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"They're Playing My Song":

The "Industry of Culture" and the "Church of Celebrity"

This chapter examines particular readings of culture and celebrity evident in *Fury* and *Step Across This Line*. Theoretical accounts of culture and celebrity are discussed in comparison to Rushdie's literary treatment of the themes. While in the first instance analysis is applied to perspectives apparent in the above-mentioned Rushdie texts, subsequent scrutiny of culture and celebrity is presented in accordance with the politics and literature methodology detailed in chapter three. Specifically, questions inspired by Rushdie's typically imaginative treatment of culture and celebrity are discussed in the context of theory and real-life examples. Culture and celebrity themes that Rushdie locates in areas such as popular music, politics, religion, photography, literature, violence and drama are examined within the border and frontier spatial logic of the binaries of: subject/object, image/substance, artificiality/authenticity, shame/shamelessness, and public/private. With reference to my earlier discussion of borders and frontiers as "meaning carrying and meaning making entities", the ideas promoted in this chapter are presented with a consciousness of the overarching question of the relationship between meaning and perspective.[1] Before introducing Rushdie's account of culture and celebrity, I will briefly examine relevant broad-scale interpretations of both terms.

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[1] Donnan & Wilson, op. cit., p. 30.

5.1 Culture: the expression of "imagined communities"

In discussing philosophical and literary concepts of culture, cultural theorist Chris Jenks provides an overview of four broad-scale accounts of the term. Firstly, he examines the view of culture as a "cerebral" or "cognitive... state of mind".[2] This understanding of culture, he argues, "carries with it the idea of perfection, a goal or an aspiration of individual or human achievement".[3] Secondly, he presents the view of culture as an "embodied or collective" concept.[4] Jenks suggests, "this is a position linking the idea of culture with civilization".[5] This link, he adds, is "informed" by early anthropological theories of "degeneration" and "progress".[6] It is an idea of culture based on the "collective life, rather than the individual conscious".[7] Thirdly, Jenks highlights perhaps the most widely embraced contemporary account of culture; that is, culture as a "descriptive and concrete category".[8] This view represents culture "as the collective body of arts and intellectual work within any one society".[9] Jenks describes this as the generally accepted meaning behind the "everyday language usage of the term".[10] Despite its common usage this understanding of culture still carries certain connotations of "exclusivity" and "elitism" regarding, for example, the classification of "arts and intellectual work".[11] The fourth, and final, category Jenks raises is "social"[12]. This social view, he argues, is a "pluralist and potentially democratic" interpretation of the term that sees culture as referring to "the whole way of life of a people".[13] This final category is perhaps the broadest interpretation of culture, one that is in various ways inclusive of a range of carefully delineated readings of the term. Rushdie's writing most commonly intersects culture in this "social" context, yet it is not limited to the social category. The intellectual dimension of this social perspective is a matter of considerable interest to Rushdie.

[2] C. Jenks, *Culture*, Routledge, London, 1993, p. 11.
[3] ibid.
[4] ibid.
[5] ibid.
[6] ibid.
[7] ibid.
[8] ibid.
[9] ibid. pp. 11-12.
[10] ibid. p. 12.
[11] ibid.
[12] ibid.
[13] ibid.

As I have shown, Rushdie is a vehement campaigner against real and imagined intellectual limits. His approach to culture is guided by a similarly permissive impulse. While perhaps not completely rejecting any of Jenks' four accounts of culture, nor would he be likely to privilege one particular understanding of the term above all others. For instance, his articulation of Solanka's identity dilemma is presented through the varied cultural prisms of work, family, friends, love, violence, death, politics, mythology, philosophy, puppetry and the internet. For Rushdie, "intellectual" expressions of culture run almost concurrently with social, "way of life" expressions of the term. No single definition of culture could traverse the broad and diverse spatial logic he affords the term. However, some preoccupations in his approach to culture are identifiable; the most prominent of which is the centrality of questions of identity.

In a relatively permissive sense, culture can be understood as referring to distinct modes of expression of collective identity. The basis of collective identity can, for example, be ethnic, national, religious, political, social and economic. However, collective identity need not be limited to, nor dependent on, these constitutive factors; indeed there are innumerable perspectives from which notions of collective identity can be formed. It is a subjective phenomenon perhaps best explained in the context of the theoretical methodology attached to nationalism theorist Benedict Anderson's term "imagined communities".[14] If Anderson's theory is applied to this discussion of culture, then it is apparent that the notion of collective identity his term describes need not necessarily be based upon concrete or tangible evidence of unity or sameness; it can be manifest through an *imagined* sense of solidarity. As is the case with personal identity, collective identity is often more accurately defined by that which it opposes (for example, the differing cultural practices of a neighbouring community) rather than being defined in accordance with its own, often indistinct, origins. In its broadest context, culture can be understood as the expression of a particular imagined community's sense of self as articulated through collective mediums such as: visual art, dance, literature,

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[14] Anderson, op. cit., pp. 1-5.
"Emotional legitimacy" is a term Anderson developed to describe particular characteristics of the expression of nationalism. Given the aims of this thesis and the fact that I employ the term itself solely as an illustrative device, Anderson's theory need not be discussed at length.

music and sport. Again, it is important to note that cultural expression need not be limited to these mediums.

The accounts of culture Rushdie presents in *Fury* and *Step Across This Line* typically engage themes of music, politics, religion and violence. Rushdie presents these themes as facets of culture, hence my intention to classify them as such. When presenting his various readings of culture, Rushdie often concurrently discusses celebrity. Indeed, to varying degrees, much of his overall treatment of culture in *Fury* and *Step Across This Line* has a celebrity dimension. This is a notable feature of his work, particularly if one is mindful of the complexities of his own celebrity dimension; specifically, his notoriety as a writer and his infamy as the subject of the *fatwa*. Celebrity can also be understood as the context within which many people recognise and define Rushdie. He is arguably more widely known as the author sentenced to death by religious fundamentalists than the literary figure who in 1993 was awarded the prestigious Booker of Bookers award. In this sense, the connection between celebrity and the various readings of identity discussed in the previous chapter is clear. However, the meaning of the widely used term celebrity is, for many, anything but clear. This irony may be viewed as inspiring much of Rushdie's literary examination of the term.

5.2 Celebrity: a form of meta-identity

One way to approach celebrity is to view it as a form of meta-identity - an expansive or magnified embodiment of the identity-difference dichotomy discussed in the previous chapter. The frontiers that define celebrity (as with identity) rely, to varying degrees, on notions of difference and reflexivity. The term celebrity also encompasses distinctions concerning an individual's status inside or outside of a particular socio-economic stratum, and distinctions between subject and object. If we accept that celebrity is a phenomenon formed through amplified processes of relational comparison (i.e. association and disassociation), then the social context within which these processes occur becomes a matter of considerable significance. Rushdie refers to this social context with the term culture, suggesting that, for him, celebrity is a facet of culture. The social

implications and cultural context of celebrity are factors that he explores extensively in both *Fury* and *Step Across This Line*. The following extract from the early stages of *Fury* - a portrayal of the late-twentieth century rise of culture and the contemporary cultural by-product celebrity - offers a summation of thematic fixations that shape Rushdie's literary treatment of the two terms. As is typical of his literary style, borders and frontiers serve as spatial maps representing zones of inclusion and exclusion, and defence and offence.

> This was the period [1970s and 80s] in which the two great industries of the future were being born. The industry of culture would in the coming decades replace that of ideology, becoming 'primary' in the way that economics used to be, and spawn a whole new *nomenklatura* of cultural commissars, a new breed of apparatchiks engaged in great ministries of definition, exclusion, revision and persecution, and a dialectic based on the new dualism of defence and offence. And if culture was the world's new secularism, then its new religion was fame, and the industry - or, better, the church - of celebrity would give meaningful work to a new *ecclesia*, a proselytising mission designed to conquer this new frontier, building its glitzy celluloid vehicles and its cathode ray rockets, developing new fuels out of gossip, flying the Chosen Ones to the stars. And to fulfil the darker requirements of the new faith, there were occasional human sacrifices, and steep, wing-burning falls.[15]

Rushdie makes some lofty assertions regarding this "new frontier". To suggest that the "great industries" he describes have usurped economic "ideology", socio-politically based "secularism" and religious fervour, is to argue that a monumental cultural shift has occurred. For example, on a practical level one could obviously not plausibly suggest that the world has dispensed with carbon-based fossil fuels in favour of a dependence on "gossip" fuel. This is not what Rushdie wishes to argue. The rich and illustrative metaphors he employs confirm that his observations are not intended as literal. However, the figurative meaning behind his assessment of contemporary culture should not be underestimated. Positioned in the early stages of *Fury*, Rushdie's statement emphasises the broader identity-related thematic tack of the text. It is Rushdie as narrator saying: "this is the terrain this novel will navigate... these are the themes I wish to explore... this is the broad cultural backdrop against which I will stage a series of intricate personal dramas". Put simply, it is the novel's "once upon a time" introduction. When

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[15] Rushdie (2001), op. cit., p. 24.

viewed as this type of literary structural device, his portrait of the tension between competing cultural values appears more plausible.

The processes of "definition, exclusion, revision and persecution" to which Rushdie refers have always been integral to various understandings of culture. Indeed, examples of these processes are evident in the four broad-scale interpretations of culture offered by Jenks. Rushdie does not appear to be disputing that fact. Rather, he is highlighting what he perceives to be the inordinate level of emphasis placed on certain aspects of these processes within contemporary culture. Rushdie's approach is not new. Many writers of political literature focus on what they perceive as examples of socio-political imbalance. For instance, Orwell examines the invasive imbalance between personal and political spheres in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. So too, in a selection of his early novels (particularly, *The Joke* and *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*), Kundera explores the notion of imbalance as it is apparent in the propagandist appropriation of culture by the post-war Czech totalitarian regime. Rushdie's literary treatment of culture and celebrity in *Fury* and *Step Across This Line* is driven by similar preoccupations. When Rushdie talks of the "everywhereness" of the "industry of culture" within the integrated global economy, a distinct parallel can be drawn to the "everywhereness" of politics within Kundera's view of culture under totalitarian rule. Rushdie questions the cultural conditions that foster a seemingly increased level of permeance at the frontier delineating the formerly separate spheres of celebrity and politics. Indeed, much of his literary project is concerned with questioning the implications of these types of emerging cultural intersections. He questions how celebrity practices influence political values and vice versa. Of course, Rushdie's focus on celebrity cannot be critiqued without an examination of the frontier delineating his own dichotomous status as a private individual and a public figure. The ambiguity of this frontier is apparent in certain non-literary (celebrity) activities in which Rushdie has engaged and openly reflected upon in the context of frontiers; it has also seen him become a target of some criticism.

5.3 "Uncool literary specs" and "godlike... fly shades"

"None of this matters very much," writes Rushdie anticipating media derision of his association with Bono, singer of the world-renowned Irish rock band U2.[16] "I've been crossing frontiers all my life," he adds, "physical, social, intellectual artistic borderlines."[17] Clearly he wishes to play down the importance of these figurative crossings. This is hardly surprising considering his argument against intellectual and artistic limits. However, the tone behind his light-hearted description of a momentary writer-celebrity exchange suggests that, despite his denials, the crossing of certain frontiers can matter "very much".

During the London leg of U2's 1992 *Zooropa* tour, Bono made "a gesture of solidarity" with Rushdie, symbolically bringing the author out of hiding by inviting him on stage at the height of the *fatwa*.[18] "For a moment", says Rushdie, "I felt what it's like to have 80,000 fans cheering you on."[19] This moment was punctuated photographically by a symbolic identity-swap between Rushdie the literary figure and Bono the rock star as they exchanged spectacles. "There I am looking godlike in Bono's Fly shades while he peers benignly over my uncool literary specs", writes Rushdie.[20] "There could be no more graphic expression of the difference between our worlds", he surmises.[21] Given the integral role of difference in identity processes, Rushdie's description of the apparent gulf between celebrity and literary spheres reveals much about his perception of his own position on this paradigm. Rushdie playfully defines his literary identity as "uncool" in comparison to the "God-like" mantle of rock star, suggesting he is aware of certain stereotypes applicable to his "literary" persona. However, whether or not Rushdie cared to admit it, the implications of his literary identity, at that time, extended far beyond the light-hearted notion that such an identity was merely "uncool". Arguably, Bono did not orchestrate this very public exchange to deride literary uncoolness, nor did he intend it as a revelatory unmasking of the

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[16] Rushdie (2002), op. cit., p. 103.
[17] ibid.
[18] ibid.
[19] ibid.
[20] ibid.
[21] ibid.

artificiality of rock-star deities. When questioned about the event, Rushdie confirms Bono's motivations. Bono, Rushdie explains, "is interested in free speech issues"; he "wanted to make [a] statement."[22] Rushdie goes on to reveal that he "was led backstage before the show" where he and Bono "worked out a little dialogue routine".[23] Rather than being a spontaneous gesture, this "routine" ironically utilised the power of celebrity image to comment on the flippancy and crude duplicity of fame and notoriety, a very public and purposeful illustration of, in this instance, the fine line between adulation and murderous rage.

Bono's symbolic hypothesis is clear, the drastically opposed responses of mass adoration or violence are primarily formed on the basis of an image or a perception; figuratively, a perception crudely portrayed through the drastically opposed cultural lenses of two different pairs of spectacles. In the context of their one-dimensional public identities as Rushdie the writer and Bono the rock star, both figures symbolically embody the image of their vocations. Equally they are both subject to certain social conventions and cultural profiles attached to these images. Rushdie is correct to suggest that such images are artificial. Obviously not all writers are "uncool" awkward intellectuals, nor are all musicians infallible "godlike" apparitions. In light of this fact, the exchange of spectacles, or the crossing of artistic frontiers, should not, as he argues, matter; however, the gravity of his own situation at that time suggests that such frontier crossings can and do matter.

Rushdie's fascination with various cultural and celebrity facets of the popular music genre offers further evidence of a possible negation, on his part, of the significance of artistic and intellectual frontier crossings between literary and popular music spheres. Rushdie's 1999 novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* is an attempt to map the cultural impact of popular music and its deity-like celebrities. The remarkable level of artistic and intellectual importance he affords the rock'n'roll genre and, even more so, its idiosyncratic celebrity exponents, has seen the novel described as "the *Ulysses* of rock'n'roll".[24] Without discussing the

[22] V. Nagarajan, "An Interview: Salman Rushdie on Bombay, Rock'n'Roll, and *The Satanic Verses*", *Whole Earth*, Autumn, 1999.
[23] ibid.
[24] Padel, op. cit.

suitability of such a description, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* is indeed an epic fictional treatment of popular music, notable for its praise of music of this variety. For example, the text's narrative voice Rai describes how the "music" of the novel's main protagonists Vina Apsara and Ormus Cama defies limits, surging "round the world, crossing all frontiers, belonging everywhere and nowhere".[25] The "rhythm" of their music, Rai concludes, "is the rhythm of life".[26] Rai's account of the posthumous influence of Vina and her star power is almost sycophantic. Upon hearing of Vina's death, Rai tells how:

> Inspissated women in sexually segregated societies cast off their veils, the soldiers of oppression lay down their guns, the members of racially disadvantaged peoples burst out from their ghettos, their townships, their slums, the rusty iron curtain is torn. Vina has blown down the walls, and this has made her dangerous. The love of her muddied radiance has spread deep into the territories of the repressed. Defying the authorities, dancing in front of their tanks, linking arms before the faltering rifles, the mourners move to her phantom beat, looking increasingly like celebrants, and even seem prepared to embrace martyrdom in her name. Vina is changing the world. The crowds of love are on the move.[27]

Through Rai, Rushdie evokes the power of celebrity image. Rai's musings on the repercussions of Vina's death are laden with superlatives and exaggerations. He is speaking the lingua franca of celebrity, discussing an image, an object, a projection, not a reality. His is the voice of a fan.

Rai is aware of the practical impossibility of the values he attaches to Vina, yet the emotive possibilities her image inspires in him (as a fan) are realised. In death, he later reflects, "she has become an empty receptacle, an arena of discourse, and we can invent her in our own image, as once we invented god."[28] Rai's narrative voice gives Rushdie the license to explore one of the facets of the novel form that he professes to "really like"; that is, its ability to "blur the edges between the fictional world and the real world".[29] When the propensity to "blur" this frontier is applied to the subject of rock'n'roll, Rushdie is able to exercise the idea that one way to make sense of the appeal and cultural function of celebrity is

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[25] Rushdie (1999), op. cit., p. 480.
[26] ibid.
[27] ibid.
[28] ibid., p. 485.
[29] Nagarajan, op. cit.

to view it as a contemporary form of mythology.

Referring to intertextual references between *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and the ancient Greek myth of Orpheus, interviewer Deborah Treisman asks Rushdie if he thinks it is "correct to say that the world of celebrities is the Mount Olympus of today". Rushdie is forthright in his reply.

> Yes, I think famous people have become these flawed giants we use to enact our own stories on a bigger stage, and then we tear them down - which is what used to happen to the gods. As a culture, we are forgetting the myths that once were our reference points. I wonder how many people could even repeat the story of Orpheus, if asked. If they could, they would probably remember the first part, which is Orpheus' decent into the underworld in search of Eurydice. But as important for me is the end of the story, where Orpheus is murdered - his head is cut off and thrown into the river, and it goes on singing. That idea - that you can destroy the singer but not the song - was something that I wanted to write about.[30]

Rushdie's reference to celebrities as "flawed giants" is significant in the context of my description of celebrity as a form of meta-identity. As I discussed in the previous chapter, in *Fury* Solanka reduces his identity dilemma to a miniature scale, enacting and negotiating the impasses in his personal story through the medium of puppetry. The celebrity mythology Rushdie discusses in relation to the Orpheus parable employs similar devices yet it operates on a larger, *meta* scale.

Celebrity is a cultural phenomenon because it is a magnified projection of the collected personal stories of many individuals. It is an imagined expression of shared understanding, and the "song" (the myth) is code for this level of understanding, a code that potentially has a cultural legacy beyond the life of the "flawed giant". As with the imagery of transformative spectacles, celebrity again, for Rushdie, becomes a question of perception. He employs *ersatz*-mythological imagery to rationalise celebrity on the basis of perceptions of scale. The literary devices that enable him to proffer this idea within the fictional framework of the novel are complex; a fact that is evident in the extraordinarily broad narrative scope he affords Rai in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*.

Rushdie constructs Rai's character in a manner that lends his narrative voice a remarkable level of versatility. Rai's lifelong friendship with Vina and

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[30] D. Treisman, "Salman Rushdie's Rock'n'Roll", *Interview*, May 1999.

Ormus grants him prestigious rock'n'roll "insider" status, yet his position as a renowned rock music photographer renders him an observer, passively reporting events through the skewed perspective of a camera lens. On one hand he is a subjective participant in the culture of celebrity, and on the other hand an objective outsider. Additionally, as an individual whose life has been marked by musical milestones (songs that have a particular personal meaning for him), he views Vina and Ormus' music in the context of the cultural/personal "referential points" to which Rushdie refers; put simply, he is also a fan. The polarities of his position do lend Rai's narrative voice a unique type of three-way insight. However, the inevitable intersection and confusion of these perspectives betrays a level of ambiguity. In some ways, the problematic aspects of Rai's perspective reflect those of Rushdie.

Like Rai, Rushdie is a fan. In one of five essays on rock'n'roll in *Step Across This Line*, Rushdie excitedly introduces his observations on the genre with a resounding "va-voom!"[31] Referring to a canon of rock lyricists (including John Lennon, Tom Waits and Paul Simon), Rushdie declares, "there is much for literary folk to study and admire".[32] While acknowledging the primitive nature of some rock music, he argues that "rock'n'roll actually has a long history of verbal, musical and off-the-cuff felicities and dexterities."[33] In addition to being a professed admirer of the intellectual and artistic dimensions of rock'n'roll, Rushdie also qualifies as an exponent.

In 2000, Rushdie was approached by U2's Bono seeking permission to appropriate phrases from *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* for a melody he had written. Rushdie was flattered. As he recalls, "one of the novel's principal images is that of the permeable frontier between the world of imagination and the one we inhabit, and here was an imaginary song crossing that frontier."[34] Rushdie appears to view this popular music interpretation of his text as a kind of actualisation of the imaginary aspects of the novel. The profundity of the situation is not lost on him. "They're playing my song", he enthusiastically

[31] Rushdie (2002), op. cit., p. 100.
[32] ibid., p. 101.
[33] ibid.
[34] ibid., p. 105.

declares whilst viewing the band (side-of-stage) as an insider at a "secret pre-tour gig".[35] Much of the imagery of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* has been realised. Rushdie, like the character Ormus, can now call himself a lyricist for the biggest rock band in the world. This directly mirrors the text, a fact that he does not shirk. "Few [people] are aware", he stresses, "that I've spent a lot of time with people in the rock world".[36] Rushdie clearly feels a part of this "world" (it is a world imagines *and* inhabits), yet his reference to it as a separate, "secret" sphere, shows a consciousness of the frontier that surrounds this realm of contemporary mythology. It is the tension at this frontier between hemispherical regions of imagination and reality that, as I have shown, he explores from various angles throughout his literary project. In the context of celebrity, this frontier tension is centred upon the overlapping spheres of "object" and "subject". Not content with limiting his study of celebrity to the world of rock'n'roll, Rushdie also devotes sections of *Step Across This Line* to the notion of the celebrity icon and the object-subject binary.

5.4 "Lethal voyeurs": negotiating the subject-object frontier

Writing in September 1997 on the death of Princess Diana, Rushdie decries what he describes as the "obscenity" of contemporary culture.[37] "We live in a culture that routinely eroticises and glamorises its consumer technology, notably the motor-car", the author observes.[38] "We also live in the Age of Fame, in which", he adds, "the intensity of our gaze upon celebrity turns the famous into commodities, too, a transformation that has often proved powerful enough to destroy them".[39] With references to J. G. Ballad's novel *Crash*,[40] and the alleged culpability of the paparazzi in Diana's death, Rushdie constructs a thesis concerning the public's destructive contribution to celebrity mythology. "We", he argues - not solely the

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[35] ibid., p. 106.
[36] Treisman, op. cit.
[37] Rushdie (2002), op. cit., p. 118.
[38] ibid.
[39] ibid.
[40] Ballard's text contentiously engages themes of violence and sexual-voyeurism. See: J. G. Ballard, *Crash – A Novel*, Picador, New York, 2001.

jostling press photographers - "are the lethal voyeurs".[41] In Rushdie's view, the publics' appetite for "the stolen secrets of people's private lives" implicates us in the "industry of culture's" drive to turn the subject into an object.[42] This subject-object frontier (the region of subject-object transition) is defined by a struggle for control.

Cultural theorist Heinz Steinert places significant emphasis on the issue of control in relation to the media's treatment of public figures. "What the paparazzi do", Steinert suggests, "is not so much to infringe on anyone's right to privacy, as to inhibit people's power to control their own image".[43] Rushdie continues in a similar vein to Steinert. "The public figure", he attests, "is happy to be photographed only when she or he is prepared for it, 'on guard' one might say.[44] The paparazzo", he adds, "looks only for the unguarded moment. The battle is for control."[45] Diana, he concludes, "met her death... fleeing from object to subject, from commodity towards humanity".[46] The idea that issues of control determine the trajectory of this transition is demonstrable, yet the spatial logic of the subject-object frontier to which Rushdie refers is difficult to decipher.

In much cultural theory, the subject-object dichotomy is not generally presented as a balanced or static concept. In attempting to explain the factors that constitute cultural identity, cultural theorist John Storey utilises a subject-object hypothesis conceived by French "post-structuralist psychoanalyst" Jacques Lacan.[47] Storey cites Lacan's theory concerning two differing experiences of self. In infancy, Lacan argues, "there is no distinction between subject and object or self and other."[48] It is when a child enters what Lacan calls the "mirror stage" that a distinct transformation begins.[49] "Looking in the mirror", he states, "the child sees itself as a separate being".[50] This, he continues, is the beginning of a lifelong

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[41] Rushdie (2002), op. cit., p. 119.
[42] ibid., pp. 119-120.
[43] H. Steinert, *Culture Industry*, Polity, Cambridge, 2003, p. 153.
[44] Rushdie (2002), op. cit., p. 120.
[45] ibid.
[46] ibid.
[47] J. Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalisation*, Blackwell, Melbourne, 2003, p. 86.
[48] ibid.
[49] ibid., p. 87.
[50] ibid.

process, a process of "misrecognition".[51] Our gradual "entry into language and culture" further emphasises the "distinction between self and other".[52] For Lacan, this shift equates to a feeling that we are experiencing a never-ending loss of self. "The infant is complete", he argues, but our mature "sense of being a unique and complete individual" is constantly eroded by our cultural interactions.[53] Storey employs Lacan's theory to suggest that "our identities are made in culture" and they are not something we "inherit from nature".[54] In his view, we are constantly striving to find ways to feel complete again, a goal that is ultimately unachievable. Although much of both Lacan and Storey's observations could be seen as aligned with theories of reflexivity and identity/difference discussed in the previous chapter, a distinct theoretical progression is evident. Identity is not solely a sociological phenomenon, for them, it is also cultural.

Aspects of Lacan and Storey's analysis can be applied to Rushdie's view of Diana's demise. Her meta-identity - specifically, contemporary culture's promotion of her as an object - almost totally consumes any viable sense of her as a subject. So great is the extent of the transformation that she is often colloquially described as "public property". This is not to suggest that, in accordance with theories of reflexivity, we are not all engaged in a subject-object view of self. Rarely, however, does this dichotomy become so imbalanced and potentially destructive, as it is in relation to celebrity.

Just as celebrity can be understood as a form of meta-identity, readings of celebrity, within the cultural context of the integrated global economy, may also be seen as accounts formed through amplified processes of collective misrecognition. But if, as Rushdie and Steinert both observe, the process of celebrity depiction is characterised by a power struggle (between, for instance, a celebrity and the paparazzi), then misrecognition can also be partly seen as a consequence of a particular celebrity's carefully constructed depiction of his or her image, and not just a culturally driven phenomenon. This is a premise that can be explained through application to Rushdie's own experience of celebrity.

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[51] ibid.
[52] ibid.
[53] ibid.
[54] ibid., p. 88.

5.5 Rushdie in love: "don't make him get out his baseball bat!"

As discussed earlier, when Rushdie relinquishes his "uncool literary specs" and dons Bono's "fly shades" in front of "80,000 people" he admits to feeling and looking "godlike". This could be described as a heightened form of misrecognition; an extremely public transformation from subject to object. It is likely that Rushdie is aware of these implications. However, as his observations concerning the paparazzi confirm, he is equally aware that the subject-object frontier is characterised by a "struggle for control". In partaking in this very public act he is presenting a powerful (and controlled) image of himself; an image that he and Bono devised. Despite this fact, he dismisses criticism concerning its significance, perhaps because he deems this "godlike" depiction of himself favourably. What if the tables are turned?

In recent years Rushdie has increasingly been the focus of both positive and negative celebrity-orientated media attention. A self-declared migratory figure, Rushdie settled in New York City in the late 1990s and began work on *Fury*. In that time he and the "actress, model, and former cook-show host" Padma Lakshmi began a relationship.[55] Much in the mould of model-turned-author Tara Moss and television chef Jamie Oliver, Lakshmi is a celebrity of note in both her native India and the U.S. Their marriage, and subsequent public outings, has raised both of their profiles, particularly in New York. As social commentator D. T. Max observes, "their sorties make news in the gossip columns".[56] Entering the lens of the paparazzi is obviously quiet a change for a writer like Rushdie who, upon arriving in New York, was depicted in a *New York Post* drawing (in a perhaps disturbingly familiar manner) "behind cross hairs".[57] Indeed, referring to the notoriety, or infamy, he endured as a consequence of the *fatwa*, Rushdie professed to a television interviewer, "to be famous for the wrong thing is a terrible fate".[58] Obviously, this remark was intended to suggest he is understandably

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[55] M. Teichner, "Rushdie: Happy to be Back", *CBS News* (online), http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/09/27/sunday/main523633.shtml, 2002 (accessed 4 April 2005).
[56] D. T. Max, "The Concrete Beneath His Feet", *The New York Times Magazine* (online), http://partners.nytimes.com/library/magazine/home/20000917mag-max.html, 2000 (accessed 9 December 2003).
[57] ibid.
[58] Teichner (online), op. cit.

uncomfortable that the quality of his writing is regularly eclipsed by his status as a target of extremist Islamic wrath. However, one account of his apparently draconian response to unfavourable gossip column attention suggests he again finds himself in a position (albeit a non-life-threatening position) in which he feels his fame is undesirable.

"If you ever write mean things about my wife again, I'll come after you with a baseball bat," witnesses claim Rushdie snapped at *New York Times* fashion editor Guy Trebay at an arts function in February 2005.[59] Rushdie's alleged outburst was apparently in response to a widely circulated article of Trebay's in which the journalist argued Lakshmi exemplified a particularly loathsome stratum of "freeloading" celebrity.[60] Referring to her sponsorship-type allegiances with a myriad of "name" fashion labels, Trebay commented she has "no obvious allergies to the idea of special treatment", adding that, "in the current fashion pantheon Ms. Lakshmi... stands for a love of money and commodity".[61] Perhaps it was this final quip that so enraged Rushdie. Considering his comments on Princess Diana and his related views on the tenuous frontier between humanity and commodity, his sensitivity in this regard is perhaps understandable, if not a little extreme.

Lakshmi is depicted as an object in Trebay's piece and, incidentally, in a range of similar articles by fellow gossip columnists. Indeed, Trebay's article, headlined: "Brand-Name Goddess Basks in the Moment", could be seen (from the outset) as powerfully dispelling even the premise that she be considered a subject, or indeed a person.[62] Lakshmi, not unlike Rushdie in Bono's fly shades, has assumed the metaphorical status of deity. The crucial difference is that this transformation has occurred in a manner that neither she nor Rushdie would deem positive. Evidently, in this instance Lakshmi and Rushdie by association lost the power struggle at subject-object frontier and consequently lost control of their images. There are parallels between the subject-object dichotomy (as explicated, for example, through the determinable factors of Lakshmi's media depiction) and

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[59] J. Bernstein, "Salman Rushdie Defends His Padma", *New York Metro* (online), http://nymag.com/nymetro/news/people/columns/intelligencer/11167/, 2005 (accessed 22 February 2005).
[60] G. Trebay, "Brand-Name Goddess Basks in the Moment", *New York Times*, 8 February 2005.
[61] ibid.
[62] ibid.

the dynamics of the image-over-substance paradigm I introduce later in this chapter. However, at this point, I wish to emphasise that the main commonality apparent in this examination of the borders and frontiers of celebrity is, as Rushdie rightly suggests, the prominence of questions of control.

Just as the cultural luminosity of so-called "low-wattage" celebrities is determined by a struggle for control (control of one's image), the image - and attendant standing - of contemporary political leaders is increasingly subject to the dynamics of this struggle.[63] Rushdie discusses the role of image in politics in both *Fury* and *Step Across This Line* with specific references to U.S. political figures such as Bill Clinton and Joe Lieberman, in which he emphasises the manner in which political images, not unlike those of celebrities, are also concerned with "the battle is for control."[64] There is a clear link between his comments concerning the object-subject transitions of celebrities with the concurrent image-based transitions he identifies in these contemporary political figures. To illustrate this connection I will firstly explain the broader cultural complexities of this "battle" through three image-based examples concerning: firstly, symbolic imagery; secondly, public relations image creation techniques; and thirdly, the apparent politicisation of celebrity.

5.6 "Force of personality" or force of image?

As with celebrity images, the image-control processes of politics are typically characterised by good-bad dichotomies. Much of the historical basis of contemporary political image sculpting techniques can be found in the oppositional visages of wartime politicians. These clearly delineated oppositions are evident in figures such as the British wartime prime minister Winston Churchill. As historian Simon Schama observes, despite the controversies of his past, "the effect of Churchill's appointment to the supreme office he had always coveted", observes Schama, "was electrifying".[65] "By sheer force of personality,

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[63] Trebay, op. cit.
[64] ibid.
[65] S. Schama, "The Churchilliad: Martin Gilbert's Finest Hour", *The New Republic*, Winter, 1984, p. 34. The controversies of Churchill's past to which I refer concern his World War One leadership record. His credentials as a wartime tactician were undermined by the adverse findings of a 1916 War Council "Dardanelles" Commission report that resulted in his dismissal from his post as First Lord of the Admiralty. [continued/...]

transmitted to the British Parliament and to the people through radio broadcasts", Schama concludes, Churchill "turned fear into fortitude".[66] The emotional intensity such a pervading conflict inspires significantly assisted the creation of this image. The propagandist object-dichotomy was clear, Churchill, the symbol of defiance, was pitted against, Adolf Hitler, the symbol of belligerence. These symbols were particularly pronounced during the Battle of Britain, Churchill's "finest hour". While the defiant nature of Churchill's image is indisputable, Schama's assertion that this image was forged through "sheer force of personality" alone is problematic. Rather, it was the "force" of the image that imbued Churchill with his symbolic appeal. No doubt Churchill was aware of the circumstantial appeal of his rhetoric of defiance. It was language of a defiant tone uncannily suited to the situation, however it was a tone that, as historian Paul Addison suggests, did not overwhelmingly appeal to the pervading mode of "war weariness" at the close of the conflict.[67] Churchill's electoral defeat and the simultaneous Labour landslide can perhaps be seen as testament to the circumstantial, or fleeting, nature of his image.

In the post-war absence of the oppositional threat of Nazism, Churchill's rallying conflict metaphors had little immediate resonance. At this point, the struggle for image control appears lost. As is the case with celebrity, "sheer force of personality" is not the factor that determines the impact of a particular political image. Again, it is control of personality that is the crucial factor. Schama virtually divorces Churchill-the-subject from Churchill-the-object, suggesting a third factor he calls "Churchillian charisma" is the secret of his historical prominence.[68] It is the cultural viability of the link between personality (subject) and image (object) that is of utmost importance in the manufacture and maintenance of a figure of political prominence. By cultural vitality I mean, it is the willingness or otherwise of the public to embrace the idea (or image) of a personality rather than its substance. It follows then, that it is the manner in which

For more information see: C. Zoller, "By Ships Alone", in: T. Coates (ed.), *Lord Kitchener and Winston Churchill: The Dardanelles Commission*, Volume I, 1914-15, The Stationery Office, London, 2000.

[66] Schama, op. cit., p. 34.

[67] P. Addison, "Why Churchill Lost in 1945", *BBC History* (online), http://www.bbc.co.uk/history war/wwtwo/election_06.shtml, 2003 (accessed 7 July 2005).

[68] Schama, op. cit., p. 34.

this idea is fostered that is of primary interest. These processes of political image control are increasingly apparent in contemporary politics.

5.7 The reign of the "good guys": carefully packaged politicians

The personality dynamics of the May 2005 U.K. election campaign offer an interesting insight into the subject-object dichotomy. Having lost some ground in the polls, primarily as a result of issues concerning U.K. involvement in the Iraq conflict, Prime Minister Tony Blair's once potent "fresh face" image was tarnished. In *Fury* Solanka offers an interesting view on what he perceives to be the public relations dilemma of U.K. Labour. He alludes to Tony Blair with the pseudonym Tony Ozymandias, stating Ozymandias' government "was simultaneously ahead in the polls and unpopular and the prime minister... seemed shocked by the paradox: what you don't like us? But it's *us*, folks, we're the good guys! People, people: it's *me*!"[69] With Blair's "good guy" image dulled by the grind of eight years of incumbency, the 2005 campaign became a real contest, with rival candidates jostling for alternative positions.[70] However, the campaign showed how the role of image gains heightened importance when these so-called alternative policy positions appear to be increasingly convergent. Commenting at the announcement of the election, U.K. political commentator John Rentoul predicted that "image" would be particularly significant for Michael Howard's Conservative Party.[71] Conscious of the similarities between the Labour Party and the Conservative Party's position in relation to major issues (for instance, the U.K. military commitment in Iraq and immigration/asylum seeker control) the Conservatives sought to differentiate themselves from Labour through an invigorated promotion of image.

With the assistance of Australian political image consultant Lynton Crosby, Rentoul claims the Conservatives "tightened up [their] backroom operation, tailoring their campaign in a manner designed to aggressively target "marginal

[69] Rushdie (2001), op. cit., p. 256.
[70] "John Rentoul Discusses Tony Blair", Interview by Tony Jones, *Lateline* (television program transcript), *ABC Television* (online), http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2005/s1339001.htm, 2005 (accessed 5 April 2005).
[71] ibid.

seats" with a heightened use of "focus group research" and specialised polling.[72] According to Rentoul, Crosby, whose techniques were honed through his prominent direction of a series of successful Australian Liberal Party campaigns, also aimed to revitalise Michael Howard's public image.

This attempted image revitalisation entailed an intense focus on the nature of Howard's encounters with the press. The primary aim was to secure better control of his image. This goal was pursued through programs of carefully regulated rhetoric and staged media events, regularly described as "photo-opportunities".[73] For example, Howard was filmed as the hard-man in a "flak jacket" accompanying the police on a "drug raid" and was alternatively presented as the every-man touring the set of the popular U.K. television series Coronation Street.[74] As political commentator Roy Hattersley observes, these carefully composed outings "were meant to reveal the contrasting, tough and tender, sides of his character".[75] Regardless of their success (Hattersley adds, Howard "looked as though he would rather be somewhere else"), these events were designed to highlight the apparently desirable aspects of Howard's image rather than intricacies of his policies. Indeed, policy rhetoric was markedly low. Aside from the provision of well-rehearsed "sound-bites",[76] Howard avoided attempting to articulate Conservative Party policies in situations viewed, from a marketing perspective, as uncontrolled and, thus, risky. His press office issued daily campaign statements with advertising-type slogans. For instance, Howard's snappy claim that, "there'll be no more half time sentences for full time criminals" was tailored for tabloid press in that it offered minimum detail but maximum impact.[77] Substitute certain words - for example: "soap-powder" for "sentences" and "stains" for "criminals" - and one could envisage a slogan of this variety on the back of a laundry detergent box. Howard's opponent, Blair, a politician often

[72] ibid.
[73] D. Lovell, *et al.*, (eds), *The Australian Political System*, Second Edition, Longman, South Melbourne, 1999, p. 475.
[74] R. Hattersley, "Roy Hattersley on Michael Howard: The more the public see of Michael Howard, the less likely they are to vote for him", *The Guardian*, London, 14 February 2005.
[75] ibid.
[76] Lovell, op. cit., p. 475.
[77] M. Howard, "Michael Howard: Time for Action" (speech transcript), http://www.michaelhowardmp.com/sp120305.htm, 2005 (accessed 11 July 2005).

described as the master of the art of the "sound-bite", uttered the following paradoxical phrase upon his signing of the so-called 1998 Good Friday Agreement: "Now is not the time for sound-bites. I can feel the hand of history on my shoulder".[78] It would seem the influx of this form of rhetoric is unavoidable, for both political exponents and voters alike. Mindful of the intense level of media scrutiny, campaigning politicians are encouraged by their ever-growing army of spin-doctors to avoid policy detail, lengthy press-retorts and informal meet-and-greet situations. In the context of public relations, uncontrolled rhetoric and campaign spontaneity is viewed as dangerous.

Politicians are increasingly adopting the marketing-type mode of public relations. Indeed, it is a mode that has steadily expanded beyond the confines of the election campaign period to encompass the broader public relations initiatives and activities of incumbent and opposition politicians alike. Steinert argues this shift is indicative of the increasing influence of the media. "What happens in the public sphere", he observes, "(especially in the case of political or intellectual debate and art) gets reconstructed in anticipation of and in line with its eventual presentation in the media".[79] If Steinert's reading is specifically applied to politics then the impetus of the increasing influence of consultants of the Crosby variety is clarified. "New professions have arisen", states Steinert, professions designed to "manage [the] contingencies" that arise in relation to the dominant politics-media dynamic.[80] "There is a whole host of roles of varying usefulness", he adds, "including advertising experts, agents, PR specialists, campaign managers, designers and people who specialise in organizing 'sensational' exhibitions."[81] Of course the "usefulness" of these tactics is debatable; however, the impact of influences of this nature, considering they are generally focused on political leaders, is more readily discernable.

Political scientists David Lovell, Ian McAllister, William Maley and Chandran Kukathas argue that the use of leader-orientated public relations

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[78] "Tony Blair Quotes", *Said What?* (online), http://www.saidwhat.co.uk/quotes/t/tony_blair_1080.php, 2005 (accessed 11 July 2005).
[79] Steinert, op. cit., p. 168.
[80] ibid., pp. 168-169.
[81] ibid., p. 169.

techniques in election campaigns have three possible "consequences for parliamentary democracy".[82] Firstly, they observe that "superficial" matters concerning a leader's "image and personal qualities" are promoted ahead of policy "content and complexity".[83] Secondly, they suggest that this form of "carefully packaged" image-based promotion is most likely to appeal to "those voters who have the least interest in politics and who are the least well-informed about the issues".[84] Finally, they highlight that the use of targeted campaigning, responsive only to opinion polls, means, "leaders' public images can easily be manipulated to fit what is thought to be most attractive to voters".[85] The major sentiment to emerge from this discussion on the potential impact of marketing style campaigning is that the activity of politics itself is in danger of being rendered superficial; or in a more cynical vein, it could be that there is a risk of the superficiality of politics is perilously close to being unmasked. Despite these concerns, this mode of campaigning is increasingly adopted, quite simply because it generally works. When it does occur, failure is rarely viewed as being a result of political superficiality; it is more often recognised as being a consequence of poor marketing or poor execution on the part of politicians.[86] That is, politicians, in view of the so-called public relations (PR) specialists, regardless of their political abilities are not always adept at PR.

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[82] Lovell, op. cit., p. 476.
[83] ibid.
[84] ibid.
[85] ibid.
[86] Media targeted political campaigns can backfire, and indeed even fail, as was the case during the 1993 Australian federal election campaign in which the then opposition leader John Hewson was urged by his team of PR advisors to partake in a photo-opportunity designed to illustrate the supposed simplicity of his "Fightback" consumption tax policy. Visibly uncomfortable under the glare of the cameras, Hewson slipped into complex economic language beyond the grasp of both the assembled media and subsequently the general public. Many analysts saw this as a turning point in which Hewson, through his use of alienating economic jargon, lost the supposedly 'unlosable' election. For more detail refer to: E. Alberici, "Businesses still adjusting to GST", *7.30 Report* (television program transcript), *ABC Television* (online), http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2005/s1404421.htm, 2005 (accessed 7 July 2005). The potential volatility of PR style campaign methods has driven some electoral candidates to retreat from targeted media exposure. Kim Beazley, Opposition Party leader during the 2001 Australian federal election campaign, may be seen as exemplifying this technique. Many political commentators described his comparative lack of John Howard-countering sound-bites and photo opportunities as the adoption of the "small-target" tactic. Ironically, a perceived reluctance to engage in marketing-style campaigning (to minimise risk) may itself be read as a shrewd public relations exercise; a masterstroke of tactical counter-attack. If this was the thinking behind Beazley's 2001 campaign, it proved to be erroneous, on both marketing-terms and in relation to his party's electoral performance. For more detail refer to: L. Edwards, "Labor is Missing the Target", *The Age*, Melbourne, 1 May 2003.

Regardless of the political substance and integrity of marketing-style electoral campaigning, its apparent success (in marketing terms) ensures that it is on the rise. Policy is increasingly packaged as a commodity. Indeed, party-room strategy sessions designed to devise ways to set the media agenda and "sell" policy to the electorate confirm this trend. In an effort to metaphorically spin political gold, political actors increasingly conform to the alchemic whims of the PR specialists. This blurring of the frontiers of marketing and politics raises a series of questions. For instance, how does this shift impact on perceptions of political integrity, honesty and transparency? And, can we believe what we see and hear or is public cynicism towards politics rising concurrently with the increasing political embrace of marketing-style campaigning?

5.8 Image duplicity in the "Theatre of Masks"

It would seem that the faces of contemporary political actors are somewhat duplicitous. Returning briefly to the U.K. example of Michael Howard, for some political commentators, the difference between Howard-the-subject and Howard-the-object was a contrast difficult to clarify. Referring to the remodelled Howard and his image sculptor Crosby, Rentoul claims, "we've no way of knowing to what extent it's [Crosby] and to what extent it's Michael Howard himself."[87] This duplicity in political images - the type of identity-confusion Rentoul refers to concerning Howard and Crosby - is a point that Rushdie emphasises with the Lilliput-Blefuscu allegory he employs in the closing stages of *Fury*. The "revolutionaries" Solanka encounters in his desperate search for Neela had, he

[87] "John Rentoul Discusses Tony Blair", (online), op. cit.
Interestingly, Michael Howard's assisted crossing of the subject-object frontier did not bring electoral success. Indeed, some may argue that Blair is too adept at managing his position on this frontier to be exposed to significant challenge. It should be noted that Tony Blair relied heavily on his own assembly of PR-specialists, most notably his former "Director of Communications" Alastair Campbell. As "political correspondent" Nick Assinder stated upon the announcement of Campbell's August 2003 resignation: "It's been said he is the one man - with the possible exception of Peter Mandelson - who the prime minister simply could not do without. Tony Blair was happy to do as Campbell said because of his obvious skills in presentation and in dealing with the media. He was the spin master supreme and, as even cabinet ministers quickly discovered, held sway across Whitehall. When Alastair spoke, Tony was speaking. Indeed it was regularly claimed that, when Tony spoke, it was Campbell's voice we all heard." See: N. Assinder, "The Life and Times of Alastair Campbell", *BBC News* (online), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/2977978.stm, 2003 (accessed 8 July 2005).

observes, "taken on the identities" of his fictional Puppet Kings.[88] "A strange piece of mask theatre was being played out on this island stage", Solanka reflects.[89] Contemplating the redundancy of his own image as the creator of the Puppet Kings, Solanka ironically concludes that "here in the Theatre of Masks the original man with no mask, was perceived as the mask's imitator."[90] In view of my account of the blurring of celebrity and political practices of image control, it would appear that the contemporary cultural environment that fosters these practices could also readily be described as the "Theatre of Masks". Only the most astute political actors, those able to traverse the image-substance frontier with their carefully sculpted image-masks intact, are able to achieve success. This process, however, is not entirely one-way. Indeed, the very fact that, as Rentoul argues, the borders delineating the real and imagined are ambiguous, suggests that certain political practices may also be infiltrating the celebrity sphere.

5.9 Celebrity politics or the "politicisation of celebrity"

Discussing the political dimension of rock'n'roll, Rushdie cites figures such as Lou Reed and Bob Dylan as advocates of the "spirit of independence and idealism".[91] He goes on to recall a conversation with the post-Soviet era Czechoslovakian president and poet Vaclav Havel, in which Havel confided "it was impossible to overstate the importance of rock music for the Czech resistance during the years of darkness between the Prague Spring and the collapse of communism."[92] According to Rushdie, Havel singled out Lou Reed's band The Velvet Underground for special praise. "With a straight face", Rushdie says, Havel commented, "Why do you think we called it the Velvet Revolution?"[93] Initially taken aback, Rushdie then reminds himself of the "oppositional origins" of rock'n'roll, recalling the imagery behind Dylan's warning from Subterranean Homesick Blues, "don't follow leaders" in contrast to the present day reality in

[88] Rushdie (2001), op. cit., p. 234.
[89] ibid., p. 235.
[90] ibid.,
[91] Rushdie (2002), op. cit., p. 299-301.
[92] ibid., p. 299.
[93] ibid.

which, as he observes,

> we continue to want to be led, to follow petty warlords and murderous ayatollahs and nationalist brutes, or to suck our thumbs and listen quiescently to nanny states which insist they know what's best for us.[94]

Rushdie's belief in the political role of rock'n'roll and its culture of revolution is centred upon nostalgic recollections of the rebellious streak of the genre's early exponents. His view of the current revolutionary state of rock'n'roll is less enthusiastic. Barring perhaps his openly expressed admiration for Bono's penchant for political "statements", Rushdie despairs that "at present" political leaders have won the day and "the only music in the air is a dead march."[95] For him, the revolutionary flame has been dampened by the burgeoning everywhereness of celebrity. Certain contemporary rock'n'roll figures, however, could be seen as disputing this view.

Popular musician Bob Geldof agrees that the celebrity-dimension of politics is expanding. Contextually he presents this view as a rebuff to the suggestion that, as noted earlier, celebrity-musicians are increasingly utilising their notoriety to act politically. "I think it's more a phenomenon of the celebritisation of politics than the politicisation of celebrity", he argues, turning the debate around. "It's not as if pop stars suddenly became politicians. Dylan, Jagger, Lennon always wrote political-type songs, and quite adroitly".[96] As he suggests, the use of the rock'n'roll as a vehicle for the lyrical expression of political views is a defining feature of the genre. To expand on Geldof's examples, Dylan's "A Hard Rain" may be seen as a warning of the consequences of social decay; Jagger's "Beggars Banquet" can, on a particular level, be interpreted as an expression of disaffection at social injustice; and Lennon's "Imagine" can readily be understood as a utopian socio-political vision. The distinguishing, or perhaps common, feature of these songs and those typical of the rock'n'roll category in general is that they are expressions of politics; they are commentaries as opposed to examples of political convention.

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[94] ibid. p. 300.
[95] ibid., p. 301.
[96] "Sir Bob Geldof", Interview by Andrew Denton, *Enough Rope* (television program transcript), *ABC Television* (online), http://www.abc.net.au/enoughrope/transcripts/s1343226.htm, 2005, (accessed 12 April 2005).

Geldof is correct to assert that a change has occurred in the dynamics of celebrity and politics; the earlier discussed Crosby-Howard link serves as only one example of this. However, perhaps as a consequence of his own politics, Geldof is seemingly unable to recognise, or indeed admit, that this is a two-way shift. He is, however, aware that the celebrity-politics frontiers are blurred. In his view, this is a direct consequence of the influence of public demand and the media. Geldof believes,

> we've become confused, with mass media, about what politicians are. Politicians started dragging their wives and children on to cameras because we demanded it. We wanted to know more about them. So they've become confused about whether they're leaders or celebrities, whereas the celebrities are quite clear that they just want to get on the stage with a guitar, and, well - shag.[97]

There is validity in Geldof's statement. "Demand" is a driving force in the heightened exposure of public figure's private lives: the shift from subject to object. As exemplified by Geldof's account, the appetite of the alleged "lethal voyeurs" can be recognised as fuelling and encouraging hyper-vigilant levels of media and public scrutiny. Nevertheless, as I will suggest later in this chapter, it is an incomplete assessment of the forces at play. At this point, however, it must be understood that the merging of political leader and celebrity is not, as Geldof asserts, a result of confusion. Nor is it, as I stated earlier, a purely one-way process.

5.10 Bill Clinton and the alleged victory of image over substance

The electoral appeal of the leader-celebrity is a proven phenomenon. Bill Clinton's 1992 pre-election saxophone rendition on the high rating Arsenio Hall television show was an important part of a carefully targeted campaign strategy and not an impulsive act of role confusion. Like Rushdie, Clinton literally donned the dark sunglasses of rock'n'roll (and by implication the appealing attitude) in a purposeful manner. Clinton's act can be understood as one designed to secure a sense of solidarity with a significant proportion of his electorate. Rushdie admittedly also sought solidarity in his on stage appearance with U2's Bono. In wearing the dark sunglasses of celebrity, political (and, it would seem, literary)

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[97] ibid.

figures can for a moment eschew the "uncool" glint of their actual vocations and garner a degree of borrowed "cool" image enhancement. However, the belief that they have gained the mythological appeal associated with the mantle of celebrity through this type of momentary identity-swap is misplaced.

Just as the positive factors of celebrity have been utilised to great effect by many political proponents, the negative factors of this interplay have also been brought to bear in recent years. For example, whereas popular musician Rod Stewart's sexual misadventures (activities Geldof would no doubt describe as symptoms of a musician's insatiable search for a "shag") have, it would seem, enhanced his image. Alternatively, Clinton's extra-marital dalliances drastically tarnished his image, at least in the short term. In the long term, however, Clinton's popularity was resurrected. Many commentators have suggested that it was Clinton's public statement of remorse that coaxed the American public to forgive him. Rushdie disagrees, for him it was public disaffection with the "rabidly partisan attack by U.S. Republicans" that turned Clinton's fortunes.[98] Referring to prosecutors led by Kenneth Starr, Rushdie claims that the restoration of Clinton's "astonishing popularity rating" was "in part a reaction to the Starr troopers' sheer vileness".[99] For Rushdie, Starr encapsulated the "hypocrisy" of "the American right's fork-tongued Christianity".[100] He draws on recent U.S. political history to illustrate his point.

> To an observer whose admiration for American democracy was born at the time of the Watergate hearings, those grave, scrupulous, bipartisan deliberations over an earlier President's genuinely high crimes, the tawdry Clinton impeachment debate [was] a disillusioning spectacle.[101]

Rushdie's observations show how the conventions of impartial political inquiry that had once applied to Richard Nixon had, by the Clinton era, been overrun by the hypocritical rules of scandal. Beholden to the directives of his image consultants and advisors, Clinton's restoration closely followed the dictates of the celebrity cycle of rise, fall, and then rise again. Despite the allegedly voracious

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[98] Rushdie (2002), op. cit., p. 290.
[99] ibid., p. 291.
[100] ibid.
[101] ibid.

appetite of the "lethal voyeurs" for news of chinks in celebrity armour, there would seem to be a point at which the public deems enough is enough. The media generally addresses this sentiment, and sometimes inspire it, with tokenistic expressions of remorse (as to the intrusiveness of their reporting). It typically follows that the celebrity "object" is momentarily granted "subject" status, and sometimes (as with Clinton) even given a second chance.

Perhaps the most ironic aspect of the blurring of celebrity-political values is the fact that those political figures that have transiently been the subject of media scorn rely on the very same institution to restore their image. As Rushdie observes in *Fury*, it is plausible to suggest that Clinton's astute knowledge of the power of the media drove his intensive late-term attempts to depart the presidency on an image high. Clinton's media savvy could hardly be understood as a skill confined to the period leading up to the end of his term. Indeed, it may be argued that he saw image as paramount throughout his presidency.

Despite his proven political attributes - for example, his remarkable reinvigoration of the ailing U.S. economy, bold trade initiatives and the legislatively-assured provision of dedicated social security funding[102] - Clinton's preoccupation with sculpting his personal image into a mould he perceived the electorate considered morally acceptable is arguably the characteristic for which he is best remembered. In *Fury* Solanka concurs with this assessment of Clinton's character, cynically suggesting that image-preoccupation was the motivating force behind a range of his major political acts. For example, referring to Clinton's brokering of Barak-Arafat negotiations in early 2000, Solanka suggests it was a vain act by an "outgoing American president, hungry for a breakthrough to buff up his tarnished legacy".[103] Granted this is a flippant assessment of Clinton's behaviour, yet perhaps it is not without some basis. However, should the influence of image in politics render associated political activities disingenuous? If

[102] Economist Steve Schifferes argues Clinton left the "legacy of a huge and growing... $4,000bn budget surplus", concurrently achieving the "longest boom in US history" and securing valuable "trade deals with China" and "NAFTA". Additionally, Schifferes notes that Clinton "succeeded in ensuring that at least part of the government surplus will be reserved to fund the future deficits of [social security] programmes". See: S. Schifferes, "Bill Clinton's Economic Legacy", *BBC News* (online), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/1110165.stm, 2001 (accessed 8 July 2005).

[103] Rushdie (2001), op. cit., pp. 65-66.

this question is applied to the Clinton example Solanka raises then additional image-substance complexities are encountered, thus suggesting the role of image in politics is not black and white.

Clinton's attempts to establish an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue were fleetingly successful, if not entirely fruitful. The ability to get Barak and Arafat to the table, despite the extreme adversarial nature that typifies their relations, was quite an achievement; indeed, it may be considered a somewhat precedent-setting act on Clinton's part, despite the subsequent disintegration of dialogue between the two parties. Not entirely unlike Solanka, Middle East analyst Roger Hardy points to the image-driven aspect of Clinton's motivations, yet he differs in that he is also careful to note, what he sees as, the substance behind his convening of the summit. "Clinton was right to try", say Hardy, "but should have done so a year or so earlier, rather than waiting until the tail end of his presidency".[104] Hardy seems to suggest that by leaving the act too late, Clinton risked having the gesture seen as tokenistic in that he did not allow time for its somewhat monumental aims to be realised. Even with that point in mind, should we be entirely cynical as to his motivations? A dualism emerges in the manner in which Solanka and Hardy address this question.

It is difficult to argue that an element of image-sculpting did not drive Clinton's decision to assume the invariably unachievable role of master Middle East conciliatator yet, despite his motivations, his actions can in one light be viewed as positive, even visionary. This is not, as Solanka seems to infer, a clear-cut case of a politician choosing image over substance. Hardy argues that the ultimate judges of character, the U.S. people, will have the final say as to the tone of his legacy. Whilst this view appears to neglect the role of international opinion, it does astutely highlight the role of histrionics. For example, instead of deriding him for not seeing the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations through, many may view Clinton's success in establishing a dialogue in the first place as a precedent-setting act; that is, the crucial first step in an ongoing process (a process that may eclipse the transient span of various presidential administrations). If we accept this view,

[104] R. Hardy "Camp David: What Went Wrong?", *BBC News* (online), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/852726.stm, 2001 (accessed 24 June 2004).

Clinton can be seen as the antithesis of an image obsessed politician, rather he is the altruistic or selfless leader laying the groundwork for a process that will eclipse his leadership. In Hardy's, perhaps idealistic, view this is not for political analysts to decide; it is in the hands of the U.S. electorate. "For the Americans", Hardy asserts, "there is the question of whether President Bill Clinton has lost his chance of entering the history books as a peacemaker"[105] Perhaps Clinton made this peace-brokering effort in the knowledge that he would most likely fail, yet, as Hardy says, he would be remembered for trying. However, many may also remember him as the adulterer.

When Solanka surmises Clinton was fighting to "buff up his tarnished legacy" he is picking up on, what may be understood as, the unspoken condition implied in Hardy's statement. This condition would imply that Clinton could be remembered as either peacemaker or sinner, not a combination of both. This dichotomy is a consequence of Clinton's momentary, yet extraordinarily impacting, loss of image control. Is this monumental fall from grace entirely Clinton's fault? Perhaps not directly; however, by relying on the beneficial properties of the increasingly influential political PR machine he also ran the risk of being crushed under its wheels. In placing so much stock in media image during his political ascendancy Clinton dualistically exposed himself to a heightened level of media scrutiny. In this vein, the appropriation of celebrity values can colloquially be understood quite simply as an act that contributed to both the making and the potential breaking of the Clinton legacy.

5.11 Belief in "the land of self-creation"

As the Crosby-Howard and Clinton examples indicate, contemporary politics is increasingly characterised by specialist public relations appeals to strategically targeted electoral groups. Whereas those examples highlighted phenomena like the increasing use by politicians of simple, brief, media-friendly rhetoric and targeted image-sculpting techniques, there are additional factors, commonly seen in contemporary U.S. politics, which further illustrate the extent of the deep

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[105] ibid.

incursion of image orientated values across the frontiers of modern political culture.

In *Step Across This Line* and *Fury* Rushdie, both directly and implicitly, describes U.S. politics as an activity predominately shaped by the seeming victory of image over substance. This sentiment is further promoted by, what he perceives as the increasing apathy of significant sectors of the U.S. electorate regarding both the election process and politics in general. Rushdie is "disconcerted that only about 30% of American voters feel it's worth bothering to vote".[106] For Rushdie, U.S. politics has, rightly or wrongly, lost its demotic appeal. It is difficult to argue with Rushdie's observations, particularly in light of, for example, the lack of palpable media and public scrutiny concerning the inordinate judicial resolution of the 2000 U.S. federal election stalemate. In the view of many commentators it became a question of personality rather than parity. That is, the 2000 election emphasised the American notion that, perhaps more often than not, it is the so-called "winning personality" that is placed upon the victory podium ahead of the actual winner, and the roar of approval drowns out the murmur of questions regarding the fairness of the contest and the integrity of the actual result.[107] Rushdie employs the U.S. children's literature character the Grinch to illustrate the dilemma:

> So they Grinched the election.
> They Grinched, day by day,
> Until all the options were whittled away.
> They Grinched it with lawyers,
> They Grinched it with writs,
> They split all the hairs
> And they picked all the nits,
> And when it came to the Ultimate Bench
> They Grinched it away with one final Wrench
> They ordered all Voteville to give up its Count,
> Before it came up with that Quite Wrong Amount.[108]

"Grinched" or otherwise, Rushdie's playful excursion into the villainous cultural terrain of Dr Seuss highlights the manner in which the prominence of political personality (the Grinch) has risen at the expense of the integrity of the political

[106] Rushdie (2002), op. cit., p. 351.
[107] For example, were significant sections of the Florida electorate wrongfully disqualified from voting? Rushdie refers to figures suggesting Bush lost the count in Florida by approximately 25,000 votes. See: ibid., p. 367.
[108] ibid., p. 364.

process itself, in this instance a process concerning a deadlocked election result. To use Rushdie's imagery, the Grinch steals the election victory and gets away with it simply because he is the Grinch and that is exactly what the Grinch is expected to do.

When considered in terms of image, personality is extremely politically significant. The success or failure of a political personality typically depends upon what Solanka (in *Fury*) labels the veracity of one's adherence to the mantra of "self-creation".[109] He makes this claim in reference to his own quest to eradicate the demons of his past and redefine himself in the U.S., "the land of self-creation".[110] Indeed, with additional reference to the 2000 election, George W. Bush can, on many levels, be seen as an exponent of self-creation. The so-called morally acceptable candidate he presented himself as in that election was an identity that could not afford to betray a hint of, for example, references to his apparently dubious military service record, supposed ineptness in business, alleged drug use and rumours of womanising. The personality, or image, Bush presented was one based on the distinctly U.S. ethos of self-creation. Self-creation is a pivotal feature of the so-called American dream; a dream fuelled by such an intensity of belief that it can even, seemingly, break an election deadlock. The ideal of self-creation is a distinctly American phenomenon that is repeatedly expressed at a cultural level.

5.12 Gatsby and the ethos of the American dream

The idea of the American dream is encapsulated in a cornerstone of the American literary canon, F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1926 novel *The Great Gatsby*. One of the text's major protagonists, Jay Gatsby, is the epitome of self-creation. His image of a success is recognised by many as a façade yet the majority of those who enter his orbit are, if not happy to be fooled, at least accepting of the charade. As one sceptical guest in Gatsby's lavish library proclaims as he clutches a book that he erroneously presumes to be fake, "it's genuine printed matter. It fooled me... what thoroughness!"[111] This extract - indicative of the over-arching theme of the novel -

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[109] Rushdie (2001), op. cit., p. 79.
[110] ibid.
[111] F. S. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1974, pp. 51-52. Rushdie's Theatre of Masks analogy is directly applicable to Gatsby's "genuine"-"fake" binary: "Here in the Theatre of Masks the original man with no mask, was perceived as the mask's imitator."[111]

suggests that an image, if presented with conviction or even "thoroughness", has substance. Within the culture of self-creation it would appear that people are ready and willing to be fooled. If we accept the ethos of the theme of Fitzgerald's novel, the illusionary aspect of the American dream holds just as much, if not more cultural currency than the actual realisation of the dream. This is an ethos readily apparent throughout extraordinarily diverse expressions of American culture. As the phantom-fighting protagonists in the commercially successful U.S. film *Ghostbusters* assert, when confronted with their potential clients' dubious stories of paranormal experiences, "we are ready to believe you".[112] It would seem this willingness to "believe" or even be happily "fooled" is an American truism that abounds not only in literature and popular culture but in politics as well. It is apparently only the scale of the illusion or dream that counts.

5.13 "Religiosity": questions of faith, "pizzazz", hypocrisy and politics

Rushdie explores notions of self-creation and belief pertaining to the distinctive nexus of religion and U.S. politics in a multi-faceted sense in both *Fury* and *Step Across This Line*. In both texts these observations are predominantly explicated through his thoughts on Senator Joe Lieberman, Al Gore's Democratic Party running mate in the 2000 election. In Rushdie's view, the encroachment of celebrity values into politics - a phenomenon he suggests is typified by Clinton - has also heightened the tone of the contemporary blurring of church and state frontiers in politics. Rushdie argues that the 2000 "god-bothered American electoral campaign" was a contest that highlighted the domineering role of the cultural pillars of self-creation and belief in U.S. politics.[113] In offering comment on the political currency of religious rhetoric, however, Rushdie is careful to draw a line (despite the fact that he nominally encourages the reader to step across it). He is not essentially concerned with questioning the veracity of a particular candidate's religious beliefs; rather he asks what are the consequences of the use of religious belief as a political tool. He attempts to clarify his argument through his interpretation of the Machiavellian notion that a leader "ought not to be religious,

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[112] *Ghostbusters* (motion picture), Columbia Pictures, U.S.A., Director: Ivan Reitman, 1984.
[113] Rushdie (2002), op. cit., p. 350.

but should be adept at simulating religiosity".[114] It is the present trend of religious simulation in U.S. politics (not unlike Gatsby's apparently 'thorough' simulation of literary sensibility) that provokes Rushdie's critique of Lieberman; a critique that, he argues, is rooted in an important component of Clinton's leadership character. As Rushdie states,

> Bill Clinton may very well be the most devout of believers, but the sheer enthusiasm and frequency with which he has confessed his sins, the brilliant volubility and star-quality performance of his fallen-sinner-sees-the-light act, has elevated the belief practices of the Leader to the level of major showbiz. His successors, none of them blessed with the fabled Clintonian charisma or pizzazz, have no option but to say what they mean, which means, unfortunately, that they also mean what they say.[115]

For Rushdie, Lieberman's campaign rhetoric glaringly betrayed the fact that he was not "blessed" with the necessary level of "charisma". In an essay from *Step Across This Line* Rushdie argues that Lieberman attempted to capitalise on the fact that "while 90% of eligible voters said they had no difficulty imagining themselves voting for a black, Jewish or gay presidential candidate, only half were willing to consider voting for an atheist".[116] In addressing the same statistics in *Fury*, Solanka cynically muses that any politician worth their salt would undoubtedly respond to figures of this kind with a resounding, "praise the Lord!"[117] Returning to his *Step Across This Line* essay, Rushdie is arguing that this is exactly the reactionary candour that Lieberman's behaviour exemplified. According to this hypothesis, his lack of showbiz nous is also the reason why he was unable to sell his proclamations. That is, in celebrity terminology, Lieberman did not have, for example, Clinton's pizzazz, Gatsby's finesse, nor Bush's gall.

Rushdie describes how Senator Lieberman invoked George Washington's rallying cry that "where there is no religion there can be no morality".[118] Rushdie

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[114] ibid.
[115] ibid.
[116] ibid., pp. 350-351.
[117] Rushdie (2001), op. cit., p. 183.
This is a good example of the distinctive dynamic apparent in much of Rushdie's writing. In addressing the same issue on both a fictional and non-fictional front particular convergences and departures are apparent. On the fictional level he has the license to cynically highlight the emotive nature of the matter, whereas in the opposing context he employs a more analytically structured tone that engages the debate within the context of academic-type argument. This versatility arguably enriches his treatment of the topic in a manner rarely realised by writers adhering to a single literary form.
[118] Rushdie (2002), op. cit., p. 351.

argues that Lieberman's error was tactical. In the context of U.S. politics, it is not unusual for a candidate's faith to become an issue. Indeed, many commentators described Al Gore's appointment of Lieberman (a Jew) as his running mate a "bold" move that highlighted the Democratic Party's positive attitude towards racial, gender and religious diversity.[119] Senator Lieberman's error, according to Rushdie, was "the two-left-feet clumsiness of his attempt to make religion even more important an issue in American public life than it already is".[120] As Solanka observes throughout *Fury*, morality has increasingly been depicted in U.S. politics as inseparable from religion. However, there would seem to be notable disquiet, particularly on the part of Democrat supporters, when the extent of this nexus is explicitly stated. The most strident criticism of Lieberman's rhetoric came from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a group which, as political analyst Mary Mostert observes, describes itself as "the world's leading organization fighting anti-Semitism through programs and services that counteract hatred, prejudice and bigotry".[121] The ADL called upon Lieberman to "refrain from overt expressions of religious values and beliefs"; adding that, "appealing to voters along religious lines is contrary to the American ideal".[122] The league emphasized that, "the First Amendment requires that government neither support one religion over another nor the religious over the non-religious".[123] These criticisms may seem somewhat unfair if the prevalence of religiosity in U.S. politics is considered in its broadest sense. Why single out Lieberman's campaign utterances when a plethora of his political peers invoke the religion-morality link everyday?

Mostert argues that it is Lieberman's failure to "adhere to his religion" that is the true source of his critics' wrath.[124] She adds that his voting record as a Senator – for example, his pro-abortion position and his support of the right to

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[119] J. Goldberg, "Where's the Anti-Semitism? Troubling aspects of the Lieberman VP Story", *National Review* (online), http://www.nationalreview.com/nr_comment/nr_commentprint080900b.html, 2000 (accessed 8 July 2005).
[120] Rushdie (2002), op. cit., p. 351.
[121] M. Mostert, "How Can Religion be Banned for Lieberman when Homosexuality and Abortion are Campaign Issues?", *Original Sources* (online), www.originalsources.com, 2000 (accessed 8 July 2005).
[122] ibid.
[123] ibid.
[124] ibid.

homosexual marriages - is inconsistent with his rhetoric on morality and an affront to Jewish law. If we accept Mostert's views, it would seem that Lieberman is not, in the Machiavellian sense, "adept at simulating religiosity" nor is he in possession of the necessary political pizzazz to strike the balance between luring the religious vote without undermining advocates of state-church separation. Lieberman, it seems, recognised the precarious nature of his position, stating, "the line between church and state is an important one".[125] However, in a somewhat contradictory fashion, he then went on to blur that line. "We have gone far beyond what the Framers [of the Constitution] ever imagined in separating the two", he declared, adding, "we have practically banished religious values and religious institutions from the public sphere."[126] This stance, perhaps understandably, caused anxiety in both camps. Supporters of separation, as I have indicated, interpreted Lieberman's comments as crossing the "boundaries of tolerance", whereas those in favour of a church-state nexus cynically viewed the Senator's comments as contradictory.[127] In addition, he failed to articulate exactly how "far", or specifically in what way, the church-state line should be shifted.

Rushdie concludes his discussion on Lieberman with the following plea. Lieberman, he argues, should remember that, "people can be moral without being godly for the simple reason that morality precedes ideology".[128] "Religion", Rushdie adds, "is a way of organizing our ideas about good and evil, and not necessarily the origin of those ideas". [129] The topography of Rushdie's vision of church-state frontier is clear. However, it is unlikely that "ideas" on "good and evil" can retain the level of clarity he advocates in a nation that, in accordance with the adversarial "with us or against us" rhetoric of the War on Terror, maps its political position in the world on the basis of its godliness and its professed moral opposition to all that is allegedly "evil". Rushdie's examination of the church-state frontier follows his preoccupation with incidences of imbalance in other facets of

[125] J. Lieberman, as cited by: J. Jacoby, "Lieberman vs. Lieberman on Religion", *Jewish World Review* (online), http://www.jewishworldreview.com/jeff/jacoby_2003_12_08.php3?2003, 2003 (accessed 9 December 2003).
[126] ibid.
[127] Jacoby, op. cit.
[128] Rushdie (2002), op. cit., p. 352.
[129] ibid.

contemporary culture. He is not suggesting that the rise of external cultural influences (such as religion) in politics is a new phenomenon; rather, he is concerned with the heightened influence that a range of external image control techniques currently have on politics.

5.14 Hitler the aria-singing Valkyre vs. Clinton the sax-tooting rocker

Image control has always been a part of politics, yet rarely has it assumed the level of importance Rushdie suggests it now holds. While many political figures of the past strategically employed celebrity-type techniques in an effort to heighten specific aspects of their public appeal, these techniques were only a component of their political identity and not the very substance. For example, in attempting to explain the "extraordinary influence" of Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin, political scientist Leonard Schapiro observes that their "magnetic charisma" was "created by a long, preparatory process of manipulation in which opponents [were] terrorised and silenced".[130] This long-term process markedly differs from current examples of political "charisma" in which this type of appeal is typically the result of short-term processes marked by "spontaneous" media events, sound-bites, and publicity stunts. Alternatively, the long-term process Schapiro describes is characterised by a "combination of terror, intrigue and showmanship; in which the leader is gradually built up as infallible and invincible."[131] The vitality of the kind of political figure Shapiro speaks of relies on a form of "mass manipulation".[132] However, it is a form of manipulation different from the machinations of image control in the celebrity sphere. The promotion of Hitler as a messianic figure at a 1930s Nuremberg rally is a projection that entails the use of certain celebrity characteristics, yet it is not wholly reliant on these characteristics. Certainly, Leni Riefenstahl's 1935 propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*[133] attests to the importance of Hitler's centrality in proceedings (a centrality perhaps not unlike that bestowed upon celebrity musicians such as Bono who is regularly the focus of a peculiarly contemporary form of rally - a rock concert) yet there is a crucial difference, in that Hitler does not attempt to completely

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[130] L. Schapiro, *Totalitarianism*, Macmillan, London, 1972, p. 22.
[131] ibid.
[132] ibid., p. 23.
[133] *Triumph of the Will* (motion picture), Germany, Director: Leni Riefenstahl, 1933.

inhabit the celebrity mould.

Despite Hitler's well-documented predilection for Wagnerian opera and the socio-political ideals he believes it represents, he does not valiantly enter the Nuremberg arena dressed as an aria singing Valkyre. Alternatively, Clinton, as I indicated, is happy to subsume his character in that of the rock-identity he believes will enhance his electoral appeal. The greatest exponents of the form of political "charisma" Shapiro describes could not subjugate their identities in this manner. Although their respective modes of leadership relied on a limited use of celebrity image-control techniques, they could not afford to resort to the complete assumption of them. This form of identity-fragmentation would undermine a vital tenet of totalitarianism; that is, promotion of the leader as the nation's "supreme and unchallengeable" meta-identity.[134] The presence of too great a level of inherently domineering celebrity characteristics would challenge this notion of supremacy and thus weaken the leader's image.

The tension between subject and object is also a factor that is carefully managed in totalitarian propaganda. As visual culture theorists Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright suggest, Riefenstahl depicted Hitler in a "strikingly dynamic" manner as the "master eye" taking in "all of the populace assembled and the full scope of the city".[135] *Triumph of the Will* promotes the idea of him being the "single object that rivets the gaze" of those at the rally.[136] He is *the* object, not merely *an* object. The celebrity characteristics he exudes may be many and varied yet the image of Hitler the film projects is not beholden to any single, identifiable celebrity entity or mould. It is a calculated construct that directly reflects Schapiro sentiments concerning the need for maintenance of character supremacy. Like the most prominent of celebrities (in the "lens-eye" of the media), the leader may indeed "rivet the gaze" of the public, yet there are important differences.

The totalitarian leader, unlike the celebrity, retains complete control of their image. A loss of total control, virtually without exception, equates with a loss of power. Loss of image control in the celebrity sphere, however, need not spell the

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[134] Schapiro, op. cit., p. 25.

[135] M. Sturken & L. Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, p. 162.

[136] ibid.

end of a career; indeed it may even result in heightened fame or the assumption of a different, not necessarily lesser form of notoriety. Clinton, in many respects embodies the latter. Image control is paramount for the totalitarian leader whose image is built on the premise of invulnerability. For example, Hitler strictly limited his public appearances and speeches concurrently with Germany's declining war fortunes.[137] Just as the absence of the Hitler's rallying rhetoric on German radio was disquieting for many beleaguered Germans towards the close of the war, the news photographic image of the trembling Fuehrer (allegedly suffering from Parkinson's Disease) bestowing medals on bedraggled, teenage troops in a dilapidated Berlin square further weakened the defiant resolve of many to hold out under his guidance against the unabated Allied advance.[138] At the very least, an image of this kind fosters doubt. For Rushdie, this is the nature of photography. It is a fleeting moment "captured" and given an "artificial" type of permanence.[139] Rushdie ascribes to the view that the emotion or feeling invoked by an image is potentially given life, and sometimes meaning, beyond that of its origin.

5.15 "Understanding the world" through photographic images

In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Rai claims "photography is his way of understanding the world."[140] So great is Rai's belief in the impact of the photographic image that he suggests photos hold greater fidelity to the emotional experiences of life than any other form of record. For example, he finds meaning in his father's suicide, not through a confessional note or by meticulously investigating the events leading up to his death, but through the revelatory

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[137] A. Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*, Odhams Press, Long Acre, 1955, pp. 579-580. See also: W. L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1962, p. 1102-1103.

[138] "Hitler's Bunker" (photograph), *The Isles of the Departed: A Photo Gallery* (online), http://dsc dsc.discovery.com/anthology/unsolvedhistory/hitler/photogallery/, 2005 (accessed 7 July 2005).
A description accompanying the photograph reads: "Once Hitler descended into the Berlin bunker, he rarely left. One of the few times he did, however, was on April 20, 1945 - his 56th birthday. In the garden just outside the bunker, Hitler decorated 20 Hitler Youths-turned-soldiers. Here he shakes hands with Alfred Czech, a 12-year-old Hitler Youth soldier, after the young veteran of battles in Pomerania and upper and lower Silesia was awarded the Iron Cross."
See also: "Eingegraben: Die alliierten Luftangriffe zwingen die Reichsregierung unter die Erde" (photograph), *ZDF Politik & Zeitgeschehen* (online), www.zdf.de/ZDFde/inhalt/11/0,1872,2107531,00.html, 2004 (accessed 7 July 2005).

[139] Rushdie (2002) op. cit., p. 113.

[140] Rushdie (1999) op. cit., p. 210.

perspective of the camera lens.

> When my father died I took his picture before they cut him down. I asked to be left alone with him and used a role of film. Most of the shots avoided his face. I was more interested in the way the shadows fell across his dangling body, and the shadow he himself cast in the early light, a long shadow for a smallish man.[141]

It is the symbolism of his father's shadow and not the expression on his face (the corporeal canvass from which we typically seek to interpret meaning) that hold most resonance for Rai. As with his exploration of the miniature "Puppet Kings" or the "flawed giants" of celebrity, Rushdie is concerned with extracting meaning from inverted perspectives. The camera reveals a vital aspect of Rai's father, a feature that cannot be animated through another medium, specifically the fact that he casts "a long shadow for a smallish man". This simple but incredibly impacting image, above all else, is the one that Rai carries of his dead father; for him, it is the most accurate and complete reflection of a man who, in life, cast innumerable shadows. Rai's fascination with shadows lures him into a compulsive search for meaning in darkness. As he explains, "I began to shoot deliberately into the dark, picking human life out of lightlessness, delineating it with as little light as I could get away with."[142] Rushdie constructs Rai's fascination with photography in a manner that allows him to explore an additional perspective paradigm. As well as the oppositional perspectives of miniature and giant, the contrasting light and dark language of the photographic image reveals hidden facets of contemporary culture.

Photographic images have a cultural code that can render them iconic. The factors that enable Rai to extract an intense level of personal meaning from his portrait of his dead father can also be apparent on a larger scale in which cultural, collective meaning is attached to a particular photographic image. For example, the distressing image of Kim Phuc, a naked and severely burnt child fleeing a napalm attack in Vietnam, acutely encapsulated the tone of much of the media coverage that contributed to the anti-war movement.[143] Similarly, the depiction of

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[141] ibid.

[142] ibid., pp. 211-212.

[143] H. C. Ut, "The Terror of War" (photograph), *Associated Press* (Online), http://www.pulitzer.org/, 8 January 1972 (accessed 7 July 2005).

Princess Diana, apparently risking personal injury, touring a minefield in an anti-blast suit significantly aided her ascendancy to the *ex-officio* title of Queen of Hearts, just as her solitary, contemplative moment at the Taj Mahal convinced many of her supposed powerless, victim-status in a loveless marriage.[144] Rushdie suggests that she played an active part in the creation of such images.

> Princess Diana became skilful at constructing the images of herself she wanted people to see. I recall a British newspaper editor telling me how she composed the famous shot in which she sat, alone and lovelorn, in front of the world's greatest monument to love, the Taj Mahal. She knew, he said, exactly how the public would read this photograph. It would bring her great sympathy, and make people think (even) less of the Prince of Wales than before. Princess Diana was not given to using words like semiotics, but she was a capable semiotician of herself. With increasing confidence, she gave us the signs by which we might know her as she wished to be known.[145]

Rushdie suggests that, to varying degrees, we are all conscious of the "signs" attached to photographs. Recalling his own experience as the subject of portrait photographer Richard Avedon, Rushdie opines as to the artificiality of the process. "He positions me just as he wants me", Rushdie says, "I find myself thinking: this is how I look when I am being made to look like this."[146] Avedon's technique leaves Rushdie feeling incredibly self-conscious and he is convinced that the portrait will reflect this feeling. However, the resulting image surprises him. It is a dark photograph, one that embodies many of the preoccupations Rushdie ascribes to Rai. Examining the picture from a quasi-objective standpoint, Rushdie begins to see additional signs in the image. "Richard Avedon was not interested in making a picture of a cheery novelist," Rushdie surmises.[147] "I think he wanted to make a portrait of a writer to whom a number of bad things have happened."[148] In the previous chapter I discussed reflexivity and its fundamental contribution to identity processes. The signs in a photograph operate in a similar manner. Aspects of our personality that we deem to be defining traits do not necessarily

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[144] See: "Princess Diana Campaigns Against Landmines, Luanda, Angola" (photograph), *Associated Press* (online), http://www.nato.int/docu/review/1999/9904-02.htm, 1997 (accessed 8 July 2005); and, "Diana Alone at the Taj Mahal – April 1992" (photograph), *Associated Press* (online), www.bbc.co.uk/politics97/diana/ob-family.html, 1997 (accessed 8 July 2005).
[145] Rushdie (2002), op. cit., p. 120.
[146] ibid., p. 116.
[147] ibid.
[148] ibid.

reflect the traits we project.

As with the subject-object frontier, the signs a photograph carries are determined through processes of image control. Rushdie describes this process using the celebrity as an example. Celebrities, he suggests, "know how to look, the good ones know what the camera sees."[149] However, this sense of control, Rushdie argues is an illusion. "They are performers on the surface, manipulators and presenters of their own extraordinary outsides."[150] In the end, Rushdie concludes, their look "is an artificiality, it is a look about how to look."[151] This artificiality is the cultural code of the celebrity image. It is a code that abides by the dictates of self-creation discussed earlier in this chapter. Specifically, in the mode of Gatsby's elaborate illusion of wealth and standing, consumers will accept artificiality if it is offered with conviction, or, in the case of the celebrity images, if it is artificiality sold by the right "look".

That Rushdie chooses to focus his examination of culture and celebrity on photography instead of, for instance painting, and rock'n'roll ahead of political cabaret, suggests that he does not recognise frontiers delineating popular and classical art forms, or high and low culture. His statement in *Fury* that he is concerned with the "industry of culture" suggests that the facets of culture to which he does direct most of his attention are those that embody the characteristics of the "industry" metaphor; specifically, contemporary expressions of culture as a product or a commodity. Rushdie uses the term "industry of culture" fully aware of its direct reference to an extensive body of theory. In addressing this theory as it compares to Rushdie's treatment, I will first briefly examine relevant distinctions between high and low cultural frontiers.

5.16 The highs and lows of the "new sensibility"

The high and low culture debate, in the main, stems from a Marxist theoretical paradigm in which clear cultural distinctions are applied to two classes: the bourgeoisie (high) and the proletariat (low). As an example, Steinert offers an

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[149] ibid., p. 114.
[150] ibid.
[151] ibid.

account of "the change of focus" that characterised the high culture view of music. "In bourgeois terms", he argues, "a concert performance was no longer a matter of making music, but of delivering a composition to an audience".[152] Low culture (or mass culture), on the other hand, is described as not "having the "same profundity as 'art'".[153] Within the high-low paradigm, Steinert observes, low culture is seen as being not intellectually "demanding", it is "employed for our entertainment and distraction."[154] It should be noted that this is merely Steinert's account of the high-low culture paradigm and not an assertion of his views. Indeed, it is argued by some that a post-modernist "new sensibility" has swept aside these distinctions, rendering the associated class appropriations of distinct forms of cultural expression irrelevant.[155] In some ways, this may be interpreted as a view Rushdie subscribes to, a point emphasised by his belief in the frontier-dissolving properties of music, rock music in particular. However, not all have embraced the so-called new sensibility.

Although it is generally agreed that the new sensibility has significantly contributed to the eschewing of the "high" and "low" distinctions of the past, many cultural theorists argue that this bourgeoisie-proletariat cultural paradigm has simply been replaced by another form of distinction and control. It is argued that the aesthetic dimension of culture has been usurped by the commercial. Storey could be interpreted as subscribing to this view. For example, he argues that, "culture is no longer ideological, disguising the economic activities of capitalist society; it is in itself an economic activity, perhaps the most important economic activity of all."[156] Culture has become popularised. For instance, the Twentieth Century emergence of the novel, pop art and pop music have eroded "high" and "low" cultural frontiers. Arguments regarding the "profundity" of

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[152] Steinert, op. cit., p. 109.
[153] ibid., p. 105.
[154] ibid.
[155] Storey (2003), op. cit., p. 63.
"In the 1960s Susan Sontag coined the term 'new sensibility'". As Storey observes, Sontag devised the "new sensibility" account of culture to redress, what she saw to be, the "historically and humanly obsolescent... distinction between high and low culture." ibid.
For more of Sontag's original account see: S. Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, Dell, New York, 1966, pp. 296-302.
[156] Storey (2003), op. cit., p. 65.

specific forms of cultural expression still abound, yet these are arguments generally articulated in terms of aesthetics rather than from differing socio-economic perspectives. Despite this apparent progression, the borders defining the shape of contemporary culture are constantly being tested. The earlier cited debate concerning the apparent blurring of celebrity and politics is only one example of this. There is an important added dimension to broader questions regarding the changing shape of culture. Storey's claim that culture is "an economic activity" highlights the thrust of a significant body of theory concerning contemporary culture; theory that treats culture as a burgeoning global industry.

5.17 The Frankfurt School and the "culture industry"

For theorists aligned with the post-war *Frankfurt School*, "the whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry".[157] As sociologist Craig Calhoun observes, the Frankfurt School challenged what they perceived to be the "increasingly enforced sameness of modern society".[158] The application of celebrity (subject-object) cultural practices to political entities could be seen as evidence of this apparent drive towards "sameness". It would seem that cultural industry is in overdrive and cultural borders and frontiers are continually being confronted, re-defined and blurred.

With differing emphasis, members of the *Frankfurt School* - most notably, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse - theorised as to the social, political and cultural implications of enforced sameness. Mindful of recurrent themes apparent in Rushdie's work, the School's articulation of so-called "culture industry" is of particular relevance. Conceived in 1944 by Adorno and Horkheimer, "culture industry" theory may be broadly understood as a concept aligned with certain aspects of Marxism.[159] As Storey observes, "the dominant class, on the basis of its ownership of, and control over, the means of production, is virtually guaranteed to have ownership over the means of

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[157] T. Adorno & M. Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception", as cited by: Sturken & Cartwright, op. cit., p. 165.
[158] Calhoun, op. cit., p. 16.
[159] Sturken & Cartwright, op. cit., p. 165.

intellectual production."[160] In a Marxist vein, if we define culture as a form of "intellectual production", then the theoretical intent behind Adorno and Horkheimer's description of it as an industry is clarified. As Steinert observes, "the culture industry has gained huge economic significance, and its substratum of communications technology has become the technology of the future".[161] It is increasingly becoming what may be called an essential activity or component of the integrated global economy, a burgeoning industry through which the so-called dominant class perpetuates its position of social, economic and political hegemony. Somewhat reflective of the earlier discussed dynamics of image control, the key dynamic of culture industry theory is that of control.

Contemporary media-driven expressions of culture are typically conceived and disseminated in a manner designed to affirm the source's agenda. Culture, in this light, may be understood as an exercise primarily concerned with justifying a particular socio-economic and/or political position. Citing Marx and Engels, Storey observes, the dominant class is "compelled... to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society... to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones".[162] In much culture industry theory, the so-called dominant class is depicted as the controlling entity; yet control is manifest in markedly varied ways throughout this industry. The incidence and degree of control within the culture industry can be complex, multi-faceted and indistinct. As a matter of course, the dominant class is not an easily defined entity; nor is it necessarily an entirely appropriate descriptor.

How do we definitively determine who or what maintains control of an industry whose primary by-product may be considered "common interest"? For example, if we accept Rushdie's claim, in relation to the death of Princess Diana, that we the consumers of gossip magazines are the "lethal voyeurs", is it not then the case that it is consumers that hold sway over the produce of the "culture industry"? [163] I doubt that he is suggesting that the issue of control is so clinical.

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[160] K. Marx & F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1966, pp. 65-66, as cited by: Storey (2001), op. cit., p. 84.
[161] Steinert, op. cit., pp. 165-166.
[162] ibid.
[163] Rushdie (2002), op. cit., p. 119.

His comments do, however, highlight the position of the consumer within the culture paradigm. The crucial point to emerge from this discussion is that the so-called common interest is, in fact, a carefully targeted consumer-orientated projection of shared ideals rather than a reflection or manifestation of societal mores. If consumers are indeed the lethal voyeurs, then they are so as a result of all-pervading processes of cultural conditioning. Despite what would seem to be the inextricable contribution of consumers, control is ultimately in the hands of the architects of cultural conditioning. The maintenance of the culture industry, however, relies on the premise that this "circle of manipulation and need" is not clarified.[164] As Adorno and Horkheimer assert, "no mention is made of the fact that the basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest."[165] Cultural conditioning aims to make all members of society complicit regardless of their socio-economic position.

The "culture industry" encourages consumers - through the means of cultural conditioning - to accept and, in turn, espouse neo-liberal values. Marcuse offers a detailed account of this process in his 1964 text, *One Dimensional Man.* Drawing, in part, on relevant aspects of Marxist and Hegelian theory, Marcuse argues the individual is inextricably subject to complex "forms of control" characterised by the repressive promotion of what he calls "false" needs.[166] At this level, the individual seems immersed in, what may be described in Marxist terms as, a culturally sanctioned form of "false consciousness".[167] "Social controls", he argues, indoctrinate individuals to identify with, and conform to, "false" needs, for instance, "the needs... to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate".[168] "The indoctrinating power of the media", he proffers, is so great that "people recognise themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set,

[164] T. Adorno & M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Verso, London, 1979, p. 126.
[165] ibid.
[166] H. Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Routledge and Kegan, London, 1964, pp. 1-18.
[167] ibid., p. 11.
[168] ibid., pp. 7 - 9.

split level home" and "kitchen equipment".[169] Marcuse adds that this indoctrinating process expands the Marxist notion of alienation to a "more progressive stage".[170] This assertion of Marcuse's is, in part, exemplified by a selection of the earlier discussed Rushdie imagery.

5.18 The culture industry and the dissolution of public-private frontiers

As he begins to realise the personal implications of his U.K exodus, Solanka sits dejectedly in his New York apartment, reflecting on what he views as the fundamental failings of his frontier crossing. "He had crossed an ocean to separate his life from life. He had come in search of silence and found a loudness greater than the one he left behind".[171] Solanka's despair at the "unbearable head-busting volume of the third millennium", "the everywhereness of life", could be understood as a reaction symptomatic of the increasingly blurred nature of the public-private frontier.[172] There is no separating "life from life" - private from public; metaphorically speaking, "there was to be no escape from intrusion, from noise".[173] Marcuse's views on alienation reflect these sentiments. The contemporary individual's "private space", he argues, "has been invaded and whittled down by technological reality".[174] Jenkins' account of reflexivity theory (discussed in the previous chapter), specifically his assertion that "our understanding of ourselves is at least as imperfect as our understanding of others", could also be interpreted as allowing for the contributing, albeit imperfect, role of "technological reality" in the formation of our understanding of ourselves.[175] If we accept Marcuse's argument that "people recognise themselves in their commodities", then the loss of "private space" is more pronounced than may otherwise have been expected.[176] If contemporary culture demands that we be "good" consumers, and indeed, if the majority within the integrated global economy identify themselves according to this

[169] ibid., pp. 8 - 9.
[170] ibid., p. 11.
[171] ibid., p. 47.
[172] ibid., pp. 47-48.
[173] ibid., p. 47.
[174] Marcuse, op. cit., p. 10.
[175] Jenkins, op. cit., pp. 34-35.
[176] Marcuse, op. cit., p. 9.

cultural/public "virtue", then what space is there for personal expression or identification?

The "identification" consumers have with their commodities, Marcuse argues, "is not an illusion but reality".[177] It is on this basis that Marcuse can be seen as extending the Marxist concept of "false consciousness". "The achievements of progress", he states, "defy ideological indictment as well as justification; before their tribunal, the false consciousness of their rationality becomes the true consciousness".[178] For Marcuse, the erosion of the public-private divide, by implication, also entails the dissolution of objectivity and subjectivity.

5.19 "Introjection": the culture industry and the "inner dimension"

The individual, argues Marcuse, is "no longer" capable of meaningful "introjection".[179] By introjection he means the process by which "the individual... reproduces and perpetuates the external controls exercised by... society".[180] Mindful of the identity-affirming role of reflexivity discussed in the previous chapter, "introjection" for Marcuse, would seem to require a form of self "observation and retrospection" that clinically separates the objective from the subjective.[181] Some proponents of reflexivity may argue that this separation is possible, albeit in an "imperfect" sense.[182] Marcuse, however, suggests that such a division is impossible. In his view, the individual is incapable of delineating between subject and object amidst the figuratively deafening "noise" of the culture industry.

"Introjection", states Marcuse, "implies the existence of an inner dimension distinguished from and even antagonistic to the external agencies".[183] If this premise is applied to Solanka's *bildungsroman*, his attempt to retreat from economically themed values could justifiably be interpreted as a search for the so-called inner dimension. However, the fact that he is unable to quantify or

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[177] ibid., p. 11.
[178] ibid.
[179] ibid.
[180] ibid.
[181] Jenkins, op. cit., p. 34.
[182] ibid., p. 35.
[183] Marcuse, op. cit., p. 11.

adequately constitute this personal sphere is significant. This ultimate inability to reconcile an unfettered personal space would seem to confirm he is, on Marcuse's terms, incapable of true introjection. In Marcuse's terms, introjection requires "an individual consciousness and an individual unconsciousness *apart from* public opinion and behaviour. The idea of 'inner freedom' here has its reality", Marcuse continues, "it designates the private space in which man may become and remain himself".[184] Solanka could be understood as a strident critic of "public opinion and behaviour", yet, even within his most withdrawn state (a state neo-liberal culture defines as "illness"), he is never totally "apart" from it. Indeed, he defines himself through his opposition to it. As Marcuse suggests, "inner freedom" is no longer a reality.

Similarly, the nominal theme of *Fury*, on a superficial level, denotes antagonism against the so-called system or "external agencies", yet this introjective factor is also incomplete or unfulfilled. The unrelenting "noise" of the system drowns out antagonist challenge. Dissent is absorbed, blunted, refined and repackaged by the culture industry. Writers of the ideological complexion of, for instance, Noam Chomsky, Michael Moore or John Pilger seem compelled to utilise, and indeed become deft exponents of, the very medias they critique. In turn, the "culture industry" ensures they are re-animated, implicitly, as both the perpetrators and subjects of that which, ironically, they originally set out to decry. Antagonism is permissible; indeed, it is promoted as a facet of the culture industry. However, antagonism that, according to Marcuse's account, could be defined as introjective is impossible. For antagonism towards the culture industry, by implication, becomes part of that very industry.

An individual's inability to firstly, segregate his or her personal sphere from the influx of public "noise"; and secondly, adequately express outward dissent or focused antagonism against that influx, begets the kind of fury that Rushdie engages in his text. Denied meaningful introjection, the restless or dissenting individual (the individual who attempts to retreat from, or reject, "the game") is left to grapple with the "culture industry's" abhorrent by-products. As I

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[184] ibid., p. 10.

indicated in the previous chapter, if the culture industry defines social deviation (i.e. rejection of "the game") as illness then that definition potentially changes the meaning, or the very nature of, deviation. Mindful of Sontag's account, it would seem that illness is no longer the metaphor; rather it is the name the "culture industry" uses to account for, and paradoxically excuse its undesirable by-products.

5.20 The culture industry's by-products

The heightened level of alienation Marcuse describes can be seen as the catalyst for distinct aspects of Rushdie's thematic treatment of alienation and violence in *Fury*. For example, referring to the "the living doll" socialite victims of the text's "S&M" murders, Solanka muses that "all three dead girls" were modern day "Desdemonas. They were property".[185] This metaphoric transformation - not unlike the subject-object or human-commodity transition discussed earlier in this chapter - promotes Solanka's belief in "the desire of modern people" to find identity through ownership.[186] This belief is comparable to Marcuse's assertion that consumers dutifully strive to "find their soul" in their commodities.[187] However, a progression, on Marcuse's theory can be drawn from Rushdie's fictional account, particularly on the part of the text's violent male protagonists who, if we extend Solanka's metaphor, may be described as modern day Othellos.

To use Marcuse's terminology, the wealthy male perpetrators of these vicious killings found their souls in their female victims. These women, and not inanimate products, were their soul-affirming commodities. The murderers looked upon their female companions as their "beautiful... blonde and formidably accomplished" symbols of wealth, "style and class".[188] They were no-longer people but "coveted medallions", signs of their respective male counterpart's socio-economic status.[189] In this vein, the commodity Marcuse speaks of is crudely personified.

[185] Rushdie (2001), op. cit., p. 73.
[186] ibid.
[187] Marcuse, op. cit., p. 9.
[188] Rushdie (2001), op. cit., p. 72.
[189] ibid.

According to Solanka's rationale, the killers were "murderous" Othellos, "destroying what [they] could not possess, because that very non-possession insulted [their] honour".[190] For these Othellos, the culture industry's dualistic celebration of modern women as "accomplished", independent, "take charge" figures contradicted its concurrent promotion of them as demure, "fully accessorized Oscar-Barbies".[191] Solanka succinctly describes the nature of this apparent duality; these women, he ponders, "could be businesswomen and flirts, profound and superficial, serious and light".[192] Their male counterparts could not accept this level of independence and versatility. They were unable to define themselves against such seemingly erratic figures. They could not reconcile their need to secure a sense of honour amidst these reflective contradictions. The resulting shame was also irreconcilable.

Solanka continues on this tact, recalling a discussion with his estranged wife Eleanor in which she described Othello's killing of Desdemona as an "honour killing".[193] Additional facets are added, questions of gender, theology, symbolism, and ethnicity chart Solanka's musings on the topic. Eleanor theorised that Othello was a "Latinization of the Arabic Attallah or Ataullah", adding that he was "not a creature of the Christian world of sin and redemption but rather of the Islamic moral universe, whose polarities are honour and shame".[194] "The attack on [Desdemona's] virtue", Eleanor explains, "was incompatible with Othello's honour".[195] The polarities of Othello's character would seem to confirm Eleanor's thesis.

Shakespeare's Othello, tormented by Iago, is blinkered by honour and reputation. His wife's alleged infidelity may be the *professed* source of his torment, yet, as literary critic A. C. Bradley suggests, above all he is "anxious not to be misjudged".[196] Othello, the outsider, the "black ram", the self-professed "base Indian", is convinced (perhaps not entirely without justification) that his position

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[190] ibid., p. 73.
[191] ibid., p. 72.
[192] ibid., p. 74.
[193] ibid., p. 11.
[194] ibid.
[195] ibid.
[196] A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, Macmillan, London, 1956, p. 9.

of honour atop the military hierarchy of the noble Venetian state is contingent on the integrity of his union with Desdemona.[197] He is pre-occupied by this thought. As Bradley adds, "the consciousness of his high position never leaves him".[198] For Othello, his very identity rests with Desdemona, whom he claims to have "loved not wisely but too well".[199] However, this confession, made in emotional desperation, is misplaced. The perceived loss of her is, for Othello, not corporeal. His loss is a loss of his honour and, as a matter of course, his identity. In reference to Othello's demise, literary critic Harold Bloom goes so far as to suggest, "men find in 'cuckoldry'... the image of their own vanishing."[200] Othello is consumed with shame, not so much as a result of his unwise or over zealous love for the departed Desdemona; it is the obliteration of his sense of self that he finds most unbearable. Othello's dilemma is echoed in Rhinehart, an outsider convinced that his "honour" is contingent on his insider status as a member of the subversive S&M club. Similarly, Rhinehart is prepared to lose or sacrifice Neela, his Desdemona, rather than lose his misguided position of honour.

In an early passage of *Fury* that pre-empts Solanka's subsequent account of the motivations of the S&M killers, Eleanor argues that Desdemona "didn't have to be guilty. The accusation was enough. The attack on her virtue was incompatible with Othello's honour. She's not even a person to him", Eleanor concludes, "he has reified her. She's his Oscar-Barbie statuette. His doll."[201] It is on this basis that Eleanor plausibly describes Desdemona's murder as an honour killing. However, is the so-called honour killing exclusively the domain of the Islamic moral universe? Rushdie's construction of the S&M murders in *Fury* would seem intended to indicate otherwise. It is a theme he has engaged extensively throughout his fiction and non-fiction. His treatment of the issue in his 1983 novel *Shame* has direct correlations with his examination of culture and violence in *Fury*.

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[197] W. Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Othello the Moor of Venice*, Penguin, London, 1968, Act I. i. 89-91.
[198] Bradley, op. cit., p. 9.
[199] Shakespeare, op. cit., Act V. ii. 341.
[200] H. Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, Riverhead Books, New York, 1998, p. 449.
[201] Rushdie (2001), op. cit., p. 11.

5.21 The "axis" between "shame and shamelessness"

"Men will sacrifice their dearest love on the implacable alters of their pride", Rushdie states in the polyphonically narrated *Shame*.[202] This author's voice comment is drawn from his mid-text recollection of an ethnic honour killing in the U.K. "Not so long ago, in East London", Rushdie recalls, "a Pakistani father murdered his only child, a daughter, because by making love to a white boy she had brought such dishonour on her family that only her blood could wash away the stain".[203] This is a disturbing, albeit common, account of what may be described as a traditional honour killing. The perpetrator, the victim and the circumstance abide by, what may crudely be called, a distinct cultural stereotype.

In a Western context, Rushdie observes, such an act is considered abhorrent and totally incomprehensible. For "Asians", he argues, it is also a "tragedy", but there is a reluctance to "condemn [such] actions".[204] The conditioning of their moral universe, it would seem, renders such acts understandable. Speaking of his own ethnic heritage, Rushdie explains, "we who have grown up on a diet of honour and shame can still grasp what must seem unthinkable to people living in the aftermath of the death of God".[205] This observation introduces a challenging question. Is Rushdie attempting to establish a polemic in which Western violence is an act spawned from alienation and Eastern violence is alternatively triggered by shame? Indeed, the Western expression that a perpetrator of heinous violence, for example, "came form the wrong side of the tracks, or from a bad home" has the propensity to invoke a comparable level of understanding, if not sympathy. In this Western context, the perpetrator's position of socio-economic disadvantage may be seen as an excusing factor, or, as Sontag describes, a form of illness.

Rushdie does not, at least in *Shame*, enter into a lengthy East-West/Muslim-Christian comparative discourse on the cultural roots of violence. In that text, he lets the "idea" of "shame... breathe its favourite air" - that of the East.[206] The East-West dichotomy is more definitively engaged in *Fury*. He does, however, offer the

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[202] Rushdie (1995), op. cit., p. 115.
[203] ibid.
[204] ibid.
[205] ibid.
[206] ibid., p. 116.

following non-culturally specific, universal assessment in *Shame*. "Between shame and shamelessness", he argues, "lies the axis upon which we turn; meteorological conditions at both these poles", he concludes, "are of the most extreme, ferocious type. Shamelessness, shame: the roots of violence".[207] The weight and texture of the figurative storm clouds that gather over *Fury* tonally suggest that he is finally ready to weather and report "the meteorological conditions" he describes in *Shame*.

Honour, shame, violence and alienation are prominent thematically throughout *Fury*, yet should his treatment of these themes be approached on the basis of an East-West comparison? Is Rushdie inferring that within the Muslim universe acts of honour and feelings of shame are interchangeable with the Christian or Western world's acts of violence and feelings of alienation? His description of the vitriolic Islamic New York taxi driver, Beloved Ali, raging against the traffic screaming, "Islam will cleanse your soul of dirty anger", suggests that, at least, a thematic link between honour and violence is apparent in the personal cauldron of the East-to-West immigrant experience (nexus).[208] The explicit inference of Ali's words is that violence will restore honour and cleanse the West of dirty or shameful anger. Implicitly, however, the reader may suspect that Rushdie presents this polarity in a manner intended to show that there are commonalities in the experience and expression of honour, shame, violence and alienation that potentially promote - yet, at the same time, ironically defy - cultural boundaries. Considering the geo-political and social context of the book, it may also be the case that, in *Fury*, Rushdie is letting shame "breathe" Western "air". These assessments are, perhaps, too simplistic. Rushdie's palette is larger. In the broadest sense, it can still be thematically understood as an exploration of the frontier between life's music and life's noise. This exploration, however, is proffered in a cultural context.

When music becomes noise so too, it would appear, the propensity for alienation and shame to be transposed into violence is concurrently heightened. This would seem to be both an Eastern and Western truism. A significant part of Rushdie's literary project is questioning what this shared trait reveals about

[207] ibid., pp. 115-116.
[208] Rushdie (2001), op. cit., p. 66.

humanity. Indeed, when literary theorist Una Chaudhuri, questions Rushdie regarding the thematic intent of *Shame*, Rushdie states, "I was interested in a kind of connection that I believed to exist between shame and violence".[209] His conclusions suggest that a thematic convergence or progression is apparent in a comparative study of *Shame* and *Fury*. "Shame - as an emotion or an idea", Rushdie observes in relation to the former novel, can make "people violent who are quite frequently not".[210] Like *Fury*, much of the thematic tone of *Shame* entwines issues of "sexual" oppression with instances of "political suppression or oppression".[211] Through his experience in writing *Shame* Rushdie admits to Chaudhuri that he discovered that "the two were the same thing. And the society that does that to women", he concludes, "will allow some of the things to be done to itself as a whole".[212] This is a conclusion that also emerges through Rushdie's depiction of Solanka's attempts to reconcile the S&M killings in *Fury*. Solanka's musings as to the possible broader implications of the act can be read as an interesting illumination of this significant component of Rushdie's literary project:

> Now living women wanted to be doll-like, to cross the frontier and look like toys. Now the doll was the original, the woman the representation. These living dolls, these stringless marionettes, were not just 'dolled-up' on the outside. Behind their high-style exteriors, beneath that perfectly lucent skin, they were so stuffed full of behavioural chips, so thoroughly programmed for action, so perfectly groomed and wardrobed, that there was no room left for messy humanity. Sky, Bindy and Ren [the murder victims] thus represented the final step in the transformation of the cultural history of the doll. Having conspired in their own dehumanisation, they ended up as mere totems of their class, the class that ran America, which in turn ran the world, so that an attack on them was also, if you cared to see it that way, an attack on the great American empire, the Pax Americana, itself... A dead body on the street, thought Malik Solanka, coming down to earth, looks a lot like a broken doll.[213]

Solanka asserts that these women "conspired" in their transition from subject to object. Can this also be said of Desdemona and the young victim of the Pakistani honour killing? Solanka's assertion that their "transformation" into symbols or "totems" was voluntary or predicated is misplaced. In critiquing his assertion it is helpful to revisit the text's narrative of the "two great industries".

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[209] Chaudhuri (online), op. cit.
[210] ibid.
[211] ibid.
[212] ibid.
[213] Rushdie (2001), op. cit., p. 74.

The industries of culture and celebrity Rushdie describes in *Fury* demand that traditional frontiers or understandings of these concepts are tested. As he suggests, these industries promote a "dialectic based on the new dualism of defence and offence" and the frontiers that define them are mapped through all pervading processes of "definition, exclusion revision and persecution".[214] These processes, by their very nature, also demand a level of failure on both a personal and public front.

Within the sphere of celebrity, success and failure can be seen as interdependent. The success of self-creation is contingent on contrived processes of definition and revisionism. Alternatively, failure is charted by sacrificial processes of exclusion and persecution. However, as I have stated, these processes should not be viewed as separate, indeed, they can even be considered cyclic. To examine these processes of defence and offence is to unveil the inner workings of the culture industry, to lay bare its figurative cogs and gears. For example, Princess Diana, Bill Clinton, Michael Howard and indeed, the character of Othello momentarily become, what Rushdie describes as, the "Chosen Ones" as a result of their carefully constructed projections of themselves. Their subject-object transitions - transitions facilitated by a range of targeted image control techniques discussed in this chapter - allow them to varying degrees to "conquer" the culture industry's frontiers.[215] But in each case, as I have illustrated, this apparent triumph is volatile and fleeting. For, as Rushdie also observes, the functionality of this industry also depends on the fulfilment of its insatiable "darker requirements".[216] The "failures" experienced by these figures is testament to that fact. Be it Diana's death, Clinton's adultery, Howard's electoral loss or Othello's tragedy, the dark side of celebrity is characterised by the tension between the frontiers of shame and shamelessness. For example, the perceived shamelessness of Clinton's saxophone rendition and, more pointedly, his adultery, sit side-by-side with public perceptions of the shame expressed in his open displays of remorse; displays typified by Clinton's mastery of, what Rushdie deems, the "fallen-sinner-sees-the-light act".[217] Whether the shame is genuine or not is no

[214] ibid. p. 24.
[215] ibid.
[216] ibid.
[217] Rushdie (2002), op. cit., p. 350.

longer the issue. Rather it is the conviction with which it is enacted that is of paramount concern. Additionally, the vigour, the sheer dogged ruthlessness of Clinton's pursuers was viewed by many critics as shameless. In this instance the culture industry narrative was inverted; Clinton was no longer the villain, he was the victim of a heartless, over-the-top character assassination.

The cyclic reconfiguration of meta-identity (celebrity), as exemplified by Clinton's deftly executed restorative redemption, is in many ways dependent on the embodiment of shame and shamelessness. As is the case with violence, this is also the precarious axis upon which celebrity exists. It is as though the public (the so-called "lethal voyeurs") demand an irreconcilable presence of both humanity and superficiality (shame and shamelessness) in "their" celebrities. This dichotomy, this fault-line in the culture industry's frontiers is what Rushdie seeks to explore. Indeed, this is the paradox also apparent in the character constructions of the victims of the S&M killings.

Unlike the dynamics of celebrity, it is not so much a question of the S&M victims' complicity (or otherwise) in their shift from subjects of to objects but more a matter concerned with the nature of this transition and the circumstances that allowed it to occur. Their "style and class" were dualistically prized and derided.[218] To exemplify these traits and yet remain subservient to the status-driven needs of their male counterparts was understood as displaying the necessary level of shame and humility; however, to promote these attributes as virtues or signs of individuality was, in the eyes of those companions, shameless. Their position within this distinct stratum of the culture industry was, for themselves and their male partners, irreconcilable. It is a position full of contradictions, one that is impossible to maintain. Interestingly, in the private sphere, this tension between shame and shamelessness alone will not necessarily bring celebrity status but it can function to imbue individuals with a distinct and recognizable status within their own socio-economic clique. Ironically, it is only in death that celebrity status is conferred on these women. However, the circumstances of their deaths and the fables surrounding their lives ensure that

[218] Rushdie (2001), op. cit., p. 72.

their posthumous celebrity status will have distinct differences from that which is recognisable in figures of popular notoriety.

5.22 Culture industry narratives: "soap opera and revenge drama"

As Solanka observes, the murder victims appear as broken dolls. This is because the voyeuristic process is skewed. It differs from the established celebrity narrative patterns of the public sphere. For example, in the case of Princess Diana, the public was able to consume her carefully constructed image over a considerably long period of time. In a somewhat contradictory sense, the public is able to feel empathy for Diana, even as an object, because the narrative of her subject-object transition is a crucial part of her meta-identity.

Diana embodies the fairytale of the commoner-turned-princess. As Steinert argues, much of the public "sorrow at Diana's death... stemmed from regret at the premature conclusion to the soap opera and revenge drama"; a drama he somewhat facetiously titles, "Snow White [Diana] and the cold-hearted Stepmother [the Queen], plus her rather clumsy Son [Charles]".[219] Diana's celebrity narrative has the obligatory twists and turns of revenge drama. As Rushdie observes, to understand and culturally contextualise this narrative, the public was able to draw on the collective framework of well-known fables.

The "public" in Rushdie's *Fury*, however, are not privy to the narrative of the S&M murder victims, at least not in a manner that could be labeled as "real time". They come in at the end of the story, upon news of the killings. In this sense the celebrity transition is played in reverse, a direction that does not lend itself to empathy. Because the narrative is fragmented, the tragedy is not seen as an essentially human one, as it was depicted to be in relation to Diana's death. In the case of the S&M murder victims, it more readily approached as a faceless or figurative tragedy. The public dutifully decries the tragedy on a representative level. Questions like, "what is wrong with this country that such a horrible thing could occur?" are implied, if not openly stated. These questions supplant questions directly concerning the human plight of the victims. As Solanka says,

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[219] Steinert, op. cit., p. 153.

the deaths are read as "an attack on the great American empire", on the American way of life and not necessarily an attack on the women involved. The media and the public somewhat unconvincingly respond to such events with claims that such acts are "un-American" rather than inhuman. The human dimension of the event is rarely countenanced. Even in death, the victims' identities are not reconciled as either subjects or objects. They are not real. They are viewed as being beyond even those distinct parameters; they are merely *dolls* petulantly smashed in the throes of a high society game gone wrong.

5.23 Conclusion: the lexicon of the "language of culture"

Just as Diana's life and death finds a cultural context through its fairytale connotations, Rushdie reanimates real women as artificial dolls to illustrate the centrality of questions of perception in contemporary culture. These questions permeate Rushdie's diverse examination of culture and celebrity. My reading of Rushdie's account of the fleeting intensity of his "literary" gaze through Bono's rock star "fly shades" illustrated the cultural codes attached to representations of meta-identity. Despite Rushdie's efforts to downplay the significance of this momentary frontier crossing, his comments on the symbolic inversion apparent in this "routine" emphasise how it is typically the broader public perception of such acts, and not the tightly focussed intent behind them, that determines their cultural code. This discussion highlighted the importance of processes of image control in the projection of meta-identity.

In analysing Rushdie's observations concerning image control and the contributory role of the "lethal voyeurs", I described the tension that characterises the subject-object frontier. This tension was explained in the context of Lacan's theory of misrecognition. Extending Lacan's identity hypothesis, I proposed that one way to understand meta-identity (celebrity) is to view it as cultural phenomenon. The unresolved state of subject-object tension embodied in the celebrity figure - the tension Rushdie discusses with reference to Princess Diana, and his own, at times, undesirable level of notoriety - is typically expressed by cultural codes rather than reflexive sociological interactions.

Rushdie's comments concerning celebrity practices of image control in politics presented an opportunity to explore additional facets of the fluctuating subject-object frontier. Rushdie's "Theatre of Masks" analogy was applied to political figures Michael Howard, Tony Blair and Michael Howard to illustrate the manner in which celebrity public relations practices of image control increasingly influence politics. Additional tensions between the binary of political image and policy substance were identified. My discussion of politics, celebrity and "religiosity" revealed the existence of a flawed Machiavellian type of duplicity in contemporary politics, and indeed, the politics of particular celebrity musicians. As Rushdie asserts, so intense is the focus on image control in the Theatre of Masks, the "original" is "perceived as the mask's imitator".[220] My discussion of Rushdie's observations concerning the primacy of artificiality in contemporary culture prompted an examination of the culturally revered ethos of self-creation.

In pointing to the prominence of Gatsby-esque processes of self-creation in U.S. culture, I provided a way of approaching Rushdie's treatment of similar themes in *Fury* and *Step Across This Line*. As I explained, using the Grinch, he applies a similar cultural visage to the machinations of the 2000 U.S. election. The Grinch behaves scurrilously, stealing the election, yet such behaviour is accepted, even applauded as it befits the character. Gatsby exhibits similarly deceptive behaviour, but the conviction behind his illusionary form of self-creation is unshakable and thus, for most he encounters, to be admired. Both characters abide by a cultural code in which artificiality, if presented with sufficient vigour and skill, is accepted. My discussion of this cultural phenomenon again emphasised the importance of questions of perception. So too, in analysing Rushdie's reading of photography, it emerged that issues concerning the tension between real and artificial, and subject and object were paramount. The abstract shadows and dark contours of photographic images can in many instances provide a startlingly incisive portrait of an individual's character. This discussion brought to bear many facets of my observations, in chapter four, of the pivotal role of reflexivity in identity processes.

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[220] Rushdie (2001), op. cit., p. 235.

Rushdie's comments concerning the potentially sophisticated signs and cultural codes carried by media as varied as photography, music and film prompted further examination of his broader argument against categories, such as those delineating "high" and "low" culture. My subsequent discussion of the "new sensibility" led to a critique of Rushdie's commentary in *Fury* regarding the "industry of culture". Subject-object binaries were drawn from Adorno and Horkheimer's comparable description of the "culture industry" as a hierarchical form of "intellectual production". Similarly, Marcuse's account of the culture industry's construction of identity processes as being aligned to consumerist urges - the urge to find one's "soul" in one's possessions - assisted in presenting a way of reading Rushdie's treatment of comparable subject-object tensions in *Shame* and *Fury*. His account of the "fury" of violence and alienation, as expressed through the Pakistani honour-killing "tragedy" in the former text, and the Shakespearian dynamics of the S&M murders in the latter, again highlighted the importance of perception.

Be it the brutal killing of a woman, or the breaking of a doll, our vision of, our response to, and our part in the culture industry is governed by perception. Perception is the lexicon of, what - as I indicated earlier - Lacan calls, "the language of culture". This is also the language apparent in Rushdie literature. Our understanding and use of the language of perception determines our respective positions on the cultural frontier, and it is these positions that Rushdie seeks to locate, dissect, test and question throughout his literary project.