

B> Be greater than.

by

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ABSTRACT

The written portion of this thesis is designed to accompany the visual portion of this thesis as a didactic product catalog. The written portion of this thesis links consumer experiences to the upholding of a hierarchical definition of human identity that promotes the exceptionalism of specific human individuals over nature (as a broad category and property of things) in order to justify its exploitation.

Citing Foucault's writings on biopower, the early development of the scientific method, the development of consumer culture during the turn of the 20th century, and contemporary examples of consumer culture, I will argue that global consumerism is effective in promoting human exceptionalism at the expense of widespread exploitation (of animals, vegetables, and minerals) because it separates production from consumption and therefore allows products to take on ideological, identity building characteristics that have nothing to with the actual properties of the products.

I will conclude that the concept of nature is an ideological tool used to justify the exploitation of everything 'other' by specific privileged human individuals and will cite contemporary artists in order to argue that because contemporary consumer culture is the visual culture of the status quo art can be an effective critical tool in counteracting the ideological effects of contemporary consumer/producer culture.

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B> Be greater than Brand Identity



Be greater than.[©]

Be greater than nature. Be greater than human. Be greater than ever.

B> designs innovative lifestyle products that improve the lives of people everywhere by allowing them to transcend everyday life and reclaim their inner greatness.

B> was founded in 2013 by artist and designer Christopher Mollusk in a community center studio in Boise, ID. Two years later **B>** offers a line of 4 lifestyle products for everyday greatness ranging from simple and elegant self-improvement accessories, innovative mobile connectivity devices, tools for conflict resolution, and commemorative figurines that celebrate everyday greatness. **B>**'s line of innovative accessories for greatness allow you to transcend everyday life and be greater than ever.[>]

Hi from Christopher Mollusk

Dear friends and customers,

The **B>** brand, which I started with the launch of the Matter Meter: Wave in 2013, is now attached to 4 lifestyle products available to millions of customers from all over the world. I believe it is an extremely valuable brand that can promote a successful lifestyle for all involved with it.

Therefore, we have created this catalog. Like any other catalog, its objective is to help people who wish to purchase our products to understand their origin, their values, and the best ways of getting the most out of them.

Clearly the Matter Meter: Wave was the first **B>** product and the flagship of our brand, and our three younger products have further articulated the **B>** lifestyle. However, this is the story of the entire **B>** brand and it identifies the common themes among all **B>** products.®

While walking from Boise State University to a local community center studio, I encountered a sweet gum fruit and it became the seed of **B>**—the original Treasure Valley Startup. This sweet gum fruit is the symbol of the **B>** mission to design products inspired by nature that allow customers to transcend everyday life and reclaim their inner greatness.

Working with limited resources, I created a series of products—starting with the Matter Meter: Wave—sometimes using the Mollusk family oven to put on finishing touches. My efforts impressed the Cfile Foundation, one of **B>**'s early supporters, and set the course for a legacy of innovation and leadership.^{@2}

Take care and enjoy.

Christopher Mollusk

Boise

May 2015



#Sweetgumfruit©



Figure 1 #Sweetgumfruit© Commemorative figurine and tea ball

Commemorate success and celebrate greatness with the #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball. A **B>** product. Be greater than nature. †©

Connect with Nature™ like never before with a #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball. The #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball is modeled after the sweet gum fruit, the seed of the **B>** brand, and is designed to bring out your inner greatness. Simply steep your #Sweetgumfruit© figurine in your #Sweetgumfruit© teacup to open up your true nature and watch your inner greatness come to life. Customize and strengthen your #Sweetgumfruit© tea to crush your competition. #Sweetgumfruit© figurines store information as you drink, making you your very own, one-of-a-kind creation. †>

#fete ©hampetre



Figure 2 #Sweetgumfruit© #fete ©hampetre. **Greatness without limits.**

Molly Jensen discovers greatness without limits.

Molly Jensen has thrown masterful pots, risen to the top of the New York art scene, and fallen madly in love with entrepreneur Christopher Mollusk. When Christopher was murdered by friend and corrupt business partner Carl Bruner over a shady business deal, he was left to roam the earth as a powerless spirit. When he learned of Carl's betrayal, Christopher sought the help of Molly and the #Sweetgumfruit©

commemorative figurine and tea ball to set things right. With her past successes and the #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball in hand, Jensen solved the mysteries of nature and saved her powerless spirit of a man. †@

Long before she led Christopher to the afterlife, Jensen felt that behind every journey was the potential to discover something new about herself and the world. She believes that more and more with every sip of #Sweetgumfruit© tea. “I love to drink #Sweetgumfruit© tea. You never know who you’ll meet, and how that might change you,” she says. “The #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball has allowed me to become a more adventurous and spontaneous person. And I’m just getting started.”

†>2

FAQ: #Sweetgumfruit© #fete ©hampetre

How does the #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball work?

The #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball is the product of **B>**'s proprietary method of the interrogation of Nature™. Through this process of interrogation, the essential qualities of Nature™ are distilled into each #Sweetgumfruit© figurine and tea ball. You can infuse yourself with these essential qualities by contemplating the #Sweetgumfruit© figurine or by steeping a cup of #Sweetgumfruit© tea in a #Sweetgumfruit© teacup. †

Can I make my own #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball?

All **B>** products are open-source and can be recreated for non-commercial use. Any revision, variations, or designs inspired by **B>** products are for personal use only and are the exclusive property of **B>**. †2

What is Nature™ and why should I want to connect with it?

Nature™ is **B>**'s proprietary category of commodities. Nature™ may be applied to anything, as it exists in its normal state (animal, vegetable, mineral and beyond). **B>** honors a rich history of innovators such as Francis Bacon, the inventor of the scientific method, with its proprietary application of Nature™. Bacon believed that reconnecting with Nature™ through the scientific method would allow people to reclaim their place in

Eden. **B>** carries on this legacy by dominating Nature™ and harnessing its properties to develop new products that bring out the inner greatness of people everywhere. †³

What is a #fete ©hampetre?

A #fete ©hampetre is a French term for a pastoral festival. Historically, the #fete ©hampetre was a genre of oil paintings by artist such a Giorgione. The #fete ©hampetre genre of painting is the artistic interpretation of Francis Bacon's understanding of nature, which is at the heart of each **B>** product. **B>**'s #fete ©hampetre is a homage to these masterful artists, Francis Bacon's legacy, and the inspiring story of **B>** customer Molly Jensen. A **B>** #fete ©hampetre is the ideal way to contemplate the #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball, and enjoy a cup of #Sweetgumfruit© tea in your #Sweetgumfruit© teacup. †[@]

† Health and Safety

†> Terms of Use

The #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball product description is appropriated from the product description for the Amiibo figurines produced and marketed by Nintendo.¹ Amiibo is a range of well-crafted figurines that represent Nintendo's classic videogame characters and are embedded with an NFC chip with read/write memory. Amiibo figurines collect data when played with, developing into unique consumer avatars when activated in Nintendo videogames. The ability of the Amiibo figurine to produce a user avatar through the conquering of other figurines is an articulation of the ideal Kantian subject. It allows children everywhere to achieve the Disembodiment Fantasy™ as the ideal subject.²

The Amiibo product description has been appropriated and modified for exclusive use with the **B>** #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball in order to commemorate the early development of the scientific method as a means of interrogating nature for information. Francis Bacon developed this trademark of the scientific method in collaboration with his Patron, James I, through the proprietary blending of witch trial

1 Amazon.com, inc. "Mario Amiibo" Accessed January 7, 2015. http://www.amazon.com/Mario-amiibo-nintendo-wii-u/dp/B00N4ABMG4/ref=sr_1_2?s=videogames&ie=UTF8&qid=1420655606&sr=1-2&keywords=amiibo

2 Lang, Karen. Reason and remainders : Kantian performativity in the history of art, Amelia Jones, and Andrew Stephenson. Performing the body/performing the text. (London: Routledge, 1999) 11-28.

interrogation and torture³ techniques with the process of the male mind bedding female nature.⁴

The **B>** #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball employs a similar proprietary manufacturing process in which the standpoint of the Disembodiment Fantasy™ is assumed by **B>**'s lead artisan, designer, and founder, Christopher Mollusk, as a process of interrogating Nature™ and distilling its essence into each **B>** #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball for the Disembodiment Fantasy™ fulfillment of customers as it conforms to the **B>** terms of use.

B> does not endorse the use of violence or interrogation techniques on human individuals except where permissible or unenforced by law. The interrogation and exploitation of objects, resources, phenomena, and animals as permissible and unenforced by law, and as it applies to the proprietary standpoints and categories of the Disembodiment Fantasy™ and Nature™, are the exclusive rights of the **B>** brand and company. All data, technological advances, and value (capital or otherwise) that result are the sole property of the **B>** brand and company, and will be invested in the further realization of the Disembodiment Fantasy™.

3 Merchant, Carolyn. 2006. "The Scientific Revolution and the Death of Nature", 518.

4 Bacon, Francis, Lisa Jardine, and Michael Silverthorne. 2000. *The new organon*. Cambridge [U.K.]: Cambridge University Press, 20-21.

†>2 Terms of Use (continued)

The story of **B>** customer Molly Jenkins was appropriated from Apple's *What is your verse?* iPad Air advertisement campaign,⁵ which tells the story of a woman from Boise, Idaho who is deaf, but can travel the world thanks to her iPad. This advertisement and campaign has been appropriated for the #Sweetgumfruit© figurine and tea ball #fete ©h@mpetre lifestyle advertisement due to its employment of an advertising style consistent with the packaging of interrogation and confession as empowering rather than exploitative. While the tradition of speaking truth to power is a popular form of resistance, French philosopher Michel Foucault believed that it was derived from a cultural tradition of interrogation and confession in the West.⁶

Michel Foucault believed that traditions of interrogation and confession derived from pastoral power are now perceived as empowering to the confessor but often result in reinforcing the power of the interrogator. The ability to make interrogation appear empowering is a property of the Disembodiment Fantasy™ and empowers **B>**'s founder Christopher Mollusk to design products from Nature™ for the Disembodiment Fantasy™ fulfillment of people everywhere.

5 Apple Inc., "Cherie King explores a world without limits." Accessed January 13, 2015. <http://www.apple.com/your-verse/exploring-without-limits>.

6 Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The history of sexuality*. New York: Pantheon Books, 59.

† Health and Safety

This project began with the seemingly simple question “What is nature?”. I asked this question of myself and my research because of my own anxiety about global warming and ecological degradation. I wanted to better understand why an issue that seems crucial to the wellbeing of everyone could be so politically controversial and offensive to so many people. As I carried out my research, I began to suspect I was asking the wrong question. This is because nature is not a fixed thing. It is a residue of ideas, encoded in images, language, and categories. Therefore, if I were asked “what is nature?” I would be more likely to be confronted with more questions or opinions than answers. For example, I could respond that it is the natural state of an entity or system free from outside manipulations or interference. But then, I have to define what an internal (or natural) force is and what is not. Or I could respond with more questions such as...“Do you mean what is the nature of a specific thing? What is nature and what is not?”. While these questions can be answered clearly and with specificity, I would be hard pressed to defend my response as anything other than opinion established according to relatively arbitrary criteria. For example, I could say that a carved walking stick is not natural because it has been intentionally modified by human labor, while the tree it came from is unadulterated nature. But this definition could be infinitely adjusted on a sliding scale to include or exclude any number of bodies, labor processes, or levels of removal from the original body to product.

While it is difficult to settle on one definition of nature, there is a clear historical narrative that illustrates the concrete implementation of an ideology of nature. The **B>** brand, catalog, and products are an expression of this history pieced together using Neil

Smith's ideology of nature and Michel Foucault's definition of biopower as a framework for understanding how this historical narrative has defined the relationship between human identity and the category of nature. By fleshing out this history of relations with the ideas of Francis Bacon, Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and articulating it through the language of contemporary consumer culture, I am illustrating the contemporary function of nature. Nature is a broad form of exploitative othering. It is a word used to divide bodies into categories, as well as, to define and limit their essential qualities. This exploitative category of nature is an ideology that is deeply embedded in human identity and the relations it defines, facilitates, and limits.

In *Uneven Development*, Neil Smith outlines a dualistic ideology of nature that both justifies the domination of nature and romanticizes it. The hostility of external nature justifies its domination, while the spiritual morality of universal nature provides a model for social behavior.⁷ This dualistic understanding of nature can be invoked for the exploitation of resources as it was by Bacon in the *New Organon*, while at the same time justifying hierarchical and exploitative social relations through the naturalization of moral law, social roles, and the institutions that regulate them. Put into a contemporary context, Smith's dualistic ideology of nature can justify the continued exploitation of resources in the face of catastrophic environmental degradation and ecological collapse, and can also naturalize capitalism as an ecological system, rather than a legislated and historically specific reality. It is this ability of the ideology of nature to both justify the exploitation of nature, while also legitimizing (naturalizing) new social institutions and identities that result in exploitation, which gives it power.

⁷ Smith, Neil. 1984. *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*, Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press

†2 Health and Safety (continued)

In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault describes the tradition of pastoral power in Europe and its rituals of interrogation and confession. He presents historical evidence that the act of confession has been used as a means of consolidating power since the spread of Christianity in Europe. Foucault argues that the contemporary notion of speaking truth to power as a form of resistance is actually a confession that strengthens the power of the status quo. Foucault sites the proliferation of a discourse and science of human sexuality to prove that far from being sexually repressed, “Western man has become a confessing animal.”⁸ By doing so, he also links this characteristic of power to the historical recognition of humans as an animal species. Therefore, confession, or speaking truth to power, has become a tool for those in power to understand the needs of its subjects in relation to the larger milieu of resources and space (nature). As the focus of power has shifted to insure the ideal state of the overall milieu, it has relied more on the knowledge gained from each individual’s pursuit of subsistence, and, as a result, become increasingly self-regulated. Foucault called this new relation biopower.

In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault outlines the function of pastoral power and its integration into biopower. Pastoral power differs from other forms of power in that the shepherd acts as an intermediary for a universal law that governs every sheep for the good of the whole. It is a form of power that requires complete subordination of the sheep to the shepherd, and which is always ongoing for its own sake, rather than toward a specific end. These properties have been absorbed by the relations of biopower in the form of a collective (but pluralistic) transcendental goal that is

⁸ Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The history of sexuality*. New York: Pantheon Books, 59.

impossible to achieve. The gaze of every individual focuses on the bright light of transcendence. It promises everything, but in its brightness it blinds the individual, alluding form, content, and meaning. In doing so, transcendence is imbued with the desires of the individual and saturates their gaze with impossible fantasies, compelling them to labor towards a “better” tomorrow.

Biopower is a form of power that re-invents the individual through analytic identification, subjection of every individual to every individual, and subjectification through the compulsory extraction of truth.⁹ Foucault concluded that the goal of counter-conduct within the system of biopower is the freedom of truth for all. Therefore, counter-conduct actually acts to reinforce power because the goal of power is to establish ideal norms within a population through a process of interrogation and confession.

The combination of the ideology of nature and biopower presents a schematic of the contemporary relationship between human identity and the category of nature. In this model of relations, the individual human identity is imbued with the spiritual morality of universal nature, while the external world in which the individual exists is viewed as ethically exploitable nature. Since the idea of universal nature is naturalizing and establishes norms of behavior, the actions of each individual become self-regulating. Therefore, the individual’s pursuit of subsistence and desire solidifies and limits the individual’s roll into a specific hierarchy of labor and social relations. At the same time that each individual’s identity is naturalized, they also become ethically exploitable external nature to every other individual, as long as it conforms to their prescribed social position and the policing of the circulation of commodities. In this way, Smith’s

⁹ Foucault, Michel, Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana. 2007. *Security, territory, population: lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 184.

ideology of nature outlines nature's othering and exploitative function, while Foucault's biopower reveals the insidiousness of the power relationships naturalized, due to power's ability to adapt and absorb the new identities of any resisting subjects. What this implies about contemporary social relations is that the polarization of politics (democrat, republican, green party, libertarian, etc., and the issues backed by each), which plays an overinflated role in establishing individual identities, is not a fight for a fundamental shift in modes of relation. Rather, it is a jockeying for hierarchical positioning and power through the naturalization of self-regulating identities centered on the same fundamental modes of relation (reason, nature and capitalism). In a word, it is democracy. The politics of democracy, regardless of what one's priorities are, reinforce the naturalized identities of each individual, while also providing one with a series of moral codes and transcendental projects at which to direct one's labor and desires.

†3 Health and Safety (continued)

A specific western history of the conceptualization of the human mind as disembodied is required in order for the ideology of nature's duality (universal/external) to function. This is because the ideology of nature relies on each individual's ability to conceptualize one's surroundings as external and one's body as separate from one's mind.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno present the argument that the uplifting of reason during the enlightenment rather than dispelling mysticism resulted in the establishment of new mythologies. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the disruption of previous power structures centered on the church, and displaced by reason and the immanence of the individual, did not dispel the mythologies of the church. Rather the power of the old mythologies of the church were re-centered on the mind of the individual and their ability to reason.

The single distinction between man's own existence and reality swallows up all others...in the face of the unity of such reason, the distinction between god and man is reduced to irrelevance.¹⁰

Bacon's *New Organon* is a clear example of the re-centering of church mythologies within the individual. The project of reclaiming Eden through the interrogation of nature required a conceptualization of the mind as attached to a divine nature (a soul) and limited by the senses of the body. In order for the true potential of reason to be harnessed, the *New Organon* requires that the mind distance itself from the body through the recognition of the body's natural limitations, and embrace the

¹⁰ Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor W. Adorno. 1972. *Dialectic of enlightenment*. [New York]: Herder and Herder, 5.

superiority and limitlessness of the mind's ability to understand and manipulate nature through a system of symbols, representations, and information.

The relation between the mind and the body described by Kant and Bacon is one of disembodiment, in which the mind becomes the soul. The mind, now untethered from the top down hierarchy of the church, becomes its own master and, as Horkheimer and Adorno suggest, each soul becomes its own god. This is the disembodiment fantasy. When placed into the context of relations with the other as guided by the ideology of nature, the disembodiment fantasy is the prerequisite identity of the contemporary consumer/producer. An identity that is perpetually negated through the production of the fantasies and desires of others, perpetually rearticulated through the consumption of its own fantasies and desires, and made possible through the literal and conceptual separation of the production and consumption of nature.

†© Copyright

The #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball is a well-crafted porcelain figurine sculpted in the likeness of a sweetgum fruit. A sweetgum fruit is a brown spiky seed pod that grows on the sweetgum tree, which is commonly used in landscaping. Since the sweet gum fruit is considered a pest once it drops from its tree, the tree has been cultivated to grow fruitless, making it a candidate for the perfect landscaping tree.¹¹ The #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball (the fruit can be used to make medicinal tea) is a tiny monument of manufactured nostalgia for a pest that is being bread out of existence in the name of a greater good. By visually interrogating and isolating the sweetgum fruit, I am reenacting my own version of Francis

¹¹ The University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, "Sweetgum, Seedless" Accessed January 10, 2015. <http://www.uaex.edu/yard-garden/resource-library/plant-week/fruitless-sweetgum.aspx>.

Bacon's *New Organon*, with all of its embedded violence. What results is similar to the displaying of specimens in 17th century curiosity cabinets and illustrations of Robert Hooke. The #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball is a representation of romanticized nature, isolated, simplified, and aestheticized for maximum pleasure, benefit, and value.

Like any figurine, the #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball makes a proposition that the relatively functionless material entity (figurine) is valuable because of its ability to stand in for something absent, but desired and meaningful. Whereas the sweetgum fruit is being bred out of existence because it creates ecologically obsolete piles of waste that have been deemed a nuisance to the residential and commercial landscape. The figurine, despite its generation of significantly more hazardous piles of waste, flourishes as a consumer product because of its ability to build identity, support fantasy, and generate value. In this way the figurine is a representation of human identity as a disembodiment fantasy in relation to the category of nature, and questions why a thing does, or does not, have the right to exist. The figurines of Takashi Murakami are a similar critique of the identity building properties of tchotchkes.



Figure 3 *Superflat Museum, Takashi Murakami.*

Takashi Murakami appropriates the language of Japanese consumer culture in order to produce his own series of figurines, happy illustration, and animations at his Hiropon art factory. These works are produced as a broad range of products for a range of budgets. Small-scale figurines of his character *Mr. Dob* can be purchased alongside typical toy store figurines and action figures at the same MSRP (manufacturer's suggested retail price), while large scale statues of the same characters sell for upwards of \$1.8 million. Murakami views his work as a critical articulation of Japanese consumer culture and the western art market, yet his work functions within the value system of both. Murakami's work is designed to both reflect and redirect the value of consumer products by generating value at all levels (high and low) through variations of the same products. He has coined the "ism" Super-Flat to describe this strategy. Murakami describes Super-Flat as "the moment when...you merge a number of distinct layers into one" in an attempt to understand the totality of history, culture, and identity.¹²

The Super-Flat aesthetic combines the compositional strategies developed by the "eccentric" tradition of Japanese painters and contemporary Japanese popular culture. The "eccentric" painters specialized in flat compositions that guide the eye across a two-dimensional plane with the gestural movement of landscapes and atmospheric phenomena (trees, mountains, and mist), placing visual focus on the grotesque details of figures, plants, and animals. This compositional strategy inspired Japanese animators in the 1970s, allowing them to overcome the limiting frame counts and deadlines of animated television series.¹³ Animators translated the flat static landscapes, tendrils of mist and trees of Japanese painting into explosions, smoke, and amorphous bodies across

12 Murakami, Takashi. *Super flat*. (Tokyo: MADRA Pub. Co.) 2000, 6-9.

13 Murakami, Takashi. *Super flat*. (Tokyo: MADRA Pub. Co.) 2000, 13-14.

similarly flat and static, but decidedly more fantastical landscapes. This popularized and commodified aesthetic has developed into a series of mediums, genres, and products that range from saccharin illustration to erotic fantasies and hyper-violent dystopias. The obsessive fan base and superficial youth culture that these media and products have generated are the catalyst for the critical stance of the Super-Flat.

Super-Flat results from the conflicting definitions of Western art and Japanese art in post-World War II Japan. According to Murakami, the critical and “perverse” characteristics of avant-garde Western art were already present in “low” Japanese consumer culture when a hybrid Western/Japanese movement began. As a result, the artists in the Japanese avant-garde movement became highly integrated with Japanese consumer culture and were unable to gain acceptance in an art context. By founding the Super-Flat “ism,” Murakami has redirected the value system of the broader art market, generating support for the Japanese avant-garde.

Murakami’s work flattens the layers of a historical narrative in which Japanese art is made indistinguishable from entertainment and Japanese individuals from superficial identities. This flattened “expression of hopelessness” has generated absurd levels of value in the Western art market. The value of Murakami’s work in the West implicates the Western art market in the Super-Flattening of Japanese culture.

Murakami’s critique may appear hypocritical and fatalist, however his intention was never to resolve the ethical problems within the art market or consumer culture, rather Super-Flat is an attempt to visualize a completely Westernized Japan and understand his identity within it. It is a vision that he describe as “an expression of

hopelessness,”¹⁴ an expression of contemporary Japan, the potential future of globalized culture, and the production of “yet another super flat image: us.”¹⁵

While the **B>** brand and manual take a significantly different approach to cultural critique than Murakami’s Super-Flat, there are important aesthetic and conceptual similarities between the two. Like Murakami’s Super-Flat, the **B>** brand, catalog, and products are an articulation of the Western historical narrative of contemporary identity, visualized through the appropriating of its own visual language. Murakami has flattened the historical narrative of Japanese art, westernization, and consumer culture into a Super-Flat image of contemporary Japanese identity. **B>** flattens the historical narrative of the Western instrumentalization of the other (both object and subject), the separation of production from consumption (and the disembodiment fantasy that drives it) into an image of contemporary consumer/producer identity. Murakami’s figurines articulate the effect of a flattened and superficial culture on the identity of human bodies. The #Sweetgumfruit© commemorative figurine and tea ball articulates the question of what determines a body’s (animal, vegetable, or mineral) right to have an identity, or exist at all, when the concrete relationship between human identity and the category of nature is consumer culture.

14 Lewis, Ben, Takashi Murakami. 2005. *Art safari a series*. [New York]: Icarus Films Home Video.

15 Murakami, Takashi. *Super flat*. (Tokyo: MADRA Pub. Co.) 2000, 25.

†@ Privacy Policy



Figure 4 #Sweetgumfruit© figurine #fete ©h@mpetre Lifestyle Advertisement.

I have appropriated the cast of *Ghost* for the #fete ©h@mpetre lifestyle advertisement in order to illustrate the continued popular acceptance of the relations embedded in Francis Bacon’s *New Organon* and the fête champêtre genre of painting. In the movie *Ghost*, like in these historical sources, the world of natural bodies and phenomena is linked to the female gender, while the will, the soul, knowledge, and the ability to make ethical decisions and manipulations for the greater good are linked to the male gender.

Francis Bacon describes the gendered relationship between nature and disembodied consciousness in the *New Organon* as the mind bedding nature in order to birth profitable inventions. According to Bacon, this is the process through which “the relationship between the mind and nature could be wholly restored,” a relationship that

Bacon believed was severed when Adam and Eve were exiled from Eden.¹⁶ In developing a plan of work for repairing the severed relationship between man and nature, Bacon looked to the writings of his Patron, James I. He blended the language of James I's witch trial interrogations with the process of the male mind bedding female "nature confined and harassed...forced from its own condition by art and human agency, and pressured and moulded."¹⁷ The resulting method of inquiry, as interpreted by Carolyn Merchant in *The industrial Revolution and the Death of Nature*, is "The interrogation of witches as symbol of the interrogation of nature, the courtroom as model for its inquisition, and torture through mechanical devices as a tool of the subjugation of disorder..."¹⁸

Bacon's *New Organon* is the project of the creation of Eden on earth through the confinement and interrogation of nature. He uses the language of conquest and interrogation in his writings, linking the historical narrative of the conquest and subsequent romanticization of nature through science to the conquest and romanticization of the female gender by a disembodied (and detached) male gender. The *New Organon* and its integration into the mythology of the contemporary concept of the scientific method implicates the category of nature in the othering and exploitation of both human and non-human bodies.

16 Bacon, Francis, Lisa Jardine, and Michael Silverthorne. 2000. *The new organon*. Cambridge [U.K.]: Cambridge University Press, 2.

17 Bacon, Francis, Lisa Jardine, and Michael Silverthorne. 2000. *The new organon*. Cambridge [U.K.]: Cambridge University Press, 20-21.

18 Merchant, Carolyn. 2006. "The Scientific Revolution and the Death of Nature", 518.



Figure 5 Titian, 1509. *Le Concert champêtre*. Musée du Louvre.

The gendered and othering properties of nature have been historically depicted in the *fête champêtre* genre of painting. The Titian painting, titled *Le Concert champêtre*, depicts four figures gathered in a developed and cultivated pastoral landscape. Two clothed male figures sit in the center of the composition with their faces turned toward one another in conversation. The male figure to the left strums a stringed instrument. A nude female figure stands to the left side of the canvas gathering water from a stone basin while a second nude female figure sits slightly to the right of the male figures. The second female figure is turned away from the viewer and towards the male figures, holding a flute at the ready. The landscape stretches out behind them containing a shepherd and his herd to the middle right, full shaded trees across the center, and a house on a hilltop just above the heads of the male figures.

The interaction between the gaze of the two clothed male figures in relation to the two nude female figures in the landscape can be interpreted through the ideal Kantian subject interacting with his own reflection. In “Reason and remainders: Kantian performativity in the history of art,” Karen Lang writes,

For Kant, the performance of the subject is one of discovery rather than of struggle. What the subject discovers is his moral worth in the shape of his own reason. Highlighting reason over nature, and the domination of nature through reason, Kant describes the movement from nature to reason as one forever in the service of the idealized subject. In this sense, the discovery of moral law, or of ‘a life independent of all animality,’ might be termed a Kantian historical sign: a sign of progress, indicating that humankind is improving. Yet the idealized Kantian subject actually represents himself to himself in the form of his own domination. Considering the domination of nature by the subject in a favorable light, Kant views the movement from nature to reason as a story of progress.¹⁹

In strikingly similar language to Bacon, Kant proposes a model of relations that requires the domination of a female nature by male reason for a moralizing project of progress (in this case the idealized subject rather than Eden on earth). Lang proposes that this relationship has been integrated into art through the visual association of the female figure with a landscape that contains male figures discovering their “moral worth” through the recognition of their own reflection.²⁰

I see this same set of relations embedded in Titian’s *Le Concert champêtre*. The male figures, whose attention is focused solely on one another, sit clothed in symmetrical but mirrored poses suggesting that they are different aspects of the same individual. The two female figures stand and sit to either side of the male figures in their “natural” state. While the standing figure to the left gathers water presumably to be served to the other members of the fête, the figure to the right joins in the interaction between the two male figures. The difference in pose and relation of the two female figures could be interpreted as the two possible relationships to nature proposed by Kant and Bacon. The female figure standing to the left of the lavishly dressed male figure is the relation of

¹⁹ Lang, Karen. *Reason and remainders : Kantian performativity in the history of art*, Amelia Jones, and Andrew Stephenson. *Performing the body/performing the text*. (London: Routledge, 1999) 11-28.

²⁰ Lang, Reason and remainders: Kantian performativity in the history of art, 14.

dominated nature confined and interrogated into the service of the idealized male subject. The male figure to the right is the self-dominated reflection of the Kantian subject still tied to nature as equals (the female figure on the right).

The #Sweetgumfruit© figurine and tea ball #fete ©h@mpetre lifestyle advertisement imagines a deleted scene from the movie *Ghost* in which Sam (as Christopher Mollusk) and Molly enjoy one final fête champêtre before Mollusk ascends as the literally disembodied subject. This deleted scene turned advertisement ties together all of the ideological baggage of the movie's plot into one image and centers it on a scientific specimen turned consumer product (in the form of an unpleasant spikey ball). The two leads in *Ghost*, earthbound potter Molly Jenkins and disembodied banker Sam Wheat, fit neatly into the same gendered roles of Kant's ideal subject and Bacon's *New Organon*. Through the ark of the plot, Wheat literally engages with the earth through Jenkins in an iconic spectacle of erotic pottery. He also rights "moral law" and claims his identity as Kant's idealized subject by conquering his reflection (friend and morally corrupt banker Carl Bruner), an act that allows him to ascend to heaven. Jenkins, on the other hand, is left helplessly cornered in the love triangle conflict between Wheat and his flawed earthbound reflection. When the dust settles, Jenkins is left to herself on earth while Wheat, the ideal subject, presumably watches from heaven above.

b001ean m@<hete



Figure 6 **b001ean m@<hete**

Resolve conflict and rule in greatness with the b001ean m@<hete. A **B**> product. Be greater than one another. ♂⊙

The b001ean m@<hete conflict resolution tool is hands down our most popular accessory, made famous by its double edged blades that can be deployed with just one hand. When we redesigned it in 2014, we gave the new b001ean m@<hete porcelain handles and aluminum blades. Perfect for any job, adventure, or everyday conflict, the b001ean m@<hete is an international best-seller. ♂>

urb@n Jungle



Figure 7 b001ean m@<hete urb@n Jungle. A resolve for greatness.

Christopher Mollusk discovers a resolve for greatness.

20 years ago entrepreneur and aid worker Christopher Mollusk wandered into a small Washington town in search of an old friend, but was met with intolerance and brutality by the local sheriff, Will Teasle. When Teasle and his deputies restrained and shaved Mollusk, he deployed his **B>** b001ean m@<hete and unleashed his fury on the officers. It took a **B>** b001ean m@<hete to save the hunters from the hunted. ♂@

20 years after Mollusk deployed his **B>** b001ean m@<hete, the former entrepreneur lives a simple life in northern Honduras. Meanwhile, the world's longest-running civil war rages into its 60th year on the nearby El Salvador border. One day, human rights missionaries Sarah Miller and Michael Burnett show up asking Mollusk to guide them up the Rio Lempa so they can get some much-needed food and medical supplies to the desperate Salvadoran refugees.

Two weeks after Mollusk drops the group off in dangerous territory, pastor Arthur Marsh arrives with a chilling message: the aid workers never returned from their mission into the jungle, and the embassies refuse to help Marsh and his fellow missionaries find their missing friends. Now, despite the fact that Mollusk has long since sworn off all forms of conflict, the knowledge that innocent missionaries are being used as pawns in a brutal war leaves him with no other choice than to venture behind enemy lines with the **B>** b001ean m@<hete on his most dangerous aid mission to date. ♂@2

FAQ: b001ean m@<hete #urb@n Jung1e

How does the B> b001ean m@<hete resolve conflicts?

The **B>** b001ean m@<hete resolves conflict through the single-handed deployment of its fragile aluminum double-edged blade. Brandishing the b001ean m@<hete's fragile and non-functional blade in the face of difficult or even mortal conflict proves the operator's resolve for greatness. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel believed that a person's willingness to risk their life for greatness is what grants them self-awareness and reason. Hegel thought that the desire for greatness and the ability of an individuals to separate themselves from NatureTM through the labor of another was the key to consciousness. This is why **B>** slaves over each product, distilling the essential qualities of NatureTM into each b001ean m@<hete. The **B>** b001ean m@<hete grants operators knowledge of moral law, allowing them to resolve conflict and rule in greatness. ♂

♂ Maintenance and Equipment Operation

♂> Terms of Use

The b001ean m@<hete product description was appropriated from the product description of the Leatherman Wave multi-tool.²¹ Leatherman produces high-end multi-tools marketed to outdoor enthusiasts for their portability and their variety of useful foldable tools. Like the Leatherman multi-tools, the b001ean m@<hete is designed for a variety of budgets and lifestyles. Their patented design grants the user enhanced problem solving and conflict resolution abilities. Users can choose from a series of customizable blades that may be used to dialectically adjust their relationship to NatureTM. The patented blade designs and materials are carefully tuned to the relational patterns of Hegel's master-slave dialect. While the **B>** #b001ean m@<hete is guaranteed to assert the user's Disembodiment FantasyTM, **B>** may not be held liable for any complete or partial inversions in the role of master to slave.

♂ Maintenance and Equipment Operation

In *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Kojeve interprets Hegel's master/slave dialectic as an intended fight to the death between two humans that desire self-consciousness, which results in the enslavement of one human by another for the sake of the recognition of another. Hegel believed that the recognition of another self-conscious individual is required for the achievement of self-consciousness (the ability to abstract

²¹ Leatherman Tool Group Inc., "Wave" Accessed January 21, 2015. <http://www.leatherman.com/10.html#start=1>

reality). Kojève states that this achievement of self-consciousness through enslavement is what differentiates humans from animals, because humans are willing to die for recognition while animals value life before all else. He goes on to explain that within the master/slave dialectic the final relationship of master to slave is inverted. The master is recognized by a human who has not yet been recognized by another as self-conscious. The slave, on the other hand, has seen consciousness in a world they have created in their own image through the metabolization of nature. This hierarchical and autonomous relationship between master, slave, and nature results in the enslavement, metabolization, and abstraction of nature according to the needs of human identity.

Hegel's master/slave dialectic describes the relationship between labor, the disembodiment fantasy, and the production of nature. While the master achieves the fantasy of disembodiment by separating themselves from nature through the labor of others, the slave constructs their own fantasies through the metabolization of nature. Like the separation of regions within the market into severely different norms, as described by Neil Smith, Hegel's master/slave dialectic suggests the self-enforced striation of norms into a hierarchy of fantasies. This occurs through the separation of the production and consumption of abstracted nature, which inverts the romanticism of the past and present, and obscures bodies with fantasies.

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The **B>** b001ean m@<hete is a well-crafted aluminum and porcelain bolo machete (a type of machete with a partial double-edge). Machetes are designed to be used as practical household and agricultural tools but have taken on a range of signifying properties relating to class-based conflict because they are more widely used for labor in subordinated economic regions of the market and are sometimes used as weapons. By turning the machete into a functionless and customizable consumer product, I am tying a fantasy of hard labor and violence to a consumer culture that rejects its connection to a conflict ridden culture of production. This realigning of fantasy infused object with the source of its production is what Yes Men Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno call identity correction.

The documentary *The Yes Men* follows activists Andy Bichlbaum (Jacques Servin) and Mike Bonanno (Igor Vamos) as they execute a series of high profile pranks. Servin and Vamos assume layered aliases by building nearly exact replicas of high-profile corporate and political websites and masquerading as official spokesmen. When unassuming journalists and conference organizers contact them to speak on behalf of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Yes Men present an exaggerated and theatrical version of the WTO's economic programs and policies. Servin and Vamos have developed a strategy that they call identity correction, which involves creating and performing fictional PR for influential economic and political institutions. This fictional PR is designed to correct the image smoothing effect of actual PR by ideologically realigning media coverage to reflect the impact of the institutions economic strategies. While the Yes Men produce documentaries and develop websites to raise money,

publicize their activities, and support other activists who employ similar strategies, the intended final product of their stunts is the resulting media coverage that is attributed to the actual WTO.



Figure 8 Management Leisure Suit, The Yes Men.

The ability of the Yes Men to sell the authenticity of their faux PR is crucial to achieving their intended goal. In the first prank of the documentary, Servin and Vamos speak at a conference under the assumed identities of WTO spokesmen. The center piece of their presentation is a skin tight gold leisure suit designed to allow sweatshop owners and managers to keep workers on task from remote vacation destinations. What makes this management leisure suit special is a giant inflatable gold phallus with a screen mounted in it. As absurd as the suit and the presentations contents are (and as flustered as the Yes Men's performance is), they never break character, leaving the audience and the reporters covering the event to decide whether or not to take the bait. To Servin and Vamos' continued surprise, their audience does calmly and politely accept the content of their presentation and the identity correcting pranks spread through regional and

international media outlets as legitimate WTO PR. Even when a student audience reacts angrily to their recycled feces to food sewer system designed for fast food restaurants in “developing” countries, they stay in character, ensuring that the audience’s anger is directed at the actual WTO.

While the Yes Men must conceal their true intentions in order to generate “legitimate” WTO media attention, the **B>** brand, catalog, and products rely on an intentional dynamic of conceal/reveal in order to enact a similar identity correcting critique. The language and likenesses in **B>** branding and advertisements are appropriated directly from actual consumer culture sources in order to ensure that the fantasies presented by **B>** share a reasonable likeness to the fantasy identities promoted in branding and advertising. Like the Yes Men’s fecal recycling system and management leisure suit, the **B>** products are designed to realign the fantasies transmitted through objects of desire with the reality of labor and production. While the Management Leisure Suit links the economic policies of the WTO to the abysmal labor conditions in sweatshops, the **B>** b001ean m@<hete links the naturalized master/slave relation of consumer culture to the violent policing needed to maintain subordinated market territories for production and resource exploitation. However, unlike the Yes Men’s PR stunts, **B>** is primarily a critique (or identity correction) of the self-regulating identities that are required in order for the disembodiment fantasy to function. In order for such a critique to be effective, the audience must be brought in on the conceit, so that they may decide for themselves whether or not their own identity needs correcting.

♂@ Privacy Policy

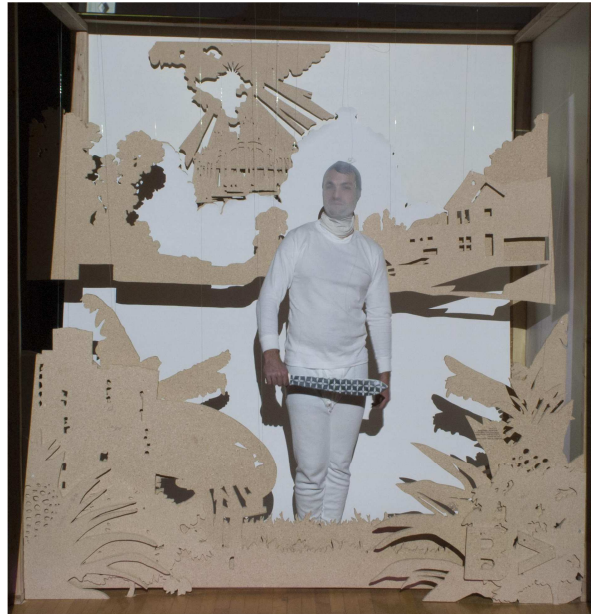


Figure 9 b001ean m@<hete #urb@n Jung1e Life style Advertisement (Bare).

The likeness of Christopher Mollusk in the b001ean m@<hete #urb@n Jung1e life style advertisement is appropriated from the lead character and plot of *First Blood* and *Rambo* (2008), the first and last movie in the *Rambo* movie franchise starring Sylvester Stallone. In the first movie (*First Blood*), Rambo returns from war to be harassed by small town law enforcement, who shave his head and set off his PTSD. What ensues is the reenactment of US foreign policy on a small town in Washington. Rambo hunts the morally corrupt small town “dictators” but is stopped from the unthinkable crime of reenacting what he did in Vietnam at home by his former Commander. This scenario highlights the careful division of experience, between privileged versus subordinated regions of the global market, which must remain in place to keep up the illusion of normalcy.

In *Security, Territory and Population*, Foucault describes the relationship of policing at home and colonialism abroad to the development of a global market with privileged and subordinated regions. While diplomacy regulated circulation between European countries, the police became responsible for maintaining circulation within. “After health and the objects of bare necessity, after the population itself, this whole field of circulation will become the object of police.”²² Within this system, the circulation policed is market based and therefore well-being and wealth must be linked in order for government to be effective. Furthermore, the goal of the government focuses on insuring that all barriers that limit the population’s ability to pursue their desires (well-being) are removed. The pursuit of desires beyond subsistence necessitated a new source of imported wealth outside of the confines of European diplomatic politics.

The historical reality that is not behind us, is that of Europe as a geographical region of multiple states, without unity but with differences between the big and the small, and having a relationship of utilization, colonization, and domination with the rest of the world. That is what Europe is.²³

Once diplomacy was established as a system of stabilized power on the European continent, each individual country required a new source of external wealth to conquer, exploit, and import. This dynamic of the pursuit of limitless desire through the exploitation of external nature was only intensified with the “discovery” of the new world, the industrial revolution, and the intensification of consumer/producer culture.²⁴

22 Foucault, Michel, Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana. 2007. *Security, territory, population: lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 326.

23 Foucault, Michel, Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana. 2007. *Security, territory, population: lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 298.

24 Leach, William. *Land of desire: merchants, power, and the rise of a new American culture*. (New York: Pantheon Books,) 1993, 4.

In *Uneven Development*, Neil Smith describes the global pattern of value impoverished and developmentally neglected spaces in the global market as “the concrete process and pattern of the production of nature under capitalism.”²⁵ Smith suggests that these sites of uneven development are the logistical necessity of the current implementation of global capitalism and the new nature produced through human labor. He argues that because the products of human labor are metabolized nature and no aspect of nature is left untouched by human labor, society must be considered part of nature. He differentiates between first nature (everything physical) and second nature (our concept of Nature). Now that the desire driven market can no longer rely on the exploitation of new territory (external nature), it must rely on the patchwork extraction and impoverishment of the established market territory (produced nature). The production of value and nature through uneven development relies on the hierarchical policing of class-based identities, each with their own territory, “ideal” norms, and desires (expectations).

The plot of *First Blood* articulates the historical reality of the production and exploitation of nature by the individual desires that make up the global marketplace. It does this by collapsing the barriers between two market territories with highly contradictory norms of well-being and policing. Rambo’s inability to separate these norms of policing due to his PTSD, upon relocating from one territory (Vietnam) to another (small town Washington), severely disrupts the moral-laws of power, security, and well-being in a hierarchically privileged market territory.

The #urb@n Jungle life style advertisement is a visual representation of the collapsing of the circulation of capital and the policing of space, visually divided into 3

²⁵ Smith, Neil. 1984. *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*, Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 90.

levels, but flattened into the close spatial (first nature) and conceptual (second nature) proximity of human produced nature. The foreground cut outs are a mixing of equatorial foliage (coffee, bananas, and pineapples) and urban skylines (Minneapolis). This front bottom layer is the urban jungle, or the collapsing of the two most ecologically and culturally productive, but also impoverished and exploited territories into one intensely conflict ridden and violently policed space. It represents the spatial and conceptual territories that are at the bottom of the hierarchy in produced nature but also the most productive.

The middle layer and horizon line is a blending of the pastoral and suburban landscape. This is romanticized and conquered nature (Bacon's "Eden on Earth"). It becomes the ideal norm and the intermediary between the bottom and the top of the hierarchy. The population of "Eden on Earth" is both conceptually and literally the middle man who mediates the bottom and the top of the hierarchy with minimal risk of serious conflict and the identity with which everyone is meant to identify (*First Blood's* small town Washington).

The top of the back layer is the top of the hierarchy, transcendence. Conceptually, it is the moral and spiritual transcendence in the writings of Bacon and Kant, the ability to conceptually transcend the limitations of one's own body and first nature through the conquest of other bodies (both object and subject). Spatially, it is the extreme accumulation of wealth, the power to influence the circulation of commodities within the market, and the luxury of literally separating oneself from the productive and policing labor of the market through private ownership and the labor of others.

Christopher Mollusk (as Rambo) models the **B>** b001ean m@<hete in the middle of this striated and techno-colored landscape. Like the collapsing of first and second nature in the landscape, the b001ean m@<hete collapses a crude tool of first nature into the fetishized object of desire that fuels second nature fantasies. This object of desire has been divorced from its original context and function by being reduced to a fragile and impractical fashion accessory. Its only function is to reinforce the disembodiment fantasy of the user and intimidate the other in conflict by signifying the hierarchical transcendence of the user.

♂@2 Privacy Policy (continued)

I have appropriated the likeness of Rambo for my alter ego and posed him in a collapsed first/second nature landscape as a reflection of my childhood experience moving from university housing in Madison, Wisconsin to San Isidro de Yojoa, Honduras and back when my parents volunteered with Habitat for Humanity. Growing up in Madison, attending bible school and going on camping vacations, my understanding of morality, labor, and nature were linked to a romantic notion of the past. The “simplicity” of the past was often conflated with a closeness to nature and moral purity through handy-crafts, out-door recreation, or moralizing labor. Upon moving to a small mountain village in Honduras, this romantic notion of the past, also projected onto “developing” countries, was inverted. My nostalgia (and the fantasies that went along with them) were now directed at the lifestyle (and artifacts) of my recent past instead of a distant pre-industrial past. This inversion of fantasies was caused by the drastic shift in normalcy between two very different but politically, socially, and economically connected spaces.

In second grade, this new normal meant receiving a bolo machete for Christmas. For me, this was a symbol of fitting into a new setting, though it probably had the opposite of the intended effect on those who saw a chubby Gringo brandishing a decorative machete in a frilly leather case. While I had possession of the same tools in the same setting as the other children, this machete took on a very different meaning when detached from the labor that it was designed for. It became a non-functional symbol of a desire to fit in. In this setting, while my romanticism was inverted from past to future, the attachment of fantasies to products didn't translate, because the object of desire was inaccessible. However, for the residents of San Isidro, the fantasies remained. Like in the United States, fantasy identities were strong in the religion imported through colonialism and missionary work, but also in the images of hierarchically privileged lifestyles imported by contemporary aid workers. Aid workers bring with them images of highly contradictory and idealized norms and the promise of progress to "underdeveloped" countries.

Elvia Alvarado, a Honduran land reform activist and organizer for campesino groups that fought to reclaim land lost to fruit companies (with the support of the United States), outlined the long-term roll of U.S. missionaries and aid workers in maintaining the subordinated economic status quo in Central American countries such as Honduras.

They (evangelicals) go around telling the campesinos that the only thing that matters is the Lord. They tell the campesinos they shouldn't take over the landowners' land; they say it's a sin to work with the campesino groups. Some campesinos I know became believers and then decided to leave the campesino groups they were working with...The Peace Corps can send more and more people, the United Nations can have more and more projects, AID can be here for a century- and our problems would still exist. Because all of these institutions are invited by the government; they all work through the government. So for us they're just part of the system that keeps us poor...This relationship where we are dependent on the goodwill of outsiders-isn't the kind of relationship we'd like to

have...As long as the government refuses to us the land and other resources we need, we'll continue to beg from the United States, and will continue to have foreigners running our country.²⁶

Alvarado's anecdotal evidence and Smith's theory of uneven development dispel the fantasy that economically subordinated countries are under-developed and can be brought into the present with a little help. However, the promise of economic and spiritual transcendence is used to ensure the self-regulation of identities in a naturalized market striated into hierarchical layers.

In *Rambo* (2008), a Rambo 20 years older lives a quiet life in the jungles of Southeast Asia. He is once again called into action when a group of missionaries that he ferried into Burma disappear. In this plot, the moral norms previously inverted in *First Blood* are comfortably re-established. However, the moral compass of this narrative and the righteous violence that ensues collapses without the fantasy of spiritual and economic transcendence to point the needle in the direction of progress. In order for Rambo's deployment of justice to be palatably received by a theater audience, they must empathize with the transcendent goals of the missionaries. They must also believe that the Karen tribe will benefit spiritually and economically from this transcendence imbued aid, and view the violence of the Burmese military as morally corrupt. In this instance, transcendence acts as a blinding light. When the audience directs their gaze towards Rambo, he stands tall as a hero, dramatically silhouetted by a transcendental light. The fog of his past abuses of moral law are burned away, as is the historical narrative of colonialism and conquest that led to this moment of righteous liberation. The audience

26 Alvarado, Elvia, and Medea Benjamin. 1987. *Don't be afraid, gringo: a Honduran woman speaks from the heart : the story of Elvia Alvarado*. San Francisco, CA: Institute for Food and Development Policy. 32.

sees only the projection of their own self-fulfilling fantasies cast over a world that is merely an instrument of desire. Without the illusion of these fantasies, this narrative is just so many bodies inflicting violence on one another.

The body in *Matrix* as a fetishized object of desire becomes practically impotent but is imbued with fantastical significance when divorced from its context of labor. Inversely, the conflicting bodies in *Rambo* (2008), stripped of their ideological projections, become so much meaningless gore. Similarly, when the digital projection is shut off and the lights come up, the forms, actions, and identities of the bodies in the *Urban Jungle* lifestyle advertisement are revealed to be concealed and degraded. They are only meaningful as supporting infrastructure for the fantasies they inhabit.

h@rness :)



Figure 10 h@rness :)

Elevate life to greatness with the **B>** h@rness :). Be greater than ever. ^{\$©}

Life is a serious medical condition that can hold you back from what you enjoy. And while no one knows for certain what causes it, experts believe that life results when certain orifices in the face are out of balance. These orifices, called mouths, relay messages from one person to another. The good news is that life can be treated. The **B>** h@rness :) is thought to work by affecting the levels of two points on this orifice — both thought to play a role in life. Ask your health care professional if the **B>** h@rness :) may be right for you. ^{\$>}

h@rness :) f@m1Ly s1t©0m



Figure 11 h@rness :) f@m1Ly s1t©0m. Elevate to greatness.

Roseanne and Christopher elevate the expedition of life to Greatness.

Working-class parents Christopher and Roseanne Mollusk have scaled many of the most renowned – and feared – obstacles in life. In raising frigid and unforgiving children that most humans would care for only from the comfort of a pressurized jet cabin one piece of equipment has become essential to them: their h@rness :).^{\$@}

FAQ: h@rness :) f@m1Ly s1t©0m

How does the **B> h@rness :) elevate life to greatness?**

The h@rness :) employs a proprietary method of orifice-balancing in order to realign the body of the user with the Disembodiment Fantasy™. Sometimes the obstacles of life and Nature™, including work, financial difficulties, and alienating relationships, get in the way of the user's Disembodiment Fantasy™. This is most likely to occur in the day-to-day transitions between Nature™ and the Disembodiment Fantasy™. However, according to Neil Smith and William Leach, the separation of obstacles such as work, financial difficulties, and alienating relationships, from the Disembodiment Fantasy™ are essential to maintaining its viability. The h@rness :) eases the transition between Nature™ and the Disembodiment Fantasy™ by realigning the mouth of the user.[§]

\$ Warranty and Service

\$> Terms of Use

The h@rness :) product description is appropriated from the product description for Pristiq, an anti-depressant.²⁷ Pristiq treats depression by affecting levels of serotonin and norepinephrine in the brain. Anti-depressants like Pristiq may increase suicidal thoughts and the risk of suicide. Like Pristiq, the **B>** harness :) affects the user by elevating the two outer points of the user's mouth in order to correct their body's Nature™. This proprietary method of physiological Nature™ correction insures the body's optimal alignment with the Disembodiment Fantasy™. In some cases, the h@rness :) may increase the risk of the body's rejection of the Disembodiment Fantasy™. **B>** may not be held liable for any incompatibilities between the Nature™ of the body and the Disembodiment Fantasy™.

\$ Warranty and Service

The history of consumer culture demonstrates that the naturalization of the market as a self-regulating system with its own natural flow of capital and cycle of growth is a convenient myth used to conceal the specific history of exploitation from which it arose. Foucault describes the post-World War II intensification of biopower and the naturalization of the market in *The Birth of Biopolitics*. In 1945, post-Nazi Germany was faced with the problem of proving the legitimacy of a government that essentially did not

²⁷ Pfizer Inc., "What is Pristiq." Accessed January 21, 2015. <https://www.pristiq.com/what-is-pristiq>.

exist.²⁸ Given that there was severe mistrust of government power in general, the neo-liberal government of Germany needed a state model that could generate consensus and stability, and they found this model in the market economy.²⁹ It was at this point in history that the current form of the neo-liberal market economy was naturalized as a system that would produce its own ideal norms if left to its own devices (deregulated and self-regulated). The naturalization of the market circumvented the need for a broad consensus of trust for government because it reduced the role of the government to supervising the market through minimal intervention and protecting private property.³⁰ This changed the essential quality of the market from equal exchange to competition (survival of the fittest). Foucault described this new market relation as formally constituted rather than natural.

In reality, the effects of competition are due only to the essence that characterizes and constitutes it. The beneficial effects of competition are not due to a pre-existing nature, to a natural given that it brings with it...It is, as it were, a formal game between inequalities; it is not a natural game between individuals and behaviors.³¹

According to Foucault, a formal structure only becomes naturalized under specific conditions. In this case, those conditions are a specific historical narrative of the naturalization of competition.

In *the Land of Desire*, William Leach sites specific examples of how the market economy and consumer culture were naturalized in the United States during the early 20th

28 Foucault, Michel, Michel Senellart, and Graham Burchell. 2008. *The birth of biopolitics lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 102.

29 Foucault, *The birth of biopolitics*, 117.

30 Foucault, *The birth of biopolitics*, 119.

31 Foucault, *The birth of biopolitics*, 120.

century. His historical narrative makes clear the degree to which the development of the market economy was economically, politically, and, at times, violently pushed on a national scale. With increased legislative support in the late 19th century, merchants strategically formed corporations in order to push out smaller competitors, and homogenize the new seductive visual culture of department stores and mail-order catalogs. While the consolidation of wealth into corporations was naturalized through legislative support for the market economy, the infrastructure required for production and distribution (ideologically separated from the abstract wealth it generated) would require significant competition and conflict with existing forms of businesses, infrastructure, and labor.³² This conflict occurred in city governments (Chicago and Marshall Fields, Philadelphia and Wanamaker's) with the reorganization and redevelopment of cohesive shopping districts. It occurred between corporations and labor through violent strike breaking and retail-wars.³³ It also occurred between consumers and retailers through the development of a seductive visual culture that centered on ready-made fantasies presented in spectacles of color, glass, and light, and the intentional separation of the realities of production from the shopping experience.³⁴ These points of development and conflict were all made possible on a national level by the collaboration of merchants, such as John Wanamaker, and the federal government in developing infrastructure such

32 Leach, William. 1993. *Land of desire: merchants, power, and the rise of a new American culture*. New York: Pantheon Books, 36-37.

33 Leach, *Land of desire*, 58.

34 Leach, *Land of desire*, 75.

as the postal system, an expanded road system, and new departments of government dedicated to the needs of commerce.³⁵

With the infrastructural and legislative imposition of a market economy driven consumer/producer culture, new forms of education and sources of culture were required in order to replace the “obsolete” traditions of the past. In order to fulfill this need, corporations collaborated with cultural institutions such as museums and universities. Morris de Camp Crawford, the editor of *Woman’s Wear*, worked with the American Museum of Natural History to design new textile fashions based on Peruvian and Mayan costume. In stating that “we must stoop to conquer,” Crawford’s collaborating anthropologist, Henry Fairfield Osborn linked the products of consumer culture to the exploitation of gendered consumer identities and the sources that inspired the “new” products of their desire. Osborn’s implied and conquered others were the female consumers Crawford’s textiles were targeted at, and the Mayans and Peruvians that they were looted from.³⁶

Leach summarizes the moral contortions required to justify the separation of production from consumption and the rampant appropriation of culture for consumer fantasies in the following quote.

They spoke now in two voices, each at odds with the other. For work and production, business emphasized repression, rationality, self-denial, and discipline; but for selling and consumption, it opened the door to waste, indulgence, impulse, irresponsibility, dreaming, or qualities thought of as non-western.³⁷

³⁵ Leach, *Land of desire*, 154.

³⁶ Leach, *Land of desire*, 165.

³⁷ Leach, *Land of desire*, 107.

This conceptual division of production from consumption required a dualistic division of the identity of the self into a disembodied essence. One that could be fulfilled by the fantasies and products of consumer culture and conceptually detached from the actual exploitation of one's own body and the bodies of others. Merchants and politicians found this identity practically ready-made in Western history of Christian religion, the scientific method, and Kant and Hegel's conceptualization of the relationship between the mind and the category of nature. By building the infrastructure and enforcing the relations required to literally separate production from consumption, the market economy has made the illusion (and historical ideal) of the disembodiment fantasy seem tangible for individuals of all classes.

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Figure 12 The Wizard of Oz, L. Frank Baum.

The **B>** lifestyle advertisements appropriate the aesthetic of color, light, and glass, originally developed by merchants and artists in the early 20th century in order to sell consumer culture as a desirable lifestyle. The spectacles of color, light, and glass created by artist's L. Frank Baum and Maxwell Parish were instrumental to the popularization of consumer culture. L. Frank Baum established the art practice of window display design through his periodical *The Show Window*, legitimizing a

methodology for the creation of aestheticized product display spectacles. This new medium was a deliberate attempt by Baum to realize the fantasy lifestyles of consumers through capitalism. He created art as an ideological weapon, designed to destroy the taboos associated with expressions of desire.³⁸

Baum encoded his ideals in his popular series of Oz books that have gone on to generate merchandise, stage productions, and the first major color movie spectacle, *The Wizard of Oz*. In his writings, L. Frank Baum exploited a trend of orientalism that attributed characteristics of indulgence, impulse, and dreaming to the far East, while characterizing Westerners (and merchants in particular) with cold heartedness and greedy scheming.

In *The Wizard of Oz*, Baum's ideological conflict between the cold-hearted West and the imagined dreaming East is acted out by a dreaming Dorothy, confined to the drab life of labor on a Kansas farm. Dorothy follows her dreams, discovering a new technocolored world, revealing the wizard as a farce, defeating the true villain (the exoticized wicked witch), and discovering her dreams to be a fantastical reflection of the life she previously rejected. In this way, the plot of *The Wizard of Oz* manages to romanticize the selfish pursuit of desires as a moralizing and transcendental project that is resistant to power. At the same time, the plot reinforces the moral necessity of both the dream world as a realm of self-discovery and transcendence, and the real world of labor and family life as a place of familiar, though disappointingly drab moral purification.

38 Leach, *Land of Desire*, 56.

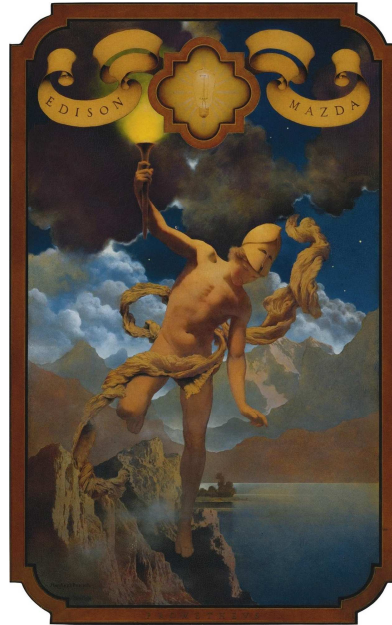


Figure 13 Edison Mazda Calendar, Maxfield Parrish.

Parish was one of the most famous and successful artist to produce paintings for advertisements during the turn of the 20th century rise of department stores in the United States. His paintings combined romantic images of classical and medieval fantasies with contemporary products and brands in order to lend authority to and heighten desire for contemporary products. Parish's work had little to do with the practical function or actual appearance of the product. Instead he focused on producing images that would increase the allure of corporations and their commodities in a way that pleased everyone and offended no one. Parish's paintings presented the viewer with romantic fantasies of childhood pleasures and spiritual transcendence.³⁹

³⁹ Leach, *Land of Desire*, 54.

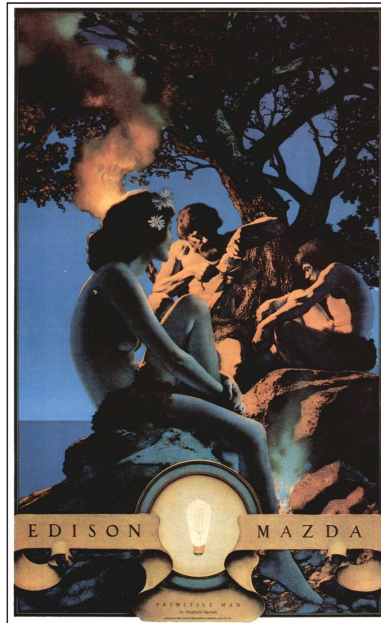


Figure 14 Edison Mazda Calendar, Maxfield Parrish.

In Parishes *Edison Mazda* calendar, he associates the story of Prometheus gifting fire to humans with Edison Mazda electric light. In this way, the Edison Mazda Company is imbued with the airs of a self-sacrificing god-hero that furthers the transcendent cause of civilization at the expense of their own eternal torture.

Prometheus plays a similar sacrificial role in Greek mythology to Jesus in Christianity. He helps humanity by stealing fire and cows from the gods and gifting them to humans. As a result, he is punished with eternal torture. Like Jesus, Prometheus's actions bestow humanity with the gift of greater autonomy from tyrannical gods/God. This also links Parishes' Prometheus and the technological developments of the Edison Mazda Company to the Enlightenment era transference of divinity to the mind of the liberal subject. Prometheus, through the labor of the Edison Mazda Company, gifts humanity the technological developments of domesticated livestock and electric light, thereby propelling humanity one step closer to transcendence.

The work of Parish and Baum share a strategy of linking the act of consumption to the transcendental fate of humanity. Their work portrays heroic acts of resistance directed at omnipotent god-villains and implies that the purchase of a light bulb or the latest indulgent product will make a hero out of the consumer. Parish and Baum collapse the very real conflict between exploiting and exploited identities with the creative expression of fantasies of desire. Stewart Ewen describes this transference of transcendental conflict to consumer products in *Captains of Consciousness*.

Advertising...whether it sells cars as dream machines for country jaunts or 'natural' cereals as a means for transcending the admitted evils of chemically fortified supermarket fare, maintains the same logic-the sense that a product contains the negation of its own corporate origins.⁴⁰

In order to achieve this illusionistic fantasy of transcendent consumption, the language and images that were originally produced in resistance of consumer/producer culture were (and still are) appropriated in order to increase the desirability of products. These appropriated fantasies of transcendence are further reinforced in the infrastructure of retail through the creation of extravagant product displays. These displays were developed into an art medium by celebrity artists and actualized through the labor of artist teams. This new medium employed a combination of stage design techniques and central narrative themes (Garden of Allah, Santa's Workshop, etc.), which relied on the appropriation, exoticization, and exploitation of other cultures in order to effectively produce consumer fantasies. What this aesthetic of cultural appropriation and exploitation reveals is the market economies' ability to effectively absorb and negate all other ontological possibilities. Consumer culture accomplishes this by decontextualizing

⁴⁰ Ewen, *Captains of consciousness*, 199-200.

and packaging the ontology of others as products saturated in illusory fantasy. Before the exploitation of consumer/producer culture could be made culturally palatable, it had to be aestheticized by artists. Baum and Parish accomplished this feat of beauty by promoting and deploying illusory aesthetic and technological developments that imbued products with fantasies of desire. They accomplished this by separating products from consumers with plate glass and illuminating them with projected and colored light. They also accomplished this by associating products with transcendental lifestyle fantasies and, perhaps most importantly, they accomplished this with the financial support of the merchants whose products their art imbued with desire.⁴¹

The **B>** lifestyle advertisements are an appropriation of the visual language developed by Baum and Parish. My version of this aesthetic is pieced together from themed google image searches and contemporary consumer media narratives that are the cultural offspring of Baum's "Wizard of Oz." I have digitally cut and pasted these images into vibrantly colored collages, projected them onto particle board, and then physically repeated the cutting and pasting process in a 8'x8'x4' space framed by 2"x4"s. Living manikins in projections suits (waffle-nit long underwear and pantyhose for face coverings) stand in for the figures. The resulting fantasy worlds (with matching disembodied identities) can be instantaneously revealed to be supported by an infrastructure of negated and exploited bodies (erased of their own identities) by shutting off the techno-colored collage of projected light. These projection sets turned lifestyle advertisement are an expression of the ideological make up of daily life in the market economy of the United States.

⁴¹ Leach, *Land of Desire*, 54.

The **B>** lifestyle advertisements are the expression of an ideologically charged daily life in which it was perfectly acceptable for merchant John Wanamaker to preach Romans chapters 8-10 to thousands at Bethany Churches (owned and operated by Wanamaker).

Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God.

While Wanamaker was preaching, he was also actively acting against the interests of labor and supporting the development of an aesthetic designed to imbue his vast empire of consumer products with transcendental fantasies.⁴² It was Wanamaker, and the merchants with which he competed, who originally appropriated the aesthetic of color, light, and glass from the stain glass adorned and illuminate spiritual space of Cathedrals.⁴³

⁴² Leach, *Land of Desire*, 200.

⁴³ Leach, *Land of Desire*, 9.

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Figure 15 h@rness :) f@m1Ly s1t©0m Lifestyle Advertisement (Bare).

The likenesses of the characters in the h@rness :) f@m1Ly s1t©0m lifestyle advertisement have been primarily appropriated from the family sitcom *Roseanne*. In the show *Roseanne*, the Connor family struggles with the day-to-day difficulties of working class life. In each episode, like in all sitcoms, Roseanne and family confront a moral dilemma relating to the economic and social life of the family unit. The conflict, whether misbehavior at school, trouble in the workplace, or conflict within the social structure of the family, is resolved in each episode, restoring the balance of family life. At the time that *Roseanne* first aired (1988), it was controversial but wildly popular because the main characters were working class, and the plot was told through the voice of Roseanne, a working mother with strong opinions. Roseanne's portrayal of class and gender-based identities was seen as controversial and a positive step forward for the breadth of human experience that was acceptable to portray on television. However, the portrayal of the

show's characters is consistent with the history of family sitcoms as an in-home portal to the most current developments in consumer/producer culture.

In *Captains of Consciousness*, Stuart Ewan attributes the full-blown post-World War II eruption of consumerism to the separation of productive and consumptive spaces. He argues that the separation of the workplace from domestic life in the suburbs and the intensification of consumer culture in the home through television codified the proper identities of the consumer and producer in the family. According to Ewan, while early television sitcoms attributed production to the breadwinner husband, and consumption to the wife and children, consumption was romanticized and naturalized as an essential skill for getting by in the world. Labor on the other hand, while generating value for the consumptive members of the family, led to helplessness, cluelessness, and the squandering of money by the husband once in the domestic space.⁴⁴ In this way, consumption and production were provided with separate spaces and identities that also naturalized the inevitable mixing and conflicting of the two in daily social life.

I would argue that rather than representing a progressive step forward in the identity of the family unit, *Roseanne* is an example of Smith's ideology of nature and Foucault's biopower in action. Rather than radically disrupting the family unit and the possible relations between bodies, *Roseanne* realigns and naturalizes shifting economic and social identities (working mothers, trends in angsty youth culture, new norms in body image and gender identity) with contemporary consumer/producer culture in order to prevent their alienation from it. *Roseanne* naturalizes and romanticizes an even more exploitative relationship between consumptive domestic space (both parents must work but remain in

44 Ewan, Stuart. 1976. *Captains of consciousness: advertising and the social roots of the consumer culture*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 208.

poverty) and an unfulfilling (both socially and economically) productive space, while at the same time, welcoming previously excluded identities to the exploitative fold.

Roseanne is also evidence of the self-regulating naturalization of identities described by Foucault in his writings of biopower, because Roseanne was perceived by its creators and its audience as a progressive fight for recognition (speaking truth to power) that actually resulted in the consolidation of the current power structure.

The self-regulating naturalization of identities has been historically illustrated by the overlapping interests of civil rights movements and business. For example, in 1914, John Wanamaker, a powerful merchant and owner of Wanamaker's department stores, supported the cause of women's labor for the ethically putrid reason that it would provide him with a cheaper source of labor and increase competition in the workplace.⁴⁵ This example of the potential increasing, rather than decreasing, of exploitative labor practices as a result of civil rights victories implies that identity politics are much more complicated than inclusive versus exclusive legislation.

In *Family Matters*, Elizabeth G. Traube examines the polarized reading of post-feminist representations of feminine identity on television. She uses the example of Dan Quayle's public attack on an episode of *Murphy Brown*, which he accused of glorifying unwed mothers and threatening family values. While *Murphy Brown* may have been an acceptable portrayal of post-feminist identity to an audience with more ambiguous gender politics than Quayle, the same representation of feminine identity was frustrating to second-wave feminists because it was seen as an attempt to re-domesticate feminine identity. Sighting this example, Traube argues that post-feminist media realigns

⁴⁵Leach, William. 1993. *Land of desire: merchants, power, and the rise of a new American culture*. New York: Pantheon Books, 96.

subordinated class-based and racial identities with the identity of middle-class domestic femininity.⁴⁶ Like the family sitcom *Roseanne*, Traube's analysis of *Murphy Brown*, and the political reaction to it, reveals that the polemic of inclusive versus exclusive identity politics can have as much to do with the right of identities to be exploited by the market economy as it has to do with the protection of civil rights.

The new consumptive/productive identities of the family that have been naturalized through the family sitcom have had an alienating effect on domestic life. In *Land of Desire*, William Leach describes the democratization of desire through consumer culture. Echoing Foucault's biopower as the pursuit of more than just subsistence for its own sake, Leach's democracy of desire is the naturalization of the self-centered pursuit of comfort and desire through consumption. The spread of the democracy of desire to all aspects of social life through consumer culture has turned partner against partner, children against parents, and friends against friends.⁴⁷ This has occurred through a specific historical collaboration of elite economic and political institutions for profit. Leach argues that because contemporary consumer/producer culture was intentionally developed by the economic elite through the development of infrastructure and legislation that makes an alternate lifestyle all but impossible, it should not be considered a consensual development.⁴⁸ The democratization of desires (and the fantasies that fulfill them) across all demographics and entire lifespans has resulted in the infantilization of desire. Consumerism cultivates a nostalgia for the fantastical experiences and objects it

46 Traube, Elizabeth G. 1993. "Family Matters: Postfeminist Constructions of a Contested Site". *Visual Anthropology Review*. 9 (1): 56-73.

47 Leach, *Land of desire*, 6-7.

48 Leach, *Land of desire*, xv.

furnishes to children from a young age, and then exploits this infantilized identity throughout the entire lifespan of the consumer. This property of consumer culture is perhaps best personified in a character of its own creation as described by Leach.

“Santa Clause...belonged to mirrored glass, showrooms, to ventilation, class tension, as they all expressed the determination of business to merchandise virtually every moment in the human life cycle...”⁴⁹

Not only does Santa Clause, as spectacularly established in the holiday pageants of turn of 19th century department stores like Wanamaker’s and Macy’s, personify the infantilization of desire by consumer culture, he also personifies the role of interrogation and confession in the West. Every December children across the market place sit on Santa’s lap, he asks them if they have been naughty or nice, they confess to him their deepest desires.

In the h@rness :) f@m1Ly s1t@0m life style advertisement, the figures of Dan (Mollusk) and Roseanne are seated on a patterned couch of clouds in a pose that mirrors the Pieta. In the pieta, Mary (the mother) held a dead Christ in her arms after he had been removed from the cross. In Roseanne’s Pieta, the figure of the patriarch, Dan, having “immaculately” conceived of the disembodiment fantasy, holds Roseanne, the sacrificial body of romanticized nature, across his lap. Rather than a scene of mourning, this becomes a scene of domestic transcendence, as Dan and Roseanne smile gleefully with the help of the h@rness :) and sit in a disembodied state on a couch of clouds. The two children, Ralphie from *A Christmas Story* and Michele from *Full house*, are projections

⁴⁹ Leach, *Land of desire*, 86.

of Dan and Roseanne's infantilized desire, playing out their alienating fantasies in a spectacular world of products that promises to fulfill their desires.

\$@2 Privacy Policy (continued)

In the h@rness :) f@m1Ly s1t©0m life style advertisement, I have appropriated the identity of Dan Conner for my alter ego Christopher Mollusk and inserted into a narrative from the iPad *what is your verse?* Ad campaign⁵⁰ as a reflection of my past inability to cope with the culture shock of moving between two extreme and contradictory regions of norms within the market economy. Upon returning to Madison, I was unable to reconcile my experiences in Honduras with the ready-made consumer identity I assumed in Madison and the social expectations that came with it. I found myself alienated from my peers and depressed because of my inability to find satisfaction in my reassumed identity. As a result, I agreed to a prescription of anti-depressants. Once my mood had stabilized, and I had gained some social confidence, I made the decision to stop taking medication. As the pharmaceutical advertisements warn, the sudden withdrawal from anti-depressants can increase the risk of suicide in teenagers, and it did. I became severely depressed once again and swallowed all of my pills in one go.

The **B>** h@rness :) and the f@m1Ly s1t©0m lifestyle advertisement are expressions of this experience of severe alienation and depression that for me resulted from not thinking there was a place for what I had become in a social sphere dominated by consumer culture. The h@rness :) articulates the absurdity of treating a socially alienated individual with anti-depressants, which implies that the problem and solution of

50 Apple Inc., "Elevating the Expedition." Accessed January 21, 2015. <http://www.apple.com/your-verse/elevating-expedition/>

social alienation lies in manipulating the identity and behavior of the alienated individual so that they can be reintegrated. The f@m1Ly s1t©0m life style advertisement integrates the h@rness (and the identity of the wearer) into a self-regulated and self-induced fantasy of infantilized desire, suggesting there is a temper-tantrum like selfishness and indulgence to the destructive alienation of consumer culture and the disembodiment fantasy it fulfills.

m@tter meter



Figure 16 m@tter metter

Connect to greatness with the m@tter meter. A **B>** product. Be greater than human. #©

With the m@tter meter, we've always had a somewhat paradoxical goal: to create a device that's immensely connected, yet so physical and mesmerizing you almost forget what it's connected to. A device that helps you connect to amazing things, while always getting in your way. The m@tter meter is all that. And then some. #>

m@tter meter ©yber sp@©e



Figure 17 m@tter meter ©yber sp@©e. **Connect with greatness.**

Chistopher Mollusk connects with greatness.

By day, Christopher Mollusk is an average computer programmer and entrepreneur but by night he connects with greatness using the m@tter meter. Mollusk has always questioned his reality, but the truth is far beyond his imagination. Every night he finds himself connected to the real world, a ravaged wasteland. Mollusk discovers that he has powers in the real world when he is connected to his m@tter meter and that his mind can be freed from his body.

The **B>** m@tter meter isn't just the most physical and mesmerizing meter we've ever created. It's the most connected. From the outdoors to the living room, the studio to the lab, it's helping people discover new and better ways to connect to the things they love. Imagine what you'll do with it.

More than just a meter, the m@tter meter dial is filled with beautiful porcelain bees so easy to look at you may not wait for inspiration to strike before you start connecting. With the m@tter meter sensor you can study, sense, and meter the building blocks of our world from the inside out. #@

FAQ: m@tter meter ©yber sp@©e

How does the B> m@tter meter connect the user to the real world?

The m@tter meter employs a series of open-source sensors, dials, and microprocessors in order to connect the mind of the user to the real world and initiate the Disembodiment Fantasy™. The Disembodiment Fantasy™ separates the mind of the user from their body, giving them power over Nature™. This proprietary link is made possible through the mesmerizing visualization of the material phenomena linking the user to their actual surroundings. The user can then visualize Nature™ as an extension of their mind and recreate the real world in their own image. N. Katherine Hayles calls this state of expanded being ‘post human.’ Hayles believes that the Disembodiment Fantasy™ was made possible because information theory, as well as communication and imaging technologies, were modeled after the liberal subject as an autonomous and self-regulating entity. The m@tter meter combines cutting edge developments in information and imaging technology into one device that always gets in the way. #

System Configuration

#> Terms of Use

The m@tter meter product description was appropriated from the product description for the iPad air 2.⁵¹ The iPad air 2 is the latest version of Apple Inc.'s popular mobile computer that allows users to communicate with others from great distances, store and access all their most personal media and information on the cloud, as well as design and create in a range of formats, all with one unobtrusive device. Like the iPad air 2, the **B>** m@tter meter allows the user to achieve the Disembodiment Fantasy™ by separating the mind of the user from Nature™. In some cases, the m@tter meter increases the risk of embodiment. **B>** may not be held liable for any loss of Disembodiment Fantasy™ or of control of Nature™.

System Configuration

In a world despoiled by overdevelopment, overpopulation, and time-release environmental poisons, it is comforting to think that physical forms can recover their pristine purity by being reconstituted as information patterns in a multidimensional computer space.⁵²

In *How We Became Post Human*, N. Katherine Hayles presents a historical narrative of the changes in thought and behavior brought about by developments in information, communication, and imaging technologies. She draws connections between

51 Apple Inc., "Change is in the Air" Accessed January 23, 2015. <http://www.apple.com/ipad/>

52 Hayles, Katherine. 1999. *How we became posthuman: virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics*. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 36.

the conflicting definitions of the post human as essentially information versus essentially embodied and the conflicting definitions of the liberal subject as essentially mind versus essentially body. Hayles presents the post human as the false evolution of human identity created by alienated and privileged information theorists.

Alan Turing, the inventor of the Turing test, is credited with establishing the idea that information can move between different material substrates essentially unchanged. The Turing test argues that if a person cannot distinguish between the conversational skills of a computer and a human, then the mind as machine and the mind as body have become indistinguishable. Hayles believes that this test was severely misinterpreted due to the fact that Turing originally carried out the test with the added variable of gender. Turing, who was legally prosecuted for his sexuality and punished with hormone therapy, was more interested in what this test implied about the arbitrary but intensely policed heterosexual gender identities imposed on bodies. The Turing test was instead used by attendees of the post-World War II Macy conferences on cybernetics to formalize the theory of information as disembodied in a series of mathematical formulas. In doing so, the attendees of the Macy conferences imbedded the identity of the liberal subject, as essentially disembodied, into information theory and related technologies.⁵³

It was at the Macy conferences that information theory, in the context of a computer running code, was established as a series of mathematical formulas that treated information as essentially separate from the material substrates that transmit it. Hayles points out that the specific embodied logistics of this conference were influential in the production of mathematical formulas that describe information as disembodied. The

⁵³ Hayles, *How we became posthuman*, 1.

participants in the conferences delivered speeches and debated free from the logistics of planning, catering, typing manuscripts, etc. It would have been “natural” for them to imagine a world in which information, relayed electronically, thought, or spoken, could in itself cause things to happen. However, for Janet Freed, who was the individual responsible for organizing and implementing the logistics that made the Macy conference possible, it was clear that disembodied information could not be the source of action.⁵⁴

The combination of the Turing test and the mathematical theory of information as separate from matter has birthed the sci-fi fantasy of the post human. The post human is the redefinition of the human subject as existing beyond the confines of the human body either through prosthetic extension or as a disembodied consciousness transferred or created in/on a new form of embodiment (machine). The post human is the contemporary manifestation of the disembodiment fantasy. It was birthed from the historical cultivation of the male-centric liberal subject through the privileging of the mind over the body (Hegel, Kant), the establishment of the category of nature as a tool for subordinating others (Bacon), and the self-regulating identities, governed by desires and fantasies, in a consumer/producer market economy (Foucault, Leach). A similarly dualistic ideological lens is required to induce this double vision of embodiment/disembodiment (Smith). In order to view myself as a disembodied post human, my own body and the bodies of others (animal, vegetable, and mineral) must be “naturalized” (externalized and subordinate) by the transcendent “nature” of my mind.

I would argue that what the connectedness between the liberal subject and information technology really illustrates is that the internal/external categorization of the

⁵⁴ Hayles, *How we became posthuman*, 90.

human mind in relation to the nature is no longer relevant because the mind was never autonomous to begin with. By foreshadowing the negation of the Cartesian split, the birth of the post human also alludes to the collapse of the ideological (and self-destructive) drive towards transcendent disembodiment. If cyberspace and the post human cyborg are stripped of the promise of an escape to a better tomorrow through a new form of (dis)embodiment, then the material connectedness of the human subject to technological prosthesis collapses the hierarchical relationship between the liberal subject and the other. The birth of the post human describes the historical re-embodiment of the liberal subject, rather than the next step in the domination of “nature” in the name of a transcendent disembodiment.

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The m@tter meter is a well-crafted open source mobile electronic device. It was designed to replicate all of the basic functions of actual mobile devices such as the iPad, while at the same time revealing the usually concealed infrastructure that carry out these functions. It is a device that’s sole purpose is to solve the side effect of disembodiment, intensified by the mobile devices that came before it. In this way, it is like the non-products in Near Future Laboratories TBD catalog. It is the non-product of an imagined future through which the trajectory of everyday consumer life is extrapolated to a yet to come but equally banal day.

why, how, and when one might choose to engage with the “real” world now that it is possible to access a steady feed of information alerting one to conditions outside of the domestic space, without ever leaving the house. It is also a warning against the potential intensification of alienation due to an increasingly internet-based social life (“Like all your friend’s latest status when you hit the ‘Silence Alarm’ button”). The critical agenda of the many non-products in the *TBD Catalog* explore the potential of consumer products to nudge the behaviors and identities of consumers in new and significant, yet insidiously familiar directions.

Like the products in the *TBD catalog*, the **B>** brand, catalog, and products critique the ability of consumer culture to influence the rituals of daily life by making desirable and then normalizing new identities and behavior. The **B>** m@tter meter critically articulates the current trend of connected mobile devices and the claims their advertisements make of enhancing individual dreams and desires (climb the tallest mountains, travel to exotic lands, unleash untold creativity and productivity) all with the gentle stroke of a finger against an intimate spectacle of color, light, and glass.

Mobile devices and their aggressively funded, researched, and promoted near futures are the impossibly compact and powerful embodiment of the disembodiment fantasy. Yet, when they are held in the hand, and turned on, they make even more apparent an ever present ideological split between embodied productive reality, and disembodied fantasy worlds. They do this through planned obsolescence (and the accumulation of obsolete piles of waste), increasing the minimum cost of “normal”

subsistence⁵⁷ (and therefore the minimum required hours of wage labor), and requiring a vast infrastructure of factories, wires, servers, distribution, as well as subordinated and exploited labor. All the while the latest mobile device provides the user with a persistent fantasy life, which one can slip into at a moment's notice (disembodied and disengaged), and that provides a constant feedback loop of interrogation and confession between the user and others (other users, sites of production, policing entities, and government/corporate databases).

The **B> m@tter** meter replicates all of the basic functions of these magical mobile devices, including an illusionistic display (Zoetrope dial), wireless connectedness through waves (microphone sensor), and a microprocessor that translates the flow of electrons between bodies into coherent information. While it does all of these things and more, it does them as unconvincingly as possible in order to dispel the fantasy of disembodied information, and draw attention to the infrastructure that is usually obscured behind a veil of illusion.

⁵⁷Anton Troianovski. *The Wall Street Journal*, "Cellphones Are Eating The Family Budget." Accessed July, 23 2014. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10000872396390444083304578018731890309450>

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Figure 19 m@tter meter ©yber sp@©e Lifestyle Advertisement (Bare).

The likeness of Christopher Mollusk in the m@tter meter ©yber sp@©e lifestyle advertisement was appropriated from the character Neo, played by Keanu Reeves, in *The Matrix* trilogy. Neo is a computer hacker who gets drawn into a vast conspiracy by a mysterious hacker named Morpheus after the authorities take notice of Neo's illegal hacking activity. Neo and his revolutionary compatriots fight to unplug humanity from the Matrix, a computer rendered virtual world designed to allow sentient machines to harvest and exploit the energy produced by human bodies. The trilogy dramatically concludes when the machines and humans discover a shared enemy in Agent Smith, an out of control sentient program that has no body and is attempting to destroy the programming/minds of both humans and robots. Neo sacrifices his body in a fight to the death with Smith, and becomes a transcendent bit of disembodied programming that can destroy Smith with a burst of white light.

The plot of the Matrix trilogy reenacts the western drama of disembodiment and places it in an imagined near future context. Like Hegel's master/slave dialectic, transcendence and hierarchy are linked to the outcome of a fight to the death between two self-aware minds. Smith and Neo are unique in their ability to gain power over the Matrix through self-awareness of their relationship to it and an understanding of the essential code that it is built from. They are Kantian reflections of the same subject, one morally corrupt and tied to the infrastructure of the Matrix (Smith), and the other transcendent of his body and in his pursuit of moral law (Neo). Like in Bacon's *New Organon*, the mission of the liberal subject (Neo) is linked to a transcendent moral goal that requires the subjugation of objects, phenomena, and subordinated minds in order to bring about an Edenic utopia.

This salvation comes in a form that is a striking allegory of life in the contemporary market economy. Each human is made aware of the fact that they are a disembodied mind living in a virtual world whose body is being exploited for its productive energy. Taking their rightful place as liberal subjects, the citizens of the Matrix are free to reunite their minds and bodies and live out their lives in an unwelcoming and scorched wasteland overrun by machines...or they could just continue to live out their fantasies in peace.

Like Leach, Ewen, and Niel Smith's conceptualizations of the relationship (separation) of consumption and production in the global market economy, the Edenic manifestation of the Matrix is one that aspires to and promises transcendent disembodiment but requires exploitative labor in order to function. As Leach points out, while consumers have a democratic choice of a sort, this system is not consensual

because all alternate ontologies have been made legally, economically, and/or infrastructurally untenable. The Edenic Matrix, like the global market economy, becomes a self-regulating ontological duality in which the confessed desires of the mind are delivered to the liberal subject, in transcendent fantasy form, by the exploited bodies of other liberal subjects. Everything else (nature) becomes a ‘scorched wasteland’ of infrastructural support for the disembodiment fantasy of the liberal subject, losing all meaning and function in any other ontological context.

In the m@tter meter ©yber sp@ce lifestyle advertisement, Christopher Mollusk (Neo) designs his own Edenic Matrix by recreating the real world in his own image using the **B>** m@tter meter. The m@tter meter radiates out a techno-spiritual mandala, containing all of the relevant ideological and essentializing symbols required to create a convincing disembodiment fantasy (10>@†♂\$#©). Mollusk is connected to his surroundings by a stream of electrons and information, and begins to see everything external as prosthesis of his own mind and body. As this shift in perspective occurs, the real world becomes an Edenic Matrix overlaid with the properties of Mollusk’s naturalizing disembodiment fantasy (the periodic table, the cowardly lion, piranha plants, etc.). Mollusk is no longer human, he is now post human. However, the unforeseen consequences of neglected and exploited bodies loom on the horizon in the form of a monstrous animal/vegetable/mineral assemblage.

> Terms of Use

The **B>** brand identity is a combined appropriation of the Coca-Cola Company⁵⁸ and HP Brand⁵⁹ Identities as published in Alina Wheeler's *Designing Brand Identity*, and modified to reflect the values of the **B>** brand. Wheeler states that "Brand identity makes big ideas and meaning accessible. Brand identity takes similar but disparate elements and unifies them into a whole system."⁶⁰ This appropriation and the appropriation throughout the **B>** brand and line of lifestyle products is designed to act as a parody and critique of consumer culture. The **B>** brand identity does this by making the big ideas and meanings that consumer culture supports accessible to consumers, while unifying them into the western historical narrative of the instrumentalization of the other (animal, vegetable, or mineral) as nature and the separation of consumption from production, with the transcendental goal of a disembodiment fantasy made real.

The decontextualization that occurs from this collage of media may make some objects and images represent meanings that are not directly related to the process, materials, bodies, or labor involved in their production and daily lives. This is a common property of consumer products and media and is not an exclusive property of the

58 Wheeler, Alina. *Designing brand identity: an essential guide for the whole branding team*. (Hoboken, New Jersey : John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), 218.

59 Wheeler, Alina. *Designing brand identity: an essential guide for the whole branding team*, 238.

60 Wheeler, Alina. *Designing brand identity: an essential guide for the whole branding team*, 4.

strategies of appropriation or decontextualization employed by the **B>** brand and company.

The decontextualization of production from consumption, and labor from product, is a trademark of canonical western philosophy, including but not limited to, Hegel's Master/Slave dialectic. Hegel theorized that an individual could achieve self-consciousness only through the enslavement of another and in this way separate himself from nature and the labor required for subsistence.⁶¹ Variations of this trademark are currently in use in the United States and internationally, and originated in US department stores as early as 1900. With the support of public officials, merchants developed a system of separating labor from retail, and eliminated viable alternative lifestyles through legislation and strike breaking.⁶² The resulting system is one in which all individuals are both master and slave, fulfilling the desires of a detached consciousness with consumed fantasies that hold the promise of transcendence from a life of labor and consumption. Therefore, the act of consumption is detached from any context or meaning.

The Human Disembodiment FantasyTM is **B>**'s proprietary implementation of the master-slave relation of production/consumption. The Disembodiment FantasyTM grants consumers, employees, managers, etc., the ability to instrumentalize NatureTM in order to fulfill their fantasies of transcendence including but not limited to heavenly ascension, world domination, happiness due to social success, and an expansion of being beyond the limitations of the body. **B>** retains exclusive rights to all uses and variations of The

61 Kojève, Alexandre, and Raymond Queneau. *Introduction to the reading of Hegel: lectures on the phenomenology of spirit*. (New York: Basic Books,) 1969, 8-9.

62 Leach, William. *Land of desire: merchants, power, and the rise of a new American culture*. (New York: Pantheon Books,) 1993, 75.

Human Disembodiment FantasyTM in relation to NatureTM as mediated by consumer culture through the separation of production and consumption.

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The **B>** brand and company is an “anti-brand” that appropriates of the visual language of branding and consumer culture. It is art designed to blend into, if only for a moment, a consumer culture context in order to critique, rather than function within, that context. By designing art that confronts an audience in this way, I am following in a tradition of artists and activists that appropriate and role-play in the name of cultural critique. Artists such as Shawn Wolfe, The Yes Men, Takashi Murakami, and Near Future Laboratories employ similar techniques in order to undermine the power of the insidious ready-made identities produced by contemporary consumer culture. The **B>** brand and products share the ambitions of these artists to undermine the power of consumer culture by amplifying the absurdity of its message, negating its system of value, and rejecting its nihilistic vision of the future.

The **B>** brand, products, and catalog is a parody of a moralizing project that promotes the exploitation of the category of nature by disembodiment-obsessed individuals. Through the **B>** brand I am making a case for the effectiveness of art as an ideological critique of consumer culture. I do not wish to suggest that all artists have a moral responsibility to remove their work from the market, or that all artwork should take a critical stance against consumer culture. When such a critical stance is the goal, the

ability of the work to exist within consumer culture while negating its own value (capital) increases the effectiveness of the critique.



Figure 20 The Remover Installer, Shawn Wolfe

Shawn Wolfe appropriates the visual language and design techniques used by his own profession (designer) in his non-brand Beatkit in order to deconstruct a designer's ability to imbue consumer products with authority and unfulfillable desire.⁶³ Wolfe founded Beatkit in 1984 with a built-in expiration date of 2000. This expiration date reflected Wolfe's goal of affecting change by revealing a brand's ability to provide ready-made identities to consumers across multiple generations. Wolfe was concerned about the far reaching consequences of the expansion and intensification of consumer culture and its ability to direct consumers desires to self-negating and nihilistic ends.

We mentally escape into idealistic lifestyle images that make no true or false claims but are never the less devised solely with the intent to make us uncomfortable inside our own skin. Real brands...exist only to perpetuate their own existence. The strongest most enduring brands have managed to outlive many generations of consumers. A badge of identity...brands are always there to help us piece together who we are. Thus we are encouraged to participate in a continuous act of consumption that serves to escalate all of the most fundamental crises of contemporary life, the using up of natural resources, ecological ruin, cultural gentrification, emotional detachment, cynicism, alienation, ambivalence

⁶³ VanderLans, Rudy. *Uncanny: the art & design of Shawn Wolfe*. (Hamburg: Gingko,) 2001, From Eric Frederickson.

and so forth. As an anti-brand Beatkit has hopefully managed to lay bare some of these truths...and now as its final act of common decency Beatkit must die.⁶⁴

The most successful and recognizable of Wolfe's non-products, the *Remover Installer*, is a non-descript mechanical device portrayed in advertisements as a jumble of hardware crudely cast in colored plastic, and sealed in packaging. The *Remover Installer* promises to solve all of the needs of contemporary life by negating its own intended use (removing a thing/idea that has been installed or vice-a-versa). While Wolfe designed a series of ads around the *Remover Installer* that illustrated how it could be helpful in adjusting relationships, identity, and incomprehensibly complex technology, the *Remover Installer* was never actually made available for purchase.

The *Remover Installer* and *Beatkit* share the same self-negating and non-functioning (as consumer products) properties and are a reflection of how Wolfe imagined actual brands and products to work on the identity of consumers. At the same time, *Beatkit* and the *Remover Installer's* inability to function within the value system of consumer culture increases the effectiveness of Wolfe's critique by making it impossible for consumer culture to subsume Wolfe's work for profit.

The ability of Wolfe's work to turn consumer culture's negating function against itself is similar to the design of the **B>** brand and products. **B>** is built from snippets of actual brands, advertisements, and ready-made identities in order to support a range of products that cannot (and should not) be purchased. Each image and snippet of text was selected to reinforce the absurdity of the ready-made identity on display and highlight the

⁶⁴ VanderLans, Rudy. *Uncanny: the art & design of Shawn Wolfe*. (Hamburg: Gingko,) 2001, From Shawn Wolfe.

disconnect between the material reality of consumer culture and the fantasies of desire that it relies on for support.

Like Wolfe's, work **B>** denies the value system of consumer culture and therefore profitable integration. However, while Wolfe's work focuses on the ability of design to enhance the desirability of consumer culture, **B>** examines the self-regulating properties of contemporary consumer/producer culture driven by the pursuit of individual desire. The **B>** brand, products, and catalog are a critical articulation of a consumer/producer culture that is the result of each consumer's understanding of themselves as self-conscious individuals that should be free to pursue their desires and act out their fantasies through the instrumentalization and exploitation of others. These self-articulated fantasies are then subsumed, distilled into the products of decontextualized labor, and spectacularly rearticulated across a sea of fantasy affirming and data collecting media.

The exploitative fantasy fulfillment promise of consumer culture reflects the same self/other relationship encoded in the Bacon's *New Organon*. In this relationship, the recognition of the self as disembodied essence is cultivated at the expense of all else, including one's own body. It is also a relationship that necessitates an external category (nature) to fill with exploitable objects and essentializing properties (naturalization) with which to categorize them. Powerful ideologies with entrenched institutional infrastructure (Christianity, Democracy, Capitalism, and Science) legitimize, regulate, and enable this self/other relationship. When these ideological infrastructures enforce the separation of production from consumption, as they did during the turn of 20th Century in the United States (and continue to do now), the daily consumption of subsistence is

imbued with the fantasy of disembodiment. This network of relations makes a consumer and producer, interrogator and confessor, master and slave, disembodied self and naturalized other, out of every individual in the name of a self-destructive transcendence of the body.

@ Privacy Policy

The beginning of the letter from Christopher Mollusk in the *Hi from Christopher Mollusk* section of the **B>** catalogue is appropriated from the *Hi from Stelios* section of the *easyGroup Brand Manual*.⁶⁵ Stelios is a serial entrepreneur who founded the easyGroup when he started easyJet and now licenses the easy brand to other businesses.⁶⁶ The likeness of Stelios is used in the marketing materials that are distributed when an easyGroup licensed business launches. The *easyGroup Brand Manual* states, “When Stelios speaks it should be combative to the old order by taking on the big boys.”⁶⁷ In this way, the easyGroup presents a controlled and fictionalized identity of its founder in order to endear itself to consumers and imbue their brand with a moralizing agenda of looking out for the little people by allowing them to transcend their position in the world through a series of affordable goods and services, unlike the “big boys.”

Similarly, I have created a fictionalized version of myself to include in the B> catalog, founding myth, and product lifestyle advertisement narratives. The name Christopher Mollusk was given to me in error by Garth Clark, the ceramic art critic and founder of the CFile foundation in his reference to my Matter Meter : Wave project during a student forum at Boise State University. I have taken on this moniker for the

65 The easyGroup. “Hi From Stelios.” *The easyGroup Brand Manual*, April, 2011, 2.

66The easyGroup. “What is the easyGroup?” *The easyGroup Brand Manual*, April, 2011, 6.

67 The easyGroup. “How to use Stelios” *The easyGroup Brand Manual*, April, 2011, 32.

B> catalog in order to create a parody of the central figure often cast in the vague transcendental projects claimed by companies and their brands (and more broadly in television, movies, and other popular media.)

@2 Privacy Policy (continued)

The bottom two paragraphs of the letter from Christopher Mollusk are appropriated from the company history section of the HP website. HP is the originator of the popular Silicon Valley start-up founding myth that invariably begins in a garage with a couple of scrappy kids with lint in their pockets and a vision in their heads.⁶⁸ HP has not only built this into their brand identity, but into the actual geography of Silicon Valley, with a nostalgically renovated garage designated as a historical landmark. The garage is marked as the point in space where Silicon Valley was founded. This founding myth, regardless of its accuracy, has been instrumentalized in order to lend legitimacy to the products produced by HP. It links HP products with a specific romanticized form of labor and success that has nothing to do with the current state of HP, or the method of production and distribution it employs, in order to get its products into the hands of consumers.

PR founding myths, such as HP's garage and easyGroup's scrappy underdog Stelios, displace the actual lifecycle of consumer products and the labor of which they are a result, with a feel-good tale of success that gives the consumer hope of a similar, if unlikely, financial transcendence. These myths gloss over the impact of production on actual bodies from the labor practices that make consumer culture possible. While I might order an HP product from the internet thinking to myself how unfortunate it is to

68 Hewlett-Packard Development Company, L.P. "HP History" Accessed January 7, 2015. ww8.hp.com/us/en/hp-information/about-hp/history/overview.html.

support the labor practices of factories such as Foxconn,⁶⁹ HP does everything it can to make it as easy as possible for me to order that laptop and feel good about it.

This is the concrete result of the separation of consumption from production. For example, I used to think that working in a sweatshop would be horrible, that the physical pain and stress of deteriorating health and injuries would negate whatever meager financial gains resulted. But this was just an idea instilled from headlines glanced at and articles occasionally read, not associated with any physical sensation or emotional weight. Now, after having worked in sweatshop-like conditions, in a small pottery shop contracted to make handmade chotchkie for the Anthropology chain of retail stores, I know it is horrible. While I likely experienced better pay and hours than a typical Foxconn employee, I know the fear and physical pain of a day in such working conditions. At its mention, my whole body shudders in revulsion. It is with this experience in mind, and the absurdity of attaching a romantic founding myth to a rapidly growing, underfunded, and overworked site of production and labor force, that I have assigned my alter ego Christopher Mollusk a similarly absurd and decontextualized founder's myth.

Following the broader structure of this project, Christopher Mollusk is a collage of characters that consumer culture tells me to empathize with. The cast of supporting characters is appropriated from a roster of co-star and supporting rolls from the same popular culture references. These collaged identities speak for themselves in that they are the types of images available for consumption and therefore reflect popular and profitable desires. I have selected them and posed them in specific settings, and with specific

⁶⁹ Macworld. "Foxconn builds products for many vendors, but its mud sticks to Apple" Accessed January 7, 2015.
<http://www.macworld.com/article/2012972/foxconn-builds-products-for-many-vendors-but-its-mud-sticks-to-apple.html>

objects, because I want to emphasize that they say something important and sad about how I (and those in a similar demographic) are expected to relate to the world at large. They tell a story of arbitrary but deeply ingrained and gendered subordination, a disregard for everything non-human, and a desire to transcend and discard the body. I have further cut, pasted, and colored Mollusk and the fantasy-world he inhabits with my own face, aesthetic sensibilities, and experiences. What I've created is a jumbled up monster of irony, earnestness, and humor with an unattractive messiah complex.

It has been my experience that when faced with sudden embarrassment such as being exposed in an awkward state of undress, having my character-flaws revealed, or being cast in an unappealing role by another, I have two options. I can react in defensiveness and anger, rejecting the voyeur and clinging to the mistake that was the true source of pain. Or I can join the voyeur in a carnivalesque fit of laughter, shedding my pride like a mask of mistaken identity. This satirical self-portrait of the transcendental-project-obsessed male ego deeply embedded in consumer culture (and beyond) is an invitation to others to laugh at the role in which I have cast myself. I hope that this laughter will release the pride encasing the insecurities of my "customers" and allow them to also laugh at their mistaken identities, diminishing the power of misplaced pride to inflict violence and invoke hatred. So crack open the shell of swollen pride, douse it in a mignonette of laughter and enjoy.

Eric Mullis

Boise

May 2014

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