocity, the Literary Brat Packers rely continually on a shared maternal theme. The brat's parents are often divorced, and fathers are rarely present. Yet, while mothers appear frequently in brat narratives, they are almost always presented as dead or dying. This fascination with dead mothers reveals a second reason for the popularity of brats: in addition to being a fun-loving symbol of youthful rebellion, the brats also reflect a more general mistrust of motherhood;

their narratives strike out at mothers. Thus, while fiction by the Literary Brat Pack helped create a new model of self-sustained, assertive "brattiness" to emulate, this only came about by turning a prior generation's "Mothers" into eighties "Mommies." The brats' more casual attitudes toward "mothers," turning them into friendly and available "mommies," devalues the responsibilities of mothering and makes them merely tragic accessories to the brats' autonomous lifestyle.

The Hollywood Brat Pack

The first stirrings of an independent American youth culture in the 1950s, epitomized by James Dean's performance in *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955), was alive in the eighties but now, instead of fetishizing the lone male rebel, eighties brats come together in packs and clubs. Journalist David Blum surely had some of this in mind when he uses a historical analogy to define a new Hollywood Brat Pack; it "is to the 1980s what the Rat Pack was to the 1960s: a roving band of famous young stars on the prowl for parties, women, and a good time."[1] The earlier Rat Pack, formed in the mid-1950s, most famously included Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr., Peter Lawford, and Joey Bishop. Of course, the label "Brat Pack" works so well because it is a direct rewriting of the "Rat Pack," but for Blum, the quiddity of the original Rat Pack is less important than the cultural significance these two groups had for their respective generations. In the absence of a figure as polarizing as James Dean, eighties Hollywood cinema forgoes the lone rebel of the 1950s in favor of the collective pack.

The "Brat Pack" label was first used by Blum in a 1985 *New York* magazine cover story on the Hollywood film industry.[2] Blum's phrase characterizes "the young movie stars you can't quite keep straight," and his piece offers an introductory survey of "what kids want to see and what kids want to be."[3] Blum claims that viewers primarily respond to these youthful film stars by identifying with and mimicking them. Yet while this might be true to an extent, a label like "brat pack" also helps mediate between Hollywood actors' screen personas and a more general cultural lifestyle that youthful viewers perceive themselves as belonging to. Furthermore, Blum implicitly marks out which kinds of "kids" will most enjoy these films; by focusing on three male actors—Emilio Estevez, Judd Nelson, and Rob Lowe—his formulation of the Hollywood Brat Pack leaves out well-known female stars such as Molly Ringwald, Demi Moore, Mare Winningham, Andie MacDowell, and Ally Sheedy.[4] Those actresses all worked together on *St. Elmo's Fire* (Joel Schumacher, 1985), one of the definitive groupings of

the Brat Pack. The other key film is John Hughes's *The Breakfast Club* (1985), starring Sheedy, Ringwald, Estevez, Nelson, and Anthony Michael Hall. So while female actresses had roles as large as male actors, the women Blum does mention in his article are only unknown hangers-on and autograph seekers, such as a Playboy Playmate who is hanging out with author Jay McInerney, and a young girl named Alice who "crosses the line" by sitting with Nelson, Lowe, and Estevez. Replicating the maleness of the Rat Pack of the prefeminist era, journalists like Blum ask women to play a supporting role that only helps show off these independent young men.

The fraternity feel of the "Hollywood Brat Pack" label belies the fact that, unlike the Rat Pack, there was no real membership; the pack's numbers range from three to thirty and more. The basic disagreement over "who is" and "who isn't" is due to the fact that none of the actors involved embraced the label, while the popular press picked it up to characterize not only the new Hollywood films of this period but also to cultivate a young, exciting image of Hollywood, so that each upcoming actor could be seen as joining this new collective. Blum, for example, defines the Brat Pack in two different ways. First, he portrays the group as a collectivized form of the star system; while these are actors whose faces "you can't quite keep straight," spectators can trust that the presence of Brat Pack actors guarantees a film's ability to address youth audiences. Second, the group members are each given a pseudodemographic profile; for example, Estevez is called "The Leader and Treasurer," a mock corporate form of typecasting that marks his unique function in the Brat Pack. These two contrasting definitions allow for a continual reinvention of the Brat Pack at the same time as the Brat Pack can be seen as a stable social group with defined roles. So, contrary to expectations, not being able to quite keep everyone straight does not weaken the group's identity, but rather strengthens it by making it more diffuse.

To help his reader sort out the new crop of faces, Blum gives the actors pseudodemographic handles that read like a cross between yearbook awards and fantasy Oscar categories: Tom Cruise is "The Hottest of Them All," Rob Lowe has "The Most Beautiful Face," Judd Nelson is "The Overrated One," Timothy Hutton is "The Only One With an Oscar," Matt Dillon is "The One Least Likely to Replace Marlon Brando," and Sean Penn is "The Most Gifted of Them All."[5] In addition to separating the otherwise indistinguishable young male actors, this generic differentiation reveals a calculated effect at creating group identity by showing how everyone plays a particular role or fits a type. When Nicolas Cage is labeled "The Ethnic Chair," Blum means to portray the group as heterogeneous and inclusive, but he instead only accentuates the lily-white nature of the bunch. In an insider's explanatory voice, Blum writes that Cage's "ethnic looks usually

land him the part of brother or best friend."[6] This kind of racially offensive typecasting shows that the individual actor's importance lies mainly in his role in the Pack. These actors, after all, are "*what* kids want to see," not "*who* kids want to see." It is not a problem that they fail to distinguish themselves; rather, the Brat Packers are more successful when fitted into a larger group identity. This replicates the larger cultural process of identifying new cultural objects and associating them with particular lifestyles.

The significance of this strategy, where youth identity is both collective (the "pack") and pseudoindividualized, is clear in the most popular Brat Pack films, which strive to homogenize youth culture into a larger collective experience. When the Brat Pack appears together in films like *St. Elmo's Fire* or *The Breakfast Club*, they demonstrate both a youthful mimicry of and rebellion against an older generation's emphasis on rigid social roles. Throughout teen films of the decade, characters predominantly appear as social types defined by their exclusive difference from other types; in other words, their identity is as much about exclusion as it is about belonging. Many of these films, such as *Pretty in Pink* (Howard Deutch, 1986), *Some Kind of Wonderful* (Howard Deutch, 1987), and *Say Anything . . .* (Cameron Crowe, 1989) rework a conventional *Romeo and Juliet* trajectory so that the difference between social types is the central theme and obstacle. *Say Anything . . .* , for example, easily presents Lloyd Dobler's (John Cusack) dating of Diane Court (Ione Skye) as a foregone impossibility because of some fundamental difference between the two. As a friend plainly tells him, "she's a brain" and "brains stick with brains." Other films like *The Breakfast Club* or *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (Amy Heckerling, 1982) suggest that these cliques are simply a general function of contemporary life.

For youth in the eighties, an individual's identity can only be understood through his or her affiliation with a collective. For example, in Hughes's *The Breakfast Club* (released in the same year as Blum's "Hollywood Brat Pack"), the five characters each belong to one of five easily definable high school social categories: "a brain, a beauty, a jock, a rebel, and a recluse." As they head to detention in the film's introduction, their parents' cars help code for the audience the family's class, which in turn provides motivation for the kids' behavior. At first, Hughes has the teens parody themselves and their perceived social roles as they stress their economic toughness, act out their parents' wealth, and mime the contradictions of their moral upbringing. By more and more rigidly enacting their perceived role in the group, the characters begin an antagonistic morning that culminates in the realization that the differences they so keenly perceive among themselves can in fact be reconciled. The film is at first aggressive in showing how these youth simply parrot the roles established for them by their parents' social class. Realizing for the first time the contrived nature of their social

identity, these youth at last refuse adult society's labels in favor of one of their own self-invention: "The Breakfast Club." The key shift here is the appropriation of a utopian, shared group identity that replaces fragmented identities carried over from the world of adults. More than merely a rejection of adult values, these teenagers have decided also to reject their own identities in order to create new ones.

Inventing the Yuppieback: The Literary Brat Pack Finds a Genre

What is suggested when the newly minted Hollywood Brat Pack itself breeds, one and a half years later, a "Literary Brat Pack," another young group of artists who captured much attention, critical and tabloid?[7] As with the Hollywood Brat Pack, the Literary Brat Pack describes both a specific core group of starter members and also a general type of youth—precocious, marketable, perhaps even talented: a lauded tyro. This second rewriting of the original Rat Pack shows a quickening of the process of cultural reference. It is not unusual that social commentators would look to the recent past to understand the present, but in the eighties, the accumulated speed with which the past became grist for the mill is strange. The Hollywood Brat Pack, only a moment ago a neologism, now becomes itself a historical referent. The disorienting effect is addressed in a group review of some Literary Brat Packers: "That they seem of their periods demonstrates how time has accelerated, or how changes in style can make for distances."[8] "Making distance" is both the method and the goal here; whether time itself has accelerated or whether styles have sped up amounts to the same thing. The unironic cannibalizing of the recent past was in fact so accelerated that the term "Brat Pack" soon became applied to just about any aesthetic group. Paul Rudnick, the great chronicler of the brat for *SPY* magazine, humorously detailed scores of them, such as "balding brats," "creative brats," "Betty Ford brats," and "political brats."[9] Also around this time, self-help books and articles like *How To Raise a Brat* and "The Boom in Brats" warned parents about indulgent permissiveness while also criticizing them for the negative effect their self-absorbed, workaholic yuppie lifestyles were having on children. Before long, brats were everywhere, and they had become a worthy problem.

The person most responsible for establishing the notion of the Literary Brat Pack is the person who hated them most: Bruce Bawer. In a 1987 essay, "Taking on the Literary Brat Pack,"[10] Bawer attacks his subject, which he sees as dominating contemporary American fiction to the detriment of more deserving authors. As Bawer tells the story, it all began in 1984 with David Leavitt's short story collection *Family Dancing*. Bawer comments,

"at first the critics were lukewarm or indifferent. Then Michiko Kakutani of the *New York Times* gave *Family Dancing* a rave review—and the next thing one knew, Leavitt and his stories were the talk of the literary world."[11] Bawer complains about how this success brought retroactive critical attention to other young writers like Meg Wolitzer, Peter Cameron, Susan Minot, Elizabeth Tallent, and Marian Thurm.[12] Lastly, these authors' popularity was cemented by the "astonishingly glowing terms" of a *New York Times Book Review*'s front page, "unequivocally positive review" of Minot's *Monkeys*,[13] and Leavitt's National Book Critics Circle Award in fiction for *Family Dancing*. This leads Bawer to his christening of these authors:

> So great, in fact, is the disparity between the public image and the performance that one is tempted to refer to this overly hyped circle of writers as the Literary Brat Pack. . . . Like the Hollywood Brat Pack, they have an overweening sense of their own importance in the scheme of things, and—by means of the enthusiastic blurbs and reviews that many of them have given to each other—have helped to distract the attention of their audience from many of their more deserving contemporaries. Like the Hollywood Brat Pack, finally, the members of the Literary Brat Pack have one outstanding skill: they promote themselves extremely well.[14]

Of course, at the time it was not only the Hollywood Brat Pack who was trained in self-promotion; the veneration of corporate culture in 1980s is clearly a ready model, and Bawer's criticism of the Literary Brat Packers' self-promotion is easily applied to this larger corporate lifestyle.

Bawer's intervention is in particular a response to what he calls "the principal document in the study of the Literary Brat Pack"—David Leavitt's essay "New Voices and Old Values"—which is exactly the sort of self-promotion that so irritates Bawer.[15] Leavitt offers a reading of what he calls "a new generation of writers who are recording through their fiction the changes in the way young people think about family, marriage, love and loyalty."[16] Although Leavitt does not include himself among these new authors (a fact Bawer notes with suspicion), he clearly belongs with these other young writers as chroniclers of changing attitudes toward family relationships. One problem is that Bawer and Leavitt seem simply to disagree on what it means for these writers to belong to a group that expresses a common new feeling. For example, where Leavitt sees how these writers share "not only their youth . . . but their predilections and obsessions, both in style and content,"[17] Bawer sees "a shorter, blunter way of putting all this. . . . Namely: 'All of us Literary Brat Packers write exactly alike.'"[18] What is a virtue for Leavitt, a continuing tradition of American literature tracing to Raymond Carver, Ann Beattie, and Mary Robinson, is for Bawer

a shameful admission that these young authors have fallen for the baser impulses of quick and easy "workshop" fiction.

Bawer has three specific complaints about the Literary Brat Pack: (1) the homogeneity of Brat Pack authors and Brat Pack characters (their subject matter), (2) the "arbitrary specifics" of the pop cultural reference that Brat Pack authors use (their style), and (3) these Brat Pack authors' youthful arrogance in the popular press (their public image).

Bawer relishes in his first complaint, reducing all Brat Pack stories to one archetypal sentence length:

> They began lives of their own in the big city (usually New York), working in publishing houses or second-hand clothing stores; they had colorful, frustrating love affairs (invariably with other upper-middle-class, suburban-reared baby-boomers); they came out of the closet to their families; they watched their aging mothers divorce or come down with cancer or die.[19]

Bawer is manifestly frustrated at any hint of self-pity, which he reads as exaggerated self-importance. Coming out of the closet is nothing big—a mother's dying of cancer is passé. Because of their sameness, Bawer writes off meaningful life events—relationships, sexuality, a parent's death—as the "baby-boom paces" of "the superficial yuppie sensibility of the 1980s."[20] While in real life these would be considered emotionally significant events, in the closed world of the Literary Brat Pack, they are merely clichéd and incestuous.

That these baby-boom paces are overly familiar is bad, that they are overworked in Brat Pack fiction makes it worse: "all the sensitive young gay men seemed to be the *same* sensitive young gay man" Bawer complains, "all the intelligent, distant, emotionally self-protective mothers seemed to be the *same* intelligent, distant, emotionally self-protective mother."[21] Bawer even typologizes, for the sake of those duped by the Literary Brat Pack's critical success, the limited range of experience these fictions deal with: "there are about four basic Brat Pack story themes: the folks' divorce . . . , the troubled relationship with Mom . . . , the frustrations of romance . . . , and dead or dying mothers."[22] Rather than see this commonality as indicative of some shared cultural youth feeling, Bawer is simply bored by the uncreative homogeneity. Worse still for Bawer is his second complaint, that all this sameness of subject matter is matched by a stylistic sameness:

> Sometimes the only noticeable differences are the external ones—the names they go by, the TV shows they watch. Read enough Brat Pack stories in a row and the young characters begin to run together in your mind—and the same goes for their mothers and their fathers, their apartments and their jobs, their parents' divorces and cancer cases.[23]

For Bawer, fictional characters should be individualized, quirky in their own internally particular ways. By only seeing external markers of difference, the reader is not given the psychological clues necessary to flesh out a character's inner life; instead, we get TV shows, pop songs, and cologne brands. Bawer humorously offers a list of T-shirt descriptions that Literary Brat Packers love to use: anatomical figures, Coke ads (one English, one Arabic), Disney World, New York subway maps, *Star Wars*, rock bands, and one that reads "The Only Safe Fast Breeder Is a Rabbit."[24] The Literary Brat Pack's limited palette—built around Coke T-shirts and *GQ* and *Mannix*—reveals yet again that bratty self-importance beneath their writing, and for Bawer the superficial details make their already boring themes even more dreadful. Picking objects over consciousness, "arbitrary specifics" (Leavitt's phrase, twisted in Bawer) instead of pointed observations, the Literary Brat Pack doubly shows their immaturity.

That this practice is so widespread is even more shocking: "such coincidences bespoke . . . a bizarre corporate commitment, on the part of all the Literary Brat Packers, to a very constricted realm of subjects styles, and characters."[25] "Corporate commitment" is a telling phrase here, as Bawer uses it to shift the Literary Brat Pack into a framework that he and other traditional critics can understand. Using the economic metaphor of the Reagan 1980s, Bawer suggests that the Literary Brat Pack craftily uses the structure of the corporation to their advantage. He has already protested their shamelessly intermingled self-promotion, and by hinting at a "bizarre corporate commitment," Bawer suggests that the Literary Brat Pack misunderstands the nature of fiction by trying to turn it into business. While Brat Packers almost never mentioned political themes, it seems Bawer saw them as buying into a sort of literary version of Reagan-era deregulation, where the Young Turks could crash the literary scene and stage a corporate takeover.

Like Blum's Hollywood Brat Pack, the Literary Brat Pack was a term so media friendly that it flew out of Bawer's hands, becoming a quasi-endearing term for three writers in particular: Tama Janowitz, Jay McInerney, and Bret Easton Ellis.[26] This is somewhat curious, as the word "brat" has generally had a derogatory meaning, so there is a mixture of affection and contempt in attitudes toward best-selling authors. But looking past a simplistic reading of "The Literary Brat Pack" as just a media-friendly marketing label, we see that it is actually a rather successful piece of cultural criticism: it marks off a new register of literary precocity, it represents a newly collective experience of self, and it tracks a new attitude toward the American family.

First, the phrase "Literary Brat Pack" makes a comment about youth, suggesting that literary success and accomplishment are achievements

best reserved for adults. We saw how outraged Bawer was at these "these kids'... tepid, adolescent little fictions,"[27] but others had contradictory feelings about this precocity. For example, one early reviewer of *Bright Lights, Big City* seems uncertain about the correlation between age and success:

> Some hot reviews and a slot on the bestseller list generated the kind of overnight fame that characterizes the literary brat pack—that covey of under-30 novelists, including Lorrie Moore and Bret Easton Ellis, among others. Their sheer youth has made them something of a publishing trend.[28]

What is most striking is the final sentence, with its overstated phrase "sheer youth." What can be particularly "sheer" about youth is unanswered, but the threat is clear—youth needs no other qualifications. While "sheer youth" is by no means a new trend, precocity always being commercially successful, youth becomes a novel selling point with the Literary Brat Pack. For example, in 1988, David Foster Wallace examines the same group, which he calls "Conspicuously Young":

> The metronome of literary fashion looks to be set on *presto*. Beginning with the high-profile appearances of David Leavitt's *Family Dancing*, Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* and Bret Easton Ellis's *Less Than Zero*, the last three-odd years saw a veritable explosion of good-willed critical and commercial interest in literary fiction by Conspicuously Young writers.[29]

Echoing other contemporaneous critics' sentiments that "time has accelerated,"[30] Wallace emphasizes the public nature of youth. By emphasizing their *conspicuous* youth, Wallace invokes the doctrine of conspicuous consumption and the related eighties prerogative to show oneself off. More than just the statistical fact that there are, post-baby boom, more youthful bodies around, Wallace suggests that these youth are also larger in the public imagination and are thereby changing traditions of fiction. He comments on this reversal of values: "certain honored traditions of starvation and apprenticeship were reversed: writers' proximity to their own puberties seemed now an asset."[31] In criticizing the dreariness of contemporary fiction, Wallace agrees with Bawer; the difference, however, is that Wallace takes the long view, seeing the conspicuous efforts of younger authors as an invigorating sign that American literature will have a healthy future.

In addition to banking on the high profile of these brats' youth, publishers also began to more consciously pack them together. The story begins with the biggest publishing success of the eighties: Vintage Contemporaries.[32] Editor Gary Fisketjon created the Vintage Contemporaries line, which hoped to grab a new audience that would respond to lower book prices,

a uniform and collectable look, and a fabricated but built-in literary merit (via a backlist and symbiotic author blurbs). In other words, explains Graydon Carter, "what Fisketjon did with the Vintage Contemporaries line was create a form of name-brand publishing for baby-boomers."[33] Fisketjon's plan for the first catalog of 1984 was to repackage older authors that had not sold well (including Raymond Carver), with the addition of one new book—McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*. Fisketjon would furthermore break tradition by putting this first novel out as a trade paperback, with a lower price than hardbacks. Most important, the packaging of Vintage Contemporaries would work to assure a mutual success; each novel would piggyback off the success of the others by featuring identical layouts, typography, cover art, and author blurbs. The effect was striking, as Carter observed, "only it didn't really look like a book. The design, with its pointillist grid and letter-spaced type, looked more like an album cover: perfect for his audience."[34] Fisketjon's dissimulation of an album cover increased the novels' shared visibility while branding a new type of reader.

These novels, derogatorily labeled "yuppiebacks," bespeak of guilty pleasures and addictions. Their short chapters, abundant cultural references, and humorous narratives all make slightness into virtue: "they are all clever, topical, timely, and ironic—the David Lettermans of the written word."[35] But while their immense success might not have had much to do with literary merit, they do represent something more than a fad. Specifically discussing *Bright Lights, Big City*, Hendrik Hertzberg comments on the considerable effect of these covers: "it would have been a . . . minor classic [but] since it originally sold over three hundred thousand copies and was the beneficiary of a shrewd marketing campaign that presented it as a cross between a compact disc and a SoHo restaurant, it has been the target of much sour comment."[36] This "sour comment," directed more at the packaging and marketing than the quality of the writing, reveals somewhat how objectionable the Literary Brat Pack were to older audiences who could not ignore these young authors' slickly marketed image. However, for all those younger brats "raised on baseball cards and Barbie costumes, Vintage Contemporaries have become the latest thing to collect."[37] Like baseball cards and Barbie costumes, the covers of these novels follow a standard template, with minimal, stylized variation, tapping into the collector's impulse.

Connecting the similar covers of these novels to the similarity of their themes, critic Josephine Hendin sees a correlation between and emphasis on this collecting impulse and a waning of youth engagement with political issues. In "Fictions of Acquisition," she examines "youthcult fiction," which describes the "heroes and antiheroes propelled toward mythic stature by

an avid college market. [These] cult heroes dramatize the ethos of the day."[38] Comparing such fiction of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Hendin finds 1980s youth fiction impotent:

> the comparable fiction of the 1980s seems to be giving up the counterculture attack on adulthood, authority, and repression. There is in progress a quiet but sharp recoil from the concepts of self and society, from the quest for authentic emotion, from the visions of individualism and possibility that have been animating forces in our literature.[39]

Like Bawer, Hendin sees a similarity in much contemporary youth fiction; however, she views this similarity as a withdrawal into quietude and abnegation. She argues that "the youthcult novels of the 1980s reflect an enormous shift" from earlier youth fiction because eighties fiction has lost an individualized "sense of social or generational conflict or advocacy of a hedonistic, experiential ethic at variance with the competitive work ethic of American culture."[40] Characters of past youthcult fiction (such as Holden Caufield) celebrated a rebellion against society, work, or one's parents, but the youth fiction of the eighties does none of these. Instead, the numbing sameness of superficial details, or drug use, or pop cultural references, replaces any sense of generational counterculture. This is again the kernel of Bawer's complaint about the Literary Brat Pack: that a homogenized passivity is a threat, while an individuality born of antagonism is a virtue. Hendin warns that "this youth fiction of personal life has been criticized for being insufficiently true to individual differences and for accepting commercially viable, collectivized notions of self."[41] By trading on a "collectivized notion of self," the Literary Brat Packers have not only failed to write good literature, but have also worked to propagate a deeply bland and conservative image of youth culture.

From Mothers to Mommies in *Bright Lights, Big City*

When we speak of brats, we are also speaking of parents, who are invariably blamed for how their children turn out. Despite a newfound, collective autonomy, the yuppiebacks of the eighties insist as a rule that the brat must come to terms with his or her parents. As Bawer noted, that parent is more often than not a mother. The editors of the satirical magazine *SPY* produced a 1989 Cliffs Notes parody, *Spy Notes*, which particularly ridicules the Literary Brat Pack on this point: "Each protagonist had a mother who died. And so on."[42] Updating Tolstoy for the eighties, they point out

how "every unhappy family, in fact, is unhappy in the same way, because the mother is dead or dying."[43] In a mock quiz, they ask:

> Eleven of the 15 books in the genre use the *dead mother* plot device. Is this because
> - a) in the 1980s most young people's mothers died before the young people turned 25?
> - b) most of the authors are still at the age when they hate their parents?
> - c) each author was convinced that his or her own adolescence was much more traumatic than everyone else's, and a fictional dead mother is a convenient gambit to justify misbehavior and whininess?[44]

SPY contributor Paul Rudnick wrote about the role that mothers played in the fiction of the Literary Brat Pack, making "a callous observation: they're dropping like flies."[45] While there are other narrative possibilities, like divorce, for a Literary Brat Pack character's "misbehavior and whininess," "the death of a parent is the primal shock, the first horror, the scabrous awakening."[46] As the satirists make clear, if there is any real thread connecting this disparate group of writers, it is this one detail. But, to take *SPY*'s quiz question more seriously, what is it about the mother in the eighties that made her brats so repetitively imagine her death?

To answer this question, I turn to McInerney's first novel *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984), the representative yuppieback with all of the archetypal brat pack elements: youthful success, colorful period details, a hip urban setting, and a son and his dead mother. Most immediately appealing about the book were its cultural details: it features a newly made yuppie brat stranded in jet-set New York at the height of an eighties club scene, it includes insider details on fashion modeling, publishing, dance clubs, cocaine use, riding the subway, and other prurient behaviors available to New Yorkers. It was also very commercially successful: it quickly sold over 300,000 copies, it secured the success of Vintage Contemporaries and the yuppieback phenomenon, it was made into a 1988 film starring Michael J. Fox (with a recently announced remake), a 1999 off-Broadway musical, a new 2005 studio cast recording, and it helped start some careers (Bret Easton Ellis, a friend and fellow Brat Packer) and further others (Don DeLillo, whose early novels were republished by *Vintage Contemporaries*). Finally, *Bright Lights, Big City* is the representative yuppieback because it radiates that distinctly eighties brat mentality that critics Bawer and Hendin identified; the novel presents collectivized notions of self by focusing on superficial details at the exclusion of the protagonist's inner life, and it not only obsesses about motherhood throughout, but hinges

on a brat's inability to reconcile his new identity with the absence of his dead mother.

Bright Lights, Big City reveals a week in the life of an unnamed protagonist, beginning and ending at Sunday's dawn in New York City. The novel is written in the second person[47] and follows a familiar comic pattern, as the narrator continually fails in his relationships, at his work, and in his social life. At the novel's opening, we learn that the narrator is concealing the fact that his model wife Amanda has left him; with the aid of his hedonistic friend Tad Allagash, he treats himself to lots of cocaine, nightclubs, and bootless one-night stands. The effect of all this excess is that the narrator is about to lose his job in the Department of Factual Verification of a thinly veiled *New Yorker*. Soon, he is scandalously interrupting Amanda's fashion shows, hiding a ferret in his ex-boss's office, and striking up impossible relationships with one random woman after another, each of which he pursues with mounting desperation.

The reader is first led to believe that the narrator's main problem is being abandoned by Amanda. Bits of Amanda and their relationship appear throughout the novel; she has literally left pieces of herself everywhere: "the place is haunted. Just this morning you found a makeup brush behind the toilet."[48] There is also mail, messages from friends, and more horrifying, Tad's comment that "ninety percent of your average household dust is composed of human epidermal matter" (43). To the narrator, "this explains your sense of Amanda's omnipresence. She has left her skin behind" (43). Clearly, their relationship was a "skinny" one, thin and superficial during their time together. This is exactly what Tad expected; for him, "Amanda's departure was not surprising but inevitable. It confirmed his world view" (116). McInerney seems to attribute this brat's dissolution to eighties culture in general; this is simply what happens when one leads this kind of amoral and shallow life.

There is, however, a secret assiduously avoided by both the narrator and the author. McInerney handles the secret behind the narrator's downfall as if he were writing a Hitchcockian thriller: there are MacGuffins (the job does not really matter, nor does Amanda), there are mysteriously recurring background characters (just why does the narrator keep avoiding his younger brother Michael?), there are abundant, potent symbols (a "Coma Baby," bread, store mannequins), and finally there is the penultimate flashback scene, in which all is revealed in close, psychosexual terms. It is not until the novel's end that we learn the keystone relationship in *Bright Lights, Big City* is with the narrator's mother, who died exactly one year ago of cancer. Because the narrator so continually refuses his mother's death, even lying about it at one point (95), this reveal catches the reader off guard. More than one critic complained that McInerney holds back a little

too much a little too long: "at the end, a revelation of a greater grief doesn't fit all that went before."[49] While the surprise ending confused reviewers, it was easy to dismiss this by comparing the novel to other yuppiebacks; for example, Josephine Hendin writes it off with a refrain we have heard before: in eighties Brat Pack fiction, "not even a dying mother runs deep."[50]

While some readers may have felt tricked, I am struck by how the text, obsessed with the mother, nonetheless constantly flees from her. There are subtle references on nearly every page, and McInerney has done such a job of obscuring her that she ultimately surprises us like a ghost. The mother's haunting presence is especially clear when we consider the series of mother substitutes around which the narrator's adventures are structured: Amanda (the narrator's estranged wife), Vicky Hollins (Tad's cousin), Megan Avery (a coworker), and Clara Tillinghast (the narrator's boss). By the novel's end, the reader understands how each of these four women serves as a replacement for the loss the narrator has yet to consider, and so, as each woman is taken up and set down by the narrator, McInerney reenacts the death scene that is still to come. In this, *Bright Lights, Big City* is both a hip novel of club-driven eighties New York City and a more traditional hall of maternal mirrors whose narrator unwittingly runs from and toward his existence as a motherless brat.

In keeping with the yuppie theme of materialism, McInerney also continuously associates the missing mother with a material object. We see the first of these recurring objects during the narrator's spirit-crushing Monday morning subway commute. McInerney humorously describes the bizarre but routine experience: a 50-minute commute on a graffiti-covered train, an old lady crushed in her seat by a begging veteran, and barkers for Times Square striptease shows. The narrator absorbs all of this without any more comment than to think about the boring sameness of the hucksters' spiel and the too-bright Monday morning sun. Then, at a crosswalk, he sees

> among the announcements of ancient upcoming events strangling the lamppost like kudzu, a fresh poster with the headline MISSING PERSON. The photograph shows a smiling, toothy girl, circa Junior Prom. You read: *Mary O'Brien McCann*. . . . Your heart sinks. You think of those left behind, the dazed loved ones who have hand-lettered this sign and taped it here, who will probably never know what happened. The light has changed. (13–14)

The narrator's intense response to this poster is arresting—we have just seen him make his bored way to work, ignoring his loopy surroundings, which, wild as they may be to nonnatives, are numbingly familiar to him. Why he is snapped out of his weary routine by an ever-present MISSING

PERSON poster is a mystery to the reader. At first, we might see this as a clue to the narrator's character; perhaps he is realizing that he is a "Missing Person," stopping at a poster for himself in a self-pitying, adolescent way. Or, when we next learn that he has been abandoned, we might think the missing wife is the Missing Person. However, for the clever reader, the initials of the Missing Person, Mary O'Brien McCann, push us in a third direction. Although the narrator's own M.O.M. will not be mentioned for some time, we see already here, by the language of the ubiquitous missing person poster, that the narrator fails to recognize her as already gone. He is still one of "the dazed loved ones" who has not yet gone to the paradoxically "ancient upcoming event" of his mother's death.

Although the narrator does not decode the acronym, the M.O.M. poster reappears throughout the novel, each time accompanied by a vague sense of recognition. Later, the narrator sees a sign reading "DON'T FORGET MOTHER'S day," the lowercase "day" slyly changing the meaning of the advertisement (86). Shortly after, "You wait fifteen minutes on the downtown platform. Everywhere you look you see the Missing Person" (86). The connection between the Missing Person and missing mothers is intensified when the narrator's exasperated brother Michael shows up in town looking for his recalcitrant sibling. When the narrator first catches sight of his brother, he bolts, "pass[ing] a construction site, walled in by acres of plywood on which the faces of various rock stars and Mary O'Brien McCann are plastered" (150). The metaphor is clear: the construction site of the narrator's psyche is plastered over by reminders of his own missing person. The narrator continues his flight from Michael: "You keep walking, thinking briefly about the Missing Person, the one who's come and gone for good" (150). No longer an "ancient upcoming event," the narrator finally seems closer to grasping the Missing Person for what she is, "the one" mother who is irreplaceable in life and death.

To cement the M.O.M. poster's significance to the narrator, it appears one final time. After being punched by his brother just before the novel flashes back to the mother's deathbed, the narrator and Michael take a walk. They notice that "at Sheridan Square a ragged figure is tearing posters off the utility poles. He claws at the paper with his fingernails and then stomps it under his feet. 'What is he, political?' Michael asks. 'No, just angry'" the narrator responds (160). The ragged and angry figure, an id-like stand-in for the narrator, is reacting to the posters, including perhaps one of the omnipresent M.O.M., in a decidedly more direct fashion than the narrator has up to now. In commenting on this, the narrator at last shows some introspection about his situation. The narrator's reading of the ragged figure—he's just angry—suggests that the narrator also will be

able to begin the grieving process, making the shift from "dazed loved one" to angry "ragged figure," and then on to proper mourning.

In addition to the missing person poster, McInerney repeatedly symbolizes the missing mother with another material object: bread. Wheat and bread are mentioned regularly, at first in reference to his ex-wife Amanda, whose "hair was the color of wheat, or so you imagined" (69). Since the narrator has yet to actually ever see any wheat, he is unreliable on this score, his thoughts dominated by nationalistic fantasy: "you pictured her backlit by a sunset, knee-deep in amber waves of grain" (69). When the new couple moved from Kansas to New York City, "every morning you woke to the smell of bread from the bakery downstairs" (9). With this, the idyll of the heartland becomes the idyll of the city. McInerney later returns us to the bakery when the narrator shops with another love interest, Megan: "'Best bread in the city,' Megan says, pointing to Zito's Bakery. . . . The fragrance of the interior reminds you of mornings on Cornelia when you woke to the smell of bread from the bakery ovens, Amanda sleeping beside you" (134). Associating bread making with the domestic woman is a hoary trope McInerney is not above invoking, but this becomes even more obvious when the mother is revealed in the final chapter.

In the final three redemptive pages, the narrator leaves a party at dawn on Sunday, walking home with a bleeding nose. Smelling bread from a bakery, he cadges some, choking on it after not having eaten for two days. Even here, the rural–urban dichotomy still holds for the narrator, who trades his Ray-Bans for a roll, fantasizing that this is "a man with a family somewhere outside the city" (182). Rather than work through the earlier stereotyped associations of the rural, feminine domestic with bread making, McInerney here simply gives those tropes over to the men: after the mother's death and the wife's abandonment, it is the men who will make and trade bread. The novel ends ambiguously; the narrator seemed ready to face his mother's death and a world characterized by her absence, but he envisions instead a world without any women at all. Choking on the bread, he realizes "You will have to go slowly. You will have to learn everything all over again" (182). This final, choking communion of self-discovery turns out to be only the beginning; the novel's end offers us the narrator's dawn rebirth, but not any redemption for the failure to grieve for his mother.

This ending takes the smell of baking bread, first associated with Amanda, and perversely reworks it as a maternal theme. After he left the party, the smell reminds the narrator of a surprise visit home from college he once made. Mom was baking bread, for

> she said she had to find some way to keep herself busy now that her sons were taking off. . . . You sat down at the kitchen table to talk, and the bread

soon started to burn. She had made bread only two other times that you could recall. Both times it had burned. You remember being proud of your mother then for never having submitted to the tyranny of the kitchen, for having other things on her mind. She cut you two thick slices of bread anyway. They were charred on the outside but warm and moist inside. (181)

The surprising image of the unsuccessful baker raises a problem for the reader, who would expect a traditionally domestic childhood memory. But this is a brat's childhood memory, and the reader must also consider the mother's own sixties upbringing and possibly rebellious youth. Should we see this as an authorial refutation of the narrator's sexist attitudes, since his mother does not fit the pattern that all women are good cooks? Or, is McInerney just picking on the mother since, not expecting company, she picks up a traditional hobby only to botch it? Or, perhaps McInerney's eighties updating of nostalgic motherhood—aproned mother ritually preparing daily bread—tries to see her as properly "liberated." The narrator finds a source of pride in the fact that Mom cannot cook because she has "other things on her mind"; by refusing "the tyranny of the kitchen," by not being "the type of mother who . . . ," she becomes admirable to the progressive son.[51]

Continuing the pattern of signaling mother-surrogacy through food, the mother's culinary incompetence recalls an earlier chapter, "Linguine and Sympathy," where McInerney develops the second of the narrator's mother-surrogates. The narrator finally makes good on a date with his coworker Megan Avery, whose initials are as suggestive as the M.O.M. poster. When Megan suggests that they cook together, the narrator responds "suspiciously" to this "radical idea" (133). As with Amanda, the narrator is at first overreliant on his initial impression of Megan. In her apartment, though, he begins to discover things he has never bothered learning before: that she has two cats, that she originally wanted to be an actress, and, most shocking, that she has a thirteen-year-old son (136–137). It is with this last maternal revelation that "suddenly Megan seems much less scrutable than you had imagined" (138). The narrator, focused on the sexual possibilities of "a man and a woman alone in a room with a bed," had asked of a picture if it was not one of Megan's old boyfriends (137). The narrator is surprised when she replies that it is her son, and the reader is even more surprised that the narrator should see a picture of an 11-year-old and immediately think "boyfriend."[52] The narrator, trying to get a handle on Megan and her inscrutability, finds himself caught between the only two ways he knows of relating to women—as a son or as a lover.

Adding to his confusion, Megan tells a dramatic story; her husband had her committed and took custody of her son, taking him to Michigan[53]

while she was "in Bellevue stupefied with Librium" (138). She does not begrudge her husband, though; she tells the narrator, "I was raving. Manic depression. . . . Now I take four tablets a day and I'm fine. But it's a little late to become a full-time mother again" (138). Megan is oddly resigned to her dis-mother-ment, and McInerney gives us here another missing mother to another missing son. Having Megan accept that "it's too late to become a full-time mother" makes a point not only about the proper time at which one can be a mother, but also makes a distinction between different types of mothers. Close to the language of Wall Street, Megan is now a "part-time" mother (she sees her son once a year), a role significantly less valued than "full-time" mother. A dead-end job without upward mobility, being a "part-time mother" is always second best.

The idea of different kinds of mothers is explored by other writers of the period. Paul Rudnick draws the distinction by suggesting that there are "Mothers," there are "Moms," and, new to the eighties, there are "Mommies." Associating Mothers with authors like Cheever and Updike, Moms with Roth and Albee, and Mommies with "today's fictioneers, the bookboomers," Rudnick makes his claim clear by comparing the way these maternal figures end life: "When Mother died, people whispered . . . in their Sunday best. When Mom died, our parents raced for the shrink, in hairshirts. When a Mommy dies, the betrayal is enormous, and kids turn to cocaine, or Rum Raisin, or TV."[54] The narrator's mother's death fits Rudnick's terms for the death of a Mommy.

To confirm the maternal hierarchies, McInerney gives us another partial, damaged, drugged-up, second-best mother in the headlines of the tabloid daily *New York Post*, which takes pride of place as "the most shameful of your several addictions" because it "confirms your sense of impending disaster" (11, 57). But his story is not one of "Killer Bees, Hero Cops, Sex Fiends . . . Tough Tots, Sicko Creeps, Living Nightmares, [or] Life on Other Planets." It is the "Coma Baby" that speaks most to him and symbolizes his inability to come to terms with his mother's death. As a figure of the narrator, the Coma Baby's daily appearance in the *Post* offers a running commentary on his progress in accepting his mother's absence. The Coma Baby, a fetus of a woman lying in a coma after a car crash, is introduced right before the M.O.M. poster. On his morning commute, the narrator reads the second page item: "COMA BABY SIS PLEADS: SAVE MY LITTLE BROTHER. There is a picture of a four- or five-year-old girl with a dazed expression" (11). The sister's "dazed expression" is echoed two pages later when the narrator imagines "those left behind, the dazed loved ones who have hand-lettered" the M.O.M. sign.

True to character, the narrator is too oblivious to see the significance of the Coma Baby to his own life—even when he has a rather opaque anxiety

dream about the Coma Baby, his boss, and his failure to fact-check a piece on French elections. His dream opens the fourth chapter, "A Womb With a View." Sneaking into a hospital, the operating room turns out to be the narrator's office; his coworkers are speaking French and doing drugs.

> The Coma Mom is stretched out on your desk in a white gown. IV bottles are hanging around the bookshelves, tubes plugged into her arms. The gown is open around her midsection. You approach and discover that her belly is a transparent bubble. Inside you can see the Coma Baby. He opens his eyes and looks at you. (54)

For the narrator, this is frightful stuff, which becomes scarier when the reader connects the Coma Baby's bratty, selfish attitude toward Coma Mom with the narrator's attitude toward his own mother-surrogates.

The narrator has cultivated the unfortunate habit of looking through people,[55] and in his dream, this practice is literalized. Although the "Womb With a View" ostensibly refers to the Coma Baby's view outward, more troubling is others' view in. For example, the *Post* calls it "Coma Baby," as if it were already born, instead of, say, "Coma Fetus." Failing to see how Coma Mom's magically transparent belly is a particularly bratty way of thinking about birth and the special importance of children (mothers are as depersonalized as hospital incubators), McInerney writes a scene ignorant of its antimaternal setting and reduces the mother to a mere vessel; it might be her womb, but it is the child's view. Looking through the window of the comatose mother's womb, the narrator sees himself alive and kicking. The "transparent bubble" that is the Coma Mom's belly also calls to mind the antiabortion movement's tactic of focusing exclusively on the fetus at the expense of the mother. Slow, spectacular, mediated, succinct—in the *Post* headlines, the narrator is able to prepare for the mourning he was unable to do in real life. When the narrator reads of the Coma Mom's death, it is hardly worth mentioning, since the Coma Baby survives.

We are now left with the novel's originary scene: the narrator's flashback to his mother's death. McInerney intends this scene to be both grotesquely unsettling and comfortably familiar, as the mother's near-corpse holds out for one final, tender scene. Showing up at the end, the narrator is shocked by the mother's aspect: "you thought you would faint [at] the ravaged form. Even the smile had shifted. . . . You wanted to run away. But the horror passed" (164). Just as he did with Megan, and with most women, the narrator has taken his mother for granted; "but for those last hours you might never have really known her" (164). McInerney wants to shatter the narrator's conception of his mother. She asks him about cocaine and about sex. "Your mother, who never smoked a cigarette in her life,

who got loopy on two drinks. . . . You always thought your mother was the last Puritan" (165). After this unexpected conversation, "the wasted flesh seemed illusory," and the narrator began to "see her somehow as young, younger than you had ever known her" (166). This new phase in their relationship—mother as fellow eighties confidant—is attributed wistfully to her impending death: "I wish I'd known a long time ago that I was going to die" (165). The memory starts to ring a false note here; the mother's eagerness to discuss her son's sexual partners and pleasures signals that we are in a brat's fantasy.

McInerney has the narrator's mother suffer horribly; she can no longer sleep or swallow, and requires a morphine injection every four hours. The mother tortures herself on this pain for the narrator's sake, not taking morphine because "she wanted to talk, to be clear" (165, 167). When the conversation turns to the narrator's childhood, her pain is associated with the narrator's unruly behavior: "'You were a funny boy. An awful baby. A real screamer.' Then she grimaced and for a moment you thought it was the memory of your screaming" (167). The narrator was the worst of all the siblings, and this makes him proud. "Unbearable as an infant, always throwing up, biting, crying through the night," the narrator, like the Coma Baby, is a brat from the beginning (168). As her own pain worsens, the mother says, "It's like when you were born. It sounds crazy, but that's exactly what it's like" (168). Her dying hurts as much as her son's birthing; the two are equal in this respect. She continues, "I didn't think I'd live through it" (168), echoing what we have heard the narrator say earlier: "before it happened you couldn't believe you would survive your mother's death" (161). As the sun comes up, his mother dies in pain, holding his hand. Her last words, "don't let go" are weepy, lachrymose, and suspicious (169). The suggestion that the narrator will literally interpret these words, refusing to let go by not mourning his mother, further vilifies the dead mother.

The novel does not end with mother's death, but rather as it began: at sunrise on a Sunday morning. The mother's death, which was also timed to the rising sun, becomes another element in McInerney's association of mortality and this culture's morality. *Bright Lights, Big City* is not far from the vampire story, with its half-alive, undead narrator. What is most striking is that while McInerney attributes the narrator's relationships to sexual desire, "the touch of flesh" (8), the author also makes each relationship a life or death situation, a play to cheat mortality: "almost any girl, specifically one with a full head of hair, would help you stave off this creeping sense of mortality" (4). Mortality, already associated with bread, is also summoned by sunlight: "if you go out into the morning alone . . . the harsh, angling light will turn you to flesh and bone. Mortality will pierce you through the

retina" (6). The coked-out, club-going vampire will have to contend not only with sunlight, but also with his mother's memory; leaving the club in the first chapter "is even worse than you expected. . . . The glare is like a mother's reproach. The sidewalk sparkles cruelly" (8).

The mother's imagined reproach—the sun's glare—continually reappears: "the glare from the sidewalk stuns you; you fumble in your jacket pocket for your shades" (27). These shades, traded finally to the man for bread, are the narrator's weapon against the sunlight and the increasing brightness of his mother's memory. The "bright lights" of the title refer not only to the brightly exciting neon lights of nighttime, but also to the brightly painful sunlight of a morning hangover. It is through these latter bright lights that the mother suffuses the text. Dazed by the excessive brightness, the narrator is blinded to any recognition of his mother, and until he gives up his Ray-Bans to the bread man, McInerney also continually keeps the reader shaded from the significance of the mother's death on the son's burned-out existence in New York City.

It is in both of these bright lights, however, that the son's guilty imagination of the mother's reproachful glare threatens to undo the illusioned life the narrator desperately wants to lead. He is "the kind of guy who . . ." wants to lead a life where wives do not run off and where mothers do not die, or at least have the good decency to die a quick, meaningless death, preferably while in a coma, at the hands of a crazed sex killer, or in a freak accident; something, in short, reportable and newsworthy. Shining through in the end, though, is the mortal, piercing ray of maternal ambivalence; the mother is gone, and while each of the son's problems are traceable back to her absence, they are each also caused by his own dazed guilt and fantasy over his improper mourning. Falling short of an apology, the guilty narrator's choking on bread does promise a return to a normal life for the sake of the mother's memory. But the brat's flight to yuppiedom, which the novel's details revel in, is shown to be a false escape from the inescapable confrontation with a mommy's eighties death. In Brat Pack novels like *Bright Lights, Big City*, the central mother figure is both revered and ignored in her death, a sacrifice required in order to give children license to grow up bratty.

Coda: The Ventriloquy of Childhood

Recall Foucault's argument that "objects of knowledge," such as the five figures discussed in this book, come to serve as a resting spot for cultural knowledge. Whether this is medical, political, legal, moral, or economic knowledge, these objects of knowledge both express and conceal social attitudes. For example, the crack baby is ostensibly a figure warning of the dangers of drug use, but it really expresses racial anxieties over black motherhood. Likewise, the brat is a figure seemingly showing off the value of precocity and getting ahead, but is really a symbol of the danger of losing traditional family values. For Foucault, the objects of knowledge he wrote about were always "other people"—figures that doctors, legislators, or priests might hold up in order to reflect a lesson or make a claim. But in the 1980s, the era of lifestyle, we see how these objects of knowledge also start to become subjects. As with the sudden appearance of postmodernism, there is a seeming inevitability to occupying a lifestyle, to making a conscious choice between a range of proffered subject positions. We see an extreme version of this in the high school halls of *The Breakfast Club* and more subtle versions in yuppie advertisements for "power" condominiums, shopping, and dining. In fact, we can read the story of the PWA as marking exactly this kind of change from object of knowledge to subject: rather than remain a victimized object to be passed around and held up as a medico-moral example, our object began speaking for itself, claiming subjecthood and refusing to be merely a sign for others.

This is what Foucault would call an ethical problem, and what I call a problem of engagement: how the individual relates to his or her cultural experience, and the options that are given for this kind of relation. As Lawrence Grossberg puts it in the context of eighties youth, the question is how one makes sense of one's experiences while also conceiving of viable responses to this experience, rather than simply confining oneself to embracing the available options.[1] In the post-1968 period, as critics questioned the relationship between theory and art, Jean-Paul Sartre addressed

this very issue when he proposed a new, politically engaged form of literature to serve as a touchstone after the radical negativity of surrealism. As he explains in *What Is Literature?* (1949), Sartre's *littérature engagée*, or "engaged literature," was intended to "take up a position *in our literature*, because literature is in essence a taking of position."[2] This position has high stakes: "literature throws you into battle. Writing is a certain way of wanting freedom; once you have begun, you are engaged, willy-nilly."[3] Sartre means to stress a new self-consciousness in the act of literature, and in a difficult sentence, he imagines the engaged writer as an ethical mediator of experience: "I shall say that a writer is engaged when he tries to achieve the most lucid and the most complete consciousness of being embarked, that is, when he causes the engagement of immediate spontaneity to advance, for himself and others, to the reflective."[4] "His engagement is mediation,"[5] Sartre concludes, and it becomes clear that engaged literature is for Sartre more a function of the author than the text; the author should attempt to summon "the most complete consciousness of being embarked" (*la conscience . . . la plus entière d'être embarqué*), in order to render clear and lucid what may be hidden—that literature is always already a taking of a theoretical position, and thus it is an ethical form related to the writer's and reader's struggle for freedom.

Before Sartre's *littérature engagée* is an American literary example of the question of writerly and readerly engagement: Herman Melville's enigmatic short story "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Tale of Wall-Street" (1853). Accounting for the ghostly figure of Bartleby means accounting for Bartleby's repeated catchall response "I would prefer not to," which veers between engagement and withdrawal. Two post-structuralist thinkers have taken up "Bartleby, the Scrivener" to argue for an ethical reading practice that accounts for the level of engagement a reader has with a text. J. Hillis Miller, in *Versions of Pygmalion*, reads Melville's short story as another version of the Pygmalion myth, where there is "a character who does something like falling in love with a statue," and where "reading makes something happen."[6] In Bartleby's case, Miller focuses on the narrator's ethical responsibility toward Bartleby, which Miller links with the narrator's unsuccessful attempts to write Bartleby's biography. In Miller's reading, the tale is really of the narrator, and Galatea-like Bartleby turns out to be the sculptor Pygmalion as well. Gilles Deleuze, in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, also takes Bartleby as a model to express a relationship between literature and life, between the critical and clinical. In a kind of "Bartleby-criticism," Deleuze emphasizes this character's "being as being, and nothing more."[7] In this reading, Bartleby's catchphrase formula "is devastating because it eliminates the preferable just as mercilessly as any nonpreferred."[8] In doing this, Bartleby's "formula" "ravages language" and

"make[s] the whole [of it] confront silence."[9] In this, Deleuze finds that Bartleby, "even in his catatonic or anorexic state . . . is not the patient, but the doctor of a sick America."[10] This reversal of the received wisdom about the story reframes Bartleby as an ethical figure who is not disengaged, but is rather a model for a new kind of engagement.

Philip Jenkins argues that "the story of American culture in the early 1970s can be seen as the mainstreaming of sixties values, the point at which countercultural ideas reached a mass audience."[11] If this is true, then the 1990s were a crisis moment for Sartre's idea of engaged literature. In the early part of the decade, popular authors and filmmakers cultivated what became known as a Generation X "slacker" culture. Douglas Coupland's novel *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (1991) gave a name to this shift in feeling, and early independent American cinema, such as Richard Linklater's *Slacker* (1991) and Kevin Smith's *Clerks* (1994), offered social realist portraits of bored, aimless, post-eighties "twentysomethings" (a label that "Generation X" replaced). These characters were like rebels with neither cause nor any real rebellion. Coupland's novel is laced with kitschy Pop Art cartoons; a glossary of terms such as "McJob," "Knee Jerk Irony," and "Legislated Nostalgia"; and meaningless, bumper-sticker mantras like "SOIL ISN'T A DOCUMENT" and "REINVENT THE MIDDLE CLASS." Coupland's novel typifies the rare literary text that manages to crystallize public feeling about youth culture and capture the public's sociological imagination, such as Mark Twain's "The Gilded Age," Kerouac's "Beat Generation," and Tom Brokaw's "The Greatest Generation." Even for those who did not read past the title, Generation X named and defined the post-Baby Boom generation, not from an economic or historical or demographic perspective, but from the cultural perspective of wage labor, ubiquitous slogans, and disaffection. So, while the phrase "Generation X" itself had been used in various ways since the 1950s, Coupland's description of bored but intelligent youth culture captured the sociological imagination in a new way.

The question for the eighties, as it falls between Sartre's call for engagement on the one hand and Gen X's withdrawal on the other, is whether the slackening of social engagement is a continuation of or a response to the culture of the eighties. Were the eighties the beginnings of the slacker's shrug to European, post-1968 ideas of political activity, or is the Generation X feeling a product of the failure of the American eighties to engage successfully with earlier political activity? As the eighties emphasis on label-as-lifestyle gives way in the nineties to a disaffected Gen X label, two different figures in the 1980s landed upon a similar solution to this problem: novelist Kathy Acker's *Great Expectations* (1982) and comedian Paul Reubens's television show *Pee-wee's Playhouse* (1986–1990). Both of

these perform what Carla Harryman calls a "ventriloquy of childhood," which I use to explain an imitation of childhood that also calls attention to itself as a performance. In both Acker's and Reubens's work, one sees a mimicry of childhood and adult behavior that seeks simultaneously to engage constructions of age as well as to navigate outside of such limitations by calling attention to the performed aspects of childhood roles. In other words, both self-consciously used mimicry in order to turn a childish object of knowledge into a subject.

Kathy Acker's Mom

Hannah Arendt, of course, was not Kathy Acker's mom, but I begin with her because Acker takes Arendt as an example of an ambivalently engaged political artist. In a 1995 address to the Authors Guild, Acker quotes Arendt on those writers who "have ventured into the public life":

> I am afraid that in their efforts, they felt very little responsibility toward the world; these efforts were, rather, guided by their hope of preserving some minimum of humanity in a world grown inhuman while at the same time as far as possible resisting the weird irreality of this worldlessness—each after his own fashion and some few by seeking to the limits of their ability to understand even inhumanity and the political and intellectual monstrosities of a time out of joint.[12]

Acker finds community with Arendt since they both share a concern with the author's ethical responsibility to her culture—to finding a response to help mitigate the similar feeling one of Acker's eighties characters has, that "all are grasping for good reason in these desperate times."[13]

Hannah Arendt is a product of dark and desperate times, as is Kathy Acker. In an earlier essay, Acker reflected on New York City in 1979, recalling her thought that "if my friends and our society didn't find a way for adequate change, we would die and quickly."[14] What then is one to do, Acker asks, with the hardships of history; how is a writer, a woman writer, to write change if writing is not change? In answer, Acker takes up Arendt's term "a committed act," whose meaning is "revealed only when the action itself has come to an end," that is, when it becomes narratable.[15] "Insofar as any *mastery* of the past is possible," Acker quotes Arendt, "it consists in relating what has happened."[16] Now, Acker explains, Arendt does not mean "master narratives" of the kind Lyotard analyzed in the postmodern context, but rather, Acker proposes a distinction between a "writing, narration" which does nothing and a "narration, writing" which is a moving language and which "restores meaning to a world which hardship and

suffering have revealed as chaotic and senseless."[17] But what of the case, Acker writes, of *really* dark times? "How can we, as Hannah Arendt says, even in worlds that seem to have become inhuman, remain obligated to these worlds?"[18] Acker glosses Arendt's answer: "'Flight from the world in dark times of impotence can always be justified as long as reality is not ignored.' *Flight* does not mean *abandonment*."[19] The restoration of meaning to the world by means of "narration, writing," in which narrative (even, in Acker's case, a nonlinear narrative) comes over "just writing," allows for a kind of fleeing from the world which is not abandonment. "*Flight* does not mean *abandonment*": between these two terms there is a way out that is also a way in.

In her novels, Acker wrote about this kind of "flight" constantly, most notably when she was writing on her favorite subject, the mother–child relationships, which structure her major novels: *Great Expectations* (1982) begins and ends with a maternal address, *Don Quixote*'s (1986) crazy-making abortion propels that text's search for feminine love, and *Empire of the Senseless* (1988) opens with a narration of Abhor's matrilineal horror story. Peter Wollen suggests that the suicide of Acker's mother Clare when Acker was 30 may have been "the most emotionally painful event of her life,"[20] and that her texts cannot help but reflect this pain by repeatedly forcing the narratorial "I" into an abandoned, traumatized orphan role. In *Great Expectations*, the most ambivalent and disconcerting of her maternal novels, Acker rewrites her mother's suicide and funeral three times, so that it structurally introduces, divides, and closes the novel. Because of this formalistic recycling, her character's orphan status self-consciously comes across as a role being performed. Perhaps this is a form of autobiographical therapy, where Acker practices a novelistic confession in order to manage the traumatic pain of her mother's suicide and get through the "task work" of writing.[21] Or perhaps this is a put-on, and considering Acker's tough punk image we could agree with Barbara Kruger that Acker was a nihilist who was not nearly as fragile as others suggested. Or, perhaps, the two are one and the same: Acker's traumatized orphan role is but the obverse of her outlaw heroine persona; like the tattooed and pierced punk, the scared orphan Acker is "both flaunting her independence, defying her oppressors and bolting in desperation, abject and humiliated."[22]

Acker's friend Carla Harryman offers another explanation for the traumatized orphan role by comparing Acker's recycled maternal narratives to the myth of Echo, pointing out that prior to Echo's "language atrophy is her excessive talkativeness," a quality Acker shared both in her texts and her life.[23] The obsessive retelling of Acker's family drama is a kind of recovery, while her echoing language is a "tragic signal or sign of trauma"[24] that

allows her to return to a disorganized, pretraumatic childhood moment. Others have also commented on the "un-formed" childishness of Acker's texts,[25] which narratively enacts childhood trauma while linguistically gesturing toward the psychoanalytic state that precedes ego organization. Narrative fiction, like ego boundaries, are confining structures, and Acker's childish diction, orphan subject matter, and fluid narratorial "I" can be read as strategies to lose these ego boundaries and thus flee from the self. As a form of language practice (as opposed to narrative), Harryman uses the phrase "the ventriloquy of childhood"[26] to describe the effect of Acker's writing. I would push that term even farther to account for how the traumatized orphan role functions as both an explanation of and a response to childish experience.

Acker's ventriloquy of childhood has an off-putting textual effect. For example, here is Barbara Kruger's complaint about Acker (summarized by Peter Wollen): "in the end, it all boils down to baby talk, to unbearable nonsense: 'Goo goo.'"[27] Likewise, the West German government decided that *Blood and Guts in High School* (1984) was immoral since "for the vast part it consists of individual words, mostly childish blabber that doesn't make any sense."[28] Naturally, Acker sees the idea of "childish blabber" differently: "the only reaction against an unbearable society is equally unbearable nonsense,"[29] she claims, and this is especially true of the American eighties: "the United States resembles a giant baby, perhaps mongoloid . . . who not maliciously but unknowingly breaks everything it meets as it crawls around in chaotic paths."[30] She follows that quotation with a comparison to Piaget's view of babies, who are unable to distinguish themselves from the external world. This is, for Acker, simply the way America looks now, and thus her ventriloquy of childhood is an intentional technique to reflect contemporary culture, rather than an attempt to run from catastrophe or toward redemption.

This returns us to the idea that Acker's "traumatized orphan role" is also realist and essentially autobiographical.[31] Acker's relationship with her own mother, gleaned from interviews and obituaries, is confused, and two of her obituaries further this confusion by discussing the maternal, autobiographical aspects of her novels. For example, Peter Guttridge, writing in *The Independent*, tells us:

> Her mother committed suicide when Acker was 30. After years of silence, they had begun to see each other again four years before. But then her mother lost all her money. She couldn't cope with impoverishment. Her mother's death features in most of Acker's novels, most particularly in *My Mother: Demonology* (1993). Acker always contended the bits about her mother were the only autobiographical parts of her books.[32]

What is interesting is how Acker's first-person pronoun, which simultaneously reflects both a real and a fake autobiographical voice in her novels, is replaced in her obituaries by the third-person feminine pronoun, which just as confusingly represents both Kathy and Kathy's mother Clare. "But then her mother lost all her money"—does Guttridge mean that Clare lost all of Kathy's money, or that Clare lost all of Clare's money? "She couldn't cope with impoverishment"—is this Kathy or Clare who could not cope with poverty, or perhaps the two together? Just as Acker performs a pronominal shift in "I"s in her novels so that she may continually reconstruct the traumatized orphan role, so does this obituary unintentionally perform a similar shift in "her"s: her mother/her money, Kathy/Clare. As Guttridge points out, it is significant that these "bits about her mother" are the most (if not the only) autobiographical elements. So why then is there a pronominal lapse where one would otherwise expect factual precision?

This confusion is repeated elsewhere; Gary Pulsifer, in *The Guardian*, writes,

> She never met her natural father, who deserted her mother when she was three months pregnant with Kathy. Kathy's mother appeared to have blamed her daughter for this act of betrayal; in later life she undertook acts of petty thievery; by Acker's 30th birthday her mother at last managed to kill herself—a subject the budding novelist turned to time and again.[33]

Again, we are left to ask, who is the "she" who was also a petty thief? This is an important detail, particularly since both Guttridge and Pulsifer stress a connection between Acker's life and her work. In this case, Pulsifer makes it sound as if the mother's death is merely good source material for Acker; she (Clare) "at last managed" to commit suicide so that she (Kathy) could indefinitely rewrite this act as fiction. The mother's suicide, happening in time for Acker's thirtieth birthday, becomes a generative gift for the "budding" novelist. This kind of cause and effect apparently works for the mother as well; Pulsifer's semicolons connect the two women in a circle—the circumstances of Kathy's birth caused Clare to hate her (Kathy, and Clare?), which caused "petty" family dramas, which led Clare to suicide, which caused Kathy to write.

Sorting out the relationship with the absent maternal in *Great Expectations* has to do with what Acker calls "movings," her term for handling the distinction raised earlier between "flight" and "abandonment." In *Great Expectations*, Acker utilizes the concept of "movings" to model a paradoxically tragic and successful strategy for negotiating her mother's suicide. In the middle section, "The Beginnings of Romance," the narrator

Sarah begins, like Peter did in the first section "Plagiarism," with a family history. Sarah's mother became pregnant during World War II and was abandoned by her father, leaving mother, daughter, and grandmother reliant on each other. Here Acker, as she did in the first section, mixes narrative paragraphs about Sarah's relationship to her mother with more philosophical paragraphs that describe how "movings" create an individual's consciousness in the world. Sarah first explains what happens after her father left:

> Mother didn't want me to leave her. . . . She craved my love . . . only so she could do what she wanted and evade the responsibility. . . . I lived so totally in the world bounded by her being her seemings, I had no idea we were a socially important family. I didn't know there was a world outside her.[34]

The idea of an all-consuming relationship with a mother repeats throughout *Great Expectations*; for each narrator, it is true that "the whole world and consciousness revolve around my mother."[35] After describing her abandonment by her mother, Sarah reflects:

> There is just moving and there are different ways of moving. Or: there is moving all over at the same time and there is moving linearly. If everything is moving-all-over-the-place-no-time, anything is everything. If this is so, how can I differentiate? How can there be stories? Consciousness just is: no time. But any emotion presupposes differentiation. Differentiation presumes time, at least BEFORE and NOW. A narrative is an emotional moving.[36]

This type of moving becomes momentarily frightening to Sarah; if the loss of absolutes results in a supposedly liberating "moving-all-over-the-place-no-time," then how is a character, already lost or journeying, meant to find her way? How can there be such a thing as a narrative—a linear moving that (for Acker) also moves all over at the same time? While this is presented as a serious question, Acker also mocks the agglutinative philosophical logic at work, getting out of one tautology by means of another.[37] Emotion presupposes, and hence generates, the possibility of differentiation, which in turn presumes, hence generates, time. Therefore, rewriting Descartes, "something exists when it's part of a narrative. Self-reflective consciousness is narrational";[38] I think I think, therefore I narrate, therefore I am. Acker explains the trap elsewhere: "I feel I feel I feel I have no language, any emotion for me is a prison."[39] The imprisonment of language (of lacking a useful language) is for Acker intimately related to emotion, which, since it requires a differentiation, and thus a past and present, itself becomes yet another kind of inaccessible narrative language.

By the novel's end, when Acker returns us to the mother's suicide that began the text, she gives a much shorter version of events:

> My mother committed suicide and I ran away. My mother committed suicide in a hotel room because she was lonely and there was no else in the world but her, wants go so deep there is no way of getting them out of the body, no surgery other than death, the body will hurt. There are times when there is no food and those times must be sat through. I ran away from pain.[40]

To say that our narrator discovered some new thing or moral lesson at the end of *Great Expectations* would compromise Acker's interest in "movings"; we find instead a figure stuck at a basic truth. Despite the novel's many journeys, despite the significance of the philosophical ideas discussed, the reader finds only just so much running from pain—not to any particular place, but just "away." Like descriptions of the mother's suicide and funeral, this fearful running away is structurally repeated; early in the novel, the narrator thinks about the future and moving back to New York: "I'm scared out of my wits. I'm a scaredy-cat. I run away from everything."[41] Later, midway through the text, the narrator interrupts the narration, saying of the author, "I'm going to tell you something. The author of the work you are now reading is a scared little shit. She's frightened . . . scared out of her wits . . . she runs away from anyone."[42] This automatic fright and flight, repeated throughout, explains the impetus to "movings," but how are we to distinguish between the fearful "running away" of "abandonment" and the "movings" of "flight"? At the end of *Great Expectations*, when Acker revisits the flight prompted by her mother's suicide, she has her narrator consider the efficacy of the novel's journey; has this been a successful moving, or have Acker's narrators just been running away, toward suicide, like the mother? The novel's final lines suggest an answer to this question; we cannot decide which works, but can only say which does not: "I don't know if the world is better or worse than it has been I know the only anguish comes from running away. Dear mother, End."[43] Acker's final address to the mother is difficult to read; is this her way of turning back to face the absent mother, to bring an end (not "the end") to the only anguish she knows? Because she does not decide the world is "better or worse," Acker rejects the options of catastrophe or redemption. In place is the argument for the "movings" of flight within the world, rather than the "running away" of abandonment.

At the beginning of *Great Expectations*, we learn that the mother committed suicide on Christmas Eve 1978, nearly a year before the novel begins.[44] A few pages later, there is a scene that we can read as either a flashback or a dream: "Today is Christmas,"[45] and playing with her mother in

the virgin snow under the 59th Street Bridge, the narrator wants to remain "in this magic snow with the beautiful yellow sun beating down on me as long as I can until a voice in my head (me) or my mother says, 'Now you know what this experience is, you have to leave.'"[46] "(Me) or my mother," which may be the same thing, knows that being has to give way to becoming, that the moment gives way to time, which by history or memory wants to return us, circularly, back to the moment. This is what dreams do in Acker's novel, what the ventriloquy of childhood does, what the "movings" from trauma do: they try to return a character back to "what this experience is," to explain and respond to the experiences of childhood without either/ors.

Pee-wee Herman's Dad

Arnold Schwarzenegger, of course, was not Pee-wee Herman's dad, but he is a seductively visible candidate for that role. Schwarzenegger's muscled, heroic, and hypermasculine persona on display in *Conan the Barbarian* (1982), *The Terminator* (1984), and *Twins* (1988) stood in stark contrast to Paul Reubens's dandyish, immature, and rouged Pee-wee Herman character in *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* (1985), *Pee-wee's Playhouse* (1986–1990), and *Big Top Pee-wee* (1988). Imagining Pee-wee as the failed disappointment of a son to Schwarzenegger's all-American (if immigrant) father captures the most worrisome vision of eighties paternal relationships. This is seen especially in the metaphors of politics: Marsha Kinder notes how Schwarzenegger's campaign speeches for George Bush in 1988 made Pee-wee Herman a "pipsqueak," childish analogy for the Democratic party, drawing a contrast with strong, fatherly, Republican figures like Schwarzenegger or Clint Eastwood's "Dirty Harry" character. The argument is not so much that a "Pee-wee" type of candidate is too effeminate or weak to lead the country; it is simply that Pee-wee is a kid, and we need a father. Even for casual viewers of the show, this might go without saying but, despite having his own Playhouse, linguistic savvy, and an autonomy to navigate in the world, Pee-wee Herman is a child. But who is his Dad?

Critic Ian Balfour does some genealogical work, arguing that Pee-wee's "real relations are his TV ancestors: Captain Kangaroo, Howdy-Doody, Soupy Sales, Mr. Rogers, and, in a somewhat different vein, Jerry Lewis."[47] But these references to comedic father figures are only available to adult audiences in the know who are able to catch the subtlety of, say, Pee-wee's brief appearance as a bellboy in the biopic film-within-a-film in *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, which recalls Jerry Lewis's similar character in his film *The Bellboy* (1960). That is to say that while there is a lineage for the Pee-wee

character, recognizing this requires an intellectual effort from viewers who are already versed in the history of children's television and comic man–child characters. What about childish viewers, or those who approach Pee-wee's appearances from a nonintellectual point of view?

Can we find Pee-wee's parents anywhere in his Playhouse? Balfour also wonders where Mom and Dad are: "we never get a glimpse of them or even hear of them second-hand. For all we know, Pee-wee may have generated spontaneously into the adolescent age he is stuck in."[48] To support this self-birthed appearance, Balfour and others identify some of the explicit Oedipal references in *Pee-wee's Playhouse* (his bicycle helmet, the Sphinx on top of his Playhouse, the scissors hanging on the wall, disembodied Jambi), but it is unclear whether Pee-wee's show is a threatening Oedipal warning to children, a fantasy of escaping from Oedipal paradigms, or just a collection of symbols, Oedipal and other.[49] To be fair, while the show does not discuss Pee-wee's parents, neither does it show many other parents; parents in general are simply absent.[50] Media scholar Henry Jenkins III sees this as partly antagonistic, calling *Pee-wee's Playhouse* "precisely the kind of 'pointless' or 'nonsensical' show that parents hate,"[51] and so their exclusion from the otherwise highly varied cast of characters makes sense.

If Acker takes on the traumatized orphan role in her novels, then what role does Pee-wee perform? One thing is certain: "he never aspires to be the father."[52] Pee-wee is paired off romantically with various male and female characters, and he repeatedly demonstrates a prurient (if juvenile) interest in anatomy and underpants, but there is never the sense that he desires to have children of his own. Rather than anticipate future children to adore, Pee-wee's character emphasizes what Kinder sees as the show's central lesson: a "celebration of the child . . . as an alternative to patriarchal values."[53] Unlike other childish television characters that serve to prepare children for adulthood, Pee-wee has no plans to grow up. This may be the best explanation for filmmaker Bruce La Bruce's claim that Pee-wee is an icon "adored by children, and whose appeal cuts across a surprisingly wide range of youth subcultures—punks, skateboard and BMX kids, even the black rap faction."[54] The collective, wide-ranging nature of Pee-wee's viewership may simply reflect his audience's satisfaction with what we could call his "self-birthed orphan role."

As Acker did with her novels' "I" protagonists, Paul Reubens's Pee-wee character ventriloquies childhood. Obviously, the difference between a novel and a television show draws attention to the linguistic versus visual components of this ventriloquy, but both uneasily mix the adult and childish, and, for both, language is central to performing a childhood role. La Bruce discusses "the lexicon that Pee Wee has developed—an aggressive mixture of childspeak and gay references," and describes for naïve viewers

Pee-wee's queer text.[55] In describing the childish qualities of the show, much attention has been given to Pee-wee's high-pitched and sing-songy voice, his smart-alecky catchphrases ("I know you are, but what am I?" "Why don't you marry it?"), and his show's repeated gags (the day's secret word, the Salesman character, Penny's cartoons). Less remarked upon is Pee-wee's demonstrative nature, where he directly addresses viewers in order to show them something. Some of these moments demonstrate do-it-yourself crafts, such as how to make play figures out of pencils and pota-toes, while, other times, Pee-wee illustrates a moral lesson, like always have a working smoke detector. But beyond these obvious examples, *Pee-wee's Playhouse* cultivates a more general attitude of addressing viewers that is more puppet-like than paternalistic. Pee-wee's playhouse is of course full of puppets: hand puppets, rod puppets, marionettes, and large talking fur-niture. But when we see Pee-wee making a phone call while staring into the camera or narrating his actions while making chocolate milk, we see him not just parodying adult behavior, but making of it a ventriloquy.

Marsha Kinder offers another clue to Pee-wee's ventriloquy of child-hood when she emphasizes the performed role of Pee-wee's character: "if you have seen him perform, you realize that PeeWee's a little man playing a child, in a suit that's too small for him, evading the moral complicity of the Reagan era."[56] Kinder reads the performative aspects of Pee-wee in a more complex fashion than other critics have: this is not just adult actor Paul Reubens playing a child character Pee-wee, but rather adult Reubens playing a little man Pee-wee playing a child Pee-wee: an actor performing a character playing at childhood. It is this middle term that allows Kinder to make the claim that "playing a child" helps avoid "moral complicity." It is not what we see Pee-wee do on screen that makes him a morally evasive character, it is our knowledge that Pee-wee is (only at times) playing at a second childish character. Seeing a "little man playing a child" is more morally complex than simply seeing a comic actor playing a child; the fris-son in Pee-wee's character comes from the idea of a performed character himself playing with a child's identity.

I know of only one brief scene in the show where Pee-wee does make a reference to his father. He has just made a giant mess out of whipped cream, which sprays and covers the camera lens. Fading back in from black, viewers see a close-up of Pee-wee's face covered with whipped cream; he scrapes his cheeks with a spoon and addresses the audience: "Look, I have a whipped cream beard (laughs). (Sings:) I'm shaving, just like daddy, la la la la, la la la."[57] The most salient detail of this short gag is Pee-wee's com-ment on the visual action "just like daddy." On the one hand, what he says identifies the play behind his otherwise goofy action, and fills viewers in on the invisible, imaginary explanation of his fantasy. On the other hand,

this is a great example of an imitation of childhood that also calls attention to itself as an external performance. In literary terms, this is like the distinction between metaphor and simile; both make a comparison between unlike things, but similes, which generally use "like" or "as," also call attention to the fact that a comparison is being made. In Pee-wee's case, not only is he comparing his playtime activities to the dissimilar adult activities of Daddy, but he is making this comparison explicit, drawing attention to the fact that scraping whipped cream off his face with a spoon is rather unlike real shaving, a point underscored when he next licks the spoon. Another prominent example of this strategy of making visual humor more simile than metaphor is seen in the opening credits of the first season—the first line of the theme song, sung by Cyndi Lauper, is "come on in, and pull yourself up a chair," to which Pee-wee shouts "like Chairry" as he jumps into the large furniture-character. In the context of the ventriloquy of childhood, these are examples of how ventriloquy relies on perfect imitation of some other action at the same time as it makes viewers aware of the performance of imitation. After all, it is not "play" if it is "real"; Pee-wee's child character plays with the adult real, but always calls attention to the fun being had.

I am not surprised that there are more mothers in my story than fathers. Most of these mothers, sadly, are villains, and it may not be surprising to find that their children can be villainous as well. But while we have mostly seen accounts of mothers and children behaving badly, the message we are left with from our eighties objects of knowledge is that the eighties are mainly about families, parents, and children. But rather than emphasize either the seeming catastrophe of family life in the 1980s or the redemptive possibilities of future generations, I encourage other engagements with the eighties. In an essay in the *Village Voice*, Acker explains "the meaning of the eighties" by way of letters between two 7-year-old girls. Zoozoo, in New York City, writes to Linda, in London, and tells her about her famous artist mother. "They say that the eighties is about emptiness. But. This is real style."[58] The real style of emptiness is a call to move in ethical ways, to see how children offer a model for making sense of and responding to a difficult reality. Because she is a child, Zoozoo can see the possible promise in this: "We might as well go to battle for joy as hard as we can because whether we fight or we elect to live like zombies, we have to die anyway."[59] Zoozoo recognizes that the two options of either "fighting" or "living like zombies" are extremely limiting. In this, she is describing how postmodernism's lifestyle choices, which I discussed in the introduction, reflect only either a doomed, catastrophic frame of mind or an ecstatic, redemptive one. Thus, the stakes of ventriloquizing childhood in the 1980s are raised: in the face of polarizing options offered by "they [who] say that

the eighties is about emptiness," Zoozoo refuses to comply and instead chooses her own engagement with her life.

In this response, Zoozoo reflects the three approaches to the eighties that my book offers: as a moment for unique conceptual historiography, as a time of actual lived history, and as a cultural moment that reverberates today. First is the self-periodizing version of postmodernism that tried to capture the current moment while it was still happening, gestured to by the title of Acker's essay, "The Meaning of the Eighties," which was published on January 2, 1990. As discussed in my introduction, the eighties was peculiar in its historiographic emphasis on giving historical meaning to the present moment as it happened, a sort of "instant history" through which cultural figures such as the ones I discuss become concepts that anchor an understanding of the decade as a specific period with specific roles for individuals to perform. Second is the actual cultural history my book describes, which, as with Zoozoo's reckoning, is a primarily despairing narrative. Examining the horrors surrounding genuinely new events like medical surrogacy, crack cocaine, and AIDS offers a perspective on the decade that illustrates new possibilities for humans' experience of the world and how those were or were not able to be integrated into existing possibilities. Last is the most interesting perspective for cultural historians of the recent past: today's nostalgic version of the 1980s as a discrete cultural artifact to be revisited. In order to understand the eighties as a period with particular shape and character, one must extract its peculiarities in order to see how those peculiarities are in fact typical of a larger moment distinct from nearby periods that are similar. At the same time, it is natural to only resurrect those things in the past that are of some use to us in the present, and thus today's eighties nostalgia should be seen as more than just raiding the past and, instead, as a consequence of significant tensions in the decade, which were never resolved. This is why I conclude with Zoozoo and Linda's letters, which, despite the sense of limited choices at the time, reflect a view of their world as still incomplete, open, and as yet undetermined by history. Likewise, for each of the objects of knowledge discussed in this book, we can simultaneously see them as static stereotypes and as a set of contradictions that real individuals needed to negotiate. In these three ways, these figures illuminate the eighties both by representing and by undermining the common cultural historical approach of looking for decisive breaks to help make sense of the human experience. In other words, these eighties people are both figments of—and the foundation for—our sense of what it meant to experience the decade.

Notes

Preface

1. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), xiii.

Introduction : The Love Affair with Labels: New Subjects in the Eighties

1. Lance Olsen, quoted in Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 12.
2. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), xiii.
3. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 4; Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 1984), xxiv; Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity—An Incomplete Project," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture,* ed. Hal Foster (New York: New Press, 1998), 1–15; Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977); Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 1987), 4; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), vii; Andreas Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," *New German Critique* 33 (1984): 5–52; Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 8; Jean Baudrillard, "The Ecstasy of Communication" in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture,* ed. Hal Foster (New York: New Press, 1998), 127; Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 2; Mark Stevens, "Comforting the Comfortable," *Newsweek*, August 20, 1984, 69.
4. After 9/11, "the end of the age of irony" was trumpeted most loudly by Graydon Carter and Roger Rosenblatt. See David Beers's "Irony Is Dead! Long Live Irony!," *Salon*, September 25, 2001, n.p. <http://archive.salon.com/mwt/feature/2001/09/25/irony_lives/> and Rosenblatt's "The Age of Irony Comes to an End," *Time*, September 24, 2001, 79 respectively.
5. Bill Barol, "The Eighties Are Over," *Newsweek*, January 4, 1988, 41.
6. Bradford Martin, *The Other Eighties: A Secret History of America in the Age of Reagan* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), x.

7. Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 23.

8. Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011), 3.

9. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence, 1982–1985* (1988), trans. Don Barry et al. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 8.

10. Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 16.

11. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 144.

12. *The Oxford Dictionary of New Words: A Popular Guide to Words in the News*, ed. Sara Tulloch, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

13. *Oxford English Dictionary*, Draft entry, December 2006, s.v. "power shopping."

14. The Cosmopolitan Condominiums, Advertisement, *New York Times*, September 27, 1985, A32.

15. Ibid.

16. *Oxford Dictionary of New Words*, 1st ed., s.v. "wannabe."

17. *Oxford English Dictionary*, Draft entry, December 2004, s.v. "wigger."

18. Haynes Johnson, *Sleepwalking through History: America in the Reagan Years* (New York: Norton, 1991), 124.

19. Kenneth T. Walsh, "The New-Collar Class," *U.S. News & World Report*, September 16, 1985, 59.

20. Ibid.

21. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), 201.

22. Ibid.

23. Philip Roth, *The Counterlife* (New York: Vintage, 1986), 308.

24. Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City* (New York: Vintage, 1984), 57.

25. Hughes's protégé Howard Deutch directed this film, while Hughes wrote and produced it.

26. Or, as the movie's poster puts it more felicitously, "a brain, a beauty, a jock, a rebel, and a recluse."

27. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1976), trans. Robert Hurley, Vol. 1 of *The History of Sexuality*. 3 vols. 1976–1984 (New York: Vintage, 1978), 105.

28. This goes much further than daily concerns such as considering appropriate social behavior, managing one's bearing, or picking a career; humans "also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria" (Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* [1984], trans. Robert Hurley, Vol. 2 of *The History of Sexuality*. 3 vols. 1976–1984 [New York: Vintage, 1985], 10–11). Later in *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault notes the Greco-Roman subject's desire "to make his life into an *oeuvre* that would endure beyond his own ephemeral existence" (139).

29. This is neatly put in the title of a January 20, 1984, interview: "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom."

30. Paul Rabinow, Introduction to *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* by Michel Foucault, trans. Robert Hurley et al. and ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), Vol. 1 of *The Essential Works of Foucault: 1954–1984*. 3 vols., xxxviii.

31. Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 97.

32. Ibid., 97–98.

33. Ibid., 98.

34. Ibid., 86.

35. Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961–1984*, trans. Lysa Hochroth and John Johnston, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext[e], 1989), 359.

36. Ibid., 35.

37. Ibid., 318.

38. Foucault, *Ethics*, 87.

39. Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 63.

40. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 105.

41. Ibid.

1.   The Surrogate Mother: *Sed mater certissima*?

1. I use the word "reproduction" cautiously, noting that it is just the most recent (1782) of its synonyms: "beget" (1205), "generate" (c. 1374), and "procreate" (1386).

2. Dion Farquhar, "Reproductive Technologies Are Here to Stay," *Sojourner* 20 (1995): 6.

3. Nancy J. Chodorow and Susan Contratto, "The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother," in *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 80.

4. Bernard Asbell shows how the history of the development of the pill was rife with questionable attitudes toward women, from the use of Puerto Rican women as guinea pigs to an apparently arbitrary standardization of women's menstrual cycles to a strict 28-day period (*The Pill: A Biography of the Drug that Changed the World* [New York: Random House, 1995]).

5. Valerie Hartouni, *Cultural Conceptions: On Reproductive Technologies and the Remaking of Life* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 32.

6. Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth, eds., *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 3.

7. The "new reproductive techniques" (NRTs) are often renamed "alternative reproductive techniques" (ARTs), diminishing their scientific strangeness in favor of an artistic utility.

8. Genesis 16.

9. Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 83.

10. E. Ann Kaplan, "The Politics of Surrogacy Narratives: 1980s Paradigms and Their Legacies in the 1990s," in *Playing Dolly: Technocultural Formations, Fantasies, & Fictions of Assisted Reproduction*, eds. E. Ann Kaplan and Susan Squier (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 117.

11. George J. Annas, "Death Without Dignity for Commercial Surrogacy: The Case of Baby M," *The Hastings Center Report* 18 (1988): 1. In that case, "fooled by broker publicity . . . [Judge] Sorkow saw surrogacy as so modern and marvelous that it could not possibly be subsumed under any existing laws" (Annas, 1). The "modern and marvelous" remains a clever juxtaposition for historicizing science; as advanced as science may become, it always retains the power of miracle.

12. Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), *Infertility: Medical and Social Choices* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988), 12, 267.

13. Barbara Katz Rothman, *Recreating Motherhood: Ideology and Technology in a Patriarchal Society* (New York: Norton, 1989), 129.

14. Stella K. Hershan, Letter, *New York Times*, April 20, 1987, A18.

15. Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, "The Gold Spinner," in *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, ed. Edna Henry Lee Turpin (New York: Maynard, Merrill, & Co., 1903), 92–98.

16. Gena Corea, *The Mother Machine: Reproductive Technologies from Artificial Insemination to Artificial Wombs* (London: The Women's Press, 1985), 55.

17. Phyllis Chesler, *Sacred Bond: The Legacy of Baby M* (New York: Vintage, 1988), 118. This was recently made clearer to me by a friend's mother who, seeing a homeless woman on the subway, pitifully exclaimed to me, "how horrible; that's someone's mother." I couldn't bring myself to point out that that need not be true, that she should have said "how horrible; that's someone's daughter."

18. Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 9.

19. Sigmund Freud, "Family Romances," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989), 298.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 299.

22. Corea, *The Mother Machine*, 289.

23. Ibid., 244–245.

24. Of course, *pater semper incertus est* is no longer true in light of genetic or DNA testing; DNA profiling, invented in 1985, was first used in criminal cases in 1987, and became more widespread (because more reliable and inexpensive) in the early 1990s.

25. A critic of surrogacy objects that "parenting is more than a contractual statement of intentions" (Annas, "Death Without Dignity for Commercial Surrogacy," 2).

26. Lamentably, OTA was closed by a Republican Congress in 1995. In response, Clinton created a National Bioethics Advisory Commission, which exists in some form today.

27. OTA notes that "existing legal models of the role of the purely genetic connection between parent and child have been worked out in the context of fathers, not mothers" (OTA, 239).

28. One more case is worth mentioning: *Michael H. v. Gerald D.*, a 1989 US Supreme Court case in which a wife was impregnated by another man without

the husband's consent (or knowledge). The court upheld the rule of presumptive paternity, and so the cuckolded husband was made legal father.

29. OTA, *Infertility*, 226.

30. Ibid., 211–212.

31. Sarah Franklin, "Postmodern Procreation: A Cultural Account of Assisted Reproduction," in *Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction*, ed. Faye D. Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 335.

32. The lack of statistics regarding surrogacy before the 1980s makes this a difficult claim. Narrowly defined as a problem of contract law, "surrogacy" did not exist before 1976. For context, OTA reports in 1988 that about 600 surrogate mother arrangements had been completed, and that there were about fifteen agencies in operation (OTA, 13). On the one hand, surrogacy is brand new in the eighties; on the other, it is only new as a statistical issue, suggesting it was not a source of concern before this period.

33. OTA, *Infertility*, 17.

34. This rarely occurring, except in the instance of medical accident or of a woman who desires a child who is genetically unrelated.

35. There is a slightly earlier reference to breeding "babies in bottles" from D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* [1928] (New York: Bantam Dell, 2007).

36. Robert G. Edwards and Steven A. Brody, *Principles and Practices of Assisted Human Reproduction* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Co., 1995), 2.

37. Michelle Stanworth, ed., *Reproductive Technologies: Gender, Motherhood, and Medicine* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 1.

38. Bruce L. Wilder, "Assisted Reproduction Technology: Trends and Suggestions for the Developing Law," *Assisted Reproduction Technology* 18 (2002): 178.

39. OTA, *Infertility*, 36.

40. Ibid., 228.

41. Corea, *The Mother Machine*, 34.

42. Although there seemed at the time to be some constitutional protection for this: "prohibiting women to earn money by selling their ova when men are permitted to sell sperm, may violate" the Fourteenth Amendment (OTA, *Infertility*, 225).

43. Ibid., 256.

44. See especially the second chapter of Susan Faludi's *Backlash*, "Man Shortages and Barren Wombs," where the source and formation of these and other myths is demonstrated (*Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* [New York: Crown Publishers, 1991]).

45. Michael Castleman, "The Sperm Crisis," *Mother Earth News*, September/October 1983, 1.

46. Jane E. Brody, "Sperm Found Especially Vulnerable to Environment," *New York Times*, March 10, 1981, C3.

47. Eloise Salholz, Renee Michael, Mark Starr, Shawn Doherty, Pamela Abramson, and Pat Wingert. "Too Late for Prince Charming?" *Newsweek*, June 2, 1986, 54.

48. OTA, *Infertility*, 4.

49. Ibid., 5.
50. Ibid., 3.
51. Rothman, *Recreating*, 231.
52. OTA, *Infertility*, 36. A quick note on terminology—in addition to contesting the word "mother," critics also raise problems with "surrogacy" or "surrogate" and the "donor" in "sperm donor." As legal analyst George J. Annas puts it, "no one is 'giving' anyone anything in surrogacy: it is the sale of the mother's interests in a child to its father" (3), and thus, she is not a "surrogate mother," but more simply a "mother." Likewise, sperm donors only euphemistically "donate," since they do so for commercial reasons.
53. OTA, *Infertility*, 239.
54. Hartouni discusses this case in her chapter "Breached Birth."
55. OTA, *Infertility*, 213.
56. Quoted in Heidi Wendel, Review of *Birth Power: The Case for Surrogacy* by Carmel Shalev, *Columbia Law Review* 90, no. 4 (1990): 1179.
57. Rothman, *Recreating*, 68.
58. Lee Salk, quoted in Michelle Harrison, "Social Construction of Mary Beth Whitehead," *Gender and Society* 1, no. 3 (1987): 301.
59. For gestational surrogate mothers labeling themselves "babysitters," see Sharyn Roach Anleu, "Surrogacy: For Love but Not for Money?" *Gender and Society* 6, no. 1 (1992): 42.
60. Barbara Katz Rothman, "Comment on Harrison: The Commodification of Motherhood," *Gender and Society* 1, no. 3 (1987): 312, 313.
61. Anleu, "Surrogacy," 39.
62. Wendel, *Birth Power*, 1177.
63. Ibid., 1178.
64. Anleu, "Surrogacy," 31, 37.
65. Gena Corea's term.
66. Chief Justice Robert Wilentz, "In the Matter of Baby 'M,'" 1988 N.J. Lexis 1, 50.
67. Annas, "Death Without Dignity for Commercial Surrogacy," 1.
68. Katha Pollitt, "The Strange Case of Baby M," *Nation*, May 23, 1987, 667.
69. According to OTA, this was the most common fee (275). In "Baby M," the payment is stipulated to be a "compensation for services and expenses," not "a fee for termination of parental rights or a payment in exchange for a consent to surrender the child for adoption," yet the fee is only payable upon surrender of the live infant. Chesler reprints the contract as an appendix.
70. Honorable Judge Harvey Sorkow, "In the Matter of Baby 'M,'" 1987 N.J. Super. Lexis 1113, 149, 48. Judge Sorkow's original decision was overturned by the Supreme Court of New Jersey, in an opinion by Chief Justice Robert Wilentz. For clarity's sake, I will cite the two opinions by judge's name, as opposed to case number.
71. Sorkow, "In the Matter of Baby 'M,'" 87–88.
72. Ibid., 135.
73. *Parens patriae* allows the courts to act as parents to minors, protecting their best interests in cases where there are no parents or the parents are in conflict. Sorkow argues "that *parens patriae* continues to exist with a power even greater than specific statutory grants" (136). Later, Wilentz disagreed: "the Legislature

would not have so carefully, so consistently, and so substantially restricted termination of parental rights if it had intended to allow termination to be achieved by one short sentence in a contract" (38, cf. 43).

74. Sorkow had ruled that the contract could be revoked only up until the time of conception, and the contract is valid at the moment of conception: "the male gave his sperm; the female gave her egg in their pre-planned effort to create a child—thus a contract" (91–92 and 93), or, as the media more succinctly put it: "sperm seals the deal."

75. Sorkow, "In the Matter of Baby 'M,'" 144.

76. Ibid., 60.

77. "She probably had multiple sclerosis" (Sorkow, "In the Matter of Baby 'M,'" 24) although "her anxiety appears to have exceeded the actual risk" (Wilentz, "In the Matter of Baby 'M,'" 9).

78. Sorkow, "In the Matter of Baby 'M,'" 25.

79. Ibid., 27 and 102. Sorkow thereby also gives a broader definition to "infertility": "the inability to conceive and carry to term without serious threat of harm to one's physical well-being" (102). OTA notes that "numerous physicians and hospitals have come to treat pregnancy as an abnormal, highly dangerous (almost diseased) state" (326). In this light, what pregnancy cannot be read as a "threat of harm?"

80. Harrison, "Social Construction of Mary Beth Whitehead," 302.

81. Sorkow, "In the Matter of Baby 'M,'" 45.

82. Andrew Kimbrell, *The Human Body Shop: The Cloning, Engineering, and Marketing of Human Life* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1997).

83. Mary Lyndon Shanley, "'Surrogate Mothering' and Women's Freedom: A Critique of Contracts for Human Reproduction," *Signs* 18, no. 3 (1993): 629.

84. Sorkow, "In the Matter of Baby 'M,'" 22.

85. Ibid., 23.

86. Wilentz, "In the Matter of Baby 'M,'" 10.

87. Chesler, *Sacred Bond*, 177.

88. Chesler argues that Mr. Stern was so self-loathing that he wanted a Christian baby to stand in for his overbearing, "pushy," Jewish, Holocaust-surviving mother (42).

89. Sorkow, "In the Matter of Baby 'M,'" 49.

90. Ibid., 49.

91. Ibid., 132.

92. Ibid., 125 and 33.

93. Ibid., 63–64.

94. Ibid.

95. Ibid., 132.

96. Wilentz, "In the Matter of Baby 'M,'" 88.

97. Sorkow, "In the Matter of Baby 'M,'" 62.

98. Ibid., 45.

99. Ibid., 83–84.

100. Rothman, "Comment," 314–315.

101. Merle Hoffman quoted in Chesler, *Sacred Bond*, 23.

102. Ibid., 24–25.

103. Ibid., 24.
104. Ibid., 25.
105. Ibid.
106. Ibid., 43.
107. Mary Beth Whitehead with Loretta Schwartz-Nobel, *A Mother's Story: The Truth About the Baby M Case* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 21, 22, 30, 33, 35, 46, 92, 129.
108. Ibid., 91. This, tellingly, in a chapter called "My Marriage to Rick." This feeling was shared by Mr. Stern; in a footnote, Chesler gives us testimony not reported in the media:

> During the course of the pregnancy, Mrs. Whitehead expressed a desire to deal only with Mrs. Stern, and then after the pregnancy she rarely spoke to [Mr.]. Stern even on the telephone. [Mr.] Stern said that he felt like an intruder, that Mrs. Whitehead was carrying his baby and he felt extremely awkward. (206)

109. Whitehead, *A Mother's Story*, 34–35.
110. Ibid., 35.
111. Ibid., 46.
112. Ibid.
113. Ibid., 48.
114. Ibid.
115. Ten-year-old Tuesday witnesses every traumatic moment; she's there screaming at Bill to help, she later beats the policeman who takes her sister away, her horrified expression is captured in a photograph as she leaves the courtroom. The lesson is not lost on Tuesday (nor on Mary Beth) when Tuesday says, in response to her mother's statement "someday you'll have a baby too," that Tuesday would rather hire someone to bear it for her (Ibid., 95).
116. The first describes Whitehead waking at night in "a pool of milk . . . alone in the darkness, with the milk running down my chest and soaking my nightgown. I held out my empty arms and screamed at the top of my lungs, 'Oh God, what have I done—I want my baby!'" (Ibid., 26–27).
117. Ibid., 48.
118. Ibid., 49.
119. Ibid., 12. Later, however, she places her moment of realization earlier: at the beginning of the ninth month of pregnancy, Betsy calls and says she bought baby clothes that day, as did Whitehead, who thinks "this woman is planning to take *my* baby home with her" (Ibid., 96).
120. Ibid., 33.
121. Ibid., 22.
122. Ultimately, this communication, halting throughout, would end. In the fifth month of Whitehead's pregnancy, she "felt [Betsy] was so overbearing that [she] simply stopped communicating" (Ibid., 94).
123. Ibid., 8, 32. This, incidentally, is the arrangement that the Sterns had initially desired, yet they were dissuaded by IVF's still experimental nature (Sorkow, "In the Matter of Baby 'M,'" 34).
124. Whitehead, *A Mother's Story*, 12.

125. Kaplan, "Politics," 122.

126. Ibid.

127. Ibid.

128. Ibid., 123.

129. Wilentz, "In the Matter of Baby 'M,'" 88.

130. Ibid., 22.

131. Rothman, "Comment," 314.

132. Rothman, *Recreating*, 138.

133. Whitehead, *A Mother's Story*, 92.

2.   The Crack Baby: Children Fight the War on Drugs

1. See Susan Markens, C. H. Browner, and Nancy Press, "Feeding the Fetus: On Interrogating the Notion of Maternal-Fetal Conflict Author(s)," *Feminist Studies* 23, no. 2 (1997): 352.

2. Andrea Stone, "Drug Epidemic's Tiny Victims; Crack Babies Born to Life of Suffering," *USA Today*, June 8, 1989, A3.

3. See the first chapter of Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1991).

4. Nixon first used the phrase "War on Drugs" in 1971.

5. Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), *National Drug Control Strategy: 2000 Annual Report* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2000), 115.

6. Ibid.

7. ONDCP, *National Drug Control Strategy, 1997: FY 1998 Budget Summary* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2000), table 3.

8. Only recently, Congress passed the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, which reduced (from 100-to-1 to 18-to-1) but did not eliminate the disparity between crack and powder cocaine.

9. United States Sentencing Commission, *Report to the Congress: Cocaine and Federal Sentencing Policy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2007), 2.

10. Ibid., B-23.

11. Drew Humphries, *Crack Mothers: Pregnancy, Drugs, and the Media* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 160.

12. Ibid., 162.

13. Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 8–9.

14. Laura E. Gómez, *Misconceiving Mothers: Legislators, Prosecutors, and the Politics of Prenatal Drug Exposure* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1997), 15.

15. David H. Angeli, "A 'Second Look' at Crack Cocaine Sentencing Policies: One More Try for Federal Equal Protection," *American Criminal Law Review* 34, no. 3 (1997): 1212.

16. Ibid.

17. Craig Reinarman and Harry G. Levine, eds. *Crack in America: Demon Drugs and Social Justice* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 3.

18. Michael Isikoff, "Drug Buy Set Up for Bush Speech," *Washington Post*, September 2, 1989, A1. Isikoff reports that "at first, the suspect seemed not to know what or where the White House was" (A22).

19. Beginning with Donna Boundy, "Program for Cocaine-Abuse Under Way," *New York Times*, November 17, 1985, WC12.

20. See Ira J. Chasnoff, William J. Burns, Sidney H. Schnoll, and Kayreen A. Burns, "Cocaine in Pregnancy," *New England Journal of Medicine* (September 12, 1985): 666–669.

21. Stone, "Drug Epidemic's Tiny Victims," A3.

22. Cheryl Sullivan, "U.S. Health-Care Crisis in the Making," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 15, 1989, US1.

23. Jane E. Brody, "Cocaine: Litany of Fetal Risks Grows," *New York Times*, September 6, 1988, C1.

24. Ana Teresa Ortiz and Laura Briggs, "The Culture of Poverty, Crack Babies, and Welfare Cheats: The Making of the 'Healthy White Baby Crisis,'" *Social Text* 21, no. 3 (2003): 46.

25. Evan Thomas, "America's Crusade," *Time*, September 15, 1986, 60.

26. Lamar Jr., Jacob V., David Beckwith, and Michael Duffy, "Rolling Out the Big Guns," *Time*, September 22, 1986, 25.

27. Ellen Hopkins, "Childhood's End," *Rolling Stone*, October 18, 1990, 72.

28. Barbara Kantrowitz, "The Crack Children," *Newsweek*, February 12, 1990, 62.

29. Sandra Blakeslee, "Crack's Toll Among Babies: A Joyless View, Even of Toys," *New York Times*, September 17, 1989, A26.

30. Ibid., A1.

31. Ibid.

32. Anna Quindlen, "Hearing the Cries of Crack," *New York Times*, October 7, 1990, E19.

33. Hopkins, "Childhood's End," 71.

34. Sandra Blakeslee, "Child-Rearing Is Story When Drugs Cloud Birth," *New York Times*, May 19, 1990, A9.

35. Blakeslee, "Crack's Toll," A26.

36. Judy Howard, quoted in Hopkins, "Childhood's End," 72.

37. Tessa Melvin, "When Mothers and Infants Are Addicts," *New York Times*, September 23, 1990, WC12.

38. Susan Chira, "Crack Babies Turn 5, and Schools Brace," *New York Times*, May 25, 1990, B5.

39. Melvin, "When Mothers and Infants Are Addicts," WC12.

40. Kantrowitz, "The Crack Children," 62.

41. Blakeslee, "Crack's Toll," A26.

42. Ibid.

43. Blakeslee, "Child-Rearing," A9.

44. Hopkins, "Childhood's End," 71.

45. Cynthia R. Daniels, "Between Fathers and Fetuses: The Social Construction of Male Reproduction and the Politics of Fetal Harm," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 22, no. 3 (1997): 579.

46. Dorothy E. Roberts, "Unshackling Black Motherhood," *Michigan Law Review* 95, no. 4 (1997): 949–950.

47. Gómez, *Misconceiving Mothers*, 118–119.

48. Douglas J. Besharov, "Crack Babies: The Worst Threat Is Mom Herself," *Washington Post*, August 6, 1989, B1.

49. Humphries, *Crack Mothers*, 15.

50. Gómez, *Misconceiving Mothers*, 122. Gómez also notes the discrepancy in scientific research on heroin versus cocaine. Twenty-one articles on prenatal heroin exposure were published over two decades between 1970 and 1990. Eighty articles on prenatal cocaine exposure were published in the same journals in only a five-year period (1985–1990) (ibid., 13).

51. Besharov, "Crack Babies," B1. Senator Daniel Moynihan says this as well: "Heroin was a male drug.... Cocaine increasingly is a female drug." (Karl Vick, "Addicted Mothers Hard Put to Find Help," *St. Petersburg Times [Florida]*, June 29, 1990, 6A). This is just one example of how crack cocaine was used as a powerful political issue by all parties.

52. ONDCP, *National Drug Control Strategy: 2000*, 115.

53. Alma Taft, "Crack Babies," *The Guardian*, December 16, 1986, 20.

54. Crack is more psychologically addictive than it is physically addictive.

55. Taft, "Crack Babies," 20.

56. "Crack Mothers, Crack Babies and Hope," *New York Times*, December 31, 1989, D10.

57. Dorothy L. Roberts, "Punishing Drug Addicts Who Have Babies: Women of Color, Equality, and the Right of Privacy," *Harvard Law Review* 104, no. 7 (1991): 1420. In 1977, Margaret Velasquez Reyes was charged in California with counts of felony child endangerment for using heroin while pregnant (Susan C. Boyd, *From Witches to Crack Moms: Women, Drug Law, and Policy* [Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2004], 108). The California Court of Appeals specifically stopped further prosecutions from following this line of argument, since fetuses do not count as "children" and could thus not be endangered (Linda C. Fentiman, "In the Name of Fetal Protection: Why American Prosecutors Pursue Pregnant Drug Users [and Other Countries Don't]," *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law* 18, no. 2 [2009]: 648).

58. Bruce Vielmetti, "Lawyer Advocates Prosecuting Mothers of Cocaine Babies," *St. Petersburg Times (Florida)*, January 28, 1990, BT5.

59. Charles Krauthammer, "Children of Cocaine," *Washington Post*, July 30, 1989, C7.

60. Richard Cohen, "When a Fetus Has More Rights," *Washington Post*, July 28, 1988, A21.

61. Peter Wolf, "The Case of Brenda Vaughan: The Judge Explains His Decision," *Washington Post*, September 4, 1988, C8.

62. Ibid.

63. Victoria Churchville, "D.C. Judge Jails Woman as Protection for Cocaine," *Washington Post*, July 23, 1988, A1.

64. In fact, says Dorothy E. Roberts, while many women are pressured to take a plea bargain, "with only one recent exception, every appellate court to consider the issue, including the highest courts in several states, has

invalidated criminal charges for drug use during pregnancy" (Roberts, "Unshackling," 940).

65. Humphries, *Crack Mothers*, 3.

66. Ronald Reagan, "Remarks on Signing the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 October 27, 1986," *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, n.p. <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/061287d.htm>.

67. Ibid.

68. Wolf, "The Case of Brenda Vaughan," C8.

69. Mariah Blake, "The Damage Done: Crack Babies Talk Back," *Columbia Journalism Review* 43, no. 3 (2004): 10.

70. Kantrowitz, "The Crack Children," 63.

71. Besharov quoted in Krauthammer, "Children of Cocaine," C7.

72. Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 212.

73. Philip Yancey, "Dr. Donahue's Crack Solutions," *Christianity Today*, September 1990, 72.

74. Marcia Slacum Greene, "'Sitting on a Time Bomb Waiting for Kids to Die': D.C. Child Welfare Services Overmatched," *Washington Post*, September 12, 1989, A1+.

75. "Crack's Smallest, Costliest Victims," *New York Times* August 7, 1989, A14.

76. Krauthammer, "Children of Cocaine," C7.

77. Michael deCourcy Hinds, "The Instincts of Parenthood Become Part of Crack's Toll," *New York Times*, March 17, 1990, A8.

78. Hopkins, "Childhood's End," 69.

79. Richard P. Kusserow, *Crack Babies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1990), 5.

80. Marilee C. Rist, "'Crack Babies' in School," *Education Digest*, May 1990, 30.

81. Priscilla Van Tassel, "Schools Trying to Cope with 'Crack Babies,'" *New York Times*, January 5, 1992, NJ10.

82. Hopkins, "Childhood's End," 72.

83. Debra Baker, "The New Delinquents," *ABA Journal* (April 1998): 18.

84. Marcia Slacum Greene, "The Crack Legacy: Children in Distress," *Washington Post*, September 10, 1989, A1+.

85. Ortiz and Briggs, "The Culture of Poverty," 44. For a thorough discussion of methodology and results, see the meta-analysis: Deborah A. Frank, Marilyn Augustyn, Wanda Grant Knight, Tripler Pell, and Barry Zuckerman, "Growth, Development, and Behavior in Early Childhood Following Prenatal Cocaine Exposure: A Systematic Review," *JAMA* (March 28, 2001): 1613–1625.

86. Katherine E. Bono, Nurit Sheinberg, Keith G. Scott, and Angelika H. Claussen, "Early Intervention for Children Prenatally Exposed to Cocaine," *Infants and Young Children* 20, no. 1 (2007): 26.

87. Susan Okie, "The Epidemic That Wasn't," *New York Times*, January 27, 2009: D1.

88. Ronald Reagan, "Remarks on Signing the 'Just Say No to Drugs Week' Proclamation May 20, 1986," *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, n.p. <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/52086a.htm>.

89. Ronald Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Education and Drug Abuse Sept. 6, 1986," *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, n.p. <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu//archives/speeches/1986/090686a.htm>.

90. Earl Wysong, Richard Aniskiewicz, and David Wright, "Truth and DARE: Tracking Drug Education," *Social Problems* 41, no. 3 (1994): 449. Wysong reports that "in 1990 D.A.R.E. programs were in place in more than 3,000 communities in all 50 states and were reaching an estimated 20 million students" (ibid.).

91. Ibid., 448.

92. Ibid., 463–464.

93. Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Campaign Against Drug Abuse, Sept. 14, 1986," *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, n.p. <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/091486a.htm>.

94. Ibid.

95. Ibid.

96. Ronald Reagan, "Remarks to Media Executives at a White House Briefing on Drug Abuse March 7, 1988," *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, n.p. <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/030788b.htm>.

97. Ibid.

98. Gómez, *Misconceiving Mothers*, 14.

99. Sharon F. Golden, "The New-Collar Class: Beatniks, Preppies, and Punkers—The Love Affair with Labels." *U.S. News & World Report*, September 16, 1985, 485.

100. It was the "the highest-rated news documentary on any network in more than five years" (Steve Daley, "CBS Gets Libel Jitters," *Chicago Tribune*, September 30, 1986, n.p. <http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1986-09-30/features/8603130156_1_drug-users-crack-street-executive-producer-lane-venardos>). Daley also speculates on the network's seemingly racially motivated editing practice, so that "white faces in Wall Street were blurred while black and Hispanic faces in Times Square and Washington Square were distinguishable" (ibid.).

101. Gómez, *Misconceiving Mothers*, 14.

102. Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Campaign Against Drug Abuse," n.p.

103. Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the Nancy Reagan Drug Abuse Center Benefit Dinner in Los Angeles, California January 4, 1989," *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, n.p. <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1989/010489a.htm>.

104. Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Campaign Against Drug Abuse," n.p.

105. Ibid.

106. Randall Rothenberg, "22% Rise in Donations for Public Service Ads," *New York Times*, June 2, 1989, D13.

107. Richard Miller, "Directors Saying Yes to Help People Say No to Drugs," *Back Stage*, March 13, 1987, 1.

108. Cynthia Cotts, "Hard Sell in the Drug War," *The Nation*, March 9, 1992, 301.

109. Joshua Levine, "Don't Fry Your Brain," *Forbes*, February 2, 1991, 116.

110. Cotts, "Hard Sell in the Drug War," 301–302.

111. Available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KogodHNjIUs>.

112. Cotts, "Hard Sell in the Drug War," 301.

113. Lauren G. Block, Vicki G. Morwitz, William P. Putsis Jr., and Subrata K. Sen, "Assessing the Impact of Antidrug Advertising on Adolescent Drug Consumption: Results from a Behavioral Economic Model," *American Journal of Public Health* 92, no. 8 (2002): 1346–1351.

114. For example, see Daniel Hill, who argues that antidrug campaigns are backed "by flimsy research that would hardly justify launching a new stain remover, let alone a program meant to help keep children sober and alive" ("Drug Money," *Brandweek*, April 27, 1998, 21).

115. Michael J. Ludwig, "The Cultural Politics of Prevention: Reading Anti-Drug Public Service Announcements," in *Undressing the Ad: Reading Culture in Advertising*, ed. Katherine Toland Frith (New York: Peter Lang, 1998): 168.

116. Ibid.

117. I have seen some antidrug PSAs that explicitly connect crack usage to slavery. One features a black actor dressed in a flamboyant witch doctor outfit, painted with white lines, who whips and jumps on the back of drug users. Another intercuts historical-looking maps of Africa, images of shackled black men, and contemporary images of black men doing drugs. Unfortunately, I cannot find production information about these commercials. A Google Videos search for "antidrug PSA slavery" leads to the following URLs: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hZffVqOLlk> and <http://www.retrojunk.com/details_commercial/7413/>.

3. The Person with AIDS: Graphic Humor and Graphic Illness

1. HTLV-III: "Human T-lymphotropic virus Type 3," GRID: "gay-related immune deficiency," AIDS: "acquired immunodeficiency syndrome," LAV: "lymphadenopathy-associated virus," ARC: "AIDS-related complex," AZT: "Azidothymidine," HIV: "Human immunodeficiency virus," ARV: "*AIDS*-associated retrovirus," IDAV: "immunodeficiency-associated virus," ACIDS: "acquired community immune deficiency syndrome," CAID: "community acquired immune deficiency," WOG: "wrath of God," ACT UP: "AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power," GMHC: "Gay Men's Health Crisis," KS: "Kaposi's sarcoma," PCP: "Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia," and CDC: "Centers for Disease Control and Prevention."

2. Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Picador, 1990), 116.

3. See Douglas Crimp, "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," *October* 43 (1987): 260.

4. Jean L. Marx, "AIDS Virus Has a New Name—Perhaps," *Science* (May 9, 1986): 699.

5. Ibid.

6. Philip J. Hilts and Cristine Russell, "U.S., French Teams Fight Over AIDS Virus Credit," *Washington Post*, April 19, 1986, A3.

7. Jan Zita Grover, "AIDS: Keywords," *October* 43 (1987): 19. The new name was reported by the Centers for Disease Control, "Hepatitis B Virus Vaccine Safety: Report of an Inter-Agency Group," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 31, no. 34 (September 3, 1982): 465–467.

8. Lawrence K. Altman, "New Homosexual Disorder Worries Health Officials," *New York Times*, May 11, 1982, C1.

9. Jan Zita Grover, "Visible Lesions: Images of the PWA," in *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*, eds. Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 377. Paula A. Treichler in 1987 also mentions this acronym, writing about "what was informally called in New York hospitals WOGS: the Wrath of God Syndrome" (Paula A. Treichler, "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification," *October* 43 [1987]: 52).

10. David B. Feinberg, *Eighty-Sixed* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 260.

11. Treichler, "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse," 33.

12. Kurt Erichsen, "Murphy's Manor," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 13.

13. David Black, *The Plague Years: A Chronicle of AIDS the Epidemic of Our Times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 28.

14. Treichler, "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse," 55.

15. "Founding Statement of People with AIDS/ARC (The Denver Principles)," *October* 43 (1987): 148.

16. National Association of People with AIDS, "The Denver Principles: 1983 and Today," n.d. Web. July 21, 2011. <http://www.napwa.org/content/denver-principles-1983-and-today>.

17. Grover, "AIDS: Keywords," 27.

18. Ibid., 26.

19. Ibid.

20. I have added terms to exclude results for the airline PWA.

21. Randy Shilts, "Patiently Tiptoeing Through the World of Word Twisters," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 11, 1989, A8.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Grover, "Visible Lesions," 355.

26. Ibid.

27. What better example of the thicket of abbreviations than ACT UP, an acronym with an acronym inside?

28. Jason DeParle, "Rude, Rash, Effective, Act-Up Shifts AIDS Policy," *New York Times*, January 3, 1990, B1+.

29. Daniel Harris, "A Blizzard of Images," *The Nation*, December 31, 1990, 851.

30. Ibid., 852.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Mark C. Donovan, "The Problem with Making AIDS Comfortable: Federal Policy Making and the Rhetoric of Innocence," *Journal of Homosexuality* 32, nos. 3–4 (1997): 117.

35. Bethany Ogdon, "Through the Image: Nicholas Nixon's 'People with AIDS,'" *Discourse* 23, no. 3 (2001): 76.

36. One of Ogdon's criticisms of Nixon's work is about this silence, for what his work "*doesn't* say about the person living with AIDS" (Ogdon, 76).

37. Grover, "Visible Lesions," 361–62.

38. Jules Feiffer, "Untitled," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 29.

39. Grover, "Visible Lesions," 367.

40. Ibid., 368.

41. *Congressional Record—Senate* [Debate on Helms Amendments], October 14, 1987: S14203.

42. Jesse Helms, "Only Morality Will Effectively Prevent AIDS From Spreading," Letter, *New York Times*, November 23, 1987, A22.

43. *Congressional Record*, S14203. Also quoted in Steven Kruger, *AIDS Narratives: Gender and Sexuality, Fiction and Science* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 68.

44. "AIDS Booklet Stirs Senate to Halt Funds," *Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 1987, 1.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. "Limit Voted on AIDS Funds," *New York Times*, October 15, 1987, B12.

48. The one exception is "Safer Sex Comix #3," about telephone sex, although that ends with a character requesting another's telephone number.

49. *Safer Sex Comix #2* (New York: GMHC Publications, 1986), 6.

50. Peter Lewis Allen, *The Wages of Sin: Sex and Disease, Past and Present* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 134. Matthew P. McAllister mentions in passing that it was #4. It could have been both, or more, that Helms distributed.

51. *Safer Sex Comix #6* (New York: GMHC Publications, 1986), 4.

52. Matthew P. McAllister, "Comic Books and AIDS," *Journal of Popular Culture* 26, no. 2 (1992): 22.

53. Edward I. Koch, "Senator Helms's Callousness Toward AIDS Victims," Letter, *New York Times*, November 7, 1987, A27.

54. McAllister, "Comic Books and AIDS," 2.

55. Of course, here is yet another acronym to add to the list that began this chapter.

56. Great Britain, *Local Government Act 1988, Chapter 9* (London: The Stationary Office, 1988), n.p. Also available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28>.

57. Groc, "Promote and Survive," *AARGH!* (Northampton, UK: Mad Love, 1988), 11.

58. Tony Reeves, "Appeal," *AARGH!* (Northampton, UK: Mad Love, 1988), 63.

59. Moore identifies himself as a heterosexual in a 1988 interview with Vincent Eno and El Csawza (*Strange Things Are Happening* 1, no. 2 [May/June 1988]): n.p.<http://www.johncoulthart.com/feuilleton/2006/02/20/alan-moore-interview-1988/>.

60. Alan Moore, "The Mirror of Love," *AARGH!* (Northampton, UK: Mad Love, 1988), 2.

61. Ibid., 9.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Bob Levin, "Interview with Trina Robbins," *The Comics Journal* 223 (May 2000): 75. In practice, this was not necessarily so. A contemporary description of the project in *The Comics Journal* quotes an unnamed spokesman's remark that "a lot of people were busy and didn't have the time to produce anything new, so they're giving us permission to reprint something they've already done, so there's a mixture now" (Frank Plowright, "More Charity," *The Comics Journal* 117 [September 1987]: 25).

66. Plowright, "More Charity," 25.

67. Levin, "Interview with Trina Robbins," 75.

68. Ibid.

69. James Wallis, Letter, *The Comics Journal* 128 (April 1989): 43.

70. "UKCAC Panel: Politics in Comics," *The Comics Journal* 129 (May 1989): 27.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.

73. R. L. Crabb, "Germ Warfare," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 8 and Leonard Rifas, "How a Healthy Immune System Works," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 45.

74. Joyce Brabner, "Here Comes Cootiebug!" *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 46; William Messner-Loebs, "The Consumption Came to Mill's End Village," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 50; Harry S. Robins, "Dance of Death," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 75; Norm Breyfogle, "Untitled," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 127; and Steve Leialoha, "Masque of the Red Death," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 128.

75. Ned Sonntag, "The Glitter Winks Out!" *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 54 and Diane Noomin, "For Joah Lowe and the X-Man," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 48.

76. Donelan, "The Quilt," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 105; Jerry Mills, "Poppers," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 95; and Angela Bocage, "The Estate Sale," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 58.

77. Tony Murphy and Greg S. Baisden, "CAM Rejects Strip Aids Exhibit," *The Comics Journal* 128 (April 1989): 9.

78. Tim Barela, "Little Victories," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 18; Trina Robbins, "Untitled," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 24; and Mindy Newell, "Down Under," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 66.

79. Sergio Aragonés, "Anytown," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 26 and Kathryn LeMieux, "Untitled," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 74.

80. Jill Thompson, "Untitled," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 99.

81. Peter Gross, "Untitled," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 42–43.

82. Lloyd Dangle, "A New Cost of Living," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 60.

83. Brad Parker, "The Experimental Cure," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 110–111.

84. Ibid., 111.

85. Geoff Darrow, "Untitled," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 130.

86. Ibid.

87. Gilbert Hernandez, "Tony," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 124–125.

88. Robert Triptow, "Needs," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 106–107.

89. Arn Saba, "Pages," *Strip AIDS U.S.A.* (San Francisco, CA: Last Gasp, 1988), 134–135.

90. Ibid., 135.

91. Jason Tougaw, "Testimony and AIDS Memoirs," in *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community*, eds. Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 179.

92. Rob Rodi, "Bigot-Bashing," *The Comics Journal* 126 (January 1989): 43–44.

93. Murphy and Baisden, "CAM Rejects Strip Aids Exhibit," 7.

94. Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, 113.

4.   The Yuppies and the Yuckies: Anxieties of Affluence

1. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), 197.

2. Ibid., 200.

3. Maureen Dowd, "Retreat of the Yuppies: The Tide Now Turns Amid 'Guilt' and 'Denial,'" *The New York Times*, June 28, 1985, B1.

4. Barry Keith Grant, "Rich and Strange: The Yuppie Horror Film," *Journal of Film and Video* 48, nos. 1–2 (1996): 4–16.

5. Ibid., 5.

6. Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 200.

7. Marilee Hartley, coauthor of *The Yuppie Handbook*, explicitly points to yuppies' children, who supposedly "will have a humanizing effect" on their parents (Dowd, "Retreat of the Yuppies," B4).

8. "The Big Chill (Revisited), Or Whatever Happened to the Baby Boom," *American Demographics* (September 1985): 29. Yuppies and Baby Boomers are sometimes used interchangeably, but most consider the latter to be more inclusive; *American Demographics* put the number of yuppies at 4.2 million, or 5 percent, of Baby Boomers.

9. Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 238.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Dowd, "Retreat of the Yuppies," B4.

13. Richard Chevat, "Gelato Was My Armageddon," *The New York Times*, September 1, 1984, 23.

14. Hendrik Hertzberg, "The Short Happy Life of the American Yuppie," *Esquire*, February 1988, 101.

15. John L. Hammond, "Yuppies," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 50 (1986): 497.

16. Jerry Adler et al., "The Year of the Yuppie," *Newsweek*, December 31, 1984, 14.

17. "While few baby boomers qualify as yuppies, millions of baby boomers are following the trends that the yuppies set" ("The Big Chill [Revisited]," 29). The number of yuppies ranged from 1.5 million to 20 million, depending on who counts (Jane Feuer, *Seeing Through the Eighties: Television and Reaganism* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995], 56).

18. Steven V. Roberts, "Hart Taps a Generation of Young Professionals," *The New York Times*, March 18, 1984, 26. See also "1984 Campaign Oratory Is Yielding Few Memorable Terms" for the importance of American politics on the development of the English lexicon, although a senior editor at Merriam-Webster was at the time skeptical that "yuppie" would make the cut ("1984 Campaign Oratory Is Yielding Few Memorable Terms," *The New York Times*, September 1, 1984, 29).

19. Roberts, "Hart Taps a Generation of Young Professionals," 26.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Brett Duval Fromson, "Reaganomics's Lure for the Yuppies," *The New York Times*, October 2, 1984, A31.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. See Howard Nelson, Letter, *The New York Times*, October 12, 1984, A34 and Eric C. Jacobson, Letter, *The New York Times*, October 17, 1984, A24.

27. Gordon Rayfield and Julian Baim, "Don't Take Yuppies for Granted," *The New York Times*, November 16, 1984, A31.

28. Hammond, "Yuppies," 488. This at the end of 1986; in the same issue of *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Michael Delli Carpini and Lee Sigelman reach the same findings. Using more detailed research and sophisticated regression

analyses, they find that the "political distinctiveness" of yuppies is "less a matter of demographic characteristics, than . . . of a state of mind or a lifestyle" (517). There appears not to be "some unique political profile that results from the combination of being young, urban, and professional [but rather that] yuppies are more liberal than the rest of the population because they are young, and young people are generally more liberal; because they are urban, and urbanites are generally more liberal; and because they are professional, and professionals are, on balance and in recent times, more liberal" (Michael Delli Carpini and Lee Sigelman, "Do Yuppies Matter? Competing Explanations of Their Political Distinctiveness," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 50 [1986]: 515–516).

29. Hammond, "Yuppies," 497.

30. Ibid., 498.

31. Walter Shapiro, "The Birth and—Maybe—Death of Yuppiedom," *Time*, April 8, 1991, 65.

32. Hammond, "Yuppies," 498.

33. Ibid.

34. Feuer, *Seeing Through the Eighties*, 14.

35. Ibid., 50–51.

36. Jane Feuer reprints the drawn cover of *The Yuppie Handbook* and a photograph from the *Newsweek* "Year of the Yuppie" special, pointing out that the later *Newsweek* photograph is "uncanny because [it] exactly duplicate[s] the cartoon figures on the cover of *The Yuppie Handbook*" (Feuer, 49).

37. Marissa Piesman and Marilee Hartley, *The Yuppie Handbook: The State-of-the-Art Manual for Young Urban Professionals* (New York: Long Shadow Books, 1984), 77.

38. Ibid., 16.

39. "Big Chillers," Editorial, *The New York Times*, March 18, 1984, E20.

40. Furthermore, jokes Russell Baker in the September 12, 1984, *The New York Times*, unlike "Yumpy," "Yumpie" "ends with the word 'pie,' thus suggesting the young, upwardly mobile professional's life is a piece of pie, a piece of cake, or a bowl of cherries, or something" (Russell Baker, "Silicon Valley Days," *The New York Times*, September 12, 1984, A31).

41. "Big Chillers," E20. The matter of names was raised again, with a smaller field, in *The New York Times*: "what's the right term for all those post-1945 baby-boom voters: yuppies or yumpies?" ("Hippies, Yippies, Yuppies," *The New York Times*, June 28, 1984, A26). The editor decides "there's no music in yumpies. It's lumpy, even wimpy. Yuppies, by contrast, captures something of the hippies who peopled 'Hair' and the yippies who tossed dollar bills down onto the New York Stock Exchange" ("Hippies, Yippies, Yuppies," A26). Other suggestions: "Y.P., Yo-Pro, Young Elite and Valley Crowd" ("Onward and Yupward," *People Weekly*, January 9, 1984, 47).

42. "The Year of the Yuppies," Editorial, *The New York Times*, March 25, 1984, E20.

43. Ibid.

44. See also the William Safire piece of March 25, 1984 ("Away with You, Nosy Parker," *The New York Times*, March 25, 1984).

45. Jonathan V. Holtzman, Letter, *The New York Times*, April 1, 1984, E20. George Will points out that "like all caricature it is based on exaggeration of fact" (George F. Will, "Yippity Yumpies," *Washington Post*, March 25, 1984, C7).

46. Holtzman, Letter, E20.

47. Bret Easton Ellis, "The Twentysomethings: Adrift in a Pop Landscape," *The New York Times*, December 2, 1990, B1.

48. Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 198.

49. Janet Maslin, "Now, Slyly, Comes the Yuppie Devil," Review of *Blue Steel*, dir. Kathryn Bigelow. *The New York Times*, March 25, 1990, B1.

50. Hertzberg, "The Short Happy Life," 101.

51. Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 196.

52. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 407.

53. Cheryl Russell, "Question: What Do You Call a Yuppie Stockbroker?," *American Demographics*, January 1988, 2.

54. Ibid.

55. Michael Kinsley, "Arise, Ye Yuppies!," *New Republic*, July 9, 1984, 41.

56. Maslin, "Now, Slyly"; Russell, "Question," 2; Roberts, "Hart Taps a Generation of Young Professionals," 26; and Lee Eisenberg, "Goodbye to All That," *Esquire*, February 1988, 15. See also Will, "Yippity Yumpies," C7.

57. Eisenberg, "Goodbye to All That," 15.

58. Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 16.

59. *Serial Murders: Hearing on Patterns of Murders Committed by One Person, in Large Numbers with No Apparent Rhyme, Reason, or Motivation* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983).

60. Quoted in Seltzer, *Serial Killers*, 150. Other nonfiction works include Tim Cahill's *Buried Dreams: Inside the Mind of a Serial Killer* (1986, on John Wayne Gacy), Joel Norris's *Serial Killers: The Growing Menace* (1988), Ann Rule's *The Stranger Beside Me* (1989, on Ted Bundy), and Elliott Leyton's *Hunting Humans: The Rise of the Modern Multiple Murderer* (1984). Thomas Harris's *Red Dragon* (1981) was successfully filmed by Michael Mann as *Manhunter* (US, 1986), and Demme's 1991 adaptation of Harris's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) won multiple Academy Awards. Such novels as Ira Levin's *Sliver* (1991), Paul Theroux's *Chicago Loop* (1990), Lew McCreary's *Minus Man* (1991), Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985), Dennis Cooper's *Frisk* (1991), and Andrea Dworkin's *Mercy* (1991) feature at their core graphic murder and dismemberment, sexual and serial violence. Dworkin is an interesting case in point of the popularity of these fictions for both men and women; journalist Edwin McDowell quizzically discusses "the acceptance of such novels by many women" (Edwin McDowell, "All the Rage in Fiction: Serial Murder, Multiple Murder, Hideous Murder," *The New York Times*, April 15, 1991, D8).

61. Alessandra Stanley, "Catching a New Breed of Killer: Two Drifters Confess to Committing Hundreds of 'Serial Murders,'" *Time*, November 14, 1983, 47. Note also *Time*'s use of the word "breed," delimiting the human and the animal to explain these figures.

62. Seltzer, *Serial Killers*, 65.

63. I would be remiss to not mention Adrian Lyne's *Fatal Attraction*, a prototypical yuppie film with a female slasher, although hopelessly caught up in regressive sexual politics. *Fatal Attraction* (and, to a lesser extent, Paul Verhoeven's *Basic Instinct* [1992]) stands apart from the yuppie killer films I will discuss because it unproblematically accepts the yuppie trope in the same way as *The Big Chill* does. While *Fatal Attraction* criticizes Michael Douglas's character for his yuppie sense of privileged entitlement, ultimately the viewer is required to identify wholly with him against the "crazy bitch" who has invaded the home (in this light, *Fatal Attraction* can be read as a yuppified update of Clint Eastwood's 1971 *Play Misty for Me*).

64. See, for example, Carol Clover's *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, which takes up the question of sadism and masochism as it relates to a putatively adolescent male audience's enjoyment of plots revolving around the destruction of a voyeuristic male villain at the hands of a Final Girl.

65. My emphasis. Peter Bowen, "Die Yuppie Scum!," *Filmmaker* 8, no. 2 (2000): 58.

66. Pagan Kennedy, "Generation Gaffe," *The Nation*, April 1, 1991, 428.

67. See especially Roger Rosenblatt's hysterical review "Snuff this Book! Will Bret Easton Ellis Get Away with Murder?" (*The New York Times*, December 16, 1990, B3) and Richard Bernstein's slightly more temperate response ("'American Psycho,' Going So Far That Many Say It's Too Far," *The New York Times*, December 10, 1990, C13).

68. Feuer, *Seeing Through the Eighties*, 50.

69. As Richard Corliss put it in his review of Harron's film, here is a "moneyman with a true killer instinct: mergers and acquisitions become murders and executions" (Richard Corliss, "A Yuppie's Killer Instinct," review of *American Psycho* by Mary Harron, *Time*, April 17, 2000, 78).

70. Linda S. Kauffman, "American Psycho," review of *American Psycho* by Mary Harron, *Film Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (2000–1): 41.

71. Ibid., 43.

72. Ibid., 41.

73. Ibid.

74. James Gardner, "A Review of *American Psycho*," review of *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis, *National Review* 48, no. 11 (1996): 56.

75. Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 5.

76. Other notable 1980s vampire films include Tony Scott's *The Hunger* (1983), which is an arty, lesbian vampire film that, while being preyuppie, still offers quite a visual feast—with Catherine Deneuve and David Bowie. *The Lost Boys* (Joel Schumacher, 1987) is a more popular teen movie; set in California and involving an adolescent gang of hip vampires, it is a sort of Brat Pack-style version of the vampire legend. *Once Bitten* (Howard Storm, 1985), with Jim Carrey and Lauren Hutton, seems a safely comic mixture of the vampire and the decade. Last, there is the *Dracula* that Cage's uncle Francis Ford Coppola made in 1992.

77. Minion also wrote Martin Scorsese's *After Hours* (1985), a companion piece tale of a yuppie being stuck out of place in downtown New York.

78. Hal Hinson, "Vampire's Kiss," review of *Vampire's Kiss* by Robert Bierman, *Washington Post*, June 2, 1989, C2.

79. Marx pointed this out over 100 years ago in *Capital*: "capital is dead labor which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks" (Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Part I* [New York: Cosimo Books, 2007]), 257.

80. Maslin, "Now, Slyly," B1.

81. David Denby, "Dirty Harriet," Review of *Blue Steel*, dir. Kathryn Bigelow. *The New York Times*, March 26, 1990, 76.

82. Roger Ebert, "Blue Steel," Review of *Blue Steel* by Kathryn Bigelow, *Chicago Sun-Times*, March 16, 1990, http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19900316/REVIEWS/3160301/1023 (August 12, 2006).

83. Maslin, "Now, Slyly," B1.

84. Janet Maslin, "A Deranged Yuppie with a Thing for His Lover's Gun," Review of *Blue Steel*, dir. Kathryn Bigelow, *The New York Times*, March 16, 1990, C18.

85. Cora Kaplan, "Dirty Harriet/*Blue Steel*: Feminist Theory Goes to Hollywood," *Discourse* 16, no. 1 (1993): 51. Kaplan borrows the phrase from a made-for-TV movie starring Angie Dickinson, *Prime Target* (Robert E. Collins, 1989); David Denby also takes the phrase "Dirty Harriet" as the title for his review of *Blue Steel*.

86. Kaplan, "Dirty Harriet/*Blue Steel*," 53.

87. Linda Mizejewski, "Picturing the Female Dick: *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Blue Steel*," *Journal of Film and Video* 45, nos. 2–3 (1993): 6–23.

88. Ibid., 6.

89. See Nicola Rehling, "Everyman and No Man: White, Heterosexual Masculinity in Contemporary Serial Killer Movies," *Jump Cut* 49 (2007): n.p.

90. Cynthia Fuchs, review of *Blue Steel* by Kathryn Bigelow, Philadelphia *City Paper*, n.d., n.p., http://www.mith2.umd.edu/WomensStudies/FilmReviews/blue-steel-fuchs (August 12, 2006), n.p. Silver's performance in *Blue Steel* works in part on a visual level of typecasting. Silver often portrays Jewish or Mediterranean types; before *Blue Steel*, he starred as a Holocaust survivor in *Enemies: A Love Story* (Paul Mazursky, 1989), and his next role after Eugene Hunt was as Alan Dershowitz in *Reversal of Fortune* (Barbet Schroeder, 1990). In *Blue Steel*, his tailored, manicured look ethnically and socially distinguishes him from the fair, working-class Megan Turner. In the visual contrast *Blue Steel* sets up, viewers are inclined to read Hunt as an example of the dangerous, sexy urban type, while Turner is the pretty, innocent girl from the suburbs.

91. The .44 Magnum is the iconic gun for cinematic masculine violence. Clint Eastwood's character fetishized it in *Dirty Harry* (Don Siegel, 1971) after Lee Marvin introduced it in *Point Blank* (John Boorman, 1967), and such extratextual resonances can be felt in *Blue Steel*.

92. Christina Lane, "From '*The Loveless* to *Point Break*': Kathryn Bigelow's Trajectory in Action," *Cinema Journal* 37, no. 4 (1998): 71.

93. She also will not see Eugene when he sneaks up from behind in Tracy's stairwell, although she does notably take the advice at film's end, when Eugene rises

up in the distance behind her on a subway platform and she spins around to shoot at him, precipitating their final showdown.

94. Fuchs asks, "Is it dad, Eugene, or some vague reference to male authority and corruption?" (n.p.).

95. In another context, a *Time* magazine article reports that "up to now, yuppies have proved harder to kill than Freddy Krueger" (Shapiro, "The Birth," 65).

96. Feuer, *Seeing Through the Eighties*, 49.

97. Ellis, *American Psycho*, 376–377.

98. Russell, "Question," 2.

5. The Brat Pack and Its Mommy: Motherhood in the Age of Yuppiebacks

1. David Blum, "Hollywood's Brat Pack," *New York*, June 1985, 42.

2. The word "brat," used to refer contemptuously to a child, appeared in English as early as 1502. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "brat."

3. Blum, "Hollywood's Brat Pack," 40.

4. While Ally Sheedy is mentioned by name in Blum's article, it is only in a picture caption to *WarGames* (John Badham, 1983), where she is called "compatibly cute" to Matthew Broderick (Blum, "Hollywood's Brat Pack," 44).

5. Ibid., 42–43.

6. Ibid., 43. This claim is true of a film like *Moonstruck* (Norman Jewison, 1987), but Cage quickly moved on to nonethnic supporting roles, for example in *Vampire's Kiss* (Robert Bierman, 1988) where he plays a yuppie.

7. The first use of the phrase "literary brat pack" I find is by Hilary DeVries in a 1985 piece on Jay McInerney that describes "the kind of overnight fame that characterizes the literary brat pack—that covey of under-30 novelists" ("Jay McInerney Enters the Literary Fast Lane," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 29, 1985, 21).

8. Darryl Pinckney, "The Fast Lane," review of *Bright Lights, Big City* by Jay McInerney, and *Fish Tales* by Nettie Jones, *New York Review of Books*, November 8, 1984, 14.

9. Paul Rudnick, "Do Brats Have More Fun?," *Spy*, December 1986, 20–27.

10. Bawer takes the opportunity to reproduce the main points of this article in a later book review of Peter Cameron's *Leap Year*. Since the two articles are so substantially similar (although the second piece's past tense tone is more "I-told-you-so"), I will treat them simultaneously.

11. Bruce Bawer, "Metropolitan Life," review of *Leap Year* by Peter Cameron, *The World & I*, June 1990, 382.

12. Bruce Bawer, "Taking on the Literary Brat Pack," *Arrival* 1 (1987): 53.

13. Bawer, "Metropolitan Life," 383.

14. Bawer, "Taking on," 53.

15. Ibid.

16. Specifically: Wolitzer, Cameron, Tallent, Thurm, and Amy Hempel. David Leavitt, "New Voices and Old Values," *New York Times*, May 12, 1985, BR1.

17. Leavitt, "New Voices and Old Values," BR1-26.

18. Bawer mock qualifies this statement: "Well, *almost* exactly. Almost everything they do derives directly from Carver, Robison, and—perhaps most of all—Beattie" ("Taking on," 54). Compare that last sentence to Leavitt's version: "stylistically, their work owes a strong debt to older writers such as Raymond Carver, Ann Beattie, and Mary Robison" (BR26). Bawer is only one of a number of critics who commented on the rise in the eighties of what is derogatorily called "workshop fiction," exemplified by two authors Leavitt admires and Bawer impugns: Raymond Carver and Ann Beattie. Particularly misguided is the new advice to "load up on concrete details, relevant or not," which has the effect that "Brat Pack writers are more likely to give a detailed run-down on the contents of a given character's cupboard or clothes or television viewing schedule than to provide a coherent and convincing set of clues to the contents of that character's soul" (Bawer, "Taking on," 54). These brats do not leave clues to the soul; instead, they check out their buddies' bookshelves and closets.

19. Bawer, "Metropolitan Life," 381.

20. Ibid., 380.

21. Ibid., 381. With this quotation in particular, it is worth noting that two gay men are at the center of this early debate, while the later, more popular Brat Pack authors (Jay McInerney, Bret Easton Ellis, and Tama Janowitz) each write texts that are either repressively straight or parodically homosocial. It may be useful to note Bawer's age; in 1987, when he published "Taking on the Literary Brat Pack," he was 31 and Leavitt was 25.

22. Bawer, "Taking on," 54.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., 55.

25. Bawer, "Metropolitan Life," 383.

26. In fact, Caveney and Young claim that Ellis, McInerney, and Janowitz were the *only* Brat Pack authors (Graham Caveney and Elizabeth Young, *Shopping in Space: Essays on America's Blank Generation Fiction* [New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1992], 16).

27. Bawer, "Taking on," 55.

28. DeVries, "Jay McInerney Enters the Literary Fast Lane," 21.

29. David Foster Wallace, "Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 8, no. 3 (1988): 36.

30. Pinckney, "The Fast Lane," 14.

31. Wallace, "Fictional Futures," 36.

32. See Stephanie Girard, who goes into more detail, including photographic comparisons of various first editions of Vintage Contemporaries ("'Standing at the Corner of Walk and Don't Walk': Vintage Contemporaries, *Bright Lights, Big City*, and the Problems of Betweenness," *American Literature* 68, no. 1 [1996]: 161–185).

33. E. Graydon Carter, "Leading the Gliterary Life," *Esquire*, December 1986, 162.

34. Ibid., 165.

35. Elizabeth Kastor, "Tama Janowitz's Talk of the Town," *Washington Post*, August 29, 1986, C1.

36. Hendrik Hertzberg, "The Short Happy Life of the American Yuppie," *Esquire*, February 1988, 105.

37. Carter, "Leading the Gliterary Life," 162. Perhaps Carter also had in mind here the Library of America, another collectible series whose first volumes were published in 1982.

38. Josephine Hendin, "Fictions of Acquisition," in *Culture in an Age of Money: The Legacy of the 1980s in America*, ed. Nicolaus Mills (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1990), 217.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid., 220.

41. Ibid., 224.

42. The Editors of SPY, *Spy Notes on McInerney's* Bright Lights, Big City, *Janowitz's* Slaves of New York, *Ellis's* Less Than Zero, *and Others* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), i.

43. Ibid., 65.

44. Ibid., 76–77.

45. Paul Rudnick, "Missing Mommies," *Spy*, October 1986, 54.

46. Ibid.

47. I will refer to this character as "the narrator," leaving the second-person "you" when it appears in quotations.

48. Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City* (New York: Vintage, 1984), 37. All subsequent references will occur in the text.

49. Ruth Doan MacDougall, "Having Fun in New York," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 5, 1984, B5. Also see Terence Moran, "Bright Lights, Big City," review of *Bright Lights, Big City* by Jay McInerney, *The New Republic*, December 3, 1984, 42; and "Bright Lights, Big City," review of *Bright Lights, Big City* by Jay McInerney, *Publishers Weekly*, August 10, 1984, 76.

50. Hendin, "Fictions of Acquisition," 219.

51. I, however, don't believe a word of this. It is a stretch to read McInerney as rewriting the mother as a liberated woman; being a poor cook is not shorthand for being a good feminist, even if she resists the siren call of the kitchen in a household with five males. McInerney demonstrates his masculinist bent by giving her four sons, two of them twins, by not giving her a name, and most of all, by martyring her on the altar of the son's manhood. Oedipal interpretations aside (see, for example, Caveney and Young's reading in *Shopping in Space* [53]), the death of the mother is a cruel scene, and the later revelation that she also cannot manage to keep an eye on the oven does not do anything to mitigate McInerney's confused sense of what the mother means to the narrator, or, more importantly, of what the mother can mean to the narrator.

52. See McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City.* There is a numerical explanation as well. The narrator is now 24 years old (65), making him 11 when Megan's 13-year-old son was born. The picture was "taken a couple of years ago" (137), when the boy was about 11. So, the narrator sees himself in the photograph of Megan's 11-year-old son—potentially both 11-year-old son and 24-year-old boyfriend.

53. Another reference to the rural/urban dualism; Megan and her husband argued over where to raise their son (McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 138).
54. Rudnick, "Missing Mommies," 54.
55. Perhaps taking a cue from Tad's cousin's girlfriend, "you knew she was the real thing when she steadfastly refused to acknowledge your presence" (McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 3).

Coda: The Ventriloquy of Childhood

1. Lawrence Grossberg, "Rockin' with Reagan, or the Mainstreaming of Postmodernity," *Cultural Critique* 10 (1988): 124.
2. Jean-Paul Sartre, *What Is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), 278.
3. Ibid., 65.
4. Ibid., 76.
5. Ibid.
6. J. Hillis Miller, *Versions of Pygmalion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), vii, viii.
7. Gilles Deleuze, "Bartleby; Or, the Formula," trans. Michael A. Greco, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 71.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 72, 73. Deleuze contrasts a "Formula" from a "Procedure," which "treats" language.
10. Ibid., 90.
11. Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 24.
12. Hannah Arendt quoted in Kathy Acker, "Writing, Identity, and Copyright in the Net Age," *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 28, no. 1 (1995): 98–99.
13. Kathy Acker, *Great Expectations* (New York: Grove Press, 1982), 123.
14. Kathy Acker, "A Few Notes on Two of My Books," in *Bodies of Work* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1997): 7.
15. Acker, "Writing, Identity," 100.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 102.
19. Ibid., 103.
20. Peter Wollen, "Kathy Acker," in *Lust for Life: On the Writings of Kathy Acker*, eds. Amy Scholder, Carla Harryman, and Avital Ronell (New York: Verso, 2006), 11.
21. Acker says of her early texts that "I really didn't want any creativity. It was task work, and that's how I thought of it" (Kathy Acker, "Devoured by Myths," interview with Sylvère Lotringer, *Hannibal Lecter, My Father* [New York: Semiotext(e), 1991], 8).
22. Wollen, "Kathy Acker," 8.

23. Carla Harryman, "Acker Un-Formed," *Lust for Life: On the Writings of Kathy Acker*, eds. Amy Scholder, Carla Harryman, and Avital Ronell (New York: Verso, 2006): 40.

24. Ibid.

25. "Acker Un-Formed" is the title of Harryman's contribution to the *Lust for Life* collection.

26. Harryman, "Acker Un-Formed," 37.

27. Wollen, "Kathy Acker," 1–2.

28. Federal Inspection Office for Publications Harmful to Minors [West Germany], "Immoral," *Hannibal Lecter, My Father* (New York: Semiotext[e], 1991), 143.

29. Kathy Acker, *Realism for the Cause of Future Revolution* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1997), 18.

30. Kathy Acker, "William Burroughs's Realism," in *Bodies of Work* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1997), 1.

31. Acker would probably hate that sentence, as when she says, "when I'm writing I become the characters in the novel, but the characters in the novel aren't me. People always think they're me, and it's a drag" (Acker, "Devoured," 20).

32. Peter Guttridge, "Obituary: Kathy Acker," *The Independent*, December 3, 1997, 21.

33. Gary Pulsifer, "Obituary: Kathy Acker: Power, Punk, and Porn," *The Guardian*, December 1, 1997, 13.

34. Acker, *Great Expectations*, 58.

35. Ibid., 14.

36. Ibid., 58.

37. Harryman says of this "that her practice is additive, not subtractive. She doesn't leave anything behind" (38).

38. Acker, *Great Expectations*, 58.

39. Ibid., 24.

40. Ibid., 127.

41. Ibid., 19.

42. Ibid., 70–71.

43. Ibid., 127–128.

44. "On Christmas Eve 1978 my mother committed suicide and in September of 1979 my grandmother (on my mother's side) died. Ten days ago (it is now almost Christmas 1979) Terence told my fortune with the Tarot cards" (Ibid., 5).

45. Ibid., 10.

46. Ibid.

47. Ian Balfour, "The Playhouse of the Signifier: Reading Pee-wee Herman," *Camera Obscura* 6, no. 2 (1988): 162–163.

48. Ibid., 162.

49. See Constance Penley, "The Cabinet of Dr. Pee-wee: Consumerism and Sexual Terror," *Camera Obscura* 6, no. 2 (1988): 40.

50. Balfour relates a respondent to an early draft of his essay, who noted that "the dinosaur family is the only family unit given any prominence in the show" (Balfour, 167).

51. Henry Jenkins III, "'Going Bonkers!': Children, Play and Pee-wee," *Camera Obscura* 6, no. 2 (1988): 177.

52. Marsha Kinder, "Back to the Future in the 80s with Fathers & Sons, Supermen & PeeWees, Gorillas & Toons," *Film Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (1989): 3.

53. Ibid., 6.

54. Bruce La Bruce, "Pee Wee Herman: The Homosexual Subtext," in *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*, eds. Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995): 383.

55. Ibid.

56. Kinder, "Back to the Future," 2.

57. "Rainy Day," *Pee-wee's Playhouse: Volume 1*, Perf. Paul Reubens, CBS, September 27, 1986, DVD.

58. Kathy Acker, "The Meaning of the Eighties," in *Bodies of Work* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1997), 141.

59. Ibid., 142.

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