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MAD MEN OF LETTERS: ADVERTISING, MASCULINITY, AND THE AMERICAN POSTMODERN NOVEL

by

JENNIFER CHANCELLOR

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

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Mad Men of Letters: Advertising, Masculinity, and the American Postmodern Novel

by

Jennifer Chancellor

Advisor: Marc Dolan

In this dissertation I account for the overwhelming whiteness and maleness of the American postmodern novel that has long puzzled scholars by arguing that the genre must be understood as an expression of dominant masculinity threatened, not by women or people of color, but rather changes in postwar business and consumer culture. I support this claim by examining works by some of the founding American postmodern novelists—Joseph Heller, Don DeLillo, Kurt Vonnegut, and Thomas Pynchon—through the lens of historicism and biography. As advertising and publicity professionals in the postwar period, these men were positioned to offer a “complicitous critique” of the emerging corporatized masculinity and its cultural conditions of production (Hutcheon 2). In contrast, as I will iterate in my conclusion, contemporaneous American postmodernists outside of the typical demographic, such as Ishmael Reed and Kathy Acker, express different concerns in their own contributions to the genre.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Since this dissertation is largely about influences on a genre, I would be remiss if I did not name the influences on my own work. My supervisor, Marc Dolan, helped me take an idea conceived in his 1950s culture seminar and elevate it into something that begged to be investigated in a larger project. I am thankful not only for his helpful conceptual and stylistic feedback, but also his hands-off advising style, since I am hard enough on myself not to need micromanagement by anyone else. In addition, I wish to thank my other committee members, Gerhard Joseph and Eric Lott, who also offered invaluable advice and support. Special thanks to Professor Lott for stepping in late in the game, after a previous committee member was unable to continue. I am also indebted to the Leon Levy Center for Biography for financial support while I completed the dissertation, and to Michael Gately, Gary Giddins, and the 2015-16 cohort of Leon Levy Center Fellows for their vital interdisciplinary perspectives. In all of these instances, I am grateful to have worked with scholars who are as kind and engaging as they are brilliant.

There are, of course, a great number of people from all stages of my academic life who have enabled me to complete my doctorate. At Texas A&M University, where I received my bachelor’s, Douglas Brooks and Victoria Rosner convinced me that I had what it takes to pursue graduate studies in English and encouraged my doing so in New York, an adventure that lasted, all told, eleven wonderful years. Chuck Taylor nurtured my first major research project, my undergraduate thesis on the amalgamation of Buddhist and Catholic teachings in the writings of Jack Kerouac, and once at New York University, where I studied for my master’s, John Maynard and Shireen Patel guided my work on the Beats in a more theoretical direction, culminating in a master’s thesis that investigated what I referred to as “subversive consumption” in the poetry of Allen Ginsberg. After arriving at the Graduate Center, I found a new passion for the work of
other midcentury writers and critical methodologies, inspired by courses with Ammiel Alcalay, Morris Dickstein, Marc Dolan, and Nancy K. Miller, and by working directly with Hildegard Hoeller in preparation for my second exam.

Because my scholarship is inextricable from my pedagogy regardless of what courses I am teaching, I must also express my appreciation here for my colleagues and students at Borough of Manhattan Community College, and for my coworkers and fellow Writing Across the Curriculum Fellows at Bronx Community College. I am especially obliged to Margaret Barrow, my mentor at BMCC, and Kathrynn DiTommaso and Julia Miele Rodas, my “bosses” at BCC, whom I regard as both role models and dear friends.

Speaking of friends, I could never have made it through this process without the support of many close friends both within and outside of the Graduate Center community. There are far too many to name, but Sadarah Bowe, Ashley Ingersoll, Svetlana Jović, and Erin McAllister, as well as my Doctoral Students’ Council and CUNY Adjunct Project colleagues, collectively kept me (relatively) sane and confident in my ability to succeed in the task at hand. Finally, I would never have begun this process—and certainly would not have completed it—were it not for the unwavering love and support from my incredible parents; my sister, Tommye; and last, but certainly not least, my cat, Ariel, who has served as my devoted research assistant for 14 years and counting.
Introduction: Falling Men

The television series *Mad Men*, an award-winning drama about the Golden Age of American advertising, is chock full of iconic images from the period: print ads and logos, costumes and hairstyles. Yet one of the most memorable parts of the program, which ran for seven seasons on the AMC network, is actually from the show’s opening credits. A faceless, black-and-white, suit-clad silhouette arrives in an anonymous office, briefcase in hand. The scene dissolves around him, and he plummets rapidly from the high-rise building past endless, colorful billboards. Images of women loom particularly large, appearing almost menacing next to the comparatively tiny tumbling figure. He does not hit the ground, as far as we can tell, but instead ends the sequence sitting pensively, cigarette in hand, with his back to the viewer. For fans of *Mad Men*, the symbolism seems clear: Don Draper and his fellow executives at the agency are striving for success in their careers yet struggling in their personal lives—with infidelity, insecurity, and identity crises, among other issues—and women, while facing rampant sexism in and outside of the workplace, are viewed as an ever-increasing threat by their male counterparts. But the fact that the falling promotions man’s work surrounds him as he plunges toward the ground suggests another source for his apparent downfall, one in which the fruits of his labor are at fault. It is in the tension between these two interpretations of what was plaguing white, middle-class men of this time—the few decades after World War II that Jameson refers to as the “brief ‘American century’” (xx)—that I wish to begin my investigation.¹

This dissertation is not about *Mad Men*, though the show does serve as a compact and visually evocative introduction to the problem with which I am concerned: the widespread cultural feeling that white, middle-class men in the postwar period—despite not only maintaining their traditional race and gender privileges, but also accumulating unprecedented wealth—were
in an alarming state of collective decline. As indicated above in my reading of the opening credits to Matthew Wiener’s program, contemporary sources frequently laid the blame at women’s feet for the deterioration of midcentury masculinity. The biggest proponent of this view was probably Philip Wylie, who filled popular magazines with articles bearing such telling titles as “Mom’s to Blame” (1950) and “The Womanization of America” (1958). According to Wylie, who was only the most venomous of many professional postwar misogynists, women dominated men in nearly every way: they ruled the home with an iron (if well-manicured) fist, forced men to work jobs they hated, and did nothing all day but spend their husbands’ hard-earned money. *Look*, a general interest magazine of the era read by men and women alike, published a series of articles in 1958 asking in regard to American men, “Why Do Women Dominate Him?” and alleging that the answer to the question, “Why Does He Work So Hard?”, was to support his wife’s shopping habits. Popular television shows such as *Bewitched* painted a picture of men’s oppression softened by humor, but the message remained more or less the same.

For most twenty-first century readers, the narrative related above seems utterly ridiculous, yet as these artifacts exhibit, it pervaded post–World War II popular culture. As suggested above, however, there is an alternate explanation for the alleged deterioration of American masculinity in this period, one that traces it to those in the promotional professions, and it is this line of reasoning with which I am primarily concerned in this dissertation. As in the former case, there are a variety of texts from the age that attest to advertising and its allied fields as detrimental to men. On the one hand, sensationalist Vance Packard published *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), which revealed—if somewhat exaggeratedly—the techniques ad men use to manipulate consumers’ behavior. On the other-hand, sociologists such as C. Wright Mills, David Riesman, and William Whyte depicted men in these positions as *themselves* weak and malleable.
The ad man in particular was singled out as an exemplary representation of the superficial and easily manipulated male archetype, which Riesman termed “other-directed” (19). But the most interesting reflections on the relationship between promotions and midcentury masculinity can be found in writings by those who were themselves in the industry during this time—the real mad men, so to speak—and these are the main objects of my study. The principal texts I propose to examine are neither scathing exposés about the evils of advertising nor pitiful memoirs about the authors’ own personal diminution due to their work as ad and PR men. Rather, as I will argue, they are novels that, in grappling with the effects of their authors’ work in these fields, helped establish an entire genre.

Enter four of the founding postmodern American novelists: Joseph Heller, Don DeLillo, Kurt Vonnegut, and Thomas Pynchon, all of whom served as advertising and public relations professionals during the postwar years. Drawing on the experiences of their promotional careers, these authors, I suggest, contend in their fiction with the ontological and hermeneutic crisis faced by white men of their generation—that is, defining what it means be a man in the postwar world—by reconstructing American masculinity in a corporate context. They by no means present this new notion of manhood uncritically; on the contrary, the primary novels I examine—Heller’s *Catch-22* (1961), DeLillo’s *Americana* (1971), Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions* (1973), and Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973)—perform what Linda Hutcheon would term a “complicitous critique” (2), one that simultaneously reifies and interrogates both corporatized masculinity and its cultural conditions of production. As I will demonstrate, this cohort of promotions men turned pioneering postmodern novelists affirms the widespread cultural perception that American manhood was in decline, but only, they reveal, through the machinations of men such as themselves. Thus, they implicitly and explicitly challenge the
popular cultural narrative—articulated in fiction and non-fiction, and on screens small and large—that women and their consumptive habits were responsible for men’s supposed emasculation during this time. These concerns manifest themselves multiple ways in the texts they created while or shortly after working in the industry, resulting in a set of stylistic, structural, and thematic traits that—given these authors’ collective influence and the larger cultural context in which they were writing—would come to characterize the American postmodern novel.

In order to understand the collective preoccupation with masculinity during this time and its relationship with promotions, it is essential to historicize. After World War II, millions of men returned from combat to civilian life, and for many white men, especially those attending college on the G.I. Bill, this meant filling a variety of positions throughout the expanding corporate world. Whether they were veterans or not, those who were part of this mass migration into white-collar work found themselves in roles that defied traditional notions of manly labor, yet were largely denied to women and people of color. Many men in the 1950s felt emasculated by their conformity-inducing careers, but as Barbara Ehrenreich argues throughout *The Hearts of Men*, instead of blaming the economy, they largely pointed the finger at women, and in particular women’s consumption, which men were obliged to financially support. At the same time, the exploding, white-male dominated promotions industry labored feverishly to market to women, casting companies as gentle patriarchs through public relations and pitching their products in the new voice of male authority through advertising (Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness* 198-206). In other words, not only did these men encourage women to spend whatever their husbands could earn, but they also facilitated the transfer of masculinity through these efforts from individual men to their proxies, corporations, and by extension, their products. Compounding the crisis,
publications like *Playboy* also began to advocate independent male consumption in the mid-1950s (Gilbert 208-11), and Madison Avenue followed suit with its exploitation of the Peacock Revolution in 1960s men’s fashion (Frank 185-204). The late Sixties counterculture, while claiming to reject “square” standards of manhood and compulsory materialism, ultimately reaffirmed that men as well as women would be defined by their consumer choices (Ehrenreich 114).

The American postmodern novel—which arose from these conditions and was established by those positioned, as members of the promotions professions, at their very epicenter—thus chronicles, I argue, the evolution of this seemingly diminished, corporatized, postmodern white male through this own agency. In making this case, I will draw on various sources that have discussed the individual aspects of my project: the state of masculinity in the postwar period, the contemporaneous world of advertising and public relations, the origins and character of postmodernism, and the links between individual authors’ commercial and fiction writings. Conceptualizing midcentury manhood requires a comprehension of martial manhood, and in this regard Paul Fussell’s *Wartime* and Samuel Stouffer’s *The American Soldier* will provide invaluable background information. Anxiety about potential emasculation must also be understood in the context of the Cold War, concern about possible Communist infiltration, and—as tangential as it may sound today—related panic about homosexual penetration, which I will discuss by incorporating various primary and secondary historical sources. As previously indicated, race is also an important factor in this analysis. While contemporaneous works about postwar masculinity rarely mention race, that is only because whiteness is “unmarked” and therefore taken for granted as a default. However, the minority that do discuss black masculinity—including Mailer’s “The White Negro” (1957) and the novels of Kerouac, and less
directly, Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* (1963)—hold it up as a more authentic alternative to the dominant white variety, part of a long American tradition of fetishizing blackness.²

Aforementioned sociological studies—Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), Mills’ *White Collar* (1951), and Whyte’s *The Organization Man* (1956)—as well as later analyses such as Barbara Ehrenreich’s *The Hearts of Men*, Susan Faludi’s *Stiffed*, and James Gilbert’s *Men in the Middle* will round out my efforts to thickly describe the much-maligned white corporate version of midcentury masculinity.³

The sociological and secondary texts listed above link postwar masculine decline—explicitly in some cases, implicitly in others—to the world of corporate promotions. Yet, they do not offer an adequate picture of advertising and publicity itself, and for this vital information we turn to ad men’s memoirs and how-to manuals, popular portrayals from the era, and critical histories of the industry and its products. Famous figures in modern advertising—David Ogilvy, Rosser Reeves, Jerry Della Femina, and George Lois—provide an inside perspective on the field in its formative years through their writings, which were synthesized and analyzed later in works like Cracknell’s *The Real Mad Men*. Equally important—though far less flattering—is the image of ad and PR men in postwar pop culture, and while they were a common sight in visual media, I am especially interested in other literary depictions of those in promotions professions: Mead’s *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (1952), Wilson’s *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955), and Yates’ *Revolutionary Road* (1961). More recently, studies such as Stuart Ewen’s *Captains of Consciousness* and *PR*, Roland Marchand’s *Advertising the American Dream* and *Creating the Corporate Soul*, and Thomas Frank’s *The Conquest of Cool* offer a broader articulation of the sociocultural and historical impact of modern promotions, chronicling the way in which advertising and public relations posited themselves as the
authoritative (white male) voices of the twentieth century—in other words, as the language of corporate masculinity.

Cultural histories will be of great value in framing my argument, but biographical information about the postmodern novelists I have selected will be essential to making the necessary connections between their promotional and literary publications. In the case of Joseph Heller, I draw on two main texts—his memoir, *Now and Then*, and Daugherty’s recent biography *Just One Catch*—in addition to numerous interviews with the author. Information on Don DeLillo’s copywriting career is sparse, given his characteristic reticence, though I was able to obtain a written interview with the author and have phone conversations with a few of his former colleagues. These and other dialogues yielded some useful morsels, yet much about his time as an ad man remains unknown. Unlike DeLillo but similar to Heller, Kurt Vonnegut spoke of his stint in publicity often—in speeches, interviews, and critical essays—and through these artifacts, in conjunction with articles and books by critical biographers Jerome Klinkowitz and Charles Shields, we can obtain a substantial amount of data about his days in PR. Pynchon, who worked in public and employee relations, is the most enigmatic of all as a person, but much about his corporate work can be gleaned from “A Trove of New Works by Thomas Pynchon?” by Adrian Wisnicki, who located and analyzed one confirmed and many probable articles by the very private writer. Together, these texts lay the groundwork for my own investigation into the lives and works of these ad men turned postmodern authors.

Some of the works above indeed argue that these authors’ day jobs influenced their fiction on an individual level, such as Daugherty’s biography of Heller and Wisnicki’s article on Pynchon, but as single-author studies, they do not position their respective subjects as part of a generation of postmodern writers stemming from the same field, nor do they extend the parallels
they perceive between these men’s socio-historical situations and their fiction to the American postmodern novel as a genre. On the other side of the coin, those critics who have located postmodernism’s origins in the abstraction of “late capitalism” (xx), as has Fredric Jameson, have overlooked what fellow Marxist theorist Raymond Williams defines as the true determining base, “the specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships” (6, emphasis mine). The gap between these two ways of understanding the postmodern novel—the individual author as ad man and the genre as a product of an abstracted (white male–oriented) capitalism and its consumerist trappings—is precisely what I propose to bridge. In doing so, I will also address the oft-posed but infrequently answered question of the American postmodern novel’s overwhelming whiteness and maleness. In the history of American letters taken as a whole, the fact that this doubly privileged group dominated the literary landscape would not be particularly noteworthy, but considering the notoriety women and people of color attained during the movement known as modernism, it is a striking reversal. As I have suggested above and will continue to substantiate throughout this dissertation, the historical, social, and economic situations of these pioneering American postmodern novelists—Heller, DeLillo, Vonnegut, and Pynchon—posit a solution to this long-standing quandary.

In Chapter One, I discuss Joseph Heller, a longtime ad man and arguably one of the first American postmodern novelists. His promotional career spanned all aspects of the industry from 1952–1962; he wrote copy at Merrill Anderson, Benton and Bowles, and Remington Rand and sold ad space at Time, Look, and McCall’s (Daugherty 161). Heller himself has repeatedly claimed that his experience as an ad man stylistically influenced his fiction, though an analysis of his debut novel reveals that it also resituates masculinity itself in a corporate context. Indeed, Catch-22 appears at first glance to be a World War II novel, but it is actually a parodic allegory
about 1950s male corporate culture, particularly in the context of advertising and public
relations. The officers in *Catch-22* are presented not as soldiers, but as ad and PR men whose
primary weapon is language, which they skillfully deploy to manipulate others. The novel’s
transformation of the military from a site of traditional manly vigor and valor to an institution
concerned only with affecting appearances and accumulating wealth emblematizes the
corporatized masculinity Heller and his fellow ad men turned postmodern novelists saw
emerging in the postwar years. In light of the emasculating environment in which he finds
himself, the manliest thing its protagonist can do is at the same time the one that seems most
cowardly: run away. One of novel’s key features is in fact its use of paradox, a logical
conundrum that Heller depicts as characterizing not only corporate masculinity, but also the
twentieth-century business world in general. This literary device would become one of the
defining characteristics of what would soon be labeled the American postmodern novel.

In Chapter Two I devote my attention to Don DeLillo, perhaps the most influential
American postmodern novelist in this study and another veteran of the promotions field. For five
years DeLillo wrote print copy for Ogilvy and Mather, and though consumer culture is a major
theme throughout DeLillo’s corpus, it is his debut novel, *Americana*, that best illustrates his
intimate familiarity with advertising. Published in 1971 and set in the mid-late 1960s, it
chronicles the adventures of a young television network executive named David Bell. The
protagonist leaves his workplace—an absurd caricature of corporate American not dissimilar
from that portrayed in *Catch-22*—to embark on a road trip with three friends, supposedly for the
purpose of filming a television series on the Navajo, but really in hopes of finding himself
somewhere along the way. In a small Midwestern town, he decides to stop and shoot footage for
an autobiographical film, using local residents to play him and his father, who is himself an
account executive in advertising. Through this process of representing his life, he recognizes the way in which “phantasmagoria” emanating from commodity capitalism have dominated his existence, cultural constructions that he has helped reify through his work in commercial television (Benjamin, “Paris” 101). Resuming his travels, he searches in vain for a more authentic masculinity to replace the empty one he embodies. In the end, David retreats to small isolated island and spends his days there repeatedly watching his life’s simulacrum on film. Indeed, the simulated’s effacement of the real is an essential element of the genre Americana helped define.

In Chapter Three I will examine another promotions professional turned postmodern author, Kurt Vonnegut, who wrote ad copy as a young man and served in the Advertising News and Sales Promotion Group at General Electric after World War II. Though he enjoyed the maleness of his work environment (Shields 99), he soon came to deplore the “slaphappy tone” in which he was obliged to compose press releases to reinforce GE’s claim that “’Progress [was their] most important product’” (111). Also, as his early fiction reveals, he became increasingly concerned about the implications for mankind of the technology he was tasked with promoting, though it was not until his 1973 novel Breakfast of Champions that he integrated the technology theme with his experience as a publicity man. The novel is the story of two white male protagonists: Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout. The former, a successful businessman, exhibits symptoms of schizophrenia, believing himself to be the only free-willed creature on an Earth otherwise populated by robots after reading a novel by the latter, an unsuccessful science fiction author. Interestingly, many characters in the novel, including Dwayne, are in fact frequently called or compared to machines, at least in part due to the manipulations of advertising, publicity, and other related means of control. The author eventually reveals himself to the reader
as the real manipulator of both protagonists, watching as his creation Dwayne accosts a number of guests at a local arts festival, then introducing himself to his other main character, Trout. Through his comments in these final scenes, Vonnegut reflects on the way in which his fiction is in fact inseparable from the public relations work he performed while at General Electric. The lack of distinction between high and low culture, the literary and the commercial, would become another fundamental feature of the American postmodern novel.

In Chapter Four I will consider a final postmodernist, Thomas Pynchon, who also spent several years utilizing his literary talents in the corporate service. As a public and employee relations writer for Boeing, one of the country’s largest military contractors, Pynchon churned out articles for Bomarc Service News, one of the company’s house organs. These early examples of Pynchon’s writing exhibit both technical information and stylistic elements—liberal use of the em dash, conversational address of the reader, and incorporation of seemingly excessive material—that would later appear in V, and to a much greater extent, Gravity’s Rainbow (9, 15). This industry experience also informed, as I will discuss, his formulation of corporate masculinity in this latter novel. Like Catch-22, Gravity’s Rainbow depicts World War II–era Europe mainly as a marketplace, and not just for black-market goods. The novel’s protagonist, Tyrone Slothrop, is effectively sold by his wealthy family to corporate researchers who condition him as an infant to become sexually aroused by weaponry. In this way he embodies corporate masculinity in a literal way: even his most “natural” urges are produced by others’ manipulation. In his quest for information about this rocket and the mysterious Schwartzgerät, his doings are almost entirely other-directed until, in the final section of the novel, he fragments along with the text. The rocket itself represents a phallus, which in turn indicates that manhood has been transferred to a product, as well as its manufacturer, the military-industrial corporation. The
irrationality of the insanely rational world of the novel and the pessimistic predictions for its future are thematized in much postmodern American fiction to follow.

At the end of each of these novels, the protagonist runs away—or in some cases disappears completely—and this figure of the seemingly diminished postmodern white man within the genre, as I reaffirm in my conclusion, results from a perceived threat to the privileged white male subject position in the mid-twentieth century. The culprit was not in fact women, but rather the corporatization of masculinity fashioned by advertising and emblematized by the military-industrial complex, an entity that is portrayed explicitly in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, but haunts all of the aforementioned novels. Further, having shown throughout that the whiteness and maleness of the dominant strain of postmodern American novel is rooted in the collective situation of these and other authors sharing this demographic, I offer two counterexamples to my argument in the form of works by writers with other race and gender identities. For African-American Ishmael Reed and bisexual woman Kathy Acker, the privileged subject position occupied by Heller, DeLillo, Vonnegut, and Pynchon was always already closed; therefore, they did not share the anxiety of these white male writers in the face of its purported decline. As a result, Reed and Acker produced works with certain shared postmodern features, but very different protagonists and themes. Finally, I briefly comment on the second generation of American postmodern novelists, who built on the work of their predecessors in a world where promotions has become the primary mode of communication.

The postmodern period is over, and the early works of Heller, DeLillo, Vonnegut, and Pynchon have already become classics in the genre and American letters as a whole. What I have tried to offer here is a new way of looking at texts that have withstood the test of time and—with the exception of *Americana*, which has received less attention than most of DeLillo’s novels—
countless critical analyses: as products of authors united by their labors in the years before they attained literary fame, common corporate careers as advertising and publicity agents in the now-iconic Mad Men age. I view this work in the larger context of increasingly popular critical, cultural, and group biographies, albeit with much greater focus on literary criticism—this is, after all, a dissertation for a doctoral degree in English—and it is my hope that it will meaningfully contribute to both of these fields, as well as American cultural and masculinity studies more broadly. Considering these novels together through the lens of their authors’ lives provides a fresh perspective on these individual novels and the postmodern canon, a product, I contend, of advertising and public relations in postwar America.
Promotions, Postmodernism, and Paradox: Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*

In December 1966, five years after the publication of his debut novel, Joseph Heller gave a surprising speech at Yale. Students who had come to hear the Next Big Thing in American letters, the authorial voice of a Sixties generation that was just beginning to recognize itself as such, were greeted not by an incarnation of his celebrated protagonist, Yossarian, but rather a 43-year-old suit-and-tie type billing himself as a “born promotion man” (Braudy, “A Few of the Jokes” 41). In both this lecture and those he gave in creative writing courses he taught at Yale the following year, Heller avoided the subjects of literature and literary craft almost entirely, bragging instead about his success in the advertising game. His slideshow, *The Pages That Sell*, was the hit of his final sales convention in the Bahamas—never mind his hit work of fiction, *Catch-22*. Students were alternately confused, disappointed, and waiting to get the joke (Braudy, “I Remember”). What they did not realize—and perhaps he did not either, at least not yet—was that he was offering them a way to understand the novel.

In many ways, *Catch-22* directly reflects Heller’s decade-long experience in the promotions industry—longer if you count his six months post-combat serving as a publicity man for Goodfellow Air Force Base in San Angelo, Texas, during which time he also took his first stab at short story–writing (Daugherty 12). After completing his bachelor’s at New York University and his master’s at Columbia, both in English, and attending Oxford on a Fulbright Scholarship, he accepted a faculty position at what was then Pennsylvania State College, but not finding it to his liking, he left in 1952 to seek work in advertising. His first three jobs were writing copy at Merrill Anderson, Benton and Bowles, and Remington Rand (Daugherty 161). It was at Merrill Anderson that Heller began writing his first and most famous novel, putting down a chapter in a single sitting one morning at his desk there. By the time an excerpt of the work in
progress was published in 1955 under the title “Catch-18” in *New World Writing #7* (the same issue containing an excerpt of Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*), he had moved on to Time Inc., where he sold advertising space, mostly in *Fortune*. In 1958, near the end of Heller’s career with Time and just before his short stint at *Look* magazine doing similar work for more money (Heller, *Now and Then* 113), Simon and Schuster offered him a publishing contract. By the time the novel was published as *Catch-22*, in 1961, Heller was employed in his final position in the industry as an advertising promotions executive for *McCall’s*, a popular women’s magazine of the era, where he remained for another year after the novel was published.

Despite Heller’s oft-professed pride in his career as an ad man, well justified in light of his record of professional accolades and successive advancements, his boasts (as boasts so often do) belied a deep-seated set of anxieties surrounding his participation in that particular field. Indeed, his colleagues recall that he was often distracted in the workplace: “‘Some days he would walk into the office and announce he was just going to brood and not work’” (Daugherty 216). What was on his mind during these years can best be glimpsed through the record left in his fiction writings—that is, in what would become *Catch-22*. Though he claimed in multiple interviews that he was inspired by the creativity and artistic interests of his coworkers and influenced in his fiction writing by the “‘catchy, snappy, unexpected’” nature of good ad copy (Daugherty 161, 189), his novel illuminates the darker side of the seemingly upbeat advertising world that Heller was well positioned to examine. A sample of his promotional writing will provide a useful lens through which to consider the subject of the author’s ruminations in *Catch-22*.

In his autobiography, *Now and Then: From Coney Island to Here*, Heller relates a number of incidents from his career in advertising. In a particularly interesting passage, he
Chancellor describes in detail a successful ad-space sales presentation he created while working for *Time* magazine: “[O]n the opening board of the easel demonstration I offered an enlarged copy of the Tenniel illustration for *Through the Looking-Glass* showing the Red Queen skimming over the ground at top speed with Alice in tow and with her explanation in a caption: ‘Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place’” (112). While this clever pitch clearly exhibits the author’s literary education, its essence lies in the quote it employs from Lewis Carroll’s classic novel. Selling advertising itself as a way for companies to stay on top, it is also an example of paradox, the central literary device of *Catch-22*.

Heller’s first and most famous novel chronicles the apparently absurd shenanigans of various members of a U.S. Air Force division stationed on the island of Pianosa during World War II. The plot centers upon protagonist Captain Yossarian’s efforts to avoid flying more missions, a struggle waged against both the military power structure and *Catch-22* itself, the paradox that one may be discharged from flying missions if found mentally unsound, but that not wanting to risk death flying missions by definition signifies one’s sanity and hence, one’s fitness for battle. Clearly, as indicated by the sample of his sales writing provided above, Heller saw paradox as the most appropriate way to depict not only the “logic” of military bureaucracy as shown in the novel, but also that of the corporate promotions world in which he found himself employed for ten years. Indeed, this sales slogan emblematizes the essence of *Catch-22* and foregrounds the issue of control of (or out of control) language that occupies the text. In this way Carroll’s and Heller’s works are quite similar, as one critic acknowledged, whether intentionally or not, by calling *Catch-22* a “jabberwock of a work” (qtd. in Nelson 173). What is remarkable about this linguistic mode is that it is being employed here in service of the very commercial culture Heller criticizes throughout the novel, which is not really about World War II, though
Heller did serve as a bombardier in the U.S. Air Force during that conflict, nor is it, properly speaking, a war novel at all. Instead, according to the author’s own remarks, he “conceived of his book as ‘contemporaneous with the 1950s, not the early 1940s’” and as being about, not combat or the military, but rather “‘the contemporary regimented business society’” (Heller qtd. in Merrill 12, 10). The logical/linguistic similarities between Heller’s sales presentation and his first novel indicate his comprehension of the power of language games in the business world, despite if not due to his participation in the biggest language game of all: advertising.

Considering the length of Heller’s advertising career and its simultaneity with his writing *Catch-22*, it is surprising that critics have been slow to connect one with the other.¹ In its revelation of language as weapon and the many nefarious purposes to which it can be deployed, *Catch-22* is clearly a text heavily influenced by Heller’s involvement in the advertising industry. Indeed, the linguistic devices deployed by various members of the military hierarchy in the novel make them seem much more like ad men and other corporate executives than commanders in the armed forces. Through their exploits, Heller exhibits one of the foundational principles of advertising, public relations, and business in general: power lies with those who control the means of representation.

Examining several exemplary passages in *Catch-22* will be useful for articulating Heller’s critique of the way in which modern society is dominated by those who effectively use and abuse language in service of advertising, marketing, and public relations goals. However, this investigation will be most fruitfully carried out through the lens of several contemporaneous works of fiction, all of which offer observations quite similar to Heller’s. The first of these texts, Shepherd Mead’s *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, was published in 1952, the same year Heller began writing *Catch-22*. In this tongue-in-cheek “handbook” for the would-be
business executive, Mead, himself an ad man by day, exhorts the reader to prevaricate, equivocate, and cultivate the illusion of work and genuine thought as a means of ascending the corporate ladder. In a similar vein, though more serious fashion, Sloan Wilson’s *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*—a novel published the same year as “Catch-18”—follows protagonist Tom Rath’s metamorphosis into a “‘cheap cynical yes-man’” in order to make his way in the world of postwar public relations (Wilson 186). Finally, Richard Yates’ *Revolutionary Road*, which made its debut the same year as *Catch-22*, depicts young Frank Wheeler’s rise in the corporate ranks of Knox Business Machines—a thinly fictionalized version of Remington Rand, which employed both Heller and Yates—through skillful deployment of puffery and adept avoidance of any real work. The similarities between these three texts and *Catch-22*, as I will demonstrate, establish my claim of the latter’s status as a business novel, while situating it within a larger context of literary discontent with midcentury corporate culture.

The Promotions Men of *Catch-22*

In *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, Shepherd Mead singles out the promotional professions of advertising and public relations as two especially invidious specializations within the business world, a critique that Heller likewise wages through the depiction of characters such as Milo Minderbinder, mess officer and syndicate operator extraordinaire. Of Milo we are told, “[o]ne of [his] moral principles was that it was never a sin to charge as much as the traffic would bear” (Heller 64), and in pursuit of maximum financial gain, he engages in an elaborate advertising campaign for his black-market business:

Each morning Milo sent planes aloft over Europe and North Africa hauling long red tow signs advertising the day’s specials in large square letters: “eye round, 79¢…whiting,
21¢.” He boosted cash income for the syndicate by leasing tow signs to Pet Milk, Gaines Dog Food, and Noxema. In a spirit enterprise, he regularly allotted a certain amount of free aerial advertising space to General Peckem for the propagation of such messages as NEATNESS COUNTS, HASTE MAKES WASTE, and THE FAMILY THAT PRAYS TOGETHER STAYS TOGETHER. Milo purchased spot radio announcements on Axis Sally’s and Lord Haw Haw’s daily propaganda broadcasts from Berlin to keep things moving. Business boomed on every battle front (254).

In this description of Milo’s exploits Heller renders him a one-man multi-media conglomerate, for he both advertises his own wares and sells ad space to other corporations (as did Heller). Moreover, his “spirit enterprise” is essentially public relations, part of an attempt to exhibit what Roland Marchand calls “the corporate soul” (Creating 363). Finally, it is remarkable that Milo is marketing and selling to the enemy; in fact, the only references to Germans as concrete combatants in the novel involve Milo. In one particularly memorable incident, he bombs his own unit because the Nazis made him a generous offer to do so. By portraying Milo as an ad man who is also “the character in the book who does the most damage” (Seltzer 114), Heller illustrates Mead’s assessment of the profession in the introduction to Chapter 15 of How to Succeed, “How to Handle Your Advertising Agency,” in which he declares that “[y]ou only have to read current fiction to know that all agencies are made up of people of low moral fiber” (122).

While Milo’s “low moral fiber” is always tied to his profit motive in Catch-22, and while his treasonous mercenary action against his own side is by far the most extreme example of his depravity, he is also ready to deceive and outright lie if it boosts sales, even if doing so might harm his customers. In a particularly telling incident, Milo has purchased the entire crop of
Egyptian cotton in an attempt to corner the market, only to find that he cannot sell it. In a desperate attempt to recoup his losses, he dips it in chocolate in hopes of hawking it in the mess halls, though he first tests the product on Yossarian:

“It can’t be that bad? Is it really that bad?”

“It’s even worse.”

“But I’ve got to make the mess halls feed it to the men.”

“They’ll never be able to swallow it.”

“They’ve got to swallow it [...] it isn’t really cotton [...] I was joking. It’s really cotton candy. Try it and see.”

“You’re lying.”

“I only lie when it’s necessary” (Heller 264).

For Milo it is business itself that necessitates lying to create a situation conducive to selling. In this passage, Milo’s mendacious sales pitch, like so many advertising claims, operates as what Marcuse calls an “operations concept” (103): a statement that directly affects consumers’ actions through particular tricks of language without needing to transform their values and beliefs. In Milo’s case, he is less concerned about whether the men “swallow” his bogus product claim than he is that they swallow the product itself. As Seltzer affirms, “Milo’s dominant need is to control reality” by any means possible (107), a need he fulfills by manipulating language in service of his commercial enterprise.

Heller’s comprehension of language’s power to manipulate behavior while circumventing belief, a key component of advertising, is also illustrated in Captain Black’s obsession with having the men recite loyalty oaths and sing the “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Of the purpose behind this project he declares, “[t]he important thing is to keep them pledging [...] It doesn’t
matter whether they mean it or not. That’s why they make little kids pledge allegiance, even before they know what “pledge” and “allegiance” mean” (Heller 113). Like any good ad man, Black acknowledges that verbal indoctrination—as exemplified by advertisers getting slogans stuck in consumers’ heads—is a sufficient end in itself, for, despite the fact that many are disgruntled with Colonel Cathcart’s constantly raising the number of missions the men must fly, they by and large obediently continue to fly them. Moreover, Captain Black’s mention of the way this mechanism works in children, something advertisers in the 1950s had become keenly aware of, further aligns him with civilian commercial interests. Indeed, Black’s propagandizing program is even given a name, just like any successful advertising campaign: “The Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade.” When other officers attempt to compete for a market share of the men’s loyalty by instituting their own loyalty oath crusades, Black redoubles his efforts, conceiving of the endeavor as a sort of war between those ostensibly on his own side, like different companies competing for consumers’ brand allegiance.

While the actions of several characters in Catch-22 construe them as promotions men, there is only one “actual” marketing executive in the novel, Colonel Cargill. Of his career prior to the military we are told, “[h]e was a very bad marketing executive […] so awful […] that his services were much sought after by firms eager to establish losses for tax purposes. His prices were high for failure that did not come easily […] He] could be relied on to run the most prosperous enterprise into the ground” (27). Interestingly, Colonel Cargill is also depicted as the least successful at manipulating language as a military administrator. After attempting a motivational speech to the officers, he is told that he is addressing the enlisted men (27), and likewise, when he claims in a memorandum that “[a]ny fool can make money these days and most of them do’’ and asks for an example of one person “’with talent and brains […] who
makes money,”” he receives a valid answer, though he is too daft to recognize it as such (36). Unlike Milo Minderbinder and Captain Black, Colonel Cargill lacks the mastery of language required of a good ad man.

Though his verbal ineptitude may seem surprising in someone who—unlike his fellow officers—is a civilian member of the advertising profession, Cargill’s failings accomplish a larger critique of the business world also made by other authors at the time: general senselessness. In *Revolutionary Road*, protagonist Frank Wheeler describes Knox Business Machines as a place where “‘you can sort of turn off your mind every morning at nine and leave it off all day, and nobody knows the difference’” (Yates 77). Illustrating this point, he composes a facile sales brochure, “Speaking of Production Control,” which he is pleased with because “[n]o one could have told that he didn’t quite know what he was talking about” (123-24). As a result of this “achievement,” he receives a promotion. The rest of the novel does not demonstrate Frank Wheeler to be an idiot, but it is precisely by disengaging his intellect that he ascends the corporate ladder. In other words, Colonel Cargill is essentially right: any fool can find success in the business world.

Colonel Cargill is not a particularly dangerous character in the novel—that is, none of his actions or decrees result in anyone’s death—but that apparent incongruity actually further strengthens Heller’s primary critique: that the real threat resides in those who are able to deploy their linguistic weapons successfully. As such, the sharpest condemnations in *Catch-22* are reserved for skilled publicity men, or those who engage in what we now call public relations. Indeed, *How to Succeed* warns the aspiring executive, “[o]nly after you have hardened yourself with long exposure to advertising men should you enter the still blacker morass of public relations” (Mead 128). One character deeply immersed in this world is General Peckem, who is
obsessed with conducting bombing runs that can be photographed aerially in an attractive way for press releases. Fittingly, as Raeburn notes, Peckem heads Special Services, the division responsible for maintaining the troops’ morale (124). We recognize the PR man’s power to manipulate truth through particular language combinations when he describes the principle of the bomb pattern: “A bomb pattern is a term I dreamed up just several weeks ago. It means nothing, but you’d be surprised how rapidly it has caught on. Why, I’ve got all sorts of people convinced, I think, that it’s important for the bombs to explode close together and make a neat aerial photograph” (Heller 324-25). By combining the words “bomb” and “pattern,” Peckem ties the principles of unity and order to what is otherwise an instrument of destructive chaos. Through both these words and the photographed images, which together comprise what Stuart Ewen calls PR’s “theater of stirring symbols” (PR 145), Peckem sells his image of a neat, rational war to his subordinates, the media, and thereby, the general public.

PR men’s penchant for “fashioning and projecting credible renditions of reality itself” is perhaps best exemplified by Colonels Cathcart and Korn (Ewen, PR 4), who are in charge of issuing press releases on behalf of the Air Force division stationed at Pianosa. Considering their role in the dirty work of public relations, it is not surprising that they are cast as men of dubious principle; accordingly, Colonel Korn describes himself as “an intelligent person with no moral character at all” (Heller 423). These two are also the men with the most blood on their hands, for, as previously stated, it is Cathcart who raises the number of missions the men must fly before being sent home. The duo’s most notable creation is essentially a cover-up for a mistake made by Yossarian: while attempting to bomb a bridge at Ferrara, he orders the six planes involved to fly over the target a second time after he is unable to hit it on the first run. He succeeds in destroying the bridge, but one of the planes is shot down in the process, killing its entire crew. In response
to this misdeed, Cathcart and Korn, concerned that the incident “’looks so lousy on the report’” (138), decide to give Yossarian a medal and promote him. Instead of censuring him, they employ one of the oldest techniques in the publicity book: “’You know, that might be the answer—to act boastfully about something we ought to be ashamed of. That’s a trick that never seems to fail,’” and they instruct Yossarian to “’[e]xit smiling’” (139).

Colonels Cathcart and Korn clearly recognize the power of public relations to redefine the real, and another occurrence in the novel affords them an additional opportunity to employ their favorite PR “trick.” Yossarian finally refuses outright to fly any more missions, so the two men offer him what they refer to as an “odious” deal to avoid the shame of having to court marshal one of their men for insubordination:

“We’re going to promote you to major and even give you another medal. Captain Flume is already working on glowing press releases describing your valor over Ferrara, your deep abiding loyalty to your outfit and your consummate dedication to duty. Those phrases are all actual quotations, by the way. We’re going to glorify you and send you home a hero, recalled by the Pentagon for morale and public-relations purposes […] You’ll have parades in your honor and make speeches to raise money for war bonds” (427).

Yossarian thus learns what Tom Rath, protagonist of The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit, ascertains from a colleague: it is more efficient and just as effective “’to go out and acquire a reputation for doing good’” through public relations than it is to commit the deeds that would justify such good opinion (Wilson 28). As part of the bargain with his superiors, Yossarian must agree to like his publicity benefactors, but what they are also asking him to do is be like them: a PR man seeking glory for both himself and his organization through manipulation of language.
Clearly, the world of *Catch-22*, in its language games and moral bankruptcy, is Heller’s conceptualization of the 1950s business world, especially the fields of advertising and publicity in which he participated for an entire decade. His insider exposé of that world, particularly its abuses of language and embrace of façade over factuality, parallels that of several other authors who parodied promotional and corporate culture during the era, including Shepherd Mead, Richard Yates, and Sloan Wilson; yet, since Heller himself claimed and our examination (along with those of many other scholars) has verified that the novel has little to do with World War II, why is a novel about the business world set in a war zone and not—at least partially—in an office, as were so many of its ilk?

When Men Were Men?

The intention, I believe, relates to a larger critique Heller wished to make, which can be elucidated by analyzing an additional passage from the novel. The incident involves an enigmatic officer named Major —— de Coverley, “a splendid, awe-inspiring, grave old man with a massive leonine head and an angry shock of wild white hair that raged like a blizzard around his stern, patriarchal face” (Heller 131). His primary wartime function, other than obtaining lavish apartments in Rome in which men on rest leave can sleep with prostitutes, is traveling to European cities on the verge of falling to the Allies in order to ensure his image appears in media coverage of the ensuing liberation. The passage describing this role is worth quoting at length:

> Newspapers would appear throughout the world with photographs of the first American soldiers bludgeoning their way into the shattered city through rubble and smoke.

Inevitably, Major —— de Coverley was among them, seated straight as a ramrod in a jeep he had obtained from somewhere, glancing neither right nor left as the artillery fire
burst about his invincible head and lithe young infantrymen with carbines went loping up along the sidewalks in the shelter of burning buildings or fell dead in doorways [...A] whole regiment of crack C.I.D. men had been thrown into the front lines to find out who [de Coverley] was, while a battalion of combat-hardened public-relations officers stood on red alert twenty-four hours a day with orders to begin publicizing him the moment he was located (132).

In other words, Major —— de Coverley is the war effort’s poster boy, depicted as the epitome of mature masculinity: physically strong, with an air of mystery, and fearless in the face of danger. However, like most of the officers in Catch-22, he only looks like a hero. He does not actually lead men into battle; he merely wishes to appear as if he is doing so, while the real heroes “fall dead in doorways.” Like the supposedly “combat-hardened public-relations officers” who make it their business to enhance his celebrity status, the only war he is fighting is one of image over reality.

In sum, Major —— de Coverley embodies what Susan Faludi refers to in Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Male as “ornamental masculinity” (35), which she argues arose in the wake of World War II. In order to maintain America’s sense of itself as a strong, masculine nation after the fighting had ceased, corporations—many backed by federal defense dollars, such as Lockheed Martin and IBM—offered men a new “mission” in the booming white-collar workforce. Along with it came a new set of corporate values—those associated with what Riesman termed “other-direction (8),” such as manipulation and conformity, as well as profit motive and conspicuous consumption. Both these principles and the products that signified them were pitched by promotions professionals like Heller, who were themselves among the expanding middle class but also sought to refashion the way men defined themselves—no longer
by action, but rather according to correctly fashioned and accessorized appearance. This new form of manhood that became prevalent in the postwar world was “[c]onstructed around celebrity and image, glamour and entertainment, marketing and consumerism […] Its essence [was] not just the selling act but the act of selling the self” (Faludi 35). In other words, every man became his own advertisement.

While Faludi is right to situate the explosion of what I will call corporate masculinity—a term I believe better describes the combination of business and promotions, surface features and underlying values that constitutes this version of manhood—in the aftermath of World War II, she errs in claiming it was a wholesale departure from the what constituted manliness during the war itself, a postwar substitution of “the GI Joe ‘action figure’” for “the GI ethic” of the preceding period (36). Instead, it was during World War II, the so-called “Good War,” that the elements of corporate masculinity arose in nascent form.6 Wartime advertisements depicted corporations as self-sacrificing, patriotic heroes, particularly if they had converted to manufacture munitions instead of their usual consumer goods, and portrayed the products they made in peacetime—”the car tires and refrigerators [people would] own and exhibit once the war [was] won”—as what the boys over there were really fighting for (Fussell 127). Moreover, for those actually fighting, the frequent occurrence of “chickenshit”—petty harassments regarding such trivial matters as the order of one’s uniform or the spotlessness of one’s gun (81)—and the knowledge that their war experiences were “systematically sanitized and Norman Rockwellized” by the media constantly reinforced the lesson that appearance trumped reality (268). Of course, even the explicitly acknowledged code of masculine values shared by most soldiers—which Samuel Stouffer, in his 1943 study *The American Soldier* identified as “courage, endurance and toughness, lack of squeamishness when confronted with shocking or distasteful stimuli,
avoidance of weakness in general, reticence about emotional or idealistic matters, and sexual competency” (2)—contained elements of artifice to cover over the one truly natural reaction to wartime violence: fear (131). However, while we know from Judith Butler that gender is always already “performative” (33), it was the type of masculine performance that began to shift during World War II, from one centered on affecting certain characteristics through conduct to one that constructed them primarily through promotional language and consumption-based image.

Thus, I am arguing that Heller set *Catch-22* in a battlefield rather than a place of business largely because he sought to chronicle the transformation of normative American masculinity from a version based on the aforementioned behavioral qualities to the superficial variety bought and sold by the fictional ad men in the novel and promotions professionals like the author in real life. As a veteran of both worlds, Heller was well positioned to chronicle this major socio-cultural shift that began during wartime and achieved what Raymond Williams would refer to as “effective dominant” status during the postwar period (9). He was also, as my continued analysis will reveal, prescient in his ability to perceive the inherent weakness of this emergent manifestation of manhood, as I will demonstrate in the remainder of this section.

Major — de Coverley, as a man full of style and void of substance, is the prototype of the new corporate man, and though the same can be said of the other officers in *Catch-22*—make-believe business magnate Milo Minderbinder, proselytizing propagandist Captain Black, image-obsessed General Peckem, and media-manipulating Colonels Cathcart and Korn—this particular character’s case stands out because Heller highlights through him the fragility of the nascent form of masculinity the author himself had a hand in popularizing. In an episode narrated immediately after the one above but more fully explained in a later chapter, Major — de Coverley is hit in the eye by an American Beauty rose thrown by a dissipated old man who
resides in a Roman whorehouse; in fact, this is the only injury the proud officer receives during the war (Heller 133-34). As the centenarian assailant implies when relating the incident to one of the officer’s subordinates, Nately, the symbolism of the attack is apt (246-47). Not only is the wound to the eye, an organ central to the new manhood, but also, the weapon with which it is effected emblematizes corporate masculinity in both appearance and name: attractive yet thorny, and appropriately nationalistic. Similarly, it is noteworthy that the occurrence is essentially a case of friendly fire, since the old man is cheering for, if less than sincerely, the arriving Allied forces. Indeed, as further examination will reveal, the threat to masculinity as recounted by Heller came not from outside entities—foreign enemies, women, or otherwise—but rather arose from within “the greatest generation” itself.

Fear of emasculation and its inverse, compulsion to constantly reaffirm that one exhibits the correct form of masculinity, are in fact major themes throughout Catch-22, further attesting to the precariousness of corporate manhood. The vacillations of Colonel Cathcart, the upward-striving combat operations commander, provide numerous examples of this gender paranoia. One notable instance involves the officer’s obsession with the effects of a certain prop, a cigarette holder, which he hopes will “embellish his masculine, martial physique with a high gloss of sophisticated heroism that illuminate[s] him to dazzling advantage among the other full colonels in the American Army with whom he [i]s in competition” (188). At stake is the good opinion of his superior General Peckem, who he alternately believes and doubts will regard the object as a “a feather in his cap” (136), a metaphor similarly suggesting the importance of accessorizing. The power attributed to such a trinket at first strikes the reader as comical, as does Cathcart’s exaggerated insecurity regarding its ultimate effects, but a deeper reading through the lenses of cultural history and psychoanalytic theory illuminates the significance of this seemingly
trivial element of characterization. Viewed in the former way, the item possesses the same
potency advertisements regularly ascribed to consumer goods beginning in the 1920s—not coincidentally, the decade just following the conclusion of World War I—and coming to full fruition in the post–World War II period: the ability to identify an individual as possessing class, taste, strength, and other valued “virtues” previously associated with one’s character and behavior. The choice of a cigarette holder, as opposed to some other accouterment—a briefcase or a cane, for example—is not an arbitrary one; the 1950s was after all the age of the Marlboro Man, and no accessory, except perhaps the automobile, signaled what type of man someone was as much as his smoke. Considering this context, Colonel Cathcart’s fixation on the cigarette holder and its implications for his manly worth must be regarded as indicative of the inherent instability of a masculinity defined in consumerist terms.

As I previously indicated, the significance of the cigarette holder also lends itself to a psychoanalytic reading, for it is by definition a fetish, an object believed to have magical powers. As such, any product could be understood as a fetish depending on the value accorded it by advertisers and consumers—in this case, the power to bestow on its possessor “a high gloss of sophisticated heroism.” Indeed, cultural theorists beginning with Marx and extending to Veblen, Lukács, and Horkheimer and Adorno have discussed the many nuances of this phenomenon known as commodity fetishism. However, in 1927 Sigmund Freud popularized a characteristically sexual element to the existing designation. Building on the work of Alfred Binet, the French psychologist who first identified what he described as “plastic love”—sexual attraction to animals, inanimate objects, or body parts not typically associated with sex (143-167)—Freud argues in “Fetishism” that “a fetish is a penis-substitute” (199), an item to which a man clings as a talisman against castration anxiety, which Freud believed all men developed
after witnessing their mothers’ “absent” genitals (199). The popularity of Freudian ideas in the 1950s, particularly in the advertising world (Samuel 11-12), as well as references to Freud in other works by Heller, suggest that the author intended to portray the cigarette holder as a sexual fetish. 8 Ironically, though its possessor considers the item a safeguard against emasculation, Cathcart’s dependence upon such trifles points to the emptiness of the corporatized form of manhood he represents.

In his preoccupation with others’ perceptions of him—exemplified not only by the cigarette-holder anecdote but also his multiple PR campaigns, general obsession with “feathers in his cap” versus “black eyes,” and request that Yossarian like him—Colonel Cathcart also provides a perfect example of another element of corporate masculinity, which David Riesman refers to as the “other-directed” personality (8). In The Lonely Crowd, Riesman describes this type, which he claims rose to dominance in postwar American society: “[T]heir contemporaries are the source of direction for the individual—either those known to him or those with whom he is indirectly acquainted [...] While all people want and need to be liked by some of the people some of the time, it is only the modern other-directed types who make this their chief source of direction and chief area of sensitivity” (21-22). Though Riesman correlated other-direction primarily with “incipient population decline” (7), he also pointed the finger at certain related aspects of modern society, as did contemporaries C. Wright Mills in White Collar (1951) and William Whyte in The Organization Man (1956), such as the expansion of the white-collar workforce and the explosion of mass culture. Moreover, while he does not say so explicitly, it is readily apparent from the examples Riesman provides in his study that his discussion of “other-directed man” is not gender-neutral. As Penner notes, women were already assumed to be other-directed (102), a cultural belief affirmed by the advertisers who targeted them, but the
development of this orientation in men was seen as a new, and for many, alarming phenomenon. The author’s introduction to the 1961 edition of *The Lonely Crowd* indicates that Riesman did not intend to vilify the other-directed man as a failed man; however, it also reveals that that is more or less how readers viewed him, “the great majority […] hav[ing] decided that it was better to be an inner-directed cowboy than an other-directed advertising man” (xxxix-xl). Indeed, though the previously examined ad men of *Catch-22* can all be understood as exhibiting other-directedness to some degree, it will be useful to consider another example of the way in which the novel likewise correlates this character type with masculine deficiency.

Major Major Major Major, one of novel’s most memorably named characters, is also the most ironically named, for if the moniker suggests strength, its possessor embodies anything but. Owing his given name to a cruel father and his title to a computer error, Major Major, as the novel typically refers to him, is a study in other-directedness: “Whatever his elders told him to do, he did. They told him to look before he leaped, and he always looked before he leaped […] He was told to honor his father and his mother, and he honored his father and his mother. He was told that he should not kill, and he did not kill, until he got into the Army. Then he was told to kill, and he killed” (85). Despite his efforts to conform, young Major Major finds himself constantly singled out: his nameless “elders disliked him because he was such a flagrant nonconformist” (85), his college classmates accuse him of being either a Communist or a homosexual (85), and everyone he meets comments on his striking resemblance to Henry Fonda (86). Thus, in his eyes, the relative anonymity and uniformity of the military is a dream come true: “All his life, Major Major had longed for but one thing, to be absorbed, and in Pianosa, for a while, he finally was” (88). However, soon after his arrival there, Colonel Cathcart appoints him squadron commander, and he is once again unwillingly distinguished and disliked. He
begins wearing dark glasses and a false mustache to avoid being recognized (97), and eventually, he refuses to see anyone at all (98-99), exiting through a window and running through ditches any time he has to leave his trailer. In the story of Major Major, we thus witness both the other-directed man as failed man and the failure of an other-directed man. In his efforts to fit in and please others, he is shown to be weak and malleable, and yet, he cannot attain even this eviscerated masculine standard. Heller’s point, however, seems to be that it is the catch-22 of the other-directed society itself—which posits “a body of fictions, a composite of normative behavior to which conforming is abnormal” (Nadel 173)—that ultimately destroys Major Major.

Major Major is a fearful figure, the shell of a man who would rather disappear entirely than stand out from the crowd. As previously stated, frightened characters abound throughout Catch-22—not surprising in a war zone—and Yossarian is one of them; however, it is the object of fear that distinguishes his distress from the social anxieties of Colonel Cathcart or Major Major. An encounter between the latter man and the protagonist will better illustrate this distinction. After flying fifty-one of the just-raised fifty-five missions required by Colonel Cathcart, Yossarian tackles the furtive squadron commander outside of his office, demanding to speak with him. Once inside, he tells his superior officer that he does not want to fly any more missions:


“I’m afraid” […]

“You wouldn’t be normal if you were never afraid. Even the bravest men experience fear. One of the biggest jobs we all face in combat is to overcome fear.”

“Oh, come on, Major. Can’t we do without that horseshit?” (102).
Here, Major Major frames Yossarian’s biggest fear, being killed in combat, as in accordance with masculine standards. And yet, as Yossarian seems to recognize, that is not the predominant fear among the men stationed on Pianosa. Milo Minderbinder and Doc Daneeka fear the loss of profit. Colonels Cathcart and Korn and General Peckem fear any assault on their image. Major Major fears being distinguished as an individual. Everyone, save Yossarian, fears defying Colonel Cathcart’s orders. Indeed, while Major Major is correct that all are afraid, the only one who exhibits fear of death in battle is Yossarian.

In the gendered “hard-soft binary” of twentieth-century American cultural logic—which James Penner describes as a “flexible myth system” applied to individuals, policies, and works of literature (15)—if the novel positions the other-directed anxieties of its other characters as soft and feminized, then by comparison, those that concern Yossarian are hard—that is, masculine—by comparison, as Major Major also seems to suggest in the conversation transcribed above. Additional passages in the narrative likewise support this distinction between the protagonist and the novel’s other characters. On one mission, a supposed milk run to bomb the undefended city of Parma, Yossarian’s plane encounters flak, and he suddenly finds himself bleeding profusely through his trousers. In pain, he yells out repeatedly to his inept navigator, “I lost my balls! Aarfy, I lost my balls!” (289). One is tempted to read this exclamation as a simultaneous declaration of fact and a symbolic recognition of having lost his courage to fight; however, additional possibilities must be considered. Though Heller originally planned to castrate his protagonist (Nagel 397), the injury as it appears in the final version of the novel is actually to Yossarian’s thigh, not his groin, and despite his reluctance, he actually flies another dozen or so missions before the end of the novel. Moreover, compared to clutching at a commodity fetish,
such as Colonel Cathcart’s cigarette holder, in order to stave off the horror of emasculation, fear of actual castration would appear to fall on the “hard” end of the masculinity spectrum.

Another episode in the novel illustrates a similar point. While Yossarian and his friend Dunbar are in the hospital, the former for his leg injury, the two play what they consider a prank—today it would certainly be called sexual assault—on a member of the hospital staff, Nurse Duckett. Because of this, the supervising physician sends a psychiatrist to interview Yossarian. The analyst asks the patient about his dreams, which the former interprets as sex dreams, as well as his inappropriate behavior toward Nurse Duckett:

“How isn’t it ever occurred to you that in your promiscuous pursuit of women you are merely trying to assuage your subconscious fears of sexual impotence?”

“Yes, sir, it has.”

“Then why do you do it?”

“To assuage my fears of sexual impotence” (298).

While his assent to Major Sanderson’s diagnosis might seem to be a joke, Yossarian does engage in what could be considered promiscuous behavior throughout the novel—including liaisons with a WAC named Dori Duz (70), General Schiesskopf’s wife (70-71), Luciana (153-163), the maid with the lime-colored panties (163-4), the bald prostitute (229-230), and Nurse Duckett (334-37)—and he responds honestly to all his interlocutor’s questions during the interview; therefore, despite its facetious appearance, this statement should by extension be taken as truthful, both literally and figuratively. Similarly, when Major Sanderson asks to show him a set of Rorschach ink blots, the protagonist tells him, “’[y]ou can save yourself the trouble. Everything reminds me of sex’” (296). The incident is loosely based on Heller’s own experience undergoing a series of psychiatric tests prior to being hired at McCall’s, though the cards were as
likely to remind the author of carnage as carnality, as he recalls in Now and Then (228). We can thus interpret Yossarian’s response, not to mention that of his creator, as another expression of threatened “hard” masculinity.

What conclusions can be drawn from this juxtaposition: on the one hand, the “soft” fears of the other-directed male characters that populate Catch-22, and on the other, Yossarian’s own concerns that more closely mirror those of traditional “hard” masculinity? Must we deduce that figures such as Major Major, Milo, and Colonels Cathcart and Korn are portrayed as soft, while Yossarian is shown to be hard? This would be, as with most binary systems, to grossly oversimplify the matter. While there is little question that, viewed through the lens of the postwar period, the former set would be considered soft—they are, after all, not only representatives of corporate masculinity, but also quite insecure in their performance of it—Yossarian’s case is far less clear. Though his primary preoccupations involve issues associated with so-called hard masculinity—fighting, his own genitalia, his sexual prowess—he in no way epitomizes it, but rather, he vacillates between compulsively performing this form of manhood and exhibiting a palpable fear of emasculation. In sum, the primary difference between these characters lies not in their state of insecurity, which is shared, but rather, in the type of masculinity they are concerned with performing.11

While the hard masculine script that preoccupies Yossarian retained a superficial existence postwar—in superhero comics, men’s magazines, and Ernest Hemingway’s fiction—it was no longer lived, to return to terminology I introduced above, as effective dominant, but was rather transitioning to what Williams would term a “residual” form (10), and for white middle-class men in particular. In Men in the Middle, James Gilbert argues that 1950s America offered men a variety of models of manhood to choose from, from the docile and domesticated sitcom
husband—Ralph Kramden of *The Honeymooners* notwithstanding—to the stylish bachelor archetype advocated in *Playboy*. However, Gilbert does not include hard masculine types in his study because, as he admits in his introduction and suggests in his title (2), the portrait of 1950s masculinity he paints is a distinctly white and middle class one. For this group of men, save those actively serving in Korea, the residual hard form of masculinity described above would only have been available vicariously through media and consumer goods; indeed, as previously stated, the characteristic common to all forms of middle-class manhood—a distinctly soft one, as many cultural critics noted—was the consumer ethic itself.\(^{12}\) To return to my earlier point, it is this shift between one effective dominant form and another that I argue *Catch-22* seeks to chronicle.

It would seem that the softer standard of 1950s masculinity would be easier to live up to, and thus less fear-provoking than its predecessor, but historical accounts—like their fictionalized counterparts *Revolutionary Road*, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, and *Catch-22*—bely the rosy picture painted by much popular culture of the period. For our purposes, it would be particularly useful to examine the observations of another real-life ad man on the subject. In his memoir, Jerry Della Femina, a rough contemporary of Joseph Heller and founder of the Della Femina Travisano & Partners agency, recalls a colleague of his, Jim, who had been a pilot during World War II and entered the industry upon his return:

Jim goes to work for a small advertising agency because it seems like a glamorous thing to do. He’s still courageous and bright, then. And as he grows older he gets scared that he might lose his salary, his expense account. The higher he goes, the more frightened he gets. The guy now is a frightened little man, and today he’s someplace in his forties. I once asked him what happened between the time that he was shooting down planes and
now, when he is a terrified account executive. He looked at me and said, “Well, for one thing, the Nazis never tried to take away my accounts” (12-13).

The primary purpose of Della Femina’s memoir is to provide a more realistic portrait of the advertising world in general, considering its many larger-than-life portrayals in American popular culture, but it is telling that the author opens the work with this anecdote. In fact, he devotes an entire chapter to the anxieties that plague the promotions man as new corporate man, ones that are markedly similar to those expressed by many of Catch-22’s officers.

If these characters represent effective dominant postwar masculinity, what are we to make of the variety Yossarian embodies? As previously mentioned, one is tempted to place it in the residual category; he is, after all, particularly prone to acts of aggression and the “promiscuous pursuit of women.” In fact, Yossarian aligns himself with this value system early in the novel when, sitting in the officer’s club and having just envisioned himself machine-gunning those in it, he declares to his friends that although everyone is trying to kill him (no matter, as he says to Clevinger, that they are trying to kill everyone), “[t]hey couldn’t touch him because he was Tarzan, Mandrake, Flash Gordon […] a real, slam-bang, honest-to-goodness, three-fisted humdinger […] a bona fide supraman” (Heller 20). Later in the novel, after watching Snowden die in his arms on the mission to Avignon and getting shot himself on a flight to Parma put the lie to his claims of indestructibility, he attempts to emulate Colonels Cathcart and Korn when he accepts their “odious” deal to act as a PR man for the military in exchange for his immediate discharge. However, finding himself uneasy in the shoes of an other-directed corporate man, he ultimately chooses a third option: neither to fight and die nor play his superiors’ game, but rather go AWOL—or in Sixties terminology, drop out. In doing so, Yossarian also chooses a third way to be a man—not the residual hypermasculinity of the past
nor the effective dominant organizational manhood of the present, but what Williams would term the emergent “oppositional” masculinity that would come to prominence in the decade after the novel was published (11).¹³

As I noted previously, though the events of *Catch-22* are set in the 1940s, Heller himself considered the novel a Fifties book, and Raeburn closely examines the text as such in “*Catch-22 and the Culture of the 1950s*.” Yet in its depiction of emergent oppositional masculinity, we can see why it has largely been embraced as a novel of the Sixties. Ultimately, however, I contend that it is none of the above, or rather, all of them at once: a work that is necessarily trans-historical—that is, depicting historical change as opposed to stasis. Indeed, the novel’s nonlinear, fragmented, and recursive structure illustrates the author’s sophisticated understanding of history. And yet, in our observation of the gendered historical narrative it constructs, I have thus far made what should be a fairly obvious omission, the same one made by more traditional chroniclers of history, which is to say, women. In the following section, I will address this apparent oversight.

A Generation of Vipers?

Much has been said thus far about the men of *Catch-22*, and rightly so. Not only is the novel, as I have argued, largely about white, middle-class American masculinity midcentury, and thus mostly populated with male characters, but also, it was received upon publication as a work with a primarily male audience. “It’s humor, I think, is essentially masculine; Few women are likely to enjoy it,” Orville Prescott declared in the *New York Times Review of Books*, and fellow author and war veteran Evelyn Waugh claimed, “There are a great number of passages in it not fit for a lady’s reading” (571). Though these critics do not specify what it is women readers
might have found so objectionable, the ribald sexual humor and related, stereotyped portrayals of women likely had something to do with it.

As with female characters in much wartime and postwar popular culture, the women of *Catch-22* are cast in a limited number of molds, the most common being the whore type. In fact, most of the female characters in the novel are prostitutes. There is some historical justification for this—that is, women in occupied countries are often forced to take up sex work to survive—but in the novel, prostitution is the fate of the vast majority of female figures. Of these, the most notable is known only as Nately’s whore. Described as long-limbed and perpetually bored, she is the object of affection for one Nately, an officer who hails from an old-money family. She eventually requites the latter’s love after he rescues her from another group of officers who had been holding her hostage, and he dreams of marrying her and raising her kid sister as an adopted daughter, but a new disagreement arises when he tells her she will have to stop selling her sexual services. In response to her protests, Nately insists,

“Now don’t argue with me. I’m the man and you have to do whatever I say […] It just isn’t right for a nice girl like you to go looking for other men to sleep with. I’ll give you all the money you need, so you won’t have to do it any more.”

“And what will I do all day instead?”

“Do?” said Nately. “You’ll do what all your friends do.”

“My friends go looking for men to sleep with.”

“Then get new friends!” […]

“If you think my friends are so bad, go tell your friends not to ficky-fick all the time with my friends!”
“From now on,” Nately told his friends, “I think you fellows ought to stop running around with her friends and settle down” […]

Nately had gone clear out of his mind. He wanted them all to fall in love right away and get married. Dunbar could marry Orr’s whore, and Yossarian could fall in love with Nurse Duckett or anyone else he liked. After the war they could all work for Nately’s father and bring up their children in the same suburb. Nately saw it all very clearly” (356-58).

While there is nothing novel about Nately’s assertion of patriarchal authority over his would-be wife, his demand that she quit her job and become financially dependent upon him is the same instruction issued to white, middle-class women by mass culture after the war’s end and a distinctive marker of that period. In this case, of course, his betrothed’s career is more at odds with married life than most professions, but it would be unthinkable for Nately to propose that she find a new one. Instead, as the further revelation of his plan indicates, he suggests that she as well as her friends embrace homemaking and motherhood, and his friends become dutiful husbands and fathers. His vision of the group moving to the same suburb and the men working for his wealthy father rounds out this archetypal picture of Fifties life, but the remarkable part is that it is not his potential wife’s fantasy, or even that of his friends, but Nately’s own. As the most privileged of the group, the scion of an affluent family with close connections in government, he symbolizes cultural power, and the fact that this is his American dream exhibits the author’s recognition of the real culprit in midcentury men’s alleged emasculation.

The above passage offers a stark contrast to the common postwar notion that women were to blame for the perceived attenuation of men and emasculation of American culture. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, this narrative, while bearing little resemblance
to historical reality, enjoyed immense popularity among white, middle class men of the period—who were, of course, its primary propagators. The best-known prophet of this belief was Philip Wylie, whose misogynistic polemic *Generation of Vipers* (1942) traced virtually every possible problem men could have to women—especially mothers. In article after article Wylie railed against female dominance in American society, and yet, even this super-sexist acknowledged that at least some men were guilty of aiding and abetting the supposed female takeover. In “The Abdicating Male and How the Gray Flannel Mind Exploits Him Through His Women,” Wylie directs his ire at the male-dominated promotions industry. By taking advantage of women’s capriciousness, insecurity, and obsession with catching and keeping a mate, he claimed, ad men intensified female control of household finances, as the money they spent would be taken from their husbands’ paychecks. According to the author, these pickpockets-by-proxy were also guilty of furthering the general—and for him, detestable—feminization of American culture. To combat these evils, he entreated those in promotions professions to compose more masculine copy and pitch more products to men. Neither Wylie nor *Playboy*, which published the article, seemed to find any fault with this solution—either for the manipulative Gray Flannel Mind or his new target, the other-directed male consumer. However, as illustrated in the above excerpt from *Catch-22*, some men of the age, such as Heller, seemed to recognize what the likes of Wylie were unable or unwilling to see: that constructing an imaginary emasculating matriarchy served to mask the corporatization to and through which men subjected themselves.\(^{14}\)

Though most of the novel’s female characters “control” men using their sexual charms, there are a few exceptions. The most notable of these for our purposes is Nurse Cramer, who, although only a minor figure, serves best to demonstrate the author’s perception of what was truly imperiling men of his ilk. While hospitalized for his leg injury, Yossarian plays a game of
musical beds, along with his friend Dunbar, to amuse himself during his recovery. Nurse Cramer, catching him in the act, scolds Yossarian and orders him to lie back down at once:

“Are you crazy?” she scolded virtuously, shaking an indignant finger in front of his eyes. “I suppose you just don’t care if you kill yourself, do you?”

“It’s my self,” he reminded her.

“I suppose you just don’t care if you lose your leg, do you?”

“It’s my leg.”

“It certainly is not your leg!” Nurse Cramer retorted. “That leg belongs to the U.S. government. It’s no different than a gear or a bedpan. The Army has invested a lot of money to make you an airplane pilot, and you’ve no right to disobey the doctor’s orders” (291).

Nurse Cramer’s righteous bossiness in a ward full of men anticipates Nurse Ratched from Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, which was published a year after *Catch-22*, and while other similarities exist between the two works that there is not space to elaborate on here, what merits comment in this context is Nurse Cramer’s equation of Yossarian’s leg, and by extension, the rest of his body, to any other piece of military equipment. In doing so, she exhibits Heller’s recognition of men’s own complicity in their positions as adjuncts of state and corporate power, forces which, to put the matter in Foucauldian terms, work through them, not outside of them. The system they comprise, which Chief Bromden, the narrator of Kesey’s novel, referred to as “The Combine” (3), could not sustain itself without the active participation of its subjects, not only in combat but also in postwar corporatized and consumerized life. Nurse Cramer, in commenting upon its *modus operandi* and enforcing its dictates, is no more responsible for facilitating that system’s functioning than Yossarian himself.
Thus, in contrast to the dominant contemporaneous cultural narrative, *Catch-22* ultimately rejects the notion that women were behind the postwar shift in white, middle-class masculinity, one that in practice privileged the so-called soft values of organizational and domestic life over the hard ones of traditional manhood, epitomized by—in cultural memory, if not in fact—the common American soldier. Instead, as a longtime advertising professional, Heller recognized his own and others’ role in abetting their own perceived oppression by creating and consuming the media and commodities that reproduce it. He was neither the first nor last to make this or a similar argument, of course; in addition to those I have already mentioned, works such as Horkheimer and Adorno’s “The Culture Industry as Mass Deception” (1944) and Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) decried the tyranny of a mass culture designed to keep the public docile and manageable for the powers that be. Similarly, Vance Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957) explored the various tactics of the advertising industry to affect both buying and voting behavior. What separates Heller’s novel from these studies, other than its status as a work of fiction, is its recognition that the victims and culprits, as Yossarian acknowledges, are often one and the same. Knowing this, what is a man to do?

Masculinity, Postmodernism, and Paradox

At the end of the novel, Yossarian decides not to participate in Cathcart and Korn’s PR scheme, instead deciding to go AWOL, believing that escape is the only way not to be implicated in the manipulations of those ostensibly in charge. Yet even freedom through flight appears to be a fantasy: before running away he learns of the existence of an alternate press release vilifying instead of glorifying him if he chooses not to cooperate. Despite the risk to his image, he goes ahead with his plan to desert, and his defiance of the other-directed, ornamental, corporatized
male norms valued by the novel’s other officers confirms his status as the hero of *Catch-22*. In executing his escape, Yossarian moves beyond the mere lamentations of the so-called “grey flannel rebel” (29), as Ehrenreich refers to the likes of *Revolutionary Road*’s Frank Wheeler. It is thus that the novel frames a deed that could be seen as “soft” and cowardly as instead bold and manly. In doing so, it exhibits the emergent oppositional masculinity that would soon be adopted by those who burned draft cards and refused to participate in the Vietnam War.

*Catch-22* would not only serve to chronicle the transformation of twentieth-century masculinity, but also as an arbiter of the related postmodern turn in contemporary literature. Of the many features of the novel that its descendants would inherit, such as non-linear narrative, superficial characterization, and dark humor, its abundant use of paradox—and I use this term to describe both real paradox, i.e., direct logical contradiction, as well as heavy irony, which is not quite the same but has become part of the common usage—is perhaps its most important, something built into the very fabric of the American postmodern novel. After all, one of postmodernism’s primary tenets is, contrary to the principles of the Enlightenment, that there is no objective truth that applies to everyone, a statement which is, in its self-reflexivity, a paradox. In *Catch-22*, the title paradox is the most pervasive and important, but the novel is chock full of striking examples of this logico-linguistic device. Of the others, perhaps the most noteworthy involves Doc Daneeka, a doctor attached to Yossarian’s division at Pianosa. Late in the narrative, a pilot named McWatt purposefully crashes his plane after having accidentally killed a fellow soldier named Kid Sampson by buzzing him a bit too closely. According to the flight manifest, Doc Daneeka was a passenger in that plane and consequently killed on impact. However, he was not actually in the plane at all, but rather standing next to the other witnesses, watching the tragedy unfold. Despite his protests to the contrary and his continued corporeal
presence, the War Department declares him dead, and from that point on, everyone treats him as such, including, ultimately, his wife (338–49). Doc Daneeka thus becomes the human equivalent of Schrödinger’s cat, a man who is both alive and dead at the same time.

In his use of paradox, Joseph Heller was especially prolific, but not unique in his time. Though not considered a major postmodern author, Bruce Jay Friedman likewise exhibits paradox in his 1962 novel Stern. The title character, a Brooklyn Jew who writes product labels for a living, moves with his wife and child to a predominantly gentile suburb. Soon after, a neighbor refers to his wife as a “kike,” pushes her down, and as she is not wearing underwear, likely catches a glimpse of her genitals (47). Rather than avenging his wife, Stern spends the vast majority of the ensuing narrative destroying himself: he masochistically demands that she recount every detail of and even reenact the attack, develops a painful ulcer, and winds up having to be institutionalized for his psychosomatic symptoms. Finally, a year and a half after the initial incident occurred, he confronts his wife’s assailant in a final attempt to reclaim his masculinity and challenges him to a fistfight, which ends ambiguously, and with the protagonist exclaiming: “I can’t understand it. I was all right for a while, but now I’m afraid of him all over again” (190). Though he returns to embrace his family in the end, he is ill at ease doing so, and even this semblance of regaining his composure was, according to Friedman, “publisher ordered” (“A Door Opens”); in the original manuscript, Stern merely implodes. The paradoxical moral of the story, one that encapsulates the plight of the postwar American man and recalls the situation of Major Major, can be summed up as follows: try to be everything society dictates a man should be, and you will cease to be a man at all.

The author of Stern had more in common with Joseph Heller than a penchant for paradox. Both men were New York Jews who had been raised in working-class households—
Heller in Brooklyn, Friedman in the Bronx. Both men had also served in the armed forces, the latter as an Air Force administrator during the Korean conflict.\textsuperscript{20} And both men had decade-long careers on Madison Avenue during the postwar period. From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, Bruce Jay Friedman was employed at Magazine Management Company, publisher of many of the era’s popular men’s adventure magazines. His first task was writing “blurbs—or ‘selling lines’—that would make the [magazines’] photographs more inviting to readers” (Friedman, \textit{Lucky Bruce 52}), but he quickly ascended the ranks to become editor of \textit{Men, Male, Man’s World, Swank}, and \textit{True Action}. Featuring “true” illustrated cover stories of men’s bravery in the face of sadistic Nazi women and man-eating wild animals, these publications were in outward appearance the polar opposite of the middle-class family magazines—those bastions of gender-role reeducation—where Heller worked as a promotions man while writing \textit{Catch-22}. Yet, studies of the men’s adventure genre demonstrate that these works, with their warnings and how-to’s, similarly served as social education manuals for men of the postwar period, a “means of instruction for gray flannel and blue-collar foot soldiers” (Parfrey 5). The countless dangers they described—not only heartless enemies and vicious critters, but also sex-crazed suburban housewives and men’s own “homosexual tendencies”—“revealed an American dream distressed by fear” (10), the fear that American men were under attack from all sides. It is possible to retain one’s life and manhood, they suggested, but only with the means of correct training they conveniently provided. Ironically, the combination of nostalgic wartime tales and “girlie pics”—residual masculinity in consumable form—with tips on how to get ahead at work and ads for man-making products that these magazines proffered actually served to ease the transition from traditional wartime manliness to the new corporate version. In other words, though these publications proclaimed themselves to be the he-man’s last stand in a feminized, sissified world,
they ultimately served instead to institutionalize the “inferior” form of masculinity they allegedly abhorred.

I have not discussed Bruce Jay Friedman here merely to provide another example of an ad man turned author who shaped the course of the American postmodern novel. As an editor, placing ads in the magazines he managed was one of his responsibilities, but it was by no means his primary task, nor is *Stern* exactly a postmodern novel. Nor have I incorporated his story solely because, like Heller, he was—given his ethnic and socioeconomic background—a new admission to both the white race and the middle class, and therefore perfectly positioned, as a man at the margins, to observe and document changes in the dominant form of manhood midcentury. Rather, I include Friedman here primarily because the trajectory of his career illustrates the paradoxical proliferation of corporate masculinity in the postwar period: even apparent attempts to resist it, as in the case of the men’s adventure genre, ultimately reaffirmed it instead. The reason for this is clear: as Frankfurt School philosophers claimed, and as the American postmodern novel would go on to repeatedly thematize, it was no longer possible to separate advertising from other forms of culture. Its logic had permeated all.

In the early 1960s—’62 and ’65, respectively—both Heller and Friedman left their Madison Avenue careers after the success of their novels rendered day jobs superfluous, but the legacies of their respective professions would live on in their debut works. Joseph Heller himself would never again write anything as impactful as *Catch-22*, but the phenomenon it chronicled—the effacement of dominant masculinity by the very possessors of white male privilege through advertising and other ideological instruments of twentieth-century consumer society—would continue to be revisited by other American postmodern novelists in the years to come. This was especially true after the Sixties, which ironically (but not surprisingly) “ended by affirming the
middle-class materialistic culture it had set out to refute” (Ehrenreich 114). Acknowledging this phenomenon, when Heller does resurrect Yossarian thirty-three years later, in Closing Time, the fictional hero of the so-called Counterculture reemerges as a suit-and-tie promotions man himself, a symbolic testament to the triumph of corporate masculinity in American culture.
Promotions, Postmodernism, and the Simulacrum: Don DeLillo’s *Americana*

While Joseph Heller was celebrating the success of his debut novel and orchestrating his exit from the promotions world, a young Don DeLillo quietly labored at his desk on the ninth floor of advertising firm Ogilvy, Benson & Mather, alternately cranking out copy and gazing out the “window”—really, a two-dimensional illustration—that he and his colleagues had affixed to their interior-facing desks (Weir). Unable to get a job in publishing, his first-choice field following a 1958 graduation from Fordham University in his native Bronx (Passaro), he soon found himself penning print ads for Sears tires and other “‘very undistinguished accounts’” (DeLillo, “Intensity of a Plot”), extolling the virtues of their products in the smooth soft-sell language that was the agency’s trademark. Unlike Joseph Heller, DeLillo has been characteristically reticent about his tenure as an ad man and dismissive about its role in his development as a writer. In interviews he has made only passing references to his advertising career—describing it, for example, as “short, uninteresting” (“PW Interviews: Don DeLillo” 49)—seemingly as a way to deflect deeper inquiries into the subject. I received a slightly more helpful but similarly terse answer in my attempt to ask about his ad-man days in my own brief written interview with the author, which will be quoted throughout this chapter.¹ His closest friends from the agency did not respond to my requests to speak with them, perhaps from a desire to respect his privacy.² Thus, other than a few minor snippets gathered from infrequent DeLillo interviews and recollections of colleagues who were more acquaintances than friends, most of the author’s five-year stint at Ogilvy, from 1959-1964, is shrouded in mystery.

While the specifics of campaigns DeLillo worked on and how he felt about writing copy are largely unknown, the history of OB&M is quite well documented,³ and much about the day-to-day experience of working there can be gleaned from memoirs and scholarly histories, as well
as interviews I conducted with a couple of DeLillo’s co-workers. Founded in 1948 by an Oxford dropout and former researcher for The Gallup Organization (Cracknell 33, 36), the Ogilvy agency emerged as an industry leader in the early 1950s with two particularly famous campaigns, Hathaway Shirts and Schweppes Tonic Water (Fox 233). Featuring classy, distinguished-looking poster-men and gently persuasive copy, these ads established and epitomized the Ogilvy style. Though not without precedent—as Marchand notes in Advertising the American Dream, the class approach was common in the 1920s (194-200)—these campaigns were viewed by many as a breath of fresh air from the visually busy, content-redundant, hard-sell techniques favored by the likes of David Ogilvy’s influential contemporary, Rosser Reeves of Ted Bates Inc. (Roman 117-19). The emphasis on style and substance over sloganeering and the many variations on adopted themes as opposed to repetition ad infinitum earned the agency a reputation for creativity in its early years, and as such, it was probably one of the better places for a literary talent to be working at the time.

However, as OB&M passed its tenth birthday and entered a new decade, the 1960s, the sleek style and reliance on research that had earned the firm respect became codified into rules and formulae that “hobbled the output of the creative department” (Cracknell 47). When Ogilvy published his Confessions of an Advertising Man in 1963—essentially an ad man’s Bible, with chapters such as “How to Build Great Campaigns” and “How to Write Potent Copy”—what began as guidelines for good advertising became strictly enforced dogma. The acquisition of new, larger clients such as Shell based on the early successes of Hathaway and Schweppes only intensified Ogilvy’s orthodoxy, and many viewed the agency “as creatively near bankrupt” (Cracknell 46).
While copywriters and art directors at OB&M found themselves chained to their chairman’s rules and regulations, another kind of agency, by comparison almost anarchic in its operations, was gaining prominence off the Avenue. Founded one year after Ogilvy, Doyle Dane Bernbach reversed the traditional hierarchy, putting leadership in the hands of the creative staff rather than account executives (Frank 57). It made no effort to hide the fact that it was partly Jewish-owned in an era when it was still common for clients to specify “no Jews” (Fox 273-74), and many of its copywriters in the early years were women, including its copy chief, Phyllis Robinson (Fox 295). In sum, it was by all appearances the opposite of any large agency in the industry, and by the late 1950s, its fresh approach began to get noticed in its campaigns for Ohrbach’s, a discount department store, and Levy’s Jewish Rye. DDB’s artistic, unconventional layouts; minimal but witty and impactful text; and avoidance of anything approaching puffery set a new standard in advertising, and with the debut of the “Think Small” campaign for Volkswagen in 1959-1960, the Creative Revolution was born (Frank 55). Indeed, Doyle Dane Bernbach was only the first of many creative boutique agencies that would flourish during this era. Papert Koenig Lois, Wells Rich Greene, and Carl Ally Inc. were some of the more successful imitators of the DDB model, and though the collective billings of these establishments, including DDB, were never more than 8% of total advertising revenue for the decade (Cracknell 215), they were seen inside the industry as a major threat, poaching both talent and clients from the larger, traditional agencies.

It is not my intention to provide a comprehensive history of the Creative Revolution here, but rather to offer a brief overview of the upheavals occurring in advertising during the early 1960s in order to contextualize DeLillo’s departure from Ogilvy in 1964. As previously indicated, many creative types exited the established agencies at this time, but unlike some of his
colleagues, DeLillo did not do so in order to sign on with one of the hot new creative boutiques, as did fellow Ogilvy alumnus Peter Mayle, who became creative director at PKL’s London office that same year (Cracknell 120). Nor did he share Heller’s success as a “serious” writer that rendered the author of *Catch 22*’s continued presence in the promotions world unnecessary. According to DeLillo, he himself did not even quit to write, but just to quit, so he could “go to the movies on weekday afternoons” (“Intensity of a Plot”). However, in a moment of seemingly greater candor, he admits that he “was just getting good at it when [he] left, and perhaps that was a secret reason for [him] to leave” (“Intensity of a Plot”). Despite his apparent anxiety about getting roped into the industry for good, he continued to write copy on a freelance basis for the rest of the decade while *Americana* (“An Outsider in this Society” 66), his first novel, “came floating, slowly, out of [his] typewriter” (Personal Interview 1).

The resulting text remains a minor novel for DeLillo, who did not obtain major critical attention until the publication of *White Noise* in 1985, but it is vital to this study because like *Catch-22*, it provides a crucial link between advertising, postwar masculinity, and the development of the postmodern novel. Published in 1971 and set in the mid-late 1960s, it is the story of David Bell, a young television network executive and the embodiment of corporate masculinity. In the first section of the novel, we learn about the protagonist’s life in New York, especially his job at the network, a place just as absurd, other-directed, and male-dominated as the quasi-ad agency portrayed in *Catch-22*. In parts two and three, David embarks on a road trip with three friends, ostensibly for the purpose of filming a television series on the Navajo, but really to find himself as a man, in the tradition of the road novel as new frontier narrative. He winds up in a small Midwestern town, where he decides to stop and produce an autobiographical film—one we later learn he has been working on for some time—using local residents to play his
part and that of his longtime-ad-man father, among others. Through this process of representing his life, he seems to gain purchase on the realization he has been grasping at up to this point in the novel: his entire life—and, in fact, the life of the country—has been dominated by “the ontological authority of images” (Cowart, “For Whom the Bell Tolls” 138), images he has helped to construct. At the end of the narrative, he retreats to New York, and eventually, to a small island off the coast of Africa, where he spends his days reflecting on, not his actual life, but its simulacrum on film. Indeed, the simulated’s effacement of the real is an essential element of the genre Americana helped to define, and DeLillo’s acute awareness of the ontological and epistemological problems inherent in searching for truth in such a society can be traced back to his ad-man days.

“Every Color is Essentially Gray as Long as Everyone is Wearing It”

In the previous chapter I devoted a considerable amount of verbal energy to establishing that Catch-22, despite its outward appearance as a war novel, is really about mid-century business culture, particularly the promotions industry. Little labor by comparison will be required to demonstrate that Americana also takes corporate culture, especially advertising, as one of its primary subjects. Not only is the first section of the novel, as previously stated, set in the offices of a television network, but the novel is chock full of overt references to specific ad campaigns—often in the voice of the protagonist’s father, an account executive who at times sounds suspiciously like Rosser Reeves. While television and advertising are of course mutually dependent and inextricably intertwined, Americana reveals the former as a mere subsidiary of the latter, as when, in Part III, television is referred to as “‘an electronic form of packaging’” in David’s life-film (270). If we can more or less take for granted that the network is also
essentially an agency, it will be useful for our purposes to compare office life in the supposedly freer 1960s to the heydey of the Organization Man, the 1950s. As DeLillo portrays it, little had changed besides the color scheme.

The novel opens with a scene of New York at Christmastime, shown as a somewhat depressing spectacle, in which only the shoppers are in good spirits. Following the depiction of an equally dreary party, we receive a lengthy description of David Bell’s appearance. Tall, fit, tan, and blond, he appears to be the quintessential all-American male, and he makes clear from the beginning that this is the most important thing the reader needs to know about him: “I had almost the same kind of relationship with my mirror that many of my contemporaries had with their analysts. When I began to wonder who I was, I took the simple step of lathering my face and shaving. It all became so clear. I was blue-eyed David Bell. Obviously my life depended on this fact” (11).

David’s preoccupation with his image, as we learn in Chapter 2, is not unique among his colleagues at the network. Indeed, the ensuing narrative reveals that constructing and maintaining the correct picture of corporate masculinity is the primary occupation of the men in the office; producing programming is merely backdrop. Because the novel is set in the Sixties, the visual aspects of this image have changed somewhat from the age of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* to reflect what Frank refers to as “The Peacock Revolution” in men’s fashion during that decade (187), a widespread embrace of different hues and patterns hitherto reserved for women’s clothing. However, as David indicates when he describes the company dress code, while the color palette has changed, the other-directed values inherent within it have not, “the establishment having learned that every color is essentially gray as long as everyone is wearing it. So [one] did not hesitate to show up for work in an orange tie, but never more orange than the
orange the others wore” (36). The bright colors of doors and furniture in the offices of the network’s executives also convey a Sixties vibe, but the variation in design aesthetic, in contrast to the uniformity in dress, is a source of great anxiety to David and his colleagues: “I thought there might be a subtle color scheme designed by management and based on a man’s salary, ability, and prospects for advancement or decline. Why did no two people have identical sofas and doors? [...] There were others who felt as I did” (89). The fear and paranoia projected in David’s descriptions of the office form an important underside to corporate manhood, as detailed in the previous chapter, and to which I will return shortly.

As we saw in Catch-22, the ability to manipulate language is another important characteristic of the corporate man, and in Americana, the network executives’ employ this skill with aplomb. Though they seem to do little other than eat, drink, flirt with the secretaries, and talk about one another, a special jargon allows them to construct a collective illusion of industriousness. What follows is a representative snippet from the Friday morning executive meeting, a conversation between Weede Denney, David’s boss, and Jones Perkins, one of his coworkers:

“I want to generate a little heat on the Morgenthau thing” [said Weede].

“The Morgenthau thing is just absolutely fine,” Jones Perkins said.

“What about Morgenthau himself?”

“What about Morgenthau himself,” Jones said. “Well, he has just about made up his mind to do it and get it done and the hell with the haircream people.”

“But has he definitely committed?”

“I would say he has just about definitely committed.”

“In other words, we have rounded the buoy.”
“Weede, I would go even further than that. I would say he has just about
definitely committed.”

“Would you say in your own mind that the haircream people do or do not enter
into it?”

“The haircream people definitely do not enter into it as far as I can see at this
juncture, pending final word from Morgenthau himself when he returns from the islands.”

“Which islands?”

“Which islands,” Jones said. “I’ll get on that right away” (64-65).

This exchange is one of the novel’s “incongruous dialogues” that exhibits “a tone of comic near-
hysteria,” an example of the way in which, in DeLillo’s words, his advertising career gave
“occasional rough shape to certain aspects of the novel” (Personal Interview 1). Even without the
seemingly necessary knowledge of who Morgenthau is, what project the network is working with
him on, or what “the haircream people” have to do with it—details that the reader never receives
but are ultimately inconsequential—what should be clear from this “dialogue” is that there is no
meaning behind these words, and not only in the Wittgensteinian sense that words and sentences
are meaningless out of context. As David describes “the graytalk of the network” (255), “[w]ords
and meanings were at odds. Words did not say what was being said nor even its reverse” (36). A
combination of conditional statements, evasions, clichés and non-sequiturs, the purpose is not to
communicate information, but to create a semblance of productivity and mark themselves as
members of the executive class. These mutual affirmations that they are all working hard are
crucial to the corporate male culture of the network.

In addition to the special language designed to disguise endemic idleness, rumors form an
important part of life at the network. 7 Heterosexual affairs between coworkers are extremely
common and essentially open secrets, so they provide little fodder for gossip. Instead, most rumors at the network relate to the prospects of one’s employment. One type, of which David finds himself the subject, is the “trend man” rumor. “Part of the company’s relentless program of cordiality” (67), it consists of all of the employees at the network telling a single network executive, for a week or so, that they “have been hearing good things about [him]” (67). As David explains it, “since our business by its nature was committed to the very flexible logic of trends, there always came the time when the bearer of glad tidings became the recipient. Each of us, sooner or later, became a trend in himself […] I was never able to figure out how these trends started, who started them, or how the word spread” (67). He cannot help but wonder, though skeptically, if “top management devised the whole thing, designat[ing] a trend-man of the month, someone whose morale needed boosting” (67). In other words, like the inflated job titles of the network’s white-collar men, who are all “executives,” and the sharing of graytalk as their official language, the trend-man system is part of what Susan Faludi refers to as “corporate America’s [false] promise to continue the World War II GI’s wartime experience of belonging (29),” to keep men feeling as manly in the office as they had on the battlefield.

On the other side of the coin from the trend-man scenario is the rumor that someone is about to get “the axe.” Throughout the first section of the novel, various individuals are singled out as next in line to be fired, in rumors originating in an equally mysterious fashion. In one instance, an executive named Paul Joyner even starts a rumor himself that he is going to be fired as an incantation against that occurrence (DeLillo, *Americana* 23). Turnover in agencies was incredibly high, and eventually, many of the firing rumors in *Americana* also prove true, as seven of David’s fellow executives are purged in the second section (123). The dread of dismissal throughout the novel, and the desperation of Joyner and others to escape this fate—like Reeves
Chancellor

Chubb, who frequently stays overnight in the office to maintain his reputation as a hard worker—reflects not only the real omnipresence of that danger, the “insecurity and pink slips” that were often “awarded” to good white-collar soldiers (Faludi 30), but also the dire consequences of a corporate man losing his employment: emasculation, or metaphorical death, which are reflected in the various terms David and his secretary, Binky, employ to describe the mass layoffs. Among these are “‘mass rape and execution’” (DeLillo, Americana 222); “‘[d]rawn and quartered’” (123), evoking dismemberment (and dis-member-ment); and “‘gunned down at the OK Corral’” (123), which humorously, though appropriately, compares the corporate man to the cowboy as a fallen masculine icon.10

One man who “got the axe,” Reeves Chubb, is of particular interest, as his supposed masculine failure precedes his firing and is possibly the reason for it, despite—or perhaps because of—his workhorse charade. According to the office rumor mill, as well as graffiti on the men’s room wall, Reeves is a homosexual, and as such, an aberration from the correct image of the corporate man. A conversation between Weede and David about Reeves, his sexuality, and his involvement in producing a program about communist China is worth quoting at length:

“The State Department doesn’t want any queers working on the China thing. Far be it from me to challenge the thinking of people whose most vital concern is our own national security. A meeting was held in a midtown hotel last week [to determine whether or not Reeves is gay]. For the most part it was inconclusive. Reeves is a married man, you know.”

“Sometimes that happens,” [David] said […] “It’s a shadow world. It’s a sickness. It can happen to anyone.”
“Did you know that Reeves sleeps in his office two or three nights a week? Something like that makes you wonder. What does his wife think about something like that?” […]

“Weede, one of the very best ways to arrive at some kind of conclusive determination in a situation like this with a man’s whole future at stake is simply to think back on it […] Think of small incidents, anecdotes he’s told, his reactions to certain words or phrases, the way he holds those little cigars of his, favorite expressions he uses, his sensibilities, his literary preferences, the amount of time he spends in the john, the kind of shoes he wears. It all has a bearing” (80-81).

The initial concern regarding Reeves reiterates the conflation of communists and homosexuals as security risks that is often relegated to the 1940s and 50s, the time of the so-called Lavender Scare, but in actuality continued throughout the 1960s. The notion of gays and lesbians as unsuitable employees was further justified by the American Psychiatric and American Psychological Associations’ classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder until 1973 (Bayer 208), a definition David refers to by labeling his colleague’s supposed same-sex attraction a “sickness.” In order to determine whether Reeves is “infected” with this dangerous, “diseased” form of masculinity, David encourages his boss to spy on his colleague as the State Department has done. As Thompson claims in Male Sexuality Under Surveillance, the office is a “sophisticated surveilling machine” (xiii), in which men constantly monitor one another for deviations from the prescribed heterosexual norm. The laundry list of microbehaviors the protagonist recounts to his boss as “evidence” against Reeves, including the accused’s consumptive habits, renders Reeves’ supposed sexual orientation legible to Weede (Thompson 115). Moreover, by discussing the matter behind closed doors, David and Weede are mutually
securing their own heterosexuality while simultaneously disciplining the men outside by suggesting that each of them could be the subject of discussion within (Thompson 116-17).¹²

Given the culture of surveillance in the corporate office, it is essential for the executives not only to avoid behaviors that might be labeled queer, but also to actively and conspicuously display their straightness. At the network, which is comprised of so many executives, almost exclusively white and male,¹³ and a large pool of female subordinates, there is no shortage of opportunities. According to David, the office is “like a fantasy of some elaborate woman-maze; wherever you go, around corners, into cubicles, up or down the stairwells, you are greeted by an almost lewd tableau […] It is like a dream of jubilant gardens in which every tree contains a milky nymph” (DeLillo, Americana 26). Unsurprisingly, he and the other executives frequently make sexual advances toward their secretaries, an aspect of what he refers to as “the new liberalism” (22).¹⁴ These overt heterosexual displays are passively accepted by the female staff but really performed for the men’s own egos—as David suggests when he reflects upon having kissed his own secretary, Binky—and also each other, as exhibited by “Dickie Slater, the sixty-five-year-old mailboy” who, when he sees that David has caught him masturbating behind one of the secretaries’ desks, “grinned, man to man, and kept rubbing” (26). Affairs are de rigueur, as then-married David indicates of his first one with a woman from the research department named Jennifer Fine, who “would […] guide [him] into the vortex of the cliché” (37). Efforts to conceal his and other intra-network trysts, like that between Weede and Binky, are made not because the men “really cared whether someone might find out but because intensity and suspense are fundamental to the maintenance of a successful affair” (38).

As the above textual evidence indicates, the primary function of female clerical workers at the network, as presented by the narrator, is to provide a means for their corporate male bosses
to demonstrate their heterosexuality. There is, however, another apparent reason these women are reduced to sexual stereotypes. Recounting the lessons he learned as he ascended the ranks at the network, David states that “most of the secretaries were more intelligent than most of the executives and that the executive secretaries were to be feared more than anyone” (36), a fact that makes him and the other network men uneasy and necessitates the objectification of the women workers as a defense mechanism. Two counterexamples of women who resist objectification will serve to prove the rule: Mrs. Kling and Isabel Mayer. Mrs. Kling, Weede’s secretary, is a satirical take on the “Momist”-type character often credited with emasculating the men in their lives in midcentury popular culture, a much older woman who rules the network office with an iron fist. While it is generally the men who observe one another and gawk at the women workers, Mrs. Kling keeps watch over everyone, a manifestation of her power. Her resistance to objectification is best illustrated by an anecdote the protagonist relates from a company party: “[P]ursuing a rumor of striptease and frolic,” he walked into a colleague’s office to find “Mrs. Kling, alone and unaware of [him], standing rigid, shoeless and blouseless, brassiered like a bank vault almost neck to navel, her left foot forward, two clenched fists raised before her […] the classic Queensberry stance of the pier brawlers” (92). This image is a parody of a 1961 Maidenform ad, in which a scantily clad Marilyn Monroe-esque model donning boxing gloves proclaims, “I dreamed I was a knockout in my Maidenform bra.” In this burlesque version, Mrs. Kling rejects the male gaze and substitutes physical power for sex appeal, and unlike the original image or, more importantly, the behavior of his male colleagues, David declares this incident unreadable.

The other asexualized woman in the network office is Isabel Mayer. A middle-aged woman, she is neither secretary nor executive, but a mid-level fashion coordinator, and according
to David, feared by all: “she was not competitive with anyone in the entire network. Yet we all went to shameful extremes to prove our friendship and loyalty […S]he seemed to be a woman who might attack at any moment, making no concessions at all to the etiquette of office combat” (DeLillo, Americana 18). On one group outing, she bragged that she had put one of her pubic hairs in a male colleague’s drink, and while imbibing with the executives at lunch one day—a clear marker, whether historically accurate or not, that the network is essentially an ad agency—she recounts to them different messages scrawled in women’s restrooms at various New York dining establishments (18). Her vulgarity is not as random as it may seem, however, but instead reflective of the corporate men by whom she is surrounded. Throughout the novel David enacts similarly juvenile revenges on colleagues—telling pointless lies, stealing trivial items, leaving a used handkerchief in a superior’s drawer—and potentially even authors, though we cannot be sure, the graphic graffiti alleging Reeves Chubb’s homosexuality. These measures are in fact modes of resistance to the strictures of corporate life, as is the rampant time-theft among the executives in the office, and Isabel’s use of such tactics can likewise be read as resistance—in this case, to objectification, in order to be read instead as “one of the boys.”

As in Catch-22, the general fear of women—a fear neutralized through men’s sexual objectification of them or magnified by women’s resistance to it—does not point to a real threat posed by women as manipulators or men, nor is it a response to the second wave of feminism that was then in its nascent stage. Rather, it is one more feature of the attenuated corporate man whose portrait DeLillo paints in Americana. Like the abhorrence of difference, the charade of productivity, the incessant gossip, the constant dread of dismissal, and the pervasive policing and performance of heterosexuality, it is a symptom of the phenomenon David describes as concomitant with his occupational advancement: “Once out of the mailroom, I began to learn
more about fear. As soon as fear begins to ascend, anatomically, from the pit of the stomach to the throat and brain, from fear of violence to the more nameless kind, you come to believe you are part of a horrible experiment’” (36). This sentiment must be understood in two contexts: historical and textual. Read through the lens of the former, it sums up the situation of postwar American white men. The process of reconversion and the so-called return to normalcy was anything but, but rather a giant sociological and socioeconomic experiment in which the federal government intervened, with measures such as the GI Bill, to enhance the class status and overall quality of life of those it deemed most responsible for the U.S. victory. While seemingly intended to expand and secure the place of the white middle-class male in American society, the ambient fear attending that subject position suggests the palpability of its tenuousness to those who occupied it, an insecurity that continued to pervade the corporate world two decades after the War’s end. Within the context of the novel itself, David’s comment recalls an anecdote his father shared with him in his youth. To comprehend the protagonist’s expression of corporate masculinity, impending existential crisis, and need to escape, we must first understand his relationship to his father.

Clinton Bell is a World War II vet who survived the Bataan Death March to live the American Dream, replete with suburban home, wife and three kids, a job in advertising, membership in all the right clubs, and a vast collection of consumer goods that “were part of the spirit of the age” (DeLillo, Personal Interview 2). In the novel’s present he is a widower, his mentally ill wife having passed from cervical cancer while David was in college, and a top account executive at a large agency, “‘the last of the old school in this business’” (DeLillo, Americana 84). He specializes in television commercials, which David recalls watching on a projector like home movies alongside his father and sister in his youth, and he is a confirmed
workaholic because “work is better than death” (83). If David Bell is corporate man 2.0, his father is the original issue.

In Part II of the novel, which is almost entirely comprised of flashback vignettes depicting David’s early family life and college days, we receive the parable that informs his comments on fear in Part I. Taking his son for a ride in his Mark IX Jaguar, the elder Bell imparts some words of wisdom upon David about the potential pitfalls of being a successful businessman:

“They pulled an experiment on these two monkeys. They gave them electric shocks every sixty seconds. Now the first monkey had a button and all he had to do was press it and he wouldn’t get any shock. The second monkey also had a button but it was completely useless. Eventually monkey-A caught on to the gimmick and started pressing the button like mad to avoid that juice. Whereas monkey-B realized his button wasn’t worth shit and he just squatted in the corner, scratching himself and getting jolted every minute. So what happens? The first monkey gets stomach ulcers and kicks off in two weeks. The second monkey, who had resigned himself to the shocks, lives happily every after. That little experiment is a moral for our time. It shows the price you have to pay for working yourself up to a decision-making post. I’ll have to show you around the office sometime. You’ll see sixty-five executive monkeys weeping into their telephones and pissing blood. That’s the kind of business your old man is in” (153).22

While Clinton Bell assures his son that he will survive despite the deleterious effects of his career, this is not exactly a tale to inspire dreams of growing up to be like one’s father, and indeed, for a time, David appears to be taking an opposite path. He attends a small liberal arts college in southern California, where he majors in experimental filmmaking. He writes poetry,
listens to jazz, studies Zen, and engages in casual sex. And yet, prior to beginning his senior year he marries a woman named Meredith, at the ripe age of twenty, and after graduation, returns to New York, where he is presented with three job opportunities by his father: two in advertising and one at a television network. He took the latter to “avoid following too closely in his footsteps” because “[i]ndependence is everything” (34).23

It is fairly obvious to the reader that while David’s footsteps have not followed his father’s exactly, he is at least wearing the same shoes; however, the protagonist is only realizing this in the process of narrating Part I. A conversation with his father at lunch one afternoon aids this discovery. Listening to Clinton Bell once again relate how much he loves his job despite the stress, David challenges him, asking, “‘Why is it that all the advertising people I’ve ever known want to get out? [...] They all want to build their own schooners, plank by plank, and sail to the Tasman Sea. I know a copywriter at Creighton Insko Dale. At lunch one day he started to cry’” (85). Relating the incident to his friend Sullivan again later, he ascertains the full implications of his copywriter friend’s story: “‘I laughed at him. A week later he had a cerebral hemorrhage. We learn nothing from the stereotypes around us, not even that we’re all the same’” (97). In the former conversation, David found himself wishing Clinton would die and believing that his own freedom was contingent upon his father’s death. In the latter, he recognizes that he has already assumed the corporate-man role of his father, not to mention his recently deceased friend, and that if freedom is possible, it can only be attained through his own agency.

Thus, like any red-blooded American male protagonist—following a long line of literary predecessors including Natty Bumppo, Huckleberry Finn, Sal Paradise, and of course, John Yossarian—David finally flees bourgeois civilization in order to escape its constraints on his masculinity.24 As previously stated, his road trip into the American Heartland is at least
ostensibly a work trip, and importantly, the subject of the program he is supposed to be filming is the Navajo. As a Native American tribe, they represent for David the country’s original brand of nostalgic manliness, valorized and retroactively transformed in the early twentieth century into white Americans’ mythical noble ancestors in works such as Zane Grey’s *The Vanishing American* (Michaels 40). It is unclear whether or not David ever intended to fulfill his assignment, for he abandons it not long after his journey begins to instead turn the camera upon himself. His new mission is two-fold: to examine himself as a man, and to explore the possibility of alternative masculinities available to him in the world outside the office. It is, as we shall see, a literary journey in more ways than one.

The Road to Self-Discovery

Though travel narratives in general have a special place in American letters—depicting such iconic events as exploration and settlement of the frontier, escape from slavery along the Underground Railroad, and mass-migration from Dust Bowl territory during the Great Depression—the road-trip story is the quintessential genre of post-WWII America. Thanks to a booming economy, more Americans than ever owned cars (Cohen 123), and beginning in 1956, with the passage of the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act, the number of large roadways multiplied rapidly. In addition to an increase in opportunities for travel, there was also, for many, an intensified perceived need to do so. Indeed, the more American culture insisted upon the importance of settling down—i.e., finding a job, getting married, purchasing a home, having children, and fulfilling various other socially expected roles—the more many felt the need to flee, especially men ( Ehrenreich 51-57). Thus, the twentieth-century road novel, as I am arguing of the postmodern American novel overall, has generally been viewed as an inherently
masculine genre, for if women are traditionally associated with the home, then the road is envisioned as a place where men can be free to be themselves, away from the feminized sphere of domestic life. Thus, not only are most members of the road genre from this period products of male authorship that feature primarily male characters—exemplified by novels such as Kerouac’s *On the Road* and Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*, and films such as *Easy Rider*—but as a group, they generally reject the notion of travel as a teleological, destination-driven means to an end; the point, as Cresswell argues in his study of *On the Road*, is the journey itself (249). This is the cultural context in which we must read the road-trip sections of *Americana*, and DeLillo self-consciously situates the novel in the postwar road narrative tradition by alternately adopting and rejecting some of its common tropes and occasionally alluding to some of its most important texts.

As in all travel narratives, multiple journeys take place in *Americana*—three, in fact—only one of which is physical, and that one is least meaningful. The other two constitute the real exploration in the novel, its “intensity of purpose” that stems from David’s own “tensions […] the elements that drive the narrative along a path of language that generates its own momentum” (DeLillo, Personal Interview 2). One of these is the interior journey David makes in the process of shooting his life-film, in hopes, it seems, of better understanding himself as a man who is the product of his experiences, the larger culture, and perhaps most importantly, other products. The other is a gradually realized, though ultimately disappointing search for another, better way to be a man in American society, which takes the form of encountering and subsequently rejecting alternatives to the model of corporate masculinity set before him by his father. In order to better contextualize the latter, I will begin by discussing the former.
After a week or so of driving “more or less to the west” (DeLillo, *Americana* 125), David and his three companions—two men, Brand and Pike, and woman named Sullivan—arrive in the anonymous small town of Fort Curtis, situated somewhere in the mid-Midwest. David decides, with the others’ acquiescence, to stay for a few days in Fort Curtis and shoot several hours of “messy, autobiographical-type film” (205), since he is not due on the Navajo set for two weeks. They check into a motel, which will serve as both shelter and studio, and David sets about recruiting locals to play various characters in his life. Many of the scenes he records over what becomes several weeks of filming—in the course of which he passively abdicates his position at the network by neither showing up for the Navajo shoot nor formally resigning—are interpretations of incidents narrated in the flashback section of the novel in Part II. These include, among other things, his sister Mary’s account of falling in love with her mobster hitman husband and he and his now ex-wife deciding to get married. However, the majority of cinematic attention, unsurprisingly, is devoted to David’s father, and these are the scenes I will analyze in greatest detail.

Having realized at the end of Parts I and II just how much of his life had been shaped by his father and the generation he represents, David delves more deeply into the subject by shooting two scripted scenes starring a local named Glenn Yost as the elder Bell. In the first of these, David films several minutes of a midday television game show with frequent commercial breaks and then proceeds to ask Glenn-as-Clinton a series of questions. He begins by asking why people watch commercial television, to which “Clinton” responds: “The TV set is a package and it’s full of products. Inside are detergents, automobiles, cameras, breakfast cereal, other televisions sets. Programs are not interrupted by commercials; exactly the reverse is true […] Without the products there’s nothing […] Who in America would want to watch TV without
Written by David, this statement exhibits his full realization that he is, by default, an ad man himself, for the primary purpose of the programs he has produced is to promote consumer products, hence his use of the phrase “commercial television.” Moreover, according to his filmic father, commercials affect the viewer by “mov[ing] him from first person consciousness to third person. In this country there is a universal third person, the man we all want to be. Advertising […] uses him to express the possibilities open to the consumer. To consume in America is not to buy; it is to dream. Advertising is the suggestion that the dream of entering the third person singular might possibly be fulfilled” (270). The consistent use of masculine pronouns in this description is significant and in direct opposition to David Ogilvy’s famous maxim that “[t]he consumer isn’t a moron. She is your wife” (96). In sum, David here explains through the voice of his father that the American dream itself has been constructed by promotions professionals like the Bell men, and that a man is, in effect, what he buys (Marchand, Advertising 234).

If the dream purveyed by advertisers is of imitating an idealized male archetype—“an image in the image and likeness of images,” as the protagonist calls it in an earlier monologue (DeLillo, Americana 130)—it cannot venture into the fantastical, as Clinton-on-film conveys. Asked to differentiate between film and advertising, since “[m]ovies are full of people we want to be” (270), he explains that “[a]dvertising is never bigger than life […] We have exploited the limitation of dreams. It’s our greatest achievement” (280). In other words, it is a more convincing simulacrum of reality than the version purveyed by Hollywood. For that reason, it is also more powerful. In The Exurbanites, SpectorSky observes that ad men are also swayed by their own depictions of the dream (261), and while aware of their self-deception (270), they are unable to resist the dream’s pull. Accordingly, when David as unnamed interlocutor asks his
“father” what he does to overcome the occasional feeling that commercial television ultimately ‘spells chaos for all of us,’” the latter answers, “‘I take a mild and gentle Palmolive bath, brush my teeth with Crest, swallow two Sominex tablets, and try desperately to fall asleep on my Simmons Beautyrest mattress’” (DeLillo, Americana 274-75). Even when recognizing the problems inherent in the consumerist American Dream, the dreamers cannot imagine a non-consumerist solution.26

Because examining his family history is a self-exploratory exercise for David, delving into his father’s military service, about which Clinton himself had been reticent, is a particularly important topic. In the other filmed scene depicting David’s father, the subject recounts his experience in the Bataan Death March. The details are disturbing—prisoners with dysentery and malaria being forced to dig mass graves and being transported to POW camps in cattle cars—but the elder Bell’s imagined interpretation of the event is especially striking. Thinking about his time in captivity, he recalls feeling hatred not for the Japanese soldiers who held him hostage, but rather “‘our country which treasured the sacrifice of its sons, making slogans out of their death and selling war bonds with it or soap for all we knew’” (297). With this statement, he recognizes, as did the officers of Catch-22, that even dead bodies have their utility in the consumer economy. Employing this logic, he regrets the loss of his Zippo lighter during the March because “‘it would have made a good ad in the campaign they were running […] THIS ZIPPO SURVIVED THE BATAAN DEATH MARCH’” (294). The fact that so many men did not becomes a major selling point. Significantly, in another interview scene depicting a different actor as David, the latter’s on-screen image says of the then-current war, Vietnam, “‘I’ve seen it on television. It’s sponsored by instant coffee among other things’” (284). The significance of this statement is two-fold: it supplants the “real” war being fought overseas with images of the
conflict shown on television, the significance of which I will discuss further in the conclusion to this chapter, and it inverts the promotional logic iterated by David’s filmic father—not using the war to sell products, but the reverse.\(^27\) \(^28\)

In sum, the scripted scenes portraying Clinton Bell are really a behind-the-scenes look at the making of a corporate man, a man who David recognizes he has become. By comparison, those starring a young local actor named Austin Wakely as David are shorter and somewhat less interesting, though a few comments are warranted. In one scene, “David” answers some questions about his marriage and moviemaking pursuits, ending with a message to his future self: "I hope you’ve finally become part of your time, David. You were always a bit behind, held back by obsolete sensibilities" (286). The sensibilities he refers to, it would appear, are the ideals of corporate masculinity inherited from his father—démodé in the late 1960s and early 1970s, of course, though still alive and well in men like himself. In another scene, Austin stands quiet and motionless while David narrates off-screen, stating that it is 1999 and his future self may now ask his former self anything he desires. What follows is twenty seconds of recorded silence (309). This scene is intended to be the last in the film and is a mirror image of the first scene, in which Austin stands silently for twenty seconds in front of a full-length mirror. That same amount of time, twenty seconds, is mentioned several places in the novel, both by David and his fictive father: it is a common duration for television commercials. If the portrayal of the protagonist’s family, especially his father, illustrates a process of becoming, then he himself is the product, and the film is, to paraphrase Norman Mailer, a collection of advertisements for himself.\(^29\)

The Fort Curtis scenes comprise only a small part of David’s life-film, which, as he explains at the beginning of Part IV, runs for nearly a week in its unedited form and depicts a
variety of incidents and images from his life, ending in “silence and darkness” (346). They are, however, both the sole scenes described in detail and the only ones that employ actors, suggesting that they bear special significance, which I interpret as follows. Collectively, in the context of both the novel and the film, the Fort Curtis scenes are an examination of masculine roles with which David is personally familiar: the corporate man, the World War II soldier, the violent mobster (his brother-in-law), the perverted provincial doctor (his mother’s), the arrogant professor (his), the naïve college student (him), and the confused young boy (same). While shooting the last of these scenes, which depicts a quasi-Oedipal moment with his mother, he wonders whether the “commercial [...] would sell the product” (317), and indeed, rather than assuring himself of his own brand identity, a term his father uses earlier in the novel to describe his own masculinity (85), the experience of filming in Fort Curtis seems to lead him to a rejection of both his own make of manhood and those he has known in the course of his development. It is thus that the pursuit of other possibilities characterizes what I have described as David’s third journey.

An Alternate Route?

As stated in the previous section, David’s search for other modes of manhood is not fully subsequent to his cinematic self-psychoanalysis. After all, he was well aware of his dissatisfaction with corporate life prior to leaving New York, and that awareness was, to paraphrase DeLillo himself, a not-so-secret reason for leaving. Moreover, his desire to not be like his ad-man father dates back to his childhood, as LeClair notes, when he rejected Clinton as a male role model, idealizing instead Burt Lancaster as Sergeant Warden in *From Here to Eternity*—“a crescendo of male perfection” (DeLillo, *Americana* 13)—as a fantasy father figure
(LeClair 19). But in the context of the road trip, the quest begins concomitant with the first leg and really resumes upon David’s solo departure from Fort Curtis. The characters he encounters along the way—from Brand the would-be Beat to a hippie called the Incredible Shrinking Man to a hardened redneck named Clevenger—embody different varieties of masculinity that he considers, though ultimately rejects, as possible alternatives. In order to understand why, it will be useful examine each case individually.

From the first mention of the proposed road trip westward, David describes it as a “‘religious’” journey, channeling the Beat writers: “Explore America in the screaming night [...] Yin and Yang in Kansas. That scene” (10). Given this goal, his selection of Bobby Brand as travel companion makes sense beyond his friend’s possession of a camper. A former Ivy Leaguer, recovering heroin addict, and aspiring novelist who lives in his aunt’s garage, Brand appears to be a (heterosexualized) composite of Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and Allen Ginsberg, and as such, a sort of spiritual guide for the protagonist. In addition to biographical details, several textual allusions support this comparison. Shortly after the journey begins, David and Brand enter a supermarket, and what follows is a loose parody of Ginsberg’s “A Supermarket in California.” The two men, led by Brand, pursue a dark woman through the produce section, then stroll the various aisles apparently “shopping for images” (Ginsberg line 4), since they never seem to buy anything. This refusal to do so can be seen as an act of defiance, as David thinks of his father’s oft repeated mantra that “[y]ou have to move the merch off the shelves” while gazing at the items offered for sale (DeLillo, Americana 207). Later on in the narrative, Brand, who claims to be writing the Great American Novel, describes a vision for his future—that of a semi-hermetic life on the West Coast in which disciples of his many literary works make pilgrimages to talk and sleep with him—which could have come directly from
Dharma Bums or Big Sur, and indeed, he references the latter, though as a place rather than a book title (290-92). Thus, at least in the early part of the journey, David admires Brand as a man who rejects the values and responsibilities of corporate manhood, in contradistinction not only to David himself, but also his friend Ken Wild from college, whom the protagonist visits in nearby Chicago to learn the former would-be Beat poet has become a systems analyst at his father’s consulting firm (264-65).

The story of David’s college friend foreshadows the protagonist’s dismissal of Beat masculinity as a model of reformed manhood. Even prior to his rendezvous with Wild, David observes Brand during a conversation with his other travel companions and thinks, “[h]is was the universal face of alumni bulletins. Assistant plant manager of the general foam division, Tenneco Chemicals, East Rutherford, N.J. Training and education officer, Air University’s Warfare Systems School, Maxwell AFB, Ala. Brand the junior partner. The young Republican” (221). In these two encounters, David begins to recognize what Ehrenreich affirms in Hearts of Men: although the Beats did indeed largely repudiate consumerism and refuse to participate in corporatization, these forces found them anyway, transforming individuals and their rebellious ideals into a consumable, image-driven lifestyle: that of the beatnik (52-67). There is thus little difference between Brand in his continued pursuit of Beatness and Wild in his renunciation of that identity, and the significance of their names, which on the surface appear as though they should be swapped, suggests DeLillo’s awareness of this similarity. Seemingly confirmed by the fact that Brand’s novel is really “the Great American Sheaf of Blank Paper” (337), David recognizes the closest thing any of them can aspire to is the beatnik brand, which is all that is left of the once subversive movement by the 1960s.
Taking leave of his former companions after a tiff with Brand and Sullivan, David sets out alone “on the first stage of the second journey […] westward to match the shadows of [his] image and [him] self” (341). Clearly, David has not yet given up on the dream of the road as his road to salvation, and he hitchhikes his way into the desert, where he comes upon a hippie commune. Those who inhabit the encampment—all apparently young and white—live alongside a group of rogue Apaches. The notion of running away from mainstream American society to live with “the Indians” is, as previously mentioned, a nod to James Fennimore Cooper’s *The Leatherstocking Tales* and other works of its kind, a fantasy of escaping a tainted, feminized civilization to reclaim a purer, more masculine way of life. It is significant, however, that there is little description of and no recorded dialogue with any of the Apache residents. Instead, the representative of this imagined return is a hippie called the Incredible Shrinking Man, one of the founders of the settlement. Along with a woman named Jill, he describes to David their philosophy and way of life: living simply, “‘cleav[ing] to the old things’” (358), and avoiding the modern rat race that they refer to as “‘the death machine’” (356). Yet they also anticipate an alien invasion that will spawn a clash with the US government, and their strategy for survival is to become “‘indistinguishable’” from one another (358). As Jill explains it, “‘[w]e all try to dress the same way here […] But it’s not like uniforms. It’s just part of the single consciousness of the community. It’s like everybody is you and you are everybody’” (356).

The hippies initially intrigue David as another alternative to the corporate squares he attempted to leave behind in New York; however, he cannot help but pick up on certain similarities between the two groups. Despite the commune dwellers’ pretensions to simplicity, unity, and rejection of modernity, David observes that the tall, tan, muscular Incredible
Shrinking Man dyes his hair blue, and when the protagonist asks Jill about this aesthetic choice, she responds that he does it for “‘[v]anity’”:

“It’s silly for a person to repress his own vanity. Make love to your body and you kill the death inside you.”

“There are certain inconsistencies here” […]

“Youth and beauty are always important. It’s what the death police hate most. They want to kill us and fuck us at the same time.”

“I admit he’s a striking figure. I suppose the Indians think he’s a god.”

“The Indians think he’s a fag,” she said (360).

What is remarkable about this exchange is that, though the jargon is different, its emptiness and nonsensical nature cause it to resemble conversations between network employees in Part I; this is true of much of the dialogue in the road-trip sections of the novel. Though DeLillo claims that “David takes the ironies and sarcasms [from the office] with him into the heartland” (Personal Interview 1), this passage suggests that they were already there waiting for him. Moreover, the content of this conversation, in so much as it has any, reveals the “inconsistencies” David senses in hippie masculinity: while it claims to be a return to older, purer, simpler ways of being, the values of conformity and exhibiting a certain correctly accessorized image remain. It is only the type of image that has changed, and it is not one that those they claim to admire find particularly impressive, given the contemporaneous opinion of homosexuals as less than men. Consequently, the Incredible Shrinking Man—the title of a 1957 science fiction film in which exposure to toxic substances shrinks a businessman to invisibility—is not merely an ironic moniker given its bearer’s size, but rather an indication that the Sixties generation’s notion of manhood is plagued by some of the same problems as its corporate predecessor. In fact, the supposedly anti-
consumerist hippies’ hipness was used to sell every product imaginable—even decidedly unhip items such as tools, cleaning products, and liquor (Frank 134-35). Thus, to an even greater extent than their ideological precursors, the Beats, hippies were transformed by advertising and consumer culture, as youthful rebellion became defined by buying mass-produced products.

If hippie masculinity (falsely) claims to return to a past not diminished by corporatization, an imaginary primitive heritage it envisions as embodied in Native Americans, there is another variety that attracts David for its existence as a remainder from an earlier period, if not exactly a return. It is represented in the novel by a middle-aged man named Clevenger, with whom the protagonist catches a ride both before and after his sojourn at the commune. Though David senses in his companion “a dry secret of thumbing days and freight cars and nights spent with songless men in the crouched light of fires” (348), he turns out to be neither Kerouac-figure nor cowhand, but a Southern-style good ol’ boy, a gun-toting Texan who regales his passenger with tales of womanizing and Old Testament–style religious wrath (363). After riding around with him for some time, David realizes “why [he] was with [Clevenger], to search out the final extreme, the bible as weapon, the lean hunt of the godfearing man for the child who confounded his elders” (362). Read through the lens of the protagonist’s continued search for American masculinity, Clevenger appears to personify a form informed by Christian fundamentalism that, while never disappearing altogether, resurged in the postwar period and particularly the 1970s, in large part as a response to the various upheavals in the 1960s, which destabilized traditional notions of race, gender and power.33 Harking back to the “muscular Christianity” movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Christian fundamentalism in the second half of the twentieth century sought to reinvigorate white-male-
heterosexual dominance under the aegis of the Bible, and in this final leg of David’s journey, he explores the unexpected implications of this at Clevenger’s place of employment.

Clevenger is supervisor-in-chief at a tire test track, and he offers David, who has long since lost his position at the network, a job there until he gets on his feet. Rather than sending David straight to work, however, Clevenger calls in three other white employees for what he calls a “pig-party” (363). After consuming a large quantity of beer and bourbon, they call in a group of Mexican prostitutes, and drunken debauchery ensues. The men take turns trying to have sex with the women, with varying degrees of success, given their state of collective inebriation. David at first refuses to participate and even tries to escape, but Clevenger cajoles him, patting him on the back while repeating the phrase “‘soft white underbelly’” (373). Here he quotes a racist, xenophobic preacher whose sermon was playing on the radio in Clevenger’s Cadillac during their travels together: “‘Soft white underbelly […] We’re too soft and too sweet and we got to bear down on all those people that blaspheme our Christian nation’” (366). The message to David is clear, that he is a white man that must stop being “soft,” in all its gendered and sexualized implications, and what better way to assert his manly American dominance than by bearing down on the body of a non-white woman? David does join in, briefly, as events spiral out of control into a disgusting tableau of piss, vomit, de-eroticized sex, and petty violence. Horrified, he finally grabs his suitcase from Clevenger’s car and runs away as fast as his legs will carry him. Unlike the emergent archetypes David previously examined, the Beat and the hippie, the residual good ol’ boy is more than just an image, but as David’s reaction implies, Clevenger is clearly no improvement over the corporate man. Instead, he embodies the return of the repressed, the underbelly of traditional white American manhood: drunkenness, violence,
domination of the racial and sexual other, and—perhaps above all, given its proclaimed Christian justification—hypocrisy. 

In his journey back toward “civilization,” David hitchhikes with a variety of characters, including a one-armed sailor who propositions him—“’We’ll see who’s more man. Bigger gives it. Smaller takes. Them’s the rules of the road’” (376)—finally arriving in Midland, Texas, where he rents a car and heads to Dallas. Before catching a flight back to New York, he retraces the route of President Kennedy’s final drive through Dealey Plaza, past the School Book Depository, and finally to Parkland Hospital. Honking the horn, he pays tribute to a fallen idol, the quintessential corporate man. A war hero with the right looks and the right brand image, he was sold “like soap flakes” to the America public, first as Representative from Massachusetts, then as Senator, and finally as President. Norman Mailer noted that he seemed as if crafted by the advertising industry, “formed around the self-image in the mind of every superior Madison Avenue opportunist that he was hard, he was young, he was In, his conversation was lean as wit, and if the work was not always scrupulous, well the style could aspire” (“Superman Comes to the Supermarket” 62). Indeed, JFK was the third-person singular incarnate, “the man everyone wants to be,” and his passing was in many ways the death of the dream. Commenting on Kennedy’s death, DeLillo wrote to me that “[v]iolence and consumerism seemed at times an intertwined phenomenon, each commenting on the other, or responding to the other – the defining elements of an era” (Personal Interview 1). Moreover, in an interview following the publication of DeLillo’s Libra, which examines the life of Lee Harvey Oswald, the author cited this as the moment when America lost “a manageable sense of reality” (“An Outsider in This Society”’ 56). In Americana, David’s quasi-memorial procession for Kennedy represents all of this: the violent death of the corporate-man dream—with nothing to replace it—and the
protagonist’s loss of his last grip on reality. The final line of the novel depicts David flying back to New York, though the fabula, to use Eco’s term, ends, as previously mentioned, with the narrator watching his life-film alone on an isolated island, bereft of any identity beyond the images on the screen.

Before looking closely at this end-of-events, it will be useful to consider one last “alternative” masculinity that, though not available to David as a substitute for the white corporate version, occupies the text throughout and must therefore be acknowledged. As I discuss in my introduction, black masculinity, while always a source of obsession for white America, became a particular source of preoccupation in the mid-twentieth century, largely due to the civil rights movement. Given the novel’s title and the mission of its protagonist, it is unsurprising that Americana and David himself share this fixation on black manhood. The novel depicts various ways the white imagination has envisioned the black man in the twentieth century—as comic figure (130), subordinate worker (370), sexual superman (205), and source of imminent violence (153-55, 171)—and while David repeatedly rejects racist humor and even criticizes his own earlier, less-enlightened thinking about race, he simultaneously indulges in fantasies of blackness. At the Christmas party that provides the setting for the opening scene of the novel, David brings a black woman, B.G. Haines, as his date. Publicly acknowledged interracial relationships in 1960s New York, were, if not rare, at least uncommon enough to be remarked upon—especially those of the white man/black woman variety—so it is significant that, though a minor character, she is the first woman David is shown with in the novel. Then, near the end of the narrative, after all the other masculine possibilities he has explored prove disappointing, David attempts to step into the figurative role of the black man by asking to be assigned to drive and change tires at Clevenger’s test track—tasks typically relegated to the non-
white workers—a request that draws the silent ire of his new boss. The fact that these two incidents more or less bookend the novel and that blackness is a specter that haunts the entire story suggests DeLillo’s purposeful invocation of a theme I mention in my introduction, and to which I will briefly return.

Both Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* and Mailer’s “The White Negro” address the postwar crisis of corporate manhood, and while their approaches and perspectives are quite different—that of a philosopher and sociologist versus that of a novelist and pop-culture icon—both works posit black men as potentially superior to their white counterparts, suggesting in different ways that their oppression and exclusion have made them less susceptible to the conformity-inducing forces plaguing white men and perhaps even capable of saving the latter group from themselves. This conceptualization has justifiably been criticized as a new twist on old stereotypes, and it is not my intention to endorse that view here. My point, rather, is to contextualize David’s latent desire for blackness throughout *Americana*, his longing to believe, “as white men will do, that some Afro-instinct burned in an early part of [his] being” (145). Seeking a masculinity that is distinctly other-than his own, he is naturally drawn to the idea of the racial Other—the Native American, in addition to the African-American—as the embodiment of a more authentic, organic form of manhood, one that could liberate him from his corporate-man cage. He explores white Negritude in the hipster/Beat (Brand) and his successor, the hippie (the Incredible Shrinking Man), and he even considers the apparent polar opposite, the racist Southern traditionalist (Clevenger), all through encounters with individuals that embody these forms of masculinity. In contrast, it is worth noting though that there are no named black male characters in the novel, because in the context of David’s quest, none are necessary. What the protagonist is attracted to, albeit subconsciously, is a white fantasy of blackness because in his
eyes it is the ultimate fantasy of difference, and for this, his own imagination, as an extension of
the cultural imagination, is sufficient. In fact, as we will see, David learns in the end that no real
person will satisfy his longing for an alternate model of manhood; the real has, in fact, been
supplanted by the image.

Masculinity, Postmodernism, and the Simulacrum

As previously mentioned, the final events in *Americana* do not take place on David’s
return flight to New York, but rather on a small island near Africa, where the protagonist spends
the remainder of his days in “exile in the ultimate suburb” (129), repeatedly watching his
autobiographical film. The narrative we are reading, we learn, is his attempt to transcribe the
making of the movie that depicts the making of David Bell (345-46), a copy of a copy of
nothing, as the author reveals himself to be coexistent and coterminous with these
representations. Indeed, several times throughout the narrative David claims that his entire life
has been spent “in the movies” (283, 287), and on the return leg of his road-trip, he recognizes
that it was not people or the “real” America but “literature [he] had been confronting these past
days, archetypes of the dismal mystery, sons and daughters of the archetypes, images that could
not be certain which of two confusions held less terror, their own or what their own might
become if it ever faced the truth” (377). The truth, as the novel-as-film-as-“real” life reveals, is
that there is none, just as there is no David Bell. He has not “preserve[d] [his] humanity in the
face of the apparatus” (“The Work of Art” 31), as Benjamin posited, but effaced it. If *Catch-22*
proclaims the image’s dominance over the real, *Americana* demonstrates the latter’s replacement
by the former.
DeLillo’s inaugural novel, in its internal erasure of David Bell by his own cultural products, exhibits what would become another foundational principle of the American postmodern novel: the triumph of the simulacrum. The concept was made famous by Jean Baudrillard in his 1981 essay “Simulacrum and Simulations,” in which he defines what he refers to as the “hyperreal” as “a substituti[on] of the sign of the real for the real itself” (169, 170). As Cowart notes “[c]ritics have not been slow to exploit the affinity between DeLillo and Baudrillard,” whose conception of the simulacrum seems “almost to have been conceived with the fiction of Don DeLillo in mind” (“For Whom the Bell Tolls” 4).43 However, with very few exceptions,44 scholars have failed to remark upon the relationship between DeLillo’s writing and that of Baudrillard’s predecessor, historian Daniel Boorstin. Nearly twenty years prior to the publication of “Simulacra and Simulations” and almost a decade before the appearance of Americana, Boorstin claimed in The Image that Americans are haunted, “not by reality, but by those images we have put in place of reality” (6). His study—which, like DeLillo’s debut novel, focuses entirely on the United States—examines the way in which every aspect of our existence has been transformed into an illusion: real news to pseudo-events, heroes to celebrities, travel to tourism, and the arts to “shadows we make of other shadows” (183). While he points to the active role of advertising and public relations in the process of substituting the pseudo for the real, he contends that “[s]killful advertising men [merely] bring us our illusions, then make them seem true” (212), a comment eerily echoed by faux Clinton Bell in David’s film. Writing in the early 1960s, Boorstin warns that “the threat of nothingness is the danger of replacing American dreams by American illusions […] We risk being the first people in history to […] live in them” (240). A decade later, the fate of DeLillo’s David—his substitution of a film for his own lived experience—reveals that that fearful vision of the future has in fact become a “reality” and
remains so. We in the present live our lives as images among other images, playing “[t]he sport of self-consumerism” thanks to “the invention of the cell-phone and the selfie” (DeLillo, Personal Interview 1).

As a specific close reading of recent American cultural history, Boorstin’s work bears a much closer relation to *Americana* than does the abstract semiotic theory of Baudrillard. While a possible source for DeLillo, given the date *The Image* was published, it is actually irrelevant whether he read it or not. Instead, the author’s affirmation of Boorstin and anticipation of Baudrillard is a product of the novelist’s promotional past. As a professional “symbol-manipulator” (3), to borrow Spectorsky’s term, DeLillo found himself in the position of peddling consumer goods that no longer merely signified class, success, masculinity and the like but were inextricable from these qualities, in fact became them, transformed “from ideal to image” (Boorstin 181). The aphorism that the clothes (or shoes or cigarettes) make the man had become literal, and the soon-to-be novelist was in a privileged position—even more so due to his semi-marginality, similar to Heller’s, as a newly whitened and middle-class son of Italian immigrants—to witness this transformation. David Ogilvy, while exhorting advertisers to provide consumers with facts about promoted products, simultaneously and repeatedly denied that any significant difference existed between “real” commodities of the same type (102). What mattered was “the brand image” (100), which is what people are “really” buying. According to Ogilvy, a successful brand image could not “be all things to all people” (100), but instead must be gendered, as Packard pointed out in a less positive light in *The Hidden Persuaders* (95-106).45 An adept consumer of manly products, Clinton Bell reminds David during their Christmastime lunch that attaining the right brand image is crucial to the corporate man’s identity (85).
David’s cross-country journey in *Americana* is, as previously stated, at least partially inspired by a desire to escape a form of manhood exemplified by his father and his fellow corporate men at the network: one that is defined by “materials and objects and the shadows they cast” (130), as well as the simulated work of casting those shadows.46 However, as he comes to recognize in his search for an authentic masculinity (and as poststructuralist feminist critics Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam would point out a bit later in the postmodern period),47 there is no such thing, only various masculinities that are nothing apart from their signs and symbols: Brand’s pot and beatnik accouterments, the Incredible Shrinking Man’s muscles and blue hair, Clevenger’s sunglasses and gun. Remove these props, and what is really left? Any vestiges of the so-called real American man he finds—the residual male represented by Clevenger—turn out to be far worse than any simulated substitutes, rife with racial hatred, misogyny, and violence. No wonder the protagonist ultimately ends up on an island by himself “wearing white flannel trousers” (348), the J. Alfred Prufrock of his age mourning a world that never was—just as Seventies pop culture mourned the Fifties48—though in this case conscious it was only ever a dream.

As we have seen, Don DeLillo was neither the first nor the last to posit the triumph of the simulacrum over the real and the roots of that phenomenon in late capitalist consumer culture. After the early intervention of Boorstin, Philip K. Dick explored the concept of simulation in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), and continued to do so throughout his thirty-year writing career. Kurt Vonnegut, as I will discuss in my next chapter, performed his own study on the subject in *Breakfast of Champions* (1973), as did William Gaddis in his 1975 novel *JR*; both men, like DeLillo, were veterans of the postwar promotions world. Theorists such as Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson were, as theorists often are, somewhat late in articulating more
explicitly the functioning of the simulacrum in contemporary society. DeLillo himself continued to delve into the matter in future works, most notably his 1985 novel *White Noise*, which depicts “THE MOST PHOTOGRAPHED BARN IN AMERICA” (12), a landmark that can no longer be seen in real life, and a real natural disaster, “The Airborne Toxic Event,” that is used to practice for a drill (134). Though it cannot be stated with any certainty that DeLillo’s literary studies of simulation directly informed these other writers, his foundational role within the genre in general can hardly be questioned, the legacy of an erstwhile ad man staring out his ersatz window.
Promotions, Postmodernism, and the Culture Industry: Kurt Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions*

Like DeLillo’s debut novel, Kurt Vonnegut’s contemporaneous work of fiction, *Breakfast of Champions*, concludes with one of its protagonists lost in a world of simulacra. Confronted by an avatar for the author, who wishes to inform his creation that he is only a literary character, Kilgore Trout trembles in fear as the former demonstrates his narrative power by virtually whisking him away to several different locations, in a scene that resembles Satan’s third temptation of Christ, then presenting him with an equally potent biblical image: an apple.¹ But of the many signs appearing throughout this novel, which is rife with criticism of American culture and its use and abuse of symbols in particular, one stands out above all others in the context of Vonnegut’s corporate career in the years prior to becoming perhaps the most popular of all postmodern novelists. The entire conversation between the author/narrator and Trout in the final scene takes place in front of the illuminated motto of Vonnegut’s own former employer: “PROGRESS IS OUR MOST IMPORTANT PRODUCT” (298).

That slogan belonged to General Electric, where Vonnegut worked as a public relations man from 1947-1951. Fourteen years DeLillo’s senior, Vonnegut was a peer to Joseph Heller,² another World War II vet who had entered the white-collar world after returning from combat. Prior to the War, Vonnegut pursued a degree in chemistry from Cornell University, where he wrote for the student newspaper. A poor student, he dropped out in 1943 and, repudiating his former isolationist sentiments, enlisted in the United States Army (Shields 44-49). While serving his tour of duty in the European theater as an intelligence scout in the 106th Infantry Division (Vonnegut, *Fates* 94), he was captured and held as a prisoner of war by the Germans, during which time he experienced the Allies’ firebombing of Dresden, an episode chronicled in his 1969 novel *Slaughterhouse Five*. Upon his return from the front, he married his high school
sweetheart, and despite lacking a bachelor’s degree, entered a graduate program in anthropology at the University of Chicago while working as a reporter for the Chicago City News Bureau (Sumner, Prologue). However, his thesis was rejected, and in 1947 he left Chicago to accept a job with technology giant GE in Schenectady, New York, where his older brother Bernard worked as an atmospheric scientist in their Research Laboratory (Shields 97). Because of his experience in journalism, the younger Vonnegut was assigned to the Advertising News and Sales Promotion Group in downtown Schenectady. He later relocated to GE’s main plant as part of the Communications and General Services division, but his task remained the same: writing press releases to promote the company’s various technological achievements (Klinkowitz, Kurt Vonnegut’s America, Ch.1), garnering public goodwill and hammering home the message reiterated at the end of Breakfast of Champions two decades later.

At first, Kurt Vonnegut liked being a PR man. Though he was rarely assigned to cover his brother’s work—Bernard discovered that seeding clouds with silver iodide could make it rain or snow (Strand 94, 108)—he produced publicity for nuclear power research and new sodium lights designed for bridges, a few projects among many that demonstrated the company’s “Jove-like scientific powers” (Shields 98, 102). He also wrote releases for company ventures undertaken specifically for public relations purposes, such as a “Freedom Train” that traveled the country circulating important national documents and a miniature town model replete with diminutive GE appliances (98-99, 102). Not only did he find the work interesting initially, but he also enjoyed “the maleness of the office […] the camaraderie of men who tended to be young, married ex-GIs” (99). In effect, he shared with this “regiment” a new peacetime mission: that of cultivating Americans’ trust in the company, which would translate into both purchasing GE’s consumer products and buying into the larger corporate vision of the country’s future.
However, as time passed, Vonnegut became concerned about things he saw at the Schenectady works, specifically machinery that was invented for the purpose of replacing human labor. Products to simplify or eliminate domestic tasks—"women’s work"—were one thing, but technology designed to supplant workingmen was something else entirely. He also came to detest the overenthusiastic hyperbole with which he was supposed to frame the achievements of his employer, and bored, satirized the style in gag releases to friends (111). He began showing up to his suit-and-tie office in an open shirt and jeans, and he "refuse[d] to be a team player" at work, becoming ever more withdrawn and unproductive (112). Increasingly, he thought of the short stories he had written and published in *Colliers* during his time at GE as an escape plan from his day job; if he could churn them out steadily, he would be able to quit (Klinkowitz, *Kurt Vonnegut’s America*, Ch.1). He succeeded in executing this plan, leaving General Electric and the world of public relations on January 1, 1951 (Shields 113).

The following year Vonnegut’s first novel *Player Piano* hit the shelves, and it strongly bore the mark of his prior workplace. The story takes place in a future where machines dictate the lives of human beings almost entirely and replace them in many capacities, and it culminates in a failed Luddite rebellion co-led by the novel’s protagonist, former manager-engineer Paul Proteus. The central sentiment expressed in the novel—that people must be wary of technology and its potentially dangerous consequences—is a theme that recurs throughout Vonnegut’s early fiction. However, as a look at his entire body of work reveals, Vonnegut is not troubled by technology as such, but rather the uses to which it is put. Of particular concern to him, especially in works published prior to *Breakfast of Champions*, is man’s desire to manipulate his fellow men, in which case technology is merely a means to an end. This human pursuit of control and its various ill effects—as well as its failures in the form of random occurrences and
extra-human forces—appear as themes throughout the author’s canon, in which he takes to task not only technological domination, but also that of a financial, political, religious, or violent nature. If Vonnegut’s previous works depict machinery as one of several tools to control humanity, *Breakfast of Champions* posits promotions—particularly public relations, but also advertising—as a primary means of control through which humans have transformed *themselves* into machines. While it may seem odd that the author would wait over twenty years, during which he composed six other novels, to write about his actual position at GE, that is because this timeline is not quite accurate. In fact, Vonnegut began what would become *Breakfast of Champions* in the early-mid 1950s, just after the publication of *Player Piano*, but he kept becoming frustrated with and abandoning the project, and it took two decades and three false starts before the novel came to be in its final form (Klinkowitz, *Kurt Vonnegut’s America* 65).

*Breakfast of Champions*, published in 1973, is the story of “two lonesome, skinny, fairly old white men on a planet which was dying fast” (Vonnegut 7), Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout. The former, a successful businessman in the town of Midland City, loses his mind, believing himself to be the only free-willed creature on an Earth otherwise populated by robots after reading a novel by the latter, an unsuccessful science fiction author in town for the local arts festival. The irony is that this is largely how the characters in the novel, including Dwayne, are portrayed: as little better than automatons, dupes of advertising, public relations, and other means of other-directed manipulation. Thus, the problem is not that freeloding women have tricked men into corporate enslavement, as the 1950s cultural narrative would have it, or that men have been mastered by their own technology. Rather, it suggests that they have become indistinguishable from that technology due to these other symbolic forms of control, which are an extension and magnification of more traditional means of manipulation. The author himself
finally materializes as a character named Philboyd Studge—interestingly, also the name of a character from a Victorian short story about advertising⁹—reveals himself as the real manipulator of both protagonists, and presides over the chaotic final scenes, in which Dwayne Hoover goes on a violent rampage while shouting advertising slogans. In the end, the author/narrator frees all of his characters and subsequently dematerializes, leaving behind only a drawing of himself, one of many sketches that appear throughout the text. As I will argue later in this chapter, these illustrations are among several important features of a larger work that positions itself as the complicit critique of a former publicity man.

Propaganda is Our Most Important Product

Unlike the battlefield in *Catch-22* or the television network in *Americana*, there is no centralized advertising or publicity firm in *Breakfast of Champions*, only ads and PR out in the world. However, the title itself indicates the centrality of promotions to the novel. In the very first lines of the preface, author/narrator Studge acknowledges that “’Breakfast of Champions’ is a registered trademark of General Mills, Inc., for use on a breakfast cereal product” (1), and at the behest of that company (“An Interview with Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.” 70), adds the disclaimer that, “[t]he use of the identical expression as the title for this book is not intended to indicate an association with or sponsorship by General Mills, nor is it intended to disparage their fine products” (*Breakfast* 1). The fact that the book is named for a product slogan not only suggests that advertising will be its primary subject, but also, by offering a disclaimer in the first few lines of the text, recognizes that a corporation effectively owns the language the novel is using, thereby affirming the primacy of promotional language in general. Moreover, these same lines are reiterated later when Bonnie McMahon, a cocktail waitress, uses the slogan while serving a
martini to a festival guest. In fact, she recites the words “Breakfast of Champions” every time she serves a martini (216). The repetitious nature of her utterances signifies both the ubiquity of advertising in our speech and the automating effect of a language occupied by advertising.

In addition to spoken slogans, *Breakfast of Champions* pays particular attention to logos and signs, as we witnessed in the opening paragraph to this chapter. In another incident, while hitchhiking toward Midland City, Kilgore Trout catches a ride in a truck with “a message written on the side of it in bright orange letters which were eight feet high” (92). What follows is a drawing of a truck with the word “PYRAMID” on its side. “Trout,” we are told, “wondered what a child who was just learning to read would make of a message like that. The child would suppose the message was terrifically important, since somebody had gone to the trouble of writing it in letters so big” (92). Thus brand names, as Trout recognizes, interfere with the way we learn to read as well as the way we speak. Logos and signs are in fact the subject of several drawings and discussions in the novel, and the bigger the sign, the more attention it demands; two more on the sides of trucks are respectively described as “shriek[ing]” (202) or “crying” out (210). With their recognizable designs and eye-catching colors, logos form a *logos* of their own, one in which each magnifies the other’s importance, determining in many ways how we read the world around us.¹⁰

Advertising also shapes our views of ourselves in relation to others, as cultural critics have long maintained, impacting people not only individually, but also socially. One of Trout’s novels, *How You Doin’?*, lampoons this ability through science fiction. In it an alien advertising agency runs a successful campaign for a certain brand of the equivalent of humans’ peanut butter, called shazzbutter: “The eye-catching part of each ad was the statement of some sort of average—the average number of children, the average size of the male sex organ on that
particular planet—[...] and so on. The ads invited the readers to discover whether they were superior or inferior to the majority [...] and so on. The ads invited the readers to discover whether they were superior or inferior to the majority [...]. Subsequently, humans invade and are able to take over that planet, after having destroyed their own, by tinkering with the statistics in the shazzbutter ads, elevating the averages for everything to extraordinary levels. Thus, “[o]nly token resistance was offered here and there, because the natives felt so below average” (175). It is also worth noting that both before and after relating the plot of that novel, the author/narrator offers several sets of statistics for different human characters in *Breakfast of Champions*, including penis size for men and bust/waist/hip measurements for women. Thus, *How You Doin’?* is clearly intended to satirize both the conformist nature of midcentury American society and the undue influence advertising has in shaping our psyches.

The above example, albeit indirectly, implicates advertising in violence—a link also made, as related in the previous chapter, by DeLillo—and this is not the only passage in *Breakfast of Champions* demonstrating that connection. When Dwayne Hoover, Trout’s co-protagonist, experiences a mental breakdown in the novel and goes on a violent rampage, we are told that “bad chemicals” inspire the former, but “bad ideas” incite the latter (14). While some of those ideas come from Kilgore Trout’s *Now It Can Be Told*, Dwayne’s utterances in the moments just before and after his attack on the Festival attendees suggest another source that informs his actions. Just before he asks Trout for “the message,” which turns out to be the offending novel, Dwayne mutters “‘Goodbye, Blue Monday’” to himself (242), the slogan of local company Barrytron Inc., and afterward, sitting handcuffed in an ambulance, he repeats the same and shouts several other slogans, including that of Old Gold cigarettes—“‘Not a cough in a carload’” (280)—as well as two World War II-era mottos: “‘A slip of the lip can sink a ship’”
and “‘Remember Pearl Harbor!’” (281-82). In addition to once again linking promotions and violence, Dwayne’s repetition of these clichés emphasizes the way in which his mind has been colonized by this powerful form of language.

The correlation of advertising and publicity with violence is perhaps best exemplified by the second title of Breakfast of Champions—Goodbye, Blue Monday—which is, as mentioned above, the slogan for a fictional firm called Barrytron headquartered in Midland City. Originally the Robo-Magic Corporation, the company had been a manufacturer of washing machines during the Depression years, and its motto, which alludes to both the traditional women’s washday and beginning-of-the-workweek blues, had been plastered on two billboards, at the time “practically the only symbol[s] in town” (250). As indicated by one of these ads, depicting a soon-to-be-unemployed black maid fretting over her replacement by a machine, Robo-Magic’s goal was, in the words of its founder, to invent appliances that would be able to do “‘all the Nigger work of the world,’” or as men called it, “women’s work” (251). During World War II, the company converted to a munitions factory, and the “brain” of the Robo-Magic washing machine was installed in bomber planes. As the “BLINC System,” or “Blast Interval Normalizing Computer,” “it released the bombs in such a way as to achieve a desired pattern of explosions” on the target area (252). One of these bombs, which Dwayne painted with the company’s slogan during his service as a civilian working for the Army Air Corps, delivered the “message” to Hamburg, Germany, in the form of injury and death (42-43). In the novel’s present, the same corporation, now a permanent part of the military-industrial complex, is manufacturing an anti-personnel bomb that “scatter[s] plastic pellets instead of steel pellets, because the plastic pellets [are] cheaper […]and] impossible to locate in the bodies of wounded enemies by means of x-ray machines” (230).
The story of Robo-Magic/Barrytron offers a particularly sinister delineation of the relationship between violence and promotions in the mid-late twentieth century. Designed to make the work of certain “machines” obsolete, the company’s washing machine quickly transitioned into a device designed to make men more efficient killing machines. In more ways than one, the Second World War was sponsored by corporations such as these, as David Bell remarks in *Americana* about the Vietnam War. Moreover, though not their original purpose, one function of these new weapon-products as Naomi Klein discusses in *Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, is to create conditions more favorable to American business interests abroad, as in the case of the Marshall Plan, roundly criticized as an example of American economic imperialism by Noam Chomsky according to the same logic. While spreading the good news of capitalism through means both verbal and violent, corporations simultaneously bolstered their own images at home as patriotic, benevolent entities—in Barrytron’s case, by sponsoring the Midland City Arts Festival and the center in which it is being held, with money earned killing Vietnamese soldiers and civilians alike. Like *Catch-22*, *Breakfast of Champions* depicts promotions itself as a powerful weapon, one that conditions us as a social body to accept and participate in systematized violence, which in turn recreates favorable conditions for the companies who stand to benefit, the real-life Barrytrons such as Honeywell, Westinghouse, Dow, and of course, General Electric.

As demonstrated in these escalating examples, Vonnegut makes some pretty major accusations against advertising, public relations, and corporate America in general throughout *Breakfast of Champions*, saving the most serious charges for companies like his own former employer. In addition to affecting our thought, speech, and social behavior, he illustrates the way in which these forces can and have reinforced racist, sexist, and other violent ideologies that
have served to maintain white male power in the United States and American (white male) power abroad. These effects can be summarized by the term control, and Vonnegut frequently depicts that control by comparing characters throughout the narrative to machines. In the preface to *Breakfast of Champions*, the author/narrator articulates his “suspicion [...] that human beings are robots, are machines,” or alternately, “huge rubbery test tubes [...] with chemical reactions seething inside” (3). These “machines made out of meat” are basically programmed by promotions (73), making them much less like human beings and more like unthinking automatons. However, the automating effects of advertising and publicity are not the only reason the novelist represents humans as machines in the novel. As we shall see in the next section, Vonnegut reveals these human machines to be products of his former field in several respects.

The [In]human Use of Human Beings

Just as General Electric manufactures various lines of appliances, so too does *Breakfast of Champions* depict different models of machine, and unsurprisingly, given that mechanization is a stand-in for control in the novel, the characters most often shown as such are those belonging to traditionally subjugated groups, which is to say, women and people of color. Like other types of machines, white women and black people are frequently portrayed as reliant on others’ directions to function properly. The most important white-woman machine in the novel is Francine Pefko, a Vietnam War widow who serves as both secretary and mistress to Dwayne, whose wife had committed suicide by eating Dräno. Upbeat and compliant, she is extremely loyal to Dwayne and makes excuses for her lover when he begins to act strangely. One day, when he approaches her for a midday romp, she cheerfully accompanies him to a motel, though
she first asks a female coworker to cover her desk, who complies, saying, “I don’t have nerve enough to commit suicide […] so I might as well do anything anybody says—in the service of mankind” (154). During a post-coital conversation, Dwayne takes offense to Francine’s suggestion that buying a Colonel Sanders Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise near the local prison would be a good business investment, believing she wants him to buy it for her. Denying this accusation, she defends herself by saying repeatedly, “’You’re my man. You’re my man’” (164). According to Studge, this response “meant that she was willing to agree about anything with Dwayne, to do anything for him, no matter how difficult or disgusting, to think up nice things to do for him that he didn’t even notice, to die for him, if necessary, and so on. She honestly tried to live that way. She couldn’t imagine anything better to do” (164). In other words, Francine-the-machine is reliant on Dwayne for instructions, like a computer waiting for commands from a programmer.

Younger than Francine but equally eager to please, Patty Keene, a waitress at a Burger Chef restaurant owned by Dwayne, is a white-woman machine that awaits direction from her boss—and not just to take his food order. Seventeen years old, with blonde hair and blue eyes, she is portrayed more as a car than a computer: “Dwayne appreciated [her] brand-newness […] She was like a new automobile, which hadn’t even had the radio turned on yet” (140). The comparison of Patty to a Pontiac at Dwayne’s dealership, his primary place of business, assumes a gendered and sexualized connotation. Cars are, after all, typically referred to using feminine pronouns, whereas the driver is usually identified as male. Moreover, taking a woman for a ride or, as in this case, turning her (radio) on, is a sexual innuendo that again depicts the man as operator, the woman as device. Unsurprisingly, Patty, who was raped by an older man not long before, also regards herself as a sexualized commodity. Realizing that Dwayne is “fabulously
well-to-do” (13), the young waitress, who is working to help pay for her sick father’s medical bills, imagines that Dwayne is endowed with supernatural powers and could “do for her what the Fairy Godmother did for Cinderella” (141): “He could give her a fine house and new automobiles and nice clothes and a life of leisure, and he could pay all the medical bills—as easily as she had given him his hamburger and his French fries and his Coke” (141). In exchange, of course, following the formula so derided by Philip Wylie and other midcentury social commentators as exploitative of men, she would give herself to him—but only at the right price—so she “had to find out if her brand-newness and prettiness and outgoing personality were worth a lot to a sweet, sort of sexy, middle-aged old Pontiac dealer like Dwayne” (146). The co-protagonist, in the grips of his mental illness, gives Patty no indication that he is interested in “buying,” though as she watches him drive away without her, she remains hopeful as she thinks about all that he owns.

In addition to these specific cases, Studge also generalizes about (white) women. In a particularly telling instance, he extends a criticism of Patty to the female population of the town:

Patty Keene was stupid on purpose, which was the case with most women in Midland City. The women all had big minds because they were big animals, but they did not use them much for this reason: unusual ideas could make enemies, and the women, if they were going to achieve any sort of comfort and safety, needed all the friends they could get.

So, in the interests of survival, they trained themselves to be agreeing machines instead of thinking machines. All their minds had to do was to discover what other people were thinking, and then they thought that, too (140).
Studge’s characterizations of (white) women here are divided into two related categories: animals and machines. In the first part of this passage, the comparison is to herd animals, like cows or sheep, which behave based on pre-programmed survival instincts. In the second part, women are described as duplicating machines, like the then-ubiquitous Xerox, but ones that copy thoughts rather than words or images on paper. In both cases, the author/narrator depicts white women as inherently other-directed, in alignment with advertisers’ long-standing assumptions and David Riesman’s implicit analysis in *The Lonely Crowd*.

The white-women machines in the passages above exhibit traits such as automation and conformity that the episodes recounted in the previous section correlate with promotions; however, it is noteworthy that these women are also depicted as commodities themselves, both products of advertising and products for sale. This is also true of many black characters in *Breakfast of Champions*, though Vonnegut emphasizes the latter attribute in the case of African-Americans for obvious historical reasons. In the brief synopsis of American history provided in the first few pages we are told that in previous times white Americans “used human beings for machinery, and, even after slavery was eliminated, because it was so embarrassing, they and their descendants continued to think of ordinary human beings as machines” (11). This historical narrative is continued when Trout comes upon two black prostitutes in Times Square while hitchhiking his way from upstate New York to Midland City. We are told that these women are from the South, “where their ancestors had been used as agricultural machinery. The white farmers down there weren’t using machines made out of meat anymore, though, because machines made out of metal were cheaper and more reliable, and required simpler homes. So the black machines had to get out of there, or starve to death” (73). To survive in the city, they went to work for a pimp who “took their free will away from them, which was perfectly all right. They
didn’t want it anyway” (74). This passage, which describes the Great Migration of African-Americans to the North during the twentieth century, depicts black sharecroppers and field hands as obsolete machinery that had to be relocated and repurposed in order to be useful. In the case of the two prostitutes, they were retooled as “fucking machines” (264), a term used several times later in the novel; managed by an engineer, the pimp; and kept in good working order by consuming “chemicals”—in this case, a tube of hemorrhoid ointment, which made their job easier by rendering them “cheerful and unafraid” (73). Free will is not a useful characteristic in a machine, so it is dispensed with.

If the black “machines” above are described as working properly and with a defined purpose, others are portrayed as broken down or useless. One of these, and the only black figure in the novel that can be considered a main character, is Wayne Hoobler, a semi-literate parolee. Having heard commercials for Dwayne’s car dealership on the radio and seen ads for it in the paper while he was in prison—“ASK ANYBODY—YOU CAN TRUST DWAYNE” (100)—Wayne, who has been institutionalized for most of his life, dreams of working for Dwayne, and upon his release goes to Dwayne’s place of business to approach him about a job. To convince the owner of his worthiness, Wayne begins furiously polishing the cars. However, Dwayne, already in the early stages of his insanity, dismisses the would-be employee with a shake of his head. Disheartened and with nowhere else to go and “nothing machine-like to do” (193), Wayne lurks amongst the cars at the dealership—machines with a clear function, of which he appears envious because “[h]e ached to be a useful machine” (193). In prison, he lived life by a mechanized routine: listening to the radio, eating, having sex with fellow inmates, working in the prison dairy (and sometimes having sex with the cows)—but on the outside he finds himself another piece of discarded machinery, like the obsolete farm “equipment” described above.
Wayne Hoobler’s way of looking at the world has clearly been shaped by Dwayne’s commercials, both in his idealization of Dwayne and his desire to emulate the businessman’s merchandise. However, advertising is only one source of influence on Wayne’s thought and behavior, and it would be ridiculous to fault promotions for the deep-seated systemic racism—which Vonnegut satirically condemns throughout Breakfast of Champions—that accounts for black people being mechanized or treated as machinery. Nor can advertising and publicity be blamed for the culturally ingrained sexism that both programs and commodities Francine and Patty, not to mention the two unnamed prostitutes. These discourses have certainly been complicit with one another at times—the stereotyped roles of women and absence of black faces in mid-century mainstream ads are notable examples—but that still does not explain why they are seemingly indiscriminately lumped together as causes of automation and objectification. In order to more adequately understand this connection, it will be useful to examine an important source for the author, one that informed both Breakfast of Champions and his first novel, Player Piano.

While Kurt Vonnegut was putting together press releases at General Electric and composing short fiction on the side, a genius of a different sort was publishing work that would have an immense impact on the world of science and technology that the former inhabited during his daytime working hours. In Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine (1948), Norbert Wiener argues that communication and control are inextricably interrelated, and that “any organism [organic, mechanical, or social] is held together in its action by the possession of means for the acquisition, use, retention, and transmission of information” (161). As such, the human brain and computing machine, as it would have been called at the time, operate essentially the same way, exercising control or being controlled through the
sending and receiving of messages (125). Stored in memory, data received in these messages creates a program for future action as well, which in humans we call learning (169-75). Though Wiener discusses the applications of his theories in various contexts, it is his analysis of their sociological implications that is of greatest interest to us here. He found it deeply troubling that the media so vital to communication in contemporary society were increasingly beholden to the interests of business, and particularly advertising (161). Because of this dependence, the opinions and ideologies of the wealthy and powerful few become the “information” available to the rest of the population. By constraining communication in this way, those who possess its means increase their influence on those who do not, rendering the latter group less like human beings and more like machines. Of course, elites have always maintained dominance at least partly by controlling the means of communication—why else would they have forbidden slaves to learn to read or women to acquire higher education? The consumerist slant is merely, as the scientist notes, the most recent iteration of longstanding methods of social control.¹⁸

Vonnegut read and greatly admired both Cybernetics and its follow-up work, The Human Use of Human Beings (1950), which presents the ideas of the former text in layman’s terms. Just about everyone at General Electric read these books, given the technological nature of its business and the fact that Wiener himself had once worked there. As Strand also notes, Vonnegut’s first novel is in many ways a tribute to Wiener. Both its title and premise are derived from passages in The Human Use of Human Beings, while other incidents and entities in Player Piano can be traced back to Cybernetics.¹⁹ In fact, there are also allusions to Wiener in Breakfast of Champions, the most important of which involve his work on communication, and it is thus in the Wienerian sense that Vonnegut depicts human beings as machines in that novel. Its author/narrator, Philboyd Studge, paraphrases from Cybernetics when he states that “[a]lmost all
the messages which [are] sent or received in [America…have] to do with buying or selling some damn thing” (53). Though various types of harmful social programming are presented in *Breakfast of Champions*—institutionalization, misinformation in education, and cultural prejudices and stereotypes, for example—Vonnegut, like Wiener, depicts his own former field of promotions as a particularly pernicious variety at the time he was writing.

This section has examined examples of white women and black people of both sexes represented as machines in *Breakfast of Champions* due to the manipulations of advertising, publicity, and other discourses of power. However, we should recall that the explicit instances of promotional control in the previous section involve the two white male protagonists, Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout. Likewise, the opening anecdote to this chapter implicates Philboyd Studge—the primary stand-in for Vonnegut, and according to the sketch on the final page of the novel (303), also a white male—in a type of promotional programming. On the one hand, these characters, by nature of their subject positions, ostensibly possess the communications controls; however, on the other hand, as we have seen, the reality is often much more complicated. The next section will focus explicitly on the two protagonists, Hoover and Trout, and the author/narrator, Studge, as iterations of the conflicted corporate man. As we will see, *Breakfast of Champions*, like *Catch-22* and *Americana*, reveals the way in which its white male characters unwittingly become the objects of their own manipulations.

A Tale of Three Cyborgs

Of the three main characters, Dwayne Hoover seems the most likely in a Wienerian sense to be a human operator of the book’s other machines. As owner of a car dealership—with its radio spots that so captivated Wayne Hoobler—several restaurants, a motel, and a tourist trap
called Sacred Miracle Cave that is advertised all over the area, Dwayne is an influential local business mogul. He is the literal boss of many, and even those who are not his employees, such as Patty Keene and Wayne Hoobler, are eager to be under his sway. However, Dwayne is also the victim of “bad chemicals” (14), and because of that, exhibits signs of psychosis: drastic personality changes, visual and auditory hallucinations, echolalia—the compulsion to repeat others’ words or phrases—and violent tendencies. Ironically, despite the fact that he is entirely subject to these psychoactive substances, he is never actually referred to as a machine in the narrative. Further, it is only when Dwayne completely loses control over his own mind that he begins to believe that he is the only one capable of thinking, after reading Trout’s novel, *Now It Can Be Told*. The “bad ideas” in it—that he is an experiment by the Creator of the Universe, the only free-willed human being in a world otherwise fully populated by robots—give “his craziness […] shape and direction” (14), motivating him to engage in a spree of violence against the supposed android attendees of the Midland City Festival of the Arts, including his estranged gay son, since they “can no more feel or reason than a grandfather clock” (261). But as demonstrated earlier in this chapter, it is not only Trout’s novel, but also the promotional discourse in which Dwayne himself is an active participant that seemingly supplies the bad ideas responsible for his rampage. In the end, we learn that his victims, human after all, have sued him, and he has been left with “‘doodley-squat’” (288).

It is in this final impecunious state of Dwayne’s that his co-protagonist, Kilgore Trout, begins the novel. He has had many science fiction stories and novels published, but primarily in pornographic magazines, from which he has received no royalties. In order to eek out a living, he installs storm windows in his hometown of Cohoes, New York, though unlike Dwayne, he is not a salesman. Trout has “nothing to do with the sales end of the business—because he ha[s] no
charm” (19). As Studge defines it, “[c]harm [i]s a scheme for making strangers like and trust a person immediately, no matter what the charmer ha[s] in mind” (18-19), a form of personal promotions Trout clearly lacks. When he receives an invitation to attend the Festival as a guest of honor, he has to hitchhike, on the way getting robbed and assaulted, and finally arrives covered in dog feces and with his feet coated in toxic waste from a nearby creek polluted by Barrytron, Inc. In some ways—his haplessness, his lack of charisma, and the absence of a successful career, at least as defined by traditional standards—Trout is a dysfunctional white male machine. Yet, in other ways he is portrayed as the least machine-like of all the characters. He is intensely critical of American society in general through his satirical science fiction works, many of which are synopsized throughout Breakfast of Champions, and one of them, as described above, serves as a set of instructions for Dwayne. Moreover, the author/narrator endows Trout with the one ability that the other automaton characters lack: self-awareness, a distinctly human quality. According to Studge, “Trout was the only character [he] ever created who had enough imagination to suspect that he might be the creation of another human being” (246). Though Trout is indeed ultimately, like all of the other characters, a device controlled by Studge, he is also (albeit unwittingly) manipulator of Dwayne’s behavior through his storytelling, and in penance, he goes on to become an advocate for “the importance of ideas as causes and cures for diseases” (15), for which he eventually becomes famous.

In sum, Dwayne and Trout are neither fully human nor machine; they are more like cyborgs, alternately exerting control and being controlled. As white men, they enjoy a certain amount of privilege and influence that the black machines and white female machines do not possess, and yet, both of them are subject to other forces: Dwayne to his bad chemicals and Trout’s bad ideas, and Trout to “somebody who wants to write a book about somebody who
suffers all the time” (246). In this way, they are both shown to be, to some extent, mechanical, but the same can even be said about the author/narrator, who appears as *deus ex machina* approximately two-thirds through the novel, in the cocktail lounge where the reception for the Festival is being held. Upon his emergence, he announces that he is “on a par with the Creator of the Universe” (205), thereby trumping the interference of ads or Trout’s own novel, and for the remainder of the narrative, he depicts the others’ words and actions as a direct result of his control; in other words, he is the programmer, and they are the machines. While sitting in the lounge waiting for Dwayne to attack, he considers the problematic aspects of humanity he has chronicled to this point in the novel, and he reflects on his own role in their existence:

> I had come suddenly to pity [humans], for I understood how innocent and natural it was for them to behave so abominably, and with such abominable results: They were doing their best to live like people invented in story books. This was the reason Americans shot each other so often: It was a convenient literary device for ending short stories and books.

Why were so many Americans treated by their government as though their lives were as disposable as paper facial tissues? Because that was the way authors customarily treated bit-part players in their made-up tales (215).

While this passage can be read as tongue-in-cheek, there is another possible interpretation, one in which literature is a stand-in for the larger project of publicity. What Studge criticizes here is “literature’s” ability to create a false reality, which people behave as if inhabiting, imitating narratives they have gleaned from reading fiction. Thus, not only does the author/narrator directly control the characters he writes about, but also seemingly blames his craft for interfering with the lives of his readers. Together, these are the capabilities of public relations, which manipulates both those written into it and those presented with it, who are asked to take its
version of truth to be “real life.” It is amid the narratives written by corporate and governmental publicity that its subjects live, and these narratives, such as the benevolence of corporate America and the necessity of war, act as a backdrop that makes the work done by advertising possible in the first place.  

At the end of Breakfast of Champions, Studge confesses his own machinations to fellow novelist Kilgore Trout, who has just been released from the hospital after Dwayne Hoover bit off his finger during his violent spree through Midland City. Following Trout in a rental car, Studge informs his character that they are in the middle of a novel. Trout, confused and frightened, asks Studge if he has a gun, to which the latter replies, “‘I don’t need a gun to control you, Mr. Trout. All I have to do is write down something about you, and that’s it’” (299). To assuage any doubts of his power, the author/narrator takes Trout on a whirlwind virtual world tour and presents him with an apple, as related in the opening paragraph of this chapter. He explains his reasoning for the latter in the following terms: “‘We Americans require symbols which are richly colored and three-dimensional and juicy. Most of all we hunger for symbols which have not been poisoned by great sins our nation has committed, such as slavery and genocide and criminal neglect, or by thinhorn commercial greed and cunning’” (300-01). It is in this scene that Philboyd Studge reveals himself as a PR man, both in his ability to manipulate Trout’s reality and his creation of a “theater of stirring symbols” (Ewen, PR 144). There is, of course, no such thing as a symbol untouched by ugly aspects of American history or commercial culture, though that is precisely the purpose of PR: to cover over that which cannot be erased.

As described above, Studge positions himself as the programmer of both the human machines in his narrative and, because of the influence of PR’s fictions, those outside the novel
as well. However, the author/narrator also characterizes himself as a “machine made out of meat.” Sitting in the cocktail lounge with the other Festival attendees, he thinks to himself,

I had come to the conclusion that there was nothing sacred about myself or about any human being, that we were all machines, doomed to collide and collide and collide […] Sometimes I wrote well about collisions, which meant I was a writing machine in good repair. Sometimes I wrote badly, which meant I was a writing machine in bad repair. I no more harbored sacredness than did a Pontiac, a mousetrap, or a South Bend Lathe (225).26

By proclaiming that, despite his divine ability to control his characters, he is in fact a machine like the others, the author/narrator/publicist acknowledges that he is not immune to his own influence or that produced by others like him. He recognizes that he is a mass-produced good, as David Bell did on his journey of self-discovery in Americana, and if godlike at all, a mechanical god, a deus ex machina in its literal translation.27 In this light, his name, Philboyd (Filboid) Studge, reveals its full significance, for it is the name of a brand of cereal in Saki’s satirical tale about advertising; this is a story being told by a product. Moreover, the author/narrator concedes that he is not all-powerful even in the context of this particular novel, an admonition affirmed shortly afterward, when Dwayne breaks his Creator’s watch and toe, and again at the very end of the novel, when Studge is attacked by a Doberman named Kazak, resulting in an injury to the author/narrator’s testicles. What the publicity men in Catch-22 demonstrated, Studge realizes here: you cannot create new narratives of reality without getting caught up in the works yourself.28

So far in this chapter we have treated the relationship between literature and publicity as metaphorical, with the former symbolizing the latter in its characteristics and function within and
outside the world of the novel. As such, all three of the primary white male characters exhibit the traits of corporate men—or human-machine cyborgs—simultaneously manipulators of and manipulated by promotional messages. However, the presentation of fiction as PR in Breakfast of Champions is not only figurative, but also literal. Studge, after all, is both a character in the novel and an avatar for the actual author, and his admonitions about his craft are thus also those of a former public relations man who recognizes the inextricability of his current and prior professions and the real relationship of their products. To comprehend his equation of the two genres, a concept central to the American postmodernism novel, we must return to the historical and biographical context with which we began: Vonnegut’s career at the postwar General Electric Corporation.

Masculinity, Postmodernism, and the Culture Industry

In 1948, while the aspiring author still labored at his PR post, General Electric began sponsoring a series of television shows, as they had radio broadcasts in previous years. The first three TV ventures were ephemeral, but in 1951, the year Vonnegut left the company, GE hired advertising giant Batten, Barton, Burstine, and Osborn to produce their program, and in 1953, General Electric Theater was born (Bird, Better Living 201-202). Sponsored by GE’s Department of Public Relations, the hit show, which ran for ten seasons on CBS in the coveted Sunday evening prime-time spot, presented adaptations of novels, short stories, plays, and films (Evans 57). It was able to recruit top talent ranging from comedians Abbott and Costello and the Marx Brothers to Hollywood stars such as Joan Crawford, James Dean, Judy Garland, and Cary Grant; all in all, the show featured fifty Academy Award–winning actors and actresses over the course of the series (58). Its host was then-actor Ronald Reagan, who always reminded his
viewers that “‘[p]rogress in products goes hand in hand with providing progress in the human values that enrich the lives of us all’” (qtd. in Bird, “General Electric Theater” 970). To concretize this message, commercials starring Don Herbert, the host of Watch Mr. Wizard, would report GE’s innovations in such areas as the “Kitchen of the Future,” “Jet Engine Advancement,” and ironically named “Atomic Safety Devices” (Bird, Better Living 204). The program went off-air in 1962 and was replaced by the short-lived GE True, hosted by Jack Webb, which adapted stories from the popular True men’s magazine. But in its near-decade on television, General Electric Theater was a highly rated program that reached millions of viewers across the United States, delivering both entertainment and corporate values into their living rooms each week.29

The story of General Electric Theater offers another way to understand the apparent vilification of literature in Breakfast of Champions. Though capable of creating counter-narratives to those put forth by corporate public relations, authors also allowed their art to be adapted by programs like this one, and while viewers tuned in for entertainment, they received a variety of messages, both subtle and direct, about the beneficence of corporations and the benefits of owning their products. Essentially, though varied in content, the literary works portrayed on General Electric Theater and productions of its ilk were as much sponsors of these companies and their values as their patrons were of them. Vonnegut himself was quite familiar with this dynamic—effectively the corporatization of literature. Having published numerous short stories in commercial magazines throughout the 1950s and 60s—Colliers, the Saturday Evening Post, Ladies Home Journal, Cosmopolitan, Redbook, and others—Vonnegut witnessed the workings of the relationship between promotions and fiction firsthand, for as Klinkowitz notes, these publications “would include advertisements and real-life features complementary
with issues the fictionist was addressing” in his own short works (“Vonnegut the Essayist” 4). But his awareness of this troublesome new symbiosis surely peaked in 1958, when his story “D.P.,” about a young black German boy searching for his father among the remaining American troops after the war’s conclusion, was adapted to become an episode of General Electric Theater called “Auf Wiedersehen,” starring Sammy Davis, Jr. 30 In the decade between the show’s last broadcast and the publication of Breakfast of Champions, the techniques would change—explicit corporate sponsorship of television programs would be replaced by freestanding commercials in the early 1970s (Baughman 144)—but the inextricability of the two forms of culture would persist, a fact that would become one of the primary tenets of the American postmodern novel.

What can be done about the fact that literature has effectively become promotions, a state of affairs that Vonnegut presents as so deeply problematic? The postmodern novel, as we have seen thus far, offers little in the way of answers to the questions it poses. In Catch-22, Yossarian’s attempt to extricate himself from the machinations of the military ad men in his unit means simply running away, but with the knowledge that he cannot really escape their verbal grasp. In Americana, David Bell, also having fled, discovers that there is nothing more real than the organization life he left behind in New York—not even a real self. Philboyd Studge, recognizing his own complicity with the corporate narratives put forth by advertising and PR, even in his overt criticisms, merely “dematerialize[s] into the void” after releasing his characters from his control (301). But before he does, he seems to hazard a response to the query posed above. Concomitant with his realization regarding the harmfulness of various promotional fictions and the difficulty of remaining outside of them as a novelist, Philboyd Studge declares that he has become a new type of writer: “Once I understood what was making America such a dangerous, unhappy nation of people who had nothing to do with real life, I resolved to shun...
storytelling. I would write about life. Every person would be exactly as important as any other. All facts would also be given equal weightiness. Nothing would be left out” (215). Here, Studge announces his intent to compose a work different from those of “old-fashioned storytellers [who wanted] to make people believe that life had leading characters, minor characters, significant details, insignificant details, that it had lessons to be learned, tests to be passed, and a beginning, a middle, and an end” (214-15). In sum, what he proposes to practice is a literary form that does not lend itself to easy appropriation by or assimilation into promotional discourse.

Arguably, Vonnegut presents *Breakfast of Champions* as this new type of writing. The plot is minimal; instead, most of the text is devoted to the “real life” Studge wants to write about, consisting largely of digressive observations about America and Americans pronounced in a matter-of-fact manner. The sketches interspersed with the text—thus far only given a brief mention, but actually quite important to the novel as a whole—not only disrupt what flow of narrative there is, but depict the most trivial details, and often rather crudely. There is also no moral to the story, such as it is, no message to unite the various elements of the text and edify the reader at its conclusion. “Let others bring order to chaos,” Studge proclaims. “I would bring chaos to order, instead, which I think I have done. If all writers would do that, then perhaps citizens not in the literary trades will understand that there is no order in the world around us, that we must adapt ourselves to the requirements of chaos instead” (215).

In addition to citing his intent to create a work incompatible with promotions, Studge offers further justification for writing the novel as he does in its preface, which is worth quoting at length:
I am programmed at fifty to perform childishly—to insult “The Star-Spangled Banner,” to scrawl pictures of a Nazi flag and an asshole and a lot of other things with a felt-tipped pen […]

I think I am trying to clear my head of all the junk in there—the assholes, the flags, the underpants […] I’m throwing out characters from my other books, too. I’m not going to put on any more puppet shows.

I think I am trying to make my head as empty as it was when I was born onto this damaged planet fifty years ago.

I suspect this is something most white Americans, and nonwhite Americans who imitate white Americans, should do. The things other people have put into my head, at any rate, do not fit together nicely, are often useless and ugly, are out of proportion with one another, are out of proportion with life as it really is outside my head (5).

In this passage, the author/narrator professes his desire to deprogram himself, and he asserts that Breakfast of Champions represents his effort to do so, to purge the signs and symbols of promotions and other forms of manipulation from his mind. In a remark that recalls Mailer and Marcuse as discussed earlier in this dissertation, he suggests that this is especially important for white people—epitomized by the organization man—and those who wish to be like them, as they are the ones simultaneously manipulating and manipulated by these linguistic weapons. In other words, the author/narrator here purports to describe and then model in Breakfast of Champions a possible solution to the problem of the human machine that has been programmed all too well by advertising, public relations, and similar devices.

If Vonnegut appears, for a postmodern novelist, atypically optimistic in his suggestion through Studge that the author can relinquish his role as de-facto ad man, write works inherently
alienated from and antithetical to advertising and publicity, and delete his own promotional programming, that is because he is also disingenuous. Rather than presenting Breakfast of Champions as succeeding in its proposed aims as listed above, he shows the novel to be a necessary failure. Not only does the author not abandon fiction-writing or free his characters—here or in future works—but he also recognizes that there is no text that cannot be incorporated into consumer culture. After all, books can never be separated from the commercial world if they are to be read, something Vonnegut, as an incredibly popular author, knew well. Moreover, in reproducing the images and ideas he claims to be clearing from his head on the pages of the novel, he is in fact reifying them, even if simultaneously debunking them. Thus, in his seventh novel Vonnegut ultimately rejects the argument of Horkheimer and Adorno’s “The Culture Industry as Mass Deception,” in which they contend that all popular art can be reduced to one unified message directed toward consumerist ends, and that if any remedy for this cultural disease exists, it is a more “pure” modern art that resists commodification. In contrast, Vonnegut—inspired by his own lived experience in dialogue with the ideas of Norbert Wiener, rather than the two Frankfurt School philosophers—demonstrates that there is no pure art any longer, if there ever was at all, no works that exist in a separate sphere from the commercial world or that are innocent of aiding and abetting its designs, even if appearing to contest them. The fact that a high modernist painting and Trout’s science fiction stories published as filler in pornographic magazines are both celebrated at the Midland City Arts Festival, which is sponsored by appliance-turned-weapons manufacturer Barrytron Inc., concisely illustrates this point in Breakfast of Champions.

Though the practitioners preceded the theorists, Jameson best summarized this postmodern understanding of culture in his 1984 essay “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”: 
“[O]ne fundamental feature of all [postmodern genres is…] the effacement in them of the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture, and the emergence of new kinds of texts infused with the forms, categories, and contents of that very culture industry so passionately denounced by all the ideologues of the modern” (2). Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions* is certainly an embodiment of this kind of text, a book literally littered with the detritus of consumer culture, often in the form of Vonnegut’s own sketched images: not only advertisements and signs, but also plastic molecules, weapons, and a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken. Of course, he was not the only one to incorporate such elements into his work during this period; as Jameson articulates of postmodern art more generally, eroding the distinction between high and low culture, literary work and popular text is probably the most common shared characteristic of postmodern literature. Don DeLillo famously created a protagonist in *White Noise* who teaches courses in Hitler studies and observes that many of his colleagues make their living analyzing cereal boxes (9-10), while the author himself includes brand names and slogans on every other page. Thomas Pynchon, Vonnegut’s fellow publicity man, is the master of amalgamating so-called serious and commercial culture, as we will see in the following chapter. Their intentional incorporation of consumerist content while offering acerbic cultural commentary epitomizes Hutcheon’s concept of the postmodern complicitous critique. Moreover, by illustrating that all culture is commercial, they acknowledge that as authors, they are always already corporate.

In the formal sense, Vonnegut’s own corporate manhood was short-lived; after just over three years working for General Electric, he left his public relations post to write fiction full-time. But as we have seen, the legacy of his career in corporate publicity would manifest itself after his departure in different ways. His first novel, *Player Piano*, was of course the most
obvious example of this, the story of a corporate man who leaves the organization and seeks to destroy it, its products, and the corporate values they represent in a machine-smashing civil war that ultimately fails. Published almost twenty years later by the same author—who in the meantime had sold dozens of stories to “slick [magazine]s” (Marvin 22), and yes, even to his former employer’s PR television program—*Breakfast of Champions* acknowledges that there is no separating literature from promotions, nor the author from the ad or publicity man. Vonnegut was the very embodiment of this postmodern conceptualization of culture in his later years, commodified not only through letters, but also image: he adorned t-shirts, bags, and coffee mugs at Barnes and Noble and provided both art and ad copy for Volkswagen and Absolute Vodka. It was almost as if he never left his corporate post—and in some ways, as he would likely affirm, he really never did.
Promotions, Postmodernism, and Rationality: Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*

The sketched self-portrait that punctuates the end of *Breakfast of Champions* is one of many images we have of Kurt Vonnegut, who rarely shied away from the camera. The same cannot be said, however, for fellow postmodern author Thomas Pynchon, of whom there are only a handful of known photographs. If DeLillo shuns celebrity and is decidedly private, Pynchon shrinks from attention and is almost, if not outright, reclusive. Though his eremitical tendencies may have intensified as a result of unexpected fame, he was always rather reserved, and for this reason it is not difficult to envision him the way he was described by a colleague from his pre-literary corporate career: long-haired and mustachioed (Fry L7), scribbling away silently while shrouded “in the enormous stiff sheets of paper used for engineering drawings [,] work[ing] within this cocoon, like an aerospace Bartleby, by whatever light filtered in” (Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon* 96). It was on similar stationary—quadrille graph paper (Weisenburger 1)—that he would later compose *Gravity’s Rainbow*, symbolically inscribing the work on his former workplace.

From March 1960-October 1962, Pynchon was employed as a technical writer in the public and employee relations sector of Boeing Corporation, one of the country’s largest government contractors (Wisnicki 14-15). A decade prior to publishing his best-known novel, the author spent his days penning pieces for one of the company’s myriad house organs, articles that were occasionally reprinted in periodicals aimed at military officials and the larger Cold War weapons industry. Prior to signing on with Boeing, Pynchon studied engineering at Vonnegut’s alma mater, Cornell University; left midway through to serve two years in the US Navy, from 1955-1957; and completed his degree in 1959, having switched his major from engineering to English (Winston 282-83). Following a brief period of beatnikdom in New York City, the scion
of an old, well-to-do Long Island family left for the West Coast to assume the position of ER/PR man at the munitions manufacturer’s headquarters in Seattle, Washington.

Given Pynchon’s penchant for privacy, one would expect information on his Boeing days to be even more inaccessible than that about DeLillo at Ogilvy. However, this is not the case thanks to a thorough investigation conducted by Adrian Wisnicki, who managed to both interview Pynchon’s coworkers at Boeing and obtain copies of the articles he wrote there, primarily for *Bomarc Service News.* Though only one of these articles actually had a byline—“Togetherness,” which was published in the December 1960 issue of *Aerospace Safety*—Wisnicki was able to determine probable and possible Pynchon writings based on distinctive features of form and content that appeared in the acknowledged article and certain contemporaneous anonymous ones, but not in the majority of those found in the same publications. Common characteristics of these pieces included the topics—all related to the safety, reliability, and maintainability of components in the Bomarc, a long-range surface-to-air missile capable of carrying nuclear or conventional warheads—as well as certain stylistic traits: a fondness for historical and literary references, a mixture of detached and conversational tones, and liberal use of em dashes, ellipses, and unusually shaped bullets (Wisnicki 20-24).

As Wisnicki notes throughout his study, both the technical expertise and aesthetic elements exhibited in these writings would later materialize in *V,* which Pynchon composed while still working at Boeing, and to a much greater extent, in *Gravity’s Rainbow.*

While Pynchon’s experience at Boeing had the most obvious impact on the latter text—in which rocketry plays a starring role, as that novel will play in this chapter—the company and its influence are also present symbolically and thematically in both of Pynchon’s earlier works, *V* (1963) and *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966). A company called Yoyodyne, “one of the giants of the
aerospace industry” that is a clear stand-in for Boeing (Crying I), makes a cameo in Pynchon’s first novel, where it serves as a stop on co-protagonist Herbert Stencil’s search for the inscrutable and elusive V (V. XI). There, he meets engineer Kurt Mondaugen, who will reemerge (or rather pre-emerge) in Gravity’s Rainbow as a Nazi, not unlike real-life rocket scientist Wernher Von Braun. In The Crying of Lot 49, the pseudonymous Yoyodyne is more significant to the story than in Pynchon’s first novel. Originally attempting to execute the estate of a former boyfriend, a wealthy businessman and majority shareholder in the Yoyodyne Corporation, protagonist Oedipa Maas finds herself interviewing employees of the firm about an underground mail operation called W.A.S.T.E., a present-day manifestation of a supposedly defunct pre-modern postal service known as the Trystero. Workers at Yoyodyne, described as a military-industrial megacorporation that had grown to envelop the entire fictional Los Angeles–area city of San Narciso, use W.A.S.T.E. as a means of micro-resistance, a way to avoid the watchful eye of the government and their employer, which are essentially one and the same (Crying III). In his third novel, Pynchon replaces Yoyodyne-as-Boeing with the firm’s primary product, the rocket, as well as the ominous nexus of business and government that the weapon represents. In the process of portraying the effects of the military-industrial complex on those entangled in its ever-expanding web, the author articulates his own conceptualization of corporate masculinity, envisioned at the moment of its emergence.

Like Catch-22, Gravity’s Rainbow is set in Europe during the World War II years—in this case, its end and aftermath—and subverts the traditional historical representation of the conflict as “the good war,” conveying instead that “the real business of the War is buying and selling” not only products, but also people and information (Pynchon, GR 107). The plot of Pynchon’s third and most famous novel focuses on the peregrinations of Tyrone Slothrop, an
American soldier who goes AWOL from his post investigating German V-2 rocket attacks in London during the last years of the war to explore his personal connection to a mysterious device known as the *Schwarzgerät*. Effectively sold by his paper mill–owning family to a researcher who conditioned him as an infant to become sexually aroused by a rocket component, the novel’s protagonist embodies corporate masculinity in a literal way: even his most “natural” urges are produced by others’ manipulation. During the course of his quest, his actions are almost entirely reactive until, in the last section of the novel, he dematerializes entirely. The rocket itself metaphorically and metonymically symbolizes a phallus, pointing to the fact that in this version of masculinity, manhood has been transferred to a product, as well as its progenitor, the MIC corporation. The final fragments of the narrative, which disintegrates along with its protagonist, magnify the dialectic depicted throughout the novel: infinite interconnection coupled with ever-increasing entropy, a tension present in many future iterations of the American postmodern novel, of which *Gravity’s Rainbow* served as an archetype. For Pynchon, it would have been a tension omnipresent while working as a technical writer at Boeing, in the heart of the military-industrial complex and at the height of Cold War—and masculine—anxieties.

The Business of War

As indicated above, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, like *Catch-22*, portrays war-torn Europe primarily as a place of business: “The murdering and violence are self-policing, and can be entrusted to non-professionals […] They] serve[ ] as spectacle, as diversion from the real movements of the war […] The true war is a celebration of markets” (107). At first this appears an odd assertion; after all, in Europe there was neither money to buy consumer goods nor much of anything available for purchase during World War II, and even in the United States, the needs
of wartime had all but halted commercial production so that industry could devote itself to manufacturing munitions and other required materiel. What the novel soon makes evident, however, is that the market to which Pynchon refers is for products of the war itself—technical information and military hardware—such as the *Schwarzgerät* sought by Slothrop. This “black device,” as the name translates in English, turns out to be part of a special edition rocket, and it is through the protagonist’s pursuit of it that we learn about the larger commercial movements of the war, which are managed by ad men, publicity agents, and various other corporate professionals.

While on leave at the recently liberated but not yet renamed Casino Hermann Goering in Monte Carlo, Slothrop receives much of the information he seeks about the rocket and the material that makes this particular one “black”: an insulation apparatus made from a new plastic called Imipolex G. The technical particulars exhibit the author’s aeronautic and engineering expertise and far exceed what the lay reader could or need digest, but more importantly, his investigation serves to expose a vast network of shady business dealings between large Allied corporations and German chemical giant IG Farben. Allusions to these collaborations are woven throughout the narrative—implicating such companies as Dutch Shell and British Imperial Chemicals in aiding the Nazis—but the most interesting for our purposes are those between American and German firms. As is typical in Pynchon’s work, the text combines fact and fiction in relating the details of these relationships and provides a dizzying array of scattered and sometimes contradictory details in order to emphasize their complexity and replicate the experience of paranoia. However, we can reconstruct a coherent narrative by consulting the author’s source—Richard Sasuly’s 1947 historical monograph, *IG Farben*—as well as more contemporary accounts of this especially unsavory chapter in American business history.
Of the various conspiracies that appear in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the most important is that between IG Farben and Standard Oil of New Jersey. Both before and during World War II, SONJ and its subsidiaries provided the IG technology for making gasoline from coal, formulating fuel additive ethyl lead, and manufacturing synthetic rubber (Sutton, Ch. 4), represented in the novel by Imipolex G. Not only did Standard Oil enable the Nazis to produce materials essential to the *Wehrmacht*, but they also withheld technology for making buna and butyl rubbers in the United States, resulting in severe tire shortages—crucial for military vehicles—in the early years of the War. The company’s treasonous aid to the enemy resembles that of *Catch-22*’s Milo Minderbinder, who bombed his own unit to turn a profit and, like Standard Oil, got away with his crimes. In other words, as the opening quote in this section suggests, the war is indeed “a celebration of markets,” one that acknowledges neither nations nor sides, but only dollar signs.

Another Allied-Axis corporate collaboration discussed in the novel involves none other than Vonnegut’s employer, General Electric, which, as Sutton reveals, had many ties to Nazi Germany (Ch. 3). One of these is explained in a vignette woven into the narrative’s final fragments, about an immortal light bulb named Byron. Through his adventures we learn of a patent exchange and price-fixing agreement between GE and German firm Krupp on the metal tungsten carbide, which is required for producing both bulbs and machine tools essential for wartime manufacturing: “The guidelines settled on were $37-$90 a pound in Germany, $200-$400 a pound in the U.S. […] When the War came, some people thought it unpatriotic of GE to have given Germany an edge like that. But nobody with any power. Don’t worry.” (Pynchon 667). In fact, General Electric shared not only resources with its Nazi corporate partners—particularly Allgemeine Elektrizitäts Gesellschaft, or German GE, which had long been co-
owned by its American namesake—but also prophecies for the future of business (Sutton, Ch. 3). This is illustrated early in the novel, when an executive from IG Farben enlists a medium to summon Walther Rathenau, heir to AEG. It is unclear what the Nazis want from the dead Jewish business leader—a blessing, advice, or mere amusement—but his presence in the narrative is significant and represents a larger “vision of the postwar State. [Rathenau] saw the war in progress as a world revolution, out of which would rise neither Red communism nor an unhindered Right, but a rational structure in which business would be the true, the rightful authority” (Pynchon 167). Though this quote literally refers to the Great War, as Rathenau was assassinated in 1922 (Weisenburger 112), his dream was in fact becoming a reality by the narrative’s present, as Pynchon illustrates throughout Gravity’s Rainbow.

Additional references to both Standard Oil and General Electric in the novel are attached to two characters, Bloody Chiclitz and Major Marvy, who have been sent to oversee corporate interests in the Zone. Unlike Rathenau, they are fictional figures, but their appearance is emblematic of the power structure the former had envisioned in his own time, “[g]et[ting] some business people in there to run [things] right, instead of having the government run everything” (575). These are the words of Bloody Chiclitz, the founder of Yoyodyne, which in Gravity’s Rainbow does not yet manufacture rockets, but rather racist toys such as the “Juicy Jap, the doll that you fill with ketchup then bayonet through any of several access slots” and “Shufflin’ Sam, the game of skill where you have to shoot the Negro before he gets back over the fence with the watermelon” (568). Like Milo Minderbinder, Old Bloody Chiclitz is a multi-talented businessman, for he also discovers a plethora of ways to profit from the war. In the Zone he is trading in furs, employing child laborers that he hopes to then sell back in the States, but with “his eyes on the future,” he foreshadows his approaching career as a munitions maker: “I think
there’s a great future in these V-weapons. They’re gonna be really big’’ (568). Anticipating the next conflict, he secures a contract with Special Services, the morale/publicity branch of the military, to host festivities for redeployed soldiers while posing as the Royal Baby, “dream[ing] of the generations of cannon fodder struggling forward on their knees, one by one, to kiss his stomach while he gobbles turkey legs and ice-cream cones and wipes his fingers in the polliwogs’ hair” (568). The evil characterization of Chiclitz—who in a single page is revealed to be a racist, human trafficker, merchant of death, war profiteer, fraud, glutton, and slob—assures that any dream of his will become an unequivocal nightmare for most of the world, as Pynchon repeatedly suggests throughout the text.

Bloody Chiclitz’s companion, Major Marvy—appropriately, a villainous cowboy-esque figure, given the frontier-like atmosphere of the Zone—shares his friend’s “values” of racial prejudice, greed, and callous disregard of human life. His assignment from the higher ups, which include both government officials and corporate executives, is to retrieve German technology related to the V-2 rocket. Slothrop encounters Marvy and his crew of American soldiers at a former Nazi rocket factory, the Mittelwerke, where they appear to be confiscating weapons parts in conjunction with the Russians. The situation is presented as a giant GE-sponsored party, replete with free-flowing beer and sexually explicit drinking songs that evoke a fraternity gathering, rather than a serious military operation. Entrepreneurial members of the crew are also selling sandwiches, hawking rocket-part souvenirs, and offering ghost tours of adjacent former prison camp, Dora. When Marvy finally spots Slothrop, he sends his Mothers, as they are called, in pursuit of the intruder, who is aided in his escape by a German mathematician, and the two finally wind up in a still-operational Nazi missile guidance lab. As the protagonist ponders why
this facility remains functional, a witty song—many of which appear throughout the text—offers an explanation:

Oh…thur’s…

Nazi’s in the woodwork,

Fascists in the walls,

Little Japs with bucktooth grins

A-gonna grab yew bah th’ balls.

Whin this war is over,

How happy Ah will be,

Gearin’ up fer thim Rooskies

And Go-round Number Three…(319).

Epitomizing Pynchon’s penchant for the popular, this ditty both points back to the previously discussed collaboration between American and Nazi German corporations during the war and eagerly anticipates what amounts to a new business opportunity: a future conflict with the Soviet Union.

The aforementioned incident, exaggerated though it is, illuminates a truth that would have been evident to the author of *Gravity’s Rainbow* from personal experience: this period was indeed a time of celebration for military contractors who, like Chiclitz and Marvy, “gr[ew] fat on government largesse” during and after World War II (Faludi 29). Though various entities had expressed concerns about the greed of munitions manufacturers since the First World War, the later conflict was unprecedented in scale and technological sophistication—and hence, possibility for profit (Patterson 57-58). In light of increased tensions with the Soviets and US intervention in Korea the following decade, the market for their arms remained, rather than
recessing after V-J Day. President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s New Look policy further increased demand by replacing personnel with strategic nuclear missiles and other high-tech weaponry as a way to reduce military expenditures overall, enriching the corporations supplying them as a result (Pierpaoli 96). As the Cold War grew warmer and Russia demonstrated its technological might with its own nuclear tests and space program, the American weapons industry boomed. Indeed, the whole period was a heyday for the likes of Major Marvy and Old Bloody Chielitz, the military-industrial complex personified, and the disgust with which the author depicts these two characters conveys what he thought of those whose interests he had served while working within it.

Though far more politic than Pynchon was in his comments on the increasingly cozy relations and increased interdependency between these businesses and the United States government in the postwar years, Eisenhower, an Army General and veteran of World War II himself, likewise remarked on the ominous implications of this phenomenon at the end of his second term and brought into usage the phrase with which we now describe it. In his January 1961 exit speech, as Pynchon labored within his paper fortress at Boeing, the President warned, “[i]n the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist” (IV). While many pundits have interpreted Eisenhower as cautioning against both military and industrial authority equally in this new alliance, such a reading does not hold upon closer examination. The military bureaucracy is by definition part of government and thus cannot be the new source of influence that made Eisenhower anxious; instead, it was big business and its encroachment on the traditional power position of government that the President most feared. Thus, though Eisenhower was avowedly
pro-business and opened the door for greater commercial influence in government, his exit speech indicates a warranted concern that that influence was becoming dominance.

Of course, by the time Pynchon documented this disturbing development in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, it had evolved into something beyond Eisenhower’s wildest dreams—or rather, nightmares—and the author’s acute perceptions regarding the inner workings of the military-industrial complex can be attributed to his particular role in the publicity sector of one of the country’s largest arms manufacturers. In the years just prior to Pynchon’s employment there, after the Russians launched Sputnik I in October 1957, firms such as Boeing, Douglas Aircraft, and General Dynamics capitalized on a sense of national insecurity by flooding aerospace trade journals geared toward the military with advertising in pursuit of even more military contracts (Ledbetter 94-95), a trend that would continue throughout the Cold War period. These efforts were supported by the Army, Navy, and Air Force, which competed with one another for defense allocations. Indeed, military branches produced different brands of quite similar products via their corresponding contractors—e.g., the Air Force’s/Boeing’s Bomarc and the Army’s/Douglas’ Nike—and pitched the virtues of their wares in these same service magazines (Huntington 47-48). Service associations dedicated to each branch then used money from corporate advertising in those same publications to lobby Congress for additional funding (Kolko 172). In short, corporations advertised to the military and the military sold their wares to the legislature, consequently making the American public the consumers, who had nothing to show for their “purchase” except an ever-increasing fear of nuclear annihilation.

As we witnessed in the previous chapter, advertising in this period was accompanied by unprecedented efforts in public relations to soothe Americans’ anxieties about the increasing authority of big business. Military contractors in conjunction with the armed services did so
utilizing television, film, and even comics to broaden their appeal (Huntington 43-44). A pioneer in this field was Standard Oil of New Jersey, whose PR film *Louisiana Story* (1948) was nominated for an Academy Award. Seeking to defuse the explosive IG Farben scandal, SONJ’s executives also convened the first-ever national public relations conference, where they called for improved “human engineering” to accompany the company’s other technological achievements (Ewen, *PR* 352). Part and parcel of this “human engineering”—also known as PR—was Pynchon’s own primary professional field of employee relations. As one writer proclaimed in the ad industry journal *Printer’s Ink*, “You can no longer tell your employee what to do, you must sell them” (Fisher 15), and Pynchon’s task—writing articles that ensured workers of their individual importance, the vital nature of their labor, and the company’s concern for their safety and well-being—amounted to precisely that. Cultivating a caring air for its workers and the general public would have been especially important at Boeing during Pynchon’s tenure due to the accident that occurred not long after his hire. In June 1960, a nuclear-tipped Bomarc missile housed at Fort Dix in New Jersey spontaneously combusted, releasing radiation into the surrounding area that was not fully remediated until well into the twenty-first century (U.S. Air Force). That his articles for Boeing often addressed safety issues suggests they were in part a response to this nuclear mini-disaster, imbuing the title of “Togetherness” in particular—evoking Cold War-era family bonding in a deluxe fall-out shelter—with a generous dose of irony.

In sum, these advertising and public relations efforts so familiar to Pynchon helped facilitate the exponential growth and astronomical rise to power of the military-industrial complex the author portrays in its nascent stage in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, represented in the novel by “the octopus IG” and figures such as Marvy and Chiclitz (288). As the author affirms, this
was a development that affected all parties without exception, in his fiction as in real life: soldiers and civilians; workers and consumers; blacks and whites; men, women, and children. As I have indicated in previous chapters, however, the middle-class white man played a particularly significant, conflicted role of simultaneous perpetrator and victim of corporate machinations in this period, and given that the military-industrial complex is part of the larger corporatization process, the same is true here. In the novel, the individual that best embodies the intersection of MIC forces, the place where its various vectors converge is Tyrone Slothrop. As I will demonstrate in the following section, his body is a literal manifestation of corporate masculinity, one that cannot be separated from the rocket itself.

Of Missiles and Men

As the protagonist travels from London to Western Europe and into the German Zone, his journey is one of self-discovery not unlike David Bell’s in *Americana*, for in his quest for the 00000 rocket and accompanying *Schwarzgerät*, he ascertains his own very intimate relationship to these pieces of equipment. Through records obtained on the black market in Switzerland, Slothrop learns that his family’s paper-manufacturing business had contracted to print alternate German currencies in the post–World War I years for corporate co-conspirators who sought to devalue the deutschmark for their own financial gain and enable Germany to purchase weapons in violation of the Versailles treaty. The individual who brokered that deal, a Lyle Bland of Boston, had also facilitated the sale of young Slothrop—referred to in the document as the *Schwarzknabe*, or “black boy”—to a branch of German firm IG Farben in exchange for funding the child’s future education at Harvard. Their interest in Infant Tyrone had to do with his use in an experiment by then-Harvard scientist Laszlo Jamf, who conditioned him to develop an
erection in response to Imiplex G—later used in the V-2 rocket—by stroking his penis with a cotton swab while the substance was present. Slothrop recalls this trauma in a sudden return of the repressed:

He is [...] getting a hardon, for no immediate reason. And there’s that smell again, a smell from before his conscious memory begins, a soft and chemical smell, threatening, haunting [...] 

Once something was done to him, in a room, while he lay helpless….

His erection hums from a certain distance, like an instrument installed, wired by Them into his body as a colonial outpost here in our raw and clamorous world, another office representing Their white Metropolis far away (289-90).

As indicated in the last line of this passage, the protagonist’s body, and particularly his manhood, has effectively been colonized by Harvard and IG Farben with the help of Slothrop’s very own father.

In Slothrop’s body we can read the relationship between the military-industrial complex and corporate masculinity. By conditioning him to become aroused by one of their products—one, it is vital to note, that is instrumental in and symbolic of violence itself—these MIC businessmen control the most basic aspect of his masculinity, a visceral version of other-direction. Importantly, Slothrop does not belong to any traditionally subjugated group, but is instead the white male progeny of the prosperous merchant class, and thus, both hapless victim and hereditary villain of his own corporatization. As such, we witness here yet another iteration of the historical narrative described throughout this dissertation. In the postwar period, the need to perpetuate the sense of masculine achievement attained by American men during wartime manifested itself in a variety of ways, and Pynchon focuses primarily on the military-industrial
facet of this phenomenon. Spurred by gendered political rhetoric of virility versus impotence, corresponding Cold War fears (of emasculation), and of course, corporate greed, weapons became sexualized to an unprecedented degree. Conditioned to regard rockets as extensions of their own penises by politicians, popular culture, and the corporate world, Americans understood missile proliferation as not only a matter of national security, but also one of national manhood. In Faludi’s words, “technological achievements of NASA, McDonnell Douglass and military-industrial America in general [such as] the satellite and the rocket were supposed to magnify the average man’s presence in the world. Some of the sheen from the huge new machines put out by huge new institutions was supposed to make him feel huge, too” (34). Norman Mailer put the matter more simply: such technological innovations were designed “to keep America up” (“A Prefatory Paper” 6).12

What emerges from the above description is military-corporate masculinity as a circular rather than linear formation, which Pynchon’s protagonist also embodies. As an other-directed corporate man, Slothrop is easily manipulated, but also by definition simultaneously manipulative. His particular talent appears to be seducing women; however, a map of Slothrop’s conquests in his office at in London—which is identical to a map of rocket strikes kept by statistician Roger Mexico—suggests he may be more than a mere Casanova. In each case, a rocket has fallen in the precise area of the protagonist’s tryst anywhere from 2-10 days post-coitus. While fellow Pavlovian Dr. Pointsman contends that the correlation indicates Slothrop was not deconditioned from his artificially imposed armaphilia, as the previous passage suggests, the time lag between intercourse and impact proves a source of puzzlement. To resolve this quandary, one of Pointsman’s colleagues postulates that Slothrop controls the rockets through psychokinesis because “he subconsciously needs to abolish all trace of the sexual
The novel never actually solves this mystery, and what Pynchon ultimately suggests, in his refusal to do so and in context of the larger historical metaphor of the novel, is that both are true. The question of cause and effect is a false one; rather, the sexual stimulation of violence and the perpetuation of that violence against the feminized Other are inextricably intertwined in a self-perpetuating cycle. This is the military-industrial logic that kept Pynchon’s former employer Boeing in business and gave direction to corporate men such as Slothrop, and for a time, the author himself.

Pynchon summarizes the national and global implications of America’s ridiculous, perilous relationship with weaponry in another incident from Slothrop’s aforementioned journey into the German Mittelwerke. While Marvy’s Mothers carry rocket parts out of the factory, the military-corporate soldiers sing a seemingly endless dirty limerick-song in which each verse describes a man having intercourse with a different missile component, e.g.:

There was a young fellow named Hector
Who was fond of a launcher-erector
But the squishes and pops
Of acute pressure drops

Wrecked Hector’s hydraulic connector (Pynchon 311)

Pynchon here illustrates the fact that fetishization of military-industrial might had unforeseen negative consequences for those whose livelihood relied upon it beyond the dangers he described in his employee relations articles. As the author of *Stiffed* states, while stimulating desire for a large arsenal created employment for thousands of (mostly white) men in the postwar period, they would eventually “be rewarded with insecurity and pink slips, with massive spasms of downsizing, restructuring, union-breaking, contracting-out, and outsourcing” (Faludi 30); in
other words, they were, as David Bell said in so many ways about his colleagues who were fired, effectively emasculated. Of course, given the international tensions fueling the arms race during the period, the outcome could have been much graver, and amazingly, even the possibility of nuclear annihilation was eroticized: World War III—the global clash between capitalism and communism gleefully foreseen in the previous section—was frequently referred to by MIC giants like the RAND Corporation as a “‘wargasm’” (Roszak xxii).

As indicated above, Slothrop was not entirely unique in his response to the rocket, nor is sexualization of weapons technology or violence uniquely American. After all, Nazi scientists constructed the V-2 at the behest of those who wished to conquer the feminized masses on behalf of the Fatherland, only later bringing their expertise to aid the US’s own Cold War–era designs for world dominance. Moreover, as Pynchon repeatedly reveals throughout the novel, far more overlap between Allied and Axis “enemies,” their interests, and their values existed than the former group would have wished to admit. At one point in the novel, Slothrop finds himself on a ship, the Anubis, speaking with former Nazi Miklos Thanatz, a fellow rocket fetishist, about the V-2: “‘Yes, fueled, alive, ready for firing…fifty feet high, trembling…and then the fantastic, virile roar […] Cruel, hard, thrusting into the virgin-blue robes of the sky, my friend. Oh, so phallic’” (472). It is through the recollections of Thanatz and his wife, Margherita Erdmann, that we receive more information about the nature of the Schwarzgerät, as the couple had previously provided pornographic entertainment for the man in charge of the project: Major Weissmann, also known as Blicero. Erdmann recounts to Slothrop being taken by Blicero—described as “[a]ll things to all men, a brand-new military type, part salesman, part scientist” (407)—to a remote petrochemical plant belonging to IG Farben, where she received a suit of Imipolex G and subsequently engaged in an orgy with various corporate officials, including one wearing a dildo
of the erotic, erectile plastic. This incident is only a test run for another involving a young boy, Gottfried, who is eventually sacrificed in a shroud of the same substance. The Schwarzgerät is designed to insulate him from the heat of the 00000 rocket—“the flame is too bright for anyone to see Gottfried inside, except now as an erotic category, hallucinated out of that blue violence, for purposes of self-arousal” (773)—so that he will be killed upon impact, his death fetishized along with the explosion/ejaculation of the missile-phallus.

As hyperbolic as the Schwarzgerät incident might appear, it is both symbolically apt and less outlandish than it may seem. The sacrifice of a child in what is effectively a giant penis reflects the author’s revulsion against the use of young people as canon fodder, to employ a term found earlier in the novel, in wars that can be read as sadistic, masculinist, masturbatory fantasies. Given that Gravity’s Rainbow—like Catch-22—is a transhistorical text, this metaphor applies to World War II and Vietnam, combatants and actual children alike. In the early years of US involvement in the later conflict, Pynchon did his part to promote the production of weapons that America used to maintain its powerful place in the world, at the expense of those represented by the ironically named Gottfried—literally, “God’s peace.” The young boy’s captor-killer and easily the most evil character in the novel is Weissmann—or “White Man”—and his nickname, Blicero, similarly derives from bleicher, the masculine form of the German adjective for “pale.” Though Pynchon clearly points to the dominant racial demographic in Europe and America by employing these appellations, he also uses Weissmann to symbolize a specific subset of that group on this side of the Atlantic. In one of the narrative’s final fragments, the author tells us, “[i]f you’re wondering where he’s gone, look among the successful academics, the Presidential advisers, the token intellectuals who sit on boards of directors […] Look high, not low” (764). These include, of course, the Nazi scientists like
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Weissmann that became essential to the MIC establishment in the postwar period, but also native sons for whom he serves as a sort of archetype.18

As evidenced above, Gravity’s Rainbow suggests that Nazi Germany and the United States—both during World War II and throughout the mid-twentieth century—in fact had much in common: corporate assets, white patriarchal culture, and most importantly in this section, sexualized violence and the fetishization of weaponry. Moreover, as Sasuly recognized early and Pynchon was able to witness in full force, America’s military-industrial complex in many ways mirrored the structure and function of the business-government alliance that powered the Nazi Wehrmacht (Sasuly 108). In foregrounding these similarities, Pynchon engages in a mode of critique quite popular in his time of writing—comparing mid-century America to the defunct fascist regime, as indicated by the spelling “Amerikkka” (Baker 330)—but as I have emphasized throughout this chapter, he focuses less on the resemblance of their Repressive State Apparatuses, to use Althusser’s distinction, and more on their ideological counterparts, as a return to the details of Slothrop’s conditioning will affirm.

The experiment to which Infant Tyrone was subject is based on Watson and Rayner’s study of Little Albert, whom the two researchers trained to fear white furry objects by making a loud, naturally frightening noise each time they presented him with something fitting that description. The child eventually became afraid of white fuzzy things—the conditioned stimuli—independently of the loud noise (Pynchon 85). The lead scientist, John B. Watson, was subsequently dismissed from Johns Hopkins University after it was discovered the married researcher had been having an affair with his graduate student protégé, Rosalie Rayner, and unable to find work elsewhere in academia, he accepted a position with J. Walter Thompson advertising agency (Buckley 134-35).19 Watson brought to the field his mechanistic methods for
manipulating behavior: ”’[T]o make your consumer react, it is only necessary to confront him with either fundamental or conditioned emotional stimuli,”’ ones that conjure fear, rage, affection, or a deep psychic need (Buckley 137). Herein lies the connection alluded to above: this is the precise modus operandi of propaganda, the heart of the Hitler’s regime as maintained by Joseph Goebbels. As Pynchon demonstrates, Nazi Germans and mid-century Americans alike were subject to the machinations of psychologically savvy ad men.

In 1928 Edward Bernays—the father of modern public relations and grandson of Sigmund Freud—published a book titled Propaganda, in which he sought to rescue the word from its negative connotation even prior to World War II. Instead, he viewed it as a public good, a means for the intelligent elite to manage the unruly masses: “[T]he group mind does not think in the strict sense of the word. Instead it has impulses, habits, and emotions” (74). These, Bernays noted, could be manipulated for either marketing or political purposes—and of course, they were, both at home and abroad. While already important in the 1920s, the formative period of modern American advertising and the age in which Watson was operating, the use of psychological sales techniques—including research to determine what feelings and needs to take advantage of—became central to promotions in midcentury America. Lyle Bland, the man who sold Slothrop to IG Farben, came to specialize in these depth studies, including one “that indicated an unacceptable 36% of the male work force weren’t paying enough attention to their cocks—not enough genital obsession there, and it was undermining the efficiency of the organs doing the real work” (Pynchon 591). Advancing and exploiting phallocentrism were essential to selling the War itself, then nuclear weapons and consumer goods alike in the following decade. Appeals to fear (of emasculation) were also popular in munitions marketing, much as they were in the political arena. These techniques reached their climax in the 1950s and 60s in the field
known as motivational research through the efforts of its prophet, Ernest Dichter, who consulted on countless campaigns and published influential works with such suggestive titles as *The Strategy of Desire* (1960). In sum, innovations in scientific propaganda revolutionized the twentieth-century promotions world, serving as tools to sell everything from margarine to missiles to men running for office by manipulating emotions and appealing to deep-seated drives.

If corporate forces were utilizing man’s innermost needs and urges to stimulate his desire for their various products, the apparent solution for those so inclined would be to unfetter these same components of the psyche, to direct them toward ends other than consumption. This philosophy, of course, was adopted by the so-called counterculture during the period in which Pynchon was writing *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Given the timing, it is unsurprising that so much sexual activity and drug use appear in the novel, pursuits believed by some to free the body and mind from the profit-driven “festival of death” (DeLillo 355), as one commune-dweller put it in *Americana*. Yet as DeLillo demonstrates through David Bell, embracing an alternative lifestyle and engaging in behaviors deemed taboo by the larger society do not necessarily lead to emancipation. Similarly, Pynchon’s portrayal of sex and drugs in his most famous novel suggests that these supposed instruments of liberation may merely be the same old tools of domination in new packaging.

Sex, Drugs, and More Control

Pynchon, as shown in the previous section, illuminates the way in which scientific advertising employed the sexual sell to further the interests of the military-industrial complex and big business in general. What we did not see, however, was much actual sex, though not for
lack of opportunity. The narrative is rife with it, in fact, though there is little romance to be found. Instead, most sexual liaisons throughout Gravity’s Rainbow involve some sort of manipulation and a power differential between parties. Some encounters entail a kind of voyeurism engaged in for profit as opposed to pleasure. Others are sadomasochistic in nature; domination/submission in fact features prominently in the novel. Pedophilia also pervades the narrative—often fantasized, but other times enacted. In a narrative so saturated with symbolism, these cannot be taken as merely gratuitous. In each case, as our examination will demonstrate, the primary purpose of these various types of trysts is not love or lust, but rather control.

Given the fact that Slothrop has been conditioned for arousal by the V-2 rocket, it is not surprising that his actual sexual behavior continues to be controlled by outside forces in various ways. While on leave at the Casino Hermann Goering, the protagonist conjugates with a woman named Katje after rescuing her from a staged attack by a giant octopus. Her task is to assist in monitoring Slothrop’s sexual response for researchers in cahoots with IG Farben; in other words, she is helping them test his desire for their product, Imipolex G. As we later learn, he has been under surveillance for quite some time, another measure of MIC power, as we know from Foucault. Though Slothrop suspects Katje is a spy, he acquiesces anyway, realizing he would rather be with her under those conditions than being fired upon in England. Moreover, he rationalizes that “the real enemy’s somewhere back in that London, and this is [only] her job” (210). The man in charge of observing their liaisons believes he is being kept impotent by those in charge in order to dispassionately record the data; in other words, his manhood is also being manipulated, the counterpoint to Slothrop, whose erections here are induced by absorbing information about the Schwarzgerät. The agent’s lamentation regarding his own situation—
“We’re all such mechanical men” (218)—is likewise generalizable to all his fellow cogs in the war machine.

Another variety of sexual control in the novel occurs in the context of sadomasochistic relationships. Prior to the firing of the 00000 rocket, Weissmann kept Katje and the seemingly teenaged Gottfried captive at the rocket launch site, subjecting them to his every disturbing sexual whim. Though the relationship is undoubtedly abusive, we are told this is a “game” the two have submitted themselves to playing (98). While Gottfried remains with Blicero till the end—ultimately, as we know, to be used as literal canon fodder—Katje decides she no longer wants to play and flees. She is, as we learn later, one of many double agents in the novel, sent to Weissmann to gather intelligence on the rocket but ultimately unable to give up his location. After leaving him, Katje takes the sadistic part in a liaison with Brigadier Pudding, an old British soldier, whom she keeps in line with whippings, obliging him to consume her excretions, and other acts of humiliation. Slothrop himself even engages in his fair share of beatings at the behest of Margherita Erdmann, the Nazi film star and practiced masochist. The point of each of these interactions in terms of the narrative is not titillation, but domination. The reasoning behind them is best phrased from Katje’s perspective while under the sway of Blicer: “it’s better, she believes, to enter into some formal, rationalized version of what, outside, proceeds without form or decent limit day and night” (97-98). In other words, the known, more ordered violence of S&M feels safer than the seemingly chaotic carnage of the war itself.

In addition to dominant-submissive relationships, pedophilic desire also suffuses the narrative. In many cases it is used to indicate particularly evil characters, such as Dr. Pointsman and Miklos Thanatz, but there are no explicit accounts of their exploits, only fantasies and allusions. Interestingly, the only one actually portrayed having sex with a child, other than
Blicero, is Slothrop. While he is aboard the *Anubis*, nearly the entire vessel—including members of the privileged classes from all of Europe, but also Slothrop himself—participates in a graphic and rather ridiculous orgy at the sight of Erdmann spanking her daughter, Bianca. The next morning, the girl, a nymphet of “11 or 12” (471), finds the protagonist and seduces him.23 Bianca does not know the identity of her father and seems to be seeking him in our hero. In a reverse-Oedipal turn, we later learn that she has been murdered by her own mother. Pynchon certainly intends to convey disgust in these instances of pedophilia, but the pairing of adult and child is also significant in terms of power differential.

In each case related above—voyeurism, sadomasochism, and pedophilia—the relations are defined by power dynamics, a need to control and be controlled. But sex, as previously discussed, is not the only way in which Pynchon depicts domination-subordination. As in all his novels, drugs feature prominently in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. In the case of milder substances, particularly marijuana and its derivatives—they seem to be mostly a means of escape and a source of slapstick comedy.24 However, the same cannot be said for stronger drugs, which serve a significant symbolic purpose in the narrative. One of the more important ones is sodium amytal, also known as amobarbital, a sedative that reduces inhibitions and increases suggestibility. It was commonly used as a truth serum in interrogations, and Slothrop undergoes questioning under the influence of sodium amytal several times throughout the novel in an effort by the MIC forces still studying him to investigate his unconscious mind, in addition to his outward behavior.25 Amobarbital and related classes of barbiturates were also utilized for brainwashing and mind-control experiments conducted by the CIA under the umbrella of Operation MKULTRA. Known as “psychic driving,” the procedure involved dosing subjects with the substance, then subjecting them to taped propaganda messages for days or weeks at a
time.\textsuperscript{26} In sum, the history of the drug reveals it as a tool for manipulating others, the same purpose it serves in Pynchon’s novel.

In addition to sodium amytal, hallucinogenic drugs play an important part in Pynchon’s novel. The fictional psychedelic Oneirine—discovered by the infamous Jamf and in actuality invented by Pynchon—is the most important of these more powerful intoxicants. Derived from the Latin word “to dream” (Weisenburger 113), the drug produces recurring hallucinations that “show a definite narrative continuity, as clearly as, say, the average Reader’s Digest article” (Pynchon 717). Oneirine also possesses “[t]he property of time-modulation” (395), which is demonstrated in a practical joke played by Seaman “Pig” Bodine, who has used it to spike the coffee onboard the U.S.S. John E. Badass. As an approaching U-boat piloted by Argentine anarchists fires a torpedo at the American ship, the target effectively disappears: “the fatal courses do intersect in space, but not in time. Not nearly in time, heh heh […] What [the Argentine gunman] fired his torpedo at was a darkrust old derelict” (395). In this case, the fictional drug has actually altered the spatiotemporal reality of those under its influence. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Oneirine is also a favorite of veteran masochist Margherita Erdmann, whose psychosis in the grasp of the substance becomes increasingly evident as the narrative progresses. The imaginary hallucinogen is thus yet another implement of manipulation in Pynchon’s novel.

From these episodes, it is clear that the omnipresent sex and drug use in Gravity’s Rainbow are not only for entertainment purposes. Rather, they are additional manifestations of one of the novel’s major themes. In conjunction with other interrelated types permeating in the text—corporate, martial, and psychological—carnal and pharmaceutical modes of control point to an area of critical cultural concern in the postwar period, of which Pynchon was clearly quite cognizant. Though the question of power dynamics has been important throughout American
history, given the more complex nature of authority in a supposedly egalitarian, pluralistic democracy as opposed to more traditional, stratified societies, it was a particularly important one in the mid-twentieth-century. The rise of fascism in Europe leading up to World War II, the power grab in the Cold War period, and the social upheavals of the 1960s all help account for the palpable increase in alarm surrounding this issue. But as the various forms of control thematized throughout *Gravity’s Rainbow* illustrate, the most intense anxieties arose not about manipulation from outside, but penetration and subjugation from within. This fear, so clearly linked by language to the horror of emasculation, accounts for such diverse phenomena as McCarthyism, the Lavender Scare, the War on Drugs, and the many popular depictions of mind control, including, of course, that committed by psychologically astute ad men as chronicled in Vance Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders*.

While sex and drugs undoubtedly serve as both symbols and techniques of control in Pynchon’s novel, they also bear a special significance that sets them apart from the other varieties discussed: as previously mentioned, they were seen as a kind of societal salvation by many—particularly those under 30—in the period we call the Sixties. In her article on sex, drugs, and other “mindless pleasures” in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Hite contends that Pynchon endorses this view. Pointing to many of the episodes we have examined, she claims that the author—who draws on Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization*, one of several contemporary philosophical texts we know he read—frequently shows sex to be a means of revelation, particularly when the subjects are engaging in “perverse” behaviors: homosexuality, sadomasochism, and coprophagia, and perhaps by extension voyeurism and pedophilia (Hite, “Fun” 694-95). While it is true that sexual acts in the novel are sometimes accompanied by epiphany, their material effects do not support Hite’s assertion that Pynchon primarily portrays them in a positive light. The data that Katje
helps gather on Slothrop’s erections results in Pointsman’s order—though snafued in practice—to castrate the protagonist. Weissmann launches Gottfried to a horrific death in a giant missile phallus. Brigadier Pudding dies of a massive $E_{coli}$ infection. Margherita Erdmann murders her daughter, Bianca, after the latter sleeps with Slothrop. All of the protagonists’ early conquests succumb to subsequent rocket attacks. While not vilifying sexuality in any way—he certainly allows for pleasure at times, and even some tender feelings here and there—Pynchon reveals, in addition to showing that sexual drives can be coopted by military-corporate manipulators, that sexual relations frequently mirror and enforce the power relations already present in society.

They can provide momentary release, but they can also discipline and punish. In reminding the reader of this, Pynchon repudiates the Sixties notion that the liberation of society is reducible to sexual liberation.\textsuperscript{31}

If sex was to redeem the body in the countercultural narrative, drugs were to deliver the mind, and here also Pynchon exhibits skepticism. Though Hite cites the psychedelic Oneirine as a source of illumination (694), her discussion of substances is quite brief, and there are in fact as many counterexamples as there are instances that support her assertion. As previously mentioned, Margherita Erdmann is an Oneirine junkie who murders multiple children under the influence of the drug, and while Seaman Bodine’s prank dosing does save his crew from the approaching submarine, they collectively hallucinate a corpse in its place and proceed to blow the body to bits. Indeed, the drug’s effects leave little to recommend it: “so ordinary, so conventional [...] ‘the dullest hallucinations known to psychopharmacology’ [...] only recognized as hauntings through some radical though plausible violation of reality “ (Pynchon 717). Interestingly, this description, along with the implication of dreaming in Oneirine’s name, recalls faux Clinton Bell’s characterization of his trade: “To consume in America is not to buy; it
is to dream […] advertising is never bigger than than life. It tries not to edge too far over the fantasy line […] We have exploited the limitation of dreams. It’s our greatest achievement” (DeLillo, *Americana* 270-71). Furthermore, Oneirine was developed by the scientist who conditioned Slothrop to sexually desire his other invention, the rocket material Imipolex G. LSD and sodium amytal have similar corporate histories, discovered and manufactured at Sandoz and Merck, respectively (Streatfeild 63, Dormandy 414), and albeit in a different way than Oneirine, they were also tried as tools of psychological control. From these observations Pynchon’s point becomes clear: just as there are diverse drugs with varying effects, so too do various entities function as drugs, including those of a commercial nature. Again, Pynchon does not demonize the substances themselves, but he also does not endorse them as the key to psychic clarity or social salvation. Tripping no more ensures enlightenment than making love precludes making war.34

Thus, over the course of the novel Pynchon reveals the counterculture’s favored means of resistance insufficient to challenge military-corporate domination. Instead, he shows how easily they are appropriated by or otherwise advance the aims of those in power. The problem is not only that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde 112), but also that the master has found a way to make every tool his own. This is essentially Marcuse’s description of repressive tolerance—seemingly subversive outlets that actually serve to preserve the larger order—which Herman and Weisenburger rightly apply to such behaviors in *Gravity’s Rainbow* (49-52). And yet, despite this palpable pessimism the author still assembles a Counterforce at the end of the novel, a group of characters that aggregate just as the protagonist—who, “at least as early as the *Anubis* era, ha[d] begun to thin, to scatter” (517)—dissolves entirely as a cohesive entity, “becom[ing] a cross himself, a crossroad” (639). Looking like quite the hippie—“letting
hair and beard grow, wearing a dungaree shirt and trousers” (635)—he, like all the other protagonists portrayed in this dissertation so far, drops out, but without even the tenuous optimism of Yossarian, his counterpart from *Catch-22*. Although we can already infer the ultimate ineffectuality of Slothrop’s successors, the Counterforce does manage to achieve what their hero was denied: a direct confrontation with Them, the MIC forces who manipulated his body and mind throughout his lifetime. In depicting this conflict, Pynchon also offers his own account—that of a former corporate man, a onetime promoter of the real-life Rocket-State—of what at the time of his writing essentially amounted to a battle for the soul of America, even if the outcome was already a foregone conclusion.

Masculinity, Postmodernism, and Rationality

Just prior to the fragmentation of the narrative, figures from throughout *Gravity’s Rainbow* come together as a self-proclaimed Counterforce. These are the Preterite in the terminology of Slothrop’s Puritan ancestors—those who have been passed over—as opposed to the Elite, or chosen ones, represented in the novel by powerful, malign MIC men: corporate executives, top scientists, and high-ranking military officials. Together the rebels plan and launch a counterattack at a dinner party attended by many of their Elite enemies, which consists of clamoring for a variety of absurd, disgusting dishes: “snot soup,” “menstrual marmalade,” “discharge dumplings,” etc. (729-30). This nauseating outburst continues for two and a half pages—its silliness underscored by a cacophony of kazoos—until every guest is ill. The incident, like many significant occurrences in the novel, is both revolting and ridiculous. It also appears to be pointless—a completely irrational response to the coordinated pursuit of world domination and destruction—but the irrationally is in fact part of the intent. When Roger asks
fellow Counterforce member Osbie Feel why their “‘We-system’” cannot “‘interlock in a reasonable way, like They-systems do,’” the latter proclaims, “‘That’s exactly it […] They’re the rational ones. We piss on Their rational arrangements’” (651), which the inquirer himself had literally done a few pages prior. Osbie’s response speaks to the rationale behind these performances, which is to say: there is none. Unlike the grotesque behavior of their Elite counterparts, which is directed toward obtaining control, the actions of the Counterforce are designed to disrupt, distract, and amuse, but without hope of actually defeating their adversaries.  

Pynchon’s depiction of the clash between this ragtag band of misfits and the ultra-powerful military-industrial Elite characterizes in microcosm the struggle of the real-life counterculture against the technocracy as portrayed in Theodore Roszak’s *The Making of the Counter Culture*. According to Roszak, the relentless pursuit of scientific progress and corporate order has led to not only “the sheer fact of the [atomic] bomb, but [a society defined] by the total *ethos* of the bomb, in which our politics, our public morality, our economic life, our intellectual endeavor are now embedded with a wealth of ingenious rationalization” (47), maintained by an ever-larger army of “image makers and public relations specialists” (15). The counterculture, as the name suggests, set itself in opposition to all of this, pursuing not progress and profit, but bodily pleasures, psychedelic journeys, and spiritual mysticisms. Their intentionally irrational activities imply also an oft-noted (and much maligned) softer gender identity for the male members of the movement, “a deliberate effort […] to undercut the crude and compulsive he-manliness of American political life” (74). While the author does not condone their specific methods, he ultimately endorses both the impetus behind and the implicit objective of the counterculture’s rebellion: to break free from the well-ordered rational oppression of the
technocracy by embracing a more holistic worldview and seeking a more democratic “good magic” to replace the alienating, destructive white man’s sorcery that science has become (260-66).

The silly incantations of the Counterforce in Gravity’s Rainbow can indeed be construed as the sort of participatory conjuring that Roszak commended in essence if not in efficacy, analogous to the 1967 attempt by Vietnam protesters to levitate the Pentagon that he cites in his study (124). But by the time Pynchon was completing his third novel, he could not be as optimistic as the former had been in the late 1960s about the potential for similar impulses to effect real change, not least because the Vietnam War raged on in spite of them. Reflecting back twenty-five years after writing The Making of the Counter Culture, Roszak remarks on some of the movement’s weaknesses, criticisms that already lurked in the margins of the original text: “From the outset, the counter culture, so distrustful of authority and suspicious of leadership, suffered for its lack of long-term organization […] and grossly underestimated the stability and resourcefulness of the corporate establishment” (xxix). In other words, according to Roszak the amorphous, free-spirited quality that set it apart from the rational order of the system it sought to undermine was also its ultimate downfall.

Pynchon likewise demonstrates that the unstructured, playful Counterforce is no match for its potent opponent, but the explanation he offers delves deeper than that put forward by Roszak. While the theorist takes for granted the societal dichotomy crystallized in the term counterculture, Pynchon repeatedly questions the dualisms he presents throughout his novel. Everyone in the Counterforce is described as “at least a double agent” (552), having worked for both “sides”—not Allied and Axis so much as for and against the interests of the Rocket-cartel. Given their conflicted status, not unlike that of Slothrop, the binary terms members of the
Counterforce use to define themselves against the Elites—i.e. We vs. They—are already revealed as falsely polarized. Pynchon elaborates on the rebels’ complicity with those they purport to resist as follows:

Well, if the Counterforce knew better what those categories concealed they might be in a better position to disarm, de-penis and dismantle the Man. But they don’t. Actually they do, but they don’t admit it. Sad, but true. They are as schizoid, as double-minded in the massive presence of money as any of the rest of us, and that’s the hard fact. The Man has a branch office in each of our brains, […] each local rep has a cover known as the Ego, and their mission in this world is Bad Shit […]

They will use us. We will help legitimize Them, though They don’t need it really, it’s another dividend for Them, nice but not critical” (727).

Here Pynchon affirms what he has implied throughout the novel as examined in this chapter: We are not so different from Them after all. Indeed, the corporate man and the counterculture were both products of postwar affluence, and both defined themselves largely in consumerist terms. Part of the reason for this is of course Their ability to set up shop in our minds with the help of promotions and other related means of manipulation, as we have seen throughout this chapter. However, as the author asserts here, those who supposedly oppose these machinations in fact often willingly submit to them, thereby enabling Them to maintain hegemony, as Gramsci defined it (12-13), rather than mere domination. Moreover, as we witnessed in the previous section, means are no guarantee of ends. The Third Reich, despite operating as a well-oiled death machine, was driven by an obsession with mysticism and the occult. The movement that yielded the peace-loving hippie and Woodstock also gave rise to Charles Manson and Altamont. And of course, Pynchon’s experience as an apologist for a
missile manufacturer, in a manner analogous to his fellow former ad and PR men discussed in this dissertation, enabled him to write *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

Ironically, the technocracy’s faith in science and reason yielded—right about the same time Pynchon left Boeing—the most unreasonable result of all: reaching the brink of annihilation during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Similarly, Robert McNamara’s use of rational planning in Vietnam resulted in the most irrational quagmire of a conflict imaginable. Vietnam was in fact the logical termination point of the historical trajectory begun in World War II, as Pynchon indicates with the novel’s prolepsis to Richard Nixon. Represented in one of the final fragments as Richard M. Zhlubb, night manager of a Los Angeles movie theater, Nixon presides over the final descent of the 00000 rocket, shot two decades into the future. With his promises of a return to “progress and order” (“Address to Accept the Presidential Nomination”), his presence at this moment is appropriate; his “peace with honor” PR campaign extended the war and thus the death toll in Vietnam by several years and thousands of lives, and two decades prior, as a leading Communist-hunter in the immediate postwar period, he helped create the conditions that made American involvement there seem sensible in the first place. It is therefore fitting that he oversees a scene of mass death in the final episode of the novel, as the rocket—seemingly transformed into a nuke—falls on the City of Angels, killing Counterforce types and Nixon alike. As Roger Mexico proclaims near the novel’s beginning, ultimately “[e]veryone’s equal […] in the eyes of the rocket” (57).

Corporate men such as the author at Boeing were simultaneously progenitors, products, and victims of the military-industrial machine that made this all possible: facilitating its formation from wartime into the postwar period, justifying its existence and expansion with strategically placed ads and skillful public and employee relations efforts, and yet, finally,
illogically, ground down in the gears of that which they helped assemble. Watching their jobs disappear en masse at home and their sons perish en masse in Vietnam—“sponsored by instant coffee,” as Americana’s David Bell reminds us—were only two of the most tangible effects of this. Given his role as the internal voice of Boeing, charged with rationalizing the insanity of missile proliferation to those tasked with doing it, it is unsurprising that this tendency toward entropy is so central in all Pynchon’s works, and has in fact become an essential element of the American postmodern novel. Indeed, he lays this well-ordered chaos bare in Gravity’s Rainbow, both thematically and formally, in the form of paranoia, uncertainty, and fragmentation. Writing at the denouement of the Sixties, however, the author cannot present the intentionally irrational antics of the Counterforce as saving the day. Instead, as the bomb falls in the final scene of Pynchon’s novel, the last thing we hear is the narrator’s voice, like that of the former ER/PR man, disingenuously reassuring us that everything will be ok.
Conclusion: Impact

Like the 00000 rocket at the end of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, we never actually witness the silhouette in the opening credits of *Mad Men* hit the ground, though we know it is coming. This not-quite-yetness is fitting given that the program ends in 1970, before the American Century and its accompanying promotional boom went bust a bit later in the decade. In the last episode of the series, Don Draper, like the authors and protagonists in this study, has fled the corporation—in the former’s case, for a hippie retreat on the California coast. Indeed, the final scene shows him meditating with a group of fellow dropouts on a cliff overlooking the beach, and we witness him attain enlightenment: not inner peace or Zen emptiness, but instead an idea for a television commercial incorporating countercultural themes. We see in the very last moments his vision come to fruition: a diverse group of people from around the world, dressed as flower children or in traditional costumes, singing a hymn to unity achieved through consumption of their favorite beverage, Coca-Cola. There is no glimpse here of the forthcoming financial crisis, though it does seem to at least imply the impending end of the Sixties era, with its cooptation at that moment reaching symbolic completion. As *Catch-22*’s Yossarian does in *Closing Time*, Don Draper will be making a corporate comeback.

Also seeing the age to an end was President Richard Nixon, who, as we have seen, is presented in the final fragments of Pynchon’s novel as the quintessential other-directed corporate man, driving a “black Managerial Volkswagen” and listening not to music,¹ but rather laugh tracks—the kind designed to stimulate audience laughter on sitcoms—that play in response to his jokes (770-71).² This was merely one of many postmodern portrayals of the ill-fated President; in fact, a few years later Kurt Vonnegut published *Jailbird* (1979), in which the protagonist is a former aid serving time in prison for the Watergate affair.³ The most apt depiction of Nixon for
our purposes, however, is in Robert Coover’s *The Public Burning*. The novel renders the Rosenberg trial of the early 1950s as a sort of postmodern morality play, with then-Vice President Nixon serving as main character and narrator for much of the text. He muddles through the storyline ostensibly searching for truth, albeit ineffectually, and the couple’s execution takes place on cue as a festive spectacle in Times Square for the entertainment of the general public. “Good” and “Evil” in the novel are personified in Uncle Sam and the Phantom, respectively, who in turn symbolize the American Way of Life and Communism. However, Uncle Sam—a crude, fast-talking yokel—actually appears much more malign than the Phantom, whom we never see and may in fact not exist. In the novel’s ultimate scene, the bumbling Nixon receives what he desires from Uncle Sam—“the incarnation” to become President—but in an unexpected manner, to say the least. Instructing the “chosen one” to bend over, our national mascot delivers his sanctification through a brutal act of anal rape, “filling [Nixon] with a rippling all-rupturing force so fierce [he] thought [he’d] die” (Coover 532). Concerned about Communist penetration of American government throughout the postwar period, the President-to-be finds himself violently penetrated by “Sam Slick the Yankee Peddler” (7). As indicated by his nickname, the cultural icon is in fact presented as a promotions man.

This portrayal of Nixon can be read as a metaphor for his rise to power in more ways than one, as epitomized by the first nationally televised Presidential Debate in 1960. Believing that Jack Kennedy looked “weak” and “effeminate” at the Democratic National Convention (“Nixon vs. JFK.”), Nixon felt good about his chances against the young, relatively unknown Senator from Massachusetts. When JFK eschewed makeup, Nixon did the same; once in their dressing rooms, however, the former took the full treatment of Max Factor, while the latter used “some hideous thing called Shave Stick,” a gray substance that merely accentuated his ever-present
five-o’-clock shadow (“Nixon vs. JFK.”). Visibly nervous and unnaturally hued, Nixon further endorsed Kennedy’s brand image and diminished his own by agreeing with most things his opponent said. As if his poor showing at the debate were not bad enough, Nixon was also bested in the advertising game by the previously unknown Kennedy, who timed his campaign commercials featuring clever jingles to coincide with the viewing habits of the average American housewife (“Nixon vs. JFK.”). JFK’s team also distributed anti-Catholic, anti-Kennedy propaganda in Irish and Italian neighborhoods, in hopes of turning out those of the faith in droves to vote for their candidate (“Nixon vs. JFK.”). And intentionally or not, he even employed the Golden Kazoo from Schneider’s fictional 1956 depiction of the 1960 race: in the months preceding Election Day, Jackie was very visibly pregnant (“Nixon vs. JFK.”). There was talk of voter fraud in Illinois—in certain predominantly African-American districts, more people cast their ballots for Kennedy than lived there—though on the advice of Eisenhower, Nixon opted not to contest the election. Through his mastery of gimmicks and “dirty tricks,” Kennedy the ad man may have screwed his opponent, but he also implanted in him the seeds of salesmanship Nixon would need to win his own electoral victory a decade later.

As we know, Nixon’s own presidency ended when he was caught employing some of the same tactics against the Democratic Party that he had used to subvert the counterculture; he may have learned tricks of the trade from fellow corporate man Kennedy, but he seemingly missed the lesson on making sure he would not be held accountable when things went wrong. Nor could the trusty PR techniques that had served him so well in managing public opinion regarding Vietnam save him from the Watergate fallout. Even after suffering the bitterest of humiliations through his own doing, he attempted to spin his resignation from office as selfless and courageous, as a prolonged trial would distract from the more important issues facing the
country. However, very little of his rather impressive track record as President—creating the Environmental Protection Agency, desegregating Southern schools, and reestablishing diplomatic relations with China—is remembered today. His name is nearly synonymous with the Watergate scandal, and his demise is emblematic of that we have seen throughout this study: defeat followed by flight of the failed corporate man, subjected to the same forces with which he had maintained control.

Interestingly, the years of Richard Nixon’s rise and fall closely coincide with “the brief ‘American century’” that Jameson dates as 1945-1973 and pegs—albeit with minimal explanation—as the period in which conditions conducive to postmodernism arose. From his ascension as a red-hunting Congressman in the immediate postwar years to Vice President under Eisenhower and finally President—after a few failed campaigns—in 1968, Nixon learned to harness the power of promotions as a politico-corporate man. When it finally failed him, and this particular falling man hit the ground, so too did the incarnation of corporate masculinity he embodied. A product of affluence, this version of manhood—based on promotional language, brand image, and conspicuous consumption rationalized by its own irrational logic—came crashing down along with the stock market. Already suffering from years of funding the Vietnam War without raising taxes and gasoline shortages caused by an Arab oil embargo, America witnessed the devastating combination of recession and inflation known as stagflation throughout the mid-late 1970s. Companies’ spending on advertising actually declined during the decade, and the white-collar jobs that had kept many corporate men employed—including those in the once-booming, now-busting MIC—disappeared. The end of the era did not offer any sort of relief for the other-directed, anxiety-ridden corporate man, however. The economic situation may have changed, but the consumerist values he sought to instill remained. The market
fluctuations of the 1970s merely altered the nature of the gender apprehension preoccupying white, middle-class men. Masculinity, after all, is always already in crisis.

If the canonical American postmodern novel indeed grew out of this “brief ‘American century’” and the conditions it created for white corporate men such as Heller, DeLillo, Vonnegut, and Pynchon, what are we to make of postmodern novels written contemporaneously by the racial and sexual Other? At the risk of sounding essentialist, there is a case to be made, as I briefly alluded to in the introduction to this dissertation, that men of color and women in general who composed works that came to be called postmodern were grappling with different—and certainly, much more difficult—sociocultural challenges during this time, which in turn were reflected in their writing. An in-depth analysis of postmodern novels by non-white and non-male authors would require studies of multiple volumes—and indeed, some excellent work has been done on the subject—so I will only hazard a few remarks here on two of the earliest works by the most important authors falling within the period addressed by this dissertation but outside the dominant demographic: Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* and Kathy Acker’s *Rip-Off Red, Girl Detective*.

A contemporary of Pynchon and DeLillo in both age and writing career, Reed is a novelist, poet, and musician whose literary works are now widely considered part of the American postmodern canon. Like other practitioners of the genre, Reed’s work is concerned with such themes as representation, history, and the relationship between so-called “high” and “low” culture. However, his meditations on black masculinity in context of these themes are—unsurprisingly—more complex than those depicted in works we have discussed thus far. Perhaps the best example of this is the author’s *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), which Pynchon respected greatly and referenced in *Gravity’s Rainbow* (598). The protagonist, Papa La Bas, is a powerful
houngan, a voodoo practitioner living in New York City during the Roaring Twenties, and the plot centers around he and his allies’ efforts to combat the malicious Wallflower Order, which seeks to destroy an “anti-plague” known as “Jes Grew” (Reed 10, 5). A cipher for black culture, particularly music and dance, Jes Grew is viewed as a threat to the WASP power structure, and while it has been driven underground by the novel’s end, the narrator remarks that “Jes Grew has no end and no beginning […] We will miss it for a while but it will come back, and when it returns we will see that it never left” (204). In the Epilogue to *Mumbo Jumbo*, this is precisely what we see: La Bas, now 100 years old, is lecturing to a then-contemporary crowd of university students on the golden age of Jes Grew in the era portrayed through allusions and illustrations as that of its resurgence, the Jazz of the 1920s transfigured into 1970s funk.

If Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* is an early black postmodern novel that presents a powerful protagonist antithetical to the other-directed corporate types we have witnessed in other works in this study, Acker’s *Rip-Off Red, Girl Detective* is one of the first renditions of the genre by a woman that likewise portrays a formidable hero(ine) and feminist vision of the future. Written in 1973—though not published until 2002—Acker’s first novel appropriates and alters the traditional hard-boiled (and ultra-masculine) detective story popular during the 1930s and 1940s, transforming it into a female-centered, first-person pornographic narrative in which the protagonist ostensibly searches for another woman’s father but appears far more intent on seeking her own sexual pleasure. “This isn’t typical of a hard-boiled detective, a detective who chooses intellectual pursuits over emotional ones,” the narrator admits, “[but] I’m a female detective; I don’t pay attention to that shit about intellectual versus emotional” (Acker 17-18). She succeeds in her quest at nearly every turn—with her assistant Peter Peter, other men, women, and herself—fending off various men’s attempts to hire her as an assistant or secretary
throughout until she finally decides she has tired of her role: “I’m no longer a detective. I’ll
decide to become someone else” (134). In her repurposing of traditionally male-dominated
detective fiction, embrace of her own sexuality, and determination toward self- (as opposed to
other-) direction, Acker through Red offers a distinctly feminist version of the American
postmodern novel.⁶

Though Reed and Acker are only two early examples of non-white and non-male writers
to emerge within the American postmodern literary scene, it is remarkable that in both cases
illustrated here these authors exhibit certain recognizably postmodern themes and stylistic
features in their works while presenting protagonists so different from those portrayed in novels
by their former corporate-men counterparts. The explanation for this disparity lies on the flip
side of the historical coin we have examined thus far: if the postwar period was a time of anxiety
for white, middle-class men derived precisely from the positions of power they occupied, the
exact opposite was true for people of color and women in general. Denied full recognition of
their masculinity and personhood after once again fighting bravely for their country in World
War II, African-American men protested their lack of rights and privileges accorded their white
counterparts with signs that read, “I AM A MAN.” As the 1960s progressed and fully nonviolent
tactics proved insufficient, the tone of black protest—particularly that of black men—became
ever more forceful, emblematized by militant groups such as the Black Panther Party.
Accordingly, works by the likes of Ishmael Reed—arguably the most important and earliest
African-American postmodern novelist—affirmed rather than agonized over the status of black
manhood. Similarly, most women found themselves increasingly confined by the dictates of the
patriarchy in mid-century America compared with wartime and just before, despite Philip Wylie
and other misogynists’ insistence that spoiled, powerful women were responsible for (white)
men’s supposed deterioration during that time. From this feeling of oppression arose the second-wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, though as in the case of black civil rights, much still remains to be done toward achieving gender equality. The potency of Reed’s and Acker’s protagonists and their alternate versions of the American postmodern novel thus stem from their relative positions of power: their shared striving—but-still-subjected subject positions in a time when privileged white men were lamenting their own perceived decline.

In closing, it seems appropriate to remark upon the trajectory of the “mainstream” (white male) strain of American postmodernism going forward. Indeed, the genre continued to flourish into the 1980s and 1990s, taking its last gasps at the turn of the twenty-first century. During this time the authors in this study continued to write—DeLillo and Pynchon, alive at the time of this writing, still do—and as we have seen, they were all incredibly influential in the genre’s development. These literary giants had a demonstrable impact, but it is important to note, as I mentioned previously, that the conditions giving rise to the original corporate man did not disappear permanently in the Seventies. With the economic boom of the 1980s arose a new corporate type, the yuppie, and even in the angsty, anti-establishment 90s—with its celebration of everything “alternative”—promotions men once again managed to commodify cool. Given the return of this hyper-consumerist climate, it is unsurprising that second-wave American postmodern authors, such as Paul Auster and David Foster Wallace, came to prominence in this period. Even if not technically veterans of the advertising world themselves, these later practitioners of the genre were writing in what Wernick refers to as a wholly “promotional culture”: by the early 1990s “the range of cultural phenomena […] serv[ing] to communicate a promotional message ha[d] become […] virtually co-extensive with our produced symbolic world (242). They were themselves therefore “not only promotional authors but promotional
products” (249): every man his own Don Draper. The promotional condition of culture cited by Wernick persists into the present moment, albeit in a somewhat more inclusive form. Despite the persistence of white male privilege, new media have arguably enabled those of all colors and genders to become their own advertising and public relations agents. What effect the democratization of promotions will have on the contemporary American literary scene, however, must be the subject of another study.
Notes for Introduction

1 “The American Century” is the title of a February 1941 article in *Life* magazine by Henry Luce, a media magnate who founded several popular periodicals in the mid-twentieth century, including *Life, Time*, and *Fortune*. Writing shortly after America’s entrance into World War II, Luce’s article was a rallying cry to the country, predicting not only America’s victory in that conflict, but also the nation’s increasing dominance in world affairs for the good of mankind. Jameson’s addition of the word “brief” to Luce’s coinage suggests that the kind of political, cultural, and economic hegemony the media mogul foresaw for America in those years in fact waned before the century’s end.

2 See especially Lott’s *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*.

3 This notion of interpreting cultural phenomena through “thick description” draws on the ideas of Clifford Geertz, who claims in *The Interpretation of Cultures* that “culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligently—that is, thickly—described” (14).

4 See Harper, Hogue, Hutcheon, and Steiner, as well as Hite’s *The Other Side of the Story* for a sense of the existing debate surrounding the race and gender dynamics of the American postmodern novel.

Notes for Chapter One

1 While it is true that critics such as Carol Pearson and Gary W. Davis have written about the manipulations of language in the novel, their analyses do not connect this phenomenon with
business or advertising. Karl, however, does briefly suggest the similarities between Catch-22 and the postwar business world, as does Raeburn, who uses social science texts of the era, such as Riesman’s The Lonely Crowd and Whyte’s The Organization Man to make his case. More recently, Daugherty makes the connection between Heller’s copywriting career and his first novel, but he does so in the broad way suited to literary biography, as opposed to illustrating the relationship through sustained textual analysis.

2 This and all subsequent citations of Heller’s work, unless otherwise noted, come from Catch-22: 50th Anniversary Edition.

3 References to the Pledge of Allegiance and loyalty oaths are also very visible traces of the postwar era. Though also used during World War II, oaths were required as part of President Truman’s anti-Communist Loyalty Program beginning in March 1948 (Hogan 254), and in July 1954, President Eisenhower signed a bill inserting the words “under God” into the Pledge, spawning both controversy and fervent recitation as an emblem of the “seemingly cohesive collective American state of mind of the 1950s” (Jones and Meyer 150).

4 See Fussell’s Chapter 11, “Accentuate the Positive,” for a detailed discussion of morale as an essential sales and PR tool for both the troops and their loved ones back home.

5 This scene recalls Hail the Conquering Hero, a 1944 film starring Eddie Bracken as would-be WWII soldier Woodrow Lafayette Pershing Truesmith. Dismissed after a month in the service for hayfever before seeing any combat, Truesmith takes a job in a shipyard, unbeknownst to his family and friends, who believe him to be fighting overseas. A group of Marines he meets in a bar call his mother, telling her he has been wounded in battle, and convince the reluctant “hero” to return home wearing one of their coats replete with medals to complete the charade. Upon his return, the town erects a statue in his honor and insists he run for mayor. However,
eventually his conscience gets the better of him, and he admits that he is not the war hero his admirers believed him to be. Similarly, Yossarian ultimately rejects Cathcart and Korn’s scheme to unjustly lionize him, though unlike Truesmith, he cannot merely reclaim his previous identity. Instead, the publicity professionals in his unit simply re-label him as a traitor.

6 Of course, the influence of promotions on popular notions of masculinity can be traced back further, at least to the 1920s (Ewen, Captains of Consciousness 153-5), but its midcentury resurgence represented a manifold amplification of its previous incarnation (206).

7 Indeed, as Sivulka points out, cars and cigarettes were among the first objects mass marketed to men. Since women made most of a family’s purchases, including men’s clothing, the vast majority of ads until the 1960s targeted female consumers (219-221). Appropriately, the opening scene of the first episode of Mad Men depicts Don Draper sitting in a bar, struggling to compose a slogan for Lucky Strike cigarettes.

8 In Something Happened, narrator Bob Slocum, an aging ad man, laments the inadequacy of the male organ compared with the importance men assign to it: “Women don’t suffer from penis envy. Men do […] What a feeble weapon indeed for establishing male supremacy […] No wonder we have to make fists and raise our voices at the kitchen table” (369). Interestingly, Kurt Vonnegut reviewed the same novel for the New York Times Review of Books. His evaluation of Something Happened alongside Catch-22 aligns somewhat with my own: “Mr. Heller’s two novels, when considered in sequence, might be taken as a […] statement about an entire white, middle-class generation of American males, my generation, Mr. Heller’s generation, Norman Mailer’s generation […] that for them everything has been downhill since World War II, as absurd and bloody as it was” (117). The reason for this decline is exemplified by Slocum: “His wife has to adapt to only one sort of hell, the domestic torture chamber in
Connecticut […] But he must [also] go regularly to his office, where pain is inflicted on all the nerve centers which were neglected by the tormentors at home” (Vonnegut “Something Happened” 120).

9 The colocation of homosexuality and Communism here is another marker of the postwar period, pointing to the association between the two during the Lavender Scare of the 1950s. The lead witch-hunter of both groups was Senator Joseph McCarthy, who famously proclaimed, “’[i]f you want to be against McCarthy, boys, you've got to be either a Communist or a cocksucker’” (qtd. in D. Halberstam 54). In the phallic political language of the era, gays and Communists were both construed as “soft,” failed men who had been penetrated, literally or figuratively (Kimmel 170-1).

10 It is worth noting, and perhaps not coincidental, that Henry Fonda was best known for starring in the 1957 movie 12 Angry Men, one of the era’s best portrayal’s of other-directedness. As Juror 8, Fonda’s character plays the lone holdout in a jury trial in which the other eleven jurors believe the defendant to be guilty. Through persuasion and peer pressure, Juror 8 gradually gets all the other jurors to change their votes to not guilty by the end of the film.

11 Surprisingly, few critics have remarked in any detail on the centrality of gender in Catch-22. Those who have primarily focus on its rejection of “traditional” (i.e. “hard”) masculine roles. Gilbert and Gubar, though only remarking on Catch-22 briefly, claim the novel “engage[s] in a critique of traditional masculinity, at least in part in response to an Axis ideology which associated the male with aggression” (228). See also my discussion of Pollard in Note 17.

12 While it could be argued that Playboy, in its sexual focus, offered a new peacetime spin on traditional hard masculinity, I hold with Nadel that the publication’s primary emphasis
was to instruct men in the art of material acquisition. In the *Playboy* paradigm, women are transformed into consumable goods that are part of a larger lifestyle (135).

13 Of course, what I am referring to as emergent oppositional masculinity had a nascent existence in the 1950s as well, as Ehrenreich notes: the Beats (52-67). However, the correct 1950s terms for one who either rejected the standards of corporate masculinity or failed to adequately perform them were “maladjusted” and “immature.” Major Sanderson, the psychiatrist who evaluates Yossarian, labels him accordingly. Interestingly, early critic Sanford Pinsker claims that “Yossarian not only refuses the traditional journey of learning in manhood, but he adopts the attitude of a perennial innocent” in the tradition of American literary figures from Huck Finn to Holden Caulfield (151). Thus, though less pejorative than that which would be rendered by the average 1950s popular psychologist, his diagnosis of Yossarian is the same.

14 Cuordileone acknowledges that while the vitriol of Wylie’s attacks suggests more deep-seated, personal grievances, his “idea of an American matriarchy might be generously read as an expression of anxiety about a loss of control or a sense of powerlessness in the face of impersonal corporate and organizational forces, which seemed to undercut male initiative, an anxiety that Wylie (and other critics) displaced on to women” (129).

15 Several studies have compared the contemporaneous novels. See, for example, Gilligan, Lupack, Waldmeir, and Schopf.

16 This equation of man and matériel is reflected, as Costello points out, in the term GI, an abbreviation for Government Issue. As common parlance for a US soldier, it “was an appropriate label for the expendable human elements in the mass-produced machine of twentieth-century warfare” (75).
John Barth, one of the other fathers of the twentieth-century American postmodern novel, also deployed paradox in what is widely considered his first truly postmodern work, *The Sot-Weed Factor*. Set in late seventeenth century London and colonial Maryland, the work follows one Ebenezer Cooke, the virginal son of a tobacco merchant who, at the bidding of Charles Calvert, the Third Baron of Baltimore, sets out to write a poetic panegyric about the colony. In the end, after a series of catastrophic misadventures, the protagonist composes instead a biting satire about his new home—a situation similar to that of an ad man assigned to extol the virtues of consumerist life and winding up, as so many did, delineating its shortcomings. Moreover, Ebenezer ultimately relinquishes his previously much-prized virginity to a diseased prostitute, declaring, “‘[t]here’s the true Original Sin our souls are born in: not that Adam learned, but that he had to learn—in short, that he was innocent’” (Barth 788). As we have seen, the notion of innocence as sin is an apt paradox to apply to the period in which Barth was writing, the 1950s, as it points to the willing acceptance of and complicity in the new corporate masculinity by men in the period, only to ascertain later that the value attributed to it might be misplaced. Published in 1960, *The Sot-Weed Factor* predated *Catch-22* by one year, so while it cannot rightly be said that Heller’s novel influenced Barth’s, these works clearly exhibit a mutual feeling about the shared cultural environment of the men who authored them.

Pollard is the only scholar who addresses the relationship between paradox and gender in *Catch-22* at any length. In “Gender in *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller,” he notes that paradox appears most often in passages that directly address gender roles, which he claims, following Judith Butler, would not occur “if trying to live up to an ideal or live out a script was a completely ‘natural’ thing to do” (112). While Pollard’s analysis on this point is insightful, it is
limited in scope to normative heterosexual/reproductive behavior and obedience to the military
power structure.

19 The two novelists also shared an agent—Candida Donadio, who likewise represented
founding postmodern novelists Thomas Pynchon and William Gaddis—and a publisher, Simon
& Schuster under Robert Gottlieb, which put out a number of books in the 1950s and 60s that
examined the plight of the corporate male, including those discussed here by Mead, Wilson, and
Whyte.

20 Interestingly, while serving at an administrative post in the Air Force, Friedman wrote
for that branch’s house organ, *Air Training*, which was edited by Captain George B. Leonard
(*Lucky Bruce* 18). Leonard would go on to become an important literary and cultural figure in his
own right, writing a number of books on a variety of subjects and cofounding the Human
Potential Movement in the 1960s. Most importantly in the context of this study, he served as
editor of *Look* magazine for nearly two decades, from 1953-1970. The often gender-focused
essays he wrote for the magazine were published as a standalone edition called *The Man and
Woman Thing and Other Provocations*. One of these essays was “Why Is He Afraid to Be
Different?,” an article that was part of the “Decline of the American Male” series referenced
above. See also Leonard’s memoir, *Walking on the Edge of the World*.

21 See Sacks for a discussion of the factors that led to the whitening of Jews and other
“Euroethnic” groups in postwar America.

22 Gilbert and Gubar discuss the dismantling of traditional hard masculinity in the work
of black humorists and other postmodern authors in Ch. 7 of *No Man’s Land*, Vol. 3; however,
they do not relate this phenomenon to corporate culture, but rather, to the sexual revolution.
Notes for Chapter Two

1 I contacted Don DeLillo via Jeff Hoffman at the Wallace Literary Agency on July 1, 2015. Though DeLillo declined my request for an in-person or phone interview, he agreed to answer three or four questions in writing. I emailed Hoffman a list of questions to transmit to DeLillo, and the author sent his responses—clearly composed on a typewriter—to his agent, who in turn mailed a hard copy to me. The answers I received were characteristically cryptic and at times evasive, but nevertheless yielded some interesting commentary, which will be woven throughout this chapter.

2 Though I had the opportunity to speak with two of DeLillo’s copywriter colleagues from Ogilvy, Tony Weir and Joel Raphaelson, neither one claimed to know him well, despite the fact that there were only twelve to fifteen copywriters working there at the time (Raphaelson). According to both men, DeLillo was quiet and kept to himself at Ogilvy, though they recommended I speak with two individuals with whom he was close at the agency and had remained friends: Sue Buck and Ian Keown. Raphaelson provided both the last known address and phone number he had for each of them, which I verified using the online White Pages. I contacted each first via letter, and after receiving no response, followed with a phone call, to no avail. Raphaelson had warned me that DeLillo’s close friends had always been protective of his privacy and might very well be unwilling to speak with me, which appears to have been the case, though I cannot confirm with certainty that they received my communications.

3 Throughout this chapter I will refer to the firm alternately as Ogilvy, Benson & Mather (OB&M), which was the full name of the firm at the time of DeLillo’s employment there, and Ogilvy, which was and is still commonly used shorthand. However, it should be noted that the agency has gone through several name changes over the years. It was founded in 1948 as Hewitt,
Ogilvy, Benson & Mather; dropping Hewitt in 1953 and Benson in 1964. Today the company continues to operate as Ogilvy & Mather but is owned by WPP, a multinational promotions conglomerate, and itself contains a number of subsidiaries, such as OgilvyOne and OgilvyInteractive.

4 This is not to say that there were no Jews or women in the creative departments at other firms, though as Fox notes, many in the former category were closeted, so to speak, and few in the latter were executives, at least until after other small firms emerged following the DDB model. Heller would of course have been an exception in the various firms where he worked, as was Mary Higgins Clark, a fellow copywriter turned author who worked with Heller at Remington Rand. The exception at Ogilvy was Reva Korda, who was recalled with great respect by DeLillo’s colleagues, Weir and Raphaelson. One of few Jews on staff and the agency’s only female vice president (Maas 16), she wrote in retirement Having It All and The Only Woman in the Room, two novels about women in advertising. For more on the experience of women in advertising during the postwar period, see the memoirs of two other postwar advertising successes: Jane Maas’ Mad Women and Mary Wells Lawrence’s A Big Life in Advertising.

5 For a more detailed account of the Creative Revolution, see Frank’s The Conquest of Cool, Cracknell’s The Real Mad Men, and Chapter 6 in Fox’s The Mirror Makers.

6 LeClair likewise refers to David as “a ‘50s organization man in late ‘60s America” and compares the passages depicting the network to works by Cheever, Updike, and Yates (34). As Osteen notes, DeLillo laces the text with few subtle intertextual references to suggest a comparison between this part of Americana and novels of the 1950s business genre, citing the line in which David says he feels as if he is living in “one of those dull morality tales about
power plays and timid adulteries” (DeLillo 20) as pointing to such works as Patterns and The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit (Osteen 17-18).

7 In his memoir, Jerry Della Femina points out that “rumors are crucial to advertising” (212), so much so that the author devotes an entire chapter to the topic.

8 Interestingly, this technique was used successfully at least once, by Della Femina, who told a reporter from Advertising Age that he was going to be fired from Ted Bates, Inc. in order to buy himself some time after defying orders from the top executives of the very traditional firm (Cracknell 151).

9 Chapter 3 in Della Femina’s memoir is mostly devoted to discussing firings, though of course, many in the industry, then as now, changed jobs willingly. George Lois, eventually of Papert Koenig Lois, recounts storming out of a number of jobs before forming his own agency in his memoir, George, Be Careful.

10 The popularity of the Western and the cowboy icon in the 1950s and 60s is well known, and several studies have examined the resurrection of the cowboy in American popular culture in the mid-twentieth century, from the Marlboro Man to John Wayne to the so-called “spaghetti westerns” starring Clint Eastwood. See for example Agnew (especially Chapter 12), Quay, Savage, and Wills.

11 See Note 18 in the previous chapter. It was not until 1973 that a series of unfavorable court decisions against the Civil Services Commission finally forced the federal government to stop excluding individuals from employment based on supposed “immoral conduct” (Johnson 210).

12 As Foucault explains in Discipline and Punish,
[d]isciplinary power…is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility…It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection. And the examination is the technique by which power, instead of emitting the signs of its potency, instead of imposing its mark on its subjects, holds them in a mechanism of objectification (187).

This notion of invisibility as power (executives meeting behind closed doors) and being under observation as domination (as in the case of the female clerical workers especially, but also the male executives, as David makes clear) is crucial to understanding the power dynamics within the network office.

13 Only one woman, Isabel Mayer, holds a non-clerical position in the office. Interestingly, David identifies her as an individual who makes the other executives uncomfortable. Also, at one point it is mentioned that “Merrill hired a Negro,” but it is clear from that statement that he is the only one, and it is not clear what his position is in the company. Interestingly, he is immediately identified as an object of surveillance, as the employees discussing this promptly decide to “go look at him” (75).

14 Veterans of the industry attest to the prevalence of sexual activity at work, especially during the 1960s. Maas devotes an entire chapter to it, titled simply “Sex in the Office.”

15 Maidenform’s “I Dreamed” series of advertisements ran from 1949-1969, each showing a woman clad from the waist up in only her Maidenform bra. For more about the campaign see Burns-Ardolino 107-118.

16 The television series *Mad Men* has helped popularize the image of the hard-drinking ad man, but according to those in the industry at the time, that portrayal is, not surprisingly, only
partially accurate. While most executives did keep alcohol in their offices, it was generally for entertaining clients, not drinking throughout the day, as Maas recalls in the chapter she dedicates to the subject, “The Three Martini Lunch and Other Vices.” Most agencies also had their favorite bars. Della Femina provides a list in his memoir, though he also says that younger members of the profession tended to prefer marijuana over alcohol (20-24).

17 David blames attributes the graffiti, which says, “Reeves Chubb climbs palm trees to suck off sleeping apes,” on his coworker, Quincy Willet. That character indeed calls Reeves Chubb a “Cocksucker” at one point (69), but since the narrator admits to his own unreliability by admitting the frequency with which he lies to colleagues, we cannot know whether or not he is himself the author or if the graffiti every existed at all.

18 De Certeau refers to the practice of time-theft as la perruque, which translates as “the wig”: “La perruque is the worker’s own work disguised as work for his employer…[It] may be as simple a matter as a secretary’s writing a love letter on ‘company time’ or as complex as a cabinetmaker’s ‘borrowing’ a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room…[T]he worker who indulges in la perruque actually diverts time (not goods, since he uses only scraps) from the factory for work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit” (25). The gendered language here—female office employee, male factory-worker—is also worth noting.

19 Nel points to a passage in Amazons, a novel written by DeLillo and published under the pseudonym Cleo Birdwell, that more directly reveals the novelist’s rejection of the cultural myth linking feminism to masculine failure. Sanders Meade, the unsympathetically portrayed head coach of the New York Rangers, claims that feminism arose in a moment of weakness for the American man and offers the women’s movement as an excuse for his own sexual
dysfunction: “It’s not mere happenstance that women made such great strides in the seventies. It’s because Vietnam and Watergate were so debilitating to the American male. You saw an opening and drove a terrific wedge right in. You found an enfeebled male population, and you saw an opening, and you came pouring through”” (Birdwell, *Amazons* 206). Though I agree with Nel that DeLillo clearly ridicules the notion that “women colluded with Vietnam and Watergate to gang up on weakened men” (431), I do not believe that the notion of the attenuated male is being discredited here, only women’s supposed role in it, and as DeLillo demonstrates in *Americana*, the process of diminution began before the 1970s.

20 The GI Bill conferred some benefits to servicemen of color and servicewomen in general, though not on an equal basis. Men of color, though technically accorded the same rights as white men under the GI Bill, were routinely discriminated against by entities designated to administer GI entitlements: banks denied blacks Veterans Administration (VA) home loans, colleges limited their ability to take advantage of tuition subsidies by utilizing racial quotas, and employers routinely ignored the Veterans Preference Act of 1944 when it came to hiring black applicants (Cohen 166-173). Women veterans, in addition to facing immense social and cultural pressure to return home and being subject to some of the same employment prejudices and college quotas as African-American men, were allocated reduced readjustment pay if married. Those serving in organizations such as the Women’s Army Core (WACS) and Women’s Air Service Pilots (WASPS) were likewise accorded unequal benefits (Cohen 138-141).

21 As previously mentioned, a strong argument can be made that Clinton Bell is modeled on Rosser Reeves. The elder Bell is said to be 55 in the novel, which would have been roughly Reeves’ age at the time, and the description of his appearance mirrors that depicted in the most common photos one finds of Reeves: wearing “fine British tweeds” and “black-rimmed and
intimidating” glasses (82). His “old school” advertising values—that good advertising is not measured by clever copy but by its ability to “move the merch off the shelves” (85)—also echo those espoused by Reeves, as does his position as a pioneer of early television commercials. It should be noted though that there are at least some similarities to Ogilvy here as well. The latter in fact shared a number of values with the former, as can be seen by comparing Reeves’ *Reality in Advertising* with Ogilvy’s *Confessions*, particularly the importance of including factual information in advertising and the emphasis on effectiveness over creativity. However, there are clear differences between the two, including the USP theory versus pre-empting the truth. The Unique Selling Proposition, the bedrock of Reeves’ advertising philosophy, states that good advertisements must capitalize on even small differences in order to set their product apart from others in the same class. This he differentiates from “pre-empting the truth” (Reeves 46-59), a practice Ogilvy advocates in *Confessions*, which entails advertising a fact about a product as if it distinguished it from others in its class—an ingredient, for example—though other products share this feature but do not advertise it (Ogilvy 96). Interestingly, the scripted scenes in David’s film depicting his father discuss Clinton’s use of pre-empting the truth as well as in the importance of brand image, both Ogilvy values. For more on the complex relationship between the two rivals and one-time brother-in-laws, see Roman, especially 59-60, 68, and 117-119.

22 Though David’s father’s account of it is not accurate in every detail, Joseph V. Brady did in fact conduct this experiment to similar results and tellingly titled the write-up, which was published in *Scientific American* in 1958, “Ulcers in ‘Executive’ Monkeys.”

23 David’s life path through Part I is a microcosm of the pattern later followed by many if not most of those who came of age in the 1960s. Many who “dropped out” in those years would
eventually become yuppies—young urban professionals—in the 1980s, the most notable example of which is former Yippie Jerry Rubin. See Krassner.

24 For more on the relationship between masculinity and the road/frontier in American letters, see Fiedler, Slotkin, White, Worden, and both listed sources by Leverenz, especially “The Last Man in America.” Ehrenreich, Mills, and several essays in Holladay and Holton specifically examine Beat literature from this angle, while Abbott argues that the tough white guy in the streets in 1930s-1950s hardboiled fiction and film noir evolved from the real-(white)-man-on-the-frontier tradition. Roberts further notes “the inherent masculinity” of the road movie genre that came to prominence post-World War II (45).

25 See Slethaug 169 for a succinct overview of scholarly commentary on the masculinity of the road narrative in fiction and film.

26 In Captains of Consciousness, Ewen laments that this is precisely the problem with the so-called Creative Revolution in advertising, which employed anti-ad ads to acknowledge and seemingly validate public exasperation with advertising while simultaneously selling products: “As we are confronted by the mass culture, we are offered the idiom of our own criticism as well as its negation—corporate solutions to corporate problems. Until we confront the infiltration of the commodity system into the interstices of our lives, social change itself will be but a product of corporate propaganda” (219).

27 As discussed in the previous chapter, the explosion of advertising and the mid-century shift in masculinity were natural outgrowths of World War II, and interestingly, though war plays a much smaller role in Americana than in Catch-22, DeLillo, like Heller, highlights the chain reaction between the so-called “good war,” the evolution of corporate manhood, and the not-so-good war that would follow two decades later.
It is worth noting that David has written the script for this scene on the wall of the motel room in Fort Curtis where he is filming. Literally, it is the writing on the wall. Later, he shoots a scene of an actor portraying himself standing in front of these words.

Advertisements for Myself is a collection of short fiction and nonfiction by Norman Mailer that was published as a volume in 1959. DeLillo stated in a 2007 interview that Mailer was one of his biggest influences early on:

“People don’t seem to link my name with Norman Mailer, but in a number of ways, Mailer was a strong force, because he was at the center of the culture and I was at the opposite end, so to speak. And I admired his writing and his opinions and the fact that he was a writer who was highly visible. Again, largely because that is the last thing I would want to be myself. And so I remember living in one room for years, and one of the books I kept picking up was Mailer’s Advertisements for Myself. That was nonfiction of all sorts, and I just found it endlessly interesting” (“Intensity of a Plot”).

This is a reference to Allen Ginsberg’s poem “Wichita Vortex Sutra,” which combines Buddhist chanting and imagery to call for an end to the Vietnam War and call out those misrepresenting the war in the media. Ginsberg composed the poem on a 1966 cross-country road trip in a Volkswagen micro-bus, during which he stopped in various locations to give readings, including Wichita, Kansas (David Carter 54).

Though he does not name Brand specifically, DeLillo acknowledges that Americana contains “some filmworthy Beatlike characters” (Personal Interview 3), of which Brand is clearly one. But Brand is also a veteran, though unlike Clinton Bell or David’s other male travel companion, Pike, Brand fought in Vietnam. That aspect of his identity is separate from his Beat aspirations and one that David does not consider as a potential model. As Faludi notes, returning
veterans were either seen as monsters, especially after My Lai (318-319), or as failed men for being on the losing end of the war (299).

32 According to Foucault, “one should totally and absolutely suspect anything that claims to be a return” ("Space, Knowledge, and Power" 250). Interestingly, this comment was his cryptic response to a question about his thoughts on modernist versus postmodernist views of history.

33 This is of course not to say that all Christian fundamentalists are Southern white men, or that all are racists or misogynists. However, the racialized and gendered characteristics of the movement as a whole are well known and well documented, epitomized in such figures as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. See Durham, Edsall and Edsall, and Daniel K. Williams.

34 LeClair declares that the men of the network and the men of the track, in their racism, sexism, debauchery, and power games, are essentially the same—“bastions of male, reductive power” (46)—though David, in running from one to return to the other, does not realize it (48).

35 Joseph Kennedy famously said of his son, in reference to his 1946 congressional campaign, “We’re going to sell Jack like soap flakes.” See White 14 for an extensive description of their political advertising efforts.

36 White argues that ad man extraordinaire Don Draper, protagonist of the hit AMC series Mad Men, is modeled on Kennedy, citing similarities in style, personality, and most importantly, carefully crafted image (133-34). Boorstin also references the image-consciousness of the Kennedy Campaign throughout The Image.

37 Eco expounds upon terms originating from the Russian Formalist school by differentiating between the fabula and the plot (or sjuzet) as follows: “[t]he fabula is the basic story stuff, the logic of actions or the syntax of characters, the time-oriented course of
events...The plot is the story as actually told, along with all its deviations, digressions, flashbacks, and the whole of the verbal devices” (27).

38 The black man as sexual threat is depicted in the context of Brand relating the proposed plot of his novel, *Coitus Interruptus*. In it, a white (male) former president begins spontaneously morphing into a woman. Meanwhile, the current president, a hip black man, is “making it with all the wives and daughters of the southern senators and even with some of the senators themselves” (205). This is the nightmare fantasy of the (racist, male) American cultural unconscious in a nutshell: the black man takes the white man’s “rightful” job and sleeps with “his” women, effectively relegating the white man to the status of his traditional subordinate: woman.

39 According to the 1970 US Census, only 24,000 white husband/black wife married couples existed in the United States, constituting about .05% of marriages (U.S. Bureau of the Census). Similar statistics for white male/black female dating are unavailable; however, common sense suggests that while the numbers would be higher, they would follow a similar distribution.

40 In “The White Negro” (1957), Mailer argues that the black man—and it is always a man he describes when using the term “Negro”—is particularly well adapted to the atmosphere of impending death inherent to twentieth-century American society. While the white “Square” has retreated to fearful conformity in the shadow of the atom bomb and the concentration camp, Mailer contends, the American Negro has never been safe in his own society and has thus evolved an existentialist, present-oriented, pleasure-seeking ethic in order to be able to live at all (302). A white man who attempted to learn the ways of the Negro Mailer describes, to adopt his lifestyle and language, was a hipster, or White Negro. Marcuse’s 1963 study *One-Dimensional Man* does not focus primarily on race, though like the earlier work, it bemoans the conformist
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Ethnic of mainstream (white) mid-century American society and culture. Like Mailer, Marcuse finds a ray of hope in this otherwise dismal picture in those who have been systematically excluded from it:

> [U]nderneath the conservative popular base is the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors [...] Their opposition hits the system from without and is therefore not deflected by the system; it is an elementary force which violates the rules of the game and, in doing so, reveals it as a rigged game [...] The fact that they start refusing to play the game may be the fact which marks the beginning of the end of a period (256-57).

Generally left out of the postwar self-portrait white America had painted of itself, black America had, for Marcuse and Mailer, ironically attained the unique position of potential game-changers for American society as a whole.

41 In “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy,” first published in *Esquire* (1961) and later in *Nobody Knows My Name*, James Baldwin, in the context of relating his personal history with Mailer, criticizes “The White Negro” as an oversimplified, romanticized vision of what it meant to be a black man in America. Most recently Glenn and Cunningham claim this cultural myth has taken the form of the “Magical Negro” character in Hollywood film. Citing *The Green Mile, The Legend of Bagger Vance*, and *The Matrix* as examples, they argue that this newer stereotype of the altruistic, enchanted black person has supplanted the supernaturally selfless servant in popular culture.

42 He says of his film, “I ended in silence and darkness” (347), describing the final scene in which his younger self is sitting silently, looking into the camera for twenty seconds before fading to black. This also reads, however, as a depiction of the final days of his life spent
watching the film and transcribing it on paper. A few pages before, he states, “I am falling silently through myself […] as I prepare the final pages I feel I am drifting downward into coma, a sleep of no special terror and yet quite narrow and bottomless. Little of myself seems to be left” (345).

43 Most critical works on DeLillo at least mention Baudrillard, but for a more elaborate read of DeLillo’s fiction through Baudrillardian theory, see especially Schuster and Stockinger.

44 Other authors—Frow, King, Knight, Shneck, and Trachtenberg—mention Boorstin, but only briefly, mostly as a means of contextualizing the relevance of Baudrillard to DeLillo’s work.

45 It is worth noting that, as with Riesman’s other-directed member of *The Lonely Crowd*, Boorstin’s image-society dweller is nearly always depicted as male.

46 I asked DeLillo whether he had ever thought of the fact that his novels, including *Americana*, contain a lot of “panicky male characters”; however, he replied, “I don’t think in terms of male panic or a crisis in masculinity. That’s another language” (Personal Interview 2).

47 Nel has argued that DeLillo’s novels of the 1980s and 1990s exhibit an increasingly enlightened understanding and critical depiction of gender roles as socially constructed and performed, and he offers *Americana* as a counterpoint to this later “enlightened period” (416-423). Deardorff, Helyer, Longmuir, Parish, and Robinson also discuss problematic masculine scripts in other DeLillo novels—including *Players, Running Dog, Libra, White Noise, Underworld, The Body Artist, Cosmopolis*, and *Falling Man*—but none of them address the issue in *Americana*. However, as I have demonstrated, this critical perspective on gender performativity is also present in DeLillo’s first novel in a nascent state.
Happy Days, American Graffiti, and Grease—the film, not the Broadway musical—are but a few examples of American pop culture’s nostalgia for the long 1950s twenty years later. Baudrillard declares of nostalgia: “When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity, and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared” (174).

Notes for Chapter Three

1 After Jesus has been fasting for forty days in the desert, Satan tempts him three times. In the last of these, he takes him to a high mountain from which he can see all the kingdoms of the world, which he tells Jesus will be his if he will worship Satan (New American Bible, Matthew 4. 8-9). The apple typically symbolizes the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden for eating (Genesis 3.1-19).

2 Vonnegut and Heller met in 1973, while both were teaching at City College in New York, but would not become friends until 1974, when Vonnegut rented a summer house near Heller’s home in Long Island. Unbeknownst to Heller, Vonnegut was at that time writing a review of Something Happened for the New York Times. See Note 15 in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

3 Vonnegut did not receive his degree from the University of Chicago until 1971, when they accepted his 1963 novel Cat’s Cradle as his thesis, citing its anthropological content (Marvin 7).
In a 1973 interview with Playboy, the author sums up his opinion of automation as he witnessed it at GE, as exemplified by a milling machine that operated by reading instructions from programming cards: “To have a little clicking box make all the decisions wasn’t a vicious thing to do. But it was too bad for the human beings who got their dignity from their jobs” (“Playboy Interview” 93).

Vonnegut’s feelings about working at and ultimately leaving GE are perhaps best summarized by his 1955 story, originally published in Esquire, “Deer in the Works.” A former newspaperman, David, goes to work in the public relations department at GE. His first assignment is to write about a deer that is loose on plant grounds. His feelings quickly transition from excitement upon being hired, to confusion and frustration when he gets lost in the plant, to disgust after he learns that plant workers intend to shoot the deer after taking its picture. The story ends with David opening a gate, letting the deer loose, and running out after it, never to return (236-7).

For example, in Player Piano, Proteus at one point attempts to dissuade his fellow revolutionaries from blowing up Ilium’s commercial bakery, reminding them that they will need it, but they note that it is still run by machines and proceed with destroying it anyway, as well as the town’s sewage disposal plant (137).

Two of Vonnegut’s short stories also illustrate this point well. His first published story, “Report on the Barnhouse Effect” (1950), describes a physicist named Arthur Barnhouse who discovers the force of “dynamopsychism” (188)—essentially telekinesis—and concerned about the possibilities, writes to the Secretary of State that he wishes to share his discovery for peaceful purposes. Instead, predictably, the military elects to use him as a weapon of mass destruction. Barnhouse escapes the government’s grasp and goes into hiding, destroying weapons systems
around the world remotely and passing on his secret to a trusted protégé, presumably in hopes that he will continue his mentor’s work. Another story, “The Euphio Question” (1951), ends less optimistically. Three men—a sociology professor, a physicist, and a radio announcer—discover a type of celestial radio signal that creates an acute euphoria in listeners, a catatonic state resembling that produced by very high levels of marijuana consumption, but much longer lasting. They manufacture a device that broadcasts this signal, which they call a “Euphoriaphone” (196), though the first two men decide after a home test on their own families that it is far too dangerous and must be destroyed. The radio announcer, undeterred, proceeds with grandiose plans for commercial production of the device, and the story concludes with the sociology professor attempting to convince the Federal Communications Commission that the “Euphio” should be banned. It is heavily implied that he is unsuccessful, as the radio announcer has programmed the device, which is present in the meeting room, to turn on automatically, thereby subduing any resistance of the participants and turning their opinion in favor of allowing the Euphio to be manufactured and made available to consumers.

8 Of course, these different means are often inextricable, in life as in Vonnegut’s novels. In *Sirens of Titan* (1959), the protagonist, along with other men, is sent to Mars and implanted with a device in his brain through which he can be controlled. He and the others are made to attack planet Earth in a war staged to unite the world’s people. He is later made a martyr for a new religion, the Church of God the Utterly Indifferent, founded by a man named William Niles Rumfoord, who had also arranged the war between Mars and Earth. We finally learn, however, that all of these events have been manipulated by an alien race, the Tralfamadorians, through a force they call the Universal Will to Become. Vonnegut’s next novel, *Mother Night* (1961), chronicles the life of Howard W. Cambell, a double-agent Nazi propagandist during World War
II. He simultaneously transmitted secret messages to the Allied forces during his pro-Axis radio broadcasts, but nevertheless reached many with his messages of hate and became an icon of Nazi sympathizers in the US. In *Cat’s Cradle* (1963), a substance called ice-nine invented by an American scientist indifferent to the consequences of his work becomes a powerful tool for his children, one of whom uses it to ascend to power in a cruel dictatorship on the small island nation of San Lorenzo. Vonnegut’s 1965 *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* begins by describing the ruthless manipulations of the Rosewater family to accumulate their massive fortune, though the most recent heir, Eliot, strives throughout the novel to undo some of this damage by giving away much of the money he inherits. Finally, *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969), Vonnegut’s war novel, describes the violent forms of control exercised in combat, as well as their aftermath in peacetime. These descriptions are necessarily oversimplified, but should provide some insight into the theme of manipulation evidenced in the author’s pre-*Breakfast* novels.

9 “Philboyd Studge” is an alternate spelling of “Filboid Studge,” a short story by the Victorian satirist Saki, also known as HH Munro. In the story, Filboid Studge is the name of a breakfast cereal, and the plot revolves around an advertising campaign in which the cereal is sold by suggesting that it is consumers’ Christian duty to eat it, rather than claiming that it tastes good. Interestingly, Vonnegut stated in a 1976 interview that he had not realized that the name of his narrator in *Breakfast of Champions* is from that story, even though he was familiar with the works of Saki, and that he had used it rather for its “gummy” sound after hearing a friend use it to describe a bad writer (“Two Conversations” 216). However, given that the title of Vonnegut’s novel is also a cereal slogan and that advertising is a major theme in the novel, it seems plausible that he might have misremembered the source of his familiarity with Philboyd/Filboid Studge.

10 See Naomi Klein’s in-depth study of branding in Western (especially American)
culture, No Logo.

11 Though modern advertising rarely acknowledges people or qualities that are less-than-average, unless the product advertised purports to improve one’s condition, it was actually common in the 1920s and 1930s to employ campaigns analogous to that lampooned in Trout’s novel, using a parable that Marchand referred to as the “Democracy of Goods” (Advertising 217-22). During the Depression, this approach, in which companies would claim their products were enjoyed by rich and poor alike—equality through consumption—was particularly popular (290-95). It is worth noting that it was during this period that Vonnegut had his first experience in advertising working with a woman named Phoebe Hurty, to whom the novel is dedicated (Breakfast 1-2).

12 On a couple of occasions, Vonnegut ridicules the concept of strategic bombing, though in a different manner than Heller, a bombardier himself. While the latter used the notion of a “tight bomb pattern” to depict a concern for appearances over results, Vonnegut proclaimed that “[e]verybody knows that the main business of the manufacturers of all [weapons] has been the creation of devices both manned and unmanned whose purpose is to kill everything, whether animal or vegetable, within an enormous radius” (Fates 108).

13 Giannone speculates that the bomb description provided here offers a clue to the significance of Vonnegut’s choice of Midland City as the novel’s setting. The town’s name “recalls Midland, Michigan, home of Dow Chemical, whose creativity has found unforeseen applications for plastic,” including “[t]he antipersonnel bomb and napalm” (105).

14 See, for example, Language and Politics and World Orders, Old and New.
The reasoning he states in the preface—that he saw men in his youth suffering from *locomotor ataxia*, a symptom of late-stage syphilis that damages the nervous system and causes people to walk in a mechanical-looking manner, making him believe they were robots (3)—is a red herring.

It is worth noting that the only black women in the novel are the two prostitutes.

See Notes 24 and 25 in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Wiener’s argument here is a rudimentary version of Althusser’s in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Toward an Investigation” (1970). Althusser includes the media in his list of Ideological State Apparatuses (98), along with schools and churches, as does Wiener.

The title of *Player Piano* is derived from an anecdote in *The Human Use of Human Beings* (Wiener 183), as is its theme: that humans must take care not to be dominated by the machines they create. Wiener is mentioned in the novel by the protagonist, who paraphrases a passage from *Cybernetics* about the occurrence of multiple industrial revolutions (Vonnegut 14).

Ironically, as Strand notes, Wiener read and hated *Player Piano*. He wrote a scathing note to Scribner’s complaining that Vonnegut should not have set the story in the future, which Wiener argued was an attempt “to avoid indicting what was actually happening in science today” (Strand 230). He also disapproved of Vonnegut’s use of his colleague John von Neumann’s name, though Vonnegut claimed to have randomly chosen it (232). In addition to informing *Player Piano*, Wiener’s work heavily influenced Vonnegut’s first published short story, “Report on the Barnhouse Effect.” In 1947 Wiener wrote an open letter to the American government, which was published in *The Atlantic*, informing officials that he would no longer allow his work to be used for military applications; similarly, the protagonist in Vonnegut’s story, who discovers that he
possesses extremely potent powers of telekinesis, declares himself “the first superweapon with a conscience” and flees the public figures who wish to use him for military purposes (185). The character Arthur Barnhouse was named after Bernard Vonnegut, who was nicknamed Barney and shared Wiener’s concerns about his own work, but Wiener was the primary inspiration for the story (Strand 116).

20 Other apparent allusions to Wiener in Breakfast of Champions include Studge’s claim that Trout’s works are all about “a tragic failure to communicate” (Vonnegut 58). Also, when Studge claims in the preface that he began believing people are machines in his youth when he saw men suffering from locomotor ataxia (See Note 14), it appears he was drawing on Cybernetics. In fact, Wiener describes this precise condition as an example of what happens when a person cannot correctly integrate feedback (95).

21 Cohoes is a stand-in for Schenectady, New York, where GE’s general headquarters was formerly located and which continues to house the company’s power operations headquarters.

22 Other representative works by Trout mentioned in Breakfast of Champions include “The Dancing Fool” and “This Means You.” In the former, an alien named Zog lands on Earth and discovers a house on fire. He goes to warn the residents, but his species communicates by farting and tap-dancing, so out of fear, “[t]he head of the house brain[s] Zog with a golf club” (Vonnegut, Breakfast 58). In the latter, a small number of people buy up all the land in Hawaii and prohibit anyone from trespassing on their property. The government steps in to help those who have been displaced by giving them all giant helium balloons, so that they can avoid trespassing (74).
I use the term “cyborg” here simply in reference to a human-machine hybrid, rather than the more complex definition popularized by Donna Haraway in “A Cyborg Manifesto.” In this essay, she identifies the cyborg as a liberating category of being that has arisen in the wake on new technologies in the late twentieth century and should be embraced, particularly by socialist feminists, as a means of rejecting the traditional and restrictive binary divisions of man/woman, human/animal, and human/machine. If his works are any indication, Vonnegut, a liberal humanist throughout his lifetime, would not have embraced this notion.

See Ewen’s PR and Herman and Chomsky’s Manufacturing Consent, especially “A Propaganda Model” (1-35).

Hume says Stude’s use of an apple to symbolize wholeness is “disingenuous, for an apple brought about the fallen world and the punishment of death, at least in the popular mythology of our culture” (441). Given the use of that symbol in Breakfast and Hume’s comment here, it is interesting to consider its adoption—albeit with a bite taken out of it—by Apple Computer beginning in the 1980s.

This passage precedes a “rebirth” Stude experiences shortly afterward, which is triggered by Rabo Karabekian, a modernist painter attending the conference. Rabo, a rude and pretentious character, makes a speech defending his work of art, a canvas painted green with a vertical strip of orange tape on one side, after it is criticized by another festival attendee. The orange tape, he says, represents “’[o]ur awareness[, which is] all that is alive and maybe sacred in any of us’” (Vonnegut, Breakfast 226). “’Everything else about us,’” he says, is dead machinery” (226). The guests in the cocktail lounge are convinced by this explanation, and Stude in fact later modifies his description of himself to “a writing meat machine” [with…] “an unwavering band of light” at its core (231). Some critics, including Broer (“Vonnegut’s
Goodbye” 77-78, Sanity Plea 104) and Gholson (138), claim that Studge’s epiphany represents a newfound believe in the power of art and imagination to overcome human beings’ mechanistic tendencies. However, as I have shown throughout this section, the truth is somewhat more complicated than that, for Vonnegut through Studge recognizes that these entities are not always liberating, and not all people exhibit much in the way of awareness. In fact, the response of the other festival guests, who accept Rabo’s speech unquestioningly and unanimously agree “that Midland City ha[s] one of the greatest paintings in the world” (241), and Dwayne’s book-triggered rampage, which occurs directly afterward, confirm this ambivalence.

27 A deus ex machina in classical Greek tragedy was a “theatrical device […] in which a deity or divine being miraculously appeared at the last minute, usually suspended from a crane or machine, and used his or her ostensibly supernatural powers to bring a resolution to the plot” (W. Heller 263). The definition has been broadened in recent times to include any character or event introduced into a work of literature that produces this effect.

28 The extreme example of this, of course, is Ronald Reagan, who, as Evans argues throughout The Education of Ronald Reagan, converted from “a self-confessed Democrat and New Dealer” to an ultra-conservative Republican as a direct result of his PR/ER work for GE (4).

29 Though many companies sponsored television programs, GE was unique in using its show as part of a larger strategy not only to raise the profile of the corporation and its products among viewers, but also to politically “educate” the public and its own employees, or more accurately, conservatize them through an extensive program of pro-business propaganda known as “Boulwarism,” after Lemuel Boulware, GE’s Vice President of Employee Relations: internal publications (Evans 50), an economics-centered book club, a managed news program—in which
Vonnegut played a part—involving local radio stations and newspapers in company towns, and Ronald Reagan’s goodwill plant tour (58). Through these means GE sought to undermine union leadership and alter the voting habits of their employees and the general public.

30 According to Vonnegut, GE asked that a pseudonym be used in the credits of “Auf Wiedersehen” and paid him extra—$1500, instead of the usual $1000—to agree to that condition, since the author had already published Player Piano. In the same interview, he recalls writing three other scripts for the show, though he does not comment on the names or plotlines, only that “[t]hey didn’t have to be very good” (Bianculli 42).

31 That Studge suggests “those who imitate white Americans” also need to empty their heads of the harmful elements of commercial culture is appropriate given the characterization of Wayne Hoobler in the novel as a poor emulator of Dwayne Hoover, but this prefatory recommendation is also reminiscent of a film released just a few years before Breakfast of Champions was published: Robert Downey, Sr.’s Putney Swope (1969). In the film, the lone black copywriter Swope accidentally inherits control of an ad agency when the chairman suddenly dies. He renames the firm Truth and Soul, replaces most of the white employees with black men, and produces off-color ads that often parody those of the Creative Revolution. As time passes, however, Swope’s employees increasingly accuse him of being “jive”; in fact, he becomes an autocratic, sexist sell-out, no better than his white predecessors. Significantly, Swope’s voice is actually that of a white man—director Robert Downey, Sr.—whose voice is dubbed over the actor’s own.

32 Trout reappears in Vonnegut’s novels Jailbird, Galápagos, and Timequake, as well as some of Vonnegut’s later autobiographical works.
Notes for Chapter Four

1 In “Thomas Pynchon and the Myth of the Reclusive Author,” David Whelan summarizes the sources that have constructed and perpetuated Pynchon’s reputation as a recluse, which Whelan claims is undeserved, as well as relating a few random details about the author that have been exposed over the years.

2 See Wisnicki 9-14 for a synopsis of the groundwork laid by other scholars regarding Pynchon’s time at Boeing and Wisnicki’s efforts to sort through conflicting information to determine which publications Pynchon wrote for and the dates of his employment.

3 See Wisnicki 25-29 for a list of probable and possible Pynchon articles. Each entry is annotated with a list of characteristics that suggest Pynchon’s authorship.

4 This and all subsequent Pynchon quotations in this chapter, unless otherwise noted, come from the Penguin edition of *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

5 According to Weisenburger, Richard Sasuly’s *IG Farben* was Pynchon’s primary source for information on the notorious megacorporation and its interconnections with various US firms before, during, and after World War II. For more detailed accounts of these relationships, see that text as well as Sutton’s more recent *Wall Street and the Rise of Hitler*, both of which I cite throughout this chapter.

6 Wisnicki suggests Teflon might have been the precursor for Imipolex G based on an article by Pynchon, “Teflon in Depth,” which discusses the real polymer’s development by Du Pont and use in the nose cones of missiles (24). The chemical knowledge exhibited in the article certainly enabled Pynchon to describe Imipolex G in the language of the specialist; however, the mention of “butadiene” in the IG Farben factory where Margherita Erdman tries on the suit of
Imipolex G confirms that it is this same synthetic rubber used to make Hitler’s tires with US corporate assistance (Pynchon 496). See Mark 126 and 129.

7 See Sasuly 141-151 and Sutton Ch. 4.

8 The Germans sitting on the IG’s board of directors were prosecuted at Nuremburg for war crimes, but the Americans were not. Sutton argues, “If the directors of a corporation are collectively responsible for the activities of the corporation, then the American directors should also have been placed on trial at Nuremburg, along with the German directors — that is, if the purpose of the trials was to determine war guilt. Of course, if the purpose of the trials had been to divert attention away from the U.S. involvement in Hitler's rise to power, they succeeded very well in such an objective” (Ch. 2).

9 In “Is It Ok to Be a Luddite?,” Pynchon paraphrases these lines from Eisenhower’s speech as follows: “[T]here is now a permanent power establishment of admirals, generals and corporate CEO’s, up against whom us average poor bastards are completely outclassed.”

10 The vast majority of scholarship that engages the historical context of Gravity’s Rainbow discusses the military-industrial complex to some degree, but see Dale Carter’s The Final Frontier: The Rise and Fall of the American Rocket State for a detailed cultural history of the rocket industry in the US—both in overtly military and space exploration applications—that includes Pynchon’s novel.

11 Metropolis is a 1927 film directed by Fritz Lang. It depicts a futuristic, technocratic society starkly divided between workers and elites and concludes with a reconciliation between the two groups that benefits the latter far more than the former. There are several allusions to the film in Pynchon’s novel, as Weisenburger notes (232, 301), which point to many similarities between the German and American Rocket-States and Lang’s pre-WWII production.
Interestingly, Vonnegut’s final short story, “The Big Space Fuck” (1972), depicts a 1989 space mission in which a rocket full of semen is sent to the Andromeda galaxy to ensure the survival of the human race, since the Earth is becoming unlivable. The protagonist is Dwayne Hoobler—a name that combines those of Dwayne Hoover and Wayne Hoobler from *Breakfast of Champions*—who, like his namesakes, recites advertising slogans: “‘Fuck You, Andromeda,’ said Dwayne, and he wasn’t being coarse. He was echoing billboards and stickers all over town. (*Palm Sunday* 209). It is also noteworthy that codpieces had returned as a trend in Vonnegut’s 1989, but this time with patriotic themes on them (213).

It is worth mentioning that the protagonist and namesake of Vonnegut’s first short story, “Report on the Barnhouse Effect” (1950), uses his psychokinetic abilities to first fire and then destroy various weapons. See Note 7 in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Later in the novel, we are informed that some of the women on Slothrop’s love map may not have existed, and it is even suggested that Slothrop invented Jamf. These contradictions are a few of many that form part of a larger theme of uncertainty in the novel.

Melley asserts that “the scientific apparatus deployed to study Slothrop only produces, or reproduces at a higher level, the problems of agency it set out to study in the first place” (94). Moreover, he points out the Pointsman’s behaviorism and Mexico’s statistics are, like weapons technology, eroticized.

The expressions of Lyndon B. Johnson, known for his foul mouth, epitomize this conceptualization of war, e.g., “’I didn’t just screw Ho Chi Minh […] I cut his pecker off’” (D. Halberstam 414).

Though Kurt Vonnegut gave *Slaughterhouse Five* the second title *The Children’s Crusade*, he noted in *Fates Worse Than Death* that the phrase made even more sense when
applied to Vietnam, as the average age of World War II soldiers was 26, but among Vietnam
GIs, only 20 (209).

18 According to McHugh, “the threat of global annihilation points to the patriarchal
discourse and desire of the white man” (4), who is represented above all in the novel by
Weissman/Blicero.

19 Coincidentally, a story surfaced in 1974—too late to be included in Gravity’s Rainbow,
but of significant interest, particularly given the novel’s preoccupation with uncertainty and
rumor—that Watson was actually fired for conducting sexual response experiments on Rayner. It
was collaborated by a speculum and some other tools found among Watson’s equipment, and the
account was subsequently reproduced in multiple textbooks. However, a 2007 scholarly
investigation resolved the matter by evaluating the evidence and determining that the story was
just that: an uncorroborated rumor. See Ludy T. Benjamin et al.

20 See Packard Chapter 3 and 7-10 for a detailed history of motivational research and in-
depth description of its uses in advertising campaigns throughout the period.

21 See Note 12 in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

22 This passage recalls the defense of Adolf Eichmann as chronicled in Hannah Arendt’s
Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil. Eichmann was in fact the epitome of
the other-directed Organization Man.

23 According to Weisenburger, Bianca is more likely 16 or 17 (262), though he does not
offer any substantial evidence to support this conjecture.

24 The best example of this is Slothrop’s mission to liberate the hashish from
Neubabelsburg as Rocket Man. His misadventures while seeking to “score” would have been
amusing and relatable to many of Pynchon’s contemporaries.
One apparent product of Slothrop’s SA sessions, which revealed subconscious fears of being sexually violated by black men, was a propaganda film made by Gerhardt von Göll at the behest of General Eisenhower himself. The piece sought to arouse racial anxieties by portraying an invented band of black Nazi troops called the Schwarzkommando, which later turn out to be real (75-76, 279). The use of Slothrop’s psychic data in the production of this film is thus analogous to market research.

David Ewen Cameron, who conducted the initial experiments at McGill University with CIA funding, used amobarbital, sodium pentothal and other varieties of barbiturates to sedate patients during the “psychic driving” process. He also attempted the experiments with LSD, psilocybin, and PCP, hallucinogens that would become popular for recreational purposes in the 1960s and 70s. See Streatfeild 218-226.

Fiedler rhetorically asked of drugs, in a scathing 1965 Partisan Review article about the decline of American culture as he saw it, “What could be more womanly […] than permitting the penetration of the body by a foreign object which not only stirs delight but even (possibly) creates new life?” (522).

Kimmel notes that “[f]ears of brain-washing, especially after the Korean War, were also fears of loss of masculine control” (175), specifically mentioning The Manchurian Candidate.

In his trade handbook Reality in Advertising, ad legend Rosser Reeves devotes an entire chapter to penetrating the consumer.

The nose-sex scene with Trudi is one instance of pure pleasure in the novel (446-7), and Roger and Jessica’s affair is a romantic one—at least until the war ends, when she returns to her fiancé, Jeremy.
Most scholars’ analyses of the novel’s treatment of sex are in line with my own: that it operates as one more means of control in the novel. See for example Burns, Chapman, Melley, and Herman and Weisenburger. Wolfley’s reading of sex in *Gravity’s Rainbow* through the lens of Norman O. Brown, whose *Life Against Death* and *Love’s Body* clearly influenced Pynchon, offers a psychoanalytic perspective opposite of that articulated by Hite: “There is no totally healthy sex in the novel because the characters are all participating willingly in a society committed to the [Freudian] death instinct. Each of the sexual oddities is traceable to some peculiarly Western social perversion” (882-83).

Pointing out the popularity among hippies of buttons bearing the slogan, “Better Things For Better Living Through Chemistry,” Roszak remarks, “the slogan isn’t being used satirically. The wearers mean it the way DuPont means it. The gadget happy American has always been a figure of fun because of his facile assumption that there exists a technological solution to every problem” (177).

Kittler essentially argues the same by drawing on difference evidence: comparing Oneirine to *Reader’s Digest*, Pynchon offers “his explanation as to why each medium, including the novel itself, is a drug, and vice versa” (169).

Pynchon purportedly told college friend Siegel, “I was so fucked up while I was writing [the first draft of *Gravity’s Rainbow*...] that now I go back over some of those sequences and I can’t figure out what I could have meant’” (172). This actually supports rather than undermines the argument made here: what seems so clear while high often disappoints after coming down.

Herman and Weisenburger summarize the various critical interpretations of Slothrop’s scattering as either implying his death or metaphorically pointing to Pynchon’s own dropping out
(200). While these interpretations also have merit, I hold with the aforementioned scholars—as well as Chapman, who articulates a similar view—that the protagonist ultimately disperses because it is the only option he has to escape the forces to which he has been subject throughout the novel. However, since there is no “outside,” no equivalent of Yossarian’s Sweden, he must cease to exist as any kind of unified entity at all. It is a rebellious act, though like others discussed in this chapter, a minimally effective one. See Chapman 16 and Herman and Weisenburger Chapter 12.

36 As Hamill notes, the term “Counterforce” originally denoted anti-Communist efforts, specifically in the form of weapons buildup as a deterrent (433-34), making Pynchon’s appropriation of it ironic.

37 Kazoos throughout the novel aid and abet disruption, but in an interesting semiotic turn, they were used in another 1950s promotions novel to represent advertising. John G. Schneider’s The Golden Kazoo (1956) chronicles an advertising agency’s efforts to market a candidate in the 1960 presidential race. They decide to pretend the candidate’s wife is expecting, recalling the positive effect on the ratings of I Love Lucy while the show’s namesake was pregnant. The title comes from a talk that one ad man in the novel gives to junior employees on the History of Advertising. In his telling, the founding father of advertising was a nameless traveling salesman who played a kazoo while hawking his wares in order to draw people’s attention: “one day this salesman observed that damn’ near everybody would stop, look and listen whenever he dished out the hoopla come-on with his kazoo […] The revered father of our trade had discovered the immutable first law of advertising, which is: There ain't any high brow in the low-brows, but there’s some low-brow in everybody […] Everything since the kazoo could be condensed into a footnote in the history of advertising” (Schneider 39).
Herman and Weisenburger compare this scene to the guerilla theater of groups like the Yippies, specifically a reading in which a member of the Underground Press Syndicate reads a letter of protest in front of President Nixon’s Committee on Obscenity and Pornography decrying the “‘Brain Police, Mind Monitors, [and] Thought Thugs’” that make him “‘puke green monkey shit’” (57). This verbal volley was followed by a cream pie assault in the face of one of the commissioners, a favorite guerilla theater tactic.

Nixon did not actually use the phrase “peace with honor” until his signing of the Paris Peace Accords in 1973 (“Address to the Nation on an Agreement to End the War in Vietnam”); however, variations of this phrase were a central to Nixon’s election and presidency. See Campbell for more on Nixon’s rhetoric surrounding Vietnam.

“Entropy” was also the title of one of Pynchon’s early short stories, published in the Spring 1960 issue of the Kenyon Review, just as the author began his career at Boeing.

Notes for Conclusion

1 Pynchon’s placement of the President in a Volkswagen, with its origins in the Third Reich, further evidences the author’s comparison of Nazi Germany with Nixon-era America in Gravity’s Rainbow. Importantly, this was a car also favored by hippies, which supports my contention in the previous chapter that the novel undermines the They-We distinction it seems to maintain throughout.

2 In The Hidden Persuaders, Packard himself describes the popularity of synthetic laughter on television as a symptom of the other-directed society (190-91).
3 Vonnegut frequently spoke and wrote of his contempt for Nixon, but the best example of the former’s loathing for the latter is probably his report on the 1972 Republican National Convention for *Harper’s*, “In a Manner That Must Shame God Himself.”

4 Nixon stated, “as President, I must put the interest of America first […] To continue to fight through the months ahead for my personal vindication would almost totally absorb the time and attention of both the President and the Congress in a period when our entire focus should be on the great issues of peace abroad and prosperity without inflation at home (“Resignation Speech”).

5 See Note 4 in the Introduction to this dissertation.

6 Hutcheon notes that “one of the problems feminist theorists and practitioners have had with the postmodern is its complicitous critique, its deconstructing fence-setting, its lack of a theory of agency—so crucial to the interventionist dimensions of working for change” (171). Clearly, Acker’s protagonist does not exhibit this same lack of agency.

7 See Note 23 in Ch. 2 of this dissertation.

8 See Frank Ch. 11: As the discovery of the rule-breaking boomers merely cemented the victory of the creative revolution, so the discovery of their rebel successors in the 1990s has breathed new life (and new imagery) into the basic wisdom established during those years: hip is the cultural life-blood of the consumer society” (Frank 234).

9 Paul Auster’s *The New York Trilogy* (1987) and David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* (1996) are two particularly remarkable iterations of the American postmodern novel in the 1980s and 1990s, respectively. The former, not unlike Acker’s *Rip-Off Red*, is a postmodern take on the hardboiled detective fiction genre, though each of its three tales features the weak, other-directed male protagonist characteristic of earlier archetypal members of the genre. Wallace’s *Infinite*
*Jest*, an encyclopedic cult classic and arguably one of the last great American postmodern novels, chronicles the lives of characters—most of them men—dwelling in a not-so-distant future America absolutely overrun by consumerism and consumed by various addictions.
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