

ABSTRACT

OKAY, MAYBE YOU ARE YOUR KHAKIS: CONSUMERISM, ART, AND IDENTITY IN AMERICAN CULTURE

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This thesis explores the evolving relationship between the cultural realms of art and the marketplace. The practice of “coolhunting,” or finding original fashions and ideas to co-opt and market to a mainstream audience, is increasingly being used in corporate America. The Toyota Scion and its advertising campaign are examples of such commodification, and they are considered within the context of Roland Marchand and Thomas Frank’s histories and theories of advertising. The novels *Pattern Recognition* by William Gibson and *The Savage Girl* by Alex Shakar both feature main characters who are coolhunters, and both approach the problem of the imposition of capital into the realm of art but formulate responses to the problem very differently. This literature offers insight into the important relationship between consumption and identity in American culture in the early twenty-first century.

Okay, Maybe You Are Your Khakis:
Consumerism, Art, and Identity in American Culture

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They're Selling Us Aspirin for Our Broken Hearts

The September, 2003 issue of *American Demographic* features an article on the “About-to-Be” Demographic: twenty-one-year-old Generation Yers. One of the products designed to meet the needs of (or at least be marketed to) this demographic is the Toyota Scion, a relatively cheap, roomy, and “tricked-out” mini-Sport Utility Vehicle. Part of the advertising campaign for this car involved hiring twenty artists to “realize their vision of the Scion”; a photograph accompanying the article shows the work of Rico, an Installation Artist (Weiss 32). When the artists had realized their visions, their work was displayed in art galleries and Toyota photographed some hip-looking 21-year-olds sitting around appreciating it. The photographs were then used in print ads that targeted Generation Y (or at least the segment of this generation that is middle- or upper-class) as a small part of a campaign that’s being hyped as the next big thing.

The art world presumably chooses objects to represent because they are beautiful, important, and/or worthy of study. The Scion, these ads claim, is not just a shiny car with halogen headlamps, an MP3 player, and fully reclining front seats; it is a work of art. It is to be contemplated in and of itself. It is installation-art-vision-worthy. For this ad campaign, Toyota invokes the aura of the art world in hopes that it has some cachet that will rub off on the Scion.

Connecting a product with a realm only tenuously related to the function of the product is not unusual; some ads even leave audiences wondering until the end what is actually being advertised. Mastercard takes us to the baseball park, Sprint takes us to a piano recital that seems to be happening on a bus, Dr. Pepper takes us to a Latin American street dance. Several “M-Life” commercials run during the 2002 Superbowl never even said what M-Life was. The Toyota Scion ad campaign stands out, however, because its foray into representation of the art world for the purposes of selling is the latest in a long history of such advances.

For our purposes here, I will define art as a privileged form of communication. A work of art says, first and foremost, that what it represents is somehow special. A sixteenth century painting of a duke could express the idea that this Duke was an important man, worthy of being commemorated and remembered. Van Gogh’s painting of the workman’s shoes may express the idea that the shoes, as well as the life that they are connected to, are important to think about. A painting of a can of soup might say that it’s important to notice the everyday details of life that we often overlook, or it might say that people are so busy thinking about commodities that they have forgotten about more important things. A toilet in an art gallery might be an argument that the art world has gone astray or a comment on the difficulty of defining ‘art.’ At any rate, a work of art says, “hey, look at this.” Its function is to call attention.

Aristotle argued that much art – especially narrative fiction – calls attention to emotion, causing heightened experiences of emotion in the audience. This leads to catharsis, which he argued serves to relieve existing pressures, rather than to create and stir them needlessly, as Plato believed it would. When political, economic, or societal circumstances evoke emotion from many people, an artist can give form to those emotions through art – painting, music, narrative, poetry, whatever. Art is also often concerned with emotional experiences on a wide scale, regardless of cultural events: love, family

problems, crises of confidence, war, etc. People benefit from the artistic declaration that they are not alone and may be able to process the emotions associated with the experiences represented better than they could in isolation.

Just as the purpose or function of art is to call attention, the most basic purpose of advertising is to call attention to a product. Persuading a consumer to want the product is also important, but, especially with branding, calling attention to it is the first step. We now have a public sphere in which corporations clamor for the attention of as many consumers as possible in hopes that attention will translate into brand loyalty, which will translate into a simple increase in sales. But corporations have not always had a hegemonic claim to the attention of the public. The rise of ubiquitous advertising is relatively new, and given that much of it uses artistic energy and technique in order to sell things rather than to bring forth and help process emotion, such a shift may affect our culture in profound ways. Of course art has never been completely free of commercial aspects, but the relationship between the two realms is certainly evolving. What I want to explore in the following work is the current conflict between the worlds of art and commerce, and how this conflict has come to be represented in literature.

In order to understand the state of advertising and art today, we can look at accounts of how advertising developed over the course of the twentieth century. We will look further at the Toyota Scion campaign in the context of this history and will seek to understand how the encroachment of commerce on artistic realms is affecting the lives of individuals. And, in the following chapters, we will look to two recent works of literature to see different formulations of and responses to the problem.

Roland Marchand's book *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* describes how corporations became savvy at influencing the public's perception of them, starting at about the dawn of the twentieth century. As large corporations gained power, the public worried about how they would fit in with other public institutions – the government and churches, for example – which they already trusted to keep public interest at heart (Marchand 9). The public's wariness of corporations was well-founded, because the rational, masculine business ethic demanded devotion foremost to the bottom line rather than to the public good (Marchand 25). While it seems perfectly "rational" today to understand that being perceived well by the public can only help the bottom line, businesses were not initially convinced that they should invest in anything other than the production of goods. Marchand's book chronicles how corporations learned to value advertising and public relations efforts.

An early example of businesses needing to justify their use of physical public space are the enormous department stores of the early twentieth century. This justification often took the form of practical contributions, such as gigantic clocks, but businesses also associated themselves with art in order to appear to contribute something to the public. Store buildings were fashioned in such a way as to educate shoppers in architectural traditions with various rooms in various architectural period styles, and they occasionally housed concerts and art exhibits (Marchand 13). Businesses also had begun building skyscraper offices for headquarters, which had an enormous impact on city skylines. The new

“cathedrals of commerce” were meant to signify at once both an understanding of civic obligation and the commercial successes of the companies housed therein (41).

Before consumer capitalism became the norm, advertising was done only sporadically and in service of specific products or events. But in the early 1900s several new and different campaigns were undertaken in order to counteract the damage to the reputations of businesses and industries that had weathered scandals. AT&T’s groundbreaking and risky institutional ad campaign, which was launched in 1908, helped to change the way that the possibilities for advertising were understood (43, 48).

AT&T believed the campaign would serve several purposes. First, there was the obvious goal of creating in the public mind an image of AT&T as a good company – one that, in fact, should be trusted with a monopoly on the telephone market (48). Another rather sinister benefit of an ongoing advertising campaign would be that a news organization’s editorial output would tend to favor a company that it looked to regularly for advertising dollars (58). A third and perhaps most interesting consequence of the advertising would be that it could influence, and even shape, a company’s own workers as well as the public (127). AT&T was one of the first businesses to use glorified images of its workers in advertisements, hoping that “When employees viewed these portraits ‘over the shoulder of the public,’ they ‘would have constantly forced upon them what they were expected to do’ and thus would grow to resemble their images” (127).

AT&T “glorified” its workers by representing them in paintings which were reproduced in advertisements. A painting commissioned and used in 1914 was called *The Spirit of Service* and showed a man braving a winter storm to repair phone lines. In 1915, *Weavers of Speech* depicted a female telephone operator holding phone wires connected to a rural home, a city, and a factory. After reproductions of these paintings ran in advertisements, the originals were displayed in “an honored place” at AT&T’s headquarters in New York. These paintings were the first examples of worker-imagery that AT&T incorporated into its advertisements for many years after. (64)

These paintings, as well as the lengthy prose back-stories that accompanied them in advertisements, were meant to create a positive image of the company in the public mind through association with high culture. This goal wasn’t limited to AT&T, though. Marchand points out that the characteristic common to nearly all corporate imagery was its aim at the status of art:

The designers of corporate imagery did not necessarily strive to make it ‘beautiful’ in some conventional sense, nor did they always insist on being au courant with contemporary artistic trends. But they sought to give it the social and cultural status of art. [...] Embracing a variety of artistic styles, they aimed in their institutional ads at an elusive quality, dependent not so much on the status of high art as the suggestion of high social class—a look that was ‘suitable for framing.’ (167)

Allusions to the Bible or Greek mythology also served to impress the public with a company’s knowledge, which was associated with class. “Even if readers were ignorant of Joshua or Achilles, as well as of Greek and Latin, one agency president observed, such ads would still enable them to ‘enjoy a sort of illumination, as if they were learning something’” (169). Notice that by this point (the 1920s), marketers have dispensed with the notion that it is important *actually* to educate the public, as the

period-architecture of the department store was intended to do; now it is enough merely to create the impression of being educated, because this would guarantee a resulting impression of trustworthiness. The same concept was behind factory tours that included a stop to observe the boss's art collection; their purpose was not to show the people the art, but to show the people that the boss owned and appreciated art (255).

In the 1930s and '40s, the increasing pressure that businesses felt to appear to have populist values conflicted with their habit of trying to associate themselves with high art and high class. This pressure came in part from the discovery in the early 1930s that the most successful ads were the ones that "took the most pessimistic view of audience intelligence, aimed the lowest, and turned to tabloid and comic-strip formats" (282). If most of their customers would enjoy "low" formats, rather than look down on them, then businesses would need to be careful not to turn the customers off with too much association with "high" art. But companies did not abandon cautious association with high art and culture, because they could still offer a veneer of legitimacy. Some corporations even asserted that "their sponsorship of art or classical music might rescue high art from elite bondage as 'something precious and reserved for the few'" (332). High art also became fodder for one of the earliest instances of niche marketing; Standard Oil sponsored "the nation's most innovative artists and prestigious photographers" in order to please the segment of society that was most critical of their prewar policies (333). This segment, in addition to being the "'thought leaders'" of society, had elite tastes.

Taking this campaign a step further, Standard Oil commissioned sixteen leading painters to commemorate "'the five crucial years (1940-1945) in which petroleum was called upon to help preserve the civilization which it had done so much to create'" (334). Although Toyota's contemporary Scion campaign stops short of crediting itself with the creation of civilization in the art gallery ads, its appeal is in a similar vein as the 1945 Standard Oil campaign, because both seek to identify the company's work as important enough to represent in artwork. Both campaigns want the art world to raise the public's esteem for the companies, although Standard Oil's paintings do so more through an appeal to upper-class values, while Scion's do so through the argument that the product itself is more than just a product. Businesses still see commerce as something that needs to justify itself; the Scion is not just a car, it's rather an object possessing such impressive abstract qualities that it should garner attention apart from its mere use.

But the print ads I have discussed are only one aspect of the Scion campaign, which is purported to be the "new wave" of advertising, seeking to ingratiate the brand to a core group of hip consumers through means more guerilla than traditional: test-drives available at cultural events, internet movies, songs by hip artists, its very own magazine (MacMillan, Ford). And this all started several years before the cars were even available for purchase. The print campaign is small, and there are few television commercials for the Scion, none appearing on major networks (at least not early in the campaign) (Griffith). The Scion campaign is profoundly different from anything imaginable a hundred or even fifty years ago – so how did businesses get from doubting that institutional advertising would be successful to believing that an enormous ongoing, practically underground campaign would be the key to brand success? Thomas Frank addresses the major shifts in advertising philosophy between 1950 and

the present in his book *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, which is useful for understanding the origin of the rationale behind campaigns like the one for the Toyota Scion.

By the mid-1940s, businesses had clearly accepted the idea that large-scale advertising was worth the investment. The business world did not look much like ours yet, but by the 1950s a new philosophy of business was beginning to take hold. Frank describes the two competing corporate worldviews from which the internal organization of businesses as well as advertising flowed, dubbed by Douglas McGregor in 1960 “Theory X” and “Theory Y” (22). Theory X ruled Madison Avenue in the 1950s; it dictated strict corporate hierarchies and a scientific approach to advertising. Theory Y, on the other hand, dictated fluid corporate structures and venerated creativity above all else, including order. Creation of advertising images and messages, according to the rigid Theory X, should closely follow a set of rules. Each ad agency had its own set of these rules, one of which controlled details down to whether the font was to have a serif¹ (42, 46). David Ogilvy, a “leading proponent of managerial rationality,” eschewed such aesthetic abstractions as “balance” and “design,” believing instead that his detailed prescriptive system for creating and judging ads was scientifically proven to “work,” and he had the background in polling and statistics to test his rules out on real audiences (45, 47). He emphasized the use of repetition and scientific-sounding numbers and statistics, as well as recommendations from trustworthy figures like doctors in advertisements (46).

However, throughout the Theory X decade of the 1950s, there was growing public concern about conformity. Writers repeatedly articulated the “mass society critique,” which was that “long-standing American traditions of individualism were vanishing and lay buried beneath the empires of the great corporations, the sprawl of prefabricated towns, and the reorientation of culture around the imperative of consuming homogenized, mass-produced goods” (10). Novels from this period, specifically *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* and, later, *Revolutionary Road*, also took up these issues. Consumers’ discontent with advertising was also increasing. Companies had run with the discovery in the 1930s that the taste and intelligence of the average consumer was low; advertisers in fact “had been profoundly contemptuous of the consumer’s intelligence, and consumers knew it: in the wake of *The Hucksters*, *The Hidden Persuaders*, the quiz show scandals, and the various FTC lawsuits against fraudulent advertisers,” consumers had become, as they say, immune to much advertising (63). Consumers had found out about things like planned obsolescence – that is, American car makers’ practice of updating each new year’s model so much as to render last year’s stylistically obsolete and therefore undesirable. They had also caught on to the “buzzwords, the heavily retouched photographs, [and] the idealized drawings” that ads overflowed with (63).

This was a problem. How does a capitalist system solve problems? With products. Frank’s main argument in *Conquest of Cool* is that the business revolution of the 1960s actually paralleled the cultural revolution by taking the mass society critique, sympathizing with it, and offering “hip consumerism” as a way out (25, 26). In other words, advertisers learned to say, as Frank writes,

¹ It was.

“alienated by the conformity and hypocrisy of mass society? Have we got a car for you!” (60). A lot of advertising became ironic – the advertiser and consumer were both wise to the game, and advertisers were no longer trying to fool anyone because the consumers were too smart for that. These changes were not entirely limited to advertising rhetoric – Frank notes that the practice of planned obsolescence in cars did die down a bit, and the Volkswagen Bug did look truly different than the tail-finned cars of the 1950s. However, understanding the changes in advertising approaches is crucial to understanding the state of advertising today as well as the effect it has on art and whatever part of American culture is still separate from the sphere of consumption.

The Pepsi campaign through the 1950s and 1960s is an especially good example of this trend. In the ‘50s, Pepsi started out trying to appeal to consumers by associating itself with the upper classes, which, in the context of Marchand’s account of early advertising techniques, seems like a reliable choice. This is especially true considering that Pepsi had been considered a bargain drink in the 1940s. Its efforts to shed that image took the form of an advertising campaign called “The Sociables,” which consisted of drawings of upper-class people enjoying Pepsi in various upper-class leisure settings (horse stables, fashion shows, etc.) (174). We know from Marchand how carefully companies had tried to be to associate themselves with high-class people and settings in the early twentieth century, and Pepsi apparently had not done so carefully enough: their sales remained flat and they abandoned the campaign in 1960 (174).

In response to this, Pepsi went to a Theory Y ad company called BBDO, which had a loose corporate hierarchy and would have treated the creation of advertising as an art rather than a science (56). Rather than continuing to try to go high-class, BBDO went young, and thus was born the Pepsi Generation. This transition may be representative of a change in the rhetorical problems facing corporations; they no longer needed to justify their use of public space and attention, but now needed to focus only on beating out competition for sales. In 1961, Pepsi adopted the idea that Pepsi is for young people who like to have fun and throughout the decade tried several different campaigns on that theme. By experimenting with countercultural imagery and always focusing on young people being wacky and having fun, Pepsi defined itself against Coca-Cola, which “was describing itself as the drink of workplace order” (176). The images Pepsi created were designed to use links to the counterculture to appeal to not only the rebellious young, but also to those people who wanted to be like them (182).

Pepsi’s abandonment of attempts to garner high-culture appeal through “The Sociables” for the counter-culture-embracing Pepsi Generation represents the last major transition we need to know about in order to understand the context out of which the Toyota Scion ads are coming. The Pepsi Generation idea and ethos should sound familiar, because it is still firmly entrenched today. Pepsi’s website (www.pepsi.com, or “Pepsi World”) exhorts us to “Get Active/Stay Active,” which could come straight out of their 1960s campaign.

According to Frank, it is no coincidence that Pepsi has clung to the idea of the Pepsi Generation. The corporate world started looking to young people in 1960 for images of rebellion against the rigid, conformist, workaday system that keeps capitalism going; the rebellion, which takes the form of hip consumerism, provides the demand for the items that the system produces (232).

Regardless of its objective “content,” and regardless of whether it even exists, rebel youth culture will always be found to fit the same profile, will always be understood as an updating of the 1960s original. Its look and sound must continually vary, but its cultural task does not change. No matter what the kids are actually doing, youth culture as we see it in ads, television, and mass circulation magazines is always a flamboyant affirmation of the core tenets of hip consumerism. (234-235)

And, of course, people who do the market research find that young people themselves embrace the mass society critique and are not susceptible to traditional advertising techniques; this is what was said about the baby boomers, and this is what was said about Generation X (233). Businesses realized in the ‘60s that they should be “honest” because that is what the consumers will respond to – they’ll see right through anything else (233). (Never mind that this implies that if consumers were really morons, marketers could be as dishonest as they pleased – and never mind that the ads they produce might actually not be as honest as they could be.) In the early ‘90s, businesses needed savvier, more creative, more Theory-Y ad agencies than ever before to deal with Generation X, just as they had needed to overturn Theory X in 1960 to deal with the baby boomers.

Enter Generation Y. Frank published *The Conquest of Cool* in 1997, so it is, given the speed of cultural progress, slightly out of date by now (2004). However, Frank’s theory about the formulation of Youth Culture As Rebellion Against Stifling Protestant Work Ethic is useful for our inquiry into the logic of Toyota Scion’s 2003 campaign, explicitly geared now toward Generation Y.

The Scion campaign and the things being said about it in the marketing world are about what you’d expect after Frank’s analysis of the attitude toward young baby boomers in the 1960s and then Generation X-ers in the 1990s. In an article called “Toyota’s Scion makes an appeal to Y generation,” Royal Ford, a columnist, explains that Generation Y-ers don’t like the hard sell; in the special Scion showrooms inside of Toyota dealerships, salespeople will leave you alone unless you ask for their assistance. Scion Vice President Jim Farley reports that the kids they’re targeting will say, “I don’t want to be sold to. Put the information in front of me and let me decide” (Ford). (The author points out, rightly, that this desire to be left alone is probably not specific to Generation Y-ers.) In “Scion ology,” another columnist explains that 18- to 24-year-olds “may be immune to conventional ad campaigns” (Griffin 2). He quotes the CEO of Fresh Machine, the developer of the Scion website, who says that “it’s also a group that doesn’t like being marketed to very much, or they’re an interesting and complicated group of people to market to” (2). Columnist Carrie MacMillan also describes how Scion’s early campaign doesn’t include traditional advertising because, as the national sales promotion manager for Scion says, “Word-of-mouth is more important to them than an ad that is bought and paid for” (1). According to marketers, it’s not that the Generation Y consumers aren’t interested in new products – they’re actually more interested than previous generations – it’s just that the channels through which companies must reach them are different (MacMillan 1). The “About-to-Be” article in *American Demographic* magazine reinforces these ideas: “[...] these Gen Yers are not averse to marketing campaigns. They just want them to be entertaining” (Weiss 36). They are bombarded with traditional advertisements that they “see right through” and thus tend to ignore; only ones that are especially

entertaining or clever will get their attention, and, if the ads are good enough, they'll even pass them on to their friends (Weiss 34).

Weiss argues that current 21-year-olds aren't challenging authority in the same way as their baby boomer parents did (31). Instead of anger at the system, there seems to be a sense that the kids who make up Generation Y are accepting of the idea that they'll work several jobs over the course of their lives (Weiss 31) and have internalized the idea that, as consumers, they're entitled to enjoyable dining "experiences" and products customized to fit their needs, all at a reasonable price. In other words, Generation Y-ers are comfortable with being primarily consumers. Of course, we could extend a dose of the aforementioned Frankian skepticism to these analyses and suggest that marketers would never ever conclude that an entire generation is simply not interested in being consumers (or in having the products and jobs that come along with that identity).

Despite these conclusions, though, a look at the Scion website shows that the use of the mass society critique is not dead. I include here the "About" section of the Toyota Scion website:

In this brand-heavy world, we are constantly inundated with messages about what to wear, where to go and how to be. However, we know that independent thought doesn't come from picking and choosing an identity from a series of prefab selections. Although we may like some of the individual elements of what's available, on the whole we would rather be able to mix and match, choose those pieces that support our distinct qualities as independent creatures. We want to be recognized as unique beings who revel in the freedom of expression. SCION (the car company and the magazine) recognizes the value of the individual and the remix, the re-appropriation of mass culture, and it will focus on the struggle, the challenge and the successes of keeping it real.

The idea of the remix has become more common and now can be applied to entire identities, from music to fashion, from technology to art. The lines have been blurred. The opportunity for independence is vital. We are now active participants in the process, tricking out the smallest details, tweaking the characteristics to fit our lifestyles. By changing color palettes, textures and soundscapes, we can be recognized by our peers for who and what we are. ("Scion | About")

Certainly the idea of the rebel consumer is still alive, although there has been a fundamentally important shift in *what*, exactly, marketers say the hip consumers are rebelling against. And here it is clear that they are no longer rebelling against the lifestyle that corporate jobs require, as their baby-boom parents did. They are instead rebelling against the conformity that the marketplace itself creates. They're not mad that they don't have fulfilling, meaningful work, as Frank Wheeler was in *Revolutionary Road*, or that they don't have enough time to spend with their families, as Tom Rath was in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* – they're mad that the marketplace has offered them only "a series of prefab selections" from which to choose an identity.

This is a problem. How does a capitalist system solve problems? With products. In this case, with customizable products. Previously, the marketplace supposedly stifled our thought by offering identical goods; as part of the mass society critique, this complaint is 50 years old. But now we can

choose to have, according to the Scion website, a red steering wheel, blue glow-in-the-dark cupholders, doorframe guards, and a subwoofer, thereby “keeping it real.” “The process” – presumably of piecing together an identity – consists of making choices within a narrow (but expanding) range of options about what to consume.

The March 5, 2004 cover story of *USA Today* aims to publicize and explain this trend. The CEO of Panera Bread explains that the increased demand for customizable products (in this case, food) is “a rejection of mass society” that comes about because “people just want to feel special” (Horovitz 1A). Author of *The Trend Commandments* Larry Samuel asserts that “we define ourselves by our pop-culture tastes” (Horovitz 2A). Starbucks reportedly offers over 19,000 potential variants of drinks, and the article is littered with statements like “Frito-Lay, which started with two chips – Fritos corn chips and Lays potato chips – now has 60” (2A). The concept of independent thought implicit in these declarations could not conceivably encompass the idea that perhaps one’s identity has less to do with the metal box with wheels we use to get from place to place, or the snacks that we consume, and infinitely more to do with the groups one identifies with as well as one’s beliefs, values, interests, hobbies, talents, ambitions, memories, and relationships.

Of course, the solution of customized products may be a result of the way in which the mass society critique was originally formulated. Complaints about “the reorientation of culture around the imperative of consuming homogenized, mass-produced goods” and suburban uniformity (Frank 10) leave themselves open to the logical response: customized goods that at least don’t appear to be mass-produced. But the mass society critique should be alarming because culture is becoming reoriented around consumption itself, regardless of whether the goods being consumed are mass-produced. The assumption that identity is based on what one consumes seems to be implicit in the original critique – why would it matter if our houses all looked the same if what our houses look like has nothing to do with who we are? It’s also important to keep in mind that marketers have self-aggrandizing reasons to assert that our consumption is important in shaping our identities; their goal is to encourage consumption, and they’ll try to attach the act of consumption to things they think we feel are important. A different type of research would be required to figure out how people themselves believe that their consumption fits in with their identity, although the novels studied in the next chapters may also give us some insight.

The 2+2=5 logic of a multinational company claiming to help consumers struggle against corporate conformity will not be accepted by everyone. True rebellion against the system, of course, most often comes from outside it. And it appears that the concept that Scion is latching onto did originate outside the system – in fact, it started with “tuners,” or “young speed seekers doing to small Asian cars what their parents or grandparents might have done to big American iron: souping up their rides,” which specifically tend to be Honda Civics (Ford 2). Honda did not initiate this – the kids started it – but clearly Toyota is running with it. And this is the key to the rebel/commodify/rebel/commodify feedback loop: once an idea or movement has been commodified, it is no longer authentic, no longer real, for the people who started it. Thus, it becomes part of that which must be rebelled against.

For the system to work, a lot of people need to follow the trends, and often enough they do. Trends in fashion, for example, are so dominant that finding people who aren't following the trends – finding the rebellion, in other words – has become an industry in itself. Some marketing firms employ “correspondents” who go around photographing and recording observations about interesting people – specifically, those people who are doing things that haven't been found and marketed to the mainstream yet; these correspondents are called “coolhunters” or “trendspotters” (“Merchants”). The people they look for care about authenticity and avoid following trends either as a matter of principle, or because they're more interested in coming up with their own styles. Coolhunters find out what they're doing, thinking about, and what they think is cool, and then sell the information to the marketing departments of large corporations.

The term “authentic” is used a lot with regard to products, although I would argue that in common use it has two distinct meanings. First, the non-trend-setters use it to describe products; its opposite is “knock-off.” Haute couture products from well-known designers would probably be most readily described by this group as “authentic” – for example, it would be used to describe a purse that's *really* Prada. A Prada knock-off is a product by a lesser brand intended to look as though it is Prada. This usage is importantly different from the usage of “authentic” to mean “uncommodified” or “original” or to refer to an idea or object that has not been produced by a corporation and thus simply for profit. The people who think in this way are very conscious of businesses poaching and producing inauthentic versions of authentic originals, as they would believe Toyota has done with the Scion. An example of this strain of thought can be found in an interview with “Dynamo-ville,” a very small company – it seems to consist of two people – who make handmade dolls of cartoon characters they made up. Alisa McDonald and Keith Rocka of Dynamo-ville first saw the Scion Bb in Japan and loved it. “Then,” they say,

we got ahold of the Scion/Urb magazine promotional publication and were turned off real quick. Every other page had some element of “underground youth culture” on it – turntables/djing, graffiti, hipster art, “electronica,” car customizing. It reeked of a marketing ploy (which seems to be working!). Anyway, now Keith's happy sticking with our un-cool Toyota Echo and using the experience as fodder. (Lance)

In their eyes, Toyota will never be able to claim a connection to authentic underground youth culture, because Toyota itself is so far above-ground, so to speak. And the pseudo-underground campaign turned them off so much that they would not consider buying a car that they really did like.

But for the most part, Toyota and the marketing world seem to expect the Scion to be successful, at least with the baby boom generation, which in the past has latched onto products coded youthful. The *USA Today* declares in bold print, “Americans have become picky. They demand – and get – what they want, how they want it” (1A). And I guess there is not much of a story here if Americans *really* want a new flavor of chips or steel door guards on their cars. But corporations cannot give Americans what they want if what they want is not a marketable product or service, and businesses know it. Says Scion VP Jim Farley, buyers take good quality for granted, so now Toyota must “‘add emotion’” (Ford). That's where the Scion comes from, and that's where the hullabaloo about rebellious

youth culture, djing, cruising, and hip-hop comes in. That's how installation art depicting a tricked-out mini-SUV comes into existence. Toyota wants to tap into the yearning for youth that the baby boomers feel, and profit from the pressure that is put on teenagers and young adults to visibly enjoy every second of their fleeting youth.

There is nothing new about the idea that corporations try to hotglue their products to experiences we want, feelings we like, and images of what we'd like to be because that's what will make them money. Coolhunters and trendspotters are embracing the idea that authentic expression and identity is out there just waiting to be found and commodified, and they're going out and doing it. But it is time for an inquiry into the consequences of this relentless emotional manipulation, as well as an inquiry into what impact the constant commodification of original ideas has on the fraction of the population who reportedly produces them, and on the millions of mainstream consumers who repeatedly buy the resulting products. The authors of *Street Trends: How Today's Alternative Youth Cultures Are Creating Tomorrow's Mainstream Markets*, a combination coolhunting manual and pitch for their own coolhunting firm, say straightforwardly that

It's important to track fashion and style when looking at the trendsetting street cultures, because this self-expression is what the mainstream can mimic easily. The mainstream can buy into the look without ever getting into why the style serves as the identity of that street culture.

(Lopiano-Misdom, De Luca 20).

This separation of symbol from meaning is also occurring with foreign-looking items that have hit the mainstream, such as t-shirts decorated with untranslated Chinese symbols or objects with icons from various Eastern religions on them. But can it be "self-expression" for people in the mainstream if they have no idea what they're expressing?

Detachment from the original meaning of symbols might be a good thing in the eyes of the coolhunters, and surely new meaning gets attached to the symbols, even if it's highly contextual, e.g. "By wearing this shirt sporting Chinese words I can't read, I am showing that I am the type of person who keeps up with fashion trends." Indeed, the "I am the type of person who keeps up with fashion trends" part seems to be applicable to the meaning of fashions based on ripped-off street culture as well. There still seems to be something disturbing, though, about the lack of critical thought by the coolhunters themselves about what they're doing, and by the mainstream who reportedly just buys into whatever comes along. And what will be the eventual result of artistic expression – and the emotion it trades in – being leveraged perpetually toward encouraging consumption of objects that have been stripped of any significance?

This is a problem that cannot be solved with products, and it's questionable whether there's any other system to solve it, or any other way for individuals to leverage the power needed to counteract it. Is the realm of art still capable of expressing discontent and mounting opposition? This is an important question to answer, and we can start by looking at the way the problem is formulated, expressed, and dealt with in contemporary fiction to see if there is a realm of resistance and, if so, what type of resistance that realm is advocating. In the chapters that follow, I will discuss two very recent novels that

both feature coolhunters, but that formulate the conflict between art and commerce very differently: *The Savage Girl* by Alex Shakar and *Pattern Recognition* by William Gibson.

Both of these novels express a sort of hopefulness regarding the fate of artistic expression as a sphere separate from marketing. However, in Chapter 2 I will argue that in *Pattern Recognition* this hope is based on a naïve, and perhaps even mythical assumption that art is and will continue to be a sacred realm that powerful people will instinctually protect. *The Savage Girl* more cynically illustrates the pernicious and relentless forces of commodification, but the acknowledgment of these forces allows for a more sophisticated conclusion regarding the potential fate of artistic expression, as I will discuss in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 includes consideration of the novels together to answer broader questions about identity and consumption.

Time, Space, and Critical Distance in *Pattern Recognition*

William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* is a departure from his earlier work in science fiction. The conflict in the novel is not so much a matter of reconciling humanity to the powerful technology it has created, although the backdrop for the story is the postmodern world of global capital that has produced such technology. The conflict here is the simple matter of a lack of information: Cayce Pollard, the protagonist, wants to discover the identity and location of "the maker" of mysterious film footage that shows up periodically on the internet. *Pattern Recognition* can be understood as a response to the encroachment of capital into the realm of art because the footage, which has the status of an art object, is potentially threatened by the forces of commodification. It is finally, however, this very status that protects it from these forces. Gibson operates on the assumption that there is still a real distinction between the use of artistic energy for marketing purposes and for art. Such an assumption conflicts with several aspects of the novel that seem very postmodern (in Frederic Jameson's conception): the emphasis on space rather than time, Cayce's waning of affect, and art that may or may not achieve a critical distance from capital.

Cayce is a 32-year-old coolhunter whose ability to detect upcoming trends stems from a pathological "allergic reaction" to logos and, more generally, to fashion. It is "a morbid and sometimes violent reactivity to the semiotics of the marketplace" (2). Her father disappeared in Manhattan on September 11, 2001 and is presumed dead, and her mother lives in California where she searches for Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP) (voices of the dead that get captured by recording equipment) with other EVP enthusiasts. The book opens with Cayce in London on a contract with Blue Ant, a marketing firm. She is also house-sitting her friend Damien's flat for two weeks, while he works on a movie he is filming in Russia. Her job is to tell Blue Ant whether proposed logos for another company will be successful or not; this foresight also seems to have come along with her allergies. Hubertus Bigend, the Belgian CEO of Blue Ant, then hires her separately to track down the maker of the footage; Cayce agrees to work for him despite her fear that he will commodify and "productize" the footage once it is found. She is a regular contributor to Fetish:Footage:Forum (F:F:F), a website on which "footageheads" discuss, theorize and debate how to interpret the footage, where/who it is coming from, how it is made, how to fit the various fragments together, etc. Through friendships she has made on the Forum, plus the use of Hubertus's expense account, Cayce is able to extract information about a watermark on one of the snippets of footage from a Japanese technology nerd named Taki. She bribes an American ex-intelligence operator she has met in London to trace the information from Taki, and gets an e-mail address associated with the origin of the footage. She sends an e-mail and the maker's twin sister, Stella, writes her back from their home in Moscow, where Cayce goes and is able to see Nora, the maker, in action.

The twins' uncle is a figure in the Russian mafia, and has been providing the means for the secretive production and release of the footage. Their parents were killed in a bombing that also left Nora with severe brain damage; while most of the shrapnel was removed from her body, one piece of metal remains lodged between her brain lobes because attempting to remove it would be too dangerous. Nora was a filmmaker before she got injured, but ever since then she has only been able – in fact has

been strongly compelled – to create these small snippets of footage. She recovered very slowly, and started speaking again first in the language that she and Stella had made up when they were young, then in Russian. She had been working on a film before she got injured, but had no reaction to it when they showed it to her. Seeing the film she'd completed and shown at Cannes "seemed to cause her great pain," and over the months of her recovery she edited it down to a single frame, then withdrew from the world again, ceasing to speak or eat. She responded only to the closed-circuit hospital security camera, and "began to die again" when it was taken away. So they ran footage from the security system into her editing deck, and she began using Photoshop to produce what would become known to the world as the snippets of footage. A special Russian prison serves as a rendering farm for the final versions of the snippets, and Stella is in charge of uploading the footage to the internet so that the world can enjoy its beauty.

Cayce summons a Forum friend, Parkaboy (Peter Gilbert), to Moscow so that he can observe the creation of the footage along with her. Cayce intends not to tell Bigend that she has found the maker, but, of course, he has been keeping her under surveillance and finds out anyway. He goes to Moscow as well, and hits it off with the twins' uncle and several of his associates. The experience of observing the footage being created seems to relieve Cayce of her allergies; she and Peter Gilbert hook up and are expected to live happily ever after, and Bigend seems to intend to make good on his claim that his interest in the footage is not commercial, even though this conclusion is not certain.

Whether Gibson is familiar with Jameson's conceptualization of postmodernism or not, his fiction uses many of the tropes that Jameson describes as hallmarks of the postmodern: concern with space which may be a sort of attempt at cognitive mapping, waning of affect, and the quest for critical distance in postmodern culture. Cayce seems to process the world mainly by categorizing the objects and people she comes into contact with. Though value judgments are rarely attached to the categorizations, much of her mental energy is reportedly used to categorize products and things by country and/or time period of origin, and by brand. Throughout the entire novel, Cayce is away from her home, Manhattan, and her resulting alienation from her foreign surroundings is emphasized, although she is never actually described as homesick. Cayce seems very unemotional; the most frequent descriptor for her is "tired," because she's jetlagged. Her relation to cyberspace, which is reliably constant and is accessible almost wherever she is, is the most comfortable place for her, even though it's not really a space at all and therefore no substitute for home.

Cayce's need to "map" the world by understanding and noting where everything comes from is stymied by the mysterious appearance of the esoteric and unique footage, and I would argue that her quest to find the maker is partly a result of this need. Whereas the footage mysteriously appears, her father has mysteriously disappeared; her desire to find the maker may also be a correlate of her fruitless search for her father or his remains. His remains are never found, but her search for the footage also indirectly leads to information about him, because one of the Russian men hired to protect the twins gives her intelligence information about her father's last known whereabouts as a gift. Although no one is certain, it seems probable that he died in the terrorist attacks on September 11th. Cayce's urge to map things is never explicit or reflected on, so it would seem to be an unconscious drive.

In the first three pages of the book alone, there are eight references to nationality (or locality) (German, Korean, Italian, British, Australian, German, Italian, and Californian) and even more to locations themselves. Later, oranges that she buys at a market come from “either Spain or Morocco,” and a knife she grabs from Damien’s kitchen is German (38, 101). The frequency of this type of adjectives drops as the novel goes on, but the references never fade out completely, which perhaps reflects her growing but incomplete comfort with her surroundings. The use of nationalistic qualifiers could imply that the products being described are of a superior quality than other like objects – one does occasionally get the sense that foreignness implies luxury – but such a claim is never explicitly made, and this does not seem to be the primary motivation for mentioning them. Cayce doesn’t specifically seek out Colombian coffee, she just notes that the coffee is Colombian. Such detail, which seems especially prominent as she is buying and consuming things, shows us that Cayce is a conscious consumer, though not necessarily a critical one.

Cayce also occasionally mentally links products to a group or a type of people; for example, in a business meeting at Blue Ant, Cayce considers how British “Silk Cut” cigarettes are “the equivalent of the Japanese Mild Seven. Two default brands of creatives” (11). This could be meant to show that she is hip to signifiers that she should be aware of as a coolhunter. The amount of focus on country of origin seems unusual compared to other contemporary American novels, although the ubiquitous focus on name brands is explainable in the context of the story, i.e. because of Cayce’s sensitivities. Coming into contact with Tommy Hilfiger logos is a big deal because of her reaction to it, and it is also part of her job as a coolhunter to be able to identify designer items such as the Prada that Damien’s unpleasant Russian girlfriend/financier, Marina, wears. However, nationality is relevant to this aspect of the story as well, because in Tokyo the major Japanese brands *Hello Kitty* and *Kogepan* do not give her the trouble that most American brands do.

Cayce’s nationality-savvy plays into the plot when her early speculation about the footage’s possible origins has caused the Russian mafia to take notice of her. She remembers one of her early posts on the F:F:F wherein she suggests that the maker could be “Some Russian mafia kingpin, with a bent for self-expression, a previously undiscovered talent, and the wherewithal to generate and disseminate the footage” (294). Once she gets the Russian e-mail address that was associated with the watermark, she mentally goes through all of her connections to Russia. She eventually figures out that her archrival from Blue Ant, Dorteia Bendetti, whom she knows was hired by “a Russian from Cyprus,” was hired because of Cayce’s public speculation about the footage’s connection to the Russian mafia. Because she is so conscious of the places and types of people in the world, she had nailed the basic truth of the situation without realizing that her seemingly wild speculation was accurate. Her awareness of national connections also helps her figure out how Dorteia fits in.

In addition to her wide geographic knowledge, Cayce is also extremely conscious of the difference between England’s (mirror-world’s) everyday objects and America’s. Her contemplation of and attention to British particulars underscores the fact that Cayce’s surroundings are different from what she – and American readers – are used to. However, while *difference* is emphasized, superiority and inferiority almost never come up. Plugs, cars, phones, sugar, milk, street furniture, and coffee are

all different in mirror-world. Gibson's decision to locate Blue Ant in London and thus set much of the book there, including the opening, results in a sense of alienation that pervades the whole book. Cayce's trips to Tokyo and Moscow, which throw language barriers into the mix, perpetuate this feeling. This creates a situation in which Cayce needs to strive to create for herself a new mental image of the physical world around her and her place in it.

Cayce's tracking of products' country of origin and her fine-grained consciousness of the difference of her British surroundings from the American details she's used to calls to mind Frederic Jameson's call for an art that has an aesthetic of cognitive mapping. Jameson's idea is derived from Kevin Lynch's description of the city as alienating, because people try to form a mental image of their physical location in the context of their surroundings but cannot (Jameson 51). Disalienation must be attained through an explicit and concerted effort to regain a "sense of space" (51). Jameson broadens this idea, folding in consideration of Lacan's Symbolic; postmodern art, therefore, should strive to map the societal structure of the world as well as the physical one.

[T]he new political art (if it is possible at all) will have to hold to the truth of postmodernism, that is to say, its fundamental object – the world space of multinational capital – at the same time at which it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as an individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion. (54)

Cayce is definitely trying to map the physical world, but despite the mountain of nationalities mentioned over the course of *Pattern Recognition*'s narrative, there is only one instance in which Cayce contemplates directly the social structures of the world in relation to a product, specifically a logo. She is being presented with the first draft of the logo she's being asked to evaluate for Blue Ant:

she imagines the countless Asian workers who might, should she say yes, spend years of their lives applying versions of this symbol to an endless and unyielding stream of footwear. What would it mean to them, this bounding sperm? Would it work its way into their dreams, eventually? Would their children chalk it in doorways before they knew its meaning as a trademark? (12)

This instance seems to fulfil Jameson's call for postmodern art – in other words, it seems to strive to represent the "world-space of multinational capital." The reader is asked to consider the basic fact that there are industrial conditions in Asian nations, which is a rhetorical move that Jameson would likely specifically approve of, considering that one of his complaints is that many Americans don't connect the disappearance of industrial conditions in their own country with its increase in other countries (53). Indeed, most of *Pattern Recognition*'s readers probably are or have been consumers of athletic shoes assembled in Asian factories. So this passage could serve to connect in their minds the shoes on their feet with a mental representation of those foreign factories. Cayce's question about dreams even addresses capital's symbolic encroachment into the Unconscious, specifically that of industrial workers in the third world. Cayce acknowledges her extremely powerful position in relation to these people, though her agency – how she uses this power – is limited by the fact that she is acting "as a very

specialized piece of human litmus paper” (Gibson 13). She cannot control what her judgment of the logo will be, only whether or not she agrees to do the job of evaluating it honestly. And she never even considers *not* doing it, at least not within the boundaries of the novel. Her career choice has long been made.

While Cayce is identifying the country of origin of various products, she could also be building a story about why her surroundings are the way that they are. “This lamp was made by workers in Italy, with materials from some other country, then it was put up for sale in a catalog, and my friend Damien liked it, and ordered it by giving them his credit card number, and so it was shipped here to his apartment,” for example. But this sort of story is never related to the reader as part of Cayce’s thought process. The consideration of Asian workers discussed above is also an anomaly in the book. It seems that Cayce has an almost robotic drive to categorize the products that she comes into contact with; for her, at least, this does not seem to be part of an effort to participate in cognitive mapping, although by including all of this information, Gibson might be encouraging the readers to think about the physical and social structure of the world themselves.

Cayce’s geographic displacement also affects her mental state, a phenomenon that she calls “soul lag.” It is the feeling that

her mortal soul is leagues behind her, being reeled in on some ghostly umbilical down the vanished wake of the plane that brought her here, hundreds of thousands of feet above the Atlantic. Souls can’t move that quickly, and are left behind, and must be awaited, upon arrival, like lost luggage (1).

So not only is she alienated from her surroundings in England, she is also alienated from her core self. As time progresses, she feels her soul being “reeled in,” but subsequent transcontinental trips interrupt its progress. Cayce needs to find her bearings both internally and externally throughout much of the book, and this is part of what seems to make her a character who is not especially vibrant. She is hard to relate to, and even her sensations and emotions seem matter-of-fact. Is she therefore an instance of what Jameson would call waning of affect?

Jameson argues that “the end of the bourgeois ego, or monad, no doubt brings with it the end of the psychopathologies of that ego [...]” which “may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling” (15). This idea seems to be in conversation with the displacement that Cayce reports, but the two thoughts do not line up exactly. Cayce is saying explicitly that her self (“soul”) is not present within her, but the fact that she’s awaiting its return implies that she does not see herself as the sort of centerless subject that Jameson is positing. (Indeed, it’s probably unlikely that *anyone*, even Jameson himself, can seriously practice this self-concept, pervasive as the experiential knowledge of oneself as a “biological subject,” in his own words, is.) However, her soul does not seem to completely return to her within the confines of the novel, given, as I have mentioned, her multiple trips across the world, leaving her relatively flat.

Perhaps, then, it is irrelevant whether Cayce conceives of herself as having a soul or not; perhaps what is more important is her actual relationship to emotion. When Cayce has finished

observing Nora working, “Stella finds her in the hallway, her face wet with tears, eyes closed, shoulders braced against plaster as uneven as the bone of Nora’s forehead” (306). Stella gives her rough paper towel soaked in cold water to press against her hot eyes. Or, in other words, all the audience gets is sensory descriptors – wet, cold, rough, and hot, as well as a somewhat morbid description of Cayce’s surroundings where one might instead expect an account of the powerful emotions that Cayce is probably overcome with. This was, after all, reported to be a transcendent experience. It is important to remember that Jameson is not saying that all emotion just disappears with the waning of affect. Instead the “‘intensities’ [...] are now free-floating and impersonal and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria” (16). Cayce considers her experience indescribable, but the free-floating intensity that Jameson would seem to expect is at best left implicit, accessible only through imagining what Cayce is feeling while crying in the corridor.

Related to the emotional details of the waning of affect is also a new emphasis on space over time that *Pattern Recognition* certainly exhibits. Jameson says that time was especially important to literary criticism of high modernism, but

We have often been told [...] that we now inhabit the synchronic rather than the diachronic, and I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time. (16)

Cayce’s constant awareness of her environment reflects this sort of spatial domination, especially in malls and markets, where her need to be careful to limit contact with logos causes the audience to conceive of those particular environments as hostile spaces. Several other aspects of the story involve spatiality as well. For example, the footageheads on F:F:F are quite concerned with determining where the footage was shot, partially for the sake of knowing that alone, and partially because it may help them figure out who is responsible for it. At the beginning of the novel, the last piece of footage to surface was of a pan across a beach, and several people believe that the location is Cannes in winter. But “French footageheads have been unable to match it, in spite of countless hours recording pans across approximately similar scenery” (Gibson 4). Before it is known that the shot can’t be duplicated because Nora is digitally altering the footage, the resistance of the beach pan to duplication might have seemed eerie and unnatural – the space was seemingly unable to be located, and this was troublesome.

Cayce is extremely interested in the aspect of “timelessness” that the footage has. As she herself “can only tolerate things that could have been worn, to a general lack of comment, during any year between 1945 and 2000” because of her allergies, she is very interested in how the maker of the footage achieves such temporal neutrality (8). When she sees snippet #135, “The Kiss,” for the first time, we learn that “They are dressed as they have always been dressed, in clothing Cayce has posted on extensively, fascinated by its timelessness, something she knows and understands. The difficulty of that. Hairstyles, too” (23). Jameson writes about how the contemporary view of the past (especially through nostalgia films) necessarily flattens the history of a period into “stylistic connotation, conveying ‘pastness’ by the glossy qualities of the image, and ‘1930s-ness’ or ‘1950s-ness’ by the attributes of fashion” (19). Significantly, Gibson has Cayce struggling to avoid such stylistic qualities, and Nora

Photoshopping her footage to a point where they fall away. The lack of decade-ness of the footage probably helps it to become something that feels transcendent to its viewers, who may be used to reading the stylistic qualities in order to categorize it in time. It defies these categories, and even seems to be somehow out of known space, thus inherently posing questions about where it is coming from.

There is another brief moment in the work when history and space seem to come into direct conflict. Dorotea burns a cigarette hole in Cayce's expensive and hard-to-find Rickson's jacket, which is a "fanatical museum-grade replica of a U.S. MA-1 flying jacket, as purely functional and iconic a garment as the previous century produced," and Cayce's possession of it enrages Dorotea because it trumps all Dorotea's attempts to out-minimalize her in terms of fashion (11). Cayce obtains a new, identical Rickson's while she is in Tokyo, and back in London, "absently she reaches to touch the place where the tape should be, but it isn't there. No hole. History erased via the substitution of an identical object" (194). In this instance, space – substitution – wins out over history and time.

While *Pattern Recognition*'s concern with nationality, space, and alienation might cause Jameson to characterize it as approaching a postmodern aesthetic, the question of whether it is striving for critical distance is at first more puzzling. It is a problem of the disappearance of a position from which to criticize capitalism and consumerism (which Jameson is concerned about), which happens because people come to believe that any rebellion against the system will be commodified by and absorbed into the system itself. *Pattern Recognition* features an art form – the footage – that could be interpreted as something completely outside of the capitalistic system, which could imply that it is trying to achieve critical distance. We can return to this question shortly, but first I would like to consider the position of the protagonist in this question.

Cayce herself lacks an articulated passionate – or even lukewarm – critical perspective on capitalism and consumerism. But Cayce doesn't absolutely love it, either. She has a disdain for Tommy Hilfiger products, thinking

My God, don't they know? This stuff is simulacra of simulacra of simulacra. A diluted tincture of Ralph Lauren, who had himself diluted the glory days of Brooks Brothers, who themselves had stepped on the product of Jermyn Street and Saville Row, flavoring their ready-to-wear with liberal lashings of polo knit and regimental stripes. But Tommy Hilfiger surely is the null point, the black hole. There must be some Tommy Hilfiger event horizon, beyond which it is impossible to be more derivative, more removed from the source, more devoid of soul. (18)

Cayce's tastes and apparent desire for authenticity seem to rest on a conception of authenticity as the *real* designer stuff, rather than cheaper knockoffs. This is evident when she meets Marina, Damien's girlfriend, who is "wearing what Cayce is trying not to admit to herself is probably this season's Prada exclusively, everything black" (179). When she encounters Marina's open Louis Vitton suitcases, which she is allergic to, she again notices lots of black Prada, to which she apparently is not allergic (188). Her expensive taste is also noticeable when she buys new, very expensive clothes in Tokyo on Bigend's expense card. Most of the resistance to consumption that Cayce exhibits is in the form of revulsion induced by either labels, which can be cut off easily, or logos, which can be avoided or cut off

as well. Much like the real bourgeoisie, who are comfortable enough with their wealth not to need to flaunt it, the significantly more expensive designer clothes are less likely to even display logos at all.

Cayce's reaction to the Tommy Hilfiger involves a distaste for "simulacra" seemingly insofar as it is simulacra. Given Cayce's affinity for designer wear and her abhorrence of knock-offs, it may perhaps seem as if she's just allergic to bad taste. A passage about national icons, however, indicates otherwise. She is reported to have had a bad allergic reaction to Nazi Germany's icons, which is

not so much from a sense of historical evil (though she certainly has that) as from an awareness of a scary excess of design talent. Hitler had had entirely too brilliant a graphics department, and had understood the power of branding all too well. (263)

According to this passage, it would seem that she is allergic to the savvy behind marketing, although it is not clear how or why she would work as a coolhunter and logo-checker if this is the case. The fact that her aversion to the symbols of consumer capitalism is an inherent quality more than a philosophical position makes it more difficult to believe that Cayce herself is concerned with attaining a critical distance from the system within which she is functioning.

The lack of critical distance on the part of the main character does not necessarily mean that the text itself isn't striving for such a distance, and the presence of the footage – an artistic expression that flows from someone like Nora who no longer seems to understand or interact with the world around her and who is not motivated by profit, that is distributed without regard for profit, and that seems to have spiritual or transcendent properties – may create an opening for at least a fictional achievement of such a distance. The content of the footage itself does not seem to be either critical or supportive of capitalism; Nora does not have a message that she is trying to relate to her viewers – in fact, she might not even understand that she has viewers. The footage is "pure" in the sense that it lacks product placement (which in one cynical moment, Cayce thinks is all anything is) or commercials, or even any commercial motivation whatsoever. Compared to most American films, at least, freedom from those considerations is unusual, possibly because the overhead of Nora's project is relatively small and easily covered by her uncle's wealth. Despite the non-commercial intentions of the project, nothing prevents it from being interpreted as Bigend does, as "the single most effective piece of guerilla marketing ever," though what it is marketing, exactly, is never specified (64). But, as is the case with any art form, the artist cannot control how it is received. Given its detachment from the problems of financing and the typical solutions to those problems involving commerciality, we can say that the footage does have a distance, but that this distance may not necessarily be a critical one.

The effects of the footage on its viewers is significantly different than the experience, say, of watching *Dude, Where's My Car?* or an episode of "The Bachelor" would be. When there were a small number of the snippets, some people believed that they were being made by an unknown student. But as more surfaced, "the evident production values had come increasingly to argue against the idea of a student effort, or indeed of anything amateur in the usual sense. The footage was simply too remarkable" (47). Although these descriptions are vague, there is clearly supposed to be something noteworthy about the snippets that people originally responded to. When Cayce is talking to Boone

about what importance the footage holds for her, she says that an initial sense of loneliness about the footage deepens once you've spent more time with it. It's "such a powerful effect" that is "impossible to describe." Boone suggests that the effect is in the viewer's own obsession with it, but Cayce responds that she can't just chalk it up to that.

"I've tried to convince myself of that. I've wanted to believe it, simply in order to let the thing go. But then I go back and look at it again, and there's that sense of...I don't know.

Of an opening into something. Universe? Narrative?" (109)

The mysterious levity of the film may itself serve as an indictment of the lighter, well, schlock being produced elsewhere, even though this doesn't seem to be what Nora has in mind. Or perhaps the sense of universe or narrative that the footage conveys is something truly transcendental and spiritual, available to viewers only through Nora's own connection to it. Nora's compulsion to create – madness? genius? – may be a part of whatever totality that Cayce is feeling connected to when viewing it.

There is also the mysterious matter of the curative powers of watching Nora create. The most pressing question about the novel is how and why Cayce's experience of finding the creator and watching her create relieves her of her allergies to the signifiers of marketing. If the footage itself is supposed to have critical distance, why would it cure an allergy to what it is supposed to be critical of? If Cayce is supposed to be striving for critical distance, how could the loss of her allergies to the signifiers of marketing help? If anything, were Gibson trying to contrast the creative power of art with the creative power of marketing, it seems like witnessing the creation of the footage should *make* one allergic to logos and fashion, or at least turn one off to them. The ending is difficult to reconcile with what most of the book seems to be aiming to do in terms of postmodernism, because it seems to rest on a distinction between art and marketing preserved from modernism. Gibson wants to say that true, pure art still exists and is in fact profoundly meaningful, despite the increasing power of global capital, despite forces of commodification, which Cayce herself profits from, and despite the often-confusing spatial physical world and the world of cyberspace. Indeed, cyberspace is even part of what makes the footage possible. But this conflict between the postmodern world and the modern values in the novel causes the ending to ring false. The notion that the logic of capital would be brought easily to a screeching halt by a benevolent businessman the second it came up against the sacred realm of art seems hopelessly naïve; hopeless, because we know that in the real world it would not likely happen this way (ask anyone whose favorite indie band has ever sold a song for use in a commercial), and hopeless because if this restraint is the only way that the realm of art can be "saved" then it is clearly a lost cause.

Pattern Recognition's optimism renders it almost too unrealistic to be hopeful. Though *The Savage Girl* appears on its face to be relentlessly cynical, I hope to show in the following chapter that its cynicism allows it a more realistic assessment of the current cultural situation and, in coming to terms with it, an equally hopeful message.

The Savage Girl as an Oppositional Text

The Savage Girl is set in “Mid City,” a fictional version of an American city like New York or Chicago. Mid City sits at the foot of a volcano, which, though it does not erupt in the story, emits foul-smelling gas and ash over the city – possibly because it doubles as Mid City’s garbage dump (121). Ursula Van Urden, who had been living in a small college town and scraping by as a painter, has moved to Mid City in order to take a job as a trendspotter with a company called Tomorrow, Ltd. She has chosen this career because her schizophrenic sister Ivy believes that the Trendspotters are the only ones who can save her. She believes that she was born a cavewoman but was kidnapped by people from the future called “Imagineers” (though not the Disney kind). The Imagineers took her to the future to learn “glamour,” and placed her in the present to advertise for glamour, and they give her orders on every last detail of how to behave. Ivy recently suffered a very public nervous breakdown that involved cutting herself and running naked through a city park.

Because the girls’ mother, Gwennan, was never particularly interested in being a mother, and their father is out of the picture, Ursula practically raised Ivy and still feels responsible for her. Gwennan is a former plastic surgeon who now spends her time playing bridge, studying Buddhism, and making money as a day trader. She was thrown out of the medical profession when she became too invested in the project of turning a woman into an exact physical replica of Betty Boop to stop when the woman became reluctant to keep going; she created a hideous but accurate “Boopleganger.”

Chas Lacouture (whose name means “hunt the culture”) runs Tomorrow, Ltd. and had been dating Ivy up until her breakdown. He is still in love with her, but she refuses to see him. He is gruff, very serious, and handsome and well-dressed. Ursula observes him from afar early in the novel, commenting, “He doesn’t look like other men; he looks like their impossible expectations for themselves” (5).

Javier Delreal and James T. Couch are the other trendspotters employed by Chas. Javier (whose name means “January of the Real”) is bipolar and met Chas when he took a class from him at the university in Mid City; he is so good at trendspotting that Chas refers to him as “a magician,” “a cultural divining rod,” and “a goddamn walking zeitgeist barometer” (64, 64, 160). Ursula reports that she can’t hazard a guess at his ethnicity, and that his tall body is slightly skinnier and more elongated than one would expect would be possible. Javier is as earnest as James T. Couch is ironic. When the reader first meets Couch, he is introduced as “James T. Couch and James T. Couch’s Irony” (108). He is incapable of earnestly expressing anything, even when he actually is feeling something earnestly. He is a pasty, slightly pudgy guy who dresses ironically in t-shirts inscribed with faux-translated Japanese slogans and neons and plaids.

Ursula’s trendspotting career is kicked off when she discovers a “savage girl” living off the land of a city park and commodifies her image. A company that has invented diet water hires Tomorrow, Ltd. to do its ad campaign for which the savage look is used. Chas convinces Ursula to allow Ivy to be the model for the ads. The campaign is successful, but Ivy wants to be even more famous, so Chas sets up a website for her, complete with 24-hour webcams. Meanwhile, Chas’s company is going downhill quickly because none of his clients like his predictions that a new Dark Age is dawning and that

businesses better position themselves to take advantage of it. Ivy catches the attention of the government by making performance art out of destroying currency in front of the webcams, which also gets Chas in trouble as her backer. Ursula blackmails Chas into selling Tomorrow, Ltd. to Couch, right before they discover that Javier has committed suicide and made plans to have himself cryogenically frozen. Ivy then makes several bombs and threatens to blow up her apartment, which gains her lots of extra media attention. When Ursula shows up at her apartment, Ivy decides to deliver her anti-consumerism message to the world, and after giving her speech, abandons the bombs and the website. She and Ursula go for awhile to the rainforest, where they collect insect specimens for preservation. Ivy stays in the rainforest, but Ursula returns to the city with plans to go back to being an artist. Chas is released from jail, and Javier is cryogenically frozen.

Ursula, Javier, and Chas all have their own systems of metaphysics. Ursula's is expressed in the triptychs that she, as a painter, rendered over and over again. Each triptych showed a representation of an infernalized world, the real world, and an idealized world. This conception of reality is clearly Platonic, and is the most complete understanding of reality of all the characters in *The Savage Girl*. But her tripartite understanding of reality makes her unable to settle on a single version of it. Her metaphysics is *not* Platonic in the sense that she cannot figure out which version of the world is infernal and which is ideal; she even believes at one point that she's lost track of which is the real, and this confusion often gives her trouble with assessing the morality of her own actions.

Javier sees the world rather Platonically as well, although instead of three levels of reality, he sees two: the real world of products, and the ideal world that products will lead everyone to. When we get to this ideal world, we will have entered what he calls "The Light Age." Products can allow people to be beautiful, and this is how Javier sees himself fitting in. As a trendspotter, Javier's job is "to give people the beauty they deserve. And from the beauty they will deserve will come the love they deserve. And from love will follow truth" (26). He reiterates this philosophy at a party for Ed Cabaj, the man who will eventually hire Tomorrow, Ltd. to handle the "savage" campaign for diet water. Javier builds a tower of bottles, trays, and party snacks, and explains

"Our world exists only to hold up this other world, this ideal world. It's the world of our dreams, our desires. It's elaborate, it's heavy, and we carry it around with us everywhere. But we don't mind. The more that's up here, the better. Because up here is where we keep all that's best in us. The more that's up here, the richer our imagination becomes. [...] Products are the materials we use to build our world above the world." (42)

The world that would correspond to reality in Ursula's metaphysics is to Javier the world of products, so Javier's metaphysics has versions of the top two elements of Ursula's.

Chas's worldview, on the other hand, has only the bottom two. He, too, sees the world progressing in the same type of way as Javier does, only instead of from the real to the ideal, he sees it going from the real to the infernalized. He sees it also as something to cash in on rather than celebrate. When he takes Ursula to the supermarket for job training, he tells her that surfaces are all people have: "How many of these people do you think ever get to experience a great passion, a great love, a great cause? A product can stand in for those experiences. A surface can stand in for the depths most people

will never know” (63). Chas also gives a speech as part of the presentation of Tomorrow, Ltd.’s trendbook, called *The Lite Age*, which describes a coming world in which “this relativistic array of lifestyle choices will consist not of realities but of illusions, beneath which a far grimmer, absolute reality will remain. It is to the aim of helping marketers exploit these flexible ‘realities’ in order to thrive in the fixed and far more unforgiving reality that the preponderance of *The Lite Age* is dedicated” (134). This worldview has sophistic elements, although Chas does believe there is a single, infernal, reality. Chas repeatedly refers to people as “morons” and “dumbasses,” and unlike Javier clearly does not see them as deserving of beauty, love, or truth. Whereas for Javier products are steps to a better world, for Chas they are part of a system of self-delusion.

Both Javier and Chas are confident enough in their conceptions of reality to risk their careers and lives on them, but Ursula is perpetually uncertain. This uncertainty leaves Ursula vulnerable to being seduced (philosophically and physically) by Javier and then Chas. As Ursula and Javier rollerblade around the city, Javier speaks almost continuously into a microphone connected to Ursula’s headset – she doesn’t have a microphone of her own. Javier is speaking to her in this way ostensibly to train her in trendspotting, but this can also be interpreted as part of an angel-on-the-shoulder trope. He observes what people are wearing, holding, and doing, and it is here that he first explains the optimistic idea of the Light Age and tells Ursula that he and Chas are tracking it as a megatrend (23). Shortly thereafter, Ursula imagines her own version of The Light Age as she’s drifting off “almost unironically” to sleep (32). Although there is no sex scene, we do see the beginning of the physical contact between Javier and Ursula. They touch each other’s hands, and Ursula “can’t remember a time she’s ever felt so comforted by a man, so safe, so tended to” (82). When they wake up in the morning the room is bright with warm sunlight, the curtains are billowing in the breeze, and the bed is “softer, actually, than anything she’s slept on in years” (83, 84). This is exactly the sort of morning and setting that would be associated with the Light Age.

Chas’s seduction of Ursula starts when they’re at the supermarket, and Chas is the devil on the shoulder to Javier’s angel. Javier’s training involved the two of them flying around the city on rollerblades, but Chas’s is the opposite; “with Chas whispering conspiratorially in her ear, she finds herself walking more tentatively, as though the linoleum floor might be mined,” which seems to be a fitting reaction to the Dark Age, or the Lite Age (59). Here Ursula learns about several tactics that sellers use to stimulate consumption. Chas’s seduction of Ursula is not complete, however, until they have sex on the roof of the Black Tower during a power outage. This scene is clearly a temptation scene, not only in terms of sex, but also because Ursula is here persuaded to allow Ivy to be used as the spokesperson for diet water despite her mental instability. She has just learned that Chas had intended to do so all along, and that it had actually been Javier’s idea. Ursula interprets this as a deep betrayal of her on Javier’s part, assuming that while Javier has been sleeping with her, he’s been fantasizing about Ivy. On the roof, Ursula comments that her surroundings are hellish, which also indicates that Chas’s worldview is focused on the infernalized world – and additionally that he is a devil figure. The power goes out when they’re in Chas’s office, and the whole city goes black. They go up to the roof, taking advantage of the fact that the alarm can’t sound. Fires burn on the ground below, the air is hot, bits of

lava are flowing in the volcano, and its stench is nearly paralyzing. Chas argues that allowing Ivy to be the spokesperson for diet water will make Ivy happy and give Ursula all the power she could ever want, but she is not sold on the idea until he offers her an image of herself:

“You’re not a baby inside, do you understand me? You’re a fucking queen inside. You’re regal, powerful, smart, sexy. You’ve got exactly what it takes to rule this shitheap of a world. I knew that from the day you walked into my office, Ursula. [...]” (125)

This is the turning point in the argument. Ursula realizes that the “person he’s describing is who she really is, who she knows she is inside, who she looks for when she looks in the mirror and can sometimes even glimpse for a fleeting moment before the fear and self-hatred chase the vision away” (125). Ursula acknowledges that he is probably just telling her what she wants to hear, but that even if that’s true, she still believes that he’s right. The real temptation is this image of herself.

Javier also articulates an image of Ursula on the first morning that they wake up in bed together. He describes having seen her for the first time and admiring her composure. He says that over the next couple of days he watched her leaving the mental hospital where Ivy was staying and realized that she wasn’t “just strong and cool; [she was] caring and good, too” (86). Clearly, both this image of herself and Chas’s are appealing to Ursula, which is an example of one of Ursula’s main problems: her continually conflicting desires and lack of a consistent sense of identity.

Chas’s worldview only becomes completely clear to Ursula once he presents the trendbook to Tomorrow, Ltd.’s clients, and despite the fact that Ursula has tacitly acknowledged (by sleeping with Chas) that she wants to be powerful in the coming Dark/Lite Age, she finds it profoundly disturbing. She wishes that Javier would “refute Chas’s argument for her point by point, rubbing the numbness from her mind with the heat of his convictions” (134). Clearly Chas’s seduction of Ursula did not overturn Javier’s, even though the two worldviews are patently contradictory. Ursula is conflicted about who and what she wants to be, because she finds both men’s perceptions of her appealing. This internal conflict plays into Chas’s belief in the power of products; much of his theory is based on the idea that every successful product has a “paradessence,” or paradoxical essence: the product promises to satisfy two opposing desires simultaneously. Of course the product doesn’t have to actually deliver on its promise – the customer just has to believe in that possibility enough to purchase it.

Chas’s Lite Age speech is significant because it is one of the many instances of commodification in the novel. In *The Savage Girl*, commodification is not only a constant threat to original ideas, but also a mechanism continually in motion. Everyone and everything is a potential target for commodification. In the case of the trendbook, Chas has taken and reinterpreted Javier’s concept of the Light Age to make it useful in the pursuit of profit. Instances of commodification in *The Savage Girl* often involve a character giving a speech, presenting an idea to a new group while simultaneously reinterpreting it.

In his speech, Chas contextualizes The Lite Age within marketing history. He explains Ernest Dichter’s argument that Soviet propaganda was designed to create contentment with inadequate living conditions, while American advertising is intended to create discontent with adequate living conditions. Although Chas does not cite Thomas Frank himself, Shakar cites *Conquest of Cool* as one of his sources

in an acknowledgment, and its influence is apparent. Chas explains several of Frank's ideas about advertising, including Volkswagen's groundbreaking use of irony in advertising starting in the 1960s.

"[...] The Volkswagen campaign showed marketers how to short-circuit these traditional world-disclosing and problem-solving functions of irony. It showed them how to co-opt and subvert any ironic critique of consumerism by harnessing it to the support of a chimerical 'alternative consumerism,' as represented by a set of products proclaiming themselves to be free of—even somehow *outside of*—the lies, cynicism, and trickery of commercial culture. Furthermore, by absorbing the critique of the pitch into the pitch itself, they created an environment in which there seemed to *be* no outside to consumerism, no dialectical antithesis, thereby bringing all attempts at dialectical reasoning to a screeching halt." (138-139)

Chas goes on to articulate the party line of marketers, namely that that which has come before – irony – is not working anymore. When he posits the idea of postirony, or postironic consciousness, he is expanding on Dichter's and Frank's ideas based on his own observations. Whereas criticism of products may have caused people to stop consuming those products in the past, now "critical and uncritical responses are indistinguishable" (140). Criticism of consumption will not cause people to abstain from consumption or consume some alternative to what is being criticized; instead, they will critique and consume everything (140). They will consume because marketers will, according to Chas, "seek to foster in the consumer a mystical relationship with consumption" (140).

It is highly likely that the mystical relationship that marketers should seek to cultivate between consumers and consumption will be based on claims such as the ones that Javier believes, namely that consumption can produce beauty, which will lead to love, which will lead to truth. However, instead of a Light Age, where we can assume that "Light" means knowledge of the truth and happiness, Chas believes there will be a Lite Age – that is, Reality Lite. The term "Lite," which usually connects diet versions to "real" foods, indicates that the world(s) consumers will create for themselves will lack a degree of reality; in other words, "this relativistic array of lifestyle choices will consist not of realities but of illusions, beneath which a far grimmer, absolute reality will remain" (134). Postirony will "schizophrenize the cultural unconscious," which explains to Ursula why Chas thinks that Ivy represents the future (142).

In Chapter 1, I described the shift toward customizable and niche products and explained how Frank's analysis of hip consumerism can be expanded to help us understand these new trends. Shakar is also expanding on Frank's analysis with the concept of postirony, and seems to anticipate, or at least allow for, the trend toward customization. The "mystical relationship" that consumers will ideally (for companies) have to their own consumption is the sense that they can have anything they want, and customization would seem to make this possible. "Through consumption consumers will be gods," Chas says; "outside of consumption they will be nothing" (140).

Any critique of the product is subverted when it is integrated into the product pitch itself. While it may seem farfetched that this would actually happen, it seems to have happened already in the Scion campaign. Toyota hired graffiti artists to paint Scions that had been wrapped in plastic, and the plastic is being displayed as installation art around the country. While most of the graffiti artists

produced images in their own traditional styles, one wrote an anti-consumerism and anti-Scion message on his car, and this item will be displayed alongside all the others (Griffith). Additionally, Scion participated in “Sponsorship,” a gallery show that consists of nothing but the logos that frequently decorate actual art exhibits. “Sponsorship” is a critique of, or at least a comment on, the growing relationship between art and commerce, but many major brands happily paid to participate. Jeri Yoshizu, a Scion promotions manager, said that she “did feel that we were being mocked, but what the hell” (Walker). What the hell indeed. It doesn’t matter that “Sponsorship” is mocking or critiquing the companies, because the companies’ voluntary participation shows that they’re in on the joke. You can’t mock them because they’re already mocking themselves.

Whereas Chas cynically uses his understanding of the system to help companies exploit consumers, his customers prefer to believe that they are doing the opposite, or to at least ignore the moral implications of something that is “just business.” So Chas’s pitch turns out to be too truthful for the marketers to accept; it scares nearly all of them off, probably because he’s stated too plainly how marketers are actually making people’s lives worse. In addition to being an unsuccessful approach to winning business for Tomorrow, Ltd., it has a profoundly negative effect on Javier, who did not know how his ideas were going to be used. Javier falls into a serious depressive phase, and when Ursula visits him, she sees that he’s torn down his detailed timeline of trends, which started in ancient times and ended in the future, where he had projected the Light Age (165).

The way that Chas uses Javier’s ideas can be thought of as a type of commodification, because Chas was intending for the Lite Age to be more marketable than the Light Age would have been. While the Light Age would have been an end in itself (i.e. happiness for humanity), the Lite Age is a means to the end of selling more goods and perpetuating consumerism. As Ernest Dichter might say, happiness for humanity is just not profitable. This is a more philosophical sense of commodification than the one central to the novel, i.e. Ursula’s commodification of the savage “look.” This instance of commodification is important because as Ursula learns how to market a new look, she comes to understand what is required of her as a commercial artist (as opposed to a “real” one).

The book opens with a description of the savage girl working in the park. Two men with “sleepy smiles” watch her work, “lulled by the savage girl’s mysterious, eye-of-the-hurricane calm” in the middle of the bustling park (4). Ursula has been moving from bench to bench around the girl in a circle

trying to get up the nerve to speak to her but unable to rid herself of the ridiculous idea that the girl simply won’t understand, that she communicates only by means of whistles, clicks of the tongue, or tattoos stamped out on the cobblestones, and that even this rudimentary language she reserves solely for communing with the spirits that toss in the rising steam of hot-dog and pretzel carts. (4)

Although it may not have been intended, this description of the placid girl occupying the center of a circle that Ursula is making around her is reminiscent of the language theories of Saussure and Derrida. She is – or at least Ursula feels that she is – the language-less and unspeakable center (“eye-of-the-

hurricane”) of a system, because she seems to be completely authentic. In other words, her outward appearance accurately reflects her being.

Derrida says that “the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form,” but also that it “closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible. As center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible” (279). The realization that there is no center, no transcendental signified inside or outside the structure of the world, “extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely” (280). But this result would not only apply to the play of language; considering this on the level of individual identity, the loss of a transcendental signified such as a Christian God would seem to extend the domain and play of the self infinitely as well. The idea of the self as constructed has extended into everyday discourse, as the excerpt from the Scion website shows – we must struggle to shape a desirable identity. But the idea that you have no God-given soul and are merely the coincidence of biology and the cultural forces surrounding you is a disconcerting one, so there is also the message that your self does have a center, namely whatever this individual consciousness is. The resulting struggle is one in which you must “be yourself;” you must organize every aspect of your life into a coherent reflection of the conscious self at the center of your being.

People can try to “express” their interior identities by partaking in trends of fashion, such as the savage look, but by the time they do so the look will have lost the authenticity that it had when it originated with the girl in the park. The savage look is authentic when the person who sports it sleeps outdoors, kills and cooks all her own food, and makes her own clothing, because the look is coincidental to the lifestyle, which is a means to the simple end of survival. The upper-class women who eventually purchase the look have absolutely no connection to its origins; the clothes serve the look, which is for these consumers an end in itself.

I say that the savage girl herself is, in one sense, the center of a system, because she exhibits the extreme integrity of a coherent self. Her actions and her appearance seem to flow from a powerful individual consciousness in a remarkable authentic “self-expression” that everyone is exhorted to attain. As a center, she exhibits the presence and non-presence that Derrida ascribes to the center of metaphysical systems, because it’s not clear that she is conscious at all; her integrity may arise from insanity. The commodity system works by finding and mimicking the expressions of authenticity that it can find, and then selling the expressions to consumers striving to show that they’re “being themselves,” but of course the selling renders the expression inauthentic.

In order to commodify the Savage Girl, Ursula must progress from being a real artist to being a commercial one. Upon examining Ursula’s first sketches of the Savage Girl, Chas tells her that she’s a good artist, but “*too* good. There’s too much dirt here. You’ve got to clean it up. We need it colorful, light, airbrushy. Can you use an airbrush?” (11). Ursula realizes that “he doesn’t want a good artist; he wants a bad one” (11). Ursula decides that creating the kind of images that Chas wants will just be another artistic skill she has to learn, but after she works up more sketches of the Savage Girl, she still hasn’t given Chas what he wants. “‘That face,’ he says. ‘Only a mother could love that face. A mother wombat’” (58). He tells her that the image is too “*real*” and explains that “you need contradictions to

make an ideal” (58). Ursula has represented the Savage Girl as being dirty and tough – that is, she has represented her realistically. But by the time she presents the “savage” idea to the company responsible for diet water, she has succeeded in making the savage look into an ideal, complete with the necessary contradictions.

The image Ursula eventually renders is “voluptuous and strong” with long but not-too-thin legs, a straight but soft Mohican, a bold but demure posture, and wears high-heeled moccasins. “You can look and look and never see it, never as a whole; your eyes shift restlessly from paradox to paradox. [...] You can look and look and look, an endless whirligig of unsatiated desire” (96). In other words, your desire to mentally reconcile the contradictions could cause you to consume (or “look and look” at) the image forever.

The contradictions inherent in the diet water campaign are not limited to the image of the savage girl. Ursula half-intends for the campaign to damage the underpinnings of consumerism itself. She suspects that it could be a kind of “guerilla campaign, waged behind enemy lines” because part of the savage message is, at least as embodied by the savage girl, a rejection of consumer culture and its trappings. Despite the overt message of encouragement to drink diet water, Ursula thinks that people may find a use for “the savage girl’s message of autonomy from consumerism” (95).

Paradoxically (of course!) Ursula pitches this message to the diet water company as an explanation for how and why it will be successful. Ursula’s presentation of the savage look is similar to Chas’s presentation of *The Lite Age* because they’re both repackaging an idea and presenting it to a group of people who want to use it to make money. And although Ursula doesn’t realize it, her pitch of the savage look partakes of exactly the irony that Chas later explains in his Lite Age presentation, because she pitches the savage look as a critique of consumerism. She tells the marketers that “The thing people are beginning to want more than anything else [...] is to be free of you. *They want not to want you; they want to not want anything you have to offer*” (97). The self-sufficient savage embodies the freedom from consumption that Ursula believes that people crave, but, of course, the ads will link this freedom to the consumption of the diet water.

The diet water itself – or “litewater,” as it’s dubbed by the time the marketing campaign is launched – is an artificial form of water that “passes through the body completely unabsorbed” (44). The company believes that demand for litewater will come from dieters who are plagued by water retention. Javier and Ursula find out about it at a party that Javier has, unbeknownst to the host, crashed in order to coolhunt. Ed Cabaj first tells them about it, and Javier reluctantly asks, “but won’t people be thirsty?” (44). Cabaj replies that of course they will, and it will just cause them to buy more. Litewater is the epitome of empty consumption; its soul purpose to be drunk. In fact, if people were to drink only litewater, they would probably die. It is a bastardization of water, the most basic necessity for human life. This company doesn’t care if a product is harmful to people, especially not if the harm creates more demand for it. Litewater, in that sense, is a satirical version of products like cigarettes or alcohol.

But like the marketable image of the savage girl, as well as products introduced to the market in the late ‘90s such as Olean, the paradox of litewater is that it is intended purely for consumption yet cannot *actually* be consumed. Olean worked the same way – it, unlike real fat, passes through the

body without being absorbed. The contradictory image of the savage girl, because it cannot be understood as a whole, cannot actually be consumed either. The audience “looks and looks” but cannot understand it. When at the end of the book Ursula returns to Mid City, she has plans to create a piece of installation art that “will be wholly graspable in a single insight, a single moment of recognition” (273). This shows that Ursula is eventually able to evolve beyond what the marketing world needs her to be, and that she can use the experience of giving people an image of something they could never have in order to learn how to give them something that they can understand and use.

Ursula’s savage trend has completely different effects than she had expected and intended it to. Instead of associations with “values such as simplicity, autonomy, inner growth, spirituality, [and] self-empowerment, [...] interest has surged in bizarre rituals and acts of bondage and scarification” (148). Also, because of the association of leather with savagery, “the most credible savages are the wealthiest and most refined” because they can afford real animal skins (148). Despite feeling disappointed and cheated at first, Ursula concludes that it should be enough that “the savage girl is an image people value, one for which they have use, whatever use that might be” (149). She rationalizes the failure of the campaign to advance anti-consumerism ideals by appreciating that she’s been able to affect people at all, acknowledging that she could never reach such big audiences with the paintings she had been doing before.

Ivy’s relationship with the concept of commodification is complicated. As the model for the litewater campaign, she is the embodiment of the commodification of the savage image. The original savage girl’s look is given paradoxes in Ivy’s body. However, Ivy herself is in a sense uncommodifiable because she started off thinking of herself as a product. She has never had a particularly forceful personality, and Ursula believed when they were young that “deep down Ivy thought that nothing she did could possibly matter” (29). She became a model because that’s what people had told her she should do.

When Ivy starts to lose touch with reality, she begins to believe that what she does matters to everyone in the world – that she is the “drain magnet in the glamour continuum” (16). She believes that she was being controlled by the Imagineers up until the Resistance contacted her, and she wants to become famous because that’s what the Resistance has told her to do. Chas, who will do anything she wants, sets up the website and six webcams for her in the all-white bedroom that she never leaves. This setting is significant because it is similar to the apartment Ivy had had before her breakdown. Ursula had learned while reading up for her trendspotting job that “white, empty space [...] is the number-one glamour cue in advertisements” (54). The entire apartment was white, and Ursula believes that this was because Ivy “aspired to the absolute zero of glamour” (54). With the addition of the web-cams, Ivy can finally be observed by the world in all her glamour, placed as a product would be.

Ivy chats online with her viewers, explaining her story about the Imagineers and various characters, and a scrolling message perpetually requests money. Ursula observes that Ivy’s theories about her place in the universe have retroactively come true. Because of the website,

her every move really is scrutinized by unseen masses. And when she talks to the cameras about her invented origins in the magical past and the mercenary future, people respond in kind,

via e-mail and chat lines, asking her to elaborate, pretending to be good witches or nefarious Imagineers or trickster trendspotters. In that little room, reality for Ivy has become something entirely malleable under the force of her will. All she has to do is imagine something, and people around the world will strive—whether out of sympathy, or for the sake of amusement, or for the sheer drama of the thing—to make it so. (195)

To Chas, what Ivy is doing is the ultimate example of postironic consciousness, because she is creating an imaginary world for herself in which she is at the center, and the world seems to her to be responding to her delusions.

Several characters around Ivy interpret her new life differently. Gwennan simply thinks that Ivy is doing highly successful performance art; “It fitted Gwennan’s definition of art—something done to repudiate the world in a public way—to perfection” (201). Gwennan even asks to get in on the ground floor of the company if Ivy decides to go public with it. But despite these arguments from her mother, Ursula cannot help but believe that Ivy might be better off in an institution. She fears that “what Gwennan had done with that deranged patient of hers, Ursula had done with her own sister, helping to turn a beautiful girl inside out in order to make a point about the ugliness she herself saw everywhere” (201). Despite the fact that Ivy seems happy doing what she is doing, Ursula remains conflicted over the decision she made to allow Ivy to get back into public life.

Ursula is also bothered by the fact that Chas is not alarmed for Ivy. He displays about the same attitude as he did on the roof of the Black Tower toward any form of psychiatric help for Ivy, claiming that the pile of money now decorating her bedroom is more help than any psychiatrist could offer. He believes that her website is the perfect demonstration of postirony; it includes elements of the tribalism and invented origins that he had been predicting, and the illusive reality that Ivy is creating for herself seems to fit well within the parameters for the Lite Age. Ursula tries to move him with the claim that Ivy is destroying herself, and if he cares about her at all, he shouldn’t let her. Chas replies, “people destroy themselves, Ursula. All the time. Sometimes that’s what it takes to keep themselves entertained” (198).

Ivy, however, doesn’t destroy herself. Her website/performance art piece ends with a speech that in some ways mirrors Ursula’s “savage” pitch and Chas’s Lite Age presentation, although rather than commodify anything, she de-commodifies herself. Whereas up until this point Ivy has been an image to be consumed, she now relates to the audience an anti-consumerism message that for its directness has a better chance of success than Ursula’s savage campaign. She rearticulates the details of her worldview, but broadens the scope to include the audience, who she claims were also kidnapped from the past. After a description of the “old ways,” Ivy says,

Look deep into your souls and try to remember the old ways. We were a great tribe, living in harmony with the land. Try to remember. You’ve been hypnotized, but try to remember, and try to bring back the old ways. They’ll try to stop you. They’ll give you money and they’ll take away the money. They’ll give you fame and they’ll take away the fame. They’ll keep doing it over and over. They’ll keep you spinning and make you dizzy. But we were a great tribe. We need to forget about all this and go back, go back home where we belong. If

we all get together and decide to go back, there's nothing they can do to stop us. There won't be anything they can do then. (257)

Ivy said, back when she was demanding that Chas make her famous, that she wasn't sure why she needed it, she just knew that she did, and that once she was famous, she'd know what it was for (157). Clearly, this speech is it. Once she finishes speaking, she can abandon the website and the fame, content to know that she's successfully carried out her mission. Ivy's postirony seems to have only been in service of a greater goal. She is still deluded, because she still believes that she was kidnapped from the past, but her vision of the past and her exhortation on how to live can still be useful to her audience. Ivy has described the alienation from the earth, from one's own emotions, and from other people that consumerism tends to perpetuate, and articulated the need to "go back" to these things.

Ivy's de-commodification of herself leaves her better off than she was when the novel started, although neither Javier nor the savage girl seem to be so lucky. Once Javier understands what Chas means by postirony – that is, as a mechanism not for leading people to Truth, but for encouraging more consumption – he can no longer cling to his optimism. When Javier, Chas, and Ursula first met at the playground, he declares himself "totally a kid person" and says, "'they can tie the skyscrapers into Krazy Straws. They can shake the sea and the sky into Seven-Up. [...] Kids are about *possibilities*'" (7). It is worth noting that both the creative gestures that he mentions here involve products; Chas's message makes him realize that children are actually hurt by products. He says that "we're starving them of love so they'll buy more of what we sell them. They think they're buying love, but it *isn't* love" (167). Which is why it is significant that when he reappears, he shows up at Ursula's apartment with a child to whom he has become a Big Brother. He has also resigned his position at Tomorrow, Ltd.

The boy's name is Eeven. This may reflect Javier's emotional state, which Ursula notices is "neither manic nor depressed but somehow perfectly balanced" (222). Javier has brought with him a pomegranate and a bag of jellybeans, items that clearly fit into one of the major operative dichotomies of the novel, i.e. that of real/authentic vs. imitations. Javier tells Eeven that jellybeans are "magical" because they imitate flavors so well, but that pomegranates are "sublime," because "you enter a compact with it. You scatter its seed. You make its life a part of you, and it makes your life a part of it" (222). This distinction can be easily understood to apply to the difference between the commodified "savage" look and the look of the savage girl herself. The girl is very much in touch with the physical world that her clothes and food are a part of. She is a producer in the same sense as someone who scatters the seed of a pomegranate would be.

When Javier asks Eeven what "magical" and then "sublime" mean, Eeven replies in a "rapid, breathless monotone" and what he says sounds like descriptions of action in a video game (221). Eeven's delivery sounds like it exhibits a waning of affect such as is described by Jameson. Scenes in which Ursula goes to an arcade in the mall looking for Javier share this quality. She sees "a pack of white teenage boys crouch forward on wheel-less motorcycles, tilting left and right and left again to the sounds of gunning engines as the screens light up their greasy, bug-eyed faces" (203). "[A]ll she sees is children, awkward, isolate, their bodies crammed to bursting with caffeine and sugar and pop music and cologne and perfume and hair gel and pimple cream and growth hormone-treated hamburger meat and

premature sex drives and costly, fleeting, violent sublimations” (203). Eeven himself only speaks when spoken to, and most of his dialogue is video talk.

The children in the arcade are “cadres in training for the Lite Age,” or, in other words, in training for a life of consumption (203). Jean Kilbourne, a research scholar and psychologist, has said that advertising is such a successful system of education because few people understand that it actually *is* education (*The Ad & The Ego*). Javier’s idea about the “Conspiracy Against the Children” is a recognition of this fact and a condemnation of the treatment of children as a useful part of the economy – that is, buying power – regardless of whether such an education will be good for them. Shakar is not the only author to make this observation; in Chuck Pahalniuk’s *Fight Club*, Tyler Durdin says, “We’ve all been raised to believe that we’ll be millionaires, rock stars, or movie gods, but we won’t. We’re slowly learning this fact, and we’re very, very pissed off.” *Fight Club* is more about what to do with that anger, but the movie’s resounding popularity could indicate that such a feeling is common.

The children in the arcade seem to be buying wholeheartedly into the myth, but another group of teenagers in the novel, the Invisigoths, display an alternative response to the world. Ursula and Chas see a group of Invisigoths when they meet in the statue of Felix Rodriguez to discuss Javier and coolhunt. The Invisigoths “sit quietly, looking everywhere but at the view, dressed uniformly in battleship gray – gray trenchcoats, gray boots, gray-dyed hair. One of them, a girl with a pale face and gray lipstick, stares back at them with white, eyeless eyes” (160). Their uniform grayness could be an expression of opposition to the ever-changing colors of the fashion world. The white contact lenses shut down possibilities for non-verbal communication—you wouldn’t even be able to tell what the wearer is looking at. Given the amount of market research being done on children, teens, and people in their early 20s, the Invisigoths might feel like they’re protecting themselves from letting others see what they’re paying attention to. They try to be as invisible as possible because they feel all-too visible and therefore vulnerable.

The Invisigoths seem to be in the minority, however. When asked, Eeven indicates that he prefers the jellybeans to the pomegranate. Javier comments to Ursula that Eeven’s generation will have “no sublimity at all, only magic,” and he wonders what they’ll be like (222). One indication of what they’ll be like lies in the detail that Eeven’s eyes are strikingly similar to Ivy’s – so far apart that “when they blink in sync, it comes as a mild surprise: she was almost expecting them to operate independently of one another” (218). Given what Ivy was like as a child, this could imply that kids growing up now, like Eeven and Ivy, see themselves primarily as consumers, and perhaps even products as well. Javier’s remark that they’re aware of how they’re being used lends credence to this reading. Like everything else in the novel, though, the Conspiracy Against the Children idea isn’t safe from commodification, and Javier’s fellow trendspotters are the ones who co-opt it.

The pomegranate has biblical significance because it, rather than the apple, may have been the fruit with which the serpent tempted Eve. So when Javier says that the next generation will only have magic – represented by the jellybeans – he’s concluding that true knowledge – represented by the pomegranate – will be lost. It seems that Javier now realizes that a world full of magic products actually

isn't superior to the present uglier and more difficult world. As he says, "I like pomegranates better anyway. Jellybeans may be magical. But pomegranates are sublime" (221).

When Javier overdoses on sleeping pills and has himself cryogenically frozen, planning to be reanimated once the Light Age is upon humanity (which he estimates will take about 500 years), we must seriously doubt if he actually believes that this will happen. He does not explain in the letter to Ursula he leaves how humanity will get past the Lite Age and into the Light Age. But he cannot let go of the idea: "He had not been wrong, he assured her, just a little premature, a little ahead of his time" (243). Ursula and Couch find him in a tub of ice in his room at the Pangloss Hotel. "Pangloss" means "blindly or naively optimistic," which, along with Javier's history of foolhardy optimism, leads us to conclude that he had no choice but to believe that the Light Age would eventually come and that he could trade up his current life for a better one in the future. He has arranged for Ursula to, after living a full natural life, be cryogenically frozen and revived along with him; however, he could apparently not bear to live a full life in such a world himself.

When Javier shows up at Ursula's apartment with Eeven, she has just cut herself. Although Ursula has concrete reasons for doing this (which involve a throbbing emotional pain in her chest that she hopes the cut will either drain or distract her from), she nonetheless scolds herself for jumping on the cutting bandwagon. Women cutting themselves is an important figure in the novel; each of the major female characters does so at some point. For example, part of Ivy's breakdown involved her drawing red marks on her body and then cutting along the lines. This image relates to a game that Ivy tells a psychiatrist in the elevator of the insane asylum that she and Ursula played when they were little. "Urse was always the surgeon because she was the oldest. She gave me nose jobs and tummy tucks and face-lifts and boob jobs. She'd draw lines on me with a red Magic Marker, and then she'd pretend to cut and snip. She'd pinch me to make it seem real. I think sometimes I really thought it was real" (105). This is reminiscent of Gwennan's job, of course, but it's also related to Ivy's body image and the desire to attain the ideal female body. She ended up really cutting herself because she "figured out" that the strange images and voices she'd been seeing and hearing were from the Resistance and that the Resistance wanted her to use her image to save the world (155). Chas had thought she was crazy, or on drugs, and told her that her "image would only make people feel unhappy and lousy about themselves" (156). This persuaded her to cut her face, but when she couldn't bring herself to do that, she cut the rest of her body. She says she couldn't cut her face because she thought Ursula would have been disappointed in her.

The savage girl, on the other hand, does cut her face, which Ursula discovers almost immediately after she and Couch have turned Javier's "Conspiracy against the Children" idea into another (perhaps, Ursula thinks, guerilla) marketing campaign. "With a surge of terror, Ursula realizes that the markings are deliberate: small, red, sickle-shaped scars, densely packed, all over her face, the sides of her shaven head, the length and circumference of her neck. The welts appear on her arms as well" (182). The marks seem to have come from the double-edged razors that the savage girl has among her belongings. Ursula interprets the sight as being a direct result of her own actions. "Those scars, she has decided, originated in the depths of her own twisted, selfish brain. She turned the girl's

self-expression into a commodity, forcing her to differentiate herself even further by doing something no one else would do” (185). The savage girl, however, has probably not noticed the savage trend for which she is the basis; she doesn’t even understand what’s happening when Ursula tries to offer her money, so it’s likely that she’s not up-to-date on fashion trends. Ursula’s interpretation of the sight gives us insight into her own assessment of the morality of her actions. She clearly feels guilty about what she did with the savage campaign, and she similarly berates herself while Ivy is participating in the litewater photo shoot, although she admits to feeling mostly relief when the shoot goes well.

Ursula’s sense that her own mind directly caused the savage girl to scar herself is similar to her reaction to Javier knocking on her door immediately after she’s cut herself. “Her mind made her cut herself with an X-acto blade and then made Javier appear in her doorway like some kind of saintly apparition. But no, her mind had nothing to do with it. He’s returned” (219). Her problem figuring out whether she herself is willing events to happen indicates that she’s struggling a bit to stay in touch with reality. When she cuts herself, she thinks, “this is what they wanted? This is what Ivy and the savage girl wanted?” but then “the pain surges, and then she understands: the real pain, the real existence of her body, grotesquely needful, bleeding, in an ugly room. The rush is reality itself” (217). In Chas’s conception of the world, the pleasures of consumerism hide the world that Ursula has just cut herself back to. She had been enjoying Ivy’s fame, and her own lesser fame, and the money they had been making, but this action brings her back to reality.

For each of these women, cutting is a form of control. Ivy thought that she could prevent her beauty from causing others unhappiness by cutting herself. The savage girl, intentionally or not, reasserted her individuality and separateness by “doing something no one else would do” (185). And Ursula’s cutting is an escape from the world of pleasure and luxury that consumerism had tempted her into. The advertising messages for beauty products that are aimed at women try to enhance their dissatisfaction with their bodies first, in order to get the women to fight against their own ugliness with products. The first part of the messages seem to work; after cutting, Ursula grits her teeth and asks herself, “Why do all the women she knows hate themselves?” (217). Within the novel, cutting is a misplaced expression of the body hatred at the same time as it is a refusal to turn to consumption to battle against it by “improving” the body. It is not as rebellious an action as loving one’s body would be, but it is a move towards rejection of consumption as a problem-solver.

However, even this rebellion is ripe for the relentless forces of commodification. I have already mentioned that the savage trend sparks interest in scarification. This happens even before the savage girl cuts herself. Further, though, Ivy appears in the litewater ads with her scars unretouched. Her scars, and even by extension her illness, are thus glamorized. The scars fit in with the look created by Ivy’s jaggedly cut hair and eyeshadow that “gave her eyes a puffy, beaten look” (145). They also fit in beautifully with the new line of warpaint makeup that Avon launches. The warpaint idea was conceived of separately from the savage campaign, but Javier notes that they’ll have “synergy” on it (11). The red Mercurochrome lines that Ivy drew before cutting herself were also interpreted by the public as war paint. So even this anguished expression of body hatred gets co-opted into the conception of the ideal body.

Despite the portrayal of commodification as a relentless force in the world, Shakar leaves open the possibility for art to function in opposition to marketing and advertising. Only after Ursula has wandered in the desert of the marketing world can she understand what is needed from her in the art world and how to deliver it. And, though there is no protection from commodification, its existence has not actually squelched the desire to create art within the individual, in this case Ursula.

Attention Shoppers: Authenticity is Dead, But Please Don't Stop Looking for It

Now that I've offered analyses of the novels *The Savage Girl* and *Pattern Recognition*, as well as of the Scion advertising campaign, we can draw some important conclusions about the relationships among marketing, identity, consumption, and creative expression in American culture at the turn of the 21st Century. Too little critical academic attention is currently being given to marketing/advertising as a cultural force in itself. Although advertising does play an important role in the ideological construction of its audience through race, gender, class, and sexuality, these factors are secondary to its main purpose, which is the construction of *any* audience member as a consumer. By focusing so much of our critical attention on demographic factors, scholars are confronting symptoms of consumer capitalism rather than its root. The ideological construction of subjects as consumers affects all demographic groups, including the currently unpopular ones containing white males. When the problems that we focus on are figured in terms of one demographic group against another (and these problems no doubt exist), the most pressing problem, i.e. the destructive consequences of everyone's consumption on *everyone*, is overlooked.

The increasing imposition of capital and business interests into the academy in the form of endowed chairs, research grants (usually to the sciences) from corporations, and the practice of gearing classroom practices toward those that will be expected of people in the workforce is in many places edging out the teaching of anything that does not lead directly to maximization of profits. It's hard to imagine, for example, ADM or Ford funding the creation of a Consumers' Studies Department that would have goals of study similar to a Women's Studies or African American Studies Department. And there is no reason that they should or would even want to invite consumers to be critical of their practices and the assumptions that they work under. It is nevertheless important to work toward a body of thoughtful analysis and eventually critique of consumerism. The novels and ad campaign that I have been discussing offer an excellent opportunity to think about subjects' construction of themselves as consumers presently and where the marketers might be wanting to go in the future.

I wrote in the first chapter about the recent trend in advertising and marketing toward customization, using the Toyota Scion as an example. Consumers are invited to create their ideal car by choosing a combination of details from a predetermined range of selections, thereby supposedly shrugging off the strictures of mass production. I also noted that the Mass Society critique of the 1950s was based already on the assumption that what one chooses to consume – be it a house, a car, clothes, or any number of other things – has some effect on oneself. If consumption were conceived to be unrelated to one's values or oneself, then it wouldn't have been such an urgent problem that Americans were living in increasing numbers in identical suburban houses and driving identical cars. (Of course, I want to argue here that consumption is important and it is political, because people do seem to believe that it is related to their identities – or, in other words, the advertising campaigns based on this idea have been successful.) The mass society critique and the mindset of its adopters created the environment in which what Thomas Frank terms “hip consumerism” could emerge. This is the same cultural environment that is now fostering the “customization as panacea” trend. Rebellion against mass culture is always figured through consumption in images perpetuated by corporations through the media, rather

than as anything potentially harmful to the consumer capitalist system. True rebellion would probably include rejection of the excesses of consumption through a reconceptualization of our relationship to the earth and its resources, but this would not be good for business and is therefore not even acknowledged. We are instead to put our thought and energy into selecting the proper combination of Scion features or particulars of our morning coffee² that will offer us maximal consuming pleasure – or earning the money that will allow us to do so.

Choosing the features of a product that will best suit us requires a certain amount of reflection. Naturally the self we reflect on in this situation is the self-as-consumer, which requires that the organization of one's opinions of oneself center on what one ought to consume. This could be based on one's general likes or dislikes, past experiences, and/or friends' opinions. It is pleasant to play the role of a consumer, because you get attention and have people doing their best to fulfill your desires. But people are not just expected to be consumers when they are actually consuming things – they are frequently addressed as consumers during their leisure time and through a growing variety of channels within popular culture. Louis Althusser says, in "Ideology and the State," that "ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing" (174). "The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing;" that is, subjects of ideology are always-already subjects. I would like to point out the similarities between ideology's metaphorical hailing of the subject and advertisements' very literal hailing of its audience. Any advertisement addresses people as potential consumers; in the futuristic film *Minority Report* (2002), this practice is taken to its logical conclusion when the ads surrounding the main character, John Anderton, frequently call out to him by name. Each of the thousands of advertisements people are exposed to in the average day asks them to, if only fleetingly, consider being a consumer of those products. It would be surprising if these experiences *didn't* add up to a self-concept that includes a vision of oneself as a consumer.

Real content and advertising have also merged in many cultural products, especially popular entertainment. For years, women's and girls' magazines have been forced for financial reasons to include "complementary copy," which is positive portrayal and information about products sold by sponsors that isn't identified as ad copy (Steinem 134). It appears that the magazine has conducted objective reviews of the products described, or even mentioned them offhand, when it is actually just printing articles meant to please the sponsors. The practice of "product placement" is simpler; companies pay producers of television shows or movies to include the consumption of their product in the content. Characters conspicuously drink Coke, drive Fords, or have boxes of Tide sitting on their washing machines.

Imagining various consumptive pleasures for ourselves is admittedly a fun pastime, so it makes sense that so many advertisements invite us to form a mental image of ourselves enjoying the service or product at hand. Product placement invites a more subtle version of this; if we're supposed to emulate

² Starbucks recently published "Make it Your Drink: A Guide to Starbucks Coffee," a 22-page guide to ordering tips and lingo.

the characters in their beauty, their toughness, or their witty repartee, then if the products are associated with these things, we may not even be conscious of how our opinion of the products is being affected. Commercials that focus more on the product being in a cool context than on the qualities of the product itself do this all the time; what makes product placement different from and more insidious than commercials is that the critical mindset that one might automatically slip into upon seeing a commercial is usually not the mindset one uses to watch an episode of a sitcom or a movie. We are more likely to be open to something we have specifically chosen to watch, and are more likely to be emulating the characters and situations therein. Our desires for our own lives are reflected and shaped by what we see, and we enjoy imagining ourselves having aspects of the characters' lives.

The scenes in *The Savage Girl* in which Javier and then Chas directly present an image of Ursula to herself are excellent examples of this process. Both men tell Ursula that she is something she wants to be; Javier tells her that she's a good sister, and Chas tells her that she can be a powerful businesswoman. These statements persuade Ursula to see merit in each of their worldviews, because she would have an identity that she desires within each scheme. In advertising, companies can tie these images of what people want to be to the use of their products. Products geared toward children provide a multitude of examples of this. For instance, Jif's slogan, "Choosy Moms Choose Jif," clearly implies that good mothers, the ones who care about their children, would only serve this particular brand of peanut butter to their kids. A good mother is a good consumer.

However, imaginary concepts of the self do not just arise in advertising in order to lure people into consumption. Ursula understands that people, with varying degrees of consciousness, can and do control the way they see themselves (with an eye toward how others see them as well) through consumption. Knowing this, however, leads her to stubbornly refuse to partake in this practice herself. Ursula wants what consumerism has to offer, namely "money and fame and respect and other things she doesn't have and will never have," but she'll "never stop hating herself for wanting" them (31). Americans learn at a young age that living a meaningful life seemingly requires the pursuit of these things, and Ursula's resistance to them, as well as her knowledge of the ways in which people create the impression of success, prevent her from feeling like her life has any meaning at all.

Ursula's consciousness of self-creation through consumption is exhibited when she notices and reflects on Chas's trenchcoat, which has a very tall turned-up collar:

No doubt within months half the city will be wearing this collar. It will make the wearers appear to themselves more dramatic, more intriguing, for they will have become the kind of people who wear trenchcoats with tall collars. Ursula will not get one herself. But only out of obstinacy. She will want one. (8)

Ursula is right that the look will catch on; at the end of the novel, one of the men called in to deal with Ivy's bomb threat sports a trenchcoat with "an eye-catchingly tall collar" (246). The product itself, Ursula knows, can have a noticeable impact on a person's self-image. It's not inconceivable that this different self-image could cause a person to behave differently as well.

It is significant that Ursula realizes that the trenchcoat will change the way people appear "to themselves." In order for people to consciously sculpt a self-image, it is extremely helpful to see

themselves from the point of view of someone outside their own bodies. Mirrors serve this basic purpose, of course. There's a wonderful scene in the movie *Mean Girls* (2004) in which three "Plastics" (gorgeous and popular high school girls) gather in front of a mirror and each takes turns offering a criticism of a specific part of her body. They then look to the fourth girl, Cady, who has recently transferred to their school from being homeschooled in Africa her whole life, and is thus unfamiliar with this practice. She has to come up with something quickly, and offers "sometimes I have really bad breath in the morning," to which the Plastics respond "ew." This scene highlights the fact that such critical body-consciousness does not occur naturally; Cady has to learn that it is expected of her. She needs to internalize an external image of herself, so that she can know what to worry about when there isn't a mirror nearby.

Both *The Savage Girl* and *Pattern Recognition* deal with this need for an internalized image of one's external self through the way that the protagonists dress. Ursula's relationship with fashion is intertwined with her search for a meaningful life and the philosophical problems she has with mainstream culture; Cayce's relationship to fashion is central in her life because she is downright allergic to it. Despite these circumstances, however, neither woman can escape the emphasis that their culture puts on appearances.

Ursula's main fashion indulgence is the blue suit that Javier buys her. When she tries it on, she is initially actually confused because the image in the mirror is so different from how she sees herself. She sees her powerful mother and her beautiful sister in the image that is actually herself, and realizes that she "wants to get to know this woman" (92). Here she does not reflect on how the suit affects her concept of herself in the same way as she did when observing Chas's trenchcoat, which indicates to us that she is starting to construct an appearance that alters her perception of herself, a practice that she'd once been critical of. She experiences the effects of the suit, but doesn't analyze her experiences at all. She wears the suit during her presentation of the savage image and when she confronts Chas about her sister and buys Tomorrow, Ltd. from him for Couch. These are both instances where she needs to look more secure than she feels. She is still wearing it when she and Couch discover Javier's body and then when she goes on Ivy's webcam. The suit can no longer protect her from the reality of losing Javier, and it even works against her at Ivy's, because it's overkill; it looks like she's so uncool that she would obviously be trying to look good for her moment of fame.

Because of her allergies, Cayce has a more defined day-to-day style than Ursula does. For a business meeting she wears

a fresh Fruit t-shirt, her black Buzz Rickson's MA-1 [jacket], anonymous black skirt from a Tulsa thrift, the black leggings she'd worn for Pilates, black Harajuku schoolgirl shoes. Her purse-analog is an envelope of black East-German laminate, purchased on e-Bay – if not actual Stasi-issue then well in the ballpark. (8)

Cayce must be more allergic to logos themselves than to fashion, because she does have a style that seems passably fashionable. She's definitely not frumpy or out-of-touch. A lot of attention in the work is devoted to describing her choices of clothing, much of which is designer. A brand name is usually given, even for brands that aren't prestigious, like Fruit-of-the-Loom in the example above. Clothing is

used in the plot of the story, too; Dorteia burning a hole in Cayce's jacket is one example. Cayce also tests Blue Ant Tokyo's willingness to grant her whatever she asks for, and their unquestioned procurement of a replacement impresses her.

Like Ursula, Cayce also experiences a moment where seeing her reflection involves a shock. She is walking along a street in Tokyo after a haircut-turned-makeover, and "the first mirror she sees herself in stops her. Her hair, she has to admit, is really something, some paradoxical state between sleek and tousled. Anime hair, rendered hi-rez" (141). Cayce realizes that her perfect hair and makeup overpower the rest of her appearance, so she stops at a nearby mega-mall equivalent and purchases, on her expense card from Bigend, "a black knit skirt, black cotton sweater, black Fogal tights that she suspects cost half a month's rent on her place in New York, and a black pair of obscurely retro French suede boots that definitely did" (141). Her new appearance attracts the attention of every man in a coffee shop she visits next, and she suspects that it intimidates Taki, the contact she meets for the watermark on a snippet of footage (143, 149).

We aren't told how Cayce reacts to the men's attention, but she does partially regret meeting Taki looking so good because she thinks it may be making him more uncomfortable than he would have been otherwise. So she clearly is aware that she looks good, even if we don't know if it makes her feel more confident or if she isn't enjoying the attention. Both women seem to be aware that there are situations where their appearance can be overkill.

Ursula has a moment similar to Cayce's urge to buy better clothes to match her new appearance. Ursula is glad to be wearing the new blue suit in the restaurant where she and Javier go for lunch that day, because she fits in with the other clientele. But when Javier takes her hands across the table, she "shakes her head sadly at the contrast between her elegant, onyx-button cuffs and her grubby, nail-bitten hands" (93). Although they both feel that some aspect of their appearance needs to be improved, the problem of Cayce's clothes is easily solved by consumption, while Ursula's problem stems from something deeper – a personal neurosis that is an expression of her moral uncertainty about what she's doing. This is not a problem that she could solve quickly, because her nails would need time to grow out. Later in the book, Ursula wears a new skirt suit to visit Javier at the nadir of his depression and "seeing him in such disarray makes her feel self-conscious and a little guilty about her own carefully crafted appearance," which includes having "had her as-of-late unbitten nails done" (164). This detail can be read as evidence of Ursula's commitment to becoming the woman whom she didn't immediately recognize in the mirror when initially trying her suit on. Ursula acknowledges that she's dressed up and cleaned up in order to impress Javier in this case, while Cayce's improved appearance is more the result of unintentionally getting a full makeover (due to the language barrier) and then just going along with it.

This minor difference between Ursula and Cayce reflects more important differences regarding each work's philosophical relationship to consumerism. In *Savage Girl*, the three coolhunters are all very conscious of how consumerism works and their own roles in its functioning. Chas sees it as a negative force, albeit one that he will accept as inevitable and will make the most of. Javier sees it as a potentially positive force that he is fostering, then realizes that it's so horrible that he cannot even bear

to live through it. And Ursula sees it as a tempting but finally malignant entity, although she wavers on whether her participation in it, though it is intended to secretly harm consumerism, is actually perpetuating it.

Ursula always has an opinion on her actions; she is either putting faith in her ability to use marketing messages to undermine the system, or beating herself up for selling herself or her sister out for fame, money, and respect. Cayce, on the other hand, takes questionable actions, such as accepting Bigend's financial backing in pursuit of the maker of the footage, while reserving judgment for an unspecified moment in the future: "All of this on Bigend's card. She's not sure how she feels about that, but she supposes she'll find out" (142). Presumably, if Bigend had turned around and commodified the footage, she would have felt bad about it; luckily, this doesn't happen. Ursula, while trying to convince herself that her participation in coolhunting is okay, at least occasionally acknowledges that there are serious moral implications to her actions. But Cayce seems much less troubled by moral questions, working on the pragmatic assumption that the means she's using may justify the ends. She can't know if what she's doing is right until she discovers the outcome.

This difference is also reflected in each woman's relationship to coolhunting itself. As we have seen, Ursula laments what she over-interprets as the effect that commodification has had on the savage girl.³ Cayce, while she does not actually participate in coolhunting in the range of time that *Pattern Recognition* covers, also does not seem to have any sort of reservations about it. In a conversation with Magda, the hatmaker, Magda describes the type of undercover advertising – "viral" "Deep-niche" – that she's doing to earn money. She is paid to hang out in specific bars and casually drop the names of products. Cayce responds to Voytek's skepticism about the method by explaining it further and arguing that it is effective. Interestingly, *Magda* is the one who really doesn't like it; she says, "'I'm devaluing something. In others. In myself. And I'm starting to distrust the most casual exchange'" (85).

Magda asks Cayce what type of advertising she does, and she replies "'What I do is pattern recognition. I try to recognize a pattern before anyone else does'" (86).

"And then?"

"I point a commodifier at it."

"And?"

"It gets productized. Turned into units. Marketed." (86)

Rather than reflecting on any of the implications of this statement, Cayce then looks around and thinks about the bar they're sitting in and the surrounding neighborhood. Given the fact that Magda expresses reservation about her job, it's significant and puzzling that Gibson doesn't attribute any qualms about coolhunting to Cayce.

This is especially true considering that Cayce clearly doesn't want the footage to be 'productized' by Bigend, and even tries to protect Stella and Nora from being found by her employer. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Cayce does not seem to see any relationship between what she does with

³ I argue in Chapter 2 that commodification of her image did not directly contribute to the savage girl cutting herself.

street fashions and what Bigend seems to be threatening to do with the footage; the footage is art, and the street fashions are something else entirely. The issue of whether the street fashions are meaningful expressions of individuals' identities does not come up, though the relatively happy ending for Cayce implies that commodifying street fashions has no negative ramifications worth mentioning. Whereas the footage is supremely important and meaningful, the significance of street fashions is practically nonexistent here.

Cayce's online community revolves around speculation that borders on religious interpretation about the meaning, purpose, and origin of the footage; when Bigend first suggests to Cayce that she work for him to find the maker and she asks why he's interested, he replies: "Am I a true believer? That is your first question. Because you are one yourself" (65). The major pursuit in this novel is not for meaning itself, as it is in *Savage Girl*; the footage provides meaning, and the main goal is to find the maker, or the god, of the footage. When Cayce confesses to Parkaboy that Bigend has provided the means for her to find Nora, the religious connotations of his response are as important as his literal statement:

"If you're about to meet the maker, and you're still talking to me, I really don't care what manner or number of goats you've had to blow to get there. And anyone you've had to kill in the process, I'll help you get rid of the bodies." (277)

"The maker" is a god-like figure, a powerful creator, but apparently no moral system prohibiting bestiality or murder comes along with her. Of course Parkaboy is speaking metaphorically here, but his lack of interest in the potential consequences of leading a potential commodifier to something both of them view almost as sacred is strange. Would the most devout Christian take Satan up on the chance to meet God?

As Gibson would have it, within the bounds of the narrative Bigend does not productize the footage, and it seems that the audience should be left with the impression that he won't. Yet Cayce learns from Magda that he has been using viral marketing to spread the word about the footage, and he clearly wants to be involved in its production somehow; he's already expressed to Cayce that he's interested in it because it's the most successful guerilla marketing he's ever seen (65).

The structure of the worlds in the novels are significantly different. For Cayce, meaning exists as, or is at least derived from, Art – the footage. When Cayce meets the maker and observes the process of creation, the artist at work, she is relieved of her allergies to logos and likely the judging capacity that made her employable up to that point as well. Both of these facts about Cayce had been large aspects of her identity, so we are left to wonder exactly who she will become.

For Ursula, however, the problem is that art – and therefore meaning – don't seem to exist in her world anymore. All she can find (and create, by this point) are paradessences, which by nature are impossible to comprehend. She realizes that most people just create systems of meaning for themselves, and is frustrated by her own ability to do so. As she follows the *Savage Girl* through the city one night, she notices that the *Savage Girl* acts "as though the city were alive with spirits [...] alerting her to danger and guiding her along on her mission through the night. Her world is in love with her, will do anything for her, generating no end of meaning" (54). And she reflects that Ivy's universe is the same

way: “the more it persecutes her, the more importance it ascribes to her” (55). This understanding prevents her from creating meaning for herself, because she’ll never be able to un-know that it is a construction, and at this point doesn’t understand how she could consciously choose to believe in something.

Ursula’s decision to take the job as a trendspotter is a result of this sense of meaninglessness – she’s supposedly going to try to help her sister get better, but in the end it is Ivy who saves Ursula from a meaningless life. Ivy does this in the confrontation they have when Ursula first enters Ivy’s room during her bomb threat. The blue suit is a major component of the identity of a powerful businesswoman that Ursula has created, and Ivy screams “‘Look at you, all prim and proper in your blue suit! All made up for the cameras! Your big day as a star!’ [...] ‘You look like a fool!’” (254). When Ursula starts to cry, Ivy becomes conciliatory, saying “‘I thought they’d gotten to you. [...] I thought they’d put a chip in your head. But it’s you! I’m so happy it’s you!’” (254). While this is obviously evidence of Ivy’s insanity, it’s also completely true on another level. Ursula *had* been gotten to in a sense, but while her appearance had changed, her identity had not. The spell of the suit is broken, as we see when Ursula wipes her nose with its cuff.

Ivy’s description of the Old World that follows points Ursula to the path, at least, that she will need to take to find her own coherent artistic expression. This is why the sisters end up in the rainforest. Of course even this space isn’t outside the reach of capital; the remaining people of the forest aren’t living the old way: “the men and boys take turns hunting for free pornography on the village WebTV, while the women and girls hang out by the logging road all day, begging for money and prostituting themselves to the loggers” (270). Meanwhile, white people from the city try to recreate the life that the tribespeople have abandoned, unsure of whether the rituals they buy from the real tribespeople are authentic. Shakar denies the typical move of looking to real tribes and “savagery” as a source of authenticity; this is not what Ursula needs or is doing anyhow. She and Ivy are actually engaged in a practice that will eventually preserve a copy of the rainforest; with the data they collect, Ark, Inc. will be able to create new rainforests even when the real ones have been destroyed. Ursula now knows, though, that this, as well as what the city people are doing, are the best that can be hoped for. They create systems because the alternative is none at all. Grand narratives are gone, and with them has gone authenticity, but smaller narratives are still possible. “Perhaps what she’s been witnessing is the birth not only of a new religion but of a new *kind* of religion, an ironic religion—one that never claims to be absolutely true but only professes to be relatively beautiful” (274). She is beginning to see how she can believe in something that is only a construction.

All of Ursula’s experiences finally position her to create the type of art that she needs to. She turns down the invitation to become a member of the tribe, feeling the need instead to return to the city to create the work of installation art she’s conceived. It will be based on the forest, each element connected to each other, and each fulfilling some unspoken need; it “will be wholly graspable in a single insight, a single moment of recognition” (273). And most importantly, it “will give people courage to go on trying to understand and master all those other forces acting on them that at first seem too pervasive and too insidious to ever take on” (273). Ursula has learned how to be an artist, and her art is

a part of the system of meaning that she's consciously chosen to adopt. She will see herself as part of an urban tribe that, though it does not know it's a tribe, shares experiences and problems with the confusing world it has found itself in (273). She hopes that she can meet others like herself, others who share the consciousness that seemed to her like a curse at the beginning of the novel.

The question of "consciousness" is extremely important here. We know that Ursula's belief in an urban tribe is an "ironic religion" rather than a postironic one, because postirony requires a self-delusion that Ursula has shown herself incapable of sustaining (274). Whereas Ivy seems to truly believe her own claims about the Imagineers, glamour continuum, etc., Ursula consciously chooses to believe in the new religion she's creating. Chas has emphasized that postirony requires the sort of schizophrenic self-delusion that Ivy exhibited literally; his formulation of the concept rests on the belief that most consumers are not conscious. Chas gives Ursula an example of unconscious consumption as they're training in the grocery store. He tells her about an experiment in which he slapped "Now Fat Free" stickers on laundry detergent and "watched the fat ladies pick them up and toss them in their carts" (63). These fat ladies were not comprehending their actions, just responding to stimuli. A moment's reflection would have uncovered the absurdity of what they were seeing.

The widespread belief in "subliminal" advertising plays into this problem of consciousness. "Subliminal" means that the supposedly manipulative information or stimuli is actually *unable to be detected* with the naked senses – it's below the threshold. The "Now Fat Free" sticker is by no means subliminal; it's right there on the box. It is successfully manipulative – they do buy it – because they're not paying attention to what they're doing. If people believe that they are somehow subliminally being manipulated, though, there is not a thing to be done about it, there is no way to resist. There is no reason for consumers to expend energy trying to be conscious of the effects that ads or products are having on them if resistance is futile.

Like Ivy, the savage girl does not seem to be conscious in the way that Ursula is. The fact that she lives in the park and uses all her energy simply to survive could be part of a protest against consumerism, but is clearly instead the result of insanity. She does not speak in the novel or seem to understand language at all. We see when Ursula offers her \$200 that she has no concept of money. One woman's beloved pet dog is to the savage girl nothing more than a resource. When confronted by the police with guns, she behaves as if she has no understanding of the danger they pose to her. The savage girl completely lacks a perspective of herself from the outside; because her only goal is survival, it is not even clear that she has an identity in the traditional sense, considering that she has no demonstrable understanding of the society she would be defining herself against. Thus the savage girl cannot exemplify a goal for others to aim at; to even be aiming for authenticity or a new identity as a savage, one is necessarily already too conscious.

So Ursula diverges from the savage girl's and Ivy's types of meaning based on self-delusion, which Chas expects to be the basis for the postironic consumer consciousness. Neither the savage girl nor Ivy is allowed to continue with their delusions, either. Ivy gets medicated, which cuts down on the instability of her mental state. And one of the cops jokes as they're taking the savage girl away that "'If she's on drugs, they'll get her off. If she's not on drugs, they'll put her on,'" which indicates that

there's probably medication in the savage girl's future, too (210). This outcome shows that we need not see insanity as the only opposition to the status quo, because Ursula's approach is the only one that is sustainable.

When you consider the artists in each story, *The Savage Girl* emerges as the more hopeful work. In *Pattern Recognition*, the creator of the footage has become great through brain damage. She did have talent as a filmmaker before the injury, but her output changes as a result. She no longer produces a coherent narrative; the fragments truly are fragments, and it's impossible to tell if there is intentionality behind them. Perhaps this does not change the fact that her work is transcendent art; what Cayce's knowledge of its production does, though, is answer the questions posed by the people on F:F:F. The Completists were wrong; the Garage Kubricks were wrong. Belief in a coherent narrative underlying the work would necessarily be based on an assumption about Nora's mind that could never be substantiated. Although attributing the capacity for great art to brain damage seems like a terribly depressing depiction of artistic creation, Gibson seems to view it as completely sublime; it cures Cayce of her allergies, she hooks up with Parkaboy and presumably lives happily ever after. Art, in *Pattern Recognition*, is important to the main character insofar as it is consumed; in *Savage Girl*, it is important insofar as it can be created.

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