

Television, advertising, and the
construction of postmodern identities*Referenslitteratur*
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According to anthropological and sociological folklore, in traditional societies, one's identity was fixed, solid, and stable. Identity was a function of predefined social roles and a traditional system of myths which provided orientation and religious sanctions to define one's place in the world, while rigorously circumscribing the realm of thought and behavior. One was born and died a member of one's clan, of a fixed kinship system, and of one's tribe or group with one's life trajectory fixed in advance. In premodern societies, identity was unproblematical and not subject to reflection or discussion. Individuals did not undergo identity crises, or radically modify their identity. One was a hunter and a member of the tribe and gained one's identity through these roles and functions.

In modernity, identity becomes more mobile, multiple, personal, self-reflexive, and subject to change and innovation.¹ Yet identity in modernity is also social and other-related. Theorists of identity from Hegel through G.H. Mead have often characterized personal identity in terms of mutual recognition, as if one's identity depended on recognition from others combined with self-validation of this recognition. Yet the forms of identity in modernity are also relatively substantial and fixed; identity still comes from a circumscribed set of roles and norms: one is a mother, a son, a Texan, a Scot, a professor, a socialist, a Catholic, a lesbian – or rather a combination of these social roles and possibilities. Identities are thus still relatively fixed and limited, though the boundaries of possible identities, of new identities, are continually expanding.

Indeed, in modernity, self-consciousness comes into its own; it becomes possible to continually engage in reflection on available social roles and possibilities and gains a distance from tradition (Kolb 1986). One can choose and make – and then remake – one's identity as one's life-possibilities change and expand or contract. Modernity also increases other-directedness, however, for as the number of possible identities increases, one must gain recognition to assume a socially validated, recognized identity. In modernity, there is still a structure of interaction with socially defined and available roles, norms, customs, and expectations, among which one must choose and reproduce to gain identity in a complex process of mutual recognition. In this way, the other is a constituent of identity in modernity and, consequently, the other-directed character is a familiar type in late modernity.

dependent upon others for recognition and thus for the establishment of personal identity (Riesman *et al.* 1950).

In modernity, identity therefore becomes both a personal and a theoretical problem. Certain tensions appear within and between theories of identity, as well as within the modern individual. On one hand, some theorists of identity define personal identity in terms of a substantial self, an innate and self-identical essence which constitutes the person. From Descartes' *cogito*, to Kant's and Husserl's transcendental ego, to the Enlightenment concept of reason, to some contemporary concepts of the subject, identity is conceived as something essential, substantial, unitary, fixed, and fundamentally unchanging. Yet other modern theorists of identity postulate a non-substantiality of the self (Hume), or conceive of the self and identity as an existential project, as the creation of the authentic individual (Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre). The existential self is always fragile and requires commitment, resolve, and action to sustain, thus making the creation of identity an existential project for each individual.

Anxiety also becomes a constituent experience for the modern self. For one is never certain that one has made the right choice, that one has chosen one's "true" identity, or even constituted an identity at all. The modern self is aware of the constructed nature of identity and that one can always change and modify one's identity at will. One is also anxious concerning recognition and validation of one's identity by others. Further, modernity also involves a process of innovation, of constant turnover and novelty. In some formulations, modernity signifies the destruction of past forms of life, values, and identities, combined with the production of ever new ones (Berman 1982). The experience of *modernité* is one of novelty, of the ever-changing new, of innovation and transitoriness (Frisby 1985). One's identity may become out of date, or superfluous, or no longer socially validated. One may thus experience anomie, a condition of extreme alienation in which one is no longer at home in the world.

By contrast, one's identity may crystallize and harden such that ennui and boredom may ensue. One is tired of one's life, of who one has become. One is trapped in a web of social roles, expectations, and relations. There appears to be no exit and no possibility of change. Or, one is caught up in so many different, sometimes conflicting, roles that one no longer knows who one is. In these ways, identity in modernity becomes increasingly problematic and the issue of identity itself becomes a problem. Indeed, only in a society anxious about identity could the problems of personal identity, or self-identity, or identity crises, arise and be subject to worry and debate. Theorists of self-identity are often anxious (Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre) concerning the fragility of identity and analyze in detail those experiences and social forces which undermine and threaten personal identity.

Identity in modernity was also linked to individuality, to developing a uniquely individual self. Whereas traditionally, identity was a function of the tribe, the group, or a collective, in modernity identity was a function of creating a particularized individuality. In the consumer and media societies that emerged after World War II, identity has been increasingly linked to *style* to producing "an image, to how one

looks. It is as if everyone has to have their own look, style, and image to have their own identity, though, paradoxically, many of the models of style and look come from consumer culture, thus individuality is highly mediated in the consumer society of the present.

Thus, in modernity, the problem of identity consisted in how we constitute, perceive, interpret, and present ourselves to ourselves and others. As noted, for some theorists, identity is a discovery and affirmation of an innate essence which determines what I am, while for others identity is a construct and a creation from available social roles and material. Contemporary postmodern thought has by and large rejected the essentialist and rationalist notion of identity and builds on the constructivist notion which it in turn problematizes. Consequently, one of the goals of this chapter will be to explicate how identity is formulated in postmodern theory and is constructed in contemporary cultural forms. At stake is whether identity is fundamentally different in so-called postmodernity and whether a distinction between modernity and postmodernity, and modern and postmodern identities, can be sustained.

IDENTITY IN POSTMODERN THEORY

From the postmodern perspective, as the pace, extension, and complexity of modern societies accelerate, identity becomes more and more unstable, more and more fragile. Within this situation, the discourses of postmodernity problematize the very notion of identity, claiming that it is a myth and an illusion. One reads both in modern theorists like the Frankfurt School, and in Baudrillard and other postmodern theorists that the autonomous, self-constituting subject that was the achievement of modern individuals, of a culture of individualism, is fragmenting and disappearing, due to social processes which produce the levelling of individuality in a rationalized, bureaucratized and consumerized mass society and media culture.² Post-structuralists in turn have launched an attack on the very notions of the subject and identity, claiming that subjective identity is itself a myth, a construct of language and society, an overdetermined illusion that one is really a substantial subject, that one really has a fixed identity (Coward and Ellis 1977; Jameson 1983, 1991).

It is thus claimed that in postmodern culture, the subject has disintegrated into a flux of euphoric intensities, fragmented and disconnected, and that the decentered postmodern self no longer experiences anxiety (with hysteria becoming the typical postmodern psychic malady) and no longer possesses the depth, substantiality, and coherency that was the ideal and sometimes achievement of the modern self (Baudrillard 1983c; Jameson 1983, 1991). Postmodern theorists claim that subjects have imploded into masses (Baudrillard 1983b), that a fragmented, disjointed, and discontinuous mode of experience is a fundamental characteristic of postmodern culture, of both its subjective experiences and texts (Jameson 1983, 1991). It is argued that in a postmodern media and information society one is at most a "terminal" (Baudrillard 1983c), or a cyberneticized effect of "fantastic systems

of control" (Kroker and Cook 1986). Deleuze and Guattari (1977) celebrate schizoid, nomadic dispersions of desire and subjectivity, valorizing precisely the breaking up and dispersion of the subject of modernity. In these theories, identity is highly unstable and has in some postmodern theories disappeared altogether in the "postmodern scene" where:

The TV self is the electronic individual *par excellence* who gets everything there is to get from the simulacrum of the media: a market-identity as a consumer in the society of the spectacle; a galaxy of hyperfibrillated moods. . . traumatized serial being.

(Kroker and Cook 1986: 274)

Many of the postmodern theories privilege media culture as the site of the implosion of identity and fragmentation of the subject, yet there have been few in-depth studies of media texts and their effects from this perspective. With the exception of the work of Jameson (see Kellner 1989c), few of the major postmodern theorists have carried out systematic and sustained examination of the actual texts and practices of popular media culture. For instance, Baudrillard's few references to the actual artifacts of media culture are extremely sketchy and fragmentary, as are those of Deleuze and Guattari (while Deleuze has written extensively on film, he does not theorize it as postmodern). Foucault and Lyotard have ignored media culture almost completely. And while Kroker and Cook (1986) carry out detailed readings of contemporary painting, they too neglect to carry out concrete studies of media culture in their explorations of the postmodern scene (though, à la Baudrillard, they ascribe tremendous power to the media in the constitution of "the postmodern scene").³

For instance, the film *Pretty Woman* puts on display the key role of image in the construction of identity in contemporary societies. A working-class prostitute (played by Julia Roberts) meets a corporate Prince Charming (played by Richard Gere) and transforms herself from fashionless street girl to high-fashion beauty. The film illustrates the process of self-transformation through fashion, cosmetics, diction, and style, and the extent to which identity is mediated through image and look in contemporary culture. The result of the Roberts character's transformation was thus a new personality, a new identity, enabling her to get her man and become a success in the image identity market. The message of the film is thus that if you want to become a new you, to transform your identity, to become successful, you need to focus on image, style, and fashion.

In this and the following chapter, I examine, in somewhat more detail than is usual in rapid postmodern raids into media culture, some popular artifacts to see what they tell us about identity in contemporary societies. My selections are hardly innocent although they are symptomatic of what are generally taken to be salient features of postmodern culture: proliferation and dissemination of images without depth; glitzy, high-tech produced intensities; pastiche and implosion of forms; and quotation and repetition of past images and forms. My focus will be on images of identity in a popular television series *Miami Vice*, which is taken as a

symptomatic postmodern media text, and cigarette advertisements which so far have been relatively unexplored by postmodern theory, but which reveal some interesting changes in contemporary image production. Together these studies should illuminate some of the dynamics of identity in so-called postmodern societies.

My take on identity in contemporary society and culture will, however, be critical of several central claims of postmodern theory. I criticize what I consider to be one-sided and inadequate postmodern positions on contemporary culture and what I take to be the limitations of excessively formalistic postmodern analysis. I also put in question claims concerning postmodernism as a concept that interprets contemporary culture as a whole, and conclude with some critical reflections on the very concept of postmodernism as a new epoch in history and the concept of postmodernism as a cultural dominant.

Television and postmodernity

While the postmodern intervention in the arts is often interpreted as a reaction against modernism,⁴ against the stifling elitist canonization of the works of high modernism, the postmodern intervention within television is a reaction against realism and the system of coded genres (sitcom, soaps, action/adventure, and so on) that define the system of commercial television in the United States. In this sense, postmodern interventions within television replicate the assault on realism and genre which modernism itself had earlier attacked. Modernism never took hold in television, especially in the commercial variety produced in the United States – which is culturally hegemonic in many sites throughout the world. Instead, commercial television is predominantly governed by the aesthetic of representational realism, of images and stories which fabricate the real and attempt to produce a reality effect (Kellner 1980). Television's relentless representational realism has also been subordinate to narrative codes, to story-telling, and to the conventions of highly coded genres. Commercial television has been constituted as an entertainment medium and it appears that its producers believe that audiences are most entertained by stories, by narratives with familiar and recognizable characters, plot-lines, conventions, and messages, as well as by familiar genres. This aesthetic poverty of the medium has probably been responsible for its contempt by high cultural theorists and its designation as a "vast wasteland" by those who have other aesthetic tastes and values.

If for most of the history of television, narrative story-telling has been the name of the game, on a postmodern account of television *image* often decenters the importance of narrative. It is claimed that in those programs usually designated "postmodern" – MTV music videos, *Miami Vice*, *Max Headroom*, high-tech ads, and so on – there is a new look and feel: the signifier has been liberated and image takes precedence over narrative, as compelling and highly artificial aesthetic images detach themselves from the television diegesis and become the center of

fascination, of a seductive pleasure, of an intense but fragmentary and transitory aesthetic experience.

While there is some truth in this conventional postmodern position, such descriptions are also in some ways misleading. In particular, I reject the familiar account that postmodern image culture is fundamentally flat and one-dimensional. For Jameson, postmodernism manifests "the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense — perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the postmodernisms" (1984: 60). According to Jameson, the "waning of affect" in postmodern image culture is replicated in postmodern selves who are allegedly devoid of the expressive energies and individualities characteristic of modernism and the modern self. Both postmodern texts and selves are said to be without depth and to be flat, superficial, and lost in the intensities and vacuities of the moment, without substance and meaning, or connection to the past.

Such one-dimensional postmodern texts and selves put in question the continued relevance of hermeneutic depth models such as the Marxian model of essence and appearance, true and false consciousness, and ideology and truth; the Freudian model of latent and manifest meanings; the existentialist model of authentic and inauthentic existence; and the semiotic model of signifier and signified. Cumulatively, postmodernism thus signifies the death of hermeneutics; in place of what Ricoeur (1970) has termed a "hermeneutics of suspicion" and the polysemic modernist reading of cultural symbols and texts, there emerges the postmodern view that there is nothing behind the surface of texts, no depth or multiplicity of meanings for critical inquiry to discover and explicate.

From this postmodern view of texts and selves, it follows that a postmodern cultural theory should rest content to describe the surface or forms of cultural texts, rather than seeking meanings or significance.⁵ Against such a formalist and anti-hermeneutical postmodern type of analysis connected with the postulation of a flat, postmodern image culture, I would advocate a cultural studies which draws on both postmodern and other critical theories in order to analyze both image and meaning, surface and depth, as well as the politics and erotics of cultural artifacts. Thus, I argue here that interpretive analysis of image, narrative, ideologies, and meanings continues to be of importance in analyzing even those texts taken to be paradigmatic of postmodern culture — though analysis of form, surface, and look is also important. I argue in the following pages that the images, fragments, and narratives of media culture are saturated with ideology and polysemic meanings, and that therefore — against certain postmodern positions (Foucault 1977; Baudrillard 1981; and Deleuze and Guattari 1977) — ideology critique continues to be an important and indispensable weapon in our critical arsenal (see Chapter 2 for discussion of the issues at stake here).

In addition, there is another familiar postmodern position which I would also like to distance myself from: the view, associated with Baudrillard (1983b, 1983c), that television is pure noise in the postmodern ecstasy, a pure implosion, a black hole where all meaning and messages are absorbed in the whirlpool and kaleidos-

cope of radical semioturgy, of the incessant dissemination of images and information to the point of total saturation, of inertia and apathy where meaning is dissolved, where only the fascination of discrete images glow and flicker in a mediascape within which no image any longer has any discernible effects, where the proliferating velocity and quantity of images produces a postmodern mindscape where images fly by with such rapidity that they lose any signifying function, referring only to other images ad infinitum, and where eventually the multiplication of images produces such saturation, apathy, and indifference that the tele-spectator is lost forever in a fragmentary fun house of mirrors in the infinite play of superfluous, meaningless images.

Now, no doubt, television can be experienced as a flat, one-dimensional wasteland of superficial images, and can function as well as pure noise without referent and meaning. One can also become overwhelmed by — or indifferent to — the flow, velocity, and intensity of images, so that television's signifying function can be derailed and can collapse altogether. Yet there is something wrong with this account. People regularly watch certain shows and events; there are fans for various series and stars who possess an often incredible expertise and knowledge of the subjects of their fascination; people do model their behavior, style, and attitudes on television images; television ads do play a role in managing consumer demand; and, most recently, many analysts have concluded that television is playing the central role in political elections, that elections have become a battle of images played out on the television screen, and that television is playing an essential role in the new art of governing (Kellner 1990a).

Now, obviously, different audiences watch television in different ways. For some, television is nothing more than a fragmented collage of images that people only fitfully watch or connect with what goes before or comes after. Many individuals today use devices to "zap" from one program to another, channel hopping or "grazing" to merely "see what's happening," to go with the disconnected flow of images. Many individuals who watch entire programs merely focus on the surface of images, with programs, ads, station breaks, and so on flowing into each other, collapsing meaning in a play of disconnected signifiers. Many people cannot remember what they watched the night before, or cannot provide coherent accounts of the previous night's programming.

And yet it is an exaggeration to claim that the apparatus of television itself relentlessly undermines meaning and collapses signifiers without signifieds into a flat, one-dimensional hyperspace without depth, effects, or meanings. Thus, against the postmodern notion of culture disintegrating into pure image without referent or content or effects — becoming at its limit pure noise — I argue by contrast that television and other forms of media culture play key roles in the structuring of contemporary identity and shaping thought and behavior. I have argued elsewhere that television today assumes some of the functions traditionally ascribed to myth and ritual (i.e. integrating individuals into the social order, celebrating dominant values, offering models of thought, behavior, and gender for imitation, and so on). I also argued that TV myth resolved social contradictions in the way that Levi-

Strauss described the function of traditional myth and provided mythologies of the sort described by Barthes which idealize contemporary values and institutions, and thus exalt the established way of life (Kellner 1982). I illustrate these points in the following sections where I discuss how popular television programs, and more generally advertising, function to provide models of identity in the contemporary world.

Consequently, I argue that much postmodern cultural analysis is too one-sided and limited, in either restricting its focus on form, on image alone, or in abandoning media culture analysis altogether in favor of grandiose totalizing metaphors (black holes, implosion, excruciating culture, and so on). Instead, it is preferable to analyze both form and content, image and narrative, and postmodern surface and the deeper ideological problematics within the context of specific exercises which explicate the polysemic nature of images and texts, and which endorse the possibility of multiple encodings and decodings. With these qualifications in mind, let us then examine *Miami Vice* to discover what we might learn concerning television, postmodernity, and identity.

Miami Vice and the politics of image and identity

Miami Vice, along with MTV, was many critics' favorite example of postmodern television (Gitlin 1987; Fiske 1987b; Grossberg 1987). The program originated in 1984 as a product of "Hill Street Blues" producer Anthony Yerkovich and film director Michael Mann; Mann became the controlling figure and remained with the program until its end in 1989. The series took the form of a crime drama centered around two undercover officers, Sonny Crockett, a Miami native and former University of Florida football player (Don Johnson) and Ricardo Tubbs (Paul Michael Thomas), a Puerto Rican detective who migrated south from New York City. Their superior, Castillo (Edward James Olmos), was a Cuban-American and they had a variety of police co-workers and street informants who were series regulars. Action focused on Miami drug and crime scenes, and was shot at actual Florida locations around Miami.

In *Miami Vice*, images are detached from the narrative and seem to take on a life of their own. Its producers rejected familiar earth tones and offered instead a wealth of artificial images, emphasizing South Florida colors of flamingo pink, lime green, Caribbean blue, subdued pastels, and flashing neon. On the cutting edge of image and sound production from the beginning, the series deployed four-track stereo and used popular rock music to establish ambience, often playing entire songs as background to the action, replicating the music video form of MTV.⁶ Their use of lighting, camera angles, cutting, sound, and the exotic terrain of Miami's high-tech, high-rise, high-crime, and multiracial culture makes for a wealth of resonant images which its producers sometimes successfully turned into aesthetic spectacles that are highly intense, fascinating, and seductive. The sometimes meandering narratives replicate experiences of fragmentation and of slow ennui, punctuated with hallucinogenic intensity. Image frequently takes precedence over narrative and the look

and feel become primary, often relegating story-line and narrative meanings to the background.

No doubt, this arguably postmodern style is a fundamental aspect of *Miami Vice* and yet I would submit that most analyses of the series as "postmodern" get it wrong, or miss key aspects of the phenomenon. Privileging Jansson's category of the waning of affect, Gitlin (1987), for example, claims that *Miami Vice* is the ultimate in postmodern blankness, emptiness, and world-weariness. Yet, against this reading, one could argue that it pulsates as well with intense emotion, a clash of values, and highly specific political messages and positions (see Best and Kellner 1987 and the following analysis). Grossberg (1987) also argues that *Miami Vice* and other postmodern culture obliterates meaning and depth, claiming:

Miami Vice is, as its critics have said, all on the surface. And the surface is nothing but a collection of quotations from our own collective historical debris, a mobile game of Trivia. It is, in some ways, the perfect television image, minimalist (the sparse scenes, the constant long shots, etc) yet concrete. (Grossberg 1987: 28)

Grossberg goes on to argue that "indifference" (to meanings, ideology, politics, and so on) is the key distinguishing feature of *Miami Vice* and other postmodern texts which he suggests are more akin to billboards to be scanned for what they tell us about our cultural terrain rather than texts to be read and interrogated.

Against Grossberg, I would argue that *Miami Vice* is highly polysemic and is saturated with ideologies, messages, and quite specific meanings and values. Behind the high-tech glitz are multiple sites of meaning, multiple subject positions, and highly contradictory ideological problematics. The show had a passionately loyal audience which was obviously not indifferent to the series which had, as I attempt to show, its own intense, affective investments and passions. In the following discussion, I thus argue that *reading* the text of *Miami Vice* hermeneutically and critically provides access to its polysemic wealth and that therefore it is a mistake to rapidly speed by such artifacts, however some audiences may relate to them.

By contrast, for a one-dimensional postmodern reading, an artifact like *Miami Vice* is all surface without any depth or layered meanings. On my reading, however, the form, narrative, and images constitute a polysemic text with a multiplicity of possible meanings which require multivalent readings that probe the various layers of the text. For my political hermeneutic, the show is read as a social text which tells us some things about contemporary society. In particular, I wish to suggest that *Miami Vice* provides many insights into the fragmentation, reconstruction, and fragility of identity in contemporary culture and that it also provides insight into how identities are constructed through the incorporation of subject positions offered for emulation by media culture. Against the Althusserian position, taken at one time by *Screen*, which claims that ideological texts interpolate individuals into subject positions that are homogenous, unified, and untroubled, I shall suggest that on the

contrary the "subject positions" of media culture are highly specific, contradictory, fragile, and subject to rapid reconstruction and transformation.⁷

To begin, media culture provides images and figures with which its audiences can identify and emulate. It thus possesses important socializing and enculturating effects via its role models, gender models, and variety of subject positions which valorize certain forms of behavior and style while denigrating and villainizing other types. For example, it is well-documented that *Miami Vice*'s detectives Crockett (Don Johnson) and Tubbs (Paul Michael Thomas) have become fashion icons, arbiters of taste. Crockett's unconstructed Italian jackets, his tennis shoes without socks, his T-shirts and loose pants, his frequently stubbled beard, his changing hairstyle, and so on produced a model for a new male look, a new hip alternative to straight fashion, a legitimation for "loose and causal." Tubbs, by contrast, provides an icon of the hip and meticulously fashionable with his Vern Uomo double-breasted suits and thin Italian ties, fashionable shoes, trendy earring, and nouveau-cool demeanor. Their male associates, Zito and Swick, with their Hawaiian shirts, loose, colorful pants, and very lack of high fashion provide models of more informal clothing and looks, while the women detectives Gina and Trudy are constantly changing their clothes, hairstyles, and looks, validating a constant turn-over and reconstruction of image and look.

The social horizon of *Miami Vice* is the materialist consumer society of the 1980s and the Reaganist emphasis on wealth, affluence, fashion, style, and image. During this time, a new image culture defined identity in terms of image. *Miami Vice*, in its images and stories, transcended these fashion and identity discourses and in turn influenced the fashion, style, and look of its era. The *Miami Vice* effect: it was now cool to engage in more casual fashion styles and to constantly change one's look and image. Don Johnson and other actors on the show became fashion icons and role models, and the show promoted a glitzy high-tech look which synthesized advertising and TV techniques, combining dazzling images with fast editing and intense musical soundtracks and background.

Crockett and Tubbs and their colleagues are arguably role models for macho white males, blacks, Hispanics, women, and teenagers, while the criminal underclass portrayed provides criminal identities. Thus, quite specific gender and role models and subject positions are projected, as are quite different images of sex, race, and class than are usual in the typical mediascapes of television world. In general, *Miami Vice* positions its viewers to identify with and desire an affluent, up-scale lifestyle via its projection of images of a high-tech, high-consumption affluent society. Its iconic images of high-rise buildings, luxury houses, fast and expensive cars and women, and, of course, the pricey and ambiguous commodities of drugs and prostitution produce images of affluence and high-level consumption which position viewers to envy the wealth and power of the villains while identifying as well with the lifestyles, personality traits, and behavior of the heroes. The challenge of *Miami Vice* is to present the "good" cops as more appropriate and desirable role models than the "bad" drug dealers and affluent criminal underworld who in a sense live out the fantasy of unbridled capitalism.

The program also invites viewers to identify with a fast, mobile lifestyle focusing on exciting consumerist leisure. The opening iconic images of the show present a speedboat racing across the ocean with blue waves and white foam pulsating to an intense musical beat; the images cut to exotic birds, sensual women, sports competition, horse and dog racing, and other leisure images with affluent Miami as the backdrop. These opening images are packed together with quick editing which provide a sensation of speed and mobility, iconic invitations to get into the fast lane and join the high life. The show itself will then demonstrate how individuals enter into this leisure utopia and find the good life within its spectacles and enticements.

As its narratives unfold, *Miami Vice* presents some revealing insights into the problematics of identity in contemporary techno-capitalist societies. The chief characters (Crockett, Tubbs and their boss Castillo) all have multiple identities and multiple pasts which intersect in unstable ways with the present. In each case, their identity is fragmented and unstable, different and distinctive in each character, yet always subject to dramatic change. Crockett is presented as an ex-football star, a Vietnam veteran, and a young man familiar with the criminal underworld, with the players in the drug and crime scene. His nickname "Sonny" codes him as an icon of youth while his last name "Crockett" evokes the hero image derived from the name of one of the heroes of the Alamo, Davy Crockett, who was subject of a successful Disney TV miniseries in the 1950s and the hero of John Wayne's *The Alamo* in 1960. Unlike the stolid bourgeois Davy, however, Sonny is presented as having been married and divorced with several episodes depicting him with his former wife and son, yet these encounters are infrequent and he gains no real lasting identity as a father or husband in the series.

Instead, Crockett is portrayed in multiple relationships, relatively unstructured and subject to quick change. In early seasons, he is shown involved with his colleague Gina and is also involved with a fashionable architect, a stewardess who dies of a drug overdose, and a woman doctor who is also a drug addict. These relationships were featured in single episodes within which the relationship disintegrated, never to reappear (his two lovers involved with drugs died). In the 1987/8 season, Crockett marries a successful rock singer who he was assigned to protect (played by Scottish rock star Sheena Easton), yet she soon disappears on a seemingly interminable rock tour and when he is shot and almost dies ("A Bullet for Crockett," 1988), she cannot be reached and only his colleagues are there for the death watch — a substitute family of a type increasingly familiar in TV world as the divorce rate soars in the real world.

Tubbs, by contrast, is presented as a street-wise black cop who leaves New York after his brother is shot and comes to Miami to seek his brother's killer; he decides to stay and teams up with Crockett. His name Ricardo Tubbs, his nickname Rico, and his dark, multiple-hued skin codes him as of mixed racial descent. Tubbs rarely talks about his past and lives a perpetual present, closely connected only to his partner Crockett. Their boss Castillo was also, like Crockett, a Vietnam veteran who worked as well for the Drug Enforcement Agency in Thailand where he

married and lost his wife in a battle with a drugs baron. Presumed dead, she and the drugs baron arrive in Miami ("Golden Triangle," 1985). Castillo learns that she is now happily married, but was kidnapped and is in effect the hostage of the drug dealer, who threatens to kill her husband if she leaves or betrays him. After Castillo rescues the woman, in a *Carabancha*-inspired ending, he bids her and her husband farewell at the end of the episode.

Castillo appears as the brooding patriarch, the self-contained and self-enclosed autonomous subject who defines himself by his morality and actions. His is the most stable identity in *Miami Vice* and he presents a figure of an autonomous self with a strongly fixed personal identity. Yet Castillo too is presented as a man of great passion and intensity which he constantly suppresses, producing the image of a smoldering figure who could explode any moment into violence and chaos, whose carefully constructed moral boundaries might at any moment dissolve – a quiet, tragic figure who could easily fall into the more chaotic world of violence and nihilism which threatens all boundaries and identities in the fragile and unstable world of *Miami Vice*.

Crockett and Tubbs in contrast to Castillo are constantly changing their looks, styles, and behavior. At the beginning of the 1988/9 season, Crockett appeared with shoulder-length hair, sometimes held back in a ponytail, while Tubbs appeared with a thick beard – which disappeared later in the season. The instability of the cops' identity in *Miami Vice* is exploited in a plot device which utilizes their multiple identities as cops and undercover players in the underworld. Both assume undercover roles with Crockett living on an expensive boat, masquerading as drug runner Sonny Burnett, while Tubbs assumes the role of buyer/dealer Ricardo Cooper who sometimes assumes a Jamaican, Caribbean persona, while other times he appears as a hip, black urban hood. One would think that the word would soon get around that "Burnett" is "really" the vice cop "Crockett" and that the various criminals who Tubbs "plays" are "really" masks for the vice cop "Tubbs." Yet in show after show, Crockett and Tubbs assume their criminal identities and slide from good guy to bad guy as easily as one would change one's undershirt.⁸ Such doubled-coded identities signals the artificiality of identity, that identity is constructed not given, that it is a matter of choice, style, and behavior rather than intrinsic moral or psychological qualities. It also suggests that identity is a game that one plays, that one can easily shift from one identity to another.

Postmodern identity, then, is constituted theatrically through role playing and image construction. While the locus of modern identity revolved around one's occupation, one's function in the public sphere (or family), postmodern identity revolves around leisure, centered on looks, images, and consumption. Modern identity was a serious affair involving fundamental choices that defined who one was (profession, family, political identifications, and so on), while postmodern identity is a function of leisure and is grounded in play, in gamesmanship, in producing an image. The notion of a "player" – central to identity construction in *Miami Vice* – provides clues to the nature of postmodern identity. A "player" knows the rules and the score and acts accordingly. The player is with and often flouts

social conventions and attempts to distinguish herself through ritualized activities, through gambling, sports, drug-dealing and use, sexual activity, or other leisure and social concerns. The player "becomes someone" if she succeeds and gains identity through admiration and respect of other players.

One of the structuring principles of *Miami Vice* points to a schizoid dichotomy within the identity construction of the two main characters which I believe points to tensions within contemporary identity construction. As noted, Crockett and Tubbs are both cops and players in many episodes, acting as criminals to entrap the "real" players. In the 1988/9 season, the plot lines played on this double identity, as Crockett schizophrenically slid from Burnett back to Crockett. The story suggests that it is easy to fall into, to become, the roles that one plays and that identity construction today is highly tenuous and fragile. Suspense was built around whether "Crockett" could continue to be "Crockett," or whether he would suddenly become "Burnett." The moral seems to be that when one radically shifts identity at will, one might lose control, one might become pathologically conflicted and divided, disabled from autonomous thought and action.

Thus it appears that postmodern identity tends more to be constructed from the images of leisure and consumption than modern identities and tends to be more unstable and subject to change. Both modern and postmodern identity contain a level of reflexivity, an awareness that identity is chosen and constructed, though, in contemporary society, it may be more "natural" to change identities, to switch with the changing winds of fashion. While this produces an erosion of individuality and increased social conformity (to contemporary models of identity), there are, however, some positive potentials of this postmodern portrayal of identity as an artificial construct. For such a notion of identity suggests that one can always change one's life, that identity can always be reconstructed, that one is free to change and produce oneself as one chooses.

This notion of multiple, freely chosen, and easily disposed of postmodern identities can be interestingly contrasted to more traditional images of police who had quite different "modern" identities and who offered quite different subject positions. In *Dragnet* (1951–9 and 1967–70) Jack Webb's Sgt. Friday was the model of the tight, moralistic, and ascetic authoritarian personality, while Robert Stack's Elliot Ness in "The Untouchables" (1959–63) was literally untouchable and incorruptible by women or criminals. Both were extremely rigid, authoritarian figures without apparent personal lives or any individuality or complex personality traits. The chief cop in *The F.B.I.* (1965–74) was also highly impersonal, with no distinctive personal identity, as were the cops in 1950s police dramas like *Highway Patrol*, *M Squad*, and *The Naked City*.

In the 1960s and 1970s more "personable" cops began to appear with *Columbo*, *Kojak*, *Baretta*, *Starsky and Hutch*, and so on. Yet these TV cops too had relatively fixed identities which were readily identifiable by their personality quirks, by their marks of individuality. Columbo's shuffling, modest, and sly methods of interrogation, Kojak's bully-boy masculinist tactics, Baretta's identification with the little guy and vice at crime, who hurt "his" people, and Starsky and Hutch's explo-

sions of moral rage provided these TV cops with stable, familiar identities – more highly individualized than previous ones, but equally substantial and fixed. Such stability is no longer visible in *Miami Vice* where Crockett and Tubbs assume different hairstyles, looks, roles, and behavior, from show to show, season to season.

Although identity in *Miami Vice* in the figures of Crockett and Tubbs is unstable, fluid, fragmentary, disconnected, multiple, open, and subject to dramatic transformation, it nonetheless privileges certain male subject positions. In particular, macho male identity is positively valorized throughout; Crockett, Tubbs, and Castillo are all highly macho figures and their male and female subordinates emulate their behavior. The viewer is thus positioned to view highly aggressive, highly masculinized, and, fairly often, highly sexist behavior as desirable, and a macho male subject is thus privileged as the most desirable role model. The two women vice cops – Trudy and Gina – are often assigned to play prostitutes, or to seduce criminals and are thus presented in negative stereotypes of sluts and seducers: they often fall into situations of danger and must be rescued by the male cops. When they are allowed subjectivity of their own, they fall for criminals, as when Gina falls in love with an unscrupulous IRA thug in the episode entitled “When Irish Eyes are Shining” (1985). The women cops are presented most positively when they engage in aggressive male behavior, as when Gina shoots the IRA gunmen, or Trudy shoots an especially sleazy criminal who she was forced to sleep with in her undercover work. Such macho behavior replicates the images of women warriors which became an increasingly central image in the late 1970s and 1980s (*Alien*, *Aliens*, *Supergirl*, *Sheena*, and so on). Equality in this ideological scenario thus becomes equal opportunities to kill, to become women warriors equal to the macho males in the realm of primal aggressivity.

The show is also arguably racist, privileging the white male Crockett as the subject of power and desire, as the center around which most of the narratives revolve. In January of 1989, NBC devoted its Friday night primetime schedule to “Three for Crockett,” broadcasting three straight episodes that centered on the central white male figure. In terms of image construction, white is also the privileged color: Crockett often wears white jackets, drives a white car, carouses on white sand beaches, and pursues beautiful white women. Black – as in the traditional melodrama genre – is coded as the site of danger, mystery, uncertainty, and evil. Few shows have used as many and as menacing black, nighttime backdrops, in which the light forms and figures are privileged as the positive index against the negatively valorized black background.

And yet the black/white friendship of Crockett and Tubbs – interpreted by some critics as blatantly homophobic (Butler 1985) – presents one of the most striking images of interracial friendship in the history of television, and Tubbs and Castillo are two of the most positive images of people of color yet to appear. On the other hand, while Tubbs and Castillo arguably provide positive role models for young black and Hispanic males, most of the images of blacks, Hispanics and Third-World people of color in the series are strongly negative. Two characters featured on many

episodes – the Cuban Izzie and the black Noogie – are stereotypes of Hispanic and black street hustlers, the improper role models against which Tubbs and Castillo are defined. Two black policemen have been featured in supporting roles – an obnoxious New York officer and an overly aggressive and incompetent federal drug enforcer – who also present the negative antithesis of the ideal black professional. The criminals are also stereotyped people of color who play the usual conventional roles: drug dealers, war lords, prostitutes, gun runners, and so on, who are predominantly vicious, unprincipled, dangerous, and violent.

Third-World scenes are likewise presented negatively as places of corruption, violence, and multiple forms of evil and these negative emanations from the site of otherness, the hearts of darkness, are shown as threatening the utopia of Miami with its easy affluence and upscale lifestyles. The underclass of the United States by contrast is rarely portrayed, though some episodes have shown quite striking images of ghetto life and one 1986 episode realistically depicts the problems of ghetto blacks in a story of a young black athlete, unable to escape from the violence and degradation of the ghetto.

In fact, there are some socially critical and progressive aspects to the series. In a sense, the “vice” portrayed is as much capitalism’s vice as Miami’s. While Miami is the site of unbridled crime, it is also the site of unbridled “free enterprise” and drug dealing is the ultimate in high-profit capital accumulation, while drugs represent the ultracapitalist dream of a commodity that is cheap to produce and that can provide tremendous profits in its selling. A Thai drugs baron in a 1985 episode “The Golden Triangle” states that drugs are “no different from tapicoca or tin ore from Malaysia. It is simply a commodity for which there is a demand.” Indeed, the series is one of the few to present critical images of capitalism. One episode, “The Prodigal Son” (1985), featured *Living Theater* impresario Julien Beck as a New York banker. In a meeting with drugs barons, the banker stated that the financial establishment favored continued drug trade to help them recoup their loans to Third-World countries, for whom drugs was one of the few high yield exports. In this and other episodes *Miami Vice* thus practices mild social critique.⁹

Like Balzac and Brecht, *Miami Vice* associates wealth with crime, capitalist enterprise with criminality. On the other hand, the very glamorizing of crime also celebrates high-powered capitalism, so the equation of crime and business is highly ambiguous – an ambiguity that runs through the series and which constitutes postmodern identity as ambivalent and beyond traditional “good” and “bad” role models. For identity is often constructed in media culture and society against dominant conventions and morality; thus there is something amoral or morally threatening about postmodern selves which are fluid, multiple, and subject to rapid change. From this perspective, Crockett is a highly ambivalent hero for American culture: he is frequently unshaven, never wears a tie and often goes without socks, is sexually promiscuous, and often reverts into his undercover “Burnett” role in which he plays with gusto the hip “player,” ready to do anything for some bucks.

Yet *Miami Vice* is really neither nihilistic nor celebratory of crime. Like the tradition of gangster film (see Warshaw 1962), the series can

be read as a cautionary morality tale which shows that those who go beyond acceptable boundaries in the pursuit of wealth and power are bound to fall. Like the gangster genre, *Miami Vice* is deeply attracted to its criminal underworld and plays out the primal passion play of capitalist free enterprise: devotion at all costs to maximizing capital accumulation. *Miami Vice* thus identifies the ultra-capitalist subject position as one of greed, uncontrolled appetite, and violent aggression which inevitably leads to death and destruction.

And yet the images of the affluent lifestyles of the criminals are so attractive and appealing that the series itself is morally ambivalent, investing both the professional identity of the cops and the outlaw identity of the criminals with positive value – an ambivalence intensified by the dual identities of Crockett and Tubbs who play out both affluent criminal roles and professional cop roles, within the same episode. Such ambivalence perhaps intensifies the sort of relativism that certain postmodern theorists claim is symptomatic of the contemporary condition. The series also puts on display and reinforces tendencies in contemporary society to adopt multiple identities, to change one's identity and look as one changes one's clothes, job, or habitat. This analysis of *Miami Vice* suggests, in fact, that *image, look, and style* are key constituents of a postmodern image culture and key constituents of postmodern identity.

Consequently, *Miami Vice* puts on display the way that identity is constituted in contemporary society through image and style, and suggests that such a mode of identity is highly fluid, multiple, mobile, and transitory. Yet I have attempted to show that certain images of fashion, gender, and style are connected to specific content and values, thus constituting specific modes and forms of identity. Likewise, the images and narratives of media culture are also saturated with ideology and value, so that identity in contemporary societies can (still) be interpreted as an ideological construct, as a means whereby enculturation produces subject positions which reproduce dominant capitalist and masculinist values and modes of life.

Throughout this book, I have attempted to redeem Marxist, feminist, and multiculturalist modes of ideology critique against postmodern formalism which abstracts ideological content from image and spectacle and which affirms theses concerning the collapse of meaning and identity in a postmodern mediascape. Against this operation, I have suggested that rather than identity disappearing in contemporary society, it is rather reconstructed and redefined and I have attempted to show the relevance and importance of theories which focus on specific ideological subject positions and modes of identity formation to help illuminate these processes. Thus, whereas the modern self often assumed multiple identities, the necessity of choice and instability of a constructed identity often produced anxiety. Moreover, a stable, substantial identity – albeit self-reflexive and freely chosen – was at least a normative goal for the modern self – a type of stable identity clearly observable in the television heroes of the 1950s through the 1970s. The rapid shifts of identity in *Miami Vice*, by contrast, suggest that the postmodern self accepts and affirms multiple and shifting identities. Identity today thus becomes a freely chosen game, a theatrical presentation of the self, in which one is able to present oneself

in a variety of roles, images, and activities, relatively unconcerned about shifts, transformations, and dramatic changes.

This analysis would suggest that what might be called postmodern identity is an extension of the freely chosen and multiple identities of the modern self which accepts and affirms an unstable and rapidly mutating condition. Yet precisely this condition of a multiplicity of choices was a problem for the modern self, producing anxiety and identity crisis. For the postmodern self, however, anxiety allegedly disappears for immersion in euphoric fragments of experience and frequent change of image and identity. I would not, however, want to go as far as Jameson (1984: 62f.) who claims that anxiety disappears in postmodern culture, nor would I want to deny that identity crises still occur and are often acute (a psychiatrist friend told me that gender confusion is especially acute among teenagers today, who are deeply attracted to androgynous figures like Boy George and Michael Jackson, as well as to feminine males like Prince, or "macho" women like Madonna). Indeed, when one changes one's images and style frequently, there is always anxiety concerning whether others will accept one's changes and validate through positive recognition one's new identity.

Yet one surmises that there is a shift in identity formation and that postmodern selves are becoming more multiple, transitory, and open. For Jameson (1984: 76), the figure of David Bowie gazing in fascination at a stack of television sets was a privileged figure of the postmodern self – an image to which we might add figures of the TV channel-switcher, rapidly changing channels and mediascapes, or the modern-connected computer freak, rapidly switching from computer games, to data-bases and bulletin boards, to one's own personal word-processing system and files, which figure the new postmodern terminal self. Moreover, there are emancipatory possibilities in the perpetual possibility of being able to change one's self and identity, to move from one identity to another, to revel in the play of multiple and plural identities.

In any case, whatever its nature – modern or postmodern – identity in contemporary society is increasingly mediated by media images which provide the models and ideals for modelling personal identity. Media stars like the cops on *Miami Vice*, or pop superstars like Michael Jackson or Madonna, also provide models of identity through the construction of looks, image, and style. Advertising too provides such models of identity and in the following discussion I want to show how some cigarette ads provide figures of the dramatic shift in the nature and substance of personal identity in contemporary society. After an examination of these artifacts, I'll draw some provisional conclusions concerning identity and postmodernity.

ADVERTISING IMAGES

Like television narratives, advertising too can be seen as providing some functional equivalents of myth. Like myths, ads frequently resolve social contradictions, provide models of identity, and celebrate the existing social order. Barthes (1972 [1957]) saw that advertising provided a repertoire of contemporary mythologies,

and in the following discussion I depict how cigarette ads contribute to identity formation in contemporary society. The following analysis is intended to show that even the static images of advertising contain subject positions and models for identification that are heavily coded ideologically. As in the previous discussion, I argue here — against a certain type of postmodern formal analysis — that the images of media culture are important both in the mode of their formal image construction and address, as well as in terms of the meanings and values which they communicate. Accordingly, I discuss some print ads which are familiar, are readily available for scrutiny, and lend themselves to critical analysis.

Print ads are an important sector of the advertising world with about 50 percent of advertising revenues going to various print media while 22 percent is expended on television advertising. Let us look first, then, at some cigarette ads, including Marlboro ads aimed primarily at male smokers and Virginia Slims ads which try to convince women that it is cool to smoke and that the product being advertised is perfect for the "modern" woman (see the illustration following).¹⁰ Corporations such as those in the tobacco industry undertake campaigns to associate their product with positive and desirable images and gender models. Thus, in the 1950s, Marlboro undertook a campaign to associate its cigarette with masculinity, associating smoking its product with being a "real man." Marlboro had been previously packaged as a milder women's cigarette, and the "Marlboro man" campaign was an attempt to capture the male cigarette market with images of archetypically masculine characters. Since the cowboy, Western image provided a familiar icon of masculinity, independence, and ruggedness, it was the preferred symbol for the campaign. Subsequently, the "Marlboro man" became a part of American folklore and a readily identifiable cultural symbol.

Such symbolic images in advertising attempt to create an association between the products offered and socially desirable and meaningful traits in order to produce the impression that if one wants to be a certain type of person, — for instance, to be a "real man" — then one should buy Marlboro cigarettes. Consequently, for decades, Marlboro used the cowboy figure as the symbol of masculinity and the center of their ads. In a postmodern image culture, individuals get their very identity from these figures, thus advertising becomes an important and overlooked mechanism of socialization, as well as manager of consumer demand.

Ads form textual systems with basic components which are interrelated in ways that positively position the product. The main components of the classical Marlboro ads are the conjunction of nature, the cowboy, horses, and the cigarette (see Figure 1). This system associates the Marlboro cigarette with masculinity, power, and nature. Note, however, in the Marlboro ad in Figure 2, how the cowboys decline in size, dwarfed by the images of desert and sky. Whereas in earlier Marlboro ads, the Marlboro man loomed largely in the center of the frame, now images of nature are highlighted. Why this shift?

All ads are social texts which respond to key developments during the period in which they appear. During the 1980s, media reports concerning the health hazard of cigarettes became widespread — a messy → highlight → the mandatory box at



the bottom of the ad that "The Surgeon General Has Determined That Cigarette Smoking is Dangerous to Your Health." As a response to this attack, the Marlboro ads now feature images of clean, pure, wholesome nature, as if it were "natural" to smoke cigarettes, as if cigarettes were a healthy "natural" product, an emanation of benign and healthy nature. The ad, in fact, hawks *Marlboro Lights* and one of the captions describes it as a "low tar cigarette." Many 1980s Marlboro ads deployed imagery that was itself "light," white, green, snowy, and airy. Through the process of metonymy, or contiguous association, the ads tries to associate the cigarettes with "light," "natural," healthy deserts, clean snow, horses, cowboys, trees, and sky, as if they were all related "natural" artifacts, sharing the traits of "nature," thus covering over the fact that cigarettes are an artificial, synthetic product, full of dangerous pesticides, preservatives, and other chemicals.¹¹

Thus, the images of healthy nature are a Barthesian mythology (1972) which attempt to cover over the image of the dangers to health from cigarette smoking. The Marlboro ad also draws on images of tradition (the cowboy), hard work, caring for animals, and other desirable traits, as if smoking were a noble activity, metonymically equivalent to these other positive social activities. The images, texts, and product shown in the ad thus provide a symbolic construct which tries to cover over and camouflage contradictions between the "heavy" work and the "light" cigarette, and between the "natural" scene and the "artificial" product, between the cool and healthy outdoors scene and between the hot and unhealthy activity of smoking, and the rugged masculinity of the Marlboro man and the Light cigarette, originally targeted at women. In fact, this latter contradiction can be explained by the marketing ploy of suggesting to men that they can both be highly masculine, like the Marlboro man, and smoke a (supposedly) "healthier" cigarette, while also appealing to macho women who might enjoy smoking a "man's" cigarette which is also "lighter" and "healthier," as women's cigarettes are supposed to be.

The 1983 Virginia Slims ad pictured in Figure 3 attempts in a similar fashion to associate its product with socially desired traits and offers subject positions with which women can identify. The Virginia Slims textual system classically includes a vignette at the top of the ad with a picture underneath of the Virginia Slims woman next to the prominently displayed package of cigarettes. In the example pictured, the top of the ad features a framed box that contains the narrative images and message, which is linked to the changes in the situation of women portrayed through a contrast with the "modern" woman below. The caption under the boxed image of segregated male and female exercise classes in 1903 contains the familiar Virginia Slims slogan "You've come a long way, baby." The caption, linked to the Virginia Slims woman, next to the package of cigarettes, connotes a message of progress, metonymically linking Virginia Slims to the "progressive woman" and "modern" living. In this ad, it is the linkages and connections between the parts that establish the message which associates Virginia Slims with progress. The ad tells women that it is progressive and socially acceptable to smoke, and it associates Virginia Slims with modernity, social progress, and the desired social trait of slimmness.

In fact, Lucky Strike carried out a successful advertising campaign in the 1930s

which associated smoking with weight reduction ("Reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet!"), and Virginia Slims plays on this tradition, encapsulated in the very brand name of the product. Note too that the cigarette is a "Lights" variety and that, like the Marlboro ad, it tries to associate its product with health and well-being. The pronounced smile on the woman's face also tries to associate the product with happiness and self-contentment, struggling against the association of smoking with guilt and dangers to one's health. The image of the slender woman, in turn, associated with slimmness and lightness, not only associates the product with socially desirable traits, but in turn promotes the ideal of slimmness as the ideal type of femininity.

Later in the 1980s, Capri cigarettes advertised its product as "the slimmest slim!", building on the continued and intensified association of slimmness with femininity. The promotion of smoking and slimmness is far from innocent, however, and has contributed to eating disorders, faddish diets and exercise programs, and a dramatic increase in anorexia among young women, as well as rising cancer rates. As Judith Williamson points out (1978), advertising "addresses" individuals and invites them to identify with certain products, images, and behavior. Advertising provides a utopian image of a new, more attractive, more successful, more prestigious "you" through purchase of certain goods. Advertising magically offers self-transformation and a new identity, associating changes in consumer behavior, fashion, and appearance with metamorphosis into a new person. Consequently, individuals are taught to identify with values, role models, and social behavior through advertising which is thus an important instrument of socialization as well as a manager of consumer demand.

Advertising sells its products and view of the world through images, rhetoric, slogans, and their juxtaposition in ads to which tremendous artistic resources, psychological research, and marketing strategies are devoted. These ads express and reinforce dominant images of gender and position men and women to assume highly specific subject positions. A 1988 Virginia Slims ad (shown in Figure 4), in fact, reveals a considerable transformation in its image of women during the 1980s and a new strategy to persuade women that it is all right and even "progressive" and ultramodern to smoke. This move points to shifts in the relative power between men and women and discloses new subject positions for women validated by the culture industries.

Once again the sepia-colored framed box at the top of the ad contains an image of a woman serving her man in 1902; the comic pose and irritated look of the woman suggests that such servitude is highly undesirable and its contrast with the Virginia Slims woman (who herself now wears the leather boots and leather gloves and jacket as well) suggests that women have come a long way while the ever-present cigarette associates woman's right to smoke in public with social progress. This time the familiar "You've come a long way, baby" is absent, perhaps because the woman pictured would hardly tolerate being described as "baby" and because women's groups had been protesting the sexist and demeaning label in the slogan. Note too, the transformation of the image of the woman in the Virginia Slims ad.

No longer the smiling, cute, and wholesome potential wife of the earlier ad, she is now more threatening, more sexual, less wifely, and more masculine. The sunglasses connote the distance from the male gaze which she wants to preserve and the leather jacket with the military insignia connotes that she is equal to men, able to carry on a masculine role, and is stronger and more autonomous than women of the past.

The 1988 ad is highly anti-patriarchal and even expresses hostility toward men with the overweight man with glasses and handlebar mustache looking slightly ridiculous while it is clear that the woman is being held back by ridiculous fashion and intolerable social roles. The "new" Virginia Slims woman, however, who completely dominates the scene, is the epitome of style and power. This strong woman can easily take in hand and enjoy the phallus (i.e. the cigarette as the sign of male power accompanied by the male dress and military insignia) and serve as an icon of female glamour as well. This ad links power, glamour, and sexuality and offers a model of female power, associated with the cigarette and smoking. Ads work in part by generating dissatisfaction and by offering images of transformation, of a new personal identity. This particular ad promotes dissatisfaction with traditional images and presents a new image of a more powerful woman, a new lifestyle and identity for the Virginia Slims smoker. In these ways, the images associate the products advertised with certain socially desirable traits and convey messages concerning the symbolic benefits accrued to those who consume the product.

Although Lights and Ultra Lights continue to be the dominant Virginia Slims types, the phrase does not appear as a highlighted caption in the 1988 ad as it used to and the package does not appear either. No doubt this "heavy" woman contradicts the "light" image and the ad connotes instead power and (a dubious) progress for women rather than slimmness or lightness. Yet the woman's teased and flowing blonde hair, her perfect teeth which form an obliging smile, and, especially her crotch positioned in the ad in a highly suggestive and inviting fashion code her as a symbol of beauty and sexuality, albeit more autonomous and powerful.

The point I am trying to make is that it is precisely the images which are the vehicles of the subject positions and that therefore critical literacy in a postmodern image culture requires learning how to read images critically and to unpack the relations between images, texts, social trends, and products in commercial culture (Kellner 1989d). My reading of these ads suggests that advertising is as concerned with selling lifestyles and socially desirable identities, which are associated with their products, as with selling the product themselves -- or rather, that advertisers use the symbolic constructs with which the consumer is invited to identify to try to induce her to use their product. Thus, the Marlboro man (i.e. the consumer who smokes the cigarette) is smoking masculinity or natural vigor as much as a cigarette, while the Virginia Slims woman is exhibiting modernity, thinness, or female power when she lights up her "slim."

This sort of reading of advertising not only helps individuals to resist manipulation, but it also depicts how something as seemingly innocuous as advertising can depict significant shifts in modes and models of identity. For example, the two

Virginia Slims ads suggest that at least a certain class of women (white, upper-middle and upper class) were gaining more power in society and that women were being attracted by stronger, more autonomous, and more masculine images. Advertising campaigns attempt to incorporate such images to associate their products with the socially desired traits which are then further promoted with the ads' attempts to promote their products.¹²

A comparison of late 1980s Marlboro ads with their earlier ads also yields some interesting results. While the Marlboro ads once centered on the "Marlboro man," and in the early 1980s continue to feature this figure, curiously, by the late 1980s, human beings disappeared altogether from some Marlboro ads which projected pure images of wholesome nature associated with the product. The caption "Made especially for menthol smokers," the green menthol insignia on the cigarette package, and the blue and green backdrops of the trees, grass, and water in the ad all attempt to incorporate icons of health and nature into the ads, as if these menthol Lights would protect the buyer from cigarette health hazards. Undoubtedly this transformation in the Marlboro ads points to growing concern about the health hazards of cigarettes which required even purer emphasis on nature. Yet the absence of the Marlboro cowboy might also point to the obsolescence of the manual worker in a new postmodern information and service society where significant sectors of the so-called "new middle class" work in the industries of symbol and image production and manipulation.

The prominent images of the powerful horses in the late 1980s ad, however, point to a continued desire for power and fantasies of virility and masculinity. The actual powerlessness of workers in contemporary capitalist society makes it in turn difficult to present concrete contemporary images of male power that would appeal to a variety of male (and female) smokers. Eliminating the male figure also allows appeal over a wider range of social classes and occupational types, including both men and women who could perhaps respond more positively to images of nature and power than to the rather obsolete cowboy figure. Further -- and these images are clearly polysemic, subject to multiple readings, -- the new emphasis on "Great refreshment in the flip-top box" not only harmonizes with the "refreshing" images of green and nature, but points to the new hedonist, leisure culture in postmodern society with its emphasis on the pleasures of consumption, spectacle, and refreshment. The refreshment tag also provides a new legitimation for cigarette smoking as a refreshing activity (building on the famous Pepsi "pause that refreshes"?) which codes an obviously dangerous activity as "refreshing" and thus as health-promoting.

Moreover, the absence of human figures in the late 1980s Marlboro ads could be read as signs of the erasure of the human in postmodern society, giving credence to Foucault's claim that in a new episteme the human itself could be washed away like a face drawn on sand at the edge of the sea (1970: 387). Yet the human cannot so easily be washed away and to behold in 1989, not only human figures, but the Marlboro man himself returned in a new ad campaign. One ad provides an example of a new advertising strategy which requires the consumer to produce the

meaning herself, much like a modernist text. This fully two-page ad portrays giant hands (presumably those of the Marlboro man himself) holding a pair of gloves, with a cigarette held between two gnarled and weatherbeaten fingers. The only caption besides the federally mandated list of ingredients and warnings to one's health - says: "Come to where the flavor is." There is no Marlboro cigarette box, portrayed nor any caption stating the brand name. Instead one has to look quite closely at the small brand name inscribed on the cigarette itself to discern precisely what brand is being advertised.

Half of the two-page ad is buried in darkness with only the caption and difficult to decipher fragments of images emerging. The other half of the ad centers on the gnarled hands, perhaps projecting the subliminal message to those concerned with the health risks of smoking that it is possible to smoke and survive. For the heavily lined hands are obviously those of someone who has lived life to the full, whose vicissitudes and experience are etched into the very skin of his hands, whose deeply textured skin attests to a long-lived life. In this way, the cigarette is associated with survival and a full life, thus assuaging worries that smoking constitutes a serious risk of cancer and other dread diseases and providing subliminal functions of anxiety reduction - a typical task of contemporary advertising.

This Marlboro ad is one of a genre of contemporary ads which forces the consumer to work at discerning the brand being sold and at deciphering the text to construct meaning. The minimalism of product signifiers appeals to readers jaded with traditional advertising, tired of the same old state images, and bored with and cynical toward advertising manipulation. To the cool postmodern reader, the association of masculinity with smoking Marboros might be laughable, yet even such minimalist ads utilize product differentiation and use new images while building on old cues. In addition to appealing to a survivalist urge in the contemporary smoker, the 1989 ad invites her to "Come to where the flavor is." The emphasis on flavor appeals to hedonist tastes, to enjoy the flavor, to light up for pleasure. Such appeals interpellate contemporary individualist-hedonist impulses to have fun, to do what one wants and pleases at all costs - even the destruction of one's health.

The textual system of this 1989 Marlboro ad as a whole thus addresses its reader as an individual, as someone able to read the complex ad and to choose their own pleasures as they will. There is thus a subliminal appeal to the individual's freedom and creativity which invites the reader to interpret the ad as one chooses and to light up the cigarette when one pleases in disregard of the obligatory government warnings linking cigarettes to health risks. The gnarled hands as well as those of an individual who is charge of his life and who makes his own decisions, so the text as a whole is structured to associate smoking Marlboro with individuality and power. Interestingly, this ad and the other Marlboro ads which erase human subjects play down gender identity and one might read this as a decentering of gender identity in contemporary society, as a disassociation between the product and gender, as a bracketing of the centrality of gender in the constitution of identity.

The appeal here is directly to use-value, to the pleasure and flavor that the cigarette produces rather than the sign value of masculinity, or the appeal to power.

Moreover, this text works to get the reader to identify with the product and to produce a pleasurable feeling from the feat of producing meaning, from reading the ambiguous text, that is presumably then transferred to and associated with the product, so that the image of Marlboro is associated with free choice and creativity. And yet the highly paid cultural interpreters who work for advertising agencies are hedging their bets concerning the Marlboro ads of recent years. For the 1990s has seen a return of the previous realist ads which center on the old Marlboro cowboy, along with production of a new type of ad just analyzed, as well as a new series of pure nature imagery.

In the 1990s, Marlboro has returned to recycling old images, especially of the famous cowboy and nature. The December 11-17, 1993 *TV Guide* back-cover ad, for instance, features the cowboy riding a horse, followed by another horse which he has roped and is leading through a snowy field. The white snow is blowing behind the cowboy deploying the images of nature. Thus, the image combines power and control with images of nature, implying that if you want to be a natural man and in control, smoke a Marlboro. Curiously, however, although the corporate insignia "Marlboro" is featured in bright red script there is no pack of cigarettes, or even a single cigarette, shown, nor is the cowboy, pictured hard at work, smoking. It is if Marlboro is embarrassed by their product and can only sell the qualities of nature and masculinity - and death, as the Surgeon General's warning, boldly emblazoned in a letter box in the bottom right-hand corner notes.

The multiplicity of strategies in cigarette ads show that the advertising agencies of contemporary capitalism are not at all sure as to what will attract consumers to their products, or with what images consumers identify. For, as I have been arguing, one of the features of contemporary culture is precisely the fragmentation, transitoriness, and multiplicity of images, which refuse to crystallize into a stable image culture. Thus, the advertising and cultural industries draw on modern and postmodern strategies, and on traditional, modern, and postmodern themes and iconography.

SITUATING THE POSTMODERN

In a sense, it is undecidable whether contemporary image culture and forms of identity should be described as modern or postmodern. The multiplicity of types of Marlboro ads currently circulating helps put into question claims concerning a radical postmodern rupture with modern culture and that postmodernism is a new cultural dominant. For the current Marlboro ads draw on traditional, modernist, and postmodern image production and aesthetic strategies, while deploying a variety of traditional and contemporary ideological appeals as well. Rather than taking postmodernity as a new cultural totality, I would thus argue that it makes more sense to interpret the many facets of the postmodern as an emergent cultural trend in contrast to residual traditional values and practices still operative and a dominant capitalist ¹ternity deft ¹ as the project of the hegemony of capital whereby

commitment, responsibility, and so on, or one might want to reconstruct these concepts, as, for instance, Habermas has attempted to do with rationality. In any case, identity continues to be the problem it was throughout modernity, though it has been problematized anew in the current orgy of commodification, fragmentation, image production, and societal, political, and cultural transformation that is the work of consumer capitalism.

Indeed, the quest for identity is arguably more intense than ever in the present moment. There has been something of a rebellion against producing identity solely as an individual achievement in the contemporary era, with increased emphasis on tribal, national, group, and other forms of collective identity. In many parts of the world, there has been a return to tribalism, to past forms of collective identities — national, religious, or ethnic — and one finds parallel projects in so-called identity politics whereby individuals gain identity through membership in groups and affirmation of a collective identity (i.e. as a woman, a black, a gay, or some combination thereof).

Yet the quest for individuality and particularity in one's look, image, style, and life continues apace. Media figures like Michael Jackson and Madonna show that identity is a construct, that it can be constantly changed and refined and fine-tuned, that identity is a question of image, style, and looks. Michael Jackson, for instance, crosses the boundary between black and white, male and female, adult and youth in his image constructions. In some of his music videos, he appears black, in others white and in yet others indeterminate; sometimes he appears highly masculine, sometimes more feminine, sometimes androgenous. At times, he appears as an adult, firmly in control of his career as King of Pop, and other times he appears as a youth, as a lover of children who is more comfortable with kids and being a kid than with adults.¹⁴

The point is that many icons of media culture suggest that identity is a matter of individual choice and action and that each individual can produce their own unique identity. In any case, the issue of identity is more pressing and contested than ever before in contemporary societies. Against the globalization of culture, there are intense struggles to preserve and enhance national identities; against the forced identities of modern nationhood (often a product of imperialism), individuals and groups are constructing identities in terms of religion, ethnicity, and region against former national identities; against all collective identities, other individuals are attempting to construct their own personal identities, which often are, however, highly mediated by collective forces.

Personal identity is thus fraught with contradictions and tensions. Many individuals, for often different reasons, are indifferent to national or other collective identities and wish to construct their identities through their own lifestyles, looks, and image. Others fervently embrace identity politics and construct their identities, their deepest sense of who they are, by affirming their membership in various groups or collectivities (i.e. women, blacks, gays, or whatever). Some have labelled this form of identity politics "postmodern," but interest group politics and even

gaining identity through political and group affiliation is also a modern phenomenon.

And so we are left with the question: Is the current construction of identity distinctly postmodern, and has a fundamental shift in the construction of identity taken place? If so, are we living in a completely new epoch, a postmodernity? I would argue that it is equally arbitrary and open to debate as to whether one posits that we are in a situation of late modernity or a new postmodernity, or whether one posits identity as primarily modern or postmodern. Either could be argued. The features that I have ascribed to postmodern identity could be read as an intensification of features already present in modernity, or as a new configuration with new emphases that one could describe as "postmodern." In fact, concepts and terms, like identity itself, are social constructs, arbitrary notions which serve to mark and call attention to certain phenomena and which fulfill certain analytical or classificatory tasks. So the debate over the postmodern is largely a debate over what terminology we should use to describe the contemporary socio-cultural matrix. If the terminology illuminates shifts in contemporary culture, it is useful. If it covers over phenomena like the continuing role of capitalism in constructing contemporary societies and identities, then it is harmful.

Likewise, it is an open question as to whether one wants to keep using the category of the subject in cultural theory and elsewhere. The concept of the subject has been shown to be socially constructed and the notion of an unified, coherent, and essential subject illusory.¹⁵ Rather than constructing something like a subject, or interpellating individuals to identify themselves as subjects, media culture tends to construct identities and subject positions, inviting individuals to identify with very specific figures, images, or positions, such as the Marlboro man, the Virginia Slims woman, a soap opera mother, or a Madonna.

Yet postmodern claims concerning the complete dissolution of the subject in contemporary culture seem exaggerated. Rather, it seems that media culture continues to provide images, discourses, narratives, and spectacles that produce pleasures, identities, and subject positions that people appropriate. Media culture provides images of proper role models, proper gender behavior, and images of appropriate style, look, and image for contemporary individuals. Media culture thus provides resources for identity and new modes of identity in which look, style, and image replaces such things as action and commitment as constituents of identity, of who one is. Once upon a time, it was who you were, what you did, what kind of a person you were — your moral, political, and existential choices and commitments, which constituted individual identity. But today it is how you look, your image, your style, and how you appear that constitutes identity. And it is media culture that more and more provides the materials and resources to constitute identities.

And so "Strike a pose! Vogue!" as Madonna orders. The advantage of this shift in the constitution of identity is that postmodern identities suggest that one can change, that one can remake oneself, that one can free oneself from whatever traps and restrictions one finds oneself ensconced in. The disadvantage is that identity becomes flattened out and trivialized in terms of style, look, and consumption in

which one is defined by one's image, possessions, and lifestyle. One's identity is a construct, constituted out of the materials of one's life-situation and one can change and transform one's life according to one's projects, as Sartre, Foucault, and others remind us. But constituting a substantial identity is work which requires will, action, commitment, intelligence, and creativity, and many of the postmodern identities constructed out of media and consumer culture lack these features, being little more than a game someone plays, a pose, a style and look that one can dispose of tomorrow for a new look and image: disposable and easily replaceable identities for the postmodern carnival.

Even weirder are some of the mutations of identity in computer culture. Many people who join MUDDS – Multi-User Dimension real-time discussion sites on computers – take on identities of members of the opposite sex – or of different races, classes, professions, or whatever. Some players in MUD games take on multiple personalities and play out different roles and identities in their computer interactions. In MUDs, Sherry Turkle notes, "the self is not only decentered but multiplied without limit" (cited in David 1994: 44). Turkle also noted in a 1994 conference that the drastic rise in the number of patients diagnosed with multiple-personality disorders might be correlated with computer and other role-playing games, though she also defined health as "a fluidity of access to different selves" and suggested that computer role-playing might also serve as a form of self-therapy (David 1994: 44).

We will explore further transmutations of identity in contemporary society in the theories of Jean Baudrillard and cyberpunk fiction in Chapter 9. But first let us examine Madonna as a celebrity and identity-machine for the end of the millennium. Continuing our probing of contemporary culture, politics, and identity, and the proper terminology to describe our present moment, we shall accordingly turn next to interrogation of the Madonna phenomenon which is deeply connected with the problematics sketched out in this chapter.

NOTES

- 1 On identity in modernity, see Berman 1982 and the essays collected in Lash and Friedman 1992. On the discourses of modernity, see Antonio and Keller, forthcoming. I am interpreting modernity here as an epoch of rapid change, innovation, and negation of the old and creation of the new, a process bound up with industrial capitalism, the democratic revolutions, urbanization, and social and cultural differentiation. Following the conventions of modern social theory, I am assuming a distinction between modern and premodern societies, but it should be kept in mind that such distinctions are ideal types that highlight certain features of a social order, while sometimes covering over similarities and continuities.
- 2 On the Frankfurt School analysis of the decline of individuality, see Kellner 1989a. On the dissolution of identity in postmodernity, see Baudrillard 1983a, 1983b, 1983c; Janeson 1983, 1984, 1991; and other texts that I discuss below.
- 3 For some other attempts to analyze postmodernism and popular culture, see the articles in *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1986) and Vol. 10, No. 2 (1986);

Screen Vol. 28, No. 2 (1987); Kaplan 1987; Ross 1988; Connor 1989, with bibliography: 263ff.; and Hutcheon 1989: 107f.

4 On modernism in the arts, see the discussion in Chapter 4. I am using the term "modernism" here to denote a series of artistic practices that attempt to produce innovation in the arts in form, style, and content, which begin with Baudelaire in the mid-nineteenth century and continue through Madonna.

5 This antihierarchic position was argued earlier by Sontag 1969 and Barthes 1975. Audiences and critics immediately took to the series use of rock music soundtrack. One early review noted:

Throbbing with rock-and-rhythmic camera work, the weekly dramas in the vanguard of network series that have begun to move to a name-brand beat, its detective heroes dress to Devo, cruise to Phil Collins and fight crime to the Rolling Stones. As executive producer Michael Mann observes, 'Miami Vice and MTV are really first cousins.' Adds composer James Di Pasquale: 'There is no question that the marriage of television and rock is getting more romantic.'

(*People*, October 29, 1984)

And:

The most striking aspect of 'Miami Vice' is its use of music. In most television programs music is employed to emphasize the action on the screen, to highlight tension, for example, or underscore sadness. But 'Miami Vice' takes rock-and-roll selections by popular performers, such as the Rolling Stones and Phil Collins, as well as more obscure works by Jamaican Rastafarian reggae groups, and combines them with closely edited film montages to create music videos similar to those shown on MTV Music Television, the round-the-clock rock-music cable channel.

(*The New York Times*, January 3, 1985)

7 I hesitate to use the term "subject positions" since I do not believe that things like "subjects" exist, that the notion of the subject is purely ideological and a socially constructed fiction. Yet media culture does produce positions through which audiences are invited or induced to identify with, thus I use the term "subject positions" in this sense to describe identities, roles, looks, or images established by media models and discourse.

8 This double-coded identity for the vice cops fooled Gittlin (1987) who claims that "the viewer has to take for granted that two Miami cops (1985 take-home pay: \$429 a week) can blithely afford the latest and flashiest in cars and clothes" (1987: 152) and that the cops exhibit "traces of outlawry" (ibid.: 153). He misses here the recurrent plot line that they have been assigned undercover identities as "players" in the drug scene – a plot device made explicit in the pilot (available for video-cassette rental) and in many episodes of the series.

9 For further examples of some progressive political messages on the series, see Best and Kellner 1987.

10 The method of reading ads and the interpretation of advertising which follows is indebted to the work of Robert Goldman (1992) and his collaborative work with Steve Pappson (forthcoming).

11 The tobacco leaf is (for insects) one of the most sweet and tasty of all plants – which requires a large amount of pesticides to keep insects from devouring it. Cigarette makers use chemicals to produce a distinctive smell and taste to the product and use preservatives to keep it from spoiling. Other chemicals are used to regulate the burning process and to filter out tars and nicotine. While these latter products are the most publicized dangers in cigarette smoking, actually the pesticides, chemicals and preservatives may well be more deadly. Scandalously, cigarettes are one of the most unregulated products

in the U.S. consumer economy (European countries, for example, carefully regulate the pesticides used in tobacco growing and the synthetics used in cigarette production).

Government sponsored experiments on the effects of cigarette smoking use generic cigarettes which may not have the chemicals and preservatives of name brands, thus no really scientifically accurate major survey on the dangers of cigarette smoking has ever been done by the U.S. government. The mainstream media, many of whom are part of conglomerates who have heavy interests in the tobacco industry, or who depend on cigarette advertising for revenue, have never really undertaken to expose to the public the real dangers concerned with cigarette smoking and the scandalous neglect of this issue by government and media in the United States. Cigarette addiction is thus a useful object lesson in the unperceived dangers and destructive elements of the consumer society and the ways these dangers are covered over. (My own information on the cigarette industry derives from an "Alternative Views" television interview which Frank Morrow and I did with Bill Drake on the research which will constitute his forthcoming book on the dangers of tobacco.)

- 12 Michael Schudson (1984) summarizes the literature and studies which put in question the effectiveness of advertising campaigns in actually getting consumers to buy their products; in fact, advertising's functions in promoting style, models and images of identification, and various ideologies is more interesting to cultural studies which should see advertising as an important and powerful legislator of style, fashion, and identity.
- 13 The distinction between residual, emergent, and dominant culture comes from Raymond Williams (1977).
- 14 In 1993, there were widespread accusations that Jackson regularly sexually molested young boys, that he was a pedophile whose house was a lure for young boys, whose parents he often paid to let them "visit" him and spend the night. Interpreting some of Jackson's music videos in this context suggests that the lyrics of many of his most popular songs can be read as legitimations of pedophilia which are addressed to young boy lovers. I do not know if Jackson is guilty of child molestation, but it is clear that the extensive media coverage of the charges, supported by former employees in his mansion and one of his own sisters, has produced an image of Jackson as pedophile, as child molester. He who lives by the media and its images dies by it as well. And yet media resurrection is also possible. In the summer of 1994, Jackson married Elvis Presley's daughter, positioning himself as responsible adult, as husband, and as part of the lineage of the King of Pop, a role that he has long sought. Media culture is thus a question of image, of the production and fine-tuning of images and of the attempt to erase negative images when they appear.
- 15 During the 1970s, contributors to *Screen* magazine polemicized against essentialist conceptions of an unified subject, following French post-structuralism, and argued – following Althusser's theory of ideology – that the cinema constructed illusory individual subjects, "interpellating" individuals to see themselves as subjects. This too is probably an illusion, for it makes more sense to see media culture as "interpellating" individuals to construct specific identities, to identify with specific subject positions, rather than with some occult "subject." In fact, the concept of the subject is highly abstract and can often be usefully replaced by cognate terms such as identities, subject-positions, ways of seeing, discourse positions, and the like.