Coloring Whiteness and Blackvoice Minstrelsy

Representations of Race and Place in *Static Shock*, *King of the Hill*, and *South Park*

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Static Shock

Abstract: The author argues that the cartoons *Static Shock*, *King of the Hill*, and *South Park* represent appropriations of racially marked cultural forms. Although transgressing traditional boundaries of white masculinity, these representations of interracial exchange demarcate the spatial boundaries of difference that signify the superiority of white subjects.

Key words: appropriation, cartoon, minstrelsy, place, representation, space

Charting the ubiquity of minstrelsy, Eric Lott includes cartoons among popular texts underwritten by blackface structures of feeling: "From 'Oh Susanna' to Elvis Presley, from circus clowns to Saturday morning cartoons, blackface acts and words have figured significantly in the white imaginary of the United States" (4–5). Yet cartoons have received little academic attention, despite being direct inheritors of the minstrel tradition. Popular contemporary cartoons as divergent as *Static Shock*, *King of the Hill*, and *South Park* perpetuate their blackface heritage, representing white appropriations of cultural forms marked as nonwhite, which typically take the form of racialized speech. In the very act of transgressing traditional boundaries of white masculinity, these cartoon representations of interracial exchanges and cultural crossovers simultaneously demarcate and violate spatial boundaries of difference that signify the superiority of white subjects. White agency thus derives from a superior mobility between imagined communities.

In this article, I examine cartoons for incidents in which an appropriated form of black culture, what we might call "blackness," becomes a strategy for representing white agency within and around specific regions. Such locations of appropriation are to be found in the mall in *Static Shock*, the ethnic geographies of states in *King of the Hill*, and the flattened terrain of Internet visuality in *South Park*. All of these regions are imagined as constitutive of whiteness. In analyzing interracial speech exchanges in cartoons, I also seek to make visible the ideological mapping of socially legible identities and identity-specific places wherein such speech collisions occur.

Black Spaces with White Faces in *Static Shock*

Static Shock represents an appropriation of a traditionally raced rhetoric of brotherhood to heal an injured whiteness whose represented dysfunction is associated with urban spaces,

limited purchasing power, and family dissolution brought about by an absence of white paternal figures. In featuring a black teen superhero, *Static Shock* complements the Warner Brothers network's multicultural lineup of Saturday morning cartoons, including *The Jackie Chan Adventures*, in which the film star pairs up with a magical Asian girl to defeat primarily Asian enemies, and *The Zeta Project*, a rip-off of *The Terminator* complete with a runaway robot. Virgil Hawkins, the ordinary ego of superhero Static Shock, is a somewhat reluctant hero in that his powers, like Jackie's in his Asian-themed cartoon, are narrowly determined. His adventures never affect spaces beyond the neighborhood as do the global dramas of Superman or Batman.

Although it is one of the first cartoons since Bill Cosby's *Fat Albert* to represent black superherodom, *Static Shock* reflects many of the limiting markings accompanying black comics illuminated by Christian Davenport:

> Blacks (whether they appeared on a street corner or on Mars) would be represented by characteristics that were/are usually associated with African Americans, such as threatening demeanor, high levels of athletic prowess, low intellectual capabilities, exotic and mysterious backgrounds, residence within an inner city, and menial or unemployment. (22)

Static's implied inferiority is further marked by his pairing with a white buddy figure, who cheerfully offers those skills that Static seems to lack. Static often relies on the wiser counsel of his white best friend, Richie Foley, who emends Virgil's intellectual oversights in racially marked phrases popularized in culture as Black English.

One episode of *Static Shock*, "Child's Play," mobilizes signs of blackness around a white family marked as poor. Signs of poverty overwhelm the viewer, as the cartoon focuses on cracks in the poor family's kitchen tiles and broken bottles by the curb in an inner city area. An organizing contrast in this episode counterbalances signs of Virgil's abundance against signs of his white antagonist's lack. Where our hero's father, a community leader and principal, is concerned about letting Virgil use the ATM, Virgil's ten-year-old white foil, Dwayne, lives fatherless with his mother and stepbrother Aaron in "Fenton Projects"—a place where, as Virgil notes, people had been snowed in. We soon find out, however, that the white substance was vanilla ice cream. As it turns out, after being exposed to the same radiation that gives rise to Static Shock, young Dwayne now has the ability to make his desires materialize instantly. The ironies here are multiple.

"Child's Play" dramatizes a reversal of racial stereotypes. Instead of a black family racked with poverty, we are presented with a white family living in the projects, complete with a disdainful thug-like prodigal son, Aaron, who has just returned from reform school. Moreover, Aaron justifies his crimes as a form of social rebellion, thus situating himself as a social and economic victim in relationship to society. After leading his fawning brother into a space clearly marked as the inner city, Aaron meets with an African American friend. What better way to alert us to signs of Aaron's moral slippage back to his evil ways? Learning of his brother's power to materialize his desires—conspicuously made up of commodity fetishes—Aaron escorts Dwayne to a bank, where he explains that the institution has done them all personal harm. Dwayne conjures up a Sumo warrior from a video game to destroy the bank. Similar video game commodity phantoms are drawn up to combat Static during the climax at the mall. That Asian-themed video game personas would do battle with an African American superhero at a mall should not surprise us; after all, such thematics conjure up the very video game and comic book industry in which the cartoon participates.

There are two kinds of border crossings constructed, traversed, and policed in *Static Shock*: urban landscapes and speech registers.

In addition to casting white characters in roles typically associated with blacks, the cartoon indirectly depoliticizes black culture by using themes such as "brotherhood" to repair imagined white injuries to the domestic sphere and imagined rifts at the core of the American family. Just beyond the focus of the cartoonist's pen are white fathers, whose absence we must suppose gives rise to the troubles depicted. In the end, the rhetoric of brotherhood and civil disobedience enables white characters to position themselves as victims of systemic economic pressures. On its surface, "Child's Play" attempts to represent the contradiction of spaces from an Afro-diasporic perspective as it mediates between the paradoxically liberating enclosures of the Freedman's Center and the mall, which are portrayed as centers of paternal authority and social exchange, and the threat of unbounded spaces, such as the docks, Fenton Projects, and street corners, which could give rise, if only briefly, to a counterpolitics that the narrative resists explaining.

Static Shock also focuses on the consumption of black entertainments or spectacles by white characters. This is suggested in the many scenes that show the hero communicating to his white sidekick. The white buddy marks the space of the cartoon and comic consumer, whose whiteness, rather than being jeopardized by its seemingly inferior position to the black superhero, is reinforced in value as a consumer of blackness. Emphasizing the motives and modes of consumption, the white character thus valorizes the position of spectator of superhumanity but not the possessor

of it. In this formulation, both superhumanity and blackness are to be thrillingly regarded rather than dangerously owned by the white buddy.

There are two kinds of border crossings constructed, traversed, and policed in *Static Shock*: urban landscapes and speech registers. In the premier episode, conflicts over the two borders coalesce. In "Shock to the System," Static is asked to join a gang to help protect him from F-Stop, a red-haired gang leader out for street "cred." The show opens with Static expediently wrapping up a bunch of villains who use improper slang during their bungled warehouse caper; Static testifies to being offended after hearing a bad guy try to express a slang term with an affected ebonic dialect. However, the episode proceeds with Richie's attempts at his own raced witticisms—"Straight up, V," "I got yo back," "Peace"—which strangely receive no comment from Static. Depending, of course, on one's listening skills and affective politics, a possible mixed message infuses the show's moments of racial border crossing of speech acts. *Static Shock* constructs a speech rule and then dramatizes its infraction on the part of the white buddy.

The formative incident that initiates Virgil Hawkens to superherodom is a police intervention gone awry. Virgil is chased through dark alleys by a multiracial gang of thugs led by F-Stop. But Virgil's thuggish friends led by Wayne show up, scaring away his attackers. Virgil's allies pressure him to join their gang and later meet at the docks where a "major throw down" with all the crews in the city of Dakota is going down. "Time to go the permanent route, lil brother," Wayne says, offering him a 45. A fog swells up around the kids after police in a helicopter drop a gas grenade that ignites a stack of propane canisters. In the morning, Static realizes his powers. He can turn on any electric appliance at will. When he meets Richie in a junkyard, he levitates on an old car. "Hey man, you could so be a superhero," voices the ecstatic white friend. "Come on, Bro, we got to get you some gear." Richie chooses his favorite among a limited selection of Static's costumes, mimicking the agency of the target comic book and cartoon-watching audience member: the young white male. Nevertheless, Static enables his own utilization by vocalizing genericness as one of his attributes: "The name's Static, I put a shock to your system. . . . I'm one of those all-purpose superheroes." "He's a natural," echoes Richie.

Ironically, even though Virgil threw away the proffered gun, signifying his unwillingness to join a gang, he becomes a superhero along with the very gang members whose kinship he intended on denying. He is permanently enjoined to these types. Might this be an optimistic vision about the perfectibility of the gangster type? The show asks, What if the very person drawn up as the usual criminal suspect were to become a superhero? Not surprisingly, ties to the local remain disadvantages that compensate for heroic transformation, as Static is now bound to protect good citizens, mall shoppers, and homeowners from other teen (mainly black) thugs who become supervillains.

The cartoon's prurient visualizing of the spaces of the inner city is juxtaposed against the mall, where global capital and local identities replicable as commodities collide.

In another episode, a subplot romantically entangles Virgil's sister with a rapper–supervillain, Rubberband Man, a reformed ex-con metahuman. The ideological focus of the episode centers on the humiliation of service labor. Virgil is shown working in a fast-food restaurant wearing jangler's bells on his head like a harlequin, the fool's cap of working youth's subjugation, but he exits to save the life of a rapper. "Superheroes don't take money. Superheroes work at Burger Fool," laments Virgil. The episode also features some intriguing moments of border control. Flying through the air on his electrically charged manhole cover, a talisman of the street, Static registers his passage through an otherwise invisible class barrier. "Wow," he proclaims, surveying his locale, "Dakota Hill. Bet nobody here has to work at Burger Fool! Look at that playground. I bet they charge admission." The cartoon belatedly alludes to the brutality experienced by black bodies near transgressed borders when Static is menaced by a bat-waving white man and quips, "A purist would never use an aluminum bat." The use of the term *purist* could only refer to white racist groups and their predilection for wooden bats when brutalizing minorities.

Aside from the usual teen cartoon backdrops of high school hallways, *Static Shock* returns to scenes consonant with a popular visual vocabulary for signifying blackness. The "ghetto" and its popular signifiers in dress, speech, and style are slated for instant commodification by the image industry. The market value of the ghetto is maximized in the paradigmatic shift brought about by the "Big Bang," the name given to the police debacle that superhumanizes minorities. The docks—one of *Static Shock*'s locations of minority and youth subcultures—are transformed into spectacles made manageable by consumerism. To be sure, the cartoon's prurient visualizing of the spaces of the inner city is juxtaposed against the mall, where global capital and local identities replicable as commodities collide.

To return to "Child's Play," the mall is a place where multiculturalism and commodification intersect. The climactic battle between Static and a series of video game villains blurs real and imagined identities and gives the

episode a postmodern sensibility. Indeed, as products of comic book and video game consumption, the subaltern, mainly Asian, identities imagined by the character Dwayne resonate against another character invented by another Dwayne, namely Dwayne Macduffie's Static Shock. Video game characters brought to life are of a greater degree of fictionality than the hero is. Contrasted against instabilities in the real-imagined relations of identities are the stable boundaries of places. But the mall provides the mediating terrain, the only place where this final battle can be settled. Where else but at the mall does the local overlap, sublate, and, of course, get subsumed by global capital? The local, perhaps symbolized by the genericness of the toy video game villains, becomes the engine that drives global commodity.

Counternormativity, another kind of local potentialized, we might say, by the very presence of a black hero, is also trumped by that hero's complicity in networks of consumerism through self-commodification, an imperative of global ontology. The sociality of the mall is neither referenced nor challenged because what the cartoon shows as taking place within its walls is still a form of shopping, a battling that is not so much physical action as much as an extended commercial for what is offered for sale at the mall. The Other remains an object for commodification. What signifies rebellion in one location becomes a cultural cachet at the mall, a space suffused with a kaleidoscope of styles for appropriation, which, as Mike Featherstone attests, has become a staple of postmodern existence:

> Signs, which are de-contextualized from tradition or subcultural ordering, are played with in a superficial way, with people revelling [*sic*] in the fact that they are artificial, opaque, and depthless in the sense that they cannot be decoded to offer access to some revelatory meaning or fundamental sense of truth. (393)

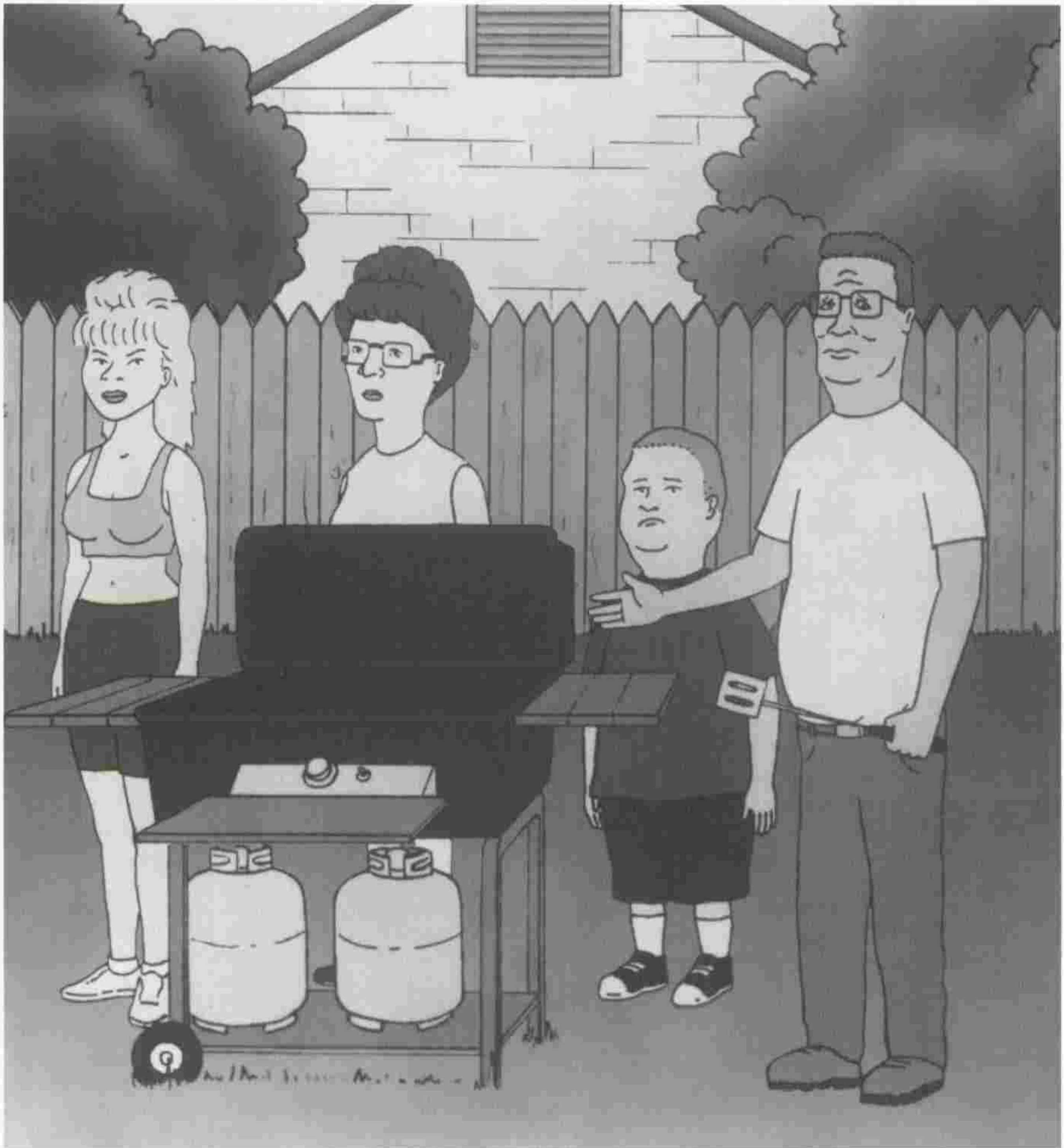
Thus, no locatable cultural form withstands commodification, not even the one cultural identity that is invisible within such a dynamic, the consumer, the tourist, the spectator. It is significantly from this position of the consumer that Static Shock is able to defeat his video game nemeses. His knowledge of video games, rather than his superpowers, saves the day. Instead of showing how such knowledge disciplines further consumption, the cartoon imagines that consumption yields victories over commodification.

Bubba's Body as Nation in *King of the Hill*

King of the Hill, the latest addition to America's fascination for primetime cartoons, comes to us from Mike Judge, the satirist cartoonist who introduced Beavis and Butthead to the popular imaginary. The very conservative and drawling gang of masculine underdog heroes in *King of the Hill*, like those grunting, head-banging teens who preceded them, represents stigmatized subjects of white culture constructed and particularized by the cartoon. Whereas Beavis specifies the head-banger as both dumb with media consumption and critically savvy of media excesses, *King of the Hill* mediates the production of a white-classed Otherness—the Texan white, a paradoxical subject both marked and unmarked—through allusions to and appropriations of cultural practices and strategies of redress traditionally imagined as black. The cartoon carves out a space for a white class consciousness that is initially marked as Other. But this marking is only tenuous. As a result of interracial interchanges, white characters leave no trace of being marked with blackness by the conclusion of their narratives. Paradoxically, blackness seems most often invoked by white characters to reinforce or enhance some inner quality already implied in the white character, thereby keeping intact the myth of white racial purity.

King of the Hill already is involved in an apparent race project as it focuses on a particularized group of whites often produced as targets of mock racialization, whose supposed backwardness only enhances the presumed superior politics of the unmarked normal white American. We might think of the cartoon as a satirical ethnography of "hicks" or "Bubbas." At first glance, we might read Hank Hill and his buddies as contemporary versions of the Southern dupe. In twentieth-century drama, this was a stock type whose anger over the historical contests of the post-emancipation South often leads to his embarrassment at the hands of a more powerful or wittier Northern gentlemen. A classic example of this relationship may be seen in the classic Warner Brothers cartoon characters Yosemite Sam and Bugs Bunny. In his research of blackface minstrelsy in post-bellum American culture, Eric Lott finds that by "blacking up," performing songs, and dancing Jim Crow, white performers borrow identities from black culture in order to establish a class solidarity among other aggrieved whites. Lott's argument reminds us that when interpreting the cultural work of interracial representations, we must attend to the way signs of blackness become markers for constructing a resistant class consciousness. We might fill out the picture of the cultural system of the "hick" in popular culture by noting that the hillbilly was popularized in such classic shows as *The Beverly Hillbillies* and replicated in such 1970s films as *Midnight Cowboy* and *Smokey and the Bandit*, as well as in the TV shows *The Dukes of Hazard* and *Hee Haw*. This type has recently become the focus for derisive spectacle not only in talk shows such as *The Jerry Springer Show* but also in more sober programming venues utilizing poor white trash as way of imagining a racialized form of whiteness.

In one episode, Hank Hill, the show's romanticized noble savage hick-hero, learns through an Internet detective service that he was originally born in New York City. The show uses sepia-colored flashbacks and allusions to "Godfather" movies to play up the embarrassed Southerner's unspeakably inauthentic origin. However, what gets insinuated as Hank's buddies begin linking certain characteristics with perceived New Yorker stereotypes is the very same pro-slav-



King of the Hill

ery logic that assumes a permanence in the relationship between origin and character. Because nothing about Hank sufficiently marks him with this exceptional quirk, his friends attach labels to him in the form of suggestively anti-Semitic epithets and "I love New York" stickers. The humor here is obviously in the attempt to mark one so obviously immune from marking. The mark of a New York heritage for a hick is absurd. Even as it marks Hank, allowing him the kind of sentimental epiphany that commonly follows such role reversals, it measures his distance from the imagined authentic New Yorker. The cartoon further polarizes the terms it produces, as New York urbanity and sophistication become a raced mark of shame in the world where the trailer park patriarchy ascends to a position of normalcy, the unmarked space from which the drama presented makes sense.

King of the Hill stages a tragic-mulatto narrative, which both implicates and exonerates its white hero

with a region-as-race marking. That this white Texan obsesses over the orderliness of his lawn renders him nothing like abject trailer park trash of, say, *The Jerry Springer Show*. Hank comes to represent a white masculinity situated as distinct from and suggestively superior to regionally classed white Others, who may actually require nativist authenticity to pass. Despite being unmasked as a native counterfeit, Hank remains no less functional for viewers as a representative of the region he so chauvinistically wishes to embody. Indeed, Hank's regional particularity is racialized when Bobby, his son, rejoices, "I always knew I had a little New York in me." Bobby's perspective translates the taint of place as one of race, but his tone is joyful, as though this racial taint adds a recognizable something extra to his unmarked identity. The more Hank Hill seems to embody the paradox of place, which the show constructs for us around an imagined cultural difference between New York and Texas, the more American he seems.

The body of this Texan "Bubba" who raises himself above his New York birth becomes a cipher for the corpus of the nation. Amy Kaplan persuasively notes a shift from geography to subjectivity in the formation of national consciousness. Popular representations around the turn of the century embody national identity in the image of the white man instead of basing it on geographical boundaries made fluid and extendable by the very properties of empire building: "The discourse of American imperialism delineates national power that is disembodied from territorial boundaries and re-embodied in the power of the male body" (663). Thus, the show asks us to entangle the boundaries of identity territories with state borders, to imagine overlaid on top of the geography of Texas a cultural field of subjectivities demarcated by a particular land but not necessarily marked by it. Ultimately, Hank participates in marking others on nativist principles, as when asking a buddy from "Looserana" to duck whenever "real" Texans pass them, but then proves to be immune from such ridicule himself. His investment in a particular dream of Texas masculinity absolves him from charges of inauthenticity.

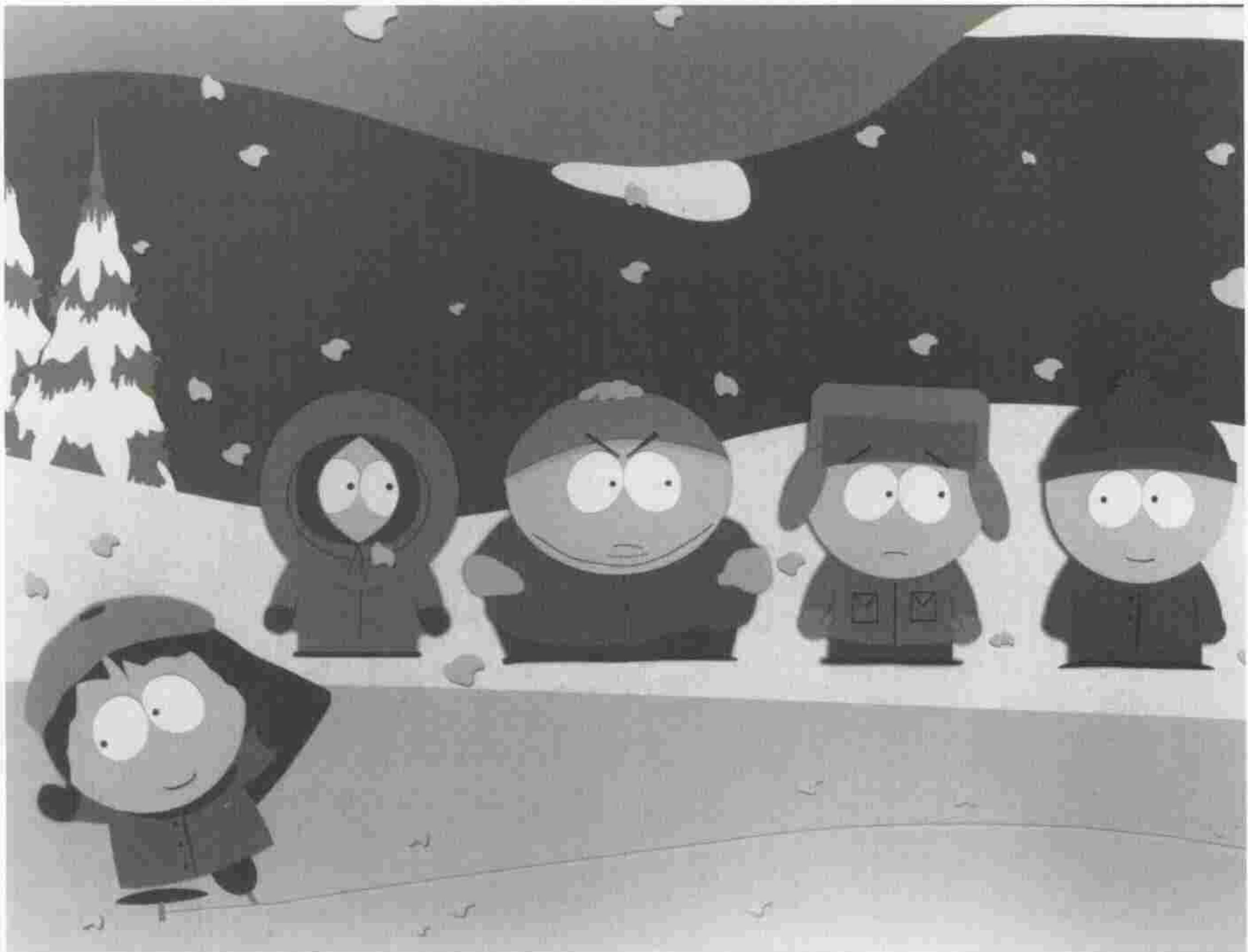
In a manner not dissimilar from presidential campaign advertisements, Texas, although a specific space within the body of the nation, functions metonymically as the nation, but only in counterpuntal relation to another imagined space, New York. Whereas the first space is conceived of as a home with determinable borders, the latter connotes a spatiality trapped within temporality. The space of New York is the past within the imaginary of the show. That its borders where the globe's locals get Americanized, or reglobalized, are covalent with the past only reasserts an expansionist teleology that equates Texas with futurity, a frontier of advanced American citizenry pushing ever outward and away from the compromising tinctures of novitiate, multicultural Americans. The binarizing of the nation between these two cultural poles further stretches the conceptuality of the intervening space, a vast confection of identities fluidly moving between fixed cultural extremes, thus suggesting as unmarked norms negotiated identities. Within the cartoon landscape, the "hill" that we presume Hank either aspires to or does reign over demarcates not simply a classed entitlement to the perfect lawn, the fastest computer, the newest truck, nor does it only delimit white male subjectivity. Rather, the hill becomes a mound of regionalisms that overshadows nationalisms. As in the minstrel performance, the cartoon puts regional identity on display, parading the local to cover a global face built by the same massification of consumer products and media images.

Static Shock and *King of the Hill* represent white appropriations of styles commonly deemed black. But this black is nothing more than a trope.

South Park and Blackvoice Minstrelsy

Static Shock and *King of the Hill* represent white appropriations of styles commonly deemed black. But this black is nothing more than a trope. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr., reminds us, the trope of blackness may be disconnected from material bodies and rather instantiated in cultural practices. But before we laud some notion of a productive hybridity resulting from white characters concretizing the fiction of blackness, we should ask how such transracial interchanges also perform a cultural work. That is, how do they facilitate socialization or the formations of subjectivity by which hegemonic forces of state and cultural power perpetuate and enforce their dominance?

In these cartoons, multiplicity encodes a set of nonwhite identities to be appropriated and commodified by whiteness. In the cartoon world, obscene humor and satire mediate this commodification. The whiteness that appropriates typically does so by virtue of its mobile positioning between and through imagined boundaries contrarily shown as impassible to black characters or agents marked as black. Let me briefly turn to an appropriately confusing example of such a character in *South Park*'s scatological hero extraordinaire, Eric Cartmen. Although this fourth-grade, trash-talking ne'er-do-well may be only the latest incarnation of a familiar American picaro—the morally errant, often classed, but sympathetic white youth from Huck Finn to Holden Caulfield, Dennis the Menace to Eminem—Eric



South Park

Cartmen's yen for breaking into Black English and interactions with black identities also fashion him an appropriator. However, Cartmen's voice and persona may be seen as only an avatar, one layer of textual identity for creator Trey Parker, who may be regarded in one sense as a "blackvoice" performer.

South Park creates a form of black voice minstrelsy in which the show's creators occupy a wide array of character voices, whereas the black character Chef fixes its voice actor Isaac Hayes to play only a version of himself. The power of whiteness is thus predicated in terms of its mobility and greater access to identities than the conceptually static identity consigned to the African American. This approach privileges cartoons as, among other things, vocal performances. The voice-over in cartoons creates the space in which racial performance emerges and mediates imagined rebel identities. There is an obvious tier of social, racial, and sexual anxieties referenced in the show's consciousness. The cartoon is a two-dimensional puppet show. A voice dramatizes what is essentially nothing more than a specter, a visual but lifeless avatar in need of the voice for its special personifying effect. I contend that vulgar associations of race, intentional aural impersonations, contribute to the process of symbolic embodying in which *South Park*, like all cartoons, exchanges.

South Park is preoccupied by a politics of place, but its regional affinities are complicated by Cartmen's vocal appropriations of black cultural expressions. When watching the show not only must you respect his "authoriTAH!" you might also "reco'nize" Cartmen's explosive declamations of "West Si-EED!" In the vocal appropriation of the term "West Side," Cartmen ventriloquizes a regionalizing rejoinder common to hip-hop culture and aligns himself through racial performance with denizens of an imagined alternative space, a rebel community already marked at the site of its iteration with overstressed vowels. The stylized vocal stress of the shibboleth "West Si-EED" presumably echoes its already marked geographic contradistinction to an unmarked East Side—that scarcely whispered white space of privilege that funky white boys usually come from but are quick to disclaim.

Unlike Eric Cartmen, Chef is programmed in a binaric mode, rarely speaking beyond his exaggerated

scripts. Already named and positioned in the buddy role, Chef plays a dichotomy familiar to African Americans in representation. He is in posterior relationship to the circumstances affecting the determination of his role. He is both avuncular moralist and sexual soulster, alternately exhorting the children to stay out of trouble and serenading them about "sex down by the fire" and "making sweet love all night long." He is Uncle Tom on TV, a walking radio with a prohibitively finite number of stations. In contrast to the variety of voices Trey Parker and Matt Stone perform, Isaac Hayes only speaks the voice of Chef, and Parker gets a song out of the Emmy-winning performer in almost every show. The show's extremist aesthetic for offense in one episode has Parker vocalizing the speech of Chef's parents in a manner so banal and yet so exaggerated that it would produce unease even in those who find nothing appropriative about boy bands or Eminem.

One episode includes a spoof cameo appearance by Michael Jackson, a performer whose effeminacy is typically ridiculed by a marking of the voice. However, instead of the expected high-pitched cooings that typically mark Jacko's speech, the joke in this show is on that very expectation as Parker affects his blanket-type impersonation of a masculine Black English not necessarily marked by femininity at all. The joke is that within the city limits of South Park, Michael Jackson's voice sounds exactly like that of Johnny Cochran. Whatever differentiates these men as sexual or racial subjects in popular culture is trumped in South Park by their shared race difference, or their perceived blackness. But why blacken Jackson, if not so that we catch another racial performer behind the screen of Eric Cartmen? In this episode, therefore, Trey Parker forces us to hear him doing his generalized black man's voice again, even to characterize one with such a tenuous claim to that identity as Michael Jackson. As with his voice characterization of Chef's parents, Parker hereby performs vocal mastery over subaltern subjects, as his white man's bad version of blackness functions as the voice in a cartoon marked as black within the cartoon universe. Is it that the occasion for slipping into the black man is too appealing to let pass? Then again, Parker's accent is bad, indicating that the show's self-conscious satire is always on hand as an alibi to exonerate its seeming flippancy over targeting primarily marked identities as objects of ridicule.

Buffooning black speech, Parker and Stone give us a falsetto set of African American cartoons: an elderly black woman who never opens her eyes and her garrulous husband whose eyes are contrastively highlighted. It is significant that eyes and looking are thematized in an episode that also dramatizes Cartmen's experiences at the eye doctor. The price of looking at spectacles is perhaps higher than listening to them. In either case, this episode focuses on both modes of witnessing the interracial comic. First learning of Chef's desire to marry a white women, the children listen at his doorway as he and wife-to-be intone a ballad very unlike Chef's ordinary crooning. As he nasally chimes, "We'll have to wait for the morning after," we are made to confront a series of borders rhetorically constructed within the aural space of the joke. During Chef's moments of folk—and thus white—impersonation, another voice actor displaces Isaac Hayes and we get a funny, because now discorporated, Chef. Humor here surrounds anxieties over miscegenation, which is technically enhanced by splicing a whitened voice over the image of Chef singing. In a similar fashion, Chef's father is also marked by speech, but his is repetitive, folksy, circular, mythical, and most important, absurdly affected.

> Women and feminized masculinity become sloughing off spaces for unspoken threats and tacit grievances in *South Park*.

And yet blackness is also ennobled in a way that women are not, even in cases of blackface drag when minstrelsy compositely operates on perhaps a more subversive level. Women and feminized masculinity become sloughing off spaces for unspoken threats and tacit grievances in *South Park*. Indeed, the show's blatant homophobia is an important structuring device in the historical racial masquerade that Lott describes: "Flight from such 'compromising' subtexts [gender role subversion, homosexuality, feminine travesty] may in fact have produced the reassertion of masculinity in misogynist representations, which usually constituted the reactionary face of a perhaps more 'undecidable' racial masquerade" (27). Gender role rebellion, therefore, functions strategically as narrative safety valves dampening while exacerbating racist farce. Producing affective switch points between two simultaneous registers of sympathy and ridicule, minstrel performances catalyze confrontations within social relations. Both real and imagined subaltern identities are part of the grammar of the ritualized practice of dialectical appropriation, in which white men divest while investing in their own subjectivity through trafficking in representation.

The bizarre internationalism of the South Park universe—a scope that matches the pop cultural reach of *The Flintstones* and the mythological or symbolic that *The Simpsons* popularized—spoofs WWII newsreels and international events from that relentlessly cynical position of the Internet surfer and reflects the "point-and-click" mentality of the Web user. But this spectatorial position is neither as highly mobile nor as infinitely varied

as the universal register of whiteness would induce us to imagine. Rather, the value systems implied in the show's humor map onto ideological coordinates located in culture, which allow us to focus more clearly on *South Park*'s constructed viewer with some particularity.

Fixity of the viewer's position in *South Park* is maintained by the relative absence of simulated zooming shots. There are hardly any scenes in which we move toward an image within a frame. And because we are rarely made to focus in on these obscene constructions, we see them always from a distance safely kept intact by the spatial logic of the cartoon. The spatial logic thus guarantees an objectivity that is merely an effect of technical arrangement.

In addition to the show's representation of collapsible geography, its preoccupation with reassembling popular culture, taboo sexuality, and flattened out identities are comparable to the post-national global structures modeled by the Internet. The cartoon constructs a world of simplistic frontality. One need only compare its horizontal *mise en scène* of rigid simplicity with the quicksilver fluidity of *The Simpsons*. *South Park* never illustrates a viewing position outside a spatializing structure that emphasizes viewer rootedness, two dimensionality, color flatness, and horizontal movement of frontal characters. Characters have no profile. Side views are nullified as the cartoon insistently animates its characters from the front. We may say, therefore, that characterization itself emerges out of a series of carefully maintained "fronts." Because there is no visual side view, there is no concomitant third position allowed. Although we might accord to South Park the very same zoning laws that allow cartoon towns such as Springfield to get away with spoofing raced characters by seeming to spoof all stereotypical identities, the cartoon polarizes possible positions, binarizing according to the dictates of the same hegemonic system of difference that it seems to be critiquing in total, but which it is really only critiquing in part. South Park, like the other regions I have mapped in this article, contains conflicting identities seething in and around the city limits denoted by the cartoon.

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