

PUNK, OBAMACARE, AND A JESUIT: BRANDING THE ICONIC IDEALS
OF VIVIENNE WESTWOOD, BARACK OBAMA, AND POPE FRANCIS

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Abstract

Practices of branding, promotion, and persona have become dominant influences structuring identity formation in popular culture. Creating an iconic brand identity is now an essential practice required for politicians, celebrities, global leaders, and other public figures to establish their image within a competitive media landscape shaped by consumer society. This dissertation analyzes the construction and circulation of Vivienne Westwood, Barack Obama, and Pope Francis as iconic brand identities in contemporary media and consumer culture. The content analysis and close textual analysis of select media coverage and other relevant material on key moments, events, and cultural texts associated with each figure deconstructs the media representation of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis. The brand identities of Westwood, Pope Francis, and Obama ultimately exhibit a unique form of iconic symbolic power, and exploring the complex dynamics shaping their public image demonstrates how they have achieved and maintained positions of authority. Although Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis initially were each positioned as outsiders to the institutions of fashion, politics, and religion that they now represent, the media played a key role in mainstreaming their image for public consumption. Their iconic brand identities symbolize the influence of consumption in shaping how issues of public good circulate within public discourse, particularly in regard to the economy, health care, social inequality, and the environment. Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis are also texts used to promote the institutions they represent, and it is this aspect of their public image that illuminates the inherent contradictions between individual and institution underlying their brand identities. Interrogating the iconic identities of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis reveals how it is the labour and strategy behind the brand that creates meaning in consumer culture. Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis are important figures for analysis because their iconic brand identities transcend the foundations of fashion, politics, and religion, and more significantly, demonstrate how branding as a promotional strategy is not unique to any particular realm or institution but a technique utilized by public figures regardless of the celebrity or elite status associated with their position.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Iconic images matter [...] They matter because they offer a shared terrain of meaning that remains enormously important. They matter because they are a key site for political engagement. Perhaps, we could even say, their importance to the practice of alternative politics is even more crucial today. In the context of global social movements, enormous political repression and disempowerment, and vast social inequality, alternative political movements need the power of the shared meaning of icon in order to make any possible intervention. This may seem simple; clearly, it is not – the challenges of a shared icon (whether for brand managers or for social movements) are enormous. Yet, the stakes in shared meaning have never been higher.

--- Marita Sturken¹

Despite the prominence of the idioms ‘icon,’ ‘brand,’ and ‘iconic brand’ in public discourse, very few figures or personas constitute such descriptions, and the terms are employed interchangeably with such frequency that they lose power and meaning. The dissolution of what constitutes an icon and brand by the discourse of consumer capitalism and the intensification of celebrity culture has influenced vernacular understandings of iconography across different social structures and institutions. Developing an iconic brand and identity is now considered a fundamental process undertaken by celebrities, politicians, and comparable public figures in order to establish their social standing within a highly cluttered and competitive environment. Vivienne Westwood, Barack Obama, and Pope Francis are three figures whose histories legitimize their status as global icons surpassing the boundaries of the institutions of fashion, politics, and religion. A critical textual analysis of the imagery that shapes their media representation reveals the influence of shifting social, political, and economic dynamics that are involved in converting Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis’s elite status as cultural icons into powerful iconic brand identities within consumer society. Transforming Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis into a simplified image exemplifies how it is the power behind the brand that creates meaning in contemporary media culture. Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis are

¹ Marita Sturken, “The Continued Relevance of the Icon,” *Sociologica* 1 (2015): 1-2.

individuals with unique and complex personal histories, however the biographical details informing their personas are obscured in favour of promoting a simplified brand identity. The symbolic power of Westwood, Pope Francis, and Obama's brand identities is demonstrated through the authority of the media in selectively framing their emerging image to mass audiences; how Obama, Pope Francis, and Westwood incorporate iconic ideals central to beliefs of public good into their brand identities to negotiate the economic, health care, and environmental crises; and the way in which Pope Francis, Westwood, and Obama's personal brand identities are utilized to promote the institutions and empires they also represent as cultural, national, and global icons.

Supported through symbolic exchange as a theoretical framework and a content and critical textual analysis of key moments that work to construct the iconic identities defining Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis's media representation, emphasis is placed upon the construction of their iconography and the ways in which their image is based upon, and influenced by, socioeconomic changes in cultural politics. Deconstructing the political orientations and techniques employed by Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis in the construction of their iconography illuminates how the institutions of fashion, politics, and religion operate discursively under the governing conventions of the symbolic economy. The analytical focus critiques the tensions comprising the relationship between individuality and institution, particularly in regard to how it is not only the institutions of fashion, politics, and religion that produce the icons of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis, but also the power of these figures as individual agents acting within – and against – the governing structure and rules of the institution. Since these three figures are deliberately distinctive, the critical textual analysis of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis's media representation demonstrates how the discourse

of branding has transformed the construction of icons in popular culture. The mediation of iconic figures functions as the forum where social issues are negotiated and consequently shifts attention away from the politics embedded within the institutions that govern everyday life, a process exemplifying Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker's argument that "lives are shaped by and embedded within popular and representational culture."² The brand identities of Westwood, Pope Francis, and Obama exhibit a form of iconic power, and addressing the complex dynamics shaping their public image reveals how they have attained positions of authority in cultural politics. Obama, Westwood, and Pope Francis represent the power of branding to conceal the highly complex process in which a public figure and the iconic ideals associated with their image are incorporated into a symbol with intense communicative power that is not just confined to the areas of fashion, politics, and religion, but also registers across different realms of influence. Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis are important figures for analysis because their iconic brand identities transcend national borders and the imagined boundaries of the institutional empires they represent. Investigating the strategy, labour, and process involved in the construction of their image reveals brand culture's privileging of the symbolic in communicating ideas about politics, consumption, and social justice.

It is commonly understood that the President of the United States plays a key role in shaping the social dynamics of particular moments or trends in Western popular culture. On an episode of the popular podcast *Gilmore Guys*, hosts Kevin Porter and Demi Adejuyigbe along with special guest Keith Powell discuss the frequency of homophobic comments and jokes on the television series *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007). Claiming that such derogatory remarks are characteristic of the Republican-led period in which George W. Bush relied upon the political

² Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker, "Gender and Recessionary Culture," in *Gendering the Recession: Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity*, ed. Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 1.

right's homophobia for re-election in 2004, Powell argues that "American culture is always defined by its president."³ *The Globe and Mail's* television critic John Doyle contends that Fox's dramatic series *24* (2001-2010/2014), depicting counter-terrorism agent Jack Bauer's attempts to thwart a wide variety of terrorist plots ranging from nuclear bombs to assassinations, effectively illustrates the undercurrents characterizing Bush's domestic and foreign policies following the events of September 11, 2001.⁴

Elected as the first Black president of the United States, Obama entered the White House during a tumultuous period defined by the 2007-2008 decline of the American mortgage and stock market that contributed to a global economic crisis. Ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in addition to gruesome allegations of torture and abuse by the American military towards prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay during Bush's presidency led to an intense distrust of government and elected officials that helped create the social undercurrents contributing to Obama's election. Characteristic of his background as a community organizer in Chicago, Obama's campaign tapped into the growing cynicism amongst the American public during the Bush presidency to ignite a grassroots campaign focused on discourses of hope and change to mobilize disenchanted voters. Reflecting on this social climate on *Gilmore Guys*, Powell elaborates that "We are now in a very activist society, stand up and have a cause for everything, because that is the way that Obama had gotten elected. We, I feel like, have subconsciously taken that on."⁵ His comments reflect the argument of the power of the president to influence the popular discourses that define periods of popular culture. The era of the Obama presidency

³ Kevin Porter and Demi Adejuyigbe, hosts, "406 – An Affair to Remember (with Keith Powell)," *Gilmore Guys* (podcast), June 3, 2015, accessed March 7, 2020, <https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/gilmore-guys/id923957904?i=1000343830538>.

⁴ John Doyle, "Who Killed 24? Barack Obama Stands Accused," *The Globe and Mail*, April 10, 2010.

⁵ Porter and Adejuyigbe, "406 – An Affair to Remember," June 3, 2015.

witnessed the emergence of several prominent discursive formations, such as commodity activism as a dominant practice for social responsibility and the pervasiveness of persona as a means of self-promotion facilitated by advances in technological and networked culture.

Amongst the significant issues and challenges facing Obama as he entered office, his presidency is primarily remembered for his relationship to, and influence on, popular culture. In their analysis of the social trends and motifs that emerged during the global financial crisis of 2008-2009, Negra and Tasker defend their emphasis on American popular culture, not only for what they argue is “its concentrated power and appeal to privileged constituencies and its high transnational circulation,” but also for the power of cultural texts originating in the United States to shape Canadian, British, and European reactions to key international events and crises like the recession.⁶ Reflecting on the iconic moment when Obama was caught by the press posing for selfies with Danish and British prime ministers Helle Thorning-Schmidt and David Cameron during Nelson Mandela’s 2013 memorial service, *The Globe and Mail*’s Russell Smith noted:

Columnist after pundit has come out to claim that one of Obama’s many strengths was a familiarity with pop music and comedy, and an ability to goof around (as with the selfie), to appear natural and self-deprecating at the same time. He appeared on late-night talk shows, he played along with comedians (Zach Galifianakis, Key and Peele, Jerry Seinfeld), he had rappers at the White House. The guy compiled Spotify playlists (on an official White House account). This, surprisingly, did not make him look unpresidential, just cool.⁷

Smith’s analysis highlights the important role Obama’s image as culturally-aware played in shaping his persona as a presidential figure able to connect to the public – both American and internationally – and as an iconic identity. Obama’s ability to understand how to build his brand identity in accordance with the broader trends and dynamics circulating within popular culture is

⁶ Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker, “Neoliberal Frames and Genres of Inequality: Recession-era Chick Flicks and Male-Centred Corporate Melodrama,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 16, no. 3 (2013): 347-348.

⁷ Russell Smith, “Our selfies, Ourselves,” *The Globe and Mail*, January 26, 2017.

reflective of his ability to adapt and promote himself with a consumer society that reproduces the power of the image.

It is within this social, political, and economic environment influenced by the cultural tones of the Obama administration that other public figures have emerged as individuals possessing an iconic brand identity. Branding techniques are frequently utilized by both cultural intermediaries and individual figures to construct the personas and iconic identities commonly associated with the institutions that govern everyday life, such as fashion, politics, and religion. Alongside Obama, Westwood and Pope Francis are frequently proclaimed as global icons due to their privileged status within their respective institutions and how their image is considered emblematic of specific moments in popular culture. Not only do these personalities function as brands at an individual level, expressed by frequent references to the “Obama brand,” for example, but Obama, Westwood, and Pope Francis also act as commodities supporting larger institutional brands, such as England’s “Cool Britannia” nation branding campaigns conceptualized by Tony Blair’s administration and the Catholic Church’s attempt to revitalize its image following years of global scandal and decline.⁸ Douglas Holt refers to an iconic brand as that “whose identity value is so powerful that they become accepted as consensus symbols in American culture.”⁹ While Holt’s work focuses explicitly on marketing in American culture, his argument of what constitutes an iconic brand is applicable to a larger discussion of iconicity within a global context, especially in regard to how certain personas like Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis achieve and maintain symbolic power.

⁸ Naomi Klein, “How Corporate Branding Has Taken Over America,” *The Guardian*, January 16, 2010, and Konrad Yakabuski, “The Obama Brand is Now A Niche Product,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 5, 2014.

⁹ Douglas B. Holt, *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004), 224.

Since being credited with popularizing Britain's punk aesthetic and revitalizing the London fashion industry, Westwood exemplifies a considerable history of political activism. Proclaimed as a "national treasure" by the British press, Westwood frequently utilizes her privileged position as a cultural icon to raise awareness towards a variety of social issues.¹⁰ A long-time advocate for Leonard Peltier's release from prison – who was convicted in the fatal 1975 shooting of two federal agents on South Dakota's Pine Ridge Reservation – Westwood's activism ranges from championing the rights of those individuals detained illegally by the British government in relation to terrorism allegations to her current focus on the environment, specifically in regard to fracking, climate change, and rampant consumerism.¹¹ Environmental activism has been the focus of her public image since the late 2000s, and the frequency in which Westwood's persona is linked in the media to these causes now eclipses her complex identity as an icon of Britishness.

Born Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Pope Francis's tenure as leader of the Catholic Church has initiated what may appear to be numerous deviations from the institution's establishment that have been relatively well received by the public. His 2013 election marked a series of firsts for the Catholic Church: the first Jesuit to be elected pope; the first pope from the Americas and Southern Hemisphere; and the first pope to focus his papal encyclical primarily on the environment, which *The Toronto Star* describes as "the most defining statement of his papacy."¹² Pope Francis has received praise for his compassion towards the poor and the significant contributions he has made to international diplomacy and environmental politics, such as his

¹⁰ Lauren Laverne, "Which Other Trade Makes a National Treasure of a Woman Who Got Her Fanny Out to Collect her OBE?" *The Guardian*, February 14, 2014.

¹¹ Vivienne Westwood, "My Week," *The Guardian*, September 17, 2006 and Olivia Bergin, "Vivienne Westwood: A Life of Campaigning," *The Telegraph*, October 7, 2014.

¹² "Pope Francis: The Radical Septuagenarian," *The Toronto Star*, June 20, 2015.

involvement in restoring American/Cuban relations and the international summits and conferences on climate change and fossil fuel dependency that have been held at the Vatican. Nancy Gibbs, *Time*'s managing editor, defended Pope Francis's suddenly iconic status when he was named the magazine's 2013 Person of the Year, arguing the pontiff is "someone who has changed the tone and perception and focus of one of the world's largest institutions in an extraordinary way."¹³ Pope Francis was quickly praised by the press as an icon "of the people," citing actions such as refusing to ride in the traditional, more luxurious Popemobile with its special security features and surprisingly posing for selfies with teenagers inside St. Peter's Basilica.¹⁴

Obama's presidency coincides with the consequences of the economic recession and other key political moments that are also central to the values of Westwood and Pope Francis that characterize their personas. The euphoric media attention deriving from his keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention acted as the catalyst propelling a politician relatively unknown outside of his local community into the national spotlight, culminating with his election as President of the United States. Obama's background as a biracial man raised by his grandparents in Hawaii along with the spectacle of his rapid ascent from the Illinois state senate to the White House, in addition to important moments like receiving the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize and the passing of the Affordable Care Act, illuminates the rhetorical frames constructing his iconic identity and how his brand circulates in popular culture. The construction

¹³ David Bauder, "Time Magazine Person of the Year 2013 Title Goes to Pope Francis," *National Post*, December 11, 2013.

¹⁴ Eun Kyung Kim, "5 Photos That Show Why Pope Francis is Already an Icon," *Today*, last modified December 11, 2013, accessed March 7, 2020, <https://www.today.com/news/5-photos-show-why-pope-francis-already-icon-2D11724266>.

of Obama's brand reveals the discursive formations that help elevate certain individuals from various institutional realms into iconic identities with global reach and power.

While Obama, Westwood, and Pope Francis initially appear to be disconnected from each other, they are considered global leaders representing the institutions of politics, fashion, and religion. The symbolic power of their identity is also supported through comparable stances on class, poverty, the environment, and socioeconomic inequalities. Obama and Pope Francis have both been recognized as "Person of the Year" by *Time*, an annual "iconic title" bestowed by the magazine's editors based upon trends and issues dominating public opinion to acknowledge the individual "who has had the most impact on the world and the news – for better or worse – over the past year."¹⁵ Similar to Obama in his institutional role as president of the United States, the pope represents a multifaceted identity in popular culture due to the numerous responsibilities and functions – celebrity, religious leader, political figure – forming his public persona. To varying levels, Obama, Westwood, and Pope Francis are also active agents in the construction of their public persona, strategically utilizing the media and their press coverage to further shape their iconic brand identities. While Westwood, and, to some extent, Obama's public image developed steadily over years thereby allowing the public to grow accustomed to their personas, Pope Francis was suddenly propelled into public discourse after the unprecedented retirement of his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI. His iconic status developed in a relatively short period of time in comparison to Westwood and Obama, and Pope Francis was especially dependent upon the labour of the press to communicate his brand to the public. This aspect of his persona is an intriguing point of comparison to understand the politics of iconography in relation to practices of symbolic exchange and signification.

¹⁵ Kim, "Pope Francis Named *Time*'s 2013 Person of the Year," *Today*, last modified December 11, 2013, accessed March 7, 2020, <https://www.today.com/news/pope-francis-named-times-2013-person-year-2D11723759>.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Overview on Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis

Scholarship on symbolic exchange functions as the theoretical framework structuring the analysis of the iconic brand identities of Westwood, Pope Francis, and Obama. Jean Baudrillard's work on symbolic exchange is particularly well suited to illustrate how the image economy bestows cultural icons with their authority in consumer society. Symbolic exchange is not a structural concept, but rather a "social relation" that constitutes an "uninterrupted cycle of giving and receiving."¹⁶ French sociologists and anthropologists writing on premodern societies, such as Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, and George Bataille, are meaningful influences in Baudrillard's theorization of the symbolic exchange – in particular Durkheim's work on religious rituals and the sacred and Mauss's argument of the gift as constituting an agonistic exchange of human interactions structuring social power.¹⁷ Baudrillard's theory of the symbolic is also influenced by Bataille's notion of the general economy, where waste and excess are fundamental principles to humanity, in contrast to the emphasis placed on production by contemporary capitalist society.¹⁸ For William Merrin, such influences reflect Baudrillard's argument on how capitalist modes of production have abolished genuine social interactions and are consequently "replaced [with] inferior, less human, relations."¹⁹ The realm of the symbolic constitutes the vibrant relations supporting the rituals, beliefs, and customs that structure pre-capitalist society.

In a similar manner to how Mauss argues that the humanistic quality of the gift as a function of exchange in 'primitive' societies is incompatible with the individualistic and

¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1993), 133 and *The Mirror of Production* (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975), 143.

¹⁷ William Merrin, "Television is Killing the Art of Symbolic Exchange: Baudrillard's Theory of Communication," *Theory, Culture & Society* 16, no. 3 (1999), 120-126.

¹⁸ Douglas Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 42, and Robert Dunn, *Identifying Consumption: Systems and Objects in Consumer Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 198.

¹⁹ Merrin, "Television is Killing the Art of Symbolic Exchange," 123.

hypercompetitive characteristics of capitalism, Baudrillard attributes the decline of the symbolic to advanced capitalism and the rise of consumption as a governing social structure. The commodity, according to Baudrillard, “feeds a social relation of power and exploitation” since it cannot be produced through practices of symbolic exchange.²⁰ Utilizing semiotics as a framework to critique Marxist approaches to political economy, Baudrillard argues that the commodity functions as an organizing power in which social relations are governed by the politics of signification. The sign value of a commodity overshadows the use-value of a product or object, thereby bestowing consumer goods with semiotic meaning based on cultural codes and conventions.²¹ The language of consumer society consequently creates a system of differentiation privileging certain symbols and images.²² Signification’s power enables the emergence of the hyper-reality Baudrillard believes exemplifies late capitalist society. Meaning and depth are absent in a society governed by the logic of signification, since, as Baudrillard contends, “it is the field of play that is specifically the field of consumption.”²³ Robert Dunn describes symbolic exchange as the “anchor” of Baudrillard’s criticism of consumer capitalism.²⁴ Baudrillard’s theoretical framework of symbolic exchange acts as the foundation to understand how Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis are branded as icons in a media culture shaped by the discourse of consumer capitalism, especially since iconicity exemplifies a form of symbolic power inherently governed by the politics of signification. Although symbolic exchange functions as the theoretical framework structuring the analysis of Obama, Pope Francis, and

²⁰ Baudrillard, *Mirror of Production*, 143.

²¹ Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981), 147-148.

²² Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998), 61.

²³ Baudrillard as cited in Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 71.

²⁴ Dunn, *Identifying Consumption*, 56.

Westwood's iconic brand identities in popular culture, scholarship from celebrity studies, advertising, and persona studies will also complement critical readings of these public figures.

Despite the popularity and prominence of Obama, Westwood, and Pope Francis in public discourse, they remain figures relatively under-researched within academic scholarship, particularly in regard to the cultural influence of their iconography, persona, and celebrity. Scholarly work on Westwood is primarily comprised of popular biographies and curatorial overviews of her fashion collections. This approach is best illustrated in curator Claire Wilcox's *Vivienne Westwood*, the exhibition catalogue to the Victoria & Albert's 2004 exhibit "Vivienne Westwood: 34 Years in Fashion." Alongside a succinct biographical account of Westwood, Wilcox showcases images from the designer's portfolio, beginning with the influential collection "Let It Rock" that debuted in 1971 to significant press attention to 2003's "Street Theatre." Wilcox's biographical overview incorporates press clippings and addresses the influence on her design philosophy of Westwood's relationship with her former business and romantic partner, Malcolm McLaren.²⁵ Wilcox's curatorial focus and cultural biographical approach to Westwood is not surprising considering that in the formative years of the discipline a substantial number of fashion scholars were employed as art historians and museum curators.²⁶ Fred Vermorel's *Fashion & Perversity: A Life of Vivienne Westwood and the Sixties Laid Bare* and *Vivienne Westwood: An Unfashionable Life* by Jane Mulvagh are two of the more prominent popular (unauthorized) biographies on Westwood; Vermorel focuses primarily on Westwood's youth, the influence of McLaren, and the impact of the 1960s on both her personality and design aesthetic, while Mulvagh's acclaimed text more critically examines Westwood's late entrance into the

²⁵ Claire Wilcox, *Vivienne Westwood* (London: Victoria & Albert Publications, 2004), 9-36.

²⁶ Anthea Jarvis, "Letter from the Editor," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 2, no. 4 (1998): 299-300.

fashion industry and the intricacies of her eccentric personality.²⁷ More critical readings of Westwood's aesthetics and design collections and her importance to the British fashion industry are found in the works of Rebecca Arnold, Diana Crane, Angela McRobbie, Juliet Ash, Caroline Evans, and Minna Thornton. Arnold, Ash, Evans, and Thornton each address topics such as Westwood's signature aesthetic of ironic historicism to approach a class critique of English society through her references to ancient Roman and Greek symbolism, in addition to Westwood's complicated relationship with the British monarchy and the influence of the aristocracy in shaping her design philosophy.²⁸ Crane and McRobbie employ a political economic analysis of Westwood's agency and institutional role in a male-governed industry, situating the designer within the growth of London's creative class and the transformative neoliberal politics shaping Britain during from the 1970s-1990s.²⁹ Constituting a brand management approach, Westwood's emphasis on sustainability as a marketing tactic is the focus of industry-specific analyses on the designer.³⁰ Westwood's history of activism, and, in particular, her current focus on the environment, is a significant aspect of her persona and brand identity that has primarily been overlooked and unaddressed by scholarship within communication and cultural studies.

²⁷ Fred Vermorel, *Fashion & Perversity: A Life of Vivienne Westwood and the Sixties Laid Bare* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996) and Jane Mulvagh, *Vivienne Westwood: An Unfashionable Life* (London: Harper Collins, 2003).

²⁸ Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton, *Women in Fashion: A New Look* (London: Quartet Books, 1989), Juliet Ash, "Philosophy on the Catwalk: The Making and Wearing of Vivienne Westwood's Clothes," in *Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader*, ed. Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 169-188, Evans, "Yesterday's Emblems and Tomorrow's Commodities," in *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, ed. Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (London: Routledge, 2000), 100-101, and Rebecca Arnold, "Vivienne Westwood's Anglomania," in *The Englishness of English Dress*, ed. Christopher Breward, Becky Conekin, and Caroline Cox (Oxford: Berg, 2012), 161-172.

²⁹ Diana Crane, "Fashion Design and Social Change: Women Designers and Stylistic Innovation," *Journal of American Culture* 22, no. 1 (1999): 61-68 and Angela McRobbie, "Fashion Culture: Creative Work, Female Individualization," *Feminist Review* 71 (2002): 52-62.

³⁰ Jean S. Clarke and Robin Holt, "Vivienne Westwood and the Ethics of Consuming Fashion," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 25, no. 2 (2016): 119-213 and Debbie Moorhouse and Danielle Moorhouse, "Designing a Sustainable Brand Strategy for the Fashion Industry," *Clothing Cultures* 5, no. 1 (2018): 7-18.

Similar to the biographical and artistic accounts of Westwood, only certain aspects of Pope Francis have been addressed by the academic literature. An extensive variety of popular biographies were released following Pope Francis's election as pontiff during the 2013 conclave to capitalize on the phenomenon of the new pope.³¹ British writer Paul Vallely's *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots* remains one of the more critical and comprehensive biographies released on Pope Francis, focusing primarily on the then Fr. Bergoglio's alleged involvement with the military dictatorship during Argentina's "Dirty War" from 1976-1983 as head of the country's Jesuit order.³² Exploring accusations that Bergoglio was complicit in the abduction and torture of two Jesuit priests for failing to protect them after they refused to abandon the poor communities in which they served, *The Sunday Times* praises Vallely's work for its "seriousness of purpose and depth," noting it stands "head and shoulders above other recent rushed cutting jobs."³³ Following the success of his 2013 biography, Vallely later published a 2015 edition, *Pope Francis: The Struggle for the Soul of Catholicism*, extended to cover the changes initiated by Pope Francis within the Vatican during the first couple years of his papacy.³⁴ Complementing the release of the 2019 Netflix film *The Two Popes*, Anthony McCarten delves into the personal history of both Joseph Ratzinger and Bergoglio to illuminate the similarities between the pontiffs. McCarten also addresses Bergoglio's complicated relationship with Argentina's Jesuit order while also attempting to understand the logic and reasoning behind Benedict's unprecedented resignation.³⁵

³¹ See, for example, Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2014) and Cary Wills, *The Future of the Catholic Church with Pope Francis* (London: Viking, 2015).

³² Paul Vallely, *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

³³ Peter Stanford, "Pope Francis: Untying the Knots by Paul Vallely," *The Sunday Times*, July 27, 2013.

³⁴ Vallely, *Pope Francis: The Struggle for the Soul of Catholicism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

³⁵ Anthony McCarten, *The Two Popes: Francis, Benedict, and the Decision That Shook the World* (New York: Flatiron Books, 2019).

Despite the prevalence of biographies on Pope Francis since his election during the 2013 conclave, there is very little academic research on the pontiff. Formerly observed during the pre-modern period with similar discourses of magnetism and wide-ranging appeal as contemporary celebrities, religious figures like Pope Francis have been overwhelmingly ignored by celebrity studies. Gëzim Alpion's analysis of how Mother Teresa exerted ownership over her public image is a prominent example of research interrogating the complex politics shaping an iconic religious figure's public persona.³⁶ The majority of scholarship addresses Pope Francis's theological doctrine on issues ranging from poverty, health care, and social institutions in highly specific journals such as *Theological Studies* and *Christian Bioethics*.³⁷ In a semi-biographical account of Pope Francis, Phillip Berryman addresses how Argentine (and larger Latin American) culture, Peronism, and the politics of the Jesuit order are key factors that must be contextualized in order to understand the principles shaping his approach to the papacy.³⁸ Work more specifically within the area of communication studies focuses on the reception of Pope Francis by the news media and his use of social media to connect with followers of the Catholic Church.³⁹ María José Pou-Amérigo uses a content analysis to interrogate how Pope Francis's 2015 papal encyclical *Laudato Si'* was framed by British and American newspapers, directing attention as to whether

³⁶ Gëzim Alpion, "Media and Celebrity Culture – Subjectivist, Structuralist and Post-structuralist Approaches to Mother Teresa's Celebrity Status," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 20, no. 4 (2006): 542 and "Why Are Modern Spiritual Icons Absent in Celebrity Studies? The role of Intermediaries in Enhancing Mother Teresa's Advocacy in India and Australia Prior to the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize," *Celebrity Studies* 11, no. 2 (2020): 222.

³⁷ See, for example, John A. Gallagher, "Pope Francis' Potential Impact on American Bioethics," *Christian Bioethics* 21, no. 1 (2015): 11-34 and Juan Carlos Scannone, S.J., "Pope Francis and the Theology of the People," *Theological Studies* 77, no. 1 (2016): 118-135.

³⁸ Phillip Berryman, "The Argentine and Latin American Background of Pope Francis," *American Catholic Studies* 127, no. 2 (2016): 55-70.

³⁹ See, for example, Nan Li et al., "Cross-Pressuring Conservative Catholics? Effects of Pope Francis' Encyclical on the U.S. Public Opinion on Climate Change," *Climate Change* 139 (2016): 367-380 and Oren Golan and Michele Martini, "The Making of Contemporary Papacy: Manufactured Charisma and Instagram," *Information, Communication & Society* (2019): <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1567803>.

the document was presented as a religious or political text.⁴⁰ While Pou-Américo does not consider the pope's encyclical to be as revolutionary as certain media reports imply, Bruno Latour explores the text's subversive potential. Latour argues that the progressiveness of *Laudato Si'* resides in Pope Francis linking the destruction of the Earth to the anguish of the global poor, and how the pontiff challenges readers to respond to their cries for assistance.⁴¹ The logistics and security concerns behind the live broadcasting of Pope Francis's tour of Chile from January 15-18, 2018 is the subject of Alejandro C. Reid's critical reflection, detailing the extensive planning required for an official papal visit.⁴² Theo Zijderveld discusses how Pope Francis utilized his Instagram account to mediate authority and governance during the pontiff's April 2017 trip to Egypt, while Juan Narbona analyzes Pope Francis's Twitter and the way in which his tweets address global audiences with very little acknowledgement of specific Catholic doctrine.⁴³

The symbolic and institutional role of the president of the United States is a public identity based upon imagery and rhetoric that has been the subject of analysis from a variety of disciplinary approaches. Scholars such as Susan Jeffords, John Orman, and David M. Lubin have addressed how the image and public identity of presidents like John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, and Jimmy Carter are situated within the unstable context of cultural politics, socioeconomics, and representations of masculinity.⁴⁴ For Barbara Hinckley, symbolism is a vital component of

⁴⁰ María José Pou-Américo, "Framing 'Green Pope' Francis: Newspaper Coverage of Encyclical *Laudato Si'* in the United States and the United Kingdom," *Church, Communication and Culture* 3, no. 2 (2018): 137.

⁴¹ Bruno Latour, "The Immense Cry Channeled by Pope Francis," *Environmental Humanities* 8, no. 2 (2016): 254-255.

⁴² Alejandro C. Reid, "Broadcasting Live the Visit of Pope Francis to Chile," *Church, Communication and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2019): 79-95.

⁴³ Theo Zijderveld, "Pope Francis in Cairo: Authority and Branding on Instagram," *Online-Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 12 (2017): 125-140 and Juan Narbona, "Digital Leadership, Twitter and Pope Francis," *Church, Communication and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2016): 90-109.

⁴⁴ Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), John Orman, *Comparing Presidential Behaviour: Carter, Reagan, and the Macho Presidential Style*

American politics that works to ensure the stability and continuity of governance while also shaping election campaigns. Analyzing addresses from the initial three years of a president's term from Harry Truman to Ronald Reagan, she applies concepts of representation and imagery to approach her theory of the symbolic presidency, which Hinkley defines as "a particular set of expectations about the office that are held by the public, described by journalists and teachers, and encouraged by the presidents themselves. Together, they form a portrait of the presidency that can be recognised when it appears, traced across time, and distinguished from other portraits."⁴⁵ Symbolism determines how an American president is viewed by civic society through tactics such as metaphorically eliminating the role of congress from public discourse, thereby creating a direct connection between the White House and the larger citizenry under the collective language of the nation.⁴⁶ The symbolic connection of a president serving the American public forms the basis to what Jeffrey K. Tulis terms as the rhetorical presidency. Influenced by Jimmy Carter's confession that his leadership failed his constituency resulting from his focus on governance, Tulis argues that "rhetorical leadership" has become the "essence of the modern presidency," evident through a president's direct appeals to the electorate on controversial and highly partisan issues ranging from military action to budget cuts to essential social services.⁴⁷ Scholarship on the rhetorical presidency stresses the increasing importance of oratory capabilities as marker of governmental success, and, in the specific example of Obama, is a core

(New York: Greenwood University Press, 1987), and David M. Lubin, *Shooting Kennedy: JFK and the Culture of Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁴⁵ Barbara Hinkley, *The Symbolic Presidency: How Presidents Portray Themselves* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 130.

⁴⁶ Hinkley, *Symbolic Presidency*, 10-12 and 130-133.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey K. Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 3-4.

element of a presidential image based upon ideals of hope and the unity of a diverse collective that form his political persona.⁴⁸

While Westwood and Pope Francis are highly influential public figures who have not been adequately addressed by existing scholarship, Obama has become a widespread subject of analysis since his swift rise to the White House. He represents a continuously growing field with both popular and scholarly texts addressing his campaigns, presidency, brand, and persona in relation to American Studies, international relations, domestic politics, popular culture, technology, and race relations, amongst other topics.⁴⁹ Following the announcement of his presidential campaign and before receiving the Democratic nomination, the *Journal of Black Studies* published an issue devoted to situating Obama's rising national profile and existing political platform within the socially constructed context of Blackness in the United States.⁵⁰ Etse Sikanku and Nicholas A. Yates critique the common reference of Obama as the first African American elected as president of the United States, arguing that such a title often overlooks his multicultural background and the formative years of his childhood spent in Indonesia.⁵¹ The

⁴⁸ See also, for example, Mary E. Stuckey, "Rethinking the Rhetorical Presidency and Presidential Rhetoric," *The Review of Communication* 20, no. 1 (2010): 38-52 and Derek Sweet and Margret McCue-Enser, "Constituting 'the People' as Rhetorical Interruption: Barack Obama and the Unfinished Hopes of an Imperfect People," *Communication Studies*, 61, no. 5 (2010): 605-612.

⁴⁹ For popular biographies and other non-fiction books on Obama, see David Remnick, *The Bridge: The Life and Rise of Barack Obama* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), David Maraniss, *Barack Obama: The Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), Ta-Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years In Power: An American Tragedy* (New York: One World, 2017), and Ben Rhodes, *The World As It Is: Inside the Obama White House* (New York: Random House, 2018). For a selection of academic work on Obama's campaign and first years of his presidency, refer to: Elizabeth Kramer, "Batmobama and ObaMarx: The Meanings of the Material and Visual Culture of Obama Mania," *Journal of Design History* 26, no. 4 (2012): 345-361 and Theon E. Hill, "Sanitizing the Struggle: Barack Obama, Selma, and Civil Rights Memory," *Communication Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (2017): 354-376.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Ron Walter, "Barack Obama and the Politics of Blackness," *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 1 (2007), 7-29, Charlton D. McIlwain, "Perceptions of Leadership and the Challenge of Obama's Blackness," *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 1 (2007): 64-74, and Randolph Burnside and Kami Whitehurst, "From the Statehouse to the White House? Barack Obama's Bid to Become the Next President," *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 1 (2007): 75-89.

⁵¹ Etse Sikanku and Nicholas A. Yates, "The Modern *E Pluribus Unum* Man: How Obama Constructed His American Identity from His Global Background," in *Iconic Obama, 2007-2009: Essays on Media Representations of the Candidate and New President*, ed. Nicholas A. Yates and Derrais Carter (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2012), 16-17.

ABC television drama *Boston Legal* (2004-2008) references Obama's presidency in the episode "Thanksgiving," which Jenny Banh situates within cultural imaginaries of a post-racial society circulating during his campaign and transition into office.⁵² *The Journal of Visual Culture* acknowledged the historic 2008 election with a special edition of short reflective essays. Scholars such as W.J.T. Mitchell, Marita Sturken, Ellis Cashmore, Curtis Marez, and Nicholas Mirzoeff responded to questions posed by the journal's editors concerning Obama's immediate transformation into a global icon, key moments from the campaign – such as Tina Fey's impression of Sarah Palin on *Saturday Night Live* – and the election's emphasis on the visual despite popular narratives surrounding the role of technology.⁵³ Following his first term in office, *Comparative American Studies* published a collection devoted to themes, motifs, and discourses embedded within the textual construction of Obama.⁵⁴ In a similar manner, the *Howard Journal of Communication* released a special edition devoted to analyzing the complexity of the Obama presidency with topics ranging from the administration's relationship with the country's Indigenous population and his Obama's dependence upon humour as a critical mechanism to confront, challenge, and neutralize racist and derogatory accusations and comments concerning his religious and ethnic background.⁵⁵

⁵² Jenny Banh, "Barack Obama or B. Hussein? The Post-Racial Debate in *Boston Legal*," in *Iconic Obama, 2007-2009: Essays on Media Representations of the Candidate and New President*, ed. Nicholas A. Yanes and Derrais Carter (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2012), 63-81.

⁵³ W.J.T. Mitchell, "Obama as Icon," *Journal of Visual Culture* 8, no. 2 (2009): 125-129, Sturken, "The New Aesthetics of Patriotism," *Journal of Visual Culture* 8, no. 2 (2009): 168-172, Ellis Cashmore, "Perpetual Evocations," *Journal of Visual Culture* 8, no. 2 (2009): 202-206, Curtis Marez, "Obama's BlackBerry, or This Is Not a Technology of Destruction," *Journal of Visual Culture* 8, no. 2 (2009): 219-223, and Nicholas Mirzoeff, "An End to the American Civil War?" *Journal of Visual Culture* 8, no. 2 (2009): 228-233.

⁵⁴ Eleanor Byrne, Julie Mullaney, and Berthold Schoene, "Barack Obama: Twenty-First-Century President," *Comparative American Studies*, 10, no. 2-3 (2012): 109-115.

⁵⁵ Chuka Onwumechili, "Introduction to the Special Issue on the Barack Hussein Obama Presidency," *Howard Journal of Communication* 26, no. 1 (2017): 1-5.

Within the theoretical context of the spectacle and Chris Rojek's framework on celebrity, Douglas Kellner argues that Obama's iconography has now achieved the status of "supercelebrity." Acknowledging the media spectacle surrounding his brand and persona, Kellner argues that Obama strategically exploited his "supercelebrity" standing to further his presidential campaign despite a significant lack of legislative experience and political credentials.⁵⁶ Jeffrey Alexander's analysis of the 2008 presidential election places both Obama's and Republican-candidate John McCain's campaigns within the metaphorical battleground of the "democratic struggle for power." He examines the symbolism employed by both politicians, the role of journalists in framing the central campaign issues, and how each candidate responded to polling data.⁵⁷ Political scientists and communication scholars, such as Michael Cornfield, John Allen Hendricks and Robert E. Denton, Jr., and Daniel Kreiss, have focused their attention to how the Obama campaign team not only effortlessly managed his online and offline persona, but also how their use of social media encouraged grassroots and community networks to offer support, thereby working to help brand his platform as inherently democratic.⁵⁸

Obama's foreign policy in relation to his persona and the discursive formations prevalent in popular culture is a prominent topic also addressed by literature on his presidency. Analyzing the popular Showtime television series *Homeland* (2011-2020), Lindsay Steenberg and Yvonne Tasker and James Castonguay address the influence of Obama's foreign policy and emphasis on

⁵⁶ Douglas Kellner, "Barack Obama and Celebrity Spectacle," *International Journal of Communication* 3 (2009): 717.

⁵⁷ Alexander, *The Performance of Politics: Obama's Victory and the Democratic Struggle for Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), xii.

⁵⁸ Michael Cornfield, "Game-Changers: New Technology and the 2008 Presidential Election," in *The Year of Obama: How Barack Obama Won the White House*, ed. Larry Sabato (New York: Longman, 2010), 205-230, John Allen Hendricks and Robert E. Denton, Jr., eds., *Communicator-in-Chief: How Barack Obama Used New Media Technology to Win the White House* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), and Daniel Kreiss, *Taking Our Country Back: The Crafting of Networked Politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 121-186.

domestic security on the program's narrative structure.⁵⁹ Drawing upon scholarship on the rhetorical presidency as a tactic employed by presidents to appeal to the public as opposed to Congress, Megan McFarlane analyzes the power of the iconic photograph from the Situation Room taken as Obama and high-ranking members of his administration watched the raid that killed Osama bin Laden. The photograph helped restore the authority behind Obama's image as commander-in-chief following criticism for failing to close Guantanamo Bay and ending military interrogations for intelligence-gathering purposes.⁶⁰ Sally Totman and Mat Hardy focus on how Obama's failures in the Middle East towards the end of his presidency – especially in regard to the way in which the United States withdrew from Iraq and the resurgence of Russia as a major force in the region – impact the legacy that determines how his political persona is reproduced within the collective memory of the nation.⁶¹ While their work encompasses Obama's eight years in the White House, the majority of scholarship on Obama evidently focuses primarily on his presidential campaign and the earlier years of his presidency.

Chapter Overview

The transformation of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis into icons symbolic of a type of collective identity marketed towards consumer publics masks the underlying social transformations occurring throughout contemporary culture. Underneath their iconic brand identities is a critique of political culture, one that can only be understood by interrogating the narrative, rhetoric, and symbolism employed by Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis in the construction of their personas. These icons focus on different aspects of cultural politics –

⁵⁹ Lindsay Steenberg and Yvonne Tasker, "'Pledge Allegiance': Gendered Surveillance, Crime Television, and *Homeland*," *Cinema Journal* 54, no. 4 (2015): 132-138 and James Castonguay, "Fictions of Terror: Complexity, Complicity and Insecurity in *Homeland*," *Cinema Journal* 54, no. 4 (2015): 139-145.

⁶⁰ Meghan D. McFarlane, "Visualizing the Rhetorical Presidency: Barack Obama in the Situation Room," *Visual Communication Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2016), 3-5, 10.

⁶¹ Sally Totman and Mat Hardy, "The Presidential Persona Paradox of Barack Obama: Man of Peace or War President?" *Persona Studies* 2, no. 2 (2016): 80-88.

Obama attempting to maintain the illusion of the American Dream through an image of inclusivity in a drastically different socioeconomic landscape, Westwood directing her activism towards the dangers of consumer culture, and Pope Francis's campaign to restore the symbolic power of the Catholic Church by raising awareness towards the poor and the environment.

Uniting the theoretical framework of symbolic exchange with a content and critical textual analysis comprising a non-random critical case sample represents a novel approach to interrogating the image and identity of public figures who work to shape the institutions that govern everyday life. Following the review of the literature in chapter two concerning different approaches to the study of icons, branding, and promotional culture and a detailed overview of the methodological approach in chapter three, chapter four addresses the creation of Obama, Pope Francis, and Westwood's image and how each figure rose to the prominent position they currently occupy in public discourse despite their initial status as outsiders. Particular focus is directed towards how they are active agents in the construction of their personas in order to introduce themselves to their respective publics. Chapter five analyzes each figure's emphasis on public good within the socioeconomic context of consumer capitalism and the aftermath of the financial crisis, analyzing how Obama's Affordable Care Act, Westwood's environmental activism, and Pope Francis's advocacy on behalf of the global poor are key components influencing each of their iconic identities. Chapter six concentrates on how these characteristics informing their persona shape the brand identities of Westwood, Pope Francis, and Obama. Particular emphasis is placed on the element that distinguishes each brand identity: the discussion of Westwood's eccentric personality by the press within the context of the contradictions between her corporate label and anti-consumption activism, in addition to how she acts as signifier of Englishness despite her support of Scottish independence; Pope Francis's

progressiveness and use of social media to connect with his followers, concentrating on how his image is critiqued by cinematic portrayals of the pontiff; and Obama's reliance upon his family to create a Kennedy-esque image coupled with his reliance upon popular culture to distinguish himself as nonchalant despite the privilege of the office he represents. These three figures appear to be specific to the realm they are primarily associated with, but their identities resonate beyond the empires of fashion, politics, and religion to reveal insight into the widespread impact of the discourse of branding and promotional culture on public discourse.

Chapter Two – Icons, Brands, and the Public: Literature on the Cultural Construction of Personas

Regardless of whether they are portrayed as a religious deity, a celebrity, an object, or a poster, icons such as Vivienne Westwood, Barack Obama, and Pope Francis are integral components of popular culture and are key to practices of signification. Their personas also reflect shifts in identity construction within popular culture that are largely shaped by practices of branding and promotion facilitated by consumer capitalism. Popular culture is not a fixed entity, and the meanings and significance behind such artefacts are always in a state of constant negotiation within daily routines.¹ Further commenting on the power of popular culture, George Lipsitz notes that “images and icons compete for dominance within a multiplicity of discourses,” creating a cultural landscape where the symbolic meanings of popular texts and artefacts are highly multifaceted with multiple interpretations.² Notwithstanding the prominence of iconoclasm in public discourse, Marshall Fishwick argues that every individual possesses what he terms a “private icon-bank” that performs a vital role in creating the symbolic meaning necessary to sustain social order.³ Icons are therefore a necessary part of everyday life, acting as visual frames of reference in public discourse that perform a critical social function by creating meaning and assisting in practices of identity construction.

Iconic figures like Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis exist primarily in popular culture as visual representations, and their power as influential identities in everyday life is formed through complex processes of iconicity and branding promoted by consumer capitalism.

¹ John Fiske, “Cultural Studies and the Culture of Everyday Life,” in *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (London: Routledge, 1992), 169.

² George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 130.

³ Marshall Fishwick as cited in Emily Truman, “Rethinking the Cultural Icon: Its Use and Function in Popular Culture,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 42, no. 5 (2017): 842.

Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright generously define icons as images that “refer to something outside of its individual components, something (or someone) that has great symbolic meaning for many people.”⁴ Their broad characterization situates icons within the politics of signification and visual culture, yet the concept itself is a highly complex negotiation between the realms of the individual and the shared space of the public sphere. While the study of icons is historically traced to its religious origins, the topic has been addressed from a wide variety of approaches such as semiotics, sociology, cultural history, and literary criticism. Historic events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the circulation of celebrity figures like Princess Diana are prime examples influencing studies on iconicity and iconic power. The discursive conventions of advertising and promotional culture have distorted the distinctions and symbolic boundaries between identity and branding to transform how iconic figures circulate within consumer society. Socioeconomic changes have also activated larger transferences determining how the public is conceptualized, with promotional culture and branding promoting discourses of commodity activism as the main expression of politics and dissent. Addressing the theoretical development of the icon alongside scholarship on advertising, promotional culture, and the influence of branding and consumer capitalism in shaping seemingly authentic spaces of politics and personal identity provides the necessary foundation to understand how Westwood, Pope Francis, and Obama operate as influential iconic figures within a variety of cultural institutions.

Defining and Validating the Icon

The circulation of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis as cultural icons exemplifies the dominance of visibility in cultural politics. The visual is integral to the politics of contemporary culture, as emphasized through W.J.T. Mitchell’s argument of the “pictorial turn,” constituting a

⁴ Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 36.

way of life shaped by images which he describes as “a society of the spectacle, a world of semblances and simulacra.”⁵ Mitchell notes that the dominance of the “linguistic turn” in the humanities prioritized the analysis of cultural texts and artefacts from a semantic perspective, emphasizing elements such as narrative, language, and rhetoric.⁶ For Mitchell, such a linguistic approach could not accurately account for the complexities specific to the visual in a society governed by the politics of the image, arguing that the pictorial “has always been with us, it presses inescapably now, and with unprecedented force, on every level of culture, from the most refined philosophical speculations to the most vulgar productions of the mass media.”⁷

Mitchell’s work and his argument of the pictorial turn has been highly influential on scholarship on the role of icon in visual culture. Mitchell’s definition of what constitutes an icon is rather flexible, pertaining to both the mythical realm of the symbolic and the supernatural while also including the commonplace items of daily life which are bestowed with emotional attachments, such as family photographs and jewellery.⁸ The complex role of the icon in visual culture, and the multiple forms they can exhibit, is a central element in Mitchell’s work, as explored in his analysis of how the mythology of the dinosaur circulates in popular culture, in the horrific images central to the rhetoric of the ‘War on Terror’ in post-9/11 American society, and in the sociopolitical context of the visual rhetoric employed by September 2011’s Occupy movement protesting against socioeconomic inequalities exacerbated by income disparity.⁹

⁵ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5.

⁶ For a discussion on iconoclastic criticism in relation to the Habermasian public sphere, refer to Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Sphere, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 39-48.

⁷ Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 16.

⁸ Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want*, 193.

⁹ Mitchell, *The Last Dinosaur: The Life and Times of a Cultural Icon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), “Image, Space, Revolution: The Arts of Occupation,” in *Occupy: Three Inquiries in Disobedience*, ed. Mitchell, Bernard E. Harcourt, and Michael Taussig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 93-130.

Despite the immeasurable variety of spectacular images that circulate on a daily basis in visual culture, only a select number are considered noteworthy, and even fewer are deemed truly ‘iconic.’ Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites contend that one of the reasons “icon” is frequently employed to describe elements and moments despite being undeserving of the label is due to the variety of spaces, venues, figures, artefacts, texts, and institutions in which the term can be applied.¹⁰ While the word is extremely overused in popular discourse, the “icon” as an area of study possesses a complicated history within the social sciences and humanities. The interdisciplinary context of the icon within the cultural studies and communication studies has been largely undertheorized, and at times condemned by scholars for promoting the debilitating consequences of specular society. Dominik Bartmanski and Jeffrey C. Alexander argue that the power of icons has been neglected by the social sciences because the triviality of icons is generally conceived as “socially dangerous.”¹¹ Scholars such as Neil Postman have critiqued images for their capability to deceive and manipulate, leading Hariman and Lucaites to acknowledge the dominant iconoclastic criticisms applied to iconic texts in the social sciences and humanities:

They are examples of mystification in a society of the spectacle that has little place for deliberative rationality; they normalize oppressive norms of race, class, and gender while sustaining illusions of political consensus that marginalize democratic dissent; they exemplify processes of repetition, commodification, and fetishization that turn citizens into consumers while hollowing out aesthetic and moral values.¹²

For Benjamin Dreschel, the term icon possesses the potential to be representative of the academic emphasis on interdisciplinarity, yet as a scholarly field requires further debate.¹³ While

¹⁰ Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, “Icons, Iconicity, and Cultural Critique,” *Sociologica* 1 (2015): 4.

¹¹ Dominik Bartmanski and Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Materiality and Meaning in Social Life: Toward an Iconic Turn in Cultural Sociology,” in *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*, ed. Alexander, Dominik Bartmanski, and Bernhard Giesen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 11.

¹² Hariman and Lucaites, “Icons, Iconicity, and Cultural Critique,” 2.

¹³ Benjamin Dreschel, “The Berlin Wall from a Visual Perspective: Comments on the Construction of a Political Media Icon,” *Visual Communication* 9, no. 1 (2010): 4.

Sturken acknowledges the common criticism of icons as trivial entities that depoliticize and simplify complex social issues into easily comprehended symbols for mass consumption, such artefacts provide valuable insights into the larger systems of power that govern the culture of everyday life.¹⁴

Religious Trajectories of the Icon

Although the Greek root of the word ‘icon’ translates to ‘image,’ the term initially was used in reference to paintings of the deceased and is commonly associated with a larger religious affiliation. Due to the adoption of Christianity by the Romans, images of religious figures including God, Jesus, and Mary alongside emperors and other pagan figures were replicated on everyday artefacts such as coins and wood panels, a form of reproduction that for Marco Solaroli represented an early example of the “critically intertwined relationship between iconicity and power.”¹⁵ Icons transformed common items with relative unimportance into spiritual objects, creating ritualistic practices that promoted sensory environments designed to encourage an emotional response from worshippers. Drawing upon this socio-religious history, William Binder conceptualizes what he refers to as secular icons that hold figurative authority through interconnecting shared feelings and values.¹⁶ The word “iconic” holds a double meaning; while icons represent visual objects, they also act as symbols that perform a particular function in cultural politics. Rooted in the politics of the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox Christianity, Binder argues that this double meaning also exists with secular icons, since they are not holy by traditional logic but function in a manner similar to religious icons. Pope Gregory, for example, believed religious icons assisted the illiterate, a notion Binder compares to the ways in which

¹⁴ Sturken, “The Continued Relevance of the Icon,” *Sociologica* 1 (2015): 2.

¹⁵ Marco Solaroli, “Iconicity: A Category for Social and Cultural Theory,” *Sociologica* 1 (2015): 4.

¹⁶ Werner Binder, “The Emergence of Iconic Depth: Secular Icons in a Comparative Perspective,” in *Iconic Power*, ed. Alexander, Bartmanski, and Giesen, 102.

secular icons support the contemporary transnational environment by “providing common points of reference for a global civil discourse.”¹⁷ Secular icons require “socialized spectators” in order for their power to be legitimized, and can only exist in a media landscape since they require public discourses in order to circulate and gain power in cultural politics. The visual as mediated by secular icons is inherently dependent upon the cultural discourses, narratives, and myths of a particular society.¹⁸

Since visual representations are a critical element in the construction of public forms of intimacy, photography is key to understanding the power of the icon in popular culture. Richard Howells identifies the connections between photography and the relics, mythology, and icons of ancient Byzantium and Greek culture, highlighting tropes that remain dominant systems of reference structuring current media representations and imagery.¹⁹ The Greek heroes in visual and literary culture were highly flawed mortals in possession of vast talents, yet suffer a premature death in order to obtain immortality within mythology. Their passing enables the hero to become a notable social presence, similar to contemporary iconic figures such as Princess Diana or Elvis Presley. While Greek heroes were primarily soldiers and athletes, the Byzantine era celebrated saints, thereby signifying their shift towards Christianity from a predominantly pagan culture.²⁰ Icons were integral for the Byzantines to create a response and dialogue with the viewer, since, as Henry Maguire notes, “it was the image, whether in icons or in visions, that made the unseen world real, and the unseen world that gave real presence to the image.”²¹ Icons acted as the means through which Byzantines communicated with the saints, aiding prayer

¹⁷ Binder, “Emergence of Iconic Depth,” in *Iconic Power*, ed. Alexander, Bartmansi, and Giesen, 113.

¹⁸ Binder, “Emergence of Iconic Depth,” in *Iconic Power*, ed. Alexander, Bartmansi, and Giesen, 102.

¹⁹ Richard Howells, “Heroes, Saints, and Celebrities: The Photograph as Holy Relic,” *Celebrity Studies* 2, no. 2 (2011): 114.

²⁰ Howells, “Heroes, Saints, and Celebrities,” 117.

²¹ Henry Maguire as cited in Howells, “Heroes, Saints, and Celebrities,” 117.

sessions, particularly for those who were illiterate, by “communicating the Christian message in visual shorthand.”²² Howells argues that the Byzantine icon reveals insight into the power of iconic artefacts and figures in contemporary visual culture, since it was “founded on the belief that the person depicted is somehow present in that depiction, and this recurring concept of ‘presence’ provides another vital stepping stone towards understanding the power of the photographic image today.”²³ While Howells focuses on photography, technological advancements have consequently enabled the instantaneous global circulation and reproduction of visual representations, ultimately bestowing greater power upon the image of the icon or iconic figure in cultural politics.

Approaches to the Icon in Everyday Life

While the sociocultural and religious history grounding the theoretical contributions by scholars like Dreschel and Howells reflects vernacular understandings of the icon in popular discourse, the term is increasingly addressed by a variety of academic disciplines including art history, communication studies, cultural anthropology, literary criticism, marketing, and philosophy, amongst others. In his overview of how interdisciplinary approaches to the study of the icon has developed, Solaroli identifies three influential scholarly schools of thought shaped by the works of Charles Peirce, Emile Durkheim, and Erwin Panofsky. Peirce’s semiotic theory of icon, index, and symbol was previously considered a dominant approach in understanding iconicity as a structural concept. An icon, for Peirce, is a direct material representation of what is resembled, with the index a depiction requiring knowledge of cultural or social meanings and the symbol directly detached from the signified without any association.²⁴ Peirce’s framework,

²² Howells, “Heroes, Saints, and Celebrities,” 119.

²³ Howells, “Heroes, Saints, and Celebrities,” 119.

²⁴ Charles Peirce, “Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs,” in *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*, ed. Robert E. Innis (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press: 1985), 1-23.

however, has been critiqued for its simplicity and inability to account for the intricate politics of visual culture.²⁵ Durkheim's work on totemism in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* is a prominent influence on the scholarly development of the icon. As the religious focus of religious practices, Durkheim's totemism accounts for how the meanings associated with rituals and the sacred are constructed in everyday life. The sacred morals and values of a society are manifested within material objects such as totems. It is the relationship between the material and the moral that makes totems powerful and highly recognizable artefacts that work to unite and naturalize the "collective consciousness" of a group or community.²⁶ Solaroli contends that Durkheim's inclusion of insulting terms such as "primitive" in the formation of his argument has resulted in his work being excluded from academic discussions of iconicity in favour of other viewpoints, such as Peirce's semiotic approach. Durkheim's framework of totemism, however, is particularly valuable for Solaroli since it shifts "attention towards the social practices through which a given image and object assumes its power rather than toward the object and image itself," representing for Solaroli how "contemporary visual-cultural icons can play the totemic role of social bonding and collective identification, giving a concrete and paradigmatic form to abstract consciousness and meanings."²⁷ Reflective upon the prevalence of Durkheim's argument in contemporary cultural politics, Alexander argues that the power of totems are in how they act as "collective representations that carry social force, communicate sacred and profane meanings, and generate intense emotional identifications through ritualistic practices centering on the material form."²⁸ Cultural beliefs, traditions, and rituals that represent collective feelings and emotions determine

²⁵ For critiques of Peirce's semiotic framework, see Roberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

²⁶ Solaroli, "Iconicity," 6.

²⁷ Solaroli, "Iconicity," 6. For work on iconicity referencing Durkheim's framework, refer to Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

²⁸ Alexander, "Iconic Power and Performance: The Role of the Critic," in *Iconic Power*, ed. Alexander, Bartmanski, and Giesen, 25.

what distinguishes the sacred from the profane. Without such emotional collectiveness, an object cannot be characterized as sacred, and it is only through symbols can shared sentiments materialize in society.²⁹

A central argument presented by Alexander is his notion of iconic consciousness, which addresses both the aesthetic and moral components of material objects that are elevated as icons in popular culture. Alexander's work on the icon is situated within the cultural sociological approach of the Yale school, which focuses on understanding the symbolic power of images and aesthetics in the construction of meaning, emotions, and identity. The aesthetic, for Alexander, refers to the surface of the object, while the moral constitutes the depth of meaning. Iconic consciousness is the product of the symbiotic relationship between aesthetics and morals and surface and depth. The moral meanings of objects are created through social interactions as opposed to their aesthetic properties.³⁰ Alexander argues that the iconic is not solely a form of communication, but primarily an experience; iconic consciousness therefore is "to understand by feeling, by contact, by the 'evidence of the senses' rather than the mind."³¹ It is through iconic consciousness that Alexander argues "we feel part of our social and physical surroundings, how we experience the reality of the ties that bind us to people we know and people we don't know, and how we develop a sense of place, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, our vocation, indeed our very selves."³² While icons are often material representations, their more significant power is rooted in the ability to ignite emotional responses through activating various senses. Alexander acknowledges that iconicity is a process that involves applying abstract meaning and symbolism

²⁹ Binder, "The Emergence of Iconic Depth," in *Iconic Power*, ed. Alexander, Bartmanski, and Giesen, 104.

³⁰ Alexander, "Iconic Power and Performance: The Role of the Critic," in *Iconic Power*, ed. Alexander, Bartmanski, and Giesen, 26.

³¹ Alexander, "Iconic Consciousness: The Material Feeling of Meaning," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26 (2008): 782.

³² Alexander, "Iconic Experience in Art and Life: Surface/Depth Beginning with Giacometti's Standing Woman," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 1 (2008): 7.

to the tangible experiences of everyday life.³³ As vital components in the structuring of commonplace existence, icons work best when such texts and artefacts mobilize emotional reactions from the public, thereby illustrating Alexander's argument of iconicity.

Although icons have historically been studied as entities comprising visual culture, such as architecture, paintings, and sculptures, the influence of the discourse of consumption has transformed the nature of iconography to include a wide variety of artefacts, including clothing, technology, film, television, celebrity, and corpses.³⁴ Icons can arise from the violent radicalness of social revolution, however Bartmanski and Alexander note that the more powerful iconic symbols and figures derive from "the placid events of everyday life."³⁵ The iPod, for example, not only represents for Eric Jenkins the relationship between corporate marketing and iconicity, but for Alexander and Bartmanski symbolizes the "powerful experience of immediacy in an increasingly mass mediated and seemingly mechanistic world."³⁶ Icons do not just represent or resignify; they are also cultural constructions that gain potency due to their inclusion within the culture of everyday life and are easily disseminated by consumer capitalism. Iconicity thereby constitutes a structural form that Alexander argues masks drastic historical, political, and economic transformations, an enchanting trait which can be applied to any object, text, or artefact such as religious totems, digitally created corporate logos, or public figures including Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis.³⁷

³³ Bartmanski and Alexander, "Materiality and Meaning in Social Life," in *Iconic Power*, ed. Alexander, Bartmanski, and Giesen, 2.

³⁴ Bartmanski and Alexander, "Materiality and Meaning in Social Life," in *Iconic Power*, ed. Alexander, Bartmanski, and Giesen, 2.

³⁵ Bartmanski and Alexander, "Materiality and Meaning in Social Life," in *Iconic Power*, ed. Alexander, Bartmanski, and Giesen, 3.

³⁶ Erik Jenkins, "My iPod, My iCon: How and Why Do Images Become Icons," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25, no. 5 (2008): 481 and Bartmanski and Alexander, "Materiality and Meaning in Social Life," in *Iconic Power*, ed. Alexander, Bartmanski, and Giesen, 3.

³⁷ Bartmanski and Alexander, "Materiality and Meaning in Social Life," in *Iconic Power*, ed. Alexander, Bartmanski, and Giesen, 4.

News Media Reporting and Photojournalism on Iconic Events in Public Culture

Although little work in communication studies has addressed the role of iconicity in the production of meaning, scholarship focusing on journalism and the news media has more explicitly accounted for the construction and circulation of iconic events, particularly in regard to framing collective memory. Icons are not created equally, since their relevance can progress or decline in relation to shifts in social dynamics and political, economic, and cultural changes, nor do iconic figures or events originate autonomously. How an icon is interpreted, consumed, or accepted by audiences and the larger public is primarily determined by critics and the news media. Analyzing reviews on a variety of cultural texts from *The New York Times*, Alexander argues that iconic power is created by the critic from print publications, who possesses a position of social power by priming the reader through their instruction combined with the cultural prestige and exclusiveness associated with their organization, magazine, or newspaper.³⁸ Alexander argues that the critic has developed significant power in iconicity, since the audience reception of an icon is mediated through specific channels and therefore largely separated from its design, production, and distribution in postmodern society. The critic's voice has therefore become the main representative of public reaction.³⁹ W. Lance Bennett and Regina G. Lawrence argue that news icons are not just noteworthy images that register with the public, but rather "enter the narrative streams of subsequent, disparate, and often unconnected events within which they originate," and are strategically utilized by journalists to "evoke larger cultural themes, symbolizing values, contradictions, or changes that have begun in society."⁴⁰ Such figures, texts,

³⁸ Alexander, "Iconic Power and Performance: The Role of the Critic," in *Iconic Power*, ed. Alexander, Bartmanski, and Giesen, 25.

³⁹ Alexander, "Iconic Power and Performance: The Role of the Critic," in *Iconic Power*, ed. Alexander, Bartmanski, and Giesen, 38.

⁴⁰ W. Lance Bennett and Regina G. Lawrence, "News Icons and the Mainstreaming of Social Change," *Journal of Communication* 45, no. 3 (1995): 23.

or events are dependent upon media attention and the strategic framing of journalists and cultural commentators to help produce and confer their iconic power through the negotiation and appropriation of their symbolic meanings.

Iconic historical moments extensively reported by the news media, such as the sinking of the *Titanic*, constitute examples of what Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz refer to as media events. Their description of media events as moments where the broadcast and print coverage of an incident or occasion disrupts the normal patterns, rhythms, and scheduling of everyday life functions as the foundation for Jeffrey C. Alexander and Ronald N. Jacobs argument that media events provide the framework for audiences to partake in civil society, since such occasions act as “plot points” constructing a continuous narrative in cultural politics.⁴¹ Dayan and Katz’s work has been subject to criticism, in particular regarding how socioeconomic changes have altered broadcasting coverage, yet their argument provides a framework for comprehending the power of contemporary global iconic events such as the elimination of the Berlin Wall and the tragic outcome of the *Titanic*’s maiden voyage. Drawing upon Dayan and Katz’s work, Julia Sonnevend defines global iconic events as incidents with global appeal that are reported extensively by the international media, become engrained into collective memory through cultural rituals of remembrance, and continue to influence social practices and political proceedings following the passing of their moment, such as the terrorists attacks of September 11th, and the primary example in her text, the fall of the Berlin Wall.⁴² Central to Sonnevend’s operationalization of global iconic events is how she distinguishes between the national and the

⁴¹ Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 9 and Alexander and Ronald N. Jacobs, “Mass Communication, Ritual and Civil Society,” in *Media, Ritual and Identity*, ed. James Curran and Tamar Liebes (London: Routledge, 1998), 27-28.

⁴² Julia Sonnevend, *Stories Without Borders: The Berlin Wall and the Making of a Global Iconic Event* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 6-16 and 20.

global. Referencing Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider's argument of cosmopolitan memory, Sonnevend emphasizes that global iconic events "are not bound to a particular nation or social group," since such occurrences "travel through temporal and spatial boundaries and cross from one medium to another."⁴³ In her analysis of the sinking of the *Titanic* as an iconic media event, Patricia Leavy argues that an occurrence reaches iconic status through processes of continued interpretation over their meaning and symbolism. The *Titanic*, for example, ultimately becomes mythological as an iconic media event for Leavy through "its appropriation into other political or social discourses and its eventual use within commercial culture," best illustrated through the continued longevity of the film in popular culture.⁴⁴ Leavy places particular emphasis on the role of the press in this process of myth construction, since the creation and bestowment of an iconic status is the result of constant negotiation over narrative and discourse. Iconic media events like the sinking of the *Titanic* are consequently influenced by the organizational and institutional pressures facing journalists and other cultural intermediaries.

Concentrating on the iconic power of the Berlin Wall, Dominik Bartmanski argues that the political is often overshadowed or rewritten by mythology in public imaginaries of an iconic historical event. According to Bartmanski, it is fundamental to reconstruct historical events and narratives of events deemed iconic by the international media in order to account for how discourses and mythologies "construe, code, and associate events with each other."⁴⁵ Events or places celebrated with iconic power can reach a level of what he refers to as "inconspicuous," which allows for the creation of "patterns of experiencing, remembering, and forgetting" and, in

⁴³ Sonnevend, *Stories Without Borders*, 21.

⁴⁴ Patricia Leavy, *Iconic Events: Media, Politics, and Power in Retelling History* (Lanham: Lexington, 2007), 4-5.

⁴⁵ Bartmanski, "Inconspicuous Revolutions of 1989: Culture and Contingency in the Making of Political Icons," in *Iconic Power*, ed. Alexander, Bartmanski, and Giesen, 43.

doing so, shifts other events to a neglected space in public collective memory.⁴⁶ For Bartmanski, image and discourse are mutually dependent upon each other, since “the actual meanings of revolutionary discourses emerge not merely ‘accompanied’ by iconic images but crucially dependent on them.”⁴⁷ He refers to icons as “informational icebergs” that perform a pivotal role in providing some type of structure and organization to a highly saturated media environment.⁴⁸ Bartmanski argues that in the battle of visibility in public discourse, the stories, events, and figures that capture the public imaginary are those that are inconspicuous, subtle, and ordinary. As multimodal texts that are highly visible in the collective memory of a society, media icons for Benjamin Dreschel are “inextricably intertwined with political myths because both theoretical concepts include complex and temporal associations of images and ideas.”⁴⁹ Critiquing previous work for focusing predominantly on photographs and overlooking other visual texts such as architecture in the example of the Berlin Wall, Dreschel argues icons link the pictorial turn with the mnemonic, which ultimately works to shape cultural memory.

While events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall comprise a substantial focus on scholarship regarding iconic events or moments constructed by the news media, Hariman and Lucaites place emphasis on specific photographs as central texts in the construction of iconicity in popular culture and public discourse. Their text, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*, situates particular images, including Dorothea Lange’s “Migrant Mother” and Alfred Eisenstaedt’s “V-J Day in Times Square,” within the sociopolitical dynamics in which they were produced, and how iconic photographs initiate some type of emotional response from the collective consciousness of American society by addressing the

⁴⁶ Bartmanski, “Inconspicuous Revolutions of 1989,” in *Iconic Power*, ed. Alexander, Bartmanski, and Giesen, 44.

⁴⁷ Bartmanski, “Inconspicuous Revolutions of 1989,” in *Iconic Power*, ed. Alexander, Bartmanski, and Giesen, 46.

⁴⁸ Bartmanski, “Inconspicuous Revolutions of 1989,” in *Iconic Power*, ed. Alexander, Bartmanski, and Giesen, 60.

⁴⁹ Dreschel, “Berlin Wall from a Visual Perspective,” 5-7.

cultural anxieties and contradictions plaguing the nation.⁵⁰ While the majority of photographs circulating in visual culture are inherently forgettable, iconic images are memorable and can transcend generational divides. Iconic photographs register with mass audiences, becoming highly engrained into the familiarity of everyday life. Hariman and Lucaites are highly critical of the disdain towards images in cultural politics, and *No Caption Needed* is positioned as a response to iconoclastic arguments by contending that forms of visual representation are integral to the health of civic society's democratic ideals. Their reading of iconic photographs has been influential in establishing a framework to contextualize the relationship between public discourse and the power of images to shape the perception of historical events and catastrophes.⁵¹ For instance, Lene Hansen combines W.J.T. Mitchell's work on the global circulation of images with Hariman and Lucaites' argument of iconic photographs in her analysis of the Abu Ghraib images, illuminating the lack of attention directed towards icons within the field of International Relations. Hansen contextualizes "The Hooded Man" photograph as an international icon, arguing that the image is strategically employed by politicians, magazine editors, and journalists as a source of critique and commentary, demonstrating the communicative ability of the text to continue to shape public discourses on American foreign policy.⁵²

In their reading of photographic print images as critical texts upholding democratic ideals of civic society Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites situate icon images within theoretical understandings of the public. Reproduced through cultural texts and artefacts, Hariman and

⁵⁰ Hariman and Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

⁵¹ For work drawing upon their analytical framework, refer to McFarlane, "Visualizing the Rhetorical Presidency," 4, Mette Mortensen, *Journalism and Eyewitness Images: Digital Media, Participation, and Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2015), 84-90, and Emily Truman, *Back to the Political Future: Coping with Crisis Through Radical Nostalgia for Revolutionary Icons* (PhD diss., Carleton University, 2014), 31-34.

⁵² Lene Hansen, "How Images Make World Politics: International Icons and the Case of Abu Ghraib," *Review of International Studies* 41 (2015): 277-288.

Lucaites contextualize public culture as an immersive communicative experience interpolating individuals into matters pertaining to the state regardless of awareness or intention.

Subconsciously registering headlines about health care reform on the front page of a newspaper, reading a magazine showcasing pictures of a fashion designer's most recent runway performance, or listening to an edited clip of a religious leader speaking about climate change posted on a news organization's Twitter feed, for example, are small acts exercised daily that contribute to formulating broader opinions on matters central to notions of social welfare and public good. Hariman and Lucaites therefore ground their theorizing of public culture within the mundane practices of everyday media usage, arguing that:

Ongoing listening, reading, viewing, and talking with others constitutes subjects as citizens within the places and practices of ordinary life, while the circulation of discourse and the media sustained by that circulation constitute norms for discursive performance and institutional accountability that provide the constraint on state power theorized as the 'public sphere.'⁵³

Hariman and Lucaites acknowledge that visual icons cannot be adequately theorized utilizing one particular theory and must be analyzed from a variety of disciplinary approaches. The discursive elements composing iconic events, figures, and photographs are often intertwined. Little research, however, has addressed the connections between these three elements in regard to an individual public personality within the context of neoliberal notions of identity, branding, and persona.

Theorizing Iconic American and British Identities

While the scholarship on iconicity and iconic consciousness offers an abstract approach, another area of focus addresses cultural icons with specific readings of individual public figures and fictional characters. Reflecting upon the predominance of citizens and fictional personalities

⁵³ Robert Hariman and John Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 26-27.

that play critical roles in American cultural politics, Klaus Rieser conceptualizes icons as “special markers within the cultural matrix of meaning, highly relevant for the day-to-day integration of the otherwise heterogeneous composition of the social landscape.”⁵⁴ He recognizes that numerous iconic identities with immense signifying power in popular culture are fictional – for example, Uncle Sam and Superman – yet there is a tendency within analysis of iconicity to focus on living or lived public figures. Rieser’s edited collection with Michael Fuchs and Michael Phillips, *Configuring America: Iconic Figures, Visuality and the American Identity*, combines critiques of fictional and non-fictional identities ranging from Lois Lane and the American Girl doll collection to LeBron James and the widows of the Civil Rights movement to approach a general understanding of cultural icons and how such images operate:

Icons are concrete, manifest, materialized (human beings, drawings on paper, film characters), but also abstractions, condensations, images in our minds [...] Iconic figures both include persons and personifications because both share a ‘gestalt’ aspect of iconic figures, the aspect through which they invite identification, empathy, desire, fear, or hatred.⁵⁵

Reiser places particular emphasis on American iconic figures, since such texts, whether a person or a fictional creation, are often employed to help brand the nation due to their global reach and ability to create imagined communities. Iconic figures are thereby subjected to continuous processes of transformation in accordance with social, economic, and political shifts in the cultural imaginary of the nation.

American iconic figures play a central role in shaping the cultural politics of the nation, yet such identities are also situated within the global image economy. The notion of “Americanness” itself is a construction supported by icons like Uncle Sam, underlining Nick

⁵⁴ Klaus Rieser, “Theorizing Iconic Figures,” in *Configuring America: Iconic Figures, Visuality, and the American Identity*, ed. Klaus Rieser, Michael Fuchs, Michael Phillips (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 3.

⁵⁵ Reiser, “Theorizing Iconic Figures,” in *Configuring America*, ed. Rieser, Fuchs, Phillips, 5.

Hefferman's argument that the United States is an "empire of signs whose global supremacy is asserted as much through the pervasiveness of its popular culture as through its military reach or its command of international trade."⁵⁶ Reiser draws upon Lauren Berlant's argument of the National Symbolic to illustrate the critical role of cultural icons in the formation of American popular culture. Berlant defines the National Symbolic as:

Discursive practices whose reign within a national space produces, and also refers to, the 'law' in which the accident of birth within a geographical/political boundary transforms individuals into subjects of a collectively held history. Its traditional icons, its metaphors, its heroes, its rituals, and its narratives provide an alphabet for a collective consciousness or national subjectivity.⁵⁷

Berlant's argument of the National Symbolic enables individuals to align their identifications with national imagery. Since icons are social constructions, Reiser contends that the value of Berlant's concept is how it provides a framework to comprehend how such imagery interpellates individuals into subject positions that ultimately reproduce dominant power relations under the illusion of a collective imaginary. The National Symbolic constitutes the collective iconography of the nation, yet in doing so, must also incorporate as many counter-narratives as possible to avoid any forms of exclusion, since icons must be inclusionary in order to be considered successful. Reiser draws upon the Obama "Hope" posters designed by Shepard Fairey as an example of the National Symbolic; the poster simultaneously signified Black advancement, the utopia of a post-race society, and the rhetoric of the American Dream during a time of economic uncertainty.⁵⁸ The promise of the National Symbolic is the potential for iconic figures to emerge from marginalized communities. Once they are an element of the collective, iconic identities are

⁵⁶ Nick Hefferman as cited in Reiser, "Theorizing Iconic Figures," in *Configuring America*, ed. Rieser, Fuchs, Phillips, 6.

⁵⁷ Lauren Berlant as cited in Reiser, "Theorizing Iconic Figures," in *Configuring America*, ed. Rieser, Fuchs, Phillips, 6.

⁵⁸ Reiser, "Theorizing Iconic Figures," in *Configuring America*, ed. Rieser, Fuchs, Phillips, 7.

open to various forms of reinterpretation and appropriation that are commonly detached from their original conception.

While Reiser, Fuchs, and Phillips's collection focuses on the circulation of American cultural icons, the iconic legacy of Princess Diana continues to be the subject of various critiques interrogating how the British figure functions as a powerful mediation within global media culture. The majority of scholarship on Princess Diana's iconicity contextualizes her celebrity identity as a fashion icon in addition to her untimely death and the outpouring of public grief that exemplifies an iconic media event defining contemporary British cultural politics.⁵⁹ Raka Shome's *Diana and Beyond: White Femininity, National Identity, and Contemporary Media Culture* represents a significant shift in such scholarship by reconciling iconic identities and the politics of national identity in global media culture. Her discussion of Princess Diana accounts for the larger cultural trends that bestowed Diana's public image with transnational appeal, particularly in regard to how her identity negotiated social shifts in British culture that were utilized by Tony Blair's administration to rebrand and market the nation.⁶⁰

Icons like Princess Diana are emblematic of larger trends in public discourse, and her symbolic power works to negotiate cultural practices informing death and grief, an aspect of her iconic identity that is the subject of Margaret Schwartz's argument in *Dead Matter: The Meaning of Iconic Corpses*. Although her analysis also includes other public figures such as Abraham Lincoln and Eva Peron, Princess Diana exemplifies what Schwartz refers to as the "iconic dead" in which her deceased body acts as a platform negotiating politics of national identity largely

⁵⁹ See, for instance, Tony Walker, ed., *The Mourning for Diana* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), Daniel Herwitz, *The Star as Icon: Celebrity in the Age of Mass Consumption* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 1-22, James Thomas, "From People Power to Mass Hysteria: Media and Popular Reactions to the Death of Princess Diana," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 11, no. 3 (2008): 362-376, and Cele C. Otnes and Pauline MacLaran, *Royal Fever: The British Monarchy in Consumer Culture* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 103-129.

⁶⁰ Raka Shome, *Diana and Beyond: White Femininity, National Identity, and Contemporary Media Culture* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

influenced by the demands of celebrity and consumer culture.⁶¹ As a textual entity, Princess Diana encompasses the realm of celebrity and her deceased body (aside from the iconic imagery of her coffin during the funeral and procession) was concealed from the public in order to preserve her living presence within the cultural imaginary, since, according to Schwartz, “iconography serves to monetize the corpse and make it productive in a post-Fordist economy where images and archival media may continue to produce economic value long after the living body has deceased.”⁶² Princess Diana is a pertinent figure to understand the power of iconic identities in a media culture governed by the spectacular imagery of celebrity, particularly since as a discursive construction she negotiates notions of private and public central to the presentation and promotion of persona. Scholarly analysis of Princess Diana, particularly in the work by Shome, also functions as a template to understand how other iconic identities like Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis negotiate the politics comprising their personal persona amidst the often-competing demands of the institution they represent, a delicate practice that reveals the various levels of labour involved in this process in addition to the dissonance and contradictions embedded with their celebrity image.

Analyzing Iconic Identities and Personas within Celebrity Culture

Evident in scholarly discussions of Princess Diana, the discourse of celebrity plays a critical role in transforming public figures into iconic identities, a factor also influencing how Obama, Pope Francis, and Westwood circulate within popular culture. Current socioeconomic trends have privileged celebrity as the discourse that informs and constructs contemporary iconic

⁶¹ Margaret Schwartz, *Dead Matter: The Meaning of Iconic Corpses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 6.

⁶² Schwartz, *Dead Matter*, 13.

figures.⁶³ Celebrity is an integral component of public culture that functions to personalize politics into an accessible manner for broader audiences while simultaneously helping to extend democracy to larger segments of the public. It is not solely the private life of an iconic celebrity that gains the interests of audiences, but rather their public image and how the persona intersects with their inner self. Nick Couldry and Tim Markham contend that celebrity culture cannot be dismissed as trivial or insignificant, since it is an intrinsic component of public discourse.⁶⁴

Approaching a definition of celebrity and determining which figures embody the term is a widely debated topic within academic discussions of celebrated public individuals. Olivier Driessens highlights the different scholarly approaches to defining the word celebrity in his overview of the field, drawing upon Ellis Cashmore and Andrew Parker's argument that it "is a slippery concept that has eluded any real sense of definition to date."⁶⁵ While the labels 'celebrity,' 'hero,' 'idol,' 'star,' and 'icon' are used interchangeably in popular culture, P. David Marshall argues that 'heroes' and other public figures, like politicians and religious leaders, are more specific classifications than the generality of celebrity since such figures primarily operate within the realm of the public sphere.⁶⁶ However, David Giles argues that the "brutal reality of the modern age is that all famous people are treated like celebrities by the mass media, whether they be a great political figure, a worthy campaigner, an artist 'touched by genius,' a serial killer, or Maureen of *Driving School*."⁶⁷ His view of modern celebrity accounts for the cultural

⁶³ Olivier Driessens, "The Celebrityization of Society and Culture: Understanding the Structural Dynamics of Celebrity Culture," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 16, no. 6 (2012): 643.

⁶⁴ Nick Couldry and Tim Markham, "Celebrity Culture and Public Connection: Bridge or Chasm?" *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 4 (2007): 404-411.

⁶⁵ Ellis Cashmore and Andrew Parker as cited in Olivier Driessens, "Celebrity Capital: Redefining Celebrity Using Field Theory," *Theory and Society* 42 (2013): 545.

⁶⁶ Marshall as cited in Driessens, "Celebrity Capital," 544.

⁶⁷ David Giles as cited in Driessens, "Celebrity Capital," 544.

dynamics that have enabled Barack Obama, Vivienne Westwood, and Pope Francis to emerge as iconic celebrity figures in popular culture.

Celebrity as a discourse performs a powerful spiritual role in society that Chris Rojek compares to the communal function of religious institutions in fulfilling desire for social solidarity, an argument that exhibits similarities to the role of totems in sociological theories of iconicity.⁶⁸ Marshall conceptualizes the iconic celebrity as a form of symbolic power conferred upon the individual at the peak of one's career. When a celebrity acquires what Marshall refers to as an iconic quality, he or she enters into the vernacular of popular culture regardless of their productivity or if the individual passes away.⁶⁹ The dominance of such personalities in popular culture enables the proliferation of what Jeffrey C. Alexander refers to as the celebrity-icon. Constituting what he argues as "totem-like material symbols [that] continue to structure our culture and economy," Alexander's work privileges the celebrity as the key figure in consumer capitalism negotiating notions of magic, enchantment, and desire central to other social symbols.⁷⁰ Alexander contextualizes celebrity-icons as "transitional objects for adults, mediating between internal and external reality, between the deepest emotional needs and contingent possibilities for their satisfaction."⁷¹ Celebrity-icons mediate between different realities and needs, and, similar to totems, are not held to the same rules as the general public. The production and maintenance of celebrity-icons is a laborious process requiring the work of public relations representatives to constantly control their image in order to preserve the sacred properties composing such an identity. The discourse of celebrity helps prioritize certain public figures as

⁶⁸ Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 99.

⁶⁹ P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 17.

⁷⁰ Alexander, "The Celebrity-Icon," *Cultural Sociology* 4, no. 3 (2010): 324.

⁷¹ Alexander, "The Celebrity-Icon," 325.

instrumental social and cultural symbols and helps to illustrate how iconicity as a structural form can be applied to analyze both objects and texts, like religious totems and digital logos, as well as personalities like Obama, Westwood, and Pope Francis.

While celebrities and other public figures are inherently human beings, their power resides in the meanings signified by their mediated persona in popular culture. Discourses of celebrity have worked to shape popular understandings of who constitutes an iconic figure, this logic also illuminates the labour involved in the creation and maintenance of persona. Described by P. David Marshall, Christopher Moore, and Kim Barbour as the “wider practice of constructing and constituting forms of public identity,” various political, economic, technological, and cultural shifts are responsible for enabling persona to emerge as a dominant cultural expression that is not only evident in the public management of Westwood, Pope Francis, and Obama’s image but also throughout contemporary society entrenched into the practices of everyday life.⁷² The intensification of celebrity as a central social force, consumer culture’s promotion of the self and emphasis on individuality, and technological advancements leading to the growth of presentational media like social network sites are dominant trends Marshall identifies as contributing to the democratization of persona, which previously was “an activity only engaged in by a quite limited celebrity and public personality culture.”⁷³ For Marshall, persona is not just a calculated expression of identity, “but, more than any other moment, this persona construction – its fetish quality – has become pandemic in the contemporary moment.”⁷⁴ It is integral to interrogate persona – particularly in regard to how personalities are constructed, circulated, and perceived, because they are formations of identity

⁷² Marshall, Christopher Moore, and Kim Barbour, “Persona as Method: Exploring Celebrity and the Public Self through Persona Studies,” *Celebrity Studies* 6, no. 3 (2015): 289.

⁷³ Marshall, *The Celebrity Persona Pandemic* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 4.

⁷⁴ Marshall, *Celebrity Persona Pandemic*, 1.

practiced by influential figures like Obama, Vivienne Westwood, and Pope Francis to the everyday individual.

Key to Marshall, Moore, and Barbour's conceptualization of persona is how they distinguish between personas popular in everyday life, such as the presentation of the self on an individual's Instagram account, and the celebrity persona like that of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis. Whereas persona relates broadly to all productions of a public identity, an analysis of celebrity persona reveals what they refer to as the "strategies of foregrounding versions of public and private presentations and how they relate to the individual celebrity negotiating his/her position within institutions and the broader culture."⁷⁵ Persona has emerged as a valuable framework for analyzing contemporary mediations of celebrity, particularly in regard to recognizing the agency of a public figure in controlling how their image circulates in popular culture and the existential questioning that arises during periods of crisis or when a celebrity's persona is subject to criticism following a scandal.⁷⁶ For instance, Bronwyn Polaschek's comparative analysis of Amy Winehouse's public identity against the image portrayed by the 2015 documentary *Amy* expands upon existing literature on persona and celebrity. Recognizing the active role Winehouse exerted over the mediation of her image, Bronwyn argues she crafted a rebellious persona that subverted hegemonic notions of femininity, an aspect overlooked by

⁷⁵ Marshall, Moore, and Barbour, "Persona as Method," 290.

⁷⁶ See, for instance, Erin Meyers, "'Can You Handle My Truth?': Authenticity and the Celebrity Star Image," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 42, no. 5 (2009): 890-907, Martha Lauzen, "The Funny Business of Being Tina Fey: Constructing a (Feminist) Comedy Icon," *Feminist Media Studies*, 14, no. 1 (2014): 106-117, Jessalyn Marie Keller, "Fiercely Real? Tyra Banks and the Making of New Media Celebrity," *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 1 (2014): 147-164, Katja Lee and P. David Marshall, "Honorary Degrees for Celebrities: Persona, Scandal, and the Case of Bill Cosby," *Celebrity Studies* (2019): <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2019.1612762>, and Marshall, "Celebrity, Politics, and New Media: An Essay on the Implications of Pandemic Fame and Persona," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 33 (2020): 89-104.

influential cultural texts like *Amy* that frame her as helpless and susceptible in accordance with stereotypes emerging from Winehouse's working-class background.⁷⁷

Such existing scholarship on cultural icons, celebrity, and persona offer further frameworks to understand the institutional roles Obama, Westwood, and Pope Francis perform in the discursive contexts of national identity and imagined empires. Although a variety of scholarly approaches have addressed the icon, there lacks a consistent application of cultural icons to the dynamics of contemporary media, particularly within the context of digital culture. Emily Truman critiques the scholarship that primarily comprises the field of iconic study, arguing that previous work has not addressed how the longevity of 21st-century cultural icons has now increased due to new forms of circulation resulting from digital technology. Using the example of the resurgence in popularity of the "Keep Calm and Carry On" poster, Truman traces the competing histories and intensions behind the design, arguing that it is through circulation that cultural icons gain their symbolic power by enabling an individualized practice of meaning making.⁷⁸ Taking into consideration how texts, including Shepard Fairey's HOPE poster that became the emblem of Obama's presidential campaign that was widely shared through social networks like Facebook, Truman theorizes a way of conceptualizing cultural icons within the context of 21st-century media landscape: "A cultural icon is a symbol (in the form of person, place, or thing) associated with the 'public good,' represented in various forms (mental image, 2D, and 3D text), circulating through a variety of networks (social, material, digital) in popular culture, in response to broader modes and contexts of crisis."⁷⁹ Truman's definition accounts for how social media channels like Twitter and Instagram provide new individualistic means of

⁷⁷ Bronwyn Polaschek, "The Dissonant Personas of a Female Celebrity: Amy and the Public Self of Amy Winehouse," *Celebrity Studies* 9, no. 1 (2018): 20.

⁷⁸ Truman, "Rethinking the Cultural Icon," 834.

⁷⁹ Truman, "Rethinking the Cultural Icon," 841.

participating in the circulation of iconic figures. She also upholds the critical role of icons in navigating institutional discourses central to public culture, a function performed by the media image of Westwood, Pope Francis, and Obama. Missing, however, from her definition of 21st-century cultural icons is the influence of brand culture and the promotional discourses of consumer capitalism that have shaped the social conditions in which Pope Francis, Obama, and Westwood's iconic identities are received by the public.

Promoting Iconic Identities in Consumer Society & Brand Culture

The iconic identities of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis are situated within the larger context of consumer society, since advertising and brand culture are critical elements involved in the circulation of their image. Iconic images that resonate with consumer society perform an integral function for corporations since they are powerful tools for reproducing dominant ideological social formations and practices.⁸⁰ Consumer capitalism increasingly prioritizes visual advertising and branding techniques as obligatory communication methods, a technique that, according to scholars such as Jane Davison, negotiates the political yet multifaced connections amongst iconography, commodity culture, advertising, and capitalism.⁸¹ Interrogating how modern society, founded by the rational principles of the Enlightenment, can be governed by the mythical power of advertising, Raymond Williams traces the historical development of the institution from its early incarnation as classified pages aiding local businesses with promoting material goods and services, to its contemporary function placing greater emphasis on elusive associations over products. By tracing the historical development of advertising, Williams argues that the institution performs both a cultural and economic function

⁸⁰ Jenkins, "My iPod, My iCon," 467.

⁸¹ Jane Davison, "Icon, Iconography, Iconology: Visual Branding, Banking and the Case of the Bowler Hat," *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 22, no. 6 (2009): 886.

as the central tool of capitalism.⁸² Analyzing the role of commodities in structuring social relations in a market economy, William Leiss, Stephen Kline, Sut Jhally, Jackie Botterill, and Kyle Asquith demonstrate how the discourse of consumption worked to privilege advertising as the dominant cultural form structuring everyday life.⁸³ Their analysis contextualizes advertising as a “channel” communicating social and political transformations, functioning as both a “discursive practice contributing to cultural and economic change and a representational practice wherein such changes can be witnessed and interpreted.”⁸⁴ As the central social institution that governs contemporary cultural politics, advertising works to not only market consumer products, but, more significantly, to transform commodities into images bestowed with symbolic meaning, power, and value, a process evident in the brand identities of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis. The images of advertising and consumer society are not innocent texts that exist independently, rather they are key components in social relationships and perform a critical function by negotiating between the political, economic, and cultural structures that govern everyday life.

Myth, Symbolism, and Meaning in Advertising & Consumer Society

While profit is a necessary element for capitalism’s stability, the economic system cannot rely exclusively on revenue for its endurance and stability. Rosa Luxemburg contends that in order for capitalism to sustain its power, the system is dependent upon the continued circulation of the symbolic through communicative means such as advertising, an argument best illustrated through the work of Judith Williamson and Roland Barthes.⁸⁵ Williamson analyzes how

⁸² Raymond Williams, “Advertising: The Magic System,” in *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 208.

⁸³ William Leiss et al., *Social Communication in Advertising*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 12-15.

⁸⁴ Leiss et al., *Social Communication in Advertising*, 11.

⁸⁵ Rosa Luxemburg as cited in Judith Williamson, “Woman Is An Island: Femininity and Colonization,” in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984), 99.

advertising replicates capitalism's symbolic power by incorporating "structures of meaning," or what she refers to as referent systems, which work to rearticulate "our relation to the world around us and the society we live in."⁸⁶ One particular reference system employed by advertising that Williamson is the focus of her semiotic analysis is magic. Performing a mythological function, magic works to "short-circuit" the complex politics embedded within capitalist production into a single image.⁸⁷ Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements* emphasizes how such cultural texts intentionally communicate meaning, an approach that draws parallels with Barthes semiotic approach. Barthes's argument of denotation and connotation is central to advertising and iconicity as communicative systems, in which the linguistic message anchors and naturalizes the symbolic meaning. Comprehending the meaning of an image is dependent upon rather extensive cultural knowledge and shared lexicon. Barthes conceptualizes myths as a communicative form of signification expressed through discourse that assists in the construction of meaning.⁸⁸ Myths perform two critical functions of both identifying and concealing, with Barthes noting that a myth "is a pure ideographic system, where the forms are still motivated by the concept which they represent while not yet, by a long way, covering the sum of its possibilities for presentation."⁸⁹ Myths are in themselves historical entities subjected to practices of naturalization, composed of "material which has already been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication."⁹⁰ It is through naturalization that myths are deemed as both factual and harmless, a process that also works to conceal the hegemonic politics involved within systems of signification.

⁸⁶ Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements*, 144.

⁸⁷ Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements*, 140.

⁸⁸ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Paladin Books, 1973), 109.

⁸⁹ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 127.

⁹⁰ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 110.

Sociohistorical Approaches to Consumer Society

In comparison to the semiotic approaches of Williamson and Barthes, Baudrillard places emphasis on the sign as the central element determining the construction of meaning associated with objects in consumer society. Changes in production to monopoly capitalism required manufacturers to create and associate needs attributed to products, what Baudrillard refers to as sign-value. Drawing upon Thorstein Veblen's argument of conspicuous consumption, consumers purchase a good or service for the prestige and status mediated by the sign-value, which ultimately becomes the organizing force of society. Consumption therefore constitutes a system of needs in which individuals can no longer appreciate the objects consumed since the pleasure previously derived from such purchases is transformed into a social responsibility.⁹¹ Reflective of how consumption emerged from a Puritan ethic, Baudrillard argues that social activities are situated within the sphere of shopping in which "needs and consumption are in fact an organized extension of productive forces."⁹² Consumption ultimately integrates individuals into a collective identity through discourses of novelty and individuality, a process that works to signify various hierarchies and social classifications based upon the element of difference necessary for the reproduction of consumer capitalism.

Ideas concerning authenticity and promotion prominent within contemporary media culture are intrinsic to American identity, where the notion of selfhood and the therapeutic ethos have been explored by a variety of scholars, such as Daniel Bell, Christopher Lasch, and T.J. Jackson Lears.⁹³ The decline of a production-orientated economy to a society governed by the

⁹¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London and Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998), 10.

⁹² Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, 93.

⁹³ Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1978), and Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History 1880-1980*, ed. Richard Wrightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 1-38.

politics of consumption helped facilitate the promotion of aspirational ideals concerning identity and self-fulfillment circulated by the continuously growing advertising industry. The sense of anomie resulting from such social transformations enabled consumer goods and promotional messages to assist in practices of identity construction by helping to relieve newfound cultural anxieties. Jefferson Pooley notes that such discourses of idealized selfhood were not exclusive to advertising and consumption but constituted a cultural phenomenon evident within “pop psychology, liberal Protestantism, entertainment media, celebrity worship, and self-help literature.”⁹⁴ The growing power of consumer society during the 21st century is exemplified by how the institution of advertising promoted a living standard centred around consumption. The development of the professional classes alongside the emerging domestic and international markets assisted in commodity culture’s ability to associate self-improvement with ideals of authenticity, a connection central to contemporary practices of promotion and branding.

Promotional Culture and Consuming Publics

Although Williams, Baudrillard, and discussions of the therapeutic ethos provide the sociohistorical context for the emergence of consumer society, Andrew Wernick’s analysis of promotional culture accounts for the semiotic relationship between advertising and design to communicate both commercial and non-commercial messages in the image economy.⁹⁵ Arguing that the “semiological complexity” of the discourse of publicity has infiltrated “all circuits of social life,” Wernick details the structural changes that enabled branding to emerge as the central technique defining promotional culture.⁹⁶ He defines a promotional message as an intricate

⁹⁴ Jefferson Pooley, “The Consuming Self: From Flappers to Facebook,” in *Blowing Up the Brand*, ed. Aronczyk and Powers, 74.

⁹⁵ Andrew Wernick, *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology and Symbolic Expression* (London and Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1991), 181-182.

⁹⁶ Wernick, *Promotional Culture*, 188.

process of signification which simultaneously “represents (moves in place of), advocates (move on behalf of), and anticipates (moves ahead of) the circulating entity or entities to which it reflects.”⁹⁷ For Wernick, branding is a reflection of social values expressed through advertisements and other marketing material that works to naturalize representations while the discourse of promotion has become the governing social structure “co-extensive with our produced symbolic world.”⁹⁸ Since the main function of advertising is to gain profits, Wernick argues it is necessary to first address the economic composition of promotional culture in order to recognize its social function. Advertising is not just a form of communication, but rather a highly complex signifying system that forms the basis of promotional culture. Conceptualizing advertising as promotion permits a more thorough analysis of its function and significance. Jonathon Gray notes that previous work on promotional culture focuses on the discursive structure’s capitalistic inequalities without addressing the motifs, imagery, and symbolism composing such messages. Gray argues that branding constitutes an example of a paratext, which he defines as textual elements attached or bestowed upon other texts that potentially alter or enhance meaning. While branding is often dismissed for its trivial tendencies, the practice of promotion facilitated by brand culture also performs an integral role in the production of meaning at a basic level.⁹⁹ The labour of branding assists in the creation and circulation of paratexts within promotional culture.

Building upon Jürgen Habermas’s theorization of the structural social changes that enabled the public sphere to develop, Christine Harold and Graham Knight apply his model to the formations and practices of identity construction in consumer society. Harold expands

⁹⁷ Wernick, *Promotional Culture*, 182.

⁹⁸ Wernick, *Promotional Culture*, 182.

⁹⁹ Jonathan Gray, “Texts that Sell: The Culture in Promotional Culture,” in *Blowing Up the Brands*, eds. Aronczyk and Powers, 309.

Habermas's public sphere to examine how discourses of commercialism have diminished the quality of civic dialogue and discussion in regard to key topics central to the wellbeing of the public. The role of commercial culture in transforming the public into "niche markets" based upon advertising and marketing practices works to create what she terms as "consuming publics."¹⁰⁰ Harold's argument of "consuming publics" focuses on how this space is inherently exclusionary. Her analysis is situated within a larger neoliberal framework that identifies the parallels between consumption and social citizenship, most notably evoking Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of consumer capitalism's structural power in re-orientating social practices that ultimately creates new exclusionary judgements of social responsibility within neoliberalism.¹⁰¹

With Nike as his primary example in his work, Graham Knight introduces the concept of the promotional public sphere to analyze the ways in which branding is integral to the construction of corporate identities. Branding bestows substance, however trivial or shallow, to otherwise futile companies producing consumer goods with "value conferred on them through the company's promotional activities."¹⁰² Knight's promotional public sphere builds upon the conceptual frameworks of Wernick and Habermas in order to illustrate the complex process of negotiation between discourses of corporate dominance and activism circulating within the public sphere. His argument addresses how activists and grassroots movements ultimately abide by the logic of branding, frequently employing techniques central to promotional culture such as celebrity endorsements, an element common in environmental issues in particular. The inability to distinguish between commercial and activist branding campaigns demonstrates for Knight the

¹⁰⁰ Christine Harold, *Ourspace: Resisting the Corporate Control of Culture* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xxii-xxiv, xxv.

¹⁰¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (New York: Open University Press, 2005), 23-30 and "Collateral Casualties of Consumption," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 7:1 (2007): 31.

¹⁰² Graham Knight, "Activism, Branding, and the Promotional Public Sphere," in *Blowing Up the Brands*, eds. Aronczyk and Powers, 173.

encompassing power of promotional culture in which a space free or detached from such logic is essentially non-existent.¹⁰³

‘Branding,’ as a term similar to icon, is applied to a variety of political, economic, and cultural contexts ranging from social movements and philanthropic efforts, politicians and government entities, corporations, athletes and amateur and professional sports, celebrities and public figures, and as a valuable strategy to globally promote discourses of national identity within the context of public diplomacy.¹⁰⁴ Branding has since outgrown its prior connection to corporate culture due to what Melissa Aronczyk and Devon Powers highlight as the institutional shift originating during the 1970s to more “entrepreneurial forms of governance” in politics, economic, and culture.¹⁰⁵ Their work is heavily influenced by David Harvey’s argument of flexible accumulation, referring to the reorganization of capital under the post-Fordist economy resulting in shifts from manufacturing to service positions, the elimination of jobs for decreased labour costs, and corporate trends including outsourcing, mergers and acquisitions, self-employment, and freelance work.¹⁰⁶ It is within this context that Celia Lury conceptualizes brands as communicative media positioned at the “intersection of the diverse histories of computing, information technology, and media, as well as those of economics, marketing, and

¹⁰³ Knight, “Activism, Branding, and the Promotional Public Sphere,” in *Blowing Up the Brands*, eds. Aronczyk and Powers, 175.

¹⁰⁴ See, for instance, Laurie Ouellette, “Citizen Brand: ABC and the Do Good Turn in US Television,” in *Commodity Activism: Cultural Resistance in Neoliberal Times*, ed. Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 39-56, Devon Powers and DM Greenwell, “Branded Fitness: Exercise and Promotional Culture,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 17, no. 3 (2017), 523-541, Kim Toffoletti and Holly Thorpe, “The Athletic Labour Femininity: The Branding and Consumption of Global Celebrity Sportswomen on Instagram,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 18, no. 2 (2018): 298-316, Aidan Moir, “Branding the Bump: Mediating Motherhood and Celebrity Culture in Popular Media,” *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement* 6, no. 1 (2015): 50-56, and Melissa Aronczyk, *Branding the Nation: The Global Business of National Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁰⁵ Melissa Aronczyk and Devon Powers, “Blowing Up the Brand,” in *Blowing Up the Brands: Critical Perspectives on Promotional Culture*, ed. Melissa Aronczyk and Devon Powers (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 1.

¹⁰⁶ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge and Malden: Blackwell, 1989), 2.

design.”¹⁰⁷ Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of Jean Baudrillard and Gilles Deleuze, brands function as new media objects, a point Lury develops through seven arguments: brands are produced by numerous fields, such as marketing, economics, design, and law; each of these fields are integral to branding, and cannot be isolated from it; brands, as objects in a manner similar to icons, are not fixed and are constantly in flux; the fluidity of brands represents the relationship between brand, image, and time; the creation and construction of a brand is highly interactive using techniques that integrate the consumer; logos, a key component of a brand, contribute to the global economic flows that ultimately construct systems of difference; and brands are situated within a legal framework, which leads to systems of inequality and oppression due to capitalist relations.¹⁰⁸ Information and the growth of the knowledge economy have transformed the brand into a new media object. There is not one single practice that has initiated this transformation, rather branding for Lury is the product of the symbiotic relationships between a variety of practices and forces in the fields of design, marketing, law, retail, and management.

There are numerous brands circulating in consumer society, however iconic brands, including those of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis, resonate with audiences since they address the anxieties and fears of a nation while also reconciling cultural contradictions through constructing identity myths for consumers. Douglas Holt contextualizes brands as “historical entities whose meaning and value depends on how the brand’s myth addresses a particular tension in society,” ultimately functioning in a manner similar to cultural texts and artefacts including films, athletes, musicians, and political and religious leaders.¹⁰⁹ Through an analysis of

¹⁰⁷ Celia Lury, *Brands: The Logos of the Global Economy* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 6.

¹⁰⁸ Lury, *Brands*, 15.

¹⁰⁹ Douglas Holt, *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004), 12 and 359.

Jack Daniel's promotional activities, interviews with the company's marketing executives, and ethnographies of the drink's position in American pub culture, Holt's thesis of brands of ideological parasites demonstrates how a brand's symbolic value is created through a company's ability to situate their product within pre-existing cultural myths, narratives and traditions. Key to this process is the role of what he refers to as "myth makers," agents involved in maintaining a brand's association with larger cultural mythologies, such as the relationship between counter-cultures and commodities and the strategic placement of commodities in films that establish visual associations between narratives and brands for audiences.¹¹⁰ Brands are stories that consist of a plot, and have characters that maintain and move the narrative of the brand, therefore "rely[ing] on metaphors to communicate and spur imaginations."¹¹¹ Although there are multiple stories that circulate in a society at a given moment, brands are created when such narratives become embedded within the dynamics of popular culture. Iconic brands are thus historical entities and must be placed within the context in which they emerge. Holt's analysis of brands including Harley Davidson, Mountain Dew, and ESPN reveal that traditional branding strategies such as mind share, emotional marketing, and viral techniques are rarely utilized by brands which have produced what are considered iconic campaigns, since such marketers do not follow conventional branding approaches.

Theorizing Authenticity in Brand Culture

Popular critiques of branding and promotional culture frequently yearn for a more authentic space untainted by commercialism and other corporate demands. However, as scholars such as Gunn Enli have noted, authenticity itself is a social construction grounded in nostalgia

¹¹⁰ Holt, "Jack Daniel's America: Iconic Brands as Ideological Parasites and Proselytizers," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 6, no. 3 (2006): 372-375.

¹¹¹ Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 3.

that does not correlate with a lived reality, a phenomenon which also extends to brand culture.¹¹²

In response to the common equation of widespread inauthenticity with the intensification of consumer capitalism across institutional realms, Sarah Banet-Weiser critiques the economic notion of branding as a corporate strategy, conversely arguing that brands perform a social function by creating “cultural spaces in which individuals feel safe, secure, relevant and authentic.”¹¹³ Defining brand culture as an affective relationship facilitating identity construction to assist individuals in navigating the practices, challenges, and obstacles of everyday life, Banet-Weiser addresses how branding is dependent upon the employment of images, ideas, and promises as opposed to economics or corporate strategy.¹¹⁴ Religion and politics, for example, are two prominent “spaces” that were previously considered ‘authentic’ yet are now transformed by the logic of branding, signifying for Banet-Weiser a transformation symbolic of the cultural shift from “authentic culture to the branding of authenticity.”¹¹⁵ Authenticity is central to the functioning of brand cultures within a neoliberal context, in which Banet-Weiser argues:

Brand culture is enabled and supported by blurrings between the authentic and the commercial precisely by decentering consuming products as the crucial act of consumption and highlighting instead cultural practices as consumptive spaces in which individuals are ‘free’ to practice politics, articulate lifestyles, and engage in creative acts. Crucial to the convergence of creativity and commercial culture is, ironically, the maintenance of a *distinction* between authenticity and the commercial, especially in terms of crafting a personal identity that is expressed as ‘freedom’ from state power. Maintaining the distinction between authentic creativity and commercialized industry in turn maintains the idea that there is a space outside of the market in which authenticity can take root and flourish, a cultural space that has somehow escaped capitalism’s unapologetic bullying.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Gunn Enli, *Mediated Authenticity: How the Media Constructs Reality* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 2-3 and 6-8.

¹¹³ Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic: The Politics of Ambivalence in Brand Culture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2012), 9.

¹¹⁴ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 4.

¹¹⁵ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 5.

¹¹⁶ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 120.

Binaries of authentic and inauthentic are not productive for comprehending how brand culture operates at a discursive level. The branding of spaces as authentic repositions how individuals construct their identity by emphasizing individuality over collectivity, both economically and politically, and such changes are naturalized by the discourse of authenticity.

It is necessary to understand how branding has influenced seemingly ‘authentic’ or uncorrupted realms such as politics and religion, since, as Banet-Weiser contends, these institutions are dominant influences on identity formation and also govern the cultural customs and rituals practiced on a regular basis. Her reasoning finds support in P. David Marshall’s argument that the power of the brand is in how its discursive conventions have worked to transform the corporation into an authentic identity.¹¹⁷ Evocative of Holt’s analysis of the corporate marketing behind iconic brands, the meanings of branded spaces are never ‘fixed’ and vulnerable to change based upon social shifts, with Banet-Weiser stressing their narrative function by providing avenues for publics to explore “the way we understand who we are, how we organize ourselves in the world, what stories we tell about ourselves.”¹¹⁸ Brands are ultimately created to narratively construct a sense of stability in periods of crisis and social change, a process evident in the construction of Barack Obama’s political brand identity. However, a brand’s existence is highly precarious and open to multiple interpretations, therefore requiring continued upkeep to reproduce the power, meaning, and symbolism.

Drawing upon the work of Viviana Zelizer, Banet-Weiser argues that in a culture where there are elements of the sublime, the consumerist intentions are restructured to avoid any associations with capitalist accumulation. This represents an inherent contradiction when

¹¹⁷ Marshall, “When the Private Becomes Public: Commodity Activism, Endorsement, and Making Meaning in a Privatised World,” in *Contemporary Publics: Shifting Boundaries in New Media*, ed. Marshall et al (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 235-236.

¹¹⁸ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 5.

branding enters into spaces or institutions like practices of faith, since religions require marketing to communicate beliefs, yet they simultaneously must disassociate themselves from any capitalist rhetoric in order to preserve a sense of authenticity.¹¹⁹ This element represents the ultimate contradiction for brand cultures; branding requires contradiction and dissonance in order to function effectively in consumer society, and it is through such incongruities that brands are bestowed with symbolic power. Banet-Weiser is especially critical of the corporate appropriation and anti-consumerism arguments that are commonly applied to analyses of brand culture in ‘untainted’ realms like politics and religion by scholars such as Naomi Klein. Critiquing these approaches for placing too much emphasis on the roles of producer and consumer, Banet-Weiser argues that corporate appropriation and anti-consumerism fails to adequately account for how power is created and negotiated within the exchange process of brand culture, consequently concealing how “other entangled discourses in culture are deeply interrelated within [brand culture].”¹²⁰ Such arguments naively operate under the assumption that an authentic or genuine cultural realm exists, however, Banet-Weiser argues that brand culture operates at a far more complex level than just an example of corporate appropriation.¹²¹ It is not that the market is an entry point to understanding culture, but rather her argument prioritizes how the market interacts with other forces to reshape cultural practices and dynamics. Brand cultures thereby operate for Banet-Weiser in a similar manner to Raymond Williams’s “structures of feeling” by creating a particular ethos that resonates with a public sphere shaped by discourses of consumption.¹²²

Commodity Activism in Promotional & Brand Culture

¹¹⁹ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 167.

¹²⁰ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 12.

¹²¹ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 8.

¹²² Williams as cited in Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 8-9 and 131-132.

Celebrities act as pedagogical tools for identity construction by characterizing the zeitgeist of a particular moment in cultural politics, such as the predominance of commodity activism in consumer capitalism.¹²³ Whereas previous conceptions of the public interpolate individuals as citizens, the realm of the private for P. David Marshall reimagines individuals as primarily consumers. Contradiction is an inherent aspect of private identity; consumption is viewed as an activity associated with the private realm, yet to undertake such an activity requires an individual to venture into the public domain of the marketplace. The private identity of the consumer creates new models of dissent, which Marshall refers to as privatized-public dissent. Meaning is created through the private choices made by consumers and the associations that individuals attach to their public consumption practices.¹²⁴ Politics is reconfigured in Marshall's argument where dissent is expressed through the marketplace as opposed to the public sphere. Central to Marshall's work is the neoliberal ethos, where identity is viewed as a process of self-construction yet discontinued from any sense of collectivity, thereby facilitating a "natural affinity to the productive-consumption self of consumer culture."¹²⁵ His theorizing of the dissent within privatized-public politics draws parallels to Banet-Weiser and her analysis of the neoliberal transition from citizen consumers to commodity activism, which "reshapes and reimagines forms and practices of social and political activism into marketable commodities and takes a specific form within brand culture."¹²⁶ The neoliberal ethic has enabled commodity activism to emerge as a powerful form of politics in contemporary public discourse. Identity politics has reshaped and challenged dominant hegemonic values, yet also exhibit similarities to

¹²³ Marshall, "The Promotion and Presentation of the Self: Celebrity as Marker of Presentational Media," *Celebrity Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010), 36.

¹²⁴ Marshall, "Private Becomes Public," 232.

¹²⁵ Marshall, "Private Becomes Public," in *Contemporary Publics*, ed. Marshall et al, 235.

¹²⁶ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 16.

niche marketing with both emerging within a similar social context. However, consumption does not translate to political activity, and changes in social citizenship leads to new consumer identities.¹²⁷ Drawing upon Bauman's writings on consumption, Leiss, Kline, Jhally, Botterill, and Asquith argue that advertising works to naturalize individualized consumer identification and engagement in an economic and political landscape shaped by practices of commodity activism.¹²⁸ Bauman's analysis of consumer culture is an influential framework to understand how advertising functions as the realm in which social, political, and economic issues are received by the public, evident in Anne MacLennan's analysis of how charitable marketing campaigns by the United Way and the Salvation Army frame, categorize, and mediate issues of poverty and social inequality to Canadian audiences.¹²⁹ The politics of commodity activism work to construct and classify social and political issues into a hierarchy of visibility in public discourse, thereby creating a consumer landscape in which social causes and campaigns must struggle and compete against each other to gain recognition.

Commodity activism illuminates the complex relationship between politics, branding, citizenship, and consumption. Activism is reimagined as a fast process or practice in which the logic of branding creates a hierarchy of causes in a manner parallel to the competition between different brands. Banet-Weiser identifies three key social shifts that have challenged what it means to be an activist in the current climate that promotes individualized notions of empowerment: Fordism and mass consumption, post-Fordism and niche marketing, and the rise of neoliberalism and immaterial labour.¹³⁰ Brands are not just an economic tactic strengthening

¹²⁷ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 32.

¹²⁸ Leiss et al., *Social Communication in Advertising*, 419.

¹²⁹ Leiss et al., *Social Communication in Advertising*, 419 and Anne MacLennan, "Promoting Pity or Empathy? Poverty and Canadian Charitable Appeals," in *Advertising, Consumer Culture, and Canadian Society*, ed. Kyle Asquith (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2018), 225-243.

¹³⁰ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 132-140.

capitalism, but are deeply rooted in American cultural history, which she contends is “predicated not on the separate domains of individual experience, everyday life, and the market but rather on their deep interrelation.”¹³¹ She formulates her argument by drawing upon the work of Lizabeth Cohen and Victoria de Grazia, who each argue in their respective influential texts that it is during the transition to new social formations that the tensions of identity politics become visible.

Identifying the longstanding connection between American politics, the economy, and consumption, Cohen’s consumer’s republic constituted a relationship reinforced by the post-war socioeconomic climate. Banet-Weiser builds her argument from Cohen influential concept of the consumers’ republic, an economy strategy that “emerged after World War II for reconstructing the nation’s economy and reaffirming its democratic values through promoting the expansion of mass consumption.”¹³² Identifying the longstanding connection between American politics, the economy, and consumption, the consumer’s republic constituted a relationship reinforced by the post-war socioeconomic climate. Following the conclusion of World War Two, the consumer market was primarily responsible for the economic prosperity of the nation. A variety of forces, including government, mass media, and labour unions, united to promote consumption as a civic responsibility. Equality can be achieved through consumption by increasing economic prosperity, since, as Cohen highlights, the development of the consumers’ republic initiated from the “conviction that mass markets offered endless potential for growth and appealed to all Americans.”¹³³ Her argument facilitates market segmentation based upon race, ethnicity, age, and lifestyle that soon entered the political sphere. Representative of the shift from a consumers’

¹³¹ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 9.

¹³² Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 11.

¹³³ Cohen, “A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 31, no. 1 (2004): 238.

republic to the consumerization of the republic, such practices for Cohen helped spawn a variety of Democratic political action, including the Civil Rights movement, since “Americans increasingly came to judge the success of the public realm much like other purchased goods, by the personal benefit individual citizen-consumers derived from it.”¹³⁴ The foundations of commodity activism are not unique to contemporary neoliberal cultural politics. In her analysis of corporate protest campaigns, Melissa Aronczyk argues that neoliberal critiques of commodity activism “employ a causal parsimony that does not adequately reveal either the complex and messy ways that different corporate campaigns actually work in practice, or the historical means by which notions of protest have developed.”¹³⁵ American social history in particular constitutes a longstanding relationship between citizenship and the marketplace, where civil rights and labour boycotts exemplified the potential of the marketplace to mobilize a citizen’s ability to facilitate social change and exercise their democratic rights through the consumption of select goods and services.¹³⁶

Branding Politics and Political Brands

Emerging from the symbiotic relationship between politics, American identity, and consumer culture that is most effectively articulated by Lizabeth Cohen’s consumer republic, branding is increasingly utilized by political figures to market and promote their symbolic power to a public governed by what Margaret Scammell refers to as consumer democracy.¹³⁷ A critical

¹³⁴ Cohen, “A Consumers’ Republic,” 239.

¹³⁵ Aronczyk, “Market(ing) Activism: Lush Cosmetics, Ethical Oil, and the Self-Mediation of Protest,” *JOMEC Journal: Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies* 4 (2013): <http://doi.org/10.18573/j.2013.10256>.

¹³⁶ Banet-Weiser and Roopali Mukherjee, “Commodity Activism in Neoliberal Times,” in *Commodity Activism*, ed. Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser, 6-7.

¹³⁷ Margaret Scammell, *Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 138-162 and Khadijah Costley White, *The Branding of Right-Wing Activism: The News Media and The Tea Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 36-41. See also Scammell, “Political Brands and Consumer Citizens: The Rebranding of Tony Blair,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political Science* 611, no. 1 (2007): 176-192.

aspect of Banet-Weiser's argument is the distinction she makes between branded politics and commodified politics. Branded politics operate within the logic of the brand, while branding operates within all levels of politics, evident by Michael Serazio's analysis of the continued influence of marketing consultants and other communication tactics within electoral politics.¹³⁸ Commodified politics assume that a pure politics previously existed, aided by discourses of nostalgia which is commonly appropriated as leverage in branded politics by interpolating consumers as authentic political activists. Key to Banet-Weiser's argument is how she distinguishes between the rational decision of citizens and emotional consumers, referencing George Bush's call for individuals to shop after the September 11th terrorist attacks.¹³⁹ The blurring of citizens and consumers as well as the rational and emotional is a dangerous distortion, since Banet-Weiser notes, "if the market structures and determines what is defined as political, then market logic applies to politics: if an issue does not have a large enough consumer base, or is seen as too alienating or offensive to consumers, then it will not become a branded political culture."¹⁴⁰ Ambivalence is key in allowing brand cultures to negotiate between profit and social justice, thereby acting as "spaces in which politics are practices, identities are made, art is created, and cultural value is deliberated."¹⁴¹ In order for an issue to gain political visibility, it must abide by branding logic, creating the central tension in commodity activism and branded politics in which profit and power are the main incentives over ideas of reform and public good for civil society.

¹³⁸ Michael Serazio, "Branding Politics: Emotion, Authenticity, and the Marketing Culture of American Political Communication," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 17, no. 2 (2017): 225-241.

¹³⁹ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 127-132, 134.

¹⁴⁰ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 147.

¹⁴¹ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 42.

The socioeconomic context of brand culture provides the necessary foundations for the celebrity politician to emerge as a powerful image in public discourse. Addressing the growing phenomenon of the celebrity politician, John Street makes the critical distinction between politicians who have achieved a luminary status and film, television, and music personalities who have branched into political matters. The emergence of institutional figures like Obama and Pope Francis as celebrities represents for Street the growing importance of spectacular media culture as the primary realm in which traits of “political attractiveness,” such as style and authenticity, are performed and negotiated, thereby establishing the relationship between “politics and popular aesthetics.”¹⁴² Street’s initial conceptualization of celebrity politics provides a framework for scholarship interrogating the power of Donald Trump’s brand identity in contemporary media and political culture, particularly in regard to how his image negotiates previous understandings of celebrity, branding, and capitalism.¹⁴³ Despite possessing extreme wealth and capital, Virginia Newhall Rademacher and Anita Biressi both explore Trump’s ability to brand himself as ‘ordinary’ and working-class through gendered rhetoric and imagery, a persona characterizing the motif of what Jo Littler refers to as “normcore plutocrats.”¹⁴⁴ Acknowledging that the power behind Trump’s brand in popular culture demonstrates the need to further interrogate celebrity politics as a conceptual framework, Street argues in more recent work that Trump (in addition to other figures like Boris Johnson) must be analyzed as celebrities rather than politicians. Trump’s celebrity, supported by the deliberate cultivation of his tabloid

¹⁴² John Street, “Celebrity Politicians: Popular Culture and Political Representation,” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 6, no. 4 (2004): 449.

¹⁴³ See for instance, Andrea McDonnell and Mark Wheeler, “@realDonaldTrump: Political Celebrity, Authenticity, and Para-Social Engagement on Twitter,” *Celebrity Studies* 10, no. 3 (2019): 427-431 and Anita Biressi, “President Trump: Celebrity-in-Chief and the Desecration of Political Authority,” *Celebrity Studies* 11, no. 1 (2020): 125-139.

¹⁴⁴ Virginia Newhall Rademacher, “Trump and the Resurgence of American Noir,” *Persona Studies* 2, no. 2 (2016): 93-97, Biressi, “President Trump,” 128, and Jo Littler, “Normcore Plutocrats in Gold Elevators: Reading the Trump Tower Photographs,” *Cultural Politics* 15, no. 1 (2019): 16.

persona and various appearances in film and television, is an important element underlying his media representation that Street argues ultimately determines his political activities and decisions.¹⁴⁵

The influence of branding as a discursive logic within the political realm addressed by scholars like Banet-Weiser also contributes a framework to understand how other social movements and grassroots organizations circulate in contemporary media culture. Applying the work of Lury, Holt, and Banet-Weiser, Khadijah Costley White's *The Branding of Right-Wing Activism: The News Media & The Tea Party* highlights the role of cultural intermediaries in constructing brands with immense circulatory power that shapes how topics central to the public good are presented and framed by the news media and larger political discourse. Critiquing popular conceptualizations of the Tea Party as a social, political, or class movement, Costley White argues that the Tea Party constituted a brand in a manner similar to other corporate entities in consumer culture and was predominantly maintained by the news media. Referring to journalists, reporters, and network news pundits from various mainstream outlets as "brand managers," her analysis accounts for how such journalistic figures promoted the Tea Party as a brand identity by emphasizing particular characteristics of "race, gender, and class (among other qualities like militarism, religiosity, and anger)."¹⁴⁶ The analyses of Trump's persona and brand by Rademacher and Street similarly stress the power of journalists as gatekeepers in actively contributing to the construction of a celebrity politician through reporting that privileges the spectacle – imagery that was first employed by the media in the branding of Obama as a rising politician.¹⁴⁷ Costley White's framing of the Tea Party as a brand represents the emergence of

¹⁴⁵ Street, "What is Donald Trump? Forms of 'Celebrity' in Celebrity Politics," *Political Science Review* 17, no. 1 (2019): 4-6, 12.

¹⁴⁶ Costley White, *Branding of Right-Wing Activism*, 5 and 184-185.

¹⁴⁷ Rademacher, "Trump and the Resurgence of American Noir," 97-100 and Street, "Who is Donald Trump?" 6-9.

scholarship addressing the role of branding in conservative politics and right-wing news media within the United States and Canada, particularly since existing literature on the relationship between politics and branding has predominantly focused on more liberal and progressive examples of social movements and causes.¹⁴⁸

Prioritizing the Self in Brand & Promotional Culture

The conventions of neoliberalism and consumer capitalism have not only transformed realms like politics but also has blurred the distinctions and symbolic boundaries governing notions such as identity, branding, and persona in favour of prioritizing the self and individualized forms of expression. Alison Hearn refers to this postmodern phenomenon as consumer capitalism's emphasis on the "self as commodity."¹⁴⁹ Postmodern culture prioritizes the self, since need and fulfillment are elements primarily satisfied through practices of consumption. Representative of the social influence of consumer capitalism, the self is constructed by the influential imagery of consumer society embedded within contemporary media culture that accentuates lifestyle over previous classifications of class and identity such as taste or conspicuous consumption. The politics of neoliberalism has helped transform the self into a powerful commodity within promotional culture, leading to the emergence of self-branding as a popular practice of identity construction. Self-branding positions the individual as a producer who is actively aware of the labour required to maintain their persona, and it is this awareness of such immateriality that distinguishes self-branding from other forms of exchange,

¹⁴⁸ See, for instance, Alex Marland and Tom Flanagan, "Brand New Party: Political Branding and the Conservative Party of Canada," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 4 (2013): 951-972, Robert Busby and Sue Cronshaw, "Political Branding: The Tea Party and its Use of Participation Branding," *Journal of Political Marketing* 14, no. 1-2 (2015): 96-110, and Reece Peck, *Fox Populism: Branding Conservatism as Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 45-55.

¹⁴⁹ Alison Hearn, "Meat, Mask, Burden': Probing the Contours of the Branded 'Self'," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 8, no. 2 (2008): 199.

such as commodification.¹⁵⁰ Fundamental to the rise of self-branding is what Banet-Weiser refers to as the interactive subject, which she defines as “an individual who can move between and within media platforms with ease, and who can produce media online, whether in the form of videos, blogs, or even comments and feedback.”¹⁵¹ Banet-Weiser’s interactive subject finds parallels to Marshall’s argument of the specular economy, in which “we are becoming more conscious of how we present ourselves and how others perceive us and this change is migrating to the epicentre of our knowledge economy.”¹⁵² Traditional or broadcast mass media were primarily the dominant influences in identity construction, but they are now complemented, or surpassed, by online screens and mobile media. Marshall references the mirror effect, in which private reflections of the mirror in the bathroom or the bedroom provide moments of self-control and discipline regarding behaviour that is later reproduced in more public realms. Acting as a component of surveillance culture, the mirror effect functions for Marshall as a critical element of the specular economy, in which “seeing ourselves helps us to imagine a better version of ourselves.”¹⁵³ The surveillance promoted by Marshall’s mirror effect underscore how self-branding is dependant upon practice of voluntary self-disclosure that assist in mediating constructed notions of authenticity and intimacy. Divulging private details of one’s personal life creates the illusion of transparency since such revelations signify an embracing of the inner self rather than abiding to corporate culture.¹⁵⁴ Self-branding encourages an imaginative experience, yet the practice also signifies how the self is now another space subjected to the logic of brand culture in a manner similar to politics and religion.

¹⁵⁰ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 60.

¹⁵¹ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 56.

¹⁵² P. David Marshall, “The Specular Economy,” *Society* 47, no. 6 (2010): 499.

¹⁵³ Marshall, “Specular Economy,” 499.

¹⁵⁴ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic*, 60-62.

Other scholarship addressing the promotion of the self has situated the synthesis between personal identity and branding – or self-branding – within the context of advertising, commodity culture, and the cultural influence of social media platforms. Hearn highlights that the notion of self-branding is not a recent phenomenon or unique to social media, but rather represents a continuation of Anthony Giddens’s argument on modernity and the reflective self.¹⁵⁵ Responding to a tendency in management literature to frame branding as purely a corporate strategy utilized for profit maximization, Hearn argues that self-branding requires further scholarly interrogation due to how prevalent the concept is in popular culture. Hearn’s operationalization of branding draws upon the arguments of Celia Lury and Adam Arvidsson, who each respectively discuss the symbiotic relationship between corporate identities, material logos, trademarks, and cultural mythologies.¹⁵⁶

Although Douglas Holt acknowledges that the emphasis placed by marketers on creating iconic brands through social media content is merely an extension of mass media advertising tactics, the contemporary consumer landscape has subsequently fostered a new promotional culture prioritizing self-branding as a central marketing technique.¹⁵⁷ In *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, & Branding in the Social Media Age*, Alice Marwick argues that social media has fostered a new cultural obsession with status by encouraging users to embrace tactics of self-promotion and personal branding in order to achieve micro-celebrity status.¹⁵⁸ Ruth Page and Susie Khamis, Lawrence Ange, and Raymond Welling each expand upon Marwick’s

¹⁵⁵ Hearn, “Meat, Mask, Burden,” 199.

¹⁵⁶ Lury, *Brands* and Adam Arvidsson, “Brands: A Critical Perspective,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5, no. 2 (2005): 325-358.

¹⁵⁷ Holt, “Branding in the Age of Social Media,” *Harvard Business Review* (2016): 42.

¹⁵⁸ Alice Marwick, *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, & Branding in the Social Media Age* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 15-19. See also Marwick and danah boyd, “I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience,” *New Media & Society* 13, no. 1 (2011): 114-133 and “To See and Be Seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter,” *Convergence* 17, no. 2 (2011): 139-158.

framework to analyze how hashtags and formations of neoliberal individualism are critical components of self-branding practices enabling everyday individuals to imitate the promotional tactics traditionally undertaken by celebrities, politicians, and other corporate entities that contribute to the emergence of influencer culture.¹⁵⁹ Referring to the type of social media capital achieved through public relations tactics and strategic brand partnerships, influencer culture consequently raises new questions concerning practices of identity construction, particularly in regard to consumer society, digital labour, and advertising regulation.¹⁶⁰ Addressing how branding and self-promotion challenge expressions of celebrity and authenticity on social media, Kyle Asquith argues that the rapid growth of “influencer marketing” represents the ability for advertising to adapt to the cultural shifts and trends strengthened by platforms like YouTube and Instagram.¹⁶¹ Despite their democratic appeals, however, social media networks like Twitter and Instagram have only intensified existing social inequalities that foster exclusionary judgements of acceptability in consumer culture. Marwick highlights this discriminatory aspect to form her critique against the democratizing and participatory ideals typically attributed to social media.¹⁶² For Asquith, influencer marketing eliminates the democratic possibilities of social media to provide a space for the content of everyday users while further obscuring the ambiguous distinctions between advertisements and media texts.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Ruth Page, “The Linguistics of Self-Branding and Micro-Celebrity in Twitter: The Role of Hashtags,” *Discourse & Communication* 6, no. 1 (2012): 181-201 and Susie Khamis, Lawrence Ange, and Raymond Welling, “Self-Branding, ‘Micro-Celebrity’ and the Rise of Social Media Influencers,” *Celebrity Studies* 8, no. 2 (2017), 191-208.

¹⁶⁰ See for instance, Emily Hund and Lee McGuigan, “A Shoppable Life: Performance, Selfhood, and Influence in the Social Media Storefront,” *Communication, Culture & Critique* 12 (2019): 18-35 and Kyle Asquith and Emily M. Fraser, “A Critical Analysis of Attempts to Regulate Native Advertising and Influencer Marketing,” *International Journal of Communication* 14 (2020): 5729-5749.

¹⁶¹ Asquith, “Influencer Marketing, the Commercial Forces of Social Media Celebrity, and Challenges for Canadian Advertising Regulation,” in *Advertising, Consumer Culture, and Canadian Society*, ed. Asquith, 207.

¹⁶² Marwick, *Status Update*, 16 and Marwick, “Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy,” *Public Culture* 27, no. 1 (2015): 156-157.

¹⁶³ Asquith, “Influencer Marketing,” 212-214.

Accounting for how self-branding is employed by celebrities and political figures, including Vivienne Westwood, Barack Obama, and Pope Francis, is necessary since it is a practice now commonplace in identity construction reflecting larger trends within consumer and promotional culture. It is within this socioeconomic context obscuring the boundaries between branding, persona, and identity that Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis have emerged as powerful global icons. Each have utilized practices of self-branding to promote the social causes and campaigns associated with their brand identities that ultimately shapes how critical topics like environmentalism and inequality are discussed in public discourse.

Despite being overlooked by various disciplines within the social sciences and humanities, icons play a critical – and also highly political – role in communicating the social ideals, values, and beliefs. Evident from W.J.T. Mitchell's critical questioning of the ideological and communicative ability of images to Hariman and Lucaites's grounding of iconic photographs as texts integral to the civic discourse the public, the existing interdisciplinary approach to examining cultural icons provides a foundation to address the identities of Vivienne Westwood, Barack Obama, and Pope Francis. Their iconic identities are inherently complex textual constructions playing an integral role negotiating the politics of signification that shape how global concerns like healthcare, the economy, and the environment are discussed within public discourse. Cultural icons gain potency in public discourse due to the influence of celebrity and promotional culture helping to circulate their image within a society governed by consumer capitalism, yet this aspect of has not been effectively addressed in regard to iconic figures. There remains a need to account for how individual figures that are not only symbolic of larger social institutions but are influential in shaping public discourse and cultural politics, an oversight addressed by interrogating the iconic brand identities of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis.

Scholarship on icons, consumption, branding, and promotional culture provide valuable insight into the larger theoretical context regarding the discursive circulation of these individuals within popular culture.

Recent work by Truman critiques the tendency in previous research for analyzing iconic identities within a singular focus by arguing that it is through the process of circulation that icons develop cultural meaning. However, the multiple participants involved in the construction of creating, marketing, and maintaining iconic figures, and how these identities are both situated within larger institutional spheres and influenced by governing social discourses of branding and promotional culture are factors that have not been addressed by the existing literature.

Recognizing the decisions undertaken by celebrated public figures and the ways in which their agency is negotiated by the larger media culture reveals an opportunity to expand upon existing literature in order to illuminate how the tensions comprising identities like Obama, Westwood, and Pope Francis are reflective of significantly larger social trends prevalent across the institutions of politics, fashion, and religion that govern identity construction within daily life.

Cultural intermediaries, in addition to the public individual figures, are mutual participants in the construction of iconic identities, but it remains necessary to further explore the purpose of this symbiotic relationship in creating the meaning that bestows Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis with their authority and symbolic power within consumer capitalism.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Since the study of cultural icons is inherently interdisciplinary, there is not a set methodological framework for understanding how to situate figures like Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis within the larger institutions and social trends they represent. Graeme Turner argues that the prominence of textual analysis in celebrity studies research is due to the influence of star studies and cultural studies. While Turner recommends more emphasis be placed on the commodity function of a celebrity, Olivier Driessens critiques Turner's ideas for failing to address the role of agency within the celebrity industry in regards to both the personality and the other cultural intermediaries involved in the circulation of their identities, proposing interviews and observations as potential methodologies for celebrity studies.¹ In her analysis of cultural icons that gained larger visibility during the economic recession from 2007-2009, Emily Truman expands upon the semiotic methodologies common in studies on iconic figures. She creates an analytical model that traces the creation and reproduction of an iconic figure's visual image, the values and beliefs that give that their representation larger cultural authority, and how social controversies create what she terms "iconographic happenings" that challenge how iconic figures are perceived by the public.² Marshall, Moore, and Barbour reflect on the methodological approaches of prosopographic field study and interpretive phenomenological analysis that they have relied upon in their past persona research in order to "contribute to the multiple dimensions that have emerged within the domain of attention to celebrity, and to recognise the potential of celebrity as a model of public presentation that contributes to the exploitation of networks,

¹ Olivier Driessens, "Expanding Celebrity Studies' Research Agenda: Theoretical Opportunities and Methodological Challenges in Interviewing Celebrities," *Celebrity Studies* 6, no. 2 (2015), 193-196.

² Emily Truman, "Back to the Political Future: Coping with Crisis Through Radical Nostalgia for Revolutionary Icons" (PhD diss., Carleton University, 2014), 93-95.

mediation, communication participation, agency, affect and identity performance.”³ Defined by Lawrence Stone as pertaining to “the investigation of the common background characteristics of a group of actors in history by means of collective study of their lives,” prosopography originally referred to the study of portraitures, analyzing how details such as dress, jewelry, and other adornments signified differing social and class hierarchies.⁴ Marshall, Moore, and Barbour adapt this method into what they term as prosopographic field study, where cultural texts and artefacts relating to an individual or group’s persona are gathered to form a collective unit for analysis of intangible qualities like reputation and image management.⁵ With their focus on the online communities forming micro-publics – a concept rooted in social media followers that borrows from Alice Marwick and danah boyd’s notion of micro-celebrity – Marshall, Moore, and Barbour place more emphasis on the everyday social media user than institutional figures like Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis.⁶

Following the diverse methodological approaches of past work on cultural icons with scholarship from persona and celebrity studies, a content analysis is triangulated with a critical textual analysis in order to deconstruct the iconic brand identities and personas of Obama, Pope Francis, and Westwood. To help navigate the wide scope and depth of these individuals in popular culture, content analysis of print media reporting on key moments associated with each public figure is used to identify the central motifs, themes, and narratives of each personality. For David Deacon, Michael Pickering, and Graham Murdock, content analysis helps empirically categorize and frame the sample’s primary material for the more significant critical textual

³ P. David Marshall, Christopher Moore, and Kim Barbour, “Persona as Method: Exploring Celebrity and the Public Self through Persona Studies,” *Celebrity Studies* 6, no. 3 (2015): 289.

⁴ Lawrence Stone as cited in Marshall, Moore, and Barbour, “Persona as Method,” 300.

⁵ Marshall, Moore, and Barbour, *Persona Studies: An Introduction* (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), 123-126.

⁶ Alice Marwick and danah boyd, “I tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience,” *New Media & Society* 13, no. 1 (2011): 114-133.

analysis, permitting “broader inferences about the processes and politics of representation.”⁷ Journalists play an influential role in determining the discourses, meanings, imagery, narratives, and frames utilized to communicate institutional figures like Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis to the larger public. Print reporting is also valuable for Jeffrey C. Alexander in its ability to reflect “feeling[s] for the meaning and emotions circulating at a particular point in time” that cannot be easily achieved from other media.⁸ In her analysis of how the news media helped develop the brand of the Tea Party, Khadijah Costley White argues that although assisted by strategists and grassroots organizers, this particular subsection of the Republican party “reaches most Americans as a news story, one grand mastered through the gatekeepers and reporters of the press.”⁹ Her argument stresses the important role journalists and the larger news media continue to play in shaping public discourse, and it is also applicable to accounting for the press coverage constructing the iconic identities of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis. Despite traits of accessibility and modesty – and the illusion of approachability fostered by social media – that are often associated with their personalities, these three figures are generally unreachable due to the exclusionary boundaries of the elite institutions they represent. Obama, Pope Francis, and Westwood are images that are primarily experienced through the everyday coverage offered by the news media. The critical textual analysis on Obama, Westwood, and Pope Francis’s media representation is influenced by Norman Fairclough’s description of the method. Fairclough focuses on how discourse – referring to language in addition to visual images, films, and other communicative practices – interacts with other social customs, notably concentrating on the

⁷ David Deacon, Michael Pickering, and Graham Murdock, *Researching Communications: A Practical Guide to Methods in Media and Cultural Analysis* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2007), 119.

⁸ Alexander, *Performance of Politics*, 292.

⁹ Khadijah Costley White, *The Branding of Right-Wing Activism: The News Media & The Tea Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 6.

ways in which discourse “figures within processes of change, and with shifts in the relationship between discourse and more broadly semiosis and other social elements within networks of practices.”¹⁰ For the critical textual analysis on Westwood, Pope Francis, and Obama, emphasis is placed on the interpretive deconstruction of the intertextuality and discursive schemas that compose each of these figures as textual entities, since interpretation is the practice where meaning is created.¹¹

A non-random critical case sample from North Atlantic news publications covering significant key moments in the creation of Obama, Pope Francis, and Westwood’s iconic brand identities contributes the necessary data for the content analysis. Analyzing key moments and events that define Obama, Pope Francis, and Westwood’s media representation in public discourse, however, accounts both theoretically and methodologically for merely a portion of their larger institutional personas. Acknowledging or incorporating all media materials devoted to Pope Francis, Obama, and Westwood is outside the scope and feasibility of the analysis. The sample reflects moments when their images are at their most intense and are events and moments that are remembered by the public and associated with their iconic identities.

A total of 1,402 articles were selected for the sample on Pope Francis from 21 British, American, and Canadian English-language newspapers. The news publications included in the sample are *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *The Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, and the *National Post*. The key moments identified with Pope Francis’s public identity and the dates associated with the data collection for his portion of sample are as follows: the period

¹⁰ Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London: Routledge, 2003), 205.

¹¹ Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London: Longman, 1989), 23-27 and John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987), 249.

between February 11-March 31, 2013, a timeline which oversaw the unexpected announcement of Pope Benedict XVI's retirement, the conclave that elected Bergoglio as Pope and his inauguration, and his first Passion Week (379 articles); June 1-30, 2013 marking Pope Francis's first international trip to Brazil for World Youth Day (146 articles); December 1-31, 2013, covering year-end reflective pieces and Pope Francis being named *Time* "Person of the Year" (112 articles); January 1-31, 2014, the month in which *Rolling Stone* featured Pope Francis on the cover (101 articles); June 1-30, 2015, the month Pope Francis's first encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, was released (192 articles); and September 1-30, 2015, Pope Francis's first visit to Cuba and the United States (472 articles). The sample accounts for media coverage from each month associated with a key moment, in order to capture preparations for the conclave and papal visits, as well as public reaction.

The sample on Obama comprised 3,467 articles from 10 British, American, and Canadian newspapers. The publications included in the sample are *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The Toronto Star*, and the *National Post*. The key moments identified with Obama and his public image and identity and the dates associated with the data collection for his portion of the sample are: July 27-August 10, 2004, covering the reaction to his keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention (63 articles); August 11-25, 2004, in which his 1995 memoir *Dreams from My Father* was re-released following the publicity after his Democratic National Convention speech (nine articles); October 16-30, 2006, in which Obama releases his second book, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (44 articles); February 10-24, 2007, after Obama announces his presidential campaign (90 articles); November 4-18, 2008, marking Obama's election as the first African American

president of the United States (808 articles); January 20-February 3, 2009, Obama's inauguration and transition into office (604 articles); October 9-23, 2009, reaction to the announcement of Obama as the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize (170 articles); March 23-April 6, 2010, following Obama's signing of the Affordable Care Act (330 articles); April 20-May 4, 2010, commentary on response to Obama's handling of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion (127 articles); May 2-16, 2011, documenting coverage of the death of Osama Bin Laden by Navy SEALs (510 articles); May 9-23, 2012, Obama announces his support of gay marriage during an interview with ABC's Robin Roberts (203 articles); November 6-20, 2012, Obama elected for a second presidential term (298 articles); August 9-25, 2014, Obama's reaction to the protests in Ferguson, Missouri following the shooting of a Black teenager by a white police officer (96 articles); and January 18-February 1, 2017, after Obama conducted his final press conference and leaves the White House (115 articles). The sample collects data for the two weeks following the event associated with Obama's public image. Since the President of the United States is a daily presence in the news, a sample timeframe of two weeks is a long enough period to capture media reaction without being inundated with so much primary material that the data collection loses focus.

For news media reporting on Westwood, 735 articles from British, American, and Canadian publications were included in the content analysis with a sample date ranging from January 1, 2004 until June 30, 2018. The publications included in the sample are the *Daily Mail*, *The Herald*, *The Independent*, *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Scotsman*, *The Times*, *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *Women's Wear Daily*, *The Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, and the *National Post*. The beginning of the sample corresponds with the months leading up to the April 2004 opening of the Vivienne

Westwood retrospective at the Victoria & Albert Museum. The display portraying Westwood's career helped cement her iconic status and was especially meaningful since the designer is the first British woman to be recognized with an exhibit by the legendary cultural institution.¹² *The Independent's* Susannah Frankel highlights the significance of the exhibit marking a "great year" for Westwood, noting "all punks, pirates and princesses, it forced even the designer's detractors to admit her status as one of the country's most powerful forces."¹³ The sample end date of June 30, 2018 coincides with the mid-year release of the documentary *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist*. Directed by Lorna Tucker, the documentary first debuted at the January 2018 Sundance Film Festival and was later released in the United Kingdom in March and in North America during the summer months. The documentary is an intriguing source of analysis since it not only represents the pinnacle of Westwood's persona, but also illuminates the tensions and contradictions involved in practices of public identity construction, particularly since Westwood was very critical of how she was presented in Tucker's documentary despite being a willing participant. Unlike Obama and Pope Francis, Westwood does not receive the same extensive press treatment. The data collection for Westwood does not require the same time limitations as for Obama and Pope Francis. Despite this apparent lack of intensity, Westwood is still a constant presence in the news media, regularly receiving coverage for her runway collections, activism, and other public appearances. Due to her status as a British cultural icon, publications from Great Britain were added to the sample for Westwood, in addition to trade journals and magazines specific to the fashion industry like *Women's Wear Daily*, *Vogue*, and *Harper's Bazaar* to account for reporting that may not appear in the news media.

¹² "Anarchy in the UK – More Like God Save the Queen," *The Sunday Times*, January 1, 2006.

¹³ Susannah Frankel, "Fashion & Style: The Year When Glamour Ruled," *The Independent*, December 23, 2004.

When necessary to deepen the analysis, additional publications and cultural texts, such as memoirs, individual episodes from television series, runway collections, documentaries and films, speeches and addresses, online content, magazine editorials, promotional content and other relevant materials are drawn upon to illustrate the complex nature of constructing an iconic persona and brand identity based upon general themes emerging from the content analysis. The publication of Westwood's personal diary, *Get A Life!* and her biography *Vivienne Westwood*, co-authored with her collaborator Ian Kelly, are two important texts that illustrate not only Westwood's agency over the construction of her public persona, but also demonstrate an acknowledgement of her status as a cultural icon, and how she utilizes that awareness to gain traction for her brand identity in popular culture. Obama's 1995 memoir *Dreams from My Father* and his political biography *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* published in 2004 are texts integral to understanding how Obama controlled how his brand developed as his celebrity grew with further recognition. Pope Francis's encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, is one of the most important documents shaping his iconic status as a global leader transcending the religious institution that he represents. Other cultural texts incorporated into the analysis include: the documentary *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist* (2018); Netflix's 2019 film adaptation of Anthony McCarten's play *The Two Popes*; selected episodes from the television series *The West Wing*, *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007), *The Mindy Project* (2012-2017), *The Young Pope* (2016) and *The New Pope* (2020) that reference Obama and Pope Francis; the issues of *Men's Vogue* Sept./Oct. 2006 edition with Obama on the cover photographed by Annie Leibovitz and the January 2014 issue of *Rolling Stone* with Pope Francis on the cover; and select fashion collections from Vivienne Westwood.

In addition to this wide variety of cultural texts, Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis's social media accounts are also selectively incorporated into the analysis. Platforms like Twitter and Instagram offer a unique forum for self-branding and identity construction unique from traditional media. Since the amount of data available on social media is far-reaching, only specific posts from their official accounts will be referenced. Twitter and Instagram in particular function to reinforce existing brand identities within promotional culture. Selectively highlighting content from Pope Francis, Obama, and Westwood's social media accounts illuminates the new forms of participation available for public figures in the construction of their personas and brand identities in popular culture, and will provide an interesting point of comparison with the news reports and dominant themes emerging from the content analysis and textual analysis in regard to the politics embedded within media representation. While social media usage is often associated with Obama and Pope Francis's image, each of these figures predominantly continue to operate within traditional media outlets.

In their overview of emerging methodological approaches for persona studies research, Marshall, Moore, and Barbour highlight the powerful role of the experiences and subjectivities of the researcher in subconsciously determining textual readings of public identities. They argue that:

Any text – whether a research interview, a media text, or a document – must be placed within its historical and cultural context. Equally, however, the researcher's interpretation must be acknowledged as stemming from the positions and background of the person doing the interpreting [...] When considering a persona as a type of role, such as an artist, a doctor, a soap opera star, a professional athlete, an academic, a mother, or any other identifiable 'front,' we must as researchers consider how that persona is located within a sociohistorical context of similar personas, and also how [our own] experience of that context will inform the way that persona is created, experienced, and interpreted.¹⁴

¹⁴ Marshall, Moore, and Barbour, *Persona Studies*, 116-117.

Their reasoning highlights how persona – and identity itself – is not a fixed entity but an element that is always shifting, in terms of creation, circulation, and reception, in accordance with social, economic, political, and cultural changes. Textual readings of celebrity personas and iconic brand identities like Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis are also highly subjective, and interpretations of their public image will change due to the same transformations.

Contextualizing what she means when she references “Diana,” Shome explains that she is “referring to an image, a constantly shifting text [that has] always been a product of the media... she presented herself as an active image, just as she was actively imaged upon... With someone like Diana, the boundaries blur. In the end, what matters is the mediation that we call Diana.”¹⁵ Her argument contributes a foundation to approach understanding Westwood, Pope Francis, and Obama’s iconic identities as images or texts in popular culture. Each of these figures are subject to intense media attention, yet they are also active agents in the construction of their public identities, making their personas inherent contradictions. It is this dissonance that unveils the larger tensions in the mediation of their iconic identities in popular culture.

The decades following Obama’s ascension into a recognizable figure after his iconic keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention witnessed several social, political, and technological changes that influenced practices of identity construction, particularly in regard to branding, persona, activism, and celebrity. By evolving his persona into what Naomi Klein refers to as a “superbrand,” Obama’s image functions socially as an “appealing canvas on which all are invited to project their deepest desires [...] big enough to be anything to anyone yet has an intimate enough feel to inspire advocacy.”¹⁶ The themes comprising Obama’s public identity work to shape the larger social trends that determine the reception of other figures in

¹⁵ Shome, *Diana and Beyond*, 39.

¹⁶ Naomi Klein, “How Corporate Branding Has Taken Over America,” *The Guardian*, January 16, 2010.

public discourse, including Westwood and Pope Francis. For example, Shome's analysis of Princess Diana situates the former member of the Royal Family within larger "cultural logics" central to the icon's public persona, such as motherhood and humanitarianism, corresponding to "millennial logics of citizenship that have been sweeping North Atlantic democracies since the 1990s."¹⁷ Her work stresses the importance of contextualizing the social dynamics around public figures since the logics "through which a particular celebrity or icon is given meaning, as well as producing meaning, intersect with the positioning of other celebrities around the same time."¹⁸ Costley White's distinction between framing and branding is also valuable for the analysis of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis. Employed by scholars such as Todd Gitlin, framing examines the way news stories are presented to the public, paying specific attention to how the media promote or conceal certain ideologies to form a dominant reading about various issues, communities, or public figures deemed iconic. Arguing that the term is better suited to examine neoliberal or promotional discourses in news media than a tradition frame analysis, Costley White employs "branding" as a more suitable subset of framing since it "positions a media audience as consumers and participants in a consumerist cycle or dialect."¹⁹ Westwood, Pope Francis, and Obama share similar positions of power in their respected institutional environments of fashion, religion, and politics, and the establishments they represent possess significant historical trajectories of iconicity, rhetoric, and public image.

¹⁷ Shome, *Diana and Beyond*, 38.

¹⁸ Shome, *Diana and Beyond*, 6-7.

¹⁹ Costley White, *Branding of Right-Wing Activism*, 10.

Chapter Four: Mainstreaming Outsiders through the Agency of Personas

“What is interesting is that persona always has a political dimension. It has been identified as a strategic identity, a form of negotiation of the individual in their foray into a collective world of the social. Persona is a fabricated reconstruction of the individual that is used to play a role that both helps the individual navigate their presence and interactions with others and helps the collective to position the role of the individual in the social. Persona is imbued with politics at its core.”

--- P. David Marshall and Neil Henderson¹

Journalists, curators, and other cultural intermediaries ultimately play critical roles in contributing to the development of Vivienne Westwood, Barack Obama, and Pope Francis into recognizable public figures, and work to build their media representation and shape these figures into iconic identities in public discourse. Despite enjoying immense symbolic power in public discourse, iconic figures do not materialize independently, nor are they fixed entities, with their symbolic value subject to fluctuations from socioeconomic, political, and cultural shifts. In accordance to Jeffrey C. Alexander’s theory of how iconic power is constructed, determining which public figures are categorized with such an esteemed title and for what particular reasons is a power he credits partly to the influence of cultural intermediaries.² In the examples of Obama and Pope Francis, who were both relatively unknown to the masses when they assumed positions of power and influence, journalists were largely responsible in determining the frames utilized to promote and brand each figure to the public, ultimately shaping the larger reaction and reception to the politician and pontiff.³ After establishing her identity as a fashion designer influenced by the socioeconomic factors that popularized the punk movement, Westwood’s persona is often reacting against the judgements directed towards her work by critics. Pope

¹ P. David Marshall and Neil Henderson, “Political Persona 2016 – An Introduction,” *Persona Studies* 2, no. 2 (2016): 1.

² Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Iconic Power and Performance: The Role of the Critic,” in *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Dominik Bartmanski, and Bernhard Giesen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 32.

³ Alexander, “Iconic Power and Performance,” 38.

Francis, Obama, and Westwood, however, are each astutely aware of how their image is received by their critics and larger public, and strategically utilize this self-awareness to their advantage. Demonstrating varying degrees of agency over how their identities circulate in public discourse, Westwood, Pope Francis, and Obama's involvement in the representation of their image created by cultural intermediaries raises intriguing questions regarding the creation of icons and their rise to prominent positions in contemporary culture.

In a similar manner to 'icon,' the terms 'fame' and 'celebrity' have different meanings and connotations despite often being used interchangeably in popular discourse. Fame as a concept derives from public recognition of achievement and accomplishment, historically linked to male activity in Greek and Roman mythology; tabloid attention of female figures occupies the passive realm of celebrity, a relatively recent product resulting from the media industries of the 20th century.⁴ Fashion designers were generally associated with the category of fame due to their artistic achievements, but now are frequently recognized as celebrities. The growth of fashion media has consequently worked to promote the image and persona of the fashion designer into a brandable identity in popular culture. More frequently viewed as celebrities instead of artists, fashion designers are expected to mediate a unique and distinguishable persona to assist in the promotion of their labels and corporate brand. Westwood is frequently framed within the discourse of celebrity by media reporting, especially in regard to her unconventional personality. Iconic moments such as receiving her Order of the British Empire while not wearing underwear enforce her celebrity status in popular culture through the focus on her appearance instead of achievements, which have frequently been underappreciated. The celebrity status of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis as cultural icons is primarily due to their media representation, and

⁴ Liesbet van Zoonen, "The Personal, the Political and the Popular: A Women's Guide to Celebrity Politics," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (2006): 290.

how these three figures are easily recognizable due to the powerful images that compose their public personas.

Persona is a valuable concept to understand contemporary cultural dynamics in identity construction since the notion expands upon previous conceptions of celebrity, while holding the individual accountable in the construction of their public image. Marshall argues that persona as a conceptual term encourages an exploration in regard to “the masks of identity as they are both constructed by our elaborate media and communication system and enacted by individuals with a degree of intention and agency.”⁵ The deliberate unveiling and concealment of identity reveals the performative nature of persona. Marshall, Kim Barbour, and Christopher Moore expand upon the relationship between public image and performance, arguing that persona’s main purpose resides in the ability to:

Convey the performance and, as such, it serves as a position from which to speak to an audience. A persona, however, cannot be located in a unique or a discreet object; a persona is formed by the relations of a series of performances and assembled objects, and it is never a single act, object, profile, or account. Persona is accrued and curated.⁶

Celebrity personas are textual formations shaped by cultural intermediaries, who are primarily responsible for Westwood, Pope Francis, and Obama’s media representation since they determine the frames, narratives, and rhetoric fundamental to their public image.

Obama, Pope Francis, and Westwood demonstrated a unique ability to leverage their outsider status to elevate their brand into the mainstream media culture. Following the extensive media reaction to his keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, Obama’s profile as a potential presidential candidate was a dominant frame circulating throughout popular

⁵ Marshall, “Personifying Agency: The Public-Persona-Place-Issue Continuum,” *Celebrity Studies* 4, no. 3 (2013): 370-371.

⁶ Marshall, Christopher Moore, and Kim Barbour, *Persona Studies: An Introduction* (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), 21.

culture that worked to establish his brand identity for a public relatively unfamiliar with his persona. While television programs like *Gilmore Girls* and *The West Wing* visualized an Obama presidency, he also demonstrated an ability to control what aspects of his identity became public knowledge by the strategic release of his memoirs *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*. Drawing parallels to the role of the keynote address that instantly established Obama's image, Pope Francis became a global celebrity after his 2013 election to the papacy. Although his previous identity as Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio required him to maintain a public persona in Buenos Aires, he primarily worked outside of the political atmosphere of the Vatican. His outsider status to the political hierarchy of the Vatican, which had been subject to intense scrutiny during Pope Benedict XVI's reign, was one characteristic appropriated by the press to brand Pope Francis's image as a radical reformist who will bring about drastic change to an institution experiencing a profound identity crisis. The role of the press in creating Pope Francis's public image to a global audience largely unfamiliar to the new pontiff is best illustrated by declaring him "the people's pope," an intertextual reference to Princess Diana. As a working-class woman with no formal design education, Westwood has always been positioned at the very edges of the British fashion industry despite her esteemed status as a cultural icon. Westwood, however, is unique from Obama and Pope Francis in that her image slowly developed from the notoriety gained due to her involvement in establishing Britain's punk movement with Malcolm McLaren. Although she is frequently the subject of extensive media attention stemming from her uncanny personality, audiences became either introduced or reacquainted with Westwood after her involvement in the 2008 film adaptation of *Sex and the City*. Westwood is critical over how she is portrayed by the British press, and the 2018 documentary *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist* exposes insights into how she is constantly

attempting to reclaim agency over her public persona. Addressing the larger process behind the construction of Obama, Pope Francis, and Westwood's iconic identities illustrates the labour involved in creating awareness for a public figure's media image. There are obvious differences between these three figures that influence how they are branded by the media, but each rose to prominent positions within the spheres of politics, religion, and fashion despite being initially positioned as outsiders by cultural intermediaries.

Capitalizing On A Moment: Obama's Emergence at the 2004 Democratic National Convention

Obama's rise from a state senator to the president of the United States is the result of a combination of social shifts and events coinciding at the opportune moment to create the cultural dynamic that bestowed prestige and potency upon his public image. Presidential election campaigns are mostly about timing and underlying social conditions rather than politics or the intricacies of the candidates and their platforms. Contemplating the possibility of defeat in the popular political drama *The West Wing*, Republican presidential candidate Arnie Vinick admits, "Sometimes the voters don't decide. Circumstance decides, history decides."⁷ In the HBO film *Game Change* (2012) depicting the theatrics behind the Republican ticket of John McCain and Sarah Palin, campaign advisors reconcile their probable loss on the night before election day: "She didn't cost us the election. That was Bush. That was the economy. That was just the cold hand of fate. We didn't have a chance."⁸ The examples from *The West Wing* and *Game Change* reflect Alexander's comparison between presidential campaigns and ancient conceptualizations of timing and chance. Referencing the ancient Greek conceptualization of time – *Kairos* (opportunity) as opposed to *chronos* (calendar) – Alexander notes that Obama's election in 2008

⁷ *The West Wing*, "Election Day Part II," NBC, April 9, 2006, written by Eli Attie and John Wells, directed by Christopher Misiano.

⁸ *Game Change*, written by Danny Strong, directed by Jay Roach (2012; New York: HBO Films, 2012), DVD.

reflected his ability to effectively capture the attention of an American public disenchanted by a tumultuous social climate. He credits part of the reason for overwhelming Republican success since the 1960s is the result of the Democrats' inability to discover and shape a charismatic leader who can apply rhetoric and oratory skills to ignite the nation's political movements into action.⁹ In order to win the "struggle for power in a democratic society," a politician must work to transform their image into what Alexander terms a "collective representation," which he argues is "much more than having performative success at this level or that particular event, however. It is a matter of establishing broad and compelling connections between political actors and citizen audiences over the course of a long campaign."¹⁰ A politician like Obama must mobilize their support networks to unite with those communities outside their social and political boundaries. Energy is a key element that gives life to politicians and it strengthens the ability to unite contesting publics through connection, whether in-person during campaign rallies or digitally through personalized email newsletters and social media. For Alexander, political disenchantment occurs when a candidate fails to shape their public image into a collective representation.

Even after gaining widespread media attention after the 2004 Democratic National Convention, Obama was still relatively unknown to national voters, requiring an extensive public relations campaign to promote his political platform, and, more importantly, his image as presidential. For instance, Obama's keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention exemplifies a form of personal branding supporting his evolving political persona. The speech acted as an extension of *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (1995/2004) by introducing his life story to the nation and introducing the political beliefs that

⁹ Alexander, *Politics of Performance*, 1-4.

¹⁰ Alexander, *Politics of Performance*, 18 and 29.

would form the core of *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (2006). Obama's selection by presidential candidate John Kerry to deliver the keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention received substantial media attention that intensified following favourable media reviews and growing support among Democratic delegates, but it was not the first time he received significant coverage by the press. Obama's appointment as the first Black president of the *Harvard Law Review* in February 1990 was covered by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Noting his background as a community organizer in Chicago, both newspapers remarked that Obama at the time planned to break the traditions of previous editors – who typically clerked for the Federal Court of Appeals and Supreme Court Justices after graduating – by opting to practice corporate law before returning to community work, with the intention of possibly running for political office.¹¹ Although making history at one of the country's most respected law reviews, *The New York Times* observed that Obama's achievement was not enough to be featured in a calendar created by Troy Chapman, a student at Harvard Law School, showcasing the achievements of the institution's Black male students.¹² The publicity Obama gained as the president of the *Harvard Law Review* eventually led to the 1995 publication of his first book, *Dreams from My Father*, which received mainly positive reviews from publications like *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*.¹³

Sporadic coverage reported on Obama's failed congressional bid, and he eventually began receiving more consistent but not substantial national attention as a potential candidate for

¹¹ Fox Butterfield, "First Black Elected to Head Harvard's Law Review," *The New York Times*, February 6, 1990 and Roxanne Roberts, "Personalities," *The Washington Post*, February 8, 1990.

¹² David Margolick, "At The Bar: Witnesses For The Positive, Promising Young Black Men Adorn A Harvard Calendar," *The New York Times*, January 11, 1991.

¹³ Paul Ruffins, "Racism or Attitude," *The Washington Post*, August 20, 1995 and Paul Watkins, "A Promise of Redemption," *The New York Times*, August 5, 1990.

Illinois' senate seat.¹⁴ *The Washington Post* proclaimed him as the frontrunner and a “bright hope” for the Democrats in the 2004 November election, *The New York Times* referred to Obama as a “treasured commodity in the Democratic Party,” and *USA Today* described him as a “shooting star” who inspires “whispers about a presidential future” from party insiders.¹⁵ Reporting on his winning of the Democratic nomination to run for the Senate in November 2004, *The New York Times* incorporated Obama's remarks to his supporters:

I think it's fair to say that the conventional wisdom was we could not win [...] We didn't have enough money. We didn't have enough organization. There was no way that a skinny guy from the South Side with a funny name like Barack Obama could ever win a statewide race. Sixteen months later we are here, and Democrats from all across Illinois – suburbs, city, downstate, upstate, black, white Hispanic, Asian – have declared: Yes, we can! Yes, we can! Yes, we can!¹⁶

The rhetoric and symbolism used by Obama in his comments are noteworthy because they later become significant themes forming his iconic persona. Obama's reference to his name and appearance, the allegory of a united country, and the repetition of the phrase “yes we can” constitute one of the earliest usages of the trademarks that came to signify his political persona and brand identity. The most notable examples where such motifs and rhetoric were further utilized to establish Obama's public image include his keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention and the branding of his 2008 presidential campaign.

In the months leading up to the 2004 Democratic National Convention, Obama continued to be the subject of significant but still limited national media attention. Bob Herbert of *The New York Times* cautioned readers to “remember the name Barack Obama” since “you'll be hearing it

¹⁴ See, for example, Kevin Davis, “Former ‘60s Militant Working to Change ‘Culture of Violence,’” *USA Today*, March 20, 2000, “Campaign Briefing,” *The New York Times*, March 21, 2000, Jodi Wilgoren, “Illinois Senator Announces He Won't See Re-election,” *The New York Times*, April 16, 2003, and Monica Davey, “Closely Watched Illinois Senate Race Attracts 7 Candidates in Millionaire Range,” *The New York Times*, March 7, 2004.

¹⁵ Harold Meyerson, “A Bright Hope in Illinois,” *The Washington Post*, March 12, 2004, Monica Davey, “As Quickly as Overnight, a Democratic Star Is Born,” *The New York Times*, March 18, 2004, and Debbie Howlet, “Dems See A Rising Star in Illinois Senate Candidate,” *USA Today*, March 19, 2004.

¹⁶ Davey, “Democratic Star is Born.”

a lot as this election season unfolds.”¹⁷ Hillary Clinton – who later became Obama’s main competitor during the 2008 Democratic primaries – was reported to have hosted fundraising parties for Obama’s Senate campaign at her Washington, D.C. home.¹⁸ In a feature on his rising profile as a “media darling” in *The Washington Post*, E.J. Dionne Jr. noted that “there’s already speculation that he may be the first African American president of the United States – and he’s only a state senator.”¹⁹ *The Washington Post* conversely framed the announcement of Obama delivering the convention’s keynote address as part of Kerry’s attempts to appeal to the Black vote, following criticism concerning the lack of diversity within his campaign.²⁰ In the days leading up to his address, Obama appeared on the nationally televised political talk shows *Meet the Press* (NBC), *Late Edition* (CNN), and *Face the Nation* (CBS) to build greater public awareness. Although larger press coverage remained relatively scarce, profiles preceding Obama’s address already framed him within the discourse of the spectacle, celebrating his young age and the hype among convention delegates and attendees regarding his oratory style and rising political potential.²¹

Obama’s keynote address was widely acclaimed by political commentators and still continues to be one of the main events associated with his iconic persona. Reflecting on its legacy during the 2016 Democratic National Convention, Mark Leibovich noted that the “speech became a touchstone of national unity and a soaring manifesto of hope that would form the foundation of his 2008 presidential campaign.”²² In his 2017 essay exploring Obama’s legacy

¹⁷ Bob Herbert, “A Leap Of Faith,” *The New York Times*, June 4, 2004.

¹⁸ Kathy Kiely, “‘My Life’ May Give Hillary a Boost,” *USA Today*, June 23, 2004.

¹⁹ E.J. Dionne Jr., “In Illinois, a Star Prepares,” *The Washington Post*, June 25, 2004.

²⁰ Howard Kurts, “Kerry Invests \$2 Million in Ads to Court Black Voters,” *The Washington Post*, July 15, 2004 and Jonathan Finer, “Kerry Gets Warm Reception From NAACP,” *The Washington Post*, July 16, 2004.

²¹ Davey, “A Surprise Senate Contender Reaches His Biggest Stage Yet,” *The New York Times*, July 26, 2004, Mark Leibovich, “The Other Man of the Hour,” *The Washington Post*, July 27, 2004, and Peronet Despeignes, “Dem Star Taking Convention Debut in Stride,” *USA Today*, July 27, 2004.

²² Mark Leibovich, “The Speech That Made Obama,” *The New York Times*, July 27, 2016.

within the context of his unconventional upbringing outside the mainland United States, and his racial identity as a Black man, Ta-Nehisi Coates characterizes Obama's speech as illustrative of his confidence in whiteness, arguing that his address "does not belong to the literature of 'the struggle,' it belongs to the literature of prospective presidents – men (as it turns out) who speak not to gravity and reality, but to aspirations and dreams."²³ *The Final Year*, the 2017 HBO documentary directed by Greg Barker capturing the activities of Obama's foreign policy advisors during the final year of his presidency, opens with a timeline of iconic moments in Obama's political career, beginning in 2004 with his speech to the Democratic National Convention; Ben Rhodes, a speechwriter and advisor to Obama who features prominently in the documentary credits his career to Obama's speech comparing the influence when first watching as being "hit by lightning."²⁴

The speech was not fully televised to national audiences on the major networks, making the iconic impact of Obama's keynote address more noteworthy and enabling journalists and reporters the power to frame Obama's image to the public. Cable channels and PBS provided extensive coverage, whereas the networks chose to air only an hour from three nights of the four-day event.²⁵ *The New York Times* projected that approximately 15,000 journalists covered the convention, reinforcing the significance of the event to civil society, although more so for self-serving symbolism and political branding opportunities.²⁶ While *Today's* Katie Couric noted that Obama "electrified" the convention, *The Washington Post* condemned NBC for its decision to "air its lame reality shows and sitcom reruns."²⁷ The newspaper continued its criticism of the

²³ Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power*, 301.

²⁴ *The Final Year*, directed by Greg Barker (2017: HBO), Netflix.

²⁵ David Bianculli, "Convention's Great Divide," *New York Daily News*, July 30, 2004.

²⁶ "The Democrats' Week in Boston," *The New York Times*, August 1, 2004.

²⁷ Tom Shales, "Too Nice For Their Own – and Our – Good," *The Washington Post*, July 29, 2004.

main networks' decision not to broadcast more of the Democratic National Convention, publishing a letter from a reader:

As Barack Obama said so eloquently Tuesday night, 'In the end, that is God's greatest gift to us, the bedrock of this nation: the belief in things not seen, the belief that there are better days ahead.' How much better off as a nation would we be had more people, especially the young people who are our future, been able to hear the inspiring words of a man born to a father from Kenya and a mother from Kansas who shared an abiding faith in the possibilities of this nation.²⁸

Aside from supporting the growing criticism regarding the American television networks, the reader's letter also illuminates how quickly Obama's backstory became engrained into public discourse. Upset about not witnessing Obama's speech live, another reader of *USA Today* complained that "as useful as edited news commentaries are, they don't measure up to seeing and hearing the speakers in their entirety and in their own words."²⁹ Obama's developing political persona, however, was aided by the lack of live coverage. Cultural intermediaries fortunate enough to witness the event were able to frame his image as a spectacular presidential contender with rhetoric supporting the hype and excitement surrounding Obama prior to the convention. Since television audiences were unable to immediately watch his speech and contextualize it for themselves, journalists and reporters reinforced their privileged status as opinion leaders in helping Obama's image gain symbolic power by transforming the address into an iconic moment through their overwhelming praise.

Political commentators were quick to applaud Obama's address as an iconic moment. Writing for *The Christian Science Monitor*, Jeremy Dauber was one of numerous columnists and pundits who applied the cinematic motif of "a star is born" to Obama's address:

Sure, Obama's speech had some of the same themes and touches of your classic set piece "political speech." There was the personal biography, describing a rise up from adversity. There was the call for unity. There was the reference to foundational documents of

²⁸ "Reflections on the Democratic Convention," *The Washington Post*, July 29, 2004.

²⁹ "Lack of Convention Coverage By TV Networks Brings 'Shame,'" *USA Today*, July 29, 2004.

American history and to recent successes of political rhetoric [...] But hearing Obama tell it, you realize how the greats – in movies and in politics – take the same sentiments, and they make it new. They make you feel like you’re hearing it and watching it for the first time. They get you excited. You watch the same pratfalls or professions of love or lone heroes facing down villains or yes, giving a political speech, and while you’ve seen it countless times before, you’re still enraptured, intensely engaged, watching the screen, remembering that these are actually ideas, not clichés. And that’s the kind of thing that if you pull it off, you get your shot at becoming immortal. There were some good speeches tonight. But only his transcended “good” to “great.” Only one that broke out of both the silence created by the absence of television coverage and the bonds of the stories created by television pundits.³⁰

Dauber’s commentary reflects the larger iconic discourse applied to Obama’s speech by other journalists and pundits. Since the speech was not televised to a national audience, the observations by Dauber and other cultural intermediaries gain even greater symbolic power in the immediate transformation of Obama’s public persona into an iconic figure.

Visualizing an Obama Presidency: *Gilmore Girls* and *The West Wing*

While there had yet to be a person of colour elected to the White House, film and television helped normalize the idea of a Black president of the United States in the imaginary of American cultural politics. Kellner and Michael Ryan first addressed how Hollywood during the 1970s projected the image of Ronald Reagan as president, with films promoting American heroics and supremacy over threats of communism.³¹ The popularity of films like *The Man* (1972) and *Head of State* (2003) and the television series *24* (2001-2010/2014) featuring Black men as president are important texts representing for Kellner popular culture’s role to “prepare the conditions to elect a Black president.”³² However, Justin S. Vaughn critiques the argument that popular culture helped normalize the possibility of a Black president, noting that film and

³⁰ Jeremy Dauber, “A Star Is Born,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 29, 2004.

³¹ Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 194.

³² Douglas Kellner, “Barack Obama and Celebrity Spectacle,” *International Journal of Communication* 3 (2009): 732.

television featuring representations of Black presidents are relatively scarce, and those that do feature insensitive, if not racially questionable, portrayals and storylines.³³ Obama's election represented a stark contrast to the depiction of a Black president in popular culture, with Vaughn arguing that:

When the narratives of these films do not directly underscore an alleged ridiculousness to the idea of black presidential leadership (*Rufus Jones for President*, *Idiocracy*, *The Fifth Element*, *Head of State*), they put protagonists in positions where they are either battling the impossible (*Deep Impact*, 2012, 24) or are under threat of assassination and removal from office (*The Man*, 24).³⁴

Denoting a further critique of Kellner's argument, Ta-Nehisi Coates asserts that the portrayal of a Black president by comedians including Richard Pryor and Dave Chappelle signified the inconceivability of such an occurrence.³⁵ Kellner also extends his argument of texts portraying Black men within authority positions to Morgan Freeman's role of God in the films *Bruce Almighty* (2003) and its sequel *Evan Almighty* (2007). Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, cultural texts that focused on religion, heaven, purgatory, and communicating with spirits and ghosts such as in the novel *The Lovely Bones* (2002), *Joan of Arcadia* (2003-2005), *Ghost Whisperer* (2005-2010), and *Medium* (2005-2011) became widely popular to a nation still in collective mourning. Portraying a Black man as God in films that continue this trend places further significance on Kellner's argument of naturalizing the sociocultural conditions that enabled Obama's election as president.

While 1972's *The Man* starring James Earl Jones was one of the earliest films to portray a Black president, direct and indirect references to Obama began appearing on fictional television

³³ Justin S. Vaughn, "Character-in-Chief: Barack Obama and His Pop Culture Predecessors," in *Iconic Obama, 2007-2009: Essays on Media Representations of the Candidate and New President*, ed. Nicholas A. Yates and Derrais Carter (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2012), 47.

³⁴ Vaughn, "Character-in-Chief," 61.

³⁵ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (New York: One World, 2018), 300.

programs after the success of his convention address. In an episode from the final season of the drama series *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007), the co-lead character Rory Gilmore, the editor of the Yale Daily News and an aspiring journalist, mentions to a prospective employer that she interviewed Obama for the student newspaper, and although he declared he had no plans to run for president, she describes that there was “a twinkle in his eye.”³⁶ This particular episode initially aired in November 2006, the same period in which Obama was promoting the release of his second political memoir *The Audacity of Hope*. The likelihood of a presidential run was discussed regularly in print publications such as *Time* and *O, The Oprah Magazine* and during televised interviews on *Late Night with Conan O’Brien*, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Today*, and *Meet the Press*.³⁷ Airing three months after Obama announced his candidacy, the May 2007 series finale of *Gilmore Girl* ends with Rory accepting a position for an online magazine to report on Obama’s presidential campaign. In addition to referring to him as “the future president of the United States,” the program perceptively alludes Rory’s position on the campaign trail will end with Obama’s presidential election.³⁸ *Gilmore Girls* was infamous for the program’s heavy reliance upon popular culture references; politicians from Hubert Humphrey to George Bush were routinely name-checked by various characters, with one episode featuring the character Kirk delivering a speech in a performative reference to Howard Dean’s infamous “Dean scream.” The sincerity in which Obama is incorporated into the cinematic language of *Gilmore Girls* is a testament to how quickly his rising persona was legitimized, validated, and promoted by the media and entered into the imaginary of popular culture.

³⁶ *Gilmore Girls*, “Introducing Lorelai Planetarium,” The CW, November 21, 2006, written by Jennie Snyder, directed by Lee Shallat-Chemel.

³⁷ Howard Kurtz, “Obama? So Handsome, and Probably Delicious,” *The Washington Post*, October 30, 2006.

³⁸ *Gilmore Girls*, “Bon Voyage,” The CW, May 15, 2007, written by David S. Rosenthal, directed by Lee Shallat-Chemel.

The character Matt Santos on *The West Wing* (1999-2006) is the most notable insinuation foreshadowing Obama's rapid rise as a politician and global celebrity – although the fictional narrative provides intriguing comparisons to the dynamics of American political culture.³⁹ Initially based upon the Clinton administration, *The West Wing* remained popular during the Bush presidency due to its alternative portrayal of President Josiah Bartlet's Democratic administration, a Nobel Prize-winning liberal economist and academic from New Hampshire. Taking over from series creator Aaron Sorkin, supervising producer Eli Attie – who himself served as a speechwriter for Al Gore before shifting to television – began probing for a politician to inspire the character who would succeed Bartlet as president on *The West Wing*. After watching Obama at the Democratic National Convention, Attie contacted Obama's chief consultant David Axelrod for further insight into his persona, particularly in regard to issues concerning race and identity. According to David Remnick, Attie originally envisioned the character to be either Hispanic or African American, but admitted that “faced with the task of fleshing out a fictional first-ever and actually viable Latino candidate for President, I had no precedent, no way to research a real-life version.”⁴⁰ Played by Jimmy Smitts and first appearing in season five of the political drama (which aired from September 2004-May 2005), Matt Santos is an admired and charismatic Hispanic Democratic congressman in his early 40s from Houston, Texas. A former military pilot, he previously served as mayor of Houston, in which he oversaw dramatic health care and public housing initiatives. After being persuaded by Josh Lyman to forgo his initial plans of not running for re-election, he decides to launch his presidential campaign despite being essentially unknown outside of Houston. *The West Wing's* seventh and final season (airing from October 2005-May 2006) depicted his election campaign after narrowly

³⁹ Kellner, “Barack Obama and Celebrity Spectacle,” 733.

⁴⁰ David Remnick, *The Bridge: The Life and Rise of Barack Obama* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 422.

winning the Democratic nomination. The series ends with Santos's inauguration as the first Hispanic – and person of colour – president of the United States.

The parallels between Santos and Obama was a popular headline in the early months of the campaign, even during the primaries before Obama officially received the Democratic nomination. A February 2008 headline in *The Telegraph*, for example, rhetorically questioned, “Barack Obama stars in the West Wing?” while *The New York Times* highlighted the program's ability to adequately foreshadow even the turbulence of the 2008 campaign in an article published just a week before the election.⁴¹ The similarities between the two politicians was a popular line of questioning for *The West Wing*'s screenwriters. Speaking to *The Guardian* after Obama's success on Super Tuesday during the Democratic primaries, *The West Wing* producer and screenwriter Eli Attie confirmed Obama was the source of inspiration for Santos's character: “I drew inspiration from him in drawing this character [...] When I had to write, Obama was just appearing on the national scene. He had done a great speech at the convention [which nominated John Kerry] and people were beginning to talk about him.”⁴² Similar to Obama, Santos delivers a passionate speech addressing delegates during the Democratic Convention that helps him secure the party's nomination, with *The West Wing* writers channeling Obama's celebrity into the fictional character of Santos: “After that convention speech, Obama's life changed. He was mobbed wherever he went. He was more than a candidate seeking votes: people were seeking him. Some of Santos's celebrity aura came from that.”⁴³ The similarities between Obama and Santos include their domestic life with two young children, backgrounds in community

⁴¹ Matthew Bayley, “Barack Obama Stars in The West Wing?” *The Telegraph*, February 14, 2008 and Brian Stelter, “Following the Script: Obama, McCain and ‘The West Wing,’” *The New York Times*, October 29, 2008.

⁴² Jonathan Freedland, “From West Wing to the Real Thing,” *The Guardian*, last modified February 21, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/feb/21/barackobama.uselections2008>.

⁴³ Freedland, “From West Wing to the Real Thing.”

organizing, rhetorical and charismatic oratory style, little political experience especially in regard to foreign policy, receiving their party's nomination after a difficult primary campaign, and running against an esteemed Republican senator with moderate political views.

The resemblances between Obama and Santos are indeed striking, especially in regard to the motifs and symbolism evoked in their rhetoric and campaign imagery. In the season six episode, "Faith-Based Initiative," Santos announces his candidacy outside of the elementary school he attended in Houston, a symbolic gesture to reinforce his commitment to education reform that is the core of his platform. Hope is the central theme structuring his campaign announcement:

I wanted to start this journey in the place where it all started for me. Soon, we will be inundated by the polls and the punditry and the prognostications – all the nonsense that goes with our national political campaigns. Well, none of that matters. Because everyday children walk into this schoolhouse to glimpse their futures, to ask for hope. They may not know they need it yet, but they do. And I am here to tell you that hope is real. In a life of trials, in a world of challenges, hope is real. In a country where families go without health care, where some go without food, some don't even have a home to speak of, hope is real. In a time of global chaos and instability, where our faiths collide as often as our weapons, hope is real. Hope is what gives us the courage to take on our greatest challenges to move forward together. We live in cynical times, I know that. But hope is not up for debate. There is such a thing as false science. There's such a thing as false promises. I am sure that I'll have my fair share of false starts in this campaign. But there is no such thing as false hope. There is only hope. And with your help and your hard work and the hopes of good people all across this land, I hereby announce my candidacy for president of these United States.⁴⁴

The episode of *The West Wing* in which Santos announces his presidential campaign first aired in January 2005 – more than two years before Obama announced his own candidacy. Considering the demands and scheduling of production, the rhetoric and symbolism employed by Whitford in Santos's speech directly borrows from Obama's keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention.

⁴⁴ *The West Wing*, "Faith-Based Initiative," NBC, January 5, 2005, written by Bradley Whitford, directed by Christopher Misiano.

The name of Obama's speech, "The Audacity of Hope," is borrowed from a phrase used in a sermon by Obama's former pastor Reverend Jeremiah A. Wright Jr., and later serves as both the title and content inspiration for his second book published in 2006. Both Obama and Santos's self-serving addresses speak to the optimism of a regime change in politics. The repetition of the word 'hope' serves as the main rhetorical device; Santos mentions 'hope' nine times in his short speech, while Obama made 13 references in his longer address. The resemblance in tempo and repetition to Obama's speech is uncanny, especially in regard to this specific paragraph towards the end of his address:

I'm talking about something more substantial. It's the hope of slaves sitting around a fire singing freedom songs; the hope of immigrants setting out for distant shores; the hope of a young naval lieutenant bravely patrolling the Mekong Delta; the hope of a millworker's son who dares to defy the odds; the hope of a skinny kid with a funny name who believes that America has a place for him, too. Hope in the face of difficulty, hope in the face of uncertainty, the audacity of hope.⁴⁵

What Obama refers to as the "politics of cynicism" and "blind optimism," Santos terms "false science," "false hope," and "false starts." While Obama's speech occurred at the party's convention rather than as a campaign announcement like Santos, the timing of each address in the political and celebratory trajectory of these men is very similar. Both speeches became "moments" receiving significant media attention that helped transport Obama and Santos to the national scene.

The episode "Faith-Based Initiative" in which Santos announces his presidential campaign is written by Bradley Whitford, the actor portraying one of *The West Wing*'s main characters, Josh Lyman, the Deputy Chief of Staff to Leo McGarry in the Bartlet administration before leaving to run Santos's presidential campaign and eventually becoming his Chief of Staff.

⁴⁵ Barack Obama, *We Are The Change We Seek: The Speeches of Barack Obama*, ed. E.J. Dionne Jr. and Joy-Ann Reid (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 12.

Lyman's character was based on Rahm Emanuel, the former American political aid and congressman who served as Obama's Chief of Staff from January 2009 until leaving to launch his Chicago mayoral campaign in October 2010. Whitford and *The West Wing* showrunner Aaron Sorkin were both clients of Emanuel's brother, Ari, a Hollywood agent.⁴⁶ Commentators were quick to identify the continued parallels between *The West Wing* and the Obama administration. For example, *The Guardian* referred to Emanuel as "the real Josh Lyman," arguing that the influence of Obama and Emanuel on popular culture made the two politicians a natural pairing: "even Emanuel's critics says his political savvy and policy expertise make him a natural partner for Obama [...] Both have inspired characters on the televisions series *The West Wing*, with Emanuel providing the model for sharp-tongued aide Josh Lyman who eventually becomes chief of staff to the fictional Latino president Matt Santos."⁴⁷ *The Guardian* expanded upon their analysis of *The West Wing*'s adequate foreshadowing of the American election, comparing the program to Oscar Wilde's iconic argument and the film *Minority Report* (2001):

It was Oscar Wilde who said that "life imitates art far more than art imitates life." History has vindicated Wildean wisdom. This week, the election of Barack Obama as US president has prompted many to talk about the prescience of *The West Wing* in scripting a charismatic, idealistic, minority Democratic presidential nominee trumping an experienced Republican maverick. Now Rahm Emanuel, the man who inspired the character of Josh Lyman, has been appointed White House chief of staff. True, the relationship is not only one-way: the writers of *The West Wing* have said they modelled the young Latino congressman Matthew Santos on Barack Obama. Yet as often as not it does indeed seem to be life that does the imitation. *Minority Report* eerily prefigured the curtailment of civil liberties and imprisonment without trial under the banner of the "war on terror."⁴⁸

The Independent highlighted a season five episode in which Lyman asks his administrative assistant Donna if she told *The Washington Post* that he wrapped a dead fish in newspaper that

⁴⁶ Damian Whitworth, "To the White House and Back, via the West Wing," *The Times*, November 8, 2008.

⁴⁷ Elana Schor, "Preparing for Trouble: The Real Josh Lyman," *The Guardian*, November 7, 2008.

⁴⁸ "In Praise Of...Life Imitating Art," *The Guardian*, November 7, 2008.

was sent to a congressman he disagreed with; Emanuel was alleged to have gifted a pollster with the same present.⁴⁹ Despite being a program based upon the American political system, *The West Wing* has always been well-received by audiences and politicians in the United Kingdom (David Cameron in particular), partly accounting for why British publications mostly reported on the similarities between the real and fictional White Houses.⁵⁰

The West Wing's influence on popular culture is immense and the program has maintained a beloved position in media culture. The popular use of the acronyms "POTUS" and "FLOTUS" – referring to the President of the United States and the First Lady of the United States – is attributed to the opening scene of *The West Wing*. The program also contributed to the larger recognition towards White House advisors and aides, and in particular, the critical role of speechwriters, whose work helps mediate the core values and messaging that shapes the president's image and political persona to the public. During interviews with the press conducted before his keynote address, Obama was particularly adamant about his ownership over his words:

I like writing my own stuff. So I made a rare intelligent decision to start writing immediately after I was asked to deliver the speech. And so I actually had a draft completed before it was publicly announced, which was helpful, because if I'd known it was such a big deal, I might have gotten nervous and gotten writer's block...It wasn't actually until last week we sent it to the Kerry people, and I've been really happy with the latitude they've given me. We really haven't had too many constraints.⁵¹

It is highly unconvincing that Obama was not aware of the publicity surrounding a political convention's keynote speaker. For instance, Bill Clinton addressed the 1988 convention, and

⁴⁹ Leonard Doyle, "Obama Chooses 'Rahmbo' as Chief of Staff," *The Independent*, November 7, 2008.

⁵⁰ See, for example, James Forsyth, "When Whitehall Meets 'The West Wing,'" *The Washington Post*, last modified May 14, 2006, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2006/05/14/when-whitehall-meets-the-west-wing/8f32a960-81f0-4708-a95a-f6d583467c84/> and "U.K. Fans a Surprise Casualty of 'West Wing' Demise," *NPR*, last modified May 15, 2006, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5405617>.

⁵¹ Despeignes, "Dem Star Taking Convention Debut in Stride."

while his speech is remembered as a catastrophe and commonly regarded as the worst of his career, is a notable example of the honour associated with the role of convention keynote and the power in shaping a political persona.⁵² Although the event marks the official nomination of the party's presidential candidate, it is widely regarded by junior politicians as an opportunity to market their personas to national audiences.

Constructing Obama's Political Persona

The success of Obama's presidential campaigns was predominantly dependent upon the performance of his authentic self, an aspect of his persona legitimized by his media appearances and the family image of Obama with his wife, Michelle, and children, Malia and Sascha. Acknowledging that genuineness itself is a social construction, Gunn Enli argues that Obama's political identity demonstrates a performed authenticity in which his public image attempts to reveal his true inner self to his constituencies. Determining whether a politician is (un)authentic is a relatively recent occurrence according to Enli, which she believes emerged with the artistic shift towards skilled acting during the late 1950s alongside technological advancements in sound editing and broadcasting that altered political rhetoric, thereby requiring politicians to act more personal and intimate in their public addresses.⁵³ The authenticity of Obama's image was shaped by his diverse background and upbringing, which gave him a unique story and perspective distinguishing himself from other politicians that formed the basis for his two biographies. *Dreams from My Father* was first published in 1995 and was re-released immediately following the success of Obama's keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. While publicly Obama admitted his hesitations about running for president with little national

⁵² Steve Kornacki, "When Bill Clinton Died Onstage," *Salon*, last modified July 30, 2012, https://www.salon.com/2012/07/30/when_bill_clinton_died_on_stage/.

⁵³ Gunn Enli, *Mediated Authenticity: How the Media Constructs Reality* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 111-113.

experience, *The Audacity of Hope* – which effectively outlined his ideals and public agenda – was published in October 2006, four months prior to announcing his presidential campaign. By addressing how his backstory provided a unique perspective to revitalizing the American Dream, the books helped familiarize readers with Obama's personal history. For Enli, *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope* were important acts of image and reputation management for a politician with vast ambition yet little public awareness: "Obama managed to influence the public agenda about his origin and loyalties at an early stage [...] the autobiographies had carefully crafted a consistent persona, as they made Obama seem like a man who did not reinvent himself as he had gradually got powerful positions, but rather stayed true to himself along the way."⁵⁴ The memoir *Dreams from My Father* and the political biography *The Audacity of Hope* were key pieces released to support his electoral ambitions, but they also helped construct Obama's enduring brand identity.

Sikanku and Yates's analysis of *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope* provide insight into the memoir's categorical capability to help negotiate the complexities of identity and belonging. His African heritage, attempts to identity as Black, and status as a global citizen are three discursive elements acknowledged by Sikanku and Yates that reflect Obama's complex identity within the "absence of legitimacy for mixed racial categories of American, thereby forcing such people to place themselves within a distinctly categorical construct."⁵⁵ In particular, *Dreams from My Father* reflected Obama's gradual understanding of his Kenyan heritage and how his background – living in Indonesia as a child before moving to Hawaii to be raised by his white grandparents from Kansas – is central to his political identity that later shapes the thematic structure of *The Audacity of Hope*.

⁵⁴ Enli, *Mediated Authenticity*, 117-118.

⁵⁵ Sikanku and Yates, "Modern *E Pluribus Unum* Man," 20.

Alongside the discourse of the spectacle, celebrity culture has worked to transform politicians into recognizable stars. For Douglas Kellner, spectacles are constructed by the media primarily through captivating visuals to disrupt the monotony of routine practices and to capture the imagination of the public. Obama's presidential campaign was assisted by Kellner's theorizing of the spectacle, a phenomenon which Obama helped facilitate alongside the media, enabling him to achieve "super-celebrity" status in both popular and political culture. After visiting with American military forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, his June 2008 speech in Berlin became a spectacular media event broadcasted internationally by news networks and helped create the image of Obama as a global leader to deflect criticism over his lack of foreign policy experience. The intense media coverage from Obama's Middle East and European tour, which itself was unprecedented for a presidential candidate during an election, supports Kellner's argument that spectacular images played a critical role in the success of Obama's campaign.⁵⁶

The promotion for the October 2006 publication of his second memoir, *The Audacity of Hope*, and the reception of these media appearances by the press are examples that effectively illustrate Obama's "super-celebrity" status. Prior to the release of his memoir, Obama made television appearances on *Meet the Press*, *Today*, *Oprah*, and *The Daily Show* and was profiled by magazines such as *Marie Claire*, *Vanity Fair*, *Time*, and, most notably, the September 2006 cover of *Men's Vogue*, is one of the most notable examples of the promotional work behind branding his presidential image to the public. First launched in September 2005 by Conde Nast with production concluding by October 2008, *Men's Vogue* was geared to male readers and covered a wide range of topics related to architecture, fashion, politics, sports, business, and culture.

⁵⁶ Kellner, "Barack Obama and Celebrity Spectacle," 716-717 and 721.

Photographed by Annie Leibovitz in his Chicago home and Capitol Hill office, Jacob Weisberg's profile, "The Path to Power" directly positions Obama as the main contender for the presidency, reinforced through the cover's captioning, "How the Star of the Senate May Become the First Black President." A casual browse through the pages devoted to Obama in *Men's Vogue* reinforces Weisberg's focus. Accompanying the feature's introductory photograph of Obama sitting casually yet authoritatively in his Senate office is the lead caption: "In the follow-up to his best-selling memoir, Barack Obama lays down a grand challenge to his own party – and it may one day get him elected president."⁵⁷ Other quotes from Weisberg's profile that are specifically highlighted denote the cover's representation of Obama's presidential image: "My attitude is that you don't want to just *be* the president. You want to change the country. You want to be a *great* president," and "McCain's denunciation of Obama indicates that the GOP front-runner sees the Democratic newcomer as a threat."⁵⁸ Such quotes from the profile on Obama are bolded and emphasized by the page design, a layout choice reinforcing to the reader (who may not read the actual text) the prospect of an Obama presidency despite the fact he had yet to announce his candidacy at the time the *Men's Vogue* issue was released, and it would not be until February 2007 that he would do so.

The photographs of Obama with Michelle and his children Sasha and Malia casually relaxing on the grass outside his home function for Gregory Frame to symbolically situate the then-future president within the visual legacy of John F. Kennedy, arguing that the issue of *Men's Vogue* is an example how "it is not the *real* Kennedy that is the driving force behind the illusion, but the *image* of him which is considered the symbolic presidential ideal."⁵⁹ Obama's

⁵⁷ Jacob Weisberg, "The Path to Power," *Men's Vogue*, September 2006, 219.

⁵⁸ Weisberg, "Path to Power," 221-222.

⁵⁹ Gregory Frame, "Seeing Obama, Projecting Kennedy: The Presence of JFK in Image of Barack Obama," *Comparative American Studies* 10, no. 2-3 (2012): 169.

Men's Vogue cover was not widely well-received upon its release. Reactions ranged from Maureen Dowd's dismissal of Obama being more concerned about his celebrity status and alleged workout regimen to other reporters in *The Washington Post* and *The Guardian* citing the *Men's Vogue* cover as examples that attempt to mask his overall political inexperience.⁶⁰ Commenting on the deliberate choice to outfit Obama in his own clothing by a magazine franchise associated with high fashion, *The Washington Post's* Robin Givhan addresses the grand gesturing of the profile:

The occasion of the cover portrait and the accompanying story is ostensibly to mark the publication of Obama's book, 'The Audacity of Hope.' But mostly it is to lavish him with praise and place him before a readership that likes its political profiles leavened with articles about tennis, architecture, a \$13,500 bicycle, \$18,500 binoculars and dogs as travel companions [...] The picture of him in his white shirt and his quiet smile against the wood-grain backdrop of his Chicago home office is all about ease, control and confidence --- but not specifically power [...] In each image, Obama is pictured in warm light or soft focus. He is pondering, nurturing, working. But never glad-handing, pontificating or fundraising. The pictures celebrate the idea of Obama rather than the reality of politics.⁶¹

Her comments speak to the imagined readership of *Men's Vogue*, but also to the ways in which Weisberg's profile on Obama illuminates the presentation of his public image as both a presidential candidate and celebrity figure without addressing the politics behind his platform.

Creating Pope Francis's Public Persona

Pope Francis's election as the leader of the Catholic Church propelled the relatively unknown priest into both an institutional figurehead and a global celebrity. The combination of mass feelings of rejuvenation and rebirth from prior scandals plaguing the Catholic Church and his rejection of the excessively opulent lifestyle associated with his predecessor helped instantly

⁶⁰ Maureen Dowd, "Obama's Project Runway," *The New York Times*, October 21, 2006, Dan Glaister, "Democratic Hero Obama May Run for White House," *The Guardian*, October 24, 2006, and Kurtz, "Obama?"

⁶¹ Robin Givhan, "Mussed for Success: Barack Obama's Smooth Wrinkles," *The Washington Post*, August 11, 2006.

transform Pope Francis into an iconic figure. Exploring reasons in regard to why religious figures admired as global icons are not analyzed within the discourse of celebrity, Alpion highlights the common assumption that “religious personalities have only a public self...creat[ing] the impression that they lack a personal life and lead an uninteresting existence.”⁶² What makes Pope Francis an intriguing global icon is how his persona negotiates between his complicated personal history and the public desire for a pontiff to initiate social reforms in a predominantly conservative institution – a yearning similar to the expectations of Obama during his presidency regarding key foreign policy issues like withdrawing from Iraq and Afghanistan and closing Guantanamo Bay. Similar to the press portraying Obama as an instant celebrity after his 2004 speech and an imagined president despite a significant lack of national political experience, the press played a central role in determining Pope Francis’s public image as a revolutionary pontiff upon his election to the papacy.

Media reporting on religion is a contentious topic and subsequently requires a far more extensive historical knowledge than other areas of journalism like sports or business. Stewart M. Hoover notes that the treatment of different faiths by the news media is a complex issue that is “deeply embedded in a set of historical, cultural, and political perceptions about religion’s natural, proper, or desirable place in democratic public life.”⁶³ How religious matters are communicated to the public is determined by the organizational structure and practices of the news media, with journalists determining the frames, sourcing, and discursive schemas that provide meaning to issues such as Pope Francis’s doctrine.⁶⁴ Katherine Bell’s analysis of print

⁶² Alpion, “Why Are Modern Spiritual Icons Absent in Celebrity Studies?” 222.

⁶³ Stuart M. Hoover, “The Cultural Construction of Religion in the Media Age,” in *Practising Religion in the Age of the Media: Explorations in Media, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Stuart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 11.

⁶⁴ Stig Hjarvard, “Mediatization and the Changing Authority of Religion,” *Media, Culture & Society* 38, no. 1 (2016): 8-17.

news coverage on Pope John Paul II's death underscored the lack of journalistic rigorousness despite the fact the majority of content was prepared prior to the pontiff's passing due to his lengthy battle with Parkinson's Disease. The Catholic Church is a global institution invested in matters relating to poverty, genocide, and medical crises, yet the Toronto-based newspapers analyzed in Bell's study dismissed Pope John Paul II's "even greater power as a political figure."⁶⁵ The absence of any type of critical commentary on the political concerns arising from Pope John Paul II's leadership represented for Bell a concerning "lack of understanding and context on the part of news organizations."⁶⁶ Despite the growth of faith brands due to technological advancements and marketing practices, religious issues are often ignored or overlooked by the mainstream media since the topic remains highly contested in public discourse. While specialist correspondents often cover religious issues, such as Laurie Goodstein for *The New York Times*, a media event like the papal conclave often has more general journalists reporting in order to meet the heightened coverage demands.⁶⁷

Unlike previous conclaves, such as the one that elected Benedict XVI in 2005, the 2013 conclave was unique in that it was the first in the modern era to not follow a pontiff's death. The College of Cardinals mandates that a conclave must be scheduled between 15-20 days after the pope's death, thereby providing a relatively short timetable for journalists and reporters to organize their reporting efforts. However, Benedict's unprecedented announcement of his retirement on February 11, 2013 drastically altered existing schedule protocols. The foremost concern for the scheduling of the 2013 conclave was to ensure a pope for the Catholic Church

⁶⁵ Katherine Bell, "The Legacy of Pope John Paul II: A Discourse Analysis of Toronto Newspapers." MA Thesis, York University, 2006, 82.

⁶⁶ Bell, "Legacy of Pope John Paul II," 81-82.

⁶⁷ Hoover, *Religion in the News: Faith and Journalism in American Public Discourse* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998), 74.

before the commencement of Holy Week (March 24-30, 2013). Pope Benedict's retirement officially began on February 28, 2013 with the conclave arranged for March 12, 2013. His retirement provided a longer timeframe for media outlets to organize their reporting efforts. Over 5,000 journalists and correspondents travelled to Vatican City to report on the 2013 conclave, marking one of the few instances where a religious event received global attention through concentrated media coverage. The comparative irregularity and spectacle of papal conclaves are key features defining such assemblies as major media events, which Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz argue function socially to unite fragmented communities by celebrating discourses of social resolution.⁶⁸ The reporting of a media event, such as a papal conclave, interrupts the patterns and rhythm of everyday life; for instance, the Vatican installed 17 television cameras providing a continuous live feed of St. Peter's Basilica and the chimney of the Sistine Chapel for networks to broadcast globally across their networks for the duration of the conclave.⁶⁹

The coverage of the 2013 conclave, the selection of Bergoglio as the new pontiff, and what he signified for the Catholic Church were primarily framed through the narrative of the reconciliation, especially in regard to media reports debating how Pope Francis can overcome the skepticism and distrust stemming from the institution's numerous scandals. The shaping of the 2013 conclave as a media event was not a new phenomenon for the religious institution. Pope John Paul II's 1979 trip to his native Poland is a frequent point of reference for Dayan and Katz in their theorizing of a media event. Following his death in April 2005, the funeral for Pope John Paul II is identified by P. David Marshall as a media event unifying transnational audiences since the ceremony was broadcasted internationally and attended by global leaders and dignitaries

⁶⁸ Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 9.

⁶⁹ "Papal Conclave: Most Reported News Event in History?" *The Hollywood Reporter*, last modified March 12, 2013, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/papal-conclave-reported-news-event-427534>.

along with over 300,000 mourners who made the pilgrimage to St. Peter's Square.⁷⁰ What distinguishes the media event of Pope Francis's election as pontiff is that the occasion reveals insight into the logic behind how an iconic persona is instantly developed for a global congregation largely unaware of the existing identity behind the public figure.

Notwithstanding the news media's general shock at the selection of Bergoglio for the papacy, his election was not exceptionally surprising, nor were the allegations published in the days following Bergoglio's election of his cooperation with the military dictatorship during Argentina's Dirty War. In the biographical book *The Pope: Francis, Benedict, and the Decision that Shook the World*, McCarten documents Bergoglio's quick ascent through the church's organizational hierarchy following his ex-communication by Argentina's Jesuit order.

Bergoglio's rising status was recognized in November 2002 by Sandro Magister, a respected Vatican reporter, who noted that if a hypothetical conclave were to be held, "it would have been difficult for him to refuse the election to the papacy, because he's the one the cardinals would vote for resoundingly, if they were called together to choose immediately the successor to John Paul II."⁷¹ When journalists reported their predictions prior to the vote, Bergoglio was not mentioned as a serious contender despite finishing second during the conclave that elected Pope Benedict XVI. *The Washington Post* evoked the symbolism of a chess game by positioning Bergoglio as merely a piece within the politics behind the 2005 conclave.⁷² Paul Vallely further illuminates the politics of the 2005 conclave, contending that the timing of a lawsuit filed in Argentina by a human rights lawyer charging Bergoglio with complicity for his alleged

⁷⁰ Marshall, "Introduction," *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, ed. Marshall (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2-3. For coverage of the spectacle of Pope John Paul II's funeral, see also Ian Fisher, "Pope Is Buried, Mourned by the Mighty and the Ordinary," *The New York Times*, April 9, 2005.

⁷¹ Anthony McCarten, *The Pope: Francis, Benedict, and the Decision that Shook the World* (New York: Flatiron Books, 2019), 63.

⁷² Jason Horowitz, "Progressive Voices Have Faded from the Papal Conclave," *The Washington Post*, March 11, 2013.

involvement in the abduction and torture of two Jesuit priests was part of a strategy to damage Bergoglio's chances for election.⁷³ Regardless, Bergoglio emerged as a serious contender for the papacy during the 2005 conclave when, despite swearing an oath of confidentiality, a cardinal anonymously leaked the results of each round of voting to an Italian magazine later that year.⁷⁴

Prior to the commencement of the 2013 conclave, few press reports referenced Bergoglio, and those that did portrayed the Argentinian cardinal within a dismissive and almost sarcastic tone. Recognizing the growth of evangelical Protestantism in the traditionally Catholic region, *The Irish Times* – in an article with the now ironic headline, “Moment may have passed for Latin America to provide pope” – highlighted the institution's complicated role during the Dirty War, but did not explicitly address Bergoglio's alleged actions.⁷⁵ *The Guardian* merely pointed out that Bergoglio exceeded expectations in the 2005 conclave by receiving more votes than Milan's Cardinal Carlo Mario Martini, a fellow liberal-leaning Jesuit.⁷⁶ Also writing in *The Guardian*, Sam Jones discredited Bergoglio's chances for the papacy, but in doing so, illuminated some of the traits that became central to his papal persona: “Then there are those who find fame for other reasons: Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the Jesuit intellectual and archbishop of Buenos Aires who travels around town by bus and told his compatriots not to waste their money on plane tickets to Rome to see him become a cardinal but to give it instead to the poor.”⁷⁷ Although his inconspicuous approach is central to Pope Francis's brand identity as pontiff, the commentary

⁷³ Paul Vallely, *Pope Francis: The Struggle for the Soul of Catholicism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 1-7.

⁷⁴ McCarten, *The Pope*, 21.

⁷⁵ Tom Hennigan, “Moment May Have Passed for Latin America to Provide Pope,” *The Irish Times*, February 13, 2013.

⁷⁶ Dylan Matthews, “The Political Science of Papal Elections,” *The Washington Post*, February 11, 2013 and John Hooper, “Conclave to Begin with No Favourites,” *The Guardian*, March 12, 2013.

⁷⁷ Sam Jones, “Papal conclave: Fault Lines Emerge as Pope-Makers Gather to Vote For A New Holy Father,” *The Guardian*, March 9, 2013.

from *The Guardian* reflects the facetious way that the former Argentinian cardinal was framed as improbable for the position.

The announcement of Bergoglio's election to the papacy and his subsequent appearance on the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica inevitably generated surprise from the press, and, by extension, the public. Writing in *The New York Times*, Ross Douthat confessed that "Bergoglio was no more on my radar screen over the last two weeks than he was on (almost) anyone else's"; his comments reflect the general astonishment characterizing the media reaction.⁷⁸ Justifying the media's inability to foresee Bergoglio's chances for the conclave, David Leonhardt in *The New York Times* drew upon a Vatican expert's argument that "the chances of being elected pope decreases in proportion to the number of times he is described papabile in the press."⁷⁹

Attempting to visualize Pope Francis's papacy, Douthat writes:

His age would suggest a kind of caretaker pope, but his name (evoking not only Francis of Assisi but the great Jesuit Francis Xavier as well) suggest a mix of humility and purifying zeal; his rich biography, meanwhile, offers enough material for multiple narratives, multiple hopes, and (of course) multiple lines of attack from the church's many critics.⁸⁰

Douthat's imagining of the new pontiff signifies the dominant narrative framework employed by the press upon the announcement of Bergoglio to the papacy. Since Pope Francis was mostly unknown to both the majority of those reporting on the conclave and to the larger public, the press occupied the powerful position of selecting the frames, themes, and symbolism used to introduce, familiarize, and brand the new pontiff to a global audience.

Pope Francis's age was one of the first elements of his persona that gained initial reaction and surprise from the press, primarily due to the availability of only superficial biographical

⁷⁸ Ross Douthat, "Pope Francis I," *The New York Times*, March 13, 2013.

⁷⁹ David Leonhardt, "In Papal Elections, Are Long Shots the Rule?" *The New York Times*, March 13, 2013.

⁸⁰ Douthat, "Pope Francis I."

details. At age 76, Francis is reported to be the ninth oldest pope to be elected. His election follows the pattern set by the conclave that elected Benedict, who, at 78, remains the oldest pontiff since the reign of Pope Clement XII in 1730.⁸¹ At the time of Benedict's election, commenters noted that despite being in relatively good health his age signified the College of Cardinals' aspiration for a shorter papacy following Pope John Paul II.⁸² Pope Francis's tenure as pontiff was also predicted to be short upon his announcement. *The New York Times* noted an average reign of five years for previous popes elected over the age of 75 and that a younger pontiff would help invigorate an institution facing an identity crisis following years of scandal.⁸³ Numerous publications also referenced removal of a lung due to an infection during Pope Francis's teenage years as evidence of worrisome health issues threatening the length of his papacy; however, *The Wall Street Journal* highlighted that actor John Wayne's career was not jeopardized by a similar procedure conducted prior to the filming of his iconic film *True Grit*.⁸⁴ Referencing a movie icon rather than a comparable political or social figure is an intriguing comparison, reinforcing Francis's role as a "superstar" while validating his ability to lead through the lens of celebrity.

Pope Francis as the "People's Pope"

In the annual issue declaring Pope Francis as "Person of the Year," *Time* introduced the magazine's piece on the pontiff with the striking headline "The People's Pope" centered across a two-page photographic spread depicting a blue sky and the pontiff on the bottom right hand

⁸¹ Nate Silver, "For Cardinals, Advantages in Choosing an Older Pope," *The New York Times*, March 13, 2013.

⁸² McCarten, *The Pope*, 108.

⁸³ Silver, "Advantages in Choosing an Older Pope," Laurie Goodstein, "New Pope Shifts Church's Center of Gravity Away From Europe," *The New York Times*, March 14, 2013, and Emily Schmall and Larry Rohter, "A Conservative With a Common Touch," *The New York Times*, March 14, 2013.

⁸⁴ Hannah Strange, "Friend of the Poor Who was also 'Cosy with the Dictators,'" *The Times*, March 14, 2013, Roy Greenslade, "Pope Francis Receives a Cautious Welcome from National Newspapers," *The Guardian*, March 14, 2013, and "Pope Francis: Heard on the Square," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 14, 2013.

corner waving to an imaginary public.⁸⁵ After Pope Francis visited migrants on the island of Lampedusa roughly four months into his papacy, the *CNN Belief Blog* reported on the pontiff's trip with the headline, "Is Pope Francis the Catholic Princess Diana?"⁸⁶ Reflecting on the selection of Pope Francis as Time's "Person of the Year," *Jezebel* also directly referenced the deceased former member of the British royal family, declaring that "Pope Francis Is the Princess Diana of Popes."⁸⁷ In a similar manner recognizing the historic nature of Pope Francis's 2015 tour of the United States, the celebrity tabloid *US Weekly* published a special commemorative issue ahead of his visit, with the first article featuring photographs of Pope Francis interacting with members of the public under the bold headline, "The People's Pope."⁸⁸ Branding Pope Francis within the discourse of the "people's pope" by *Time* and *US Weekly* is a common theme in press reporting of his first few years as pontiff, evident in coverage of events and iconic moments as the conclave and inaugural mass, Pope Francis's appearance on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, and his official visits to Brazil and North America.

One of the earliest examples of this symbolically powerful allusion is in *The Washington Post*'s exploration of Bergoglio's selection of Francis for his papal name. For Catholic University of America theology professor Chad Pecknold – who is quoted extensively by *The Washington Post* – the choice of Saint Francis of Assisi by Bergoglio affirms that "he's going to be the people's pope. We often associate Saint Francis with incredible love for humanity."⁸⁹ Pope Francis's inaugural mass reflected the theme of compassion associated with Saint Francis

⁸⁵ Howard Chua-Eoan and Elizabeth Dias, "The People's Pope," *Time*, December 23, 2013.

⁸⁶ Eric Marrapodi, "Is Pope Francis the Catholic Princess Diana?" *CNN Belief Blog*, last modified July 14, 2013, <https://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/07/14/is-pope-francis-the-catholic-princess-diana/>.

⁸⁷ Erin Gloria Ryan, "Pope Francis Is the Princess Diana of Popes," *Jezebel*, last modified December 11, 2013, <https://jezebel.com/pope-francis-is-the-princess-diana-of-popes-1481106005>.

⁸⁸ "The People's Pope," *US Weekly*, September 2015, 4-17.

⁸⁹ Joel Achenbach, "Pope Francis: His Name Reflects 'His Ministry for the Poor,'" *The Washington Post*, March 15, 2013.

of Assisi by highlighting the struggles of the global poor, thereby symbolizing his iconic status as the “people’s pontiff” or “people’s pope.”⁹⁰ More importantly, labelling Francis as the “people’s pope” signifies Pope Francis’s iconic status through the intertextual reference to Princess Diana, coined the “people’s princess” by British Prime Minister Tony Blair in his iconic speech following her 1997 death. *The New York Times* included commentary by an individual attending a “tailgate party” celebrating Pope Francis’s 2015 visit to Philadelphia, who directly made the association between the two iconic individuals noting that “he reminds me of Princess Diana.”⁹¹ The allusion to Princess Diana is mainly rhetorical, requiring readers to draw connections between the two public figures. Britain’s *The Sunday Independent* is one of the few publications to directly make the association, arguing: “They’re already calling Francis ‘the people’s Pope,’ which is fitting really, seeing as he seems to enjoy the same healthy disregard for protocol as Diana, the people’s Princess, and a sort of secular pope of her time.”⁹² Their mention of Princess Diana’s dismissive attitude towards the institutional customs and practices of the monarchy is meant to illuminate the similar awareness by Pope Francis of how his image challenges the expected protocols of the Catholic Church, particularly in regard to his rejection of the papal palace for his living quarters and deliberate decision not to dress in the elaborate vestments expected of a newly elected pontiff appearing on the balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica.⁹³

The intertextual reference to Princess Diana in Pope Francis’s media presentation gains further symbolic traction by the coverage of his first Holy Thursday as pontiff. Upon announcement of Pope Francis’s intentions for Holy Thursday, *The Guardian* reported: “He has

⁹⁰ John Chapman, “A Plea for the Poor from People’s Pope,” *The Daily Express*, March 20, 2013.

⁹¹ Alyson Krueger, “Parties to Honor the Pope,” *The New York Times*, September 24, 2015.

⁹² Brandan O’Connor, “Pope Francis: Just Another Shepherd in Sheep’s Clothing,” *The Sunday Independent*, March 24, 2013.

⁹³ Gordon Fairclough and Stacy Meichtry, “A Humble Beginning: Signs From a Papacy’s First Days,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 30, 2013.

already made himself known as the pope who takes the bus, pays his bills and wears his old shoes. Now Pope Francis has taken another step towards solidifying his image as the people's pontiff by announcing plans to celebrate a major pre-Easter ceremony in a youth detention centre."⁹⁴ Emblematic of Jesus washing the feet of his 12 apostles, Pope Francis's decision to conduct one of the most important and traditional ceremonies in Catholicism with members of Rome's marginalized community was perceived as symbolic of his inclusive approach to the papacy, particularly in comparison to Pope Benedict who insisted such rituals be conducted within the Vatican. The most notable part of Pope Francis's Holy Thursday ritual, however, was his inclusion of two women in the conventionally all-male practice, including a Serbian Muslim female. Embracing not only women but also non-Catholics in the feet-washing custom prompted intense reaction from the press, leaving Pope Francis's critics "speechless," but was also read as an attempt to restore relations with the Islamic faith following inflammatory comments previously made by Pope Benedict XVI.⁹⁵

Despite marking the first time a pontiff conducted Holy Thursday customs in a detention centre, Pope Francis's tradition of performing the feet-washing ritual in marginalized communities was not widely reported. *The Wall Street Journal*, for instance, noted that Bergoglio as an archbishop regularly held Holy Thursday mass at different Buenos Aires' hospices, shelters, and prisons, while the *National Post* and *The Guardian* argued that Francis's inclusion of women in the ritual merely marked a continuation of inclusive practices first established in Argentina.⁹⁶ Biographers of Pope Francis also highlighted his extensive history

⁹⁴ Lizzy Davies, "Pope Francis to Celebrate Holy Thursday with Young Offenders," *The Guardian*, March 22, 2013.

⁹⁵ Fairclough and Meichtry, "Humble Beginning," Nick Miroff and Anthony Faiola, "In Pope Francis, Other Faiths See a Friend," *The Washington Post*, March 24, 2013, and Lizzy Davies, "Pope Francis Calls for Better Links Between Islam and Christianity," *The Guardian*, March 23, 2013.

⁹⁶ Meichtry, "Pope Breaks From Tradition," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 28, 2013, "Pope Plans to Hold Service in Prison Chapel, Wash Prisoners' Feet," *National Post*, March 22, 2013, and "Pope Francis Washes Female Prisoners' Feet," *The Guardian*, March 29, 2013.

involving vulnerable individuals in the rituals of Holy Thursday, particularly those suffering from AIDS. McCarten documents Bergoglio holding mass at Buenos Aires' Muñiz Hospital for Infectious Diseases in April 1998 following his appointment as archbishop, quoting the hospital chaplain's recollection of the event: "When he arrived, I explained that while the Gospel speaks of twelve male apostles, here in the hospital we had men, women, transvestites. He told me: 'Whom you choose, I will wash their feet.'"⁹⁷ During his first Holy Thursday mass as pontiff at the juvenile detention centre, Francis justified his approach during his sermon, proclaiming, "It is the example set by our Lord. The one who is highest up must be at the service of others."⁹⁸ The discursive schemas employed to frame coverage of Pope Francis's compassionately inclusive Holy Thursday rituals – symbolic of his general approach to society's most marginalized and impoverished communities – draws parallels to Diana's work on AIDS awareness, particularly in regards to the influential images of her shaking the hands of those infected with the virus without wearing gloves that subverted ill-informed ideas of transmission through touch. Although she critically situates Diana's emphasis on human contact in her humanitarian work within the unequitable power dynamics of Western society, Raka Shome notes that "Diana is allegedly to have said that the biggest disease the world suffers from is a lack of love and that touching heals all barriers of race and culture."⁹⁹ Evoking similar imagery, *The Washington Post* quotes a New York City pastor in their examination of Pope Francis as the "people's pope," who contends that, "it seems as if Pope Francis has touched the nerve of what the church is really about. In spite of

⁹⁷ McCarten, *The Pope*, 60.

⁹⁸ Meichtry, "Pope Breaks From Tradition."

⁹⁹ Raka Shome, *Diana and Beyond: White Femininity, National Identity, and Contemporary Media Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 127.

these scandals and everything that's gone on we know that the core of the church is love and joy and service."¹⁰⁰

The iconic legacy of Princess Diana as the "people's princess" and the period of collective mourning after her death reflects for both Shome and Rosi Braidotti the power of such rhetoric to interpolate citizens into a collective public regardless of class, racial, or religious differences. The most notable aspect of Diana's funeral for Braidotti is the number of minority communities, particularly women of colour, joining in the public mourning for a former member of such an hegemonic institution as the British monarchy.¹⁰¹ Her death performed a critical ideological function demonstrated through practices of shared grief, with Shome arguing that the framing of Diana as the "people's princess" articulated different formations of "belonging in the nation and new ways of imagining the national body and one's own self in relation to it."¹⁰² Framing Francis as the "people's pope" worked in a similar manner to transform the pontiff from an institutional figurehead into a global leader regardless of one's faith or religious beliefs, a motif that has continued throughout his papacy, particularly in regard to his environmental advocacy.

Pope Francis's Influence in Popular Culture

Pope Francis's instant transformation into an iconic figure and the general positive reception by the press coincided with broader visibility towards Catholicism in popular culture. The most notable example remains *Rolling Stone's* February 2014 edition featuring the pontiff on the cover of the revered cultural magazine. The coverage features a stock photograph of Pope Francis smiling and waving – key features of his persona now synonymous with his iconic

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Tenety, "Pope Francis, the 'Humble Pope'?" *The Washington Post*, July 26, 2013.

¹⁰¹ Rosi Braidotti, "In The Sign of the Feminine: Reading Diana," *Theory & Event*, 1, no. 4 (1997): 2 and 15.

¹⁰² Shome, *Diana and Beyond*, 36-37.

identity – with the accompanying article by Mark Binelli extensively detailing the pontiff’s biography and doctrine while addressing the widespread excitement that accompanies his image as the “people’s pope” in popular culture.¹⁰³ Although they compare his charismatic interactions with the public to that of Bill Clinton, *Rolling Stone*’s affirmation of Pope Francis as the “people’s pope” gained significant media attention and strengthened the intertextual narratives critical to shaping his still-developing public persona.¹⁰⁴ As the first pontiff to be featured on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, the *New York Post* noted that “the mag’s choice to put him on the cover – following stars including Eminem, Paul McCartney, Macklemore and Miley Cyrus – cements his place in pop culture.”¹⁰⁵ The day *Rolling Stone* announced Pope Francis as the cover for the February 2014 edition, a graffiti mural depicting the pontiff as a superhero appeared outside the Vatican. Designed by artist Mauro Pallotta, the graffiti art features Pope Francis flying into the air with his right fist clenched and holding a briefcase with his left hand labeled in Spanish “valores” (values).¹⁰⁶ An image of Pallotta’s mural was featured by the Vatican on their Twitter feed, Vatican News, with the accompanying text: “We share with you a graffiti found in a Roman street near the #Vatican”; the tweet received over 2,400 retweets and more than 1,100 likes.¹⁰⁷ Rome’s police removed the graffiti art merely days after it appeared.¹⁰⁸

The immense media attention directed towards Pope Francis since his election in March 2013 has led to a resurgence of film and television addressing Catholicism. Narratives, imagery,

¹⁰³ Mark Binelli, “Pope Francis: The Times They Are A-Changin’,” *Rolling Stone*, February 13, 2014, 37-43 and 66.

¹⁰⁴ Roy Greenslade, “Pope Francis Graces the Cover of Rolling Stone Magazine,” *The Guardian*, January 28, 2014, Nick Squires, “Pope Meets Talking Parrot after Dove Disaster,” *The Telegraph*, January 30, 2014, “Pope Francis’ Rolling Stone Cover Cements His Prominence In Pop Culture,” *HuffPost*, last modified December 6, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/pope-francis-rolling-stone-cover_n_4682143.

¹⁰⁵ “Papal Cover Star,” *New York Post*, January 29, 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Nick Squires, “Superhero Pope Graffiti Appears on Vatican Street,” *The Telegraph*, January 29, 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Vatican News, Twitter post, January 28, 2014, 5:12 a.m., https://twitter.com/vaticannews_it/status/428108394445025280.

¹⁰⁸ “Superhero Pope Image Rubbed Out,” *The Independent*, January 31, 2014.

and symbolism regarding expressions of spirituality and faith within media texts are not unique representations, but rather exemplify Stig Hjarvard's argument of banal religion, in which "contemporary ideas about what religion is or may be used for are informed by a bricolage of representations and practices without any necessary or close connection to specific, organized forms of religion."¹⁰⁹ The popularity of film, television, music videos, and novels like Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, Baz Luhrmann's film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, the series *Lost*, and Lady Gaga's song "Judas" are examples of cultural texts that symbolically work to normalize understandings of faith, spirituality, and the hereafter without any direct reference to religious institutions and everyday practice.¹¹⁰ The immense media attention reacting to Pope Francis's public image, however, has subsequently contributed in creating a visual space within popular culture to critically address issues central to contemporary Catholic identity within daily life. In collaboration with the Vatican, the visual culture of Catholicism comprised the theme of the 2018 Costume Institute exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination*. Displaying garments and accessories loaned by the Vatican archives in addition to pieces inspired by Catholic imagery from designers including Versace, Dolce & Gabbana, and Alexander McQueen, *Heavenly Bodies* became the institution's best-attended exhibit with over 1.6 million visitors.¹¹¹ Acknowledging the proliferation of film and television focusing on Catholic families, *The Washington Post* addressed the cinematic trend within the context of Pope Francis's visit to the United States in September 2015, noting that while "it's too early in Francis's papacy for his popularity to have had much influence on the

¹⁰⁹ Hjarvard, "Mediatization and the Changing Authority of Religion," *Media, Culture & Society* 38, no. 1 (2016): 13.

¹¹⁰ Hjarvard, "Mediatization and the Changing Authority of Religion," 13 and Paddy Scannell, "Media and Religion," *Media, Culture & Society* 38, no. 1 (2016): 3-4.

¹¹¹ "1,659,647 Visitors to Costume Institute's *Heavenly Bodies* Show at Met Fifth Avenue and Met Cloisters Make It the Most Visited Exhibition in The Met's History," *Met Museum*, last modified October 11, 2018, <https://www.metmuseum.org/press/news/2018/heavenly-bodies-most-visited-exhibition>.

Hollywood production cycle, it's fascinating to see an area of media that's often excoriated for ignoring religion find new ways to tell stories about Catholic faith and Catholic culture."¹¹² Recognized with the Academy Award for Best Picture, the release of 2015's *Spotlight*, which depicted the research behind *The Boston Globe*'s investigation of sexual abuse towards minors by parish priests, coincided with an increase in coverage of Pope Francis's actions in regard to this issue ahead of his American visit.¹¹³ First broadcasted on April 1, 2018 to mark Easter Sunday, NBC's concert performance of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar* starring John Legend recorded almost 10 million viewers and the decision to stage the rock opera was viewed by critics as symbolic of Pope Francis's success in rehabilitating the image of the Catholic Church in popular culture following the aftermath of the sexual abuse scandal.¹¹⁴ An adaptation of McCarten's play of the same name, Netflix's *The Two Popes* (2019) marks the first major cinematic portrayal of Pope Francis. The film documents an imagined meeting between the then-cardinal Bergoglio and Pope Benedict prior to announcing his resignation.

The persona of Pope Francis also had an impact on television. On the Fox/Hulu comedy *The Mindy Project* (2012-2017) one of the main characters, Danny Castellano, identifies as a practicing Catholic, declaring, "I'm so Catholic, I don't even trust this new pope!," and references to Pope Francis's evolving image is made throughout the duration of the series.¹¹⁵ When questioned by his brother, "Why are you so wound up? Pope Francis try surfing or

¹¹² Alyssa Rosenberg, "Pop culture's Catholic Resurgence," *The Washington Post*, October 27, 2015.

¹¹³ See, for example, Andrew Pulver, "Mark Ruffalo Urges Pope to Use His New Film to Heal Sex Abuse Victims," *The Guardian*, September 3, 2015 and Tom Kington, "Vatican Panel Kicks Off Meeting on Sexual Abuse by Watching 'Spotlight,'" *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 2016.

¹¹⁴ Sara Coughlin, "Has Catholicism Earned This 'Fashion' Moment?" *Refinery 29*, last modified May 3, 2018, <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2018/05/197114/met-gala-theme-catholic-imagination-meaning>.

¹¹⁵ *The Mindy Project*, "French Me, You Idiot," Fox, April 1, 2014, written by Paul Lieberstein, directed by Jack Burditt.

something?,” Danny replies, “Why’s that guy so chill?”¹¹⁶ Another episode incorporates a reference to the Church’s sexual abuse scandal, and Danny defends his religious leader, “Hey, hey. That is all over. It’s over. Pope Frank is on the case.”¹¹⁷ His mother later decorates Danny’s apartment with images of Pope Francis to impress a Catholic priest invited for dinner. While Pope Francis is a consistent source of reference for *The Mindy Project* – specifically to highlight the contradictions and ironies within Catholicism – direct mentions of and insinuations to the new pontiff can be found in a variety of television programs such as *The Good Fight*, *Homeland*, *Grace & Frankie*, *The Young Pope*, *The New Pope*, and *One Day at a Time*. Although the program does not directly reference the pontiff, contemporary Catholicism is a central theme portrayed in *Jane the Virgin*. Focusing on the multigenerational Villanueva household, *Jane the Virgin* underscores how the religion is deeply entrenched within the traditions, practices, and beliefs of the Venezuelan American family.

One of the most powerful examples of Pope Francis’s reception within popular culture is in Netflix’s *One Day at a Time* (2017-2019/2020), an adaptation of the comedy series of the same name that initially aired during the mid-1970s. The reworking of the program revolves around the Cuban American Alvarez family living in Los Angeles, in which Penelope, an army veteran newly separated from her husband and working towards becoming a nurse practitioner, is raising her teenage children Elena and Alex with the help of her mother, Lydia, a devoted Catholic. When Elena informs her family that she is a lesbian, Lydia initially struggles with the revelation, but in accepting her granddaughter’s sexual orientation she references Pope Francis’s alleged acceptance of the gay community:

¹¹⁶ *The Mindy Project*, “The Girl Next Door,” Fox, April 29, 2014, written by Michael Weaver, directed by Tracey Wigfield and Alina Mankin.

¹¹⁷ *The Mindy Project*, “I Slipped,” Fox, October 7, 2014, written by Lynn Shelton, directed by Charlie Grandy.

Lydia: Look, I know you are cool with this, but you have to understand I am a religious woman. I'm sorry, but I have a problem with Elena being gay. It goes against God. Although God did make us in his image. And God doesn't make mistakes. Clearly [refers to herself]. And when it comes to the gays, the pope did say, "Who am I to judge?" And the pope represents God. So what, am I going to go against the pope and God? Who the hell do I think I am? Okay. Okay, I'm good.

Penelope: What? You just worked that out in 10 seconds?

Lydia: Sí. Because she is my granddaughter and I love her no matter what. Ya. So, tell me, when is the parade?¹¹⁸

Pope Francis's iconic statement referenced by *One Day at a Time* occurred during an informal press conference on the flight back to Rome following Pope Francis's visit to Brazil. Presiding over the festivities for World Youth Day held in Rio de Janeiro, the trip garnered significant press attention reporting on Pope Francis's first international visit – perceived as a style of homecoming to Latin America. In response to questions concerning an alleged "gay lobby" within the Vatican, Pope Francis elaborated that "When I meet a gay person, I have to distinguish between their being gay and being part of a lobby. If they accept the Lord and have goodwill, who am I to judge them? They shouldn't be marginalized. The tendency is not the problem. They're our brothers."¹¹⁹ His words represented a stark contrast to Pope Benedict XVI's doctrinal approach, who publicly referred to same-sex marriage as an "intrinsic moral evil" comprising as "objective disorder."¹²⁰

Lydia's reference to Pope Francis's words in the episode of *One Day at a Time* stresses the way in which his statement on sexual orientation became an important moment associated with the pontiff's iconic identity, and how his public image sparked the imaginary of popular culture. More significantly, Pope Francis's comments demonstrate Alpion's argument that

¹¹⁸ *One Day at a Time*, "Pride & Prejudice," Netflix, January 6, 2017, written by Sebastian Jones and Andy Roth, directed by Linda Mendoza.

¹¹⁹ John Corvino, "A Papal Surprise: Humility," *The New York Times*, July 30, 2013.

¹²⁰ Ruth Marcus, "In Comments on Gays, Pope Francis Doesn't Pontificate," *The Washington Post*, July 31, 2013.

religious figures “employ the press and every other medium of communication with dexterity, and at times, unscrupulously, to reach their intended audiences.”¹²¹ The Catholic Church’s position on issues like gay marriage has been subject to intense scrutiny by the media. Considering that this remark occurred just over a year after Barack Obama announced his support of gay marriage in a spontaneous May 2012 interview with Robin Roberts on *Good Morning America*, Pope Francis conceivably would have been well aware over how his now-iconic phrase would be received by his critics and the public. The informal press conference is an important example illustrating his awareness over his image, and how to utilize the characteristics associated with his public persona to promote his brand through the press.

Vivienne Westwood: Developing Her Persona

The summer 2008 theatrical release of the film adaptation of HBO’s iconic television series *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) marked a significant moment in popular culture. The comedy program maintained its immense popularity with audiences after its conclusion by continuing to develop its fanbase through other forms of distribution such as syndication, digital video, and online streaming. Carrie Bradshaw, the main character, become entrenched in the imaginary of popular culture, and the synonymous transformation of lead actress Sarah Jessica Parker into a fashion icon legitimized, and still maintains, her status as an elite celebrity. Frequently remembered for her conspicuous passion towards designer shoes, the character of Bradshaw brought mass attention to boutique labels such as Manolo Blahnik while transforming costume designer Patricia Field into a recognizable figure herself. Promotional coverage for *Sex and the City: The Movie* subsequently revolved around the film’s fashion; *Women’s Wear Daily* describes the 81 outlandish outfits worn by Carrie as the “most metaphorical wardrobe in

¹²¹ Alpion, “Media and Celebrity Culture,” 542.

cinematic history.”¹²² Amongst the variety of designer clothing and accessories showcased in *Sex and the City: The Movie*, one piece of clothing in particular emerged as the film’s iconic fashion moment: a lavish silk and tulle multilayered Vivienne Westwood strapless couture gown that Bradshaw is gifted by the designer for her wedding after modelling the dress for a fictional *Vogue* cover.

The Vivienne Westwood wedding dress quickly entered into the iconography of the franchise and is often included in retrospectives of the series’ top fashion moments. *Women’s Wear Daily* in particular highlighted the couture dress as the “grand showpiece” of the film – rare praise that Westwood has not often received throughout her career.¹²³ Described by *Harper’s Bazaar* as a “corset top created in gold-backed ivory silk-satin duchess [with] the skirt from metres of ivory silk Radzimir taffeta, creating an exaggerated silhouette, nipped-in waist and a pointed sculptural bust,” the iconographic success of the gown introduced Westwood to new audiences.¹²⁴ *The Globe and Mail*, for instance, argued that *Sex and the City: The Movie* helped revitalize Westwood’s career by generating “a new level of international fame.”¹²⁵ The original couture gown featured in *Sex and the City: The Movie* was priced at over \$15,000, however a considerably cheaper, yet still relatively inaccessible, version of the dress sold out within hours upon release roughly a year after the film’s premiere on the popular online retailer Net-a-Porter.¹²⁶ To commemorate the 10th anniversary of the iconic scene from *Sex and the City: The Movie* in May 2018, Westwood released a ready-to-wear collection inspired by the original

¹²² Jessica Iredale, “Sex and the City: For Better and for Worse Dressed,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, May 23, 2008, 20.

¹²³ Iredale, “Sex and the City,” 20.

¹²⁴ “Vivienne Westwood Celebrates the 10th anniversary of the Famous *Sex and the City* Wedding Dress,” *Harper’s Bazaar*, last modified May 25, 2018, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/uk/fashion/fashion-news/a20915590/vivienne-westwood-10th-anniversary-sex-and-the-city-wedding-dress/>.

¹²⁵ Elizabeth Renzetti, “Westwood Ho!” *The Globe and Mail*, January 22, 2011.

¹²⁶ Tracey Lomrantz Lester, “Carrie Bradshaw’s Vivienne Westwood Wedding Dress Sells Out In Hours,” *Glamour*, last modified March 31, 2009, <https://www.glamour.com/story/carrie-bradshaws-vivienne-west>.

gown's corset bodice, and the dress worn by Parker herself was displayed for public viewing for two weeks in May at Westwood's flagship London boutique.¹²⁷ The couture gown featured in *Sex and the City: The Movie* is one of the most recognizable Vivienne Westwood designs.

While Obama and Pope Francis's public image were constructed in a considerably short period of time, Westwood has maintained visible presence in popular culture since emerging as a recognizable identity during the British punk movement of the 1970s. Westwood's extensive cultural influence is effectively summarized by *Women's Wear Daily*: "few designers have explored fashion's multiplicity of possibilities as the iconic yet iconoclastic Vivienne Westwood. Called both the 'Mother of Punk' and the 'Mother of Fashion,' Westwood has been pushing the boundaries and challenging the presumptions of fashion for 35 years."¹²⁸ Her political and environmental activism and iconic moments like accepting a Member of the British Empire from Queen Elizabeth at Buckingham Palace without wearing underwear are key moments commonly associated with Westwood's public image. It can be challenging, however, to recall or identify other pieces or collections by the designer other than the *Sex and the City* wedding dress, with Westwood herself admitting, "most people have never seen my clothes, but they've heard of me."¹²⁹ Evocative of Westwood's instance of self-awareness over her public image, Pamela Church Gibson argues that Westwood is more familiar to audiences for her eccentric personality than the clothes she designs, arguing:

She may have become part of the fashion establishment, but through her extraordinary attire, she nevertheless parodies the dress of the English lady and thus maintains her own self-consciously eccentric persona. She sets out, it seems, to look arresting, unusual and bizarre rather than conventionally stylish; she has famously used artist Tracey Emin and former *Baywatch* star Pamela Anderson, rather than conventional models or celebrities, in

¹²⁷ Marina Liao, "You Can Now Buy Dresses Inspired by Carrie Bradshaw's Iconic Wedding Gown," *Marie Claire*, last modified May 25, 2018, <https://www.marieclaire.com/fashion/a20914583/where-to-get-carrie-bradshaw-wedding-dress/>.

¹²⁸ Lisa Movius, "Westwood Hits Shanghai," *Women's Wear Daily*, August 16, 2005.

¹²⁹ Rose Apodaca, "On The Road With Viv," *Women's Wear Daily*, November 27, 2000.

her advertisements. Unlike Sonia Rykiel, Rei Kawakubo and even Victor and Rolf, Westwood has spurned financially profitable collaborations with the high street. She rides an old-fashioned bicycle and is obviously determined to retain her individuality.¹³⁰

Church Gibson's commentary on Westwood illuminates how the designer has strategically utilized her eccentric public image to create an instantly recognizable persona that helps her maintain relevancy in a media culture despite the struggles she confronts from the fashion industry.

Despite her concentration on political and environmental activism during the later stages of her career as a celebrity figure, Westwood credits her Northern English childhood in Tintwistle, Derbyshire as a key influence in developing her counter-hegemonic awareness. Westwood is highly critical of consumerist ideology that promotes excessive waste, which Claire Wilcox attributes to the influence of post-war frugality on Westwood's upbringing where her parents worked as textile workers.¹³¹ A subject referenced in the media interviews as well as the biographical overview of *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist*, Westwood frequently discusses how, at four years old, she became aware of the false consciousness shaping society after learning about Jesus's crucifixion, realizing "what the adult world is like – full of cruelty and hypocrisy."¹³² Her family's move to the outskirts of London to become shopkeepers was a meaningful moment for Westwood, reflecting that "it was culturally quite provincial where I came from. I didn't know about classical music or art galleries. My parents and I moved to London when I was 17, and I tried to understand the world a bit more, thinking I was stupid."¹³³ She elaborates extensively on the biographical details and personal reflections regarding her childhood in the autobiographical text *Vivienne Westwood* co-written with Ian Kelly, and her

¹³⁰ Pamela Church Gibson, *Fashion and Celebrity Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 192-193 and 195.

¹³¹ Wilcox, *Vivienne Westwood*, 9-10.

¹³² Stuart Jeffries, "Vivienne's Vision," *The Guardian*, December 3, 2011.

¹³³ Wilcox, *Vivienne Westwood*, 10 and Jeffries, "Vivienne's Vision."

family's move to London is also included in an edition of the popular children's illustrated book series *Little People, Big Dreams*.

After leaving her first career as a primary school teacher, Westwood first met Malcolm McLaren in 1965, leading to an influential yet tumultuous relationship as business, design, and intimate partners. Although vocal after his death about the emotional abuse Westwood and her children were subjected to from McLaren, she credits him for introducing her to the cultural knowledge and experiences she did not receive during her Northern English childhood that played a fundamental role in developing Westwood's design philosophy. Together in 1971 they opened their shop, Let It Rock, at 430 King's Road in London. Although the property has experienced numerous name changes to reflect changes in their design aesthetic, such as Too Fast to Live, Too Young to Die, and, currently, Worlds End, the shop remains an iconic location open to customers. Their shop embraced the theme of rebellion with fashions reacting to larger cultural and political dynamics, best illustrated in Westwood and McLaren's embrace of the Teddy-boy motif that satirized the styles of the Edwardian period and the sexual undertones characterizing their interpretation of the punk aesthetic.

The t-shirt remains the item of clothing most commonly associated with Westwood and McLaren's punk aesthetic. Although subject to British obscenity legislations, their t-shirts, such as the "porn" collection displaying illustrations of nude cowboys, functioned as a signifier of protest and subversion against socially constructed notions of morality. Westwood characterized the porn t-shirt as an example of design activism, explaining to *The Face* that, "my job is always to confront the establishment to try and find out where freedom lies and what you can do."¹³⁴ Characterizing Dick Hebdige's argument of style as communication, the punk aesthetic

¹³⁴ Wilcox, *Vivienne Westwood*, 12.

embraced by Westwood and McLaren relied upon appropriating symbols of British culture with references to fascism and sadomasochism.¹³⁵ Westwood and McLaren's aesthetic during the 1970s was inherently political, with Tricia Henry arguing that it provided an outlet for the primarily white working-class English youth disillusioned by the nation's declining economic wellbeing to artistically express their frustrations.¹³⁶ However, the clothes designed and sold by Westwood at Let It Rock were expensive and largely unattainable by the relegated youth who served as their prime demographic. Their motifs and trends consequently began to be reproduced by more accessible retailers contributing to the punk aesthetics' recuperation into mass culture, contributing to the cynicism that informs Westwood's later design philosophy: "I'm sure if there is such a thing as the 'Anti-Establishment' – it feeds the Establishment."¹³⁷ In addition to the emotional abuse from McLaren that contributed to their professional and personal separation, Westwood responded to her disillusionment by focusing on developing a counter-hegemonic design aesthetic from within the fashion industry.

Portraying Persona: Dynamics of Gender, Nationality, Class, & Age in Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist

The politics of the attention economy has transformed celebrity into a powerful platform that reshapes identities into personas easily marketable by consumer culture. Westwood's image consequently is a complex and multifaceted entity layered with competing intentions, particularly since her identity is symbolically attached to both her fashion brand and her public image as a celebrated icon. Joseph H. Hanock, II defines fashion branding as an evolving process where "designers, manufacturers, merchandise, buyers, strategists, creative directors, retailers and those responsible for selling fashion create campaigns and give fashion garments a unique

¹³⁵ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London and New York: Routledge, 1979), 99-112.

¹³⁶ Tricia Henry, "Punk and Avant-Gard Art," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 17, no. 4 (1986): 31.

¹³⁷ Wilcox, *Vivienne Westwood*, 15.

identity.”¹³⁸ The creation of a fashion brand like Vivienne Westwood is an intricate process dependent upon the symbiotic relationship between the immaterial labour of self-promotion by Westwood herself and the judgement of cultural intermediaries in determining the narrative that mediates her image throughout popular culture. Her working-class background, unique career path, and lack of any formal design training are parts of her identity that are exploited by critics to undermine Westwood’s legitimacy as an elite fashion designer comparable to other ‘icons’ like Alexander McQueen or John Galliano. Reviewing Jane Mulvagh’s biography of Westwood, the provocative fashion critic for *The New York Times* and *The Cut*, Cathy Horyn is one journalist who has been very dismissive of Westwood reinforced through her assertion that she “often strikes people as rude and oblivious to social graces,” due to not having the “benefit of a literary upbringing” thereby having to rely upon “other people’s knowledge to gain her own.”¹³⁹ In another review of Westwood’s work, Horyn flippantly contextualized the designer’s public image, writing “England has a place for messy lives, lives that in spite of talent never seem to come together. This was Westwood’s story through and through. She was the rebel who had become a middle-aged, grating woman surviving on her threadbare principles.”¹⁴⁰

Westwood commonly intervenes in the construction of her identity, and the disconnect between brand and persona, two core components to Westwood’s public image, are highlighted by Lorna Tucker’s 2018 documentary *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist*. After shadowing the designer and documenting her personal, professional, and political endeavours for numerous years, Tucker’s *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist* debuted at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival. Receiving somewhat positive reviews, *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist* chronicles in an

¹³⁸ Joseph H. Hancock, II, *Brand Story: Cases and Explorations in Fashion Branding* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 7.

¹³⁹ Cathy Horyn, “Dame Vivienne Queen of Extreme,” *The Globe and Mail*, February 20, 1999.

¹⁴⁰ Horyn, “The Queen Viv,” *The New York Times*, October 18, 2009.

overwhelmingly celebratory manner the trajectory of the designer's career from her northern English working class background and prior career as a primary school teacher to her relationship with Malcolm McLaren and the struggles she has faced gaining recognition from the fashion industry. Tucker's documentary highlights the multiple contradictory elements composing Westwood's persona – such as gender, age, class, and nationality, but also the variety of roles she performs, including businesswoman, entrepreneur, designer, and activist – that are the substance behind the public persona that forms her iconic identity. The personal and professional relationship between Westwood and her husband and design partner, Andreas Kronthaler, emerged as one of more compelling storylines of the documentary *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist*. The documentary includes intimate footage of the couple wearing coordinating outfits partaking in photoshoots accompanied by a voiceover from Kronthaler: "There's Vivienne the fashion designer. There's Vivienne the campaigner. And then there's Vivienne the person."¹⁴¹ His comments illuminate the complex and contradictory layers embedded within the persona that make up the core element of Westwood's brand identity in public discourse.

Fashion labels, particularly couture houses that do not record the same revenue as more mainstream labels, have survived in a changing economic environment due to successful partnerships with mass retailers, extensive licensing for beauty, fragrance, and accessories, and diffusion and ready-to-wear lines. Designers are also embracing branding techniques to further their identities into celebrity personas in accordance with the dynamics of contemporary culture that prioritize self-promotion and presentation. Matt Tyrhauer's *Valentino: The Last Emperor*, for example, showcases the Italian designer's lavish lifestyle complete with his pugs enjoying air travel on a private jet. More significantly, the documentary also highlights Valentino's ability to

¹⁴¹ *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist*, directed by Lorna Tucker (2018; London: Finished Films, 2018), DVD.

adapt to a fluctuating marketplace by expanding his clientele to less esteemed celebrities not commonly associated with his couture label. Tom Ford leveraged his respected status that he built as creative director for Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent to legitimize his cinematic career when he made his directorial debut with the film adaptation of Christopher Isherwood's novel *A Single Man* (2009). The promotion and branding techniques of designers like Valentino and Ford represent for Pamela Church Gibson their ability to "exploit the new economic power of celebrity" by ensuring "maximum publicity for their business through the careful cultivation of their own personal image and a trademark mode of self-presentation."¹⁴² The genre of fashion documentaries has grown with titles including *Lagerfeld Confidential* (2007), *The September Issue* (2009), *Mademoiselle C* (2013), *Dior and I* (2014), *In Vogue: The Editor's Eye* (2015), *Inside Dior* (2016), *The Boy Who Made Shoes For Lizards* (2017), *McQueen* (2018), and *7 Days Out* (2018).¹⁴³

The beginning of *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist* briefly mentions Westwood's past as a schoolteacher and her previous marriage before focusing more specifically on the designer's creative and personal relationship with Malcolm McLaren. Westwood's narration of biographical details like her childhood and artistic and intellectual development is accompanied by stock video and photographs from the 1960s through to the 1980s. Interspersed within Tucker's historical overview of Westwood are segments in the archives of the Victoria & Albert Museum, in which curator Claire Wilcox warrants the cultural significance of Westwood's more iconic collection, such as the "Destroy" t-shirt and a unisex outfit from her "Pirates" collection. A short clip of a significantly younger Westwood wearing the iconic "God Save the Queen" t-shirt is

¹⁴² Pamela Church Gibson, *Fashion and Celebrity Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 184.

¹⁴³ Naomi Pike, Tamison O'Connor, and Radhika Seth, "The Fashion Documentaries To Watch Before Applying For Fashion School," *Vogue*, last modified December 17, 2019, <https://www.vogue.co.uk/gallery/best-fashion-documentaries?image=5d54bea3aed0b900081dc0ce>.

also featured and is complemented by a voice-over from the designer describing the references to ancient Greece and the Scottish Highlands in her earlier work. The personal history covered by Tucker towards the beginning of her documentary repeat details already addressed by other biographical texts on Westwood, such as Jane Mulvagh's *Vivienne Westwood: An Unfashionable Life* and Wilcox's *Vivienne Westwood* which accompanied an exhibit of the designer that debuted at London's Victoria and Albert Museum before viewings in Sydney, Shanghai, and Hong Kong.¹⁴⁴

A common area of discussion regarding Westwood's legacy is that her eccentric personality and the spectacle showcased by her runway collections has overshadowed the quality of her work. In a 1992 biographical feature on Westwood, *Women's Wear Daily* highlighted the creativity and innovation evident in her collections but also the designer's continuous struggle to develop a reputable status and financial backing:

Imagination is something Viv has never lacked. She had gold-capped teeth in her collections before the idea was even a gleam in Madonna's mouth. She removed and repositioned eyebrows in her 'Always on Camera' Hollywood tribute before jet-setting mannequins began erasing their own. She was asymmetrical before the Japanese, 'destroy' before Martin Margiela, had unfinished seams long before Jean Colonna and spoofed Hollywood glamour before the trendiest transvestites. So why isn't she rich? One reason may be that while other designers in her generation were building careers by exploring color, hem, length, and fit, Westwood was 'exploring anarchy.'¹⁴⁵

Her lack of recognition by the industry is a prominent theme apparent in *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist*, with Westwood commenting, "the way it works is when you're new and you do something new, then everybody is on to the new discovery, they all want to discover you at the same time. Then you get left, and they want to know what's the next latest thing. That's how the English press treated me."¹⁴⁶ The documentary includes scenes strategically edited together to

¹⁴⁴ Movius, "Westwood Hits Shanghai."

¹⁴⁵ Amy Spindler, "Viva Vivienne!" *Women's Wear Daily*, November 18, 1992.

¹⁴⁶ Tucker, *Westwood*.

showcase contempt and surprise by critics regarding Westwood's recognition as British Fashion Designer of the Year. Also credited as a British cultural icon, Alexander McQueen had been a vocal critic of Westwood. His views on Westwood were reported in *Women's Wear Daily* and addressed her complaints about not receiving proper credit for her aesthetic contributions: "In answer to Vivienne Westwood's moan that everyone copies her, McQueen cheekily suggested a visit to London's Tate Gallery to see 'where her inspiration' really comes from."¹⁴⁷ However, in the May 2006 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*, McQueen was cited as equating Westwood to the "Coco Chanel of our day" in terms of her influence on revitalizing the British fashion industry.¹⁴⁸

At other times throughout her career, however, Westwood has received praise for her artistic vision. A 1989 review of the "Voyage to Cythera" collection in *Women's Wear Daily* labelled Westwood as "London's most influential designer," while the significant publication later referred to the designer as a "slyly subversive genius" who "possesses the type of vision that really becomes an inspiration to others."¹⁴⁹ Other fashion designers have also bestowed their praise upon Westwood. Jasper Conran emphasized her influence on the industry, noting that "Vivienne does, and others follow," and in declaring her "Queen Vivienne Westwood," Christian Lacroix admitted, "the fashion world is unfair to her, forgetting that so many stars nowadays have stolen her work since 'World's End.'"¹⁵⁰ Founder of *W* and former *Women's Wear Daily* editor in chief John Fairchild listed Westwood as one of his six greatest fashion designers in his book *Chic Savages* alongside Emanuel Ungaro, Karl Lagerfeld, Giorgio Armani, Christian Lacroix, and Yves Saint Laurent.

¹⁴⁷ "Eye Scoop," *Women's Wear Daily*, January 6, 1997.

¹⁴⁸ Hamish Bowles, "No-rules Britannia!" *Harper's Bazaar*, May 1, 2006.

¹⁴⁹ "London RTW: Ethnic and Period Again," *Women's Wear Daily*, March 13, 1989, "Fashion's Altered States," *Women's Wear Daily*, March 20, 1995, and Alice Welsh, "Juniors: A Trend Ahead," *Women's Wear Daily*, December 1, 1994.

¹⁵⁰ Cathy Horyn, "Dame Vivienne Queen of Extreme," *The Globe and Mail*, February 20, 1996 and "Mutual Admiration Society," *Women's Wear Daily*, July 16, 2001.

The continued association between Westwood and the anti-establishment motifs of the punk aesthetic sustain the popular idea of the designer as an antimonarchist. This connection manifests within *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist*. Images of red, white, and blue smoke left in the sky by a Royal Air Force fly past (presumably the Red Arrows) that bring to mind the Union Jack and Queen Elizabeth waving to public crowds are juxtaposed against a voiceover from Westwood proclaiming, “people didn’t like you being a punk. We wanted to undermine the establishment.”¹⁵¹ However, her relationship to the monarchy is significantly more complex than the anti-establishment discourse of punk, with the aristocracy a highly influential aspect of her design philosophy. Westwood received her Order of the British Empire in 1992 from Queen Elizabeth and was elevated to a Dame in 2006. The former honour not only bestowed Westwood with greater credibility relatively early in her fashion career, but also became the moment that established her eccentric personality as a core component of her iconic identity that was described by *The Times* as “brilliant and bonkers in equal measure.”¹⁵² Prior to the ceremony, photographers captured Westwood outside Buckingham Palace twirling in her coat dress, revealing that she was not wearing underwear underneath her nude nylons, a widely circulated image that can be seen on the cover of Fred Vermorel’s *Fashion & Perversity: A Life of Vivienne Westwood and the Sixties Laid Bare*.

For Caroline Evans, the image of Westwood twirling outside Buckingham Palace draws parallels to another iconic and extensively distributed print, the scene of Marilyn Monroe standing on a subway grate with her skirt blowing up from the breeze in *The Seven Year Itch*. Despite the apparent differences between the two women, Westwood and Monroe both serve as discursive frameworks mediating socially constructed ideas regarding femininity, identity, and

¹⁵¹ Tucker, *Westwood*.

¹⁵² Alan Franks, “National Treasures 2006,” *The Times*, December 6, 2006.

power dynamics within male-dominated industries. The iconic image of Monroe (a product of Hollywood's star system) in *The Seven Year Itch* occurred after 14 takes after over three hours of filming in both New York and Los Angeles. With over 100 male photographers and thousands of fans witnessing the film shoot in New York, Monroe purportedly wore multiple pairs of undergarments to create a sense of privacy within the publicized space.¹⁵³ In comparison, Evans argues that Westwood's decision about her underwear and actions outside of Buckingham Palace, regardless of the initial intent, signifies her agency and control over the portrayal of her public image.¹⁵⁴ Tucker also refers to this instance towards the end of *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist* by incorporating the still image of the honoree outside the royal residence with Westwood narrating the scene, admitting, "people were very impressed by it, all the people who work for me were very pleased because they feel like they share in it really."¹⁵⁵ Her comments convey the pride in being recognized with an esteemed title – particularly since Tucker's documentary chronicles Westwood's frustrations in not receiving proper recognition – but also denote the awareness Westwood exhibits over how this moment has become representative of her iconic persona in popular culture. More significantly, the moment reflects her skill in utilizing this knowledge to maintain a presence in a media culture in which visibility is not widely available.

Included in the digital video release of *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist* is the short film "In Bed With Vivienne." Although Westwood claims the purpose of the short film is to showcase her bedroom as the source of her infamous energy, the three-minute clip primarily

¹⁵³ Anne T. Donohue, "That Silly Little Dress: The Story Behind Marilyn Monroe's Iconic Scene," *The Guardian*, last modified September 15, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2014/sep/15/marilyn-monroe-seven-year-itch-dress>.

¹⁵⁴ Caroline Evans, "Yesterdays Emblems and Tomorrow's Commodities," in *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, ed. Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (London: Routledge, 2000), 100-101.

¹⁵⁵ Tucker, *Westwood*.

functions as a promotional advertisement for the environmental charity Cool Earth and its work on rainforest preservation. Tucker enters the private space of Westwood's bedroom at the beginning of the film. By inviting Tucker – who does not say anything aside from wishing the designer “good morning” – into the private realm of the bedroom, Westwood is granting the viewer access to the setting commonly understood to be one of the more intimate spaces of domestic life. The clip then opens to a long shot of Westwood's very cramped and unassuming bedroom, a stark contrast to the glamour associated with iconic and celebrity figures but in line with the designer's philosophical beliefs concerning consumer waste and materialism. A window imparting natural sunlight into the cluttered room showcases the double mattress centered in between bedside tables displaying numerous books showing signs of wear from being frequently consulted or reread. Further shots reveal her bedside table in greater focus, yet the only title clearly visible is presumably a French-English dictionary. Westwood's head is barely visible with her body covered by a quilted duvet cover. Without careful observation it would be easy for the viewer to overlook Westwood's presence in the opening frames. The next frames provide close-ups of Westwood's face asleep, intentionally drawing attention to the colour of Westwood's hair. Instead of the vivid orange that has become symbolic of the designer's iconic identity, her silver hair signifies her age and social status as a senior citizen in her late 70s at the time Tucker's film was shot. Westwood is almost unrecognizable and could easily be misidentified, particularly since there are very few images of aging women portrayed in such an intimate realm in popular culture.

Stereotypical signifiers of ‘Englishness’ are apparent in Westwood's bedroom. The floral-patterned fabric outfitting Westwood's bedframe and headboard evoke similarities to the motifs of British textile design company Laura Ashley. The parallels between the company's

Welsh namesake founder and Westwood are noteworthy. Both designers worked in previous occupations while raising children before inadvertently pursuing fashion careers; Westwood taught primary school, while Ashley was employed as a secretary before establishing her business during the 1950s. Their respective companies shared humble beginnings, first functioning out of their flats and then independently owned storefronts before expanding into larger enterprises. Similar to Westwood's initial aesthetic influences and inspirations, a patchwork exhibit at the Victoria & Albert Museum served as Ashley's initial vision behind designing headscarves, tea towels, and other handicrafts.¹⁵⁶

The shorter clip of Westwood sleeping in her bedroom is also featured as one of the opening scenes in *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist*. Expanding upon the realm of the bedroom, Tucker depicts Westwood partaking in her daily morning activities, which further reveals the aesthetic of her home since various rooms are made accessible to the viewer. She is pictured in a small but cozy room with a large window that provides glimpses of the lush trees and buses that compose her personal garden. Vision boards with photographs and newspaper clippings decorate the dark teal-coloured walls. Westwood works on design samples for a coat pocket on a large craft table cluttered with an assortment of scrap paper, sculptures, photographs of her children, pottery, figurines, art supplies, and books. Two copies of *Get A Life!* are subtly placed on the desk, with the bright orange binding of Westwood's diary – the same colouring typically associated with her iconic hair – capturing the viewer's attention. Tucker then follows Westwood into her private library and reading area, where a built-in mahogany wood bookcase complements the fireplace displaying more personal photographs, figurines, and another

¹⁵⁶ Nicola Bryan, "Laura Ashley 30 Years On: Memories of the Girl from Dowlais," *BBC News*, last modified September 29, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-34290383> and Suzanne Slesin, "Laura Ashley, British Designer, Is Dead at 60," *The New York Times*, September 18, 1985.

collection of books. The space is decorated with antique furniture and floral-patterned cushions and curtain drapes that evoke traditional signifiers of aesthetic Britishness.¹⁵⁷

One of the characteristics of Westwood's public image that distinguishes her from other comparative figures is her ability to maintain visibility despite her social categorization as a senior approaching her 80s. For instance, *The Sunday Times* termed Westwood as the "ageing enfant terrible of British fashion," referencing the French expression for an embarrassing child that has been appropriated to refer to unconventional artists.¹⁵⁸ Representations of aging in popular culture have predominantly framed older women as 'others.' In a mid-1990s feature on Westwood for *Women's Wear Daily*, Janet Ozzard's description of the designer exemplified such discourse of differentiation: "With her soft voice, white hair and porcelain skin, the 53-year-old designer seems more like a grandmother than a radical designer – if one ignores the bright red hose and the plaid stiletto platform ankle-wrap shoes."¹⁵⁹ Although written over 20 years ago, Ozzard's commentary reflects a strong theme persistent in contemporary coverage of Westwood that frames her idiosyncrasy – apparently evident through shoes and nylons – as evidence of an immaturity by refusing to abide by social normalities around aging and femininity. The topic of prominent public figures and ageing has been overlooked by celebrity studies despite the fact that for Deborah Jermyn and Su Holmes the realm of celebrity "has become the central lens in popular culture through which to interrogate questions of aging and gender."¹⁶⁰ It is important to address the cultural significance of ageing since it is a process negotiated by all women, whether

¹⁵⁷ Tucker, *Westwood*.

¹⁵⁸ Patricia Nicol, "Queen of Punk is Hot on the Scots," *The Sunday Times*, January 24, 1999.

¹⁵⁹ Janet Ozzard, "Forever Viv," *Women's Wear Daily*, September 13, 1994.

¹⁶⁰ Deborah Jermyn and Su Holmes, "A Timely Intervention – Unravelling the Gender/Age/Celebrity Matrix," in *Women, Celebrity & Cultures of Ageing*, ed. Deborah Jermyn and Su Holmes (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 4.

through personal experience or through interacting with popular texts and images like Westwood.

Popular and scholarly work on persona also assume a sense of youthfulness, primarily due to the contemporary association between identity construction and social media. Melanie Williams' analysis of Judy Dench's public image addresses how the actor's celebrity persona, based upon her status as a cinematic icon, attempts to challenge social normalities associated with senior citizens by conveying a sense of rebelliousness. Although the last decade contemporary films like *Something's Gotta Give* (2003) and *Book Club* (2018) have featured storylines showcasing older women in lead roles, Jermyn argues that "Hollywood has long stood as a kind of exemplary instance of popular culture's erasure of older women."¹⁶¹ Dench has consistently maintained a cinematic presence throughout her 70s and 80s due to a combination of acclaimed films such as *Notes on a Scandal* (2006) and *Philomena* (2013) and her involvement with the James Bond franchise. While Dench has been outspoken about Britain's health care and the lack of services directed towards senior citizens from her personal experience with vision loss, Williams notes that the actress continues to challenge social normalities associated with her age through her publicity efforts. Dench's 2015 interview with *Good Housekeeping* addressed her use of popular acronyms like "YOLO" in text messages with friends, and in an article celebrating her 80th birthday, *The Huffington Post* reported on the actor's hobby of needlework embroidering crude messages onto cushions and patches that she gifts to her colleagues.¹⁶² For Williams, such activities demonstrate Dench's subversive persona:

Privileged position in terms of seniority, class identity and professional status enables her to use culturally loaded signifiers like tattoos and swearing to complicate the stuffy

¹⁶¹ Jermyn, "'Get a Life, Ladies. Your Old One Is Not Coming Back': Ageing, Ageism and the Lifespan of Female Celebrity," *Celebrity Studies* 3, no. 1 (2012): 3.

¹⁶² Melanie Williams, "The Best Exotic Graceful Ager: Dame Judi Dench and Older Female Celebrity," in *Women, Celebrity and Cultures of Aging*, ed. Jermyn and Holmes, 150-151.

reputation commonly bestowed upon theatrical dames and so-called ‘national treasures.’ Instead of compromising her damely dignity, they arguably give a fuller sense of a well-rounded individual which runs counter to the usual (rather restrictive) cultural logic of what is appropriate for women over 60, and perhaps women of her particular class milieu.¹⁶³

The analysis of Dench’s persona by Williams offers an intriguing comparison to Westwood’s efforts at constructing her public identity as an older woman working in an industry that privileges youth. There are apparent differences between the two women, most notably between artistic professions and the greater prestige associated with Dench’s iconic persona, but Westwood attempts to project a sense of youthfulness in her public activities that challenges the predetermined characteristics associated with her senior status that is often condemned in public discourse as too forced and insincere.

The opening scenes of *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist* depicts the final fitting before Westwood’s showing at London Fashion Week. Westwood is wearing a pink, green, and purple plaid kilt with a matching argyle sweater visible beneath a thick oversized orange jumper, attire that evokes the eccentricity that is often associated with her public persona. When previously asked about her wardrobe choices in an April 2004 interview with *The Times* before her 63rd birthday – where she is described as “looking her age” – Westwood defends her youthful clothing, proclaiming, “You don’t have to wear a woolly cardigan and flat shoes.”¹⁶⁴ Westwood expresses displeasure at her assistant with concerns over the details of the collection, referring to the hems as “crap” and the clothing as “shit.”¹⁶⁵ The scene works to reinforce popular ideas regarding Westwood’s personality, anchored through her dismissive ramblings about the clothing and eccentric appearance. Despite the scene’s assertion that she is removed from the

¹⁶³ Williams, “Best Exotic Graceful Ager,” 152.

¹⁶⁴ Joan Smith, “You Don’t Need Taste to Buy Clothes.” *The Times*, April 1, 2004.

¹⁶⁵ Tucker, *Westwood*.

creative and aesthetic decisions behind her label, Westwood's forcefulness in managing the final rehearsals before the runway performance is a characteristic that is not commonly depicted by women working in their mid-to-late 70s and especially those within the fashion industry.

The highly active portrayal of Westwood in Tucker's documentary complements press coverage applauding the designer for creating new forms of visibility for aging women. In Britain's *Daily Mail*, for example, Liz Jones commends Westwood as:

An example to all of us, too, in that she is still working hard at the age of 71, when all most women her age expect to look forward to is being plonked in a care home. The sight of her on Sunday at her London Fashion Week show, in piratical make-up and trademark orange hair, wearing hot pants, chunky socks, clumpy platforms, all topped off with a spangled helmet, surely inspires women not to hide away apologetically.¹⁶⁶

She later decided in 2014 to grow out her bright orange hair colour, one of the elements of Westwood's identity frequently referenced or identified with her public image, and embraced a more natural white hue to signify her senior social status.¹⁶⁷ Despite being in her early to mid 70s during the filming of *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist*, scenes from the documentary capture her commuting across London on her bicycle, which is also a popular topic of reference in press coverage regarding her age and vigour. *Women's Wear Daily* credited Westwood's vitality to a combination of a new raw-food diet and cycling as her preferred method of transportation.¹⁶⁸ The 25-year age difference between Westwood and her partner Kronthaler is also a common line of questioning in interviews with the couple, especially since appointed as creative lead for the Gold label. In a feature on their relationship in *The Times*, Kronthaler reflects on the realities of Westwood's age: "She has incredible stamina. When we ride the bike I get to the top of the hill and then I look beside me and she has come to the top of the hill. But I know one day this will

¹⁶⁶ Liz Jones, "Batty But Brilliant," *Daily Mail*, September 18, 2012.

¹⁶⁷ Olivia Bergin, "Vivienne Westwood: a life of campaigning," *The Telegraph*, October 7, 2014.

¹⁶⁸ Joanna Ramey, "Queen For A Day," *Women's Wear Daily*, March 6, 2007.

change.”¹⁶⁹ The portrayal of Westwood as highly active offers the potential to create new imaginaries for older women in popular culture. Especially within the realm of fashion that performs a hegemonic role in enforcing social conventions regarding age and gender, her unapologetic image challenges pre-existing expectations in regard to appearance and activity.

The Politics of Agency and Contesting Persona

In a director question-and-answer segment included in the digital video release of *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist*, Tucker elaborates on why she wanted to pursue a documentary on the designer. Addressing the inspirations behind her process, Tucker described what she found important about Westwood:

I was really inspired by her story, and it's a story that she doesn't normally talk about because she is not one...to live in the past. She's all about what goes on now, what her message is now. It's a story about a woman who is in the later years of her life, still as forceful, still as strong and still as creative as she's ever been [...] And what really inspired me was just how long as it took for her to become the woman she is now. She's always been this punk...she's always been this incredible force of nature [...] I really felt it was a story that a new generation needed to know. And also a generation – all generations really – people that don't have any understanding about her place in culture, her place in England as an icon, as someone who has constantly been breaking boundaries – whether that's being a woman in a time that the industry was run by men designing for women. Women having no financial backing and having nearly gone into bankruptcy several times. Just never stopped. And never put in a box.¹⁷⁰

Tucker's statement speaks to some of the characteristics associated with Westwood's persona, such as her status as a cultural icon. Her description also highlights elements that make her public identity especially captivating, mainly beginning her fashion career later in life and Westwood's inability to gain the large-scale recognition she rarely publicly admits that she feels is deserved.

¹⁶⁹ Deborah Ross, “The Odd Couple,” *The Times*, June 7, 2014.

¹⁷⁰ Tucker, *Westwood*.

Westwood was especially vocal in expressing her disappointment over Tucker's cinematic depiction of her life following the release of *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist*. Prior to the documentary's premiere at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival, a statement was posted on the Vivienne Westwood Twitter account condemning the film:

The Vivienne Westwood documentary set for release this year 'Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist' has been made and produced by a third party and as it stands isn't endorsed by Vivienne Westwood. Lorna Tucker asked to film Vivienne's activism and followed her around for a couple years, but there's not even 5 minutes activism in the film, instead there's lots of old fashion footage which is free and available to view online. It's a shame because the film is mediocre, and Vivienne and Andreas are not.¹⁷¹

Westwood's eldest son Ben (who is interviewed for the documentary) also expressed his disappointment, insisting the true film was discarded during the editing process. Westwood reportedly asked Tucker to make substantial changes to the film prior to its March 2018 release in the United Kingdom, contributing to what *The Sunday Times* describes as a "bitter dispute" between the former friends.¹⁷² Tucker elaborates about the process of convincing Westwood to partake in the project and the struggles involved in creating a documentary, noting that "when you're filming someone, you have an idea of what the film is in your head and that is constantly evolving. And the person you're filming has a whole different idea of what the film is in their head [...] We all see something differently. It was always going to be difficult."¹⁷³ Her statement alludes to the discrepancy that can exist between director and subject, but, more importantly, alludes to the tensions that exist in the practices of creating and maintaining persona. As someone who has tried to exert control over how their public identity is shaped, Westwood's

¹⁷¹ Vivienne Westwood, Twitter post, January 19, 2018, 5:25 p.m., <https://twitter.com/followwestwood/status/954404519068295168>.

¹⁷² Alice Newbold, "Vivienne Westwood's Son Denounces Documentary," *Vogue*, last modified April 3, 2008, <https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/vivienne-westwood-son-ben-westwood-denounces-lorna-tucker-film> and James Gillespie and Jane McFarland, "Vivienne Westwood's Paris Dazzle Hides a Snarl," *The Sunday Times*, March 3, 2018.

¹⁷³ Tucker, *Westwood*.

criticism speaks to the anger in having that power taken away. It also reveals how strongly activism is rooted in her identity; when *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist* downplayed this aspect of her persona, it minimized the complexities that compose Westwood's public image.

Although active participants in the creation and construction of their public image, Barack Obama, Pope Francis, and Vivienne Westwood's iconic identities also resulted from the contributions of journalists and cultural texts like film and television, which bestowed these figures with varying degrees of status within a media culture highly influenced by discourses of celebrity and self-promotion. Obama gained prominence following the Democratic National Convention and controlled his public persona by strategically publishing his memoirs to coincide with political momentum, yet examples like *The West Wing* and *Men's Vogue* demonstrate the role cultural intermediaries played in helping construct his identity within the context of the imagined presidential image. In contrast to a presidential election, the spectacle surrounding a papal conclave mediates a different sense of unpredictability. The media event corresponding with Pope Francis's election to the papacy, along with the unique characteristics of his biography and background, transformed the pontiff into an instant icon assisted by the contribution of the press through figurative designations like the "people's pontiff." What distinguishes Pope Francis from previous pontiffs is his ability to understand how to manipulate his media representation to register with shifts in social and political discourse, particularly in regard to human rights and social justice issues. It is this aspect of his persona that Pope Francis shares with Westwood, who despite resentments concerning the lack of respect and neglect she experiences from an industry and culture she is vocally critical of, continues to attract attention and headlines primarily due to her eccentric personality and awareness over how her image circulates.

According to these dynamics, Obama, Westwood, and Pope Francis each personify what Casey Schmitt refers to as an iconographic persona, a designation bestowed upon a celebrity or public figure grounded by the cultural standing they have developed from their media representation built gradually through reception and select participation in film and television, events, campaigns, and public appearances. Schmitt argues that iconographic personas are powerful entities that enable figures such as Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis to “achieve a symbolic potency in public discourse, and the mere image of the individual or mention of that individual’s name can serve as symbolic allusion to concepts, populations, and values.”¹⁷⁴ Focusing her analysis on Clint Eastwood’s infamous public appearances in 2012, Schmitt credits the success of his “Halftime in America” Superbowl commercial for Chrysler to the advertisement’s ability to not only reference but also economically exploit the actor and director’s image built from films like *Dirty Harry* and *Million Dollar Baby*. However, his address at the 2012 Republican National Convention sparked a moment of embarrassment for Eastwood, who was largely mocked and ridiculed by viewers and political commentators because his speech was completely disconnected from his public image. When a celebrity fails to perform in accordance to their iconographic persona, the dissonance that develops leads to what Schmitt terms “communicative failure.”¹⁷⁵ While Schmitt’s focus is on Eastwood’s oratory capabilities, her argument of iconographic persona functions as a framework to understand how, once generated and recognized as culturally significant, the image of Pope Francis, Obama, and Westwood are subject to continuous maintenance and negotiation that creates meaning behind their symbolic power. The success of Westwood, Pope Francis, and Obama’s public appearances

¹⁷⁴ Casey Schmitt, “A Tale of Two Eastwoods: Iconographic Persona and Rhetorical Ethos in Clint Eastwood’s ‘Halftime in America’ and RNC 2012 Address,” *Persona Studies* 2, no. 1 (2016): 44.

¹⁷⁵ Schmitt, “Tale of Two Eastwoods,” 52.

are thereby contingent upon the acknowledgement and recognition of their pre-existing public identity, particularly since they cannot easily recreate their persona for different events. Obama, Pope Francis, and in particular, Westwood have been able to successfully preserve their iconographic personas with very little scandal or controversy despite the contradictions underlying their public identities, which is reflective of the larger shift towards self-promotion and persona that is now one of the more dominant expressions of celebrity in an attention-obsessed media culture.

What thereby connects the seemingly unrelated personas of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis is their similar status as outsiders who are brought into the mainstream of their respective institutions through the creation of their image. Instantly declared as a future presidential candidate by the press after being thrust into the national spotlight following his keynote speech for the 2004 Democratic National Convention, Obama's outsider identity was a dominant motif framing his developing identity as a Black politician with little experience in governance who did not grow up on the mainland. Pope Francis's South American roots and his shunning of high living and the trappings of power that separated him from his European colleagues at the Vatican became a key signifier of his identity that was embraced by press coverage to distinguish his persona from that of his predecessors that quickly defined his public image. For Westwood, her anti-establishmentarianism and punk aesthetic that battled against recognition by contemporary designers and the British star system are elements central to understanding her persona and how she attempts to exert control over she is represented in popular media, evident by her anger towards Tucker's cinematic portrayal in *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activists*. The creation of Obama, Pope Francis, and Westwood as iconic figures demonstrates the ways in which those identities deemed as outcasts progress into personas possessing the symbolic power that is

especially valuable to the institutions in which they are claimed to represent. The intricate process of creating an iconic identity to function as a signifier for the establishment is similar across different spheres and dependent upon the labour of both the person and the cultural intermediaries responsible for bestowing legitimacy upon their image, whether that institution be the British fashion industry, a religion in desperate need of a revive to maintain its global authority in regions facing decline, or a nation whose culture (and global power) is highly influenced by the individual elected to the presidency.

Chapter Five: Discourses of Consumption in Branding Public Good

“Our failure to care for creation is the result of a world-view that defines everything in consumerist terms and looks for solutions solely in things that can be bought and sold. The market economy and the culture of consumption are locked in a dance of death, leading to spiritual impoverishment for those who control it, material impoverishment for those who don’t, and environmental impoverishment across the globe.”

--- Naomi Oreskes¹

Barack Obama’s election to the presidency in November 2008 was celebrated as an iconic moment signifying a drastic shift towards improving the socioeconomic well-being of the nation after the tumultuous final years of the Bush presidency, which were marked by the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the collapse of the financial and housing markets. The rhetoric of rejuvenation is well illustrated by the *New Yorker*’s George Packer, who commented on the cultural significance of the presidential election, writing:

November 4, 2008, is one of those frequent dates when one historical age and one generation, with a distinct political and economic and cultural character, gave way to another age, another generation. The new era that is about to begin under President Obama will be more about public good than about private goods. The mean will be smaller, and have less interesting flavours, but it will be shared more fairly. The great American improvisation called democracy still bends along the curve of history. It has not yet finished astounding the world.²

Evoking longstanding narratives of American exceptionalism, Packer’s commentary reflects the larger social anxiety deriving from the economic crisis that is commonly cited as providing the circumstances that helped naturalize the feasibility of Obama’s presidential candidacy. More significantly, Packer’s reference to an idealized notion of public reflects a common theme uniting the public image of Obama, Westwood, and Pope Francis as iconic figures. Due to their iconic status and the regular media attention their actions and work receive, Westwood, Obama,

¹ Naomi Oreskes, introduction to *Encyclical on Climate Change & Inequality: On Care for Our Common Home*, by Pope Francis (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2015), xxi.

² George Packer, “The New Liberalism,” *New Yorker*, November 17, 2008.

and Pope Francis contribute to the creation of a public culture elevating issues of healthcare and the environment to more visible and prominent positions in public discourse. Packer's commentary also mirrors the ways in which the mainstream media idealized Obama as a selfless leader who prioritized marginalized concerns over corporate interests, a branding of identity, which may not correlate into practice, that can also be extended to Pope Francis and Vivienne Westwood in their advocacy against social inequalities. How expressions and understandings of public welfare manifest in is unique to the realm of celebrity an individual is situated within; for Obama, health care is the dominant narrative orientating his identity to ideals of public good and social reform, while Westwood and Pope Francis focus their efforts on revealing the connections between environmentalism, consumption, and global poverty. Obama, Pope Francis, and Westwood ultimately became pseudo-heroes within larger discourses of social reform, particularly in regard to health care and environmentalism, subsequently extending the reach and power of their iconic identities in public culture. The health and environmental crises addressed by the iconic ideals of Obama, Westwood, and Pope Francis's brand identities are rooted in an existential questioning of consumer capitalism and the reproduction of social inequalities that were aggravated by the 2008 collapse of the global economy.

The word public possesses an extensive history and, similar to icon, is frequently employed with various usages in everyday discourse. The idea of a public sphere conceptualized by Juergen Habermas that privileges consensus achieved through rational debate and discussion is a utopic concept with no practicality or feasibility. Addressing the different ways in which the term has been conceptualized, P. David Marshall highlights the connection between public government resources and the citizenry. Evident in references to public libraries, public welfare, and public good, the notion of 'public' represents for Marshall "the embedded notion of the state

and its responsibility for its people.”³ Other scholarly notions of the public, however, has focused on community-orientated notions of social harmony, such as Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community.”⁴ The rationality of the public sphere is in contrast to other competing conceptualizations of mass society, evident in the work of Matthew Arnold, that emphasized the uncontrolled feelings and reactions associated with a mob mentality. Other uses of “public” range from Habermas’s notion of “representative publicness” and the idea of public life commonly associated with members of royal families to the vernacular convention of “going public” in reference to both the stock market and the intimate revelation of one’s private life to wider audiences.⁵ The growth of the corporate marketing industry during the 21st century further shaped general usages of the term, enabling the concept of publicity to emerge that witnessed a discursive shift from the public to publics. Originating with Edward Bernays’s work on public relations, the emphasis on publics accounted for a newer understanding of audience plurality that ultimately helped shape cultural politics. The contemporary emphasis on difference within consumer capitalism permits publics to develop into what Marshall describes as “new generations of political and cultural visibility” in which “the contentious world of publics has become a performative space with varied and nuanced codes of communication within publics and between publics.”⁶ Public figures like Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis function as platforms in which the boundaries governing notions of private and public are continuously reproduced, negotiated, and challenged. Marshall contextualizes this practice as an example of what he refers to as privatized-public politics, where the “individual as consumer, the private

³ P. David Marshall, “Introduction: The Plurality of Publics,” in *Contemporary Publics: Shifting Boundaries in New Media, Technology and Culture*, ed. P. David Marshall et al (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 3-4.

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 15.

⁵ Marshall, “Introduction,” 2-5.

⁶ Marshall, “Introduction,” 6-7.

corporation, and the realm of consumption have become a major form of contemporary political engagement and activity.”⁷ His overview of the sociohistorical theoretical development behind the cultural politics shaping contemporary society provides the necessary context to interrogate how motifs of public good are central forces shaping the iconic identities of Westwood, Pope Francis, and Obama, especially in regard to how their work is situated within a larger discussion of how discourses of consumption structure central issues like crises regarding healthcare and the environment.

Discourses of public good play a central role in how Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis’s iconic identities are legitimized within popular culture. Obama entered the White House during a period defined by economic crisis and his two terms as president oversaw momentous events such as the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011 and Obama’s announcement of his support of gay marriage a year later. The passage of the Affordable Care Act represents his most significant political achievement while in office. The plan provided cost-sharing and tax credits that also enabled young adults under the age of 26 to stay on a parent’s insurance plans and prohibited insurance companies from denying coverage to those with pre-existing medical conditions. After he signed the plan into law in March 2010, the Affordable Care Act faced significant opposition and numerous appeals from both political parties and individual states before being upheld by the Supreme Court in 2012. These obstacles, however, required extensive promotional campaigning that ultimately shaped how health care was conceptualized as an expendable product for the public in accordance with consumer capitalism, best illustrated by the administration’s dependence upon celebrity culture in advertising the complex policy.

⁷ Marshall, “When the Private Becomes Public: Commodity Activism, Endorsement, and Making Meaning in a Privatised World,” in *Contemporary Publics: Shifting Boundaries in New Media*, ed. Marshall et al (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 230.

For Westwood and Pope Francis, it is through environmental activism that their iconic identities are associated with discourses of public concern. Westwood's advocacy is situated within motifs of spectacular environmentalism expressed through fashion and acts of protest that has become a popular means of visualizing issues like climate change. Conversely, Pope Francis's environmental activism is enforced by his papal encyclical *Laudato Si'*, and while his argument draws parallels to Westwood's critique of wasteful consumerism, his message is granted greater authority due to the higher legitimacy of his institutional position than that permitted to a fashion designer. Despite the apparent differences between health care and environmental politics and how these topics are communicated and visualized in public culture, what connects Obama, Westwood, and Pope Francis is how their orientations to issues of public good and social reform are influenced by the discourses of consumer capitalism.

Obama and Discourses of Economic Crisis

The way in which capitalism flows and circulates within the cultural realms of public discourse is intricately multilayered and complex. Focusing her analysis on what she refers to as revolutionary icons, Emily Truman argues that the textual circulation of public figures such as Obama and Marie Antoinette gain potency during periods of crisis and intense social anxiety by their ability to help negotiate larger political and economic shifts.⁸ Obama's emergence as a global icon during this period demonstrates for Truman the power of revolutionary public culture, which she argues constitutes a "symbolic space in which the presence and status of cultural anxieties can be measured in relation to conjunctural moments of crisis."⁹ The financial collapse of 2008 was also the catalyst for a variety of cultural responses to the Obama

⁸ Emily Truman, "Back to the Political Future: Coping with Crisis Through Radical Nostalgia for Revolutionary Icons" (PhD diss., Carleton University, 2014), 4-6.

⁹ Truman, "Back to the Political Future," 291.

administration's handling of the economic crisis that formed a persistent theme prevalent throughout the 2010s, with Sarah Banet-Weiser arguing that:

The culture of the economy, and the economy of culture, has generated a variety of impulses and reactions to the Great Recession of the early twenty-first century: there have been financial responses in the form of government bailouts; subversive challenges to capitalism in terms of alternative lifestyles including the global Occupy movements ideological proclamations about what capitalism is and should be; recuperative answers that privilege a new, 'leaner' global market.¹⁰

The consequences from the economic recession resulted in deep mistrust between the public and financial institutions – further inflamed by Obama's decision to bail out the automobile industry and Wall Street – that required extensive re-branding efforts to rebuild the strength and public trust with consumer culture by visualizing optimistic narratives of individuals overcoming hardship.¹¹ Marked by events such as the implosion of the global stock market and the collapse of the American mortgage market that sparked record numbers of foreclosures, the financial recession initiated a larger discussion within cultural politics on the role of consumption as a governing social structure – a theme which also encompasses Pope Francis and Westwood's advocacy.

It is within this socioeconomic climate that Obama's image as a politician seemingly willing to destabilize the institutional structures gains the traction necessary for his brand of 'hope' and 'change' to register with the public. Commenting on the motifs that contributed to elevating his profile within public discourse, Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan contends that the multiple crises plaguing American society during the late 2000s were central to Obama's popular and political visibility. He does not isolate the collapse of the market as the sole calamity

¹⁰ Sarah Banet-Weiser, "Branding the Crisis," in *Aftermath: The Cultures of the Economic Crisis*, ed. Manuel Castells, João Caraça, and Gustavo Cardoso (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 108.

¹¹ Banet-Weiser, "'We Are All Workers': Economic Crisis, Masculinity, and the American Working Class," in *Gendering the Recession: Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity*, ed. Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 99.

underlying the 2008 presidential election, but also includes “local, global, national, transnational, moral, economic, financial, governmental, political, institutional, infrastructural” factors among the concerns generating a “reality of unprecedented crisis.”¹² The wide-ranging predicament of American society due to the numerous identity crises plaguing the nation ultimately shapes the reciprocal relationship between how Obama communicates with the public and how they read him as an extremely visible political entity, with Radhakrishnan arguing that “the figure of Obama is both the visual image of the crisis as well as an attempt to understand, represent and find a way beyond the crisis.”¹³ His argument underscores the way in which Obama’s image gained symbolic power by capturing the discursive shift towards larger narratives of social welfare and public good.

Recognizing that Obama might not have been elected if the collapse of the economy occurred months after November 2008, W.J.T. Mitchell shifts focus to another momentous crisis by highlighting the influential role of George W. Bush’s political decisions that directly shaped Obama’s public image as an “icon of anti- or non-Bushiness.”¹⁴ After capturing mainstream attention with the rise of his celebrated profile, Obama’s opposition to the Iraq war was frequently cited by the press – in particular his words from a 2002 anti-war rally in Chicago prior to the invasion of Iraq, “I am not opposed to all wars. I am opposed to dumb wars” – as a favourable aspect of his political persona that not only distinguished him from the politics of the Bush administration, but also from other established Democratic candidates like Hillary Clinton.¹⁵ Refamiliarizing audiences with the timeline of Obama’s swift political rise, the HBO

¹² Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, “Recognizing Obama: Image and Beyond?” *Journal of Visual Culture* 8, no. 2 (2009): 151.

¹³ Radhakrishnan, “Recognizing Obama,” 152.

¹⁴ W.J.T. Mitchell, “Obama as Icon,” *Journal of Visual Culture*

¹⁵ Barack Obama, “What I am Opposed To Is A Dumb War,” in *We Are The Change We Seek: The Speeches of Barack Obama*, ed. E.J. Dionne Jr. and Joy-Ann Reid (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 3. For examples on how this line became a signifier of Obama’s position on Iraq, refer to Julian Borger, “Rising Star to Woo Voters with Upbeat

documentary *The Final Year* (2018) contains footage of Obama's iconic speech from the 2004 Democratic National Convention, and embraces a select passage that reestablishes his opposition regarding the invasion of Iraq: "When we send our young men and women into harm's way, we have a solemn obligation not to fudge the numbers, or shade the truth about why they're going, and to never, ever go to war without enough troops, to win the war, secure the peace, and earn the respect of the world."¹⁶ Although *The Final Year* is focused on the Obama administration's foreign policy, by including the portion of Obama's speech that indirectly refers to the war in Iraq, the documentary alludes to how Obama's early image was situated within the context of national crisis facing the public.

One of the more powerful cultural depictions of the correlation between Obama's image and the social context of crisis is expressed by a parody of *The New York Times* that was distributed a week after Obama's November 2008 election. A joint collaboration between journalists and different activist groups with the culture jammers The Yes Men assisting with distribution of over 1.2 million copies across major cities including New York City, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Los Angeles, the 14-page spoof edition of the newspaper, which was dated the next Independence Day (July 4, 2009), declared in a bold typeface, "Iraq War Ends." Other war-related headlines complementing the main storyline included "Troops to Return Immediately," "Streets Come Alive as Relief and Exuberance Greet End of Conflicts," "Ex-Secretary Apologizes for W.M.D. Scare," and "Court Indicts Bush on High Treason Charge." The front page of the hoax print edition also included the headline, "Nation Sets Its Sights on Building Sane Economy," with corresponding stories imagining maximum wage legislation that

Keynote Speech," *The Guardian*, July 24, 2004, Tom Baldwin, "Could This Man Be the First Black President of America?" *The Times*, October 26, 2006, and Leonard Doyle, "The Upstart With a Dream," *The Independent*, November 5, 2008.

¹⁶ *The Final Year*, directed by Barker.

creates a limit for excessive corporate salaries, echoing the larger social climate defined by the financial crisis that shaped the final month of the presidential election. While the end of war and the withdrawal of troops from Iraq is the predominant theme, a website edition of the mock issue also included the headline, “National Health Insurance Act Passes.” The special issue is a parody that symbolically works to create a sense of accountability for Obama by visualizing public expectations – denoted by the print version displaying the twist on *The New York Times*’ well-known slogan, “All the news we hope to print” – while simultaneously critiquing Obama’s ability to instigate “change” due to the significant institutional constraints that prevent such a utopic idea of governance for the advancement of public good. The wide focus on the hypothetical end of the Iraq war is in stark contrast, however, to the limited coverage given to health care. Although a caricature, this example of design activism is a visualization of the larger discourses that helped to shape Obama’s image, discourses that also work to signify and reproduce the hierarchies of visibility that determine what issues constitute a major crisis to the public.¹⁷

Obamacare and Negotiating Healthcare through Discourses of Consumption

Obama’s signing into law of the Affordable Care Act on March 23, 2010 is largely considered one of the more iconic moments of his presidency, commonly described as his “flagship” and “defining” domestic policy achievement that bestowed his administration with “swagger.”¹⁸ The significance of the event was underscored by the viral coverage resulting from

¹⁷ David Usborne, “Spoof ‘Times’ Puts Obama on Notice,” *The Independent*, November 13, 2008 and “‘Iraq War Ends!’” *The Toronto Star*, November 13, 2008. For news reporting with visual examples of the prank edition of *The New York Times*, refer to Lewis Wallace, “Spoof *New York Times* Proclaims Iraq War Over,” *Wired*, last modified November 12, 2008, <https://www.wired.com/2008/11/spoof-new-york-times-proclaims-iraq-war-over/> and Ed Pilkington, “New York Times ‘Special Edition’ Spoof Perplexes Readers,” *The Guardian*, last modified November 12, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2008/nov/12/new-york-times-spoof>.

¹⁸ Gerald F. Seib, “One Goal, Pursued With Two Presidential Personas,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 23, 2010, “It was a big day for Obama (and a big f***ing deal for Joe Biden),” *The Independent*, March 24, 2010, and Helene Cooper, “A Giant-Killer, Feeling His Oats,” *The New York Times*, March 28, 2010.

Vice President Joe Biden's offhand remark, "This is a big fucking deal," that was picked up by the ceremony's microphones and broadcast across television and radio networks¹⁹ The inability of Americans to afford and receive healthcare was a prominent point of reference within popular culture in the years prior to Obama's presidential election, primarily in response to the Clinton administration's tumultuous experience attempting to legislate a universal health care plan and the ensuing existential crisis concerning the failures of government and the insurance industry to provide affordable health care. Although serialized medical television programs like *ER* (1994-2009), *Private Practice* (2007-2013), and *Grey's Anatomy* (2005-) depicting the occupational demands and romantic lives of medical professionals are examples of the genre's continuing popularity, Joseph Turow argues that such cultural texts rarely offer a political economic critique of the system.²⁰ The release of Michael Moore's 2007 documentary *Sicko* (2007) gained notable popular attention for the dangers of a profit-based health care system by capturing the stories of middle-class and impoverished American citizens denied insurance coverage. Moore's documentary is an example of the medical sub-genre focusing more specifically on systematic inequality by featuring plotlines in which central characters turned to illegal activities to help cover medical expenses, such as the film and television programs *John Q* (2002), *Last Holiday* (2006), and *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013).

The inadequacies of the American healthcare system were evidently prominent motifs within public discourse during the mid-to-late 2000s. Obama had occasionally referenced healthcare in various speeches, such as in his keynote speech at the 2004 Democratic National

¹⁹ "It was a big day for Obama," Richard Adams, "Bleeping Biden," *The Guardian*, March 24, 2010, Giles Whittell, "Obama Declares 'New Season in America,'" *The Times*, March 24, 2010, Mimi Hall, "Jubilant Crowds Celebrate Bill at Signing Events," *USA Today*, March 24, 2010.

²⁰ Joseph Turow, *Playing Doctor: Television, Storytelling, and Medical Power* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 3-17.

Convention where he vocalized his dismay at the hypothetical situation in which “a senior citizen somewhere who can’t pay for their prescription drugs and having to choose between medicine and the rent.”²¹ He directly equates health care as a crisis in the February 2007 speech announcing his presidential campaign, adamantly declaring “we will have universal health care in America by the end of the next President’s first term.”²² However, as Rupert Cornwell noted in his overview of Obama’s two presidential terms, the subject was not a major element of his political platform during the 2008 election campaign.²³ In an interview with *The Wall Street Journal* after the election, Obama’s chief of staff Rahm Emanuel argued that what distinguished Obama from John McCain was that he “made it about health care.”²⁴ Yet reports debating Obama’s possible presidential campaign sporadically referenced health care reform as a core component of his political platform, although his plans to salvage the economy, automobile industry, and housing market and for the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq were the major talking points of his election platform that garnered far more consistent attention by the media.²⁵ Obama’s ambitions to overhaul the health care system were primarily addressed in reporting after his election on November 4 as one of the reasons why he appealed to younger voters. Media commentaries focusing on health insurance in relation to this specific demographic was one of the few instances in which healthcare was referred to as a “crisis” in the same manner applied to the economy, ongoing wars, and occasionally, the environment.²⁶

²¹ Obama, “The Audacity of Hope,” in *We Are The Change We Seek*, ed. Dionne Jr. and Reid, 11.

²² David Morgan, “Transcript of Barack Obama’s Speech,” *CBS News*, last modified February 10, 2007, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/transcript-of-barack-obamas-speech/>.

²³ Rupert Cornwell, “America Feels a Better Place than Eight Years Ago – and that Alone is No Mean Feat,” *The Independent*, January 20, 2017.

²⁴ Jason O’Reilly, “The Weekend Interview with Rahm Emanuel,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 8, 2008.

²⁵ See, for example, Michiko Kakutani, “Foursquare Politics With a Dab Of Dijon,” *The New York Times*, October 17, 2006, Katherine Q. Seelye, “Obama Offers More Variations From the Norm,” *The New York Times*, October 24, 2006, and Tim Harper, “American Idol in the Making,” *The Toronto Star*, October 26, 2006.

²⁶ Olivia Ward, “Looking at How Obama Brought Youth to Polls,” *The Toronto Star*, November 10, 2008.

Just days after his 2008 election, economist Dean Baker argued in *The Guardian* for the necessity of Obama implementing a plan for equitable health care insurance in order to help salvage the economy, writing that the American financial crisis “poses substantial dangers but also enormous opportunities. If Barack Obama is prepared to seize them, he will establish himself as one of the truly great presidents. He can take advantage of the crisis to jump-start national health insurance, which will give an immediate boost to the economy.”²⁷ *The Washington Post* further enforced the connections between the economy and healthcare, but framed this relationship within the context of neoliberal individualism and consumer society:

Obama will also need to deal with some vast inefficiencies in our economy if we are to prevent further erosions in our standard of living. Some U.S. sectors are global leaders ... others are embarrassing, such as health care, where Americans spend far more than citizens in many other industrialized countries and get underwhelming results. We need a bold approach here, reforming not just the way we provide medicine but also thinking more broadly about health. That means doing more about diseases associated with alcoholism, drugs, tobacco and obesity, which have increasingly come to symbolize American over-consumption.²⁸

The rhetoric by *The Washington Post* naturalizes the connections between social citizenship, consumption, and health care. Echoing a similar discursive schema following Donald Trump’s inauguration in January 2017, *The Washington Post* compared the incoming administration’s economic promises against the advancements achieved during Obama’s two terms in office, and in regard to health care, argued that “health-insurance is also an economic issue; those without it risk being overwhelmed by medical bills that eat up savings and drive people into bankruptcy.”²⁹ The influence of consumption in rhetorical approach to core public issues demonstrates Whitney

²⁷ Dean Baker, “Seize the Chance to Set Up National Healthcare,” *The Guardian*, November 6, 2008.

²⁸ Joseph Stiglitz, “More Pain to Come, Even if He’s Perfect,” *The Washington Post*, November 9, 2008.

²⁹ Ana Swanson, “8 Ways to Track the President’s Promises on the Economy,” *The Washington Post*, January 29, 2017.

Gent's argument that "power and inequality are currently conditioning civic engagement."³⁰

Despite framing healthcare as solely an economic issue, *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* are examples of the few commentaries mapping the connections between universal health care coverage and consumption. However, health care is equated with the well-being of the economy, and this framing of the issue by *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* represents a more wide-ranging reluctance to critique health care access within context of consumer capitalism and the reproduction of poverty.

Reorienting community welfare into individualized practices, language plays a critical function in reproducing the hegemonic practice of neoliberal discourses, evident in how politicians like Obama communicate policy decisions to the public. One of the challenges plaguing the popular acceptance of the administration's attempts to legislate health care reform was Obama's dependence upon his former intellectual persona as a constitutional law professor, a communicative approach which failed to register with the public in the same way as other government reactions to crises.³¹ In his rhetorical analysis of Obama's speech to Congress on his Affordable Care Act, Robert C. Rowland focuses on how the text fails to effectively inform or persuade the American public on health care reform. Obama's emphasis on appealing to the reasonableness and rationality of the American public ultimately contributed to mass confusion over the intricacies of the health coverage overhaul. Rowland acknowledges the key themes central to Obama's political persona, arguing that: "Obama's preference for rational argument and his professorial persona also have drawn much attention, and much of it unfavorable. In the health care debate, as noted, he was often attacked for making complex arguments rather than

³⁰ Whitney Gent, "'Expensive' People: Consumer Citizenship and the Limits of Choice in Neoliberal Publics," *Communication and the Public* 3, no. 3 (2018): 201.

³¹ See for instance Seib, "One Goal, Pursued With Two Presidential Personas."

connecting directly with people.³² Policies that are promoted as enhancing the social welfare of the nation are those that best suit the economic interests of those involved. Jeffrey St. Onge analyzes the rhetoric utilized by Obama in his addresses to Congress concerning the Affordable Care Act, arguing that the president's promotion of his health care policy exposes the "tensions between individualism and community that reflect neoliberalism's deep presence in political language."³³ Obama's rhetoric attempted to appeal to the American public as a collective, emphasizing that the need to ensure the well-being of the citizenry is not an individual issue but one that affects the entire country. By referencing powerful concepts like "freeloading" and "American solutions," Obama's promotion of the Affordable Care Act framed health coverage not as a public issue but one with significant economic implications to a country still recovering from the financial crisis, which St. Onge argues discloses a "conception of America that monetizes, individualizes, and privatizes complex issues like public welfare and the social safety net, treating them only as units in the larger economy."³⁴ Since neoliberal language is so heavily ingrained into the imaginary of the American public, Obama needed to draw upon individualized rhetoric to effectively communicate the details of his health plan, which contradicted the themes of social welfare that defined his political persona.

Health care was also a consistent, although not significant, subject discussed by Obama in his 2004 political memoir *The Audacity of Hope*. The topic of health care was primarily examined by Obama in relation to vague references to the nation's "broken" and "terribly inefficient" system due to policies such as George H. Bush's Health Savings Account initiative.³⁵

³² Robert C. Rowland, "Barack Obama and the Revitalization of Public Reason," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 14, no. 4 (2011): 704.

³³ Jeffrey St. Onge, "Neoliberalism as Common Sense in Barack Obama's Health Care Rhetoric," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (2017): 296.

³⁴ St. Onge, "Neoliberalism as Common Sense," 304.

³⁵ Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, (New York: Broadway Paperbacks, 2006), 22, 40, and 179-180.

Obama does outline a rough framework in *The Audacity of Hope* for a potential overhaul of the health care system, including the possibility of citizens paying into insurance pools and restructuring tax breaks for employers who provide plans to finance subsidies directed to children and lower-income households. His hypothetical plan prioritizes preventative care and managing chronic medical conditions, such as diabetes, cardiovascular issues, and kidney and liver diseases, to help reduce financial burdens on health care providers. Obama supported his argument with the individualistic statistic that since “20 percent of all patients account for 80 percent of care, if we can prevent diseases from occurring or manage their effects through simple interventions like making sure patients control their diets or take their medicines regularly, we can [...] save the system a great deal of money.”³⁶ His reasoning taps into neoliberal logics determining who is worthy of social assistance, a judgement that for Anne MacLennan is rooted in historical classifications of poverty and the “deserving poor.”³⁷ Those individuals who exhibit ownership over their well-being – by managing their wellbeing through nutrition, diet, and exercise – are framed in public discourse as meriting access to health care and insurance. The individualistic framing exhibited by Obama is a testament to the power of consumer capitalism in shaping how important issues are approached within public discourse, thereby reflecting Zygmunt Bauman’s notion of failed consumers where those who do not consume in a manner deemed acceptable are stripped of their social citizenship and excluded from participating in a public governed by discourses of consumption.³⁸

³⁶ Obama, *The Audacity of Hope*, 184-185.

³⁷ Anne MacLennan, “Promoting Pity or Empathy? Poverty and Canadian Charitable Appeals,” in *Advertising, Consumer Culture, and Canadian Society*, ed. Kyle Asquith (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2018), 226-227.

³⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, “Collateral Casualties of Consumption,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 7, no. 1 (2007): 31-32 and Gent, “Expensive People,” 191-192.

Obama's reference in *The Audacity of Hope* to the importance of diet as a preventative measure for overall health and patient care foretells Michelle Obama's advocacy efforts as First Lady towards nutrition, exercise, and lowering childhood obesity. The March 2009 debut of Michelle Obama's vegetable garden on the White House lawn and her "Let's Move" campaign, which she positions in her memoir *Becoming* (2018) as "complementing Barack's success in establishing the 2010 Affordable Care Act," worked to further associate individualized notions of healthiness with neoliberal ideas of social citizenship.³⁹ Commonly cited as Michelle Obama's most influential campaign as First Lady, particularly due to iconic moments in popular culture such as collaborating with Big Bird for a *Funny or Die* skit and her push-up challenge on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, "Let's Move" prioritized diet and movement as important yet individualized elements critical to the overall health of the nation, and the messaging of her activism and promotional efforts symbolically coincided with attempts by the Obama administration to pass health care reform policy. Michelle Obama also collaborated with *Funny or Die* to create the skit "Snackpocalypse," which showed the First Lady watching a mock trailer for a film about defeating an army of teenage zombies who solely eat junk food from vending machines in promotion of her lobbying efforts to improve the nutrition in school cafeterias.⁴⁰ Obama's earlier remarks in *The Audacity of Hope* and the motifs of the "Let's Move" campaign and the "Snackpocalypse" skit are examples of how the administration's promotional efforts concerning the Affordable Care Act were dependent upon the neoliberal connections between citizenship, consumption, and physical activity that shaped how health care was visualized in public culture.

³⁹ Michelle Obama, *Becoming* (New York: Crown, 2018), 348.

⁴⁰ Kendall Breitman, "Michelle Obama Does 'Funny or Die,'" *Politico*, last modified March 9, 2014, <https://www.politico.com/story/2014/09/michelle-obama-funny-or-die-snackpocalypse-110548>.

Communicating Obamacare to the Public: Social Media & *Funny or Die*

Presidents have an interest in attempting to determine how their policies are framed and communicated to the public. The widespread nickname ‘Obamacare’ was primarily first used by Republicans, in particular Mitt Romney, in speeches criticizing the Affordable Care Act. The Obama administration’s efforts to reshape the moniker into a more positive context is a prime example of a president’s efforts to frame popular discussions of key policy for the public in a manner deemed more accessible. Despite initially employed by Republicans as a critique of government and to frame Obama as a socialist, the administration’s communication staff created messaging to reconcile the ‘care’ in Obamacare with the president’s responsibility to the nation’s well-being. Jennifer Hopper argues through her frame analysis of coverage containing the word Obamacare in mainstream print newspapers that “even given the challenge of recasting a high-profile derogatory term as a positive, the president and his surrogates and supporters were able to gain media attention and help shift sentiments about the policy in a less negative direction when Obamacare appeared in the news.”⁴¹ Following the passage of the Affordable Care Act in March 2010, Obama first incorporated this rhetoric regarding the moniker for his health care policy during an August 2011 town hall meeting in Cannon Falls, Minnesota in a response to a question about medical marijuana: “Let me tell you, I have no problem with folks saying Obamacares. I do care. If the other side want to be the folks who don’t care, that’s fine with me. But yeah, I do care about families who’ve been struggling because of crushing health care costs.”⁴² Evoking the contemporary fascination with care and well-being, this messaging crafted by the Obama

⁴¹ Jennifer Hopper, “Obamacare, the News Media, and the Politics of 21st-Century Presidential Communication,” *International Journal of Communication* 9 (2015): 1293.

⁴² Colby Hall, “Obama: ‘I have No Problem With Folks Saying ‘Obamacares’ ...I DO Care,’” *Mediaite*, last modified August 15, 2011, <https://www.mediaite.com/tv/president-obama-i-have-no-problem-with-folks-saying-obamacares-i-do-care/>.

administration was visualized through the “I love Obamacare” campaign, complete with the sale of t-shirts, buttons, and bumper stickers displaying the slogan, a parallel to the consumer merchandise first created for his campaign which encourages the public to consume the persona of Obama as a brand that further extends his power as a cultural icon.

Roughly two years after the passage of the Affordable Care Act, the Obama administration began their larger social media campaign to reclaim the nickname Obamacare that had already been circulating in the news media and public culture. Characteristic of the communication tactics utilized to great effect during his 2008 presidential campaign, an email was sent to subscribers to commemorate the health care act’s signing, noting in particular that “the law that almost everyone called Obamacare has been doing exactly what the other side has hoped it wouldn’t do: It’s been working. It’s about time we give it the love it deserves. Let everyone know: ‘I like Obamacare.’”⁴³ Wishing the Affordable Care Act a “happy birthday” on Twitter, Obama urged his followers to post on Twitter with the hashtag #ilikeobamacare what they liked best about his health care plan, tweeting: “If you’re proud of Obamacare and tired of the other side using it as a dirty word, complete this sentence: #ILikeObamacare because...”⁴⁴ The rhetoric of care continued to be a constant reference point throughout his social media channels, well-illustrated through a post on his @barackobama Twitter profile – which, at the time, was his official presidential account primarily used for campaign purposes prior to the 2015 launch of the @POTUS handle – with (presumably) a staff member tweeting, “Barack Obama – ‘I kind of like the term ‘Obamacare.’ Because I do care. That’s why I passed the

⁴³ Eric Randall, “How ‘ObamaCare’ Went from Smear to Cheer,” *The Atlantic*, March 23, 2012.

⁴⁴ Barack Obama, Twitter post, March 23, 2012, 3:03 p.m., <https://twitter.com/BarackObama/status/183267724124880897> and Obama, Twitter post, March 23, 2012, 3:04 p.m., <https://twitter.com/BarackObama/status/183267904530300929>.

bill.”⁴⁵ The achievement of the social media campaign in both promoting the Affordable Care Act and rearticulating the rhetorical positioning of Obama with consumer-orientated discourses of care is a reflection of how easily his persona can shift between political and popular culture.

In order to ensure the accessibility of the Affordable Care Act, Obama needed young adults within the 18-to-35 age demographic to purchase health insurance in order to prevent drastic increases in other premiums within the marketplace. Although his 2008 presidential campaign witnessed high turnout from young voters, the success of his policy was partially dependent upon those citizens to express their support through purchasing power, a challenging task as many believed they did not require health insurance due to the good health of youth and others were unable to afford such a rather large expenditure.⁴⁶ Although already working with numerous grassroots groups such as Young Invincibles, Generation Opportunity, and Enroll America to overcome the larger imagery challenges facing health care reform, the Obama administration collaborated with Hollywood executives and agencies to promote the Affordable Care Act and encourage the public, and in particular younger voters, to sign up for insurance when Obama’s coverage plan started on October 1, 2013. The Obama administration also drew upon the support of the Hollywood Health & Society program based within the University of Southern California’s Annenberg Lear Center by awarding a \$500,000 grant to help television writers and producers generate content that accurately reflected key policy elements. Supported by financial backing from public institutions and philanthropic organizations like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, Hollywood Health & Society was first conceptualized in 1994 as a partnership with the Center for Disease Control to assist

⁴⁵ Obama, Twitter post, August 15, 2012, 2:43 p.m., <https://twitter.com/BarackObama/status/235809026326286336>.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, Ezra Klein and Sarah Kliff, “Obama’s Last Campaign: Inside the White House Plan to Sell Obamacare,” *The Washington Post*, July 13, 2013.

entertainment creators communicating information about HIV.⁴⁷ The Obama administration's decision to financially partner with Hollywood Health & Society reflects the integral importance of popular culture to Obama's image, since, as the program's head Martin Kaplan noted in the press release announcing the collaboration, "the public gets just as much, if not more, information about current events and important issues from their favorite television shows and characters as they do from the news media."⁴⁸

The announcement of the grant awarded to the Hollywood Health & Society program by his administration is just one example of Obama utilizing popular culture to help promote the Affordable Care Act. Obama's appearance on the program *Between Two Ferns with Zack Galifianakis* – in which comedian Galifianakis mockingly interviews celebrities such as Natalie Portman, Bradley Cooper, and Charlize Theron – streamed on the comedy webpage *Funny or Die* is often cited as an iconic moment of his presidency, symbolizing his ability to create viral moments that register with popular culture. Filmed in the White House's Diplomatic Room and released on March 13, 2014 ahead of that month's deadline to enroll for health care coverage, the 6-minute clip – which has surpassed 32 million views on YouTube – showcases Galifianakis interviewing Obama on healthcare and the racism faced by his administration, such as his birth certificate and the possible location of his presidential library in Kenya. Obama addresses the tumultuous rollout of the healthcare.gov website, noting that despite extensive technical difficulties when first launched, the website "works great now," and further appeals to *Funny or Die*'s demographic of young adults by comparing the cost of insurance under the Affordable

⁴⁷ "Overview," *Hollywood Health & Society*, accessed July 29, 2020, <https://hollywoodhealthandsociety.org/about-us/overview>.

⁴⁸ Dominic Patten, "Obamacare Angles For Starring Role On Primetime TV," *Deadline*, last modified October 9, 2013, <https://deadline.com/2013/10/obamacare-hollywood-tv-series-grant-607768/>.

Care Act to a monthly cell phone bill.⁴⁹ The segment was well-received by both the public and the press, and was recognized with a 2014 Emmy Award in the category Outstanding Short-Format Live-Action Entertainment Program.

Obama's appearance on Galifianakis's program is part of a larger collaboration between his administration and *Funny or Die* to help promote the Affordable Care Act to younger audiences. *Funny or Die* chief executive officer Mike Farah was involved in a series of consultations at the White House to explore the possibilities for policy promotion within the entertainment industry, which led to the mutually beneficial relationship between the Obama administration and the comedy website. One of the more prominent promotional videos resulting from Farah's relationship with the White House that gained significant public reaction was the *Funny or Die* skit featuring actress Jennifer Hudson parodying political fixer Olivia Pope, the main character from the television series *Scandal* (2012-2018). Released in September 2013 prior to the October launch of the enrollment webpage healthcare.gov, Hudson's spoof of *Scandal*'s Olivia Pope coincided with the political thriller gaining influence and entering into the vernacular of popular culture. Wearing a white trench coat (Olivia Pope became iconic for her white-coloured wardrobe), Hudson is stealthily approached by scared individuals needing medical assistance. She becomes increasingly exasperated when their issues can be fixed by the Affordable Care Act, begging a covert agent at the end of the clip to exclaim, "can you find me a real scandal? All these people's issues can be fixed by the ACA!"⁵⁰ The coverage issues addressed by the parody – including a college graduate with no insurance, a politician concerned

⁴⁹ Zack Galifianakis, "President Barack Obama." *Between Two Ferns with Zach Galifianakis*, YouTube video, 6:36, posted by *Funny or Die*, March 13, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnW3xkHxIEQ&list=PLRcB4n4CGcy--S3f3LidbEOBHQHKZi4ie&index=18&t=0s&app=desktop>.

⁵⁰ "Scandalous with Jennifer Hudson," YouTube video, 2:12, posted by *Funny or Die*, September 30, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzjLb2LwM7w>.

about his mistress who is pregnant and uninsured, a woman concerned that her employer does not insure mammograms, and a young adult hesitant to seek coverage due to his asthma stemming from childhood as a pre-existing condition – articulate the key policy reforms promoted by Obama to capture the attention of the important young adult demographic. *Funny or Die*'s Scandal skit is dependent upon neoliberal discourses that create exclusionary categories of social citizenship. The majority of the hypothetical scenarios visualized by the skit are due to circumstances beyond their control and not the result of bad personal decisions, such as over-consuming processed food or failing to achieve a 'healthy' lifestyle, further reinforcing the power of neoliberal logics of proper consumerism that regulate who is deemed worthy of social assistance in public culture.

At a more symbolic level, utilizing the narrative conventions of *Scandal* to endorse the key elements of the Affordable Care Act reference larger themes of outrageousness characterizing coverage of the systematic injustices that constitute a crisis within the American health care system that have long circulated within both popular culture and public discourse. However, public discussions of accessible health care mimicked language and rhetoric used to condemn consumers for the financial crisis by placing blame at an individual rather than systematic level. The Obama administration's partnership with *Funny or Die* to promote the Affordable Care Act along with Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" campaign exemplify Sarah Banet-Weiser's argument that "advertising has held a crucial role in nation-building, through its reassuring messages to citizens that consumption not only should be a habit, but is more profoundly a national duty."⁵¹ The Obama administration's promotional campaign naturalized the neoliberal connections between citizenship, consumption, and socially constructed notions of

⁵¹ Banet-Weiser, "Branding the Crisis," 109.

health that ultimately worked to shape how the Affordable Care Act was debated within public discourse.

Visualizing Crises Through Spectacular Environmentalism

Discourses of consumerism evidently played a key role in framing how the Obama administration promoted the Affordable Care Act. The connections between capitalism, poverty, and health care access were predominantly unaddressed by the press, particularly since recovery from the economic collapse continued to be the dominant crisis facing the nation. Just over a month after the official signing of the Affordable Care Act into law, the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig owned and operated by BP exploded in the Gulf of Mexico on April 20, 2010, resulting in one of the largest oil spills in history. Although oil spills occur frequently across the world with very little media attention, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill became an iconic event that captured the global imaginary. Documentaries and films like Spike Lee's *If God Is Willing and da Creek Don't Rise* (2010) and *Deepwater Horizon* (2016) starring Mark Wahlberg are texts representative of the crisis's cinematic influence, the initial reporting of the explosion and attempts at crisis management by the Obama administration and BP also created new practices for visualizing and communicating environmental destruction.⁵² The oil spill symbolized the reiterating system of environmental destruction and capitalist exploitation required to maintain consumer society, and, consequently, reproduce the social inequalities that Obama was elected to help reform.

The media coverage of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill helped initiate a more intense cultural interrogation of the environmental crisis, along with vocal criticism of the lack of public

⁵² Alison Anderson, *Media, Environment and the Network Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 98-127 and Andrea Miller and Victoria LaPoe, "Visual Agenda-Setting, Emotion, and the BP Oil Disaster," *Visual Communication Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2016): 53-63.

policy directed towards mitigating climate change and global warming. In a similar framework to the public emotion and anxiety regarding the fallout from the 2008 economic recession, Phaedra C. Pezzullo argues that environmentalism is also applicable to scholarly discussions of cultural crisis.⁵³ Pezzullo references Naomi Klein's statement from *This Changes Everything* – in which she writes “What if global warming isn't only a crisis? What if it's the best chance we're ever going to get to build a better world?” – to argue that the framing of environmental topics like global warming and rainforest destruction as representative of a larger cultural crisis creates an imagined space to envision the possibility for social change.⁵⁴ Evident in the visual communication of the Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill, the discursive conventions of the spectacle is an important contributor to the ways in which environmental politics circulate throughout popular culture. Michael Goodman, Jo Littler, Dan Brockington, and Maxwell Boykoff contend that it is because of the power of the spectacle that environmental issues enter into public discourse. Defined as “large-scale mediated spectacles about environmental problems,” they argue that spectacular environmentalisms are critical to maintaining public attention on key topics due to the politics of mediation and the selective framing involved in communicating science and policy to the public.⁵⁵ Spectacular environmentalisms functions symbolically as a critique of Debord's theorization of the spectacle, which they argue is limited in its ability to account for the complexity composing the relationship between the media and the public. Debord's spectacle operates under the presumption that the media is a falsified construction bestowing authenticity on connections developed between people on a micro level.

⁵³ Phaedra C. Pezzullo, “Hello From the Other Side: Popular Culture, Crisis, and Climate Activism,” *Environmental Communication* 10, no. 6 (2016): 803.

⁵⁴ Pezzullo, “Hello From the Other Side,” 803-804.

⁵⁵ Michael K. Goodman et al, “Spectacular Environmentalisms: Media, Knowledge and the Framing of Ecological Politics,” *Environmental Communication* 10, no. 6 (2016): 678.

Goodman, Littler, Brockington, and Boykoff argue that spectacular environmentalisms challenge the Debord approach, since ecological imagery “influence a range of equally politicized ways of seeing, being with and relating to diverse environments through the tethering of the spectacular to the discourses and practices of the everyday.”⁵⁶ In her analysis of the potential for spectacular imagery to impact policy decisions concerning environmental issues, Libby Lester draws upon Nancy Frasier’s discussion of the global economic, political, and communication networks and how these interconnected systems impact theorizations of the public sphere. The visual plays an important role in communicating scientific information and raising awareness over political decisions with significant environmental impact while also transforming specific locations into major points of reference within public discourse.⁵⁷

Celebrity Environmental Activism

The dependence upon celebrity figures by the Obama administration to help promote the Affordable Care Act is just one example of the influential trend of employing celebrities to communicate complex policies like health care and environmental legislation within the public sphere. There is a significant history of celebrity intervention on issues prevalent in public discourse, ranging from Mark Twain’s criticism of diplomacy efforts during the Spanish-American war to Marlon Brando and his work with the United Nations Children’s Fund and the American Indian Movement. Liza Tsaliki, Christos Frangonikolopoulos, and Asteri Huliaras argue that the emphasis currently placed upon celebrity activism – promoting what they term as “philanthropic capitalism” – is the contemporary equivalent of how 1930s film stars glamorized

⁵⁶ Goodman et al, “Spectacular Environmentalisms,” 678.

⁵⁷ Libby Lester, “Containing Spectacle in the Transnational Public Sphere,” *Environmental Communication* 10, no. 6 (2016): 795.

the ideals of consumer society.⁵⁸ For Annika Bergman Rosamon, celebrity activism exemplifies the cosmopolitan argument in international relations in which the rights of the individual are prioritized over those pertaining to the state. The measures taken by celebrities on behalf of political campaigns or environmental issues are often legitimized by the public as an appropriate method of action despite not being subjected to review.⁵⁹ Within this landscape of commodity activism, figures like Westwood and Pope Francis are legitimized as highly persuasive voices in the context of environmental politics, a trend that Alison Anderson argues is representative of the “growing synergy between the entertainment industry and politics in many liberal democracies.”⁶⁰ Celebrity activism, however, possesses the ability for notable individuals to connect with a public often generalized as apathetic, thereby functioning as an example of publicity on behalf of political institutions and organizations, such as in the rhetoric of *Funny or Die*’s videos promoting the Affordable Care Act and, most notably, in the realm of environmental communication.⁶¹

The relationship between celebrity culture and other public figures, social and political advocacy, and the environment is not unique to the contemporary power of commodity activism. Dan Brockington notes that the current excess of these symbiotic associations is due to the intensification of neoliberalism, the power of celebrity as an influential platform, and most significantly, the changes that have occurred in the organization and funding of conservation

⁵⁸ Liza Tsaliki, Christos Frangonikolopoulos, and Asteri Huliaras, “The Challenge of Transnational Celebrity Activism,” in *Transnational Celebrity Activism in Global Politics: Changing the World?*, ed. Liza Tsaliki, Christos Frangonikolopoulos, and Asteri Huliaras (Bristol: Intellect, 2011), 10-12.

⁵⁹ Annika Bergman Rosamon, “The Cosmopolitan-Communitarian Divide and Celebrity Anti-war Activism,” in *Transnational Celebrity Activism in Global Politics*, ed. Tsaliki, Frangonikolopoulos, and Huliaras, 67-69.

⁶⁰ Alison Anderson, “‘Together We Can Save the Arctic’: Celebrity Advocacy and the Rio Earth Summit 2012,” *Celebrity Studies* 4, no. 3 (2013): 340.

⁶¹ Rosamon, “Cosmopolitan-Communitarian Divide,” 69 and Giorgos Pleios, “Fame and Symbolic Value in Celebrity Activism and Diplomacy,” in *Transnational Celebrity Activism in Global Politics*, ed. Tsaliki, Frangonikolopoulos, and Huliaras, 256-258.

efforts and how these critical resources are distributed.⁶² Since the late 1980s, environmentalism and resource conservation have become popular issues for celebrities to connect to their public personas; Sigourney Weaver advocated for gorilla welfare after portraying murdered zoologist Dian Fossey in the 1988 film *Gorillas in the Mist*, Woody Harrelson previously owned an O2 oxygen bar, and Barbara Streisand, amongst numerous other actors and musicians, has donated over \$20 million to various environmental organizations throughout her career.⁶³ Members of the British Royal Family have also built their charitable portfolios around environmental and conservation issues, such as the Duchess of Sussex Meghan Markle's narration of the documentary *Elephant* (2020). While he was previously ridiculed for his environmental focus, many of Prince Charles' sustainability initiatives have been generally well-received by contemporary critics. Officially launched in 2015 as a means to recognize Queen Elizabeth II's legacy, the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy raises awareness towards rainforests by providing support to local indigenous communities to maintain the natural environments for future generations, while also functioning as a platform for knowledge and resource exchange on conservation issues.⁶⁴

Such activities however must be situated within a continuously evolving celebrity ecology. Michael K. Goodman and Jo Littler contextualize a celebrity ecology as a phenomenon that is "co-produced through a nexus of power relations and uneven power geometrics," while

⁶² Dan Brockington, *Celebrity and the Environment: Fame, Wealth and Power in Conservation* (London: Zed Books, 2009), 2-3.

⁶³ Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics*, 118-121.

⁶⁴ "QCC Key Objectives," *The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy*, accessed May 27, 2020, <https://queenscommonwealthcanopy.org/>. For popular discussions on Prince Charles, refer to Oliver Burkeman, "How Green is Charles?" *The Guardian*, last modified October 28, 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2005/oct/28/themonarchy.g2>, Catherine Mayer, "Heroes of the Environment: Prince Charles," *Time*, last modified October 17, 2007, http://content.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1663317_1663319_1669898,00.html and Graeme Wearden, "Reshape Economy to Fight Climate Crisis, says Prince Charles," *The Guardian*, January 22, 2020.

Marshall notes that this unique ecosystem functions by creating hierarchies that privilege “not only the power of individuals, but just as equally, the issues that are explored through these individuals.”⁶⁵ Celebrity ecologies function by creating space for celebrities with a high visibility to participate in other fields like social welfare and environmentalism, however intervention in such political issues is consequently explored through these public personas. Addressing environmental activism within the concept of celebrity ecologies provides a framework to question not only the feasibility but also the inherent contradictions of such interventions, since Goodman and Littler argue that “celebrity – with its individualized mode of power, its concentration of wealth, its imbrication in systematic profit-making – [is] the exact opposite of what biodiversity and the environmental crisis needs: participation, co-operation, regulation against exploitation and systematic political change.”⁶⁶ Environmental politics evidently have become a popular topic for figures like Westwood and Pope Francis to legitimize their social status and brand identity, and the power of their personas to determine how issues circulate in the public realm represents for Marshall the ability to “normalise debates beyond fact.”⁶⁷ Conservation issues and climate change are also very complex and often scientifically technical topics, therefore requiring environmental groups to become dependent upon celebrity engagements and marketable public relations campaigns to generate the publicity required to gain traction within the public sphere. Celebrity intervention within environmental politics elevates certain issues and places to occupy a more favoured position within the social hierarchy of visibility in public discourse.

⁶⁵ Michael K. Goodman and Jo Littler, “Celebrity Ecologies,” *Celebrity Studies* 4, no. 3 (2013): 274 and Marshall, “Personifying Agency: The Public-Persona-Place-Issue Continuum,” *Celebrity Studies* 4, no. 3 (2013): 369.

⁶⁶ Goodman and Littler, “Celebrity Ecologies,” 269.

⁶⁷ Marshall, “Personifying Agency,” 274.

The power of environmental activism to rebrand a celebrity or public figure's career is well illustrated by the example of Al Gore and the popularity of his Academy Award-winning documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006). Gore's public persona constitutes Goodman and Littler's argument of "enviro-tainment" and the "celebrification of nature," in which the interventions of public figures into politics shape how such topics like climate change and ecological preservation are presented to the public.⁶⁸ Following the conclusion of his terms as Vice President of the United States and after the controversial loss to George H.W. Bush in the 2000 presidential election, Gore's privileged status in public discourse might have suffered if not for the widespread recognition associated with his environmental activism. Gore's environmental activism is legitimized by his political background, yet he is dependent upon the conventions of celebrity to promote his work. The success of Gore's activism is in how his advocacy is situated within popular conversations on environmentalism, which Marshall, D'Cruz, and McDonald define as a "complex scientific discourse that substantiates the reality of global warming, but it is also a gestural narrative that enables individuals to express with an belief system that confers on them an identity that is indivisibly connected to the meta-narrative of climate crisis."⁶⁹ Individual acts attached to consumption, such as switching off household appliances, are inextricably linked to larger scientific and policy issues. It is debatable, however, if the individual actions promoted by Gore in *An Inconvenient Truth* can expedite concrete change, leading to questions regarding whether they are more effective in formulating a sense of an ethical identity.

While the commercial success of *An Inconvenient Truth* is frequently credited with creating a space in mainstream public discourse to discuss ecological issues, Gore's

⁶⁸ Goodman and Littler, "Celebrity Ecologies," 271 and 273.

⁶⁹ Marshall, D'Cruz, and McDonald, "'Un Geste Suffit'? Unpacking the Inconvenient Truths About Al Gore's Celebrity Activism," *Persona Studies* 4, no. 2 (2018): 68.

environmental activism is greatly informed by the logic of consumer capitalism by positioning individuals as ethical consumers within a public structured by consumption. Questioning the activities of celebrated public figures like Gore who approach ecological politics through the framework of commodity activism, Marshall, D'Cruz, and McDonald argue this approach often undertaken by celebrities, including Vivienne Westwood, reinforces that “environmental activism is imbricated within the economic flows of consumer capitalism, which means that activism is mediated through our consumption of commodities.”⁷⁰ The prominence of ethical consumption practices is attributed to the growth of niche-marketing and lifestyle branding since the 1970s alongside the continuously growing socioeconomic inequalities facilitated by neoliberal policies. Technological advancements expedited the production and distribution of consumer goods, which Litter acknowledges has consequentially brought greater attention to the depletion of natural resources, pollution, climate change, and other environmental issues.⁷¹ Acknowledging the inexistence of a “golden-age of non-commodified social relations,” ethical consumption practices represent for Littler consumer capitalism’s “crisis of moralism.”⁷² This crisis plaguing the public is well illustrated by the Victoria & Albert Museum’s 2018-2019 exhibit “Fashioned from Nature,” which acknowledged the environmental devastation generated by the fashion industry while also highlighting the cultural shift towards sustainability. Writing in the foreword to the exhibit, actress Emma Watson reflects on her personal journey into an ethical consumer after being introduced to the inequalities of the industry when studying for her A-Levels. Discussing the impact of touring Bangladesh garment factories, Watson reveals:

⁷⁰ Marshall, D'Cruz, and McDonald, “Unpacking the Inconvenient Truths,” 70.

⁷¹ Littler, “Good Housekeeping: Green Products and Consumer Activism,” in *Commodity Activism: Cultural Resistance in Neoliberal Times*, ed. Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 77-78, 88.

⁷² Littler, *Radical Consumption: Shopping for Change in Contemporary Culture* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2009), 4-5.

Utilizing the red carpet, I pledged to wear sustainable designs by creatives embracing concepts and materials that could reshape the future of fashion. This challenge spread into my daily wardrobe. I find peace of mind knowing what I'm wearing is either vintage and reused, or carefully sourced and produced in a way that strives to improve the working lives of the makers. I don't get it right all the time, but if I start by asking the right questions then I'm conscious of making a better choice.⁷³

Reflective of the individualized focus of celebrity environmental activism, Watson's rhetoric reinforces the neoliberal argument that an ethical wardrobe is a skill developed through economic and cultural capital. Evocative of the way the Obama administration connects physical activity and proper nutrition as singular actions that determine one's health that ultimately influences the larger economy, Watson's commentary reflects the overarching neoliberal correlation between consumption and individual choice in facilitating a sense of public good. More significantly, the associations made by Watson between environmentalism, consumer capitalism, and global poverty reflect the larger social dynamics creating the space in public culture for Westwood's activism and the political messaging that forms Pope Francis's advocacy.

Westwood's Development into an Environmental Activist

Although Westwood has always been known for expressing her political opinions, the May 2007 publication in *The Guardian* of her manifesto, "An Active Resistance to Propaganda," signified the shift to focusing more explicitly on environmental activism. Told through the journeys of the philosophers Aristotle and Diogenes and iconic functional characters like Alice, the White Rabbit, the Mad Hatter, and Pinocchio, Westwood argues that the discourse of commercialism has diminished the value of art since the practice is appropriated as propaganda by the political elites, and that the wasteful consumerism evocative of the 21st century has

⁷³ Emma Watson, foreword to *Fashioned from Nature*, edited by Edwina Ehrman (London: Victoria & Albert Publishing, 2018), 6.

directly contributed to climate change and the annihilation of natural resources. To attempt to transform the current capitalistic system that values consumerism over the protection of the environment, Westwood, drawing upon Matthew Arnold's argument of mass socialization in *Culture and Anarchy*, encourages citizens to reconsider hegemonic ideas of 'high' culture in order to develop a more refined artistic and social consciousness, claiming that "art gives culture and [culture] is the antidote to propaganda."⁷⁴ Westwood often cites Arnold as an important reference in developing her socio-political themed manifesto, admitting in *Get A Life!* that she frequently rereads *Culture and Anarchy* and declares that his concept of the "best self" is the "wisest thing I have ever heard and the greatest advice this diary can pass on."⁷⁵ Coinciding with the launch of her activist webpage, Active Resistance, Westwood held public readings of her manifesto across the United Kingdom in the fall of 2007, including a special event held at London's Wallace Connection in which model and socialite Georgia May Jagger voiced the character of Alice.

Westwood's manifesto and the subsequent articles posted on her Active Resistance website primarily focused on critiquing government action, the role of consumption, and the potential of high art to restore civic values with only a small consideration towards the environment. It was not until Westwood read a March 2008 article in *The Guardian* by scientist James Lovelock – who believes that the effects of climate change will result in the earth's population decreasing by one billion by the end of the 21st century – that environmental politics became the major focus of her activism. His piece was a major prompt for Westwood, who describes in her diary her reaction to Lovelock's arguments: "We must tell everyone! What can

⁷⁴ Westwood, "Active Resistance to Propaganda," *The Guardian*, May 12, 2007.

⁷⁵ Westwood, *Get A Life!* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2016), 218-219.

we do? We must get people talking!”⁷⁶ Westwood responded by meeting with various nongovernmental organizations working in rainforest preservation, eventually deciding to work with Cool Earth, an organization that supports indigenous populations and conservation efforts in the Congo, Brazil, and Papua New Guinea.

Founded in 2007 by British politician Frank Fields and Swedish billionaire Johan Eliasch, Cool Earth is financed through personal donations, trusts, and business partnerships with companies like Starflight Aviation and Sushisamba. Based in the United Kingdom, Cool Earth’s mandate is to prevent further destruction of rainforests by working “alongside local people to help build better health, better education and better livelihoods to create resilient and empowered villages.”⁷⁷ Cool Earth invited Westwood and Kronthaler to be the organization’s inaugural patrons in September 2015, with the organization citing her personal donation and funding of a trip to the Asháninka rainforest in Peru as evidence of Westwood’s commitment to Cool Earth’s core values and principals. A variety of projects undertaken by Westwood and Kronthaler are showcased on the organization’s webpage including “Vivienne Westwood’s Rainforest Manifesto” (a public call for “friends, celebrities and everyone interested in saving our beautiful world”) which highlights the protective work Cool Earth has undertaken in the Western Amazon to prevent illegal timber harvesting.⁷⁸ Her autumn/winter 2014-2015 Gold Collection inspired by her trip to Peru is also highlighted with a gallery of runway images accompanied by show notes from Westwood and Kronthaler along with praise from Cool Earth for her contributions in

⁷⁶ Westwood, *Get A Life!*, 7.

⁷⁷ “Our Impact,” *Cool Earth*, accessed May 18, 2020, <https://www.coolearth.org/what-we-do/our-impact/>.

⁷⁸ “Vivienne Westwood’s Rainforest Manifesto,” *Cool Earth*, last modified April 2, 2014, <https://www.coolearth.org/2014/04/vivienne-westwoods-rainforest-manifesto/>.

raising the organization's public profile by generating additional celebrity involvement from Kate Moss.⁷⁹

Although she has frequently utilized the runway to visualize her support for a variety of causes, including her ongoing support of imprisoned Native American activist Leonard Peltier and Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, Westwood's current focus on the environment has been a major recurring theme prevalent in her collections: "Chaos" (autumn/winter 2008-2009), "Climate Revolution" (spring/summer 2013), "Mirror of the World" (spring/summer 2016), and "Intellectual Unite" (autumn/winter 2016-2017). The spectacle of the designer's construction of her contemporary persona as an environmental activist is well captured by *The Guardian's* accurate characterization that "the last six years in the life of inimitable fashion designer and mother of punk, Vivienne Westwood, have been characterised by climate change activism, vehement political criticism, and of course, fashion shows – all in typical Westwood style."⁸⁰ Reinforcing *The Guardian's* description, Westwood's Gold Label spring/summer 2010 collection, "Get A Life," featured models with blazing red hair styled to signify the environmental destruction perpetuated by consumer capitalism. At her September 2015 runway performance at London Fashion Week, models carried placards displaying the catchphrases "Climate Revolution," "Politicians R Criminals," and "Fracking is a Crime" while walking to a soundtrack of blaring police sirens.⁸¹

⁷⁹ "Rainforest Inspires Vivienne Westwood Show," *Cool Earth*, last modified March 3, 2014, <https://www.coolearth.org/2014/03/rainforest-inspires-vivienne-westwood-show/> and "Vivienne Westwood and Cool Earth," *Cool Earth*, last modified March 31, 2014, <https://www.coolearth.org/2014/03/vivienne-westwood-and-cool-earth/>.

⁸⁰ Stephanie Convery, Lucy Clark, and Steph Harmon, "Bookmark This: From Queen Victoria to Twin Peaks – November's Literary Highlights," *The Guardian*, November 4, 2016.

⁸¹ "Vivienne Westwood Stages Protest At London Fashion Week," *Huffington Post*, last modified September 21, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/09/21/vivienne-westwood-protest-london-fashion-week_n_8172258.html.

Westwood's introduction of environmentalism into her design activism has at times not been well-received by her critics. Following the 2007 release of her manifesto, *The Guardian* described her "attempt to persuade everyone to stop watching television and look at paintings" as "embarrassing."⁸² *The Independent* dismissed her more recent collections as evidence of Westwood wearing her "environmentalist hat," and Sylvia Hui of the Associated Press noted in reviewing Westwood's work that "the grand dame of fashion, as she is known, has been making headlines in recent years more for her activism than her runway collections."⁸³ Such commentary works to undermine Westwood's commitment to her political advocacy, while also denoting her environmental efforts are more of a passing trend than a philosophical commitment. While not immune to criticism, however, Westwood's environmental activism is legitimized through her extensive participation in anti-fracking protests throughout the United Kingdom and long-time backing of Greenpeace conservation efforts, in addition to her £1 million personal donation to Cool Earth funding their exposure of the inadequate dispersal of financial resources and supplies by the World Bank's Climate Investment Funds.⁸⁴ The designer's incorporation of environmental themes into her runway collections has been criticized by some commentators, but others have applauded her activism as a now integral aspect of Westwood's iconic identity. In a retrospective of her blending of politics and fashion that "steal the spotlight," *Vogue* ranks her work advocating for climate change awareness as prime examples of why "she's fashion's

⁸² David Shariatmadari, "Is Westwood's Reputation Going South?" *The Guardian*, last modified November 19, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/artblog/2007/nov/19/haswestwoodsreputationgonesouth>.

⁸³ Luke Blackall, "Westwood Warns Off Fracking," *The Independent*, January 16, 2014 and Sylvia Hui, "Modern Dance Opening Highlights 'Fashion Activism' at Vivienne Westwood's London Show," *Postmedia*, September 15, 2013.

⁸⁴ Jamie Waters, "Vivienne Westwood's Top 10 Political Moments," *Dazed*, last accessed April 8, 2015, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/24335/1/vivienne-westwood-s-top-ten-political-moments> and Hannah Devlin, "Westwood Gives £m to Save Planet," *The Times*, November 28, 2011.

top activist.”⁸⁵ In a similar overview of her political approach to fashion in honour of her 74th birthday, British bi-monthly cultural publication *Dazed* highlighted the numerous moments that established Westwood’s identity as “the iconoclast” and “doyenne of British fashion.” Events highlighted by *Dazed* include Westwood’s collaboration with the print magazine *Dazed & Confused* to edit their July 2008 issue themed to promote her Active Resistance website, the launch of her environmental campaign Climate Revolution during the closing ceremonies for the London 2012 Paralympic Games, delivering a box of asbestos to then-prime minister David Cameron at 10 Downing Street, and turning her Red Label autumn/winter 2015-2016 runway show into a promotional advertisement for green political parties.⁸⁶

Westwood’s guest collaboration with *Dazed & Confused* for the July 2008 issue revolved around the designer’s newfound focus on environmental politics after being introduced to the issues highlighted by Lovelock’s article in *The Guardian*. The cover photograph featured a male child wearing Active Resistance buttons; other images in the issue portray children wearing makeshift dresses created out of copies of Westwood’s manifesto. “Emergency on Planet Earth,” a feature on Lovelock’s predictions for Earth accompanied with imagined satellite maps of the planet for the year 2050, visualizes the dreary actuality that comprises the rhetoric central to Westwood’s activism, illuminating that “between melting snow and ice caps, disappearing forests and warming oceans, we’re seriously messing with how conditions necessary for life are regulated...the forecast for the immediate future is grim – think *The Day After Tomorrow* meets *Waterworld* meets *Mad Max* and you are getting the picture.”⁸⁷ Other content in the *Dazed & Confused* issue reinforces the rhetoric and narrative associated with the designer’s developing

⁸⁵ Steff Yotha, “Vivienne Westwood Proves She’s Fashion’s Top Activist,” *Vogue*, last modified September 12, 2015, <https://www.vogue.com/article/vivienne-westwood-activism-tank-2>.

⁸⁶ Waters, “Vivienne Westwood’s Top 10 Political Moments.”

⁸⁷ Chris Hatherill, “Emergency on Planet Earth,” *Dazed & Confused*, July 2008, 104.

persona as an environmental activist, such as a photo-editorial portraying the type of apocalyptic environment she envisions will occur due to global warming and an interview with James Martin, the Pulitzer Prize nominated author of *The Wired Society* and *The Meaning of the 21st Century*, regarding the social, economic, and technological changes that need to occur in order to counteract the challenges that will plague future generations.

Emphasized by *Dazed* as a critical moment in the construction of her iconic identity, Westwood's participation in the closing ceremonies of the 2012 London Paralympic Games signified the debut of Climate Revolution, the designer's environmental campaign that has become a core component of her brand and public persona. Influenced by the aesthetics of the Mad Max franchise and Boudicca, the British folk hero and Celtic Queen of the Iceni Tribe, Westwood rode into the ceremony on a flaming chariot designed in the form of a horde and galleon composed out of recycled scrap materials. Wearing a veil designed to conceal her identity until she was the focus of television cameras, Westwood's dress unraveled to expose a Climate Revolution banner. Westwood discussed the planning and implementation of her presentation in her diary *Get A Life!*, which was designed in collaboration with artist Joe Rush, founder of the British performing arts group Mutoid Waste Company. She highlights her make-up as an important aesthetic element of her performance, designed specifically to embody an eco-warrior heading into battle:

My Make-up was crucial [...] I was supposed to be Boudicca, the Queen of the ancient Britons, who fought the Romans and used a blue dye called woad for warpaint. And because I am dead serious about the Climate Revolution, I wanted the face of war [...] I just drew a face that was the opposite of a smiley face (Wipe that smile off your face!). I painted my face like that and painted arrows on my arms.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Westwood, *Get A Life!*, 129-130.

Coinciding with her appearance at the closing ceremonies, Rush also designed specially themed Climate Revolution windows for the Vivienne Westwood boutique in London's Conduit Street, utilizing scrap metals to create sculptures that visualized an apocalyptic worldview, such as a man trapped inside an iron cage.

Spelled out in a bold black typeface against a white backdrop, Climate Revolution operates as an outlet articulating Westwood's identity as an environmental activist. The slogan first featured during the Paralympic Games closing ceremonies has overtaken Active Resistance as the dominant theme of her political webpage (distinct from corporate pages promoting the Westwood fashion labels), where she writes blog entries and posts articles promoting a variety of environmentally focused activities and causes. Following the launch of Climate Revolution, white box-cut t-shirts displaying the Climate Revolution logo across the chest were available for purchase for £36 with profits benefiting Cool Earth. Lady Gaga was photographed by tabloids wearing a Climate Revolution t-shirt in Los Angeles while Pamela Anderson wore the same design when appearing on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* to promote her fundraising efforts for the New York City Marathon and to a *Vanity Fair* party hosted by Giorgio Armani during the Cannes Film Festival. Westwood's Climate Revolution campaign has also been worked into the advertising campaign for her Gold Label spring/summer 2013 collection. Photographed by Juergen Teller and featuring Westwood and Kate Moss modelling pieces from the collection (including Climate Revolution t-shirts) in front of paintings displayed in Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum, the aesthetics reflected a tribal theme articulated through frayed hems and the use of lively colours and prints.⁸⁹ The campaign connects the priorities of Westwood's political philosophy to her design aesthetic – high culture, fine art, and

⁸⁹ Westwood, *Get A Life!*, 135, 241, 302-303 and 145-147.

environmental preservation – yet the success of the images is dependent upon the reader’s awareness to understand how the advertisements articulate such messaging. The labelling of Climate Revolution is now a core component of Westwood’s visual communication, and the knowledge required to appreciate Westwood’s examples of design activism is not nearly as intricate as was previously needed to decode the historical references included in her earlier collections. Westwood’s prominence and status as a cultural icon influenced celebrities like Lady Gaga to follow suit, thereby making the Climate Revolution t-shirt a trend to consume in accordance with the dynamic of commodity activism. Westwood manipulates her influence within popular culture as she knows that consumption will occur within the fashion industry but is able to utilize the act of purchasing to her advantage. Her political activity and fashion legacy legitimize her environmental campaign, and advertising Climate Revolution through other prominent celebrities introduces her agenda to other demographics and publics.

The concentration on environmental politics articulated by Westwood’s Climate Revolution campaign also encompasses her work with Greenpeace. The debut of Westwood’s Gold Label autumn/winter 2013-2014 “Save the Arctic” collection during Paris Fashion Week coincided with Greenpeace’s campaign launch of the same name to help mitigate the elements contributing to the gradual ruin of the arctic regions. Westwood designed a Save the Arctic campaign graphic portraying the globe twisted into the outline of a heart, which was subsequently printed on t-shirts that circulated through popular culture. As part of the promotional campaign for the theatrical release of the film *Muppets Most Wanted* (2014), Westwood and Kronthaler appeared in a short video in which they had tea with Miss Piggy. The iconic Muppets character wore a Save the Arctic t-shirt with a plaid skirt and was gifted a Climate Revolution t-shirt by Westwood and Kronthaler. In *Muppets Most Wanted*, Westwood

designed the wardrobe for Miss Piggy using environmentally friendly materials, including a replica of the designer's iconic Harris Tweed suit and a sustainable Vivienne Westwood couture bridal gown crafted out of plastic recycled bottles.⁹⁰

Westwood's Save the Arctic t-shirt became the focus of a specific 2015 campaign for Greenpeace in which photographer Andy Gotts captured over 60 celebrities and prominent figures donning the t-shirt, including George Clooney, Julian Assange, Sharon Osborne, and Chris Martin. The photographs were staged as an exhibit displayed alongside the escalators at London's Waterloo station, the location most frequently accessed by Shell employees due to the close proximity of the oil company's South Bank headquarters.⁹¹ Westwood's support of the organization extends to her advocacy on behalf of the Arctic 30, the Greenpeace activists and freelance journalists who were detained and charged with piracy and hooliganism by Russia – and eventually released – after protesting the country's drilling practices in the Prirazlomnoye oil field located in the Pechora Sea. The designer was a constant presence at the Arctic 30 protests outside of Shell's London office, partaking in the staging of 10-foot-high boxes displaying the portraits of those detained and participating in an *i-D* magazine documentary detailing the Arctic 30 campaign against the company's involvement in Russia's controversial arctic drilling practices.⁹²

Aside from her work with Greenpeace, Westwood has embarked upon numerous commercial partnerships to promote her Climate Revolution brand. Westwood collaborated with cosmetics retailer Lush in January 2013 for their New Year's themed campaign to encourage

⁹⁰ Romy Oltuski, "Miss Piggy Talks With Vivienne Westwood," *Harper's Bazaar*, last modified February 11, 2014, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/fashion/designers/a1566/miss-piggy-talks-with-vivienne-westwood/>.

⁹¹ For a complete gallery of the exhibit, refer to "Save the Arctic Campaign," *Vivienne Westwood*, accessed May 22, 2020, <https://www.viviennewestwood.com/en/westwood-world/save-the-artic-campaign/>.

⁹² Westwood, *Get A Life!*, 260-261 and 268.

ethical consumer habits amongst their clientele. With their shop windows across 104 locations in the United Kingdom promoting Westwood's Climate Revolution label, Westwood addressed the reasoning behind her decision to partner with the brand: "I was impressed by Lush – it's run like a family business with the earth and its people as a priority. I like the attention they give to the amount of packaging they use and the communities from which they source their products."⁹³ Westwood continued working with Lush to design a knot-wrap for that year's holiday campaign, with Lush co-founder and chief executive officer Mo Constantine describing the "exciting collaboration" as an example of "two iconic British brands coming together, at Christmas, and asking the high street to consider their waste."⁹⁴ Encouraging consumers to purchase a Climate Revolution knot-wrap – within the style of the Japanese textile 'furoshiki' reusable for gift wrapping – the collaboration aimed to both diminish and raise awareness towards the approximately 227,000 miles of decorative wrapping paper that is deposited into landfills across Britain at the conclusion of the holiday season. Westwood inserts the potential consumer directly into her activist rhetoric, proclaiming that:

Everyone who saves a plastic bag is a freedom fighter for climate change [...] These Climate Revolution knot-wraps can replace wrapping paper and will last a lifetime. More importantly, when you buy them you join an uprising: the Climate Revolution that we need if we are to have a future that we can survive and thrive on.⁹⁵

The £15 knot-wrap, which Lush has sold since 2005, can be used either as gift packaging or worn as an accessory. Displaying Westwood's Climate Revolution logo alongside Westwood's signature and other subversive-styled graphics, proceeds of the Lush knot-wrap collaboration

⁹³ Aimee Farrell, "Westwood's Lush Work," *Vogue*, last modified January 11, 2013, <https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/vivienne-westwood-and-lush-team-up>.

⁹⁴ Katy Young, "Vivienne Westwood Designs Scarves for Lush," *The Telegraph*, November 4, 2013.

⁹⁵ Young, "Westwood Designs Scarves for Lush."

were directed towards charities and nongovernmental organizations preferred by Westwood.⁹⁶ Her collaboration with Lush is an example that highlights Westwood's ability to promote a product symbolizing a complex concern – the environmental effects of discarded holiday decorations and wrapping paper – and transform it into an opportunity for individuals to participate in practices of commodity activism that registers with the public. Lush's main demographic is adolescents and young women under the age of 30 who are often not the direct appeal of ethical consumer campaigns, which in turn works to introduce Westwood's image to a considerably more youthful market than her traditional clientele. She again turns to consumption to promote her environmental agenda and is able to mediate her message in a familiar way that supports change without threatening the capitalist framework at the heart of not only consumer culture but also her livelihood as a fashion designer. This fragile balance is integral to how her otherwise challenging, and sometimes farfetched, viewpoints are so widely disseminated and acceptable in conversations about environmental politics, sustainability, and public good.

Mediating counter-hegemonic discourses through visual means such as Westwood's Climate Revolution clothing is not a unique form of expression. When viewed as instances of commodity activism, the Climate Revolution clothing and accessories, alongside other cause-related marketing campaigns, represent the popular approach undertaken by global brands aiming to enhance their public image with the impression of political awareness. The French clothing and accessories company Lacoste, for example, reworked their iconic green crocodile logo into the shape of endangered species for their autumn/winter 2018-2019 collection in partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature, despite previous accusations by Greenpeace of worsening water pollution through the toxicity of Lacoste's

⁹⁶ Hayley Joyer, "Vivienne Westwood Creates Climate Revolution Knot-Wrap," *Lush*, accessed May 22, 2020, <https://uk.lush.com/article/vivienne-westwood-creates-climate-revolution-knot-wrap>.

Chinese manufacturing practices.⁹⁷ Westwood's Climate Revolution employs the same marketing techniques reminiscent of other examples of commodity activism, such in the Lacoste campaign, and is one of numerous instances in which Westwood has created collections of resistance clothing and accessories for purchase. Prior to focusing more specifically on environmental politics, Westwood released a collection of accessories including belts, pins, and t-shirts to advocate for Leonard Peltier's release from jail. While certain artefacts are participatory in their ideals, such as the print publication of the designer's online installation *100 Days of Active Resistance* highlighting submissions from global youth detailing their opposition efforts, other work, including Climate Revolution, function more as brand-strengthening opportunities for Westwood that develop legitimacy through the association with her public image.

Regardless of the intentions of her work, Westwood's environmental activism and the way in which she has employed the narratives of capitalist critique to build her public identity are not free from contradiction and criticism. This resulting dissonance is an inherent aspect of public figures like Westwood – and to a similar extent Pope Francis – since as Graeme Turner argues, “the celebrity-commodity, no matter how worthy the cause, will always have to overcome the already embedded sense of their inauthenticity or ‘constructedness’ in order to serve an environmental politics.”⁹⁸ Her 2013 collaboration with Richard Branson's airline Virgin Atlantic garnered tepid reaction from her critics. Redesigning the uniforms for over 7,500 Virgin Atlantic employees, Westwood utilized sustainable fabrics, such as polyester yarn recycled from

⁹⁷ Lucy Hutchings, “Lacoste Replaces Signature Crocodile with Endangered Species,” *Harper's Bazaar*, last modified March 3, 2018, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/uk/fashion/fashion-news/a19065563/lacoste-replaces-signature-crocodile-with-endangered-species/>.

⁹⁸ Graeme Turner, “Celebrities and the Environment: The Limits to Their Power,” *Environmental Communication* 10, no. 6 (2016): 813.

plastic bottles, while also sourcing luggage created by the Ethical Fashion Initiative, her collaboration with the United Nations to support the economic development of Nairobi's textile industry.⁹⁹ Although Branson has announced the withdrawal of his charitable and corporate investments from fossil fuel holdings in a manner similar to other institutions and public figures like the Sainsbury family, Prince Charles, and the Church of England, critics denounced Westwood's collaboration with a mode of transportation associated with burning excessive amounts of non-renewable resources for failing to validate the image of the designer as an environmental activist that has become entrenched into the public imaginary.¹⁰⁰ Satirically comparing Westwood's collection for Virgin Atlantic to Naomi Campbell's concession that she does not object to wearing unethically-sourced diamonds, *The Guardian's* Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett deemed the designer's decision an "infinite disappointment," arguing that Westwood "is now designing uniforms for a company whose fossil fuel consumption could very well outstrip that of a small principality, possibly Wales."¹⁰¹ While Cosslett's commentary makes extreme use of hyperbolic comparisons and reinforces the point that Westwood does not completely challenge consumer capitalism, she addresses the discord that develops when public figures adopt practices of commodity activism to reshape their public identities, writing "that small spark of belief in the fundamental goodness of people has been bluntly sniffed out, only to be replaced with the pervading belief that no one in the public eye is capable of doing anything remotely philanthropic without there being a smidgeon of self-promotion among their motives.

⁹⁹ Ella Alexander, "Westwood Designs Virgin Atlantic Uniforms," *Vogue*, last modified May 2, 2013, <https://www.vogue.co.uk/gallery/vivienne-westwood-designs-virgin-atlantic-uniforms> and Marc Karimzadeh, "Vivienne Westwood Designing Uniform for Virgin Atlantic," *Women's Wear Daily*, May 2, 2013.

¹⁰⁰ For popular discussions of fossil fuel disinvestments, refer to Pilita Clark, "Prince Charles Shuns Fossil Fuel Investments," *Financial Times*, April 27, 2015 and Josh Gabbatiss, "Church of England Votes to Withdraw Funds from Companies that Contribute to Climate Change," *The Independent*, July 9, 2008.

¹⁰¹ Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett, "Vivienne Westwood, Virgin and Good Old-Fashioned Celebrity Sell-Outs," *The Guardian*, May 3, 2013.

Yes, even Kim Kardashian. Even Angelina Jolie.”¹⁰² While Westwood herself proclaims she does not frequently travel unless to Paris and Milan for the work required for her label, the frequent mentions of air travel in her diary was the subject of criticism in reviews of *Get A Life!* For instance, the *Daily Mail*’s review of Westwood’s book commented that “like so many right-on celebrities, she seems to see no contradiction with her self-image as an eco-warrior and damaging the planet by travelling so many air miles.”¹⁰³ Although it does make the designer vulnerable to criticism when she discloses flying to India to attend Naomi Campbell’s James Bond themed birthday party without recognizing the pretentiousness, airline travel does not completely discredit Westwood’s work. While Vivienne Westwood’s actions invite criticism, her iconic identity in popular culture focuses media attention on important environmental issues central to the public.

Visualizing Zombies and the Apocalypse in Westwood’s Design Activism

Apocalyptic terror and horror imagery were prevalent themes to negotiate the power dynamics of the 2008 financial crisis and consequential post-recession culture. The housing and mortgage crisis within the United States acted as a morbid platform to examine the gendered dynamics of white suburban middle-class households. For Tim Snelson, the popularity of horror films and televised anthologies during the mid 2000s and early 2010s, such as *Paranormal Activity* and *American Horror Story* coincides with the implosion of the housing market and the collapse of homeownership as a fundamental characteristic of the American Dream. In addition to informational websites on fraudulent mortgages and lending schemes utilizing the generic conventions of horror and the supernatural, Snelson argues that these cultural texts repurpose the domestic setting of the home into a “site of threat, instability, and disruption” by symbolically

¹⁰² Cosslett, “Westwood, Virgin and Good Old-Fashioned Celebrity Sell-Outs.”

¹⁰³ Geoffrey Levy, “Dame Dotty,” *Daily Mail*, October 15, 2016.

locating “white, middle-class families as the main victims” of the “structural violence and gendered inequalities underlying capitalist cycles of boom and recession.”¹⁰⁴ *Vogue* attributes the popularity of horror motifs during the 2015-2017 runway performances to discourses of austerity characterizing post-recession culture, believing designers were weary of showcasing immaculate conceptions of beauty and glamour.¹⁰⁵ In media interviews, fashion collections, and personal reflections from her diary and blog, Westwood consistently frames environmental issues as ecological disasters accelerated by the global capitalist system that will ultimately result in an apocalyptic society. First adopting the rhetoric of catastrophe in her guest-edited issue of *Dazed*, Westwood described environmental politics as a “war for the very existence of the human race [and] that of the planet.”¹⁰⁶ Westwood frames environmental destruction as an ecological horror brought on by the capitalist system by incorporating narratives, motifs, and imagery predominant in the still-emerging genre of eco-horror. For Stephen Rust, the “locus of horror” in such films is placed upon the individual, thereby marking the genre of eco-horror as “an important signifier of the looming presence of humanity as an agent of global ecological change during the rise of neoliberalism.”¹⁰⁷ Due to the prominence of natural catastrophic imagery in popular culture, ranging from news reports on hurricanes and wild fires to disaster films, humanity has become numb to ecological tragedies, and, paralleling the hegemony of capitalism as the governing social structure, cannot visualize a society radically transformed by changes designed for environmental preservation that will radically shift the practices of everyday life. The cinematic horrific body is a predominant construct in Westwood’s design activism to communicate issues

¹⁰⁴ Tim Snelson, “The (Re)possession of the American Home: Negative Equity, Gender Inequality, and the Housing Crisis Horror Story,” in *Gendering the Recession*, ed. Negra and Tasker, 162 and 176.

¹⁰⁵ Steff Yotka, “TV, Film, and Now Fashion: A Look at the Eerie and Unusual Themes Ruling the Runways,” *Vogue*, last modified October 23, 2015, <https://www.vogue.com/article/horror-themes-spring-2016-runways>.

¹⁰⁶ Harriet Walker, “Nothing Like a Dame,” *The Independent*, July 12, 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Rust, “Comfortably Numb,” 551.

related to environmental politics, relying upon the highly mobile and intertextual image of the zombie to engage her public with the catastrophic realities of contemporary political and consumer culture.

The zombie is a central motif in Westwood's design activism. With an extensive textual history since its cinematic emergence in American popular culture during the 1930s, the aftermath of the events of September 11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq alongside the economic recession of 2008 provided the socioeconomic context for a resurgence of the zombie motif as a thematic construct to interrogate larger social anxieties.¹⁰⁸ Integrating zombies – alongside other apocalyptic horror imagery – into her runway collections during the height of the motif's resurgence after the success of AMC's televised adaptation of the graphic novel *The Walking Dead* (2010-2020), Westwood's reliance upon the imagery acts as a frame of reference that easily captures popular attention. The Red Label autumn/winter 2013-2014 performance during Paris Fashion Week signified one of the first instances of Westwood's incorporation of the zombie motif into her aesthetic through the model's styling, as described by the lifestyle website *PopSugar*:

Those who are fans of designer Vivienne Westwood know that she has a flair for the dramatic, and she proved that yet again at her fall 2013 Paris Fashion Week Show. Models' faces were powdered pale and white and then accented with fluorescent eye shadows, purple contouring and cloth braids. The result was a strange hybrid – part Marie Antoinette, part zombie – that was so colourful, it was impossible not to stare.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ See for example, Peter Dendle, "The Zombie as Barometer of Cultural Anxiety," in *Monsters and the Monstrous: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*, ed. Niall Scott (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 45-57 and Nicole Birch-Bayley, "Terror in Horror Genres: The Global Media and the Millennial Zombie," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 45, no. 6 (2012): 1147.

¹⁰⁹ Maria Del Russo, "See Vivienne Westwood's Pastel Zombie Girls at Paris Fashion Week," *PopSugar*, last modified March 3, 2013, <https://www.popsugar.com/beauty/Vivienne-Westwood-Hair-Makeup-Fashion-Week-Fall-2013-28380513>.

With their heavily powdered faces and excessively long nails, the models' visual appearance was not connected to Westwood's developing design activism but rather credited as a further example of her peculiar personality. *PopSugar*'s comparison of the cosmetic styling to Marie Antoinette is intriguing especially since the iconic figure is a common representation to signify metaphorical critiques of conspicuous consumption, particularly during periods of economic recession and political hypocrisy.¹¹⁰

In addition to her design aesthetic, apocalyptic imagery is the dominant visual motif employed by Westwood's environmental activism. Speaking at a press conference supporting The End Ecocide campaign in January 2014 – which aimed to gather one million signatures to establish the European Union as criminally responsible for their ecological destruction – Westwood employed the common metaphor associating consumers as zombies, proclaiming, “Napoleon said the English were a nation of shopkeepers. By that I take it to mean they'd sell their grandmother for money, and that's what's going on.”¹¹¹ The press conference featured a mock trial that was live streamed by Sky News, in which executives from Canadian oil companies occupying the tar sands were found guilty of ecocide; although actors were hired to play the roles of the accused, the evidence discussed in the lawyers' arguments was based on scientific evidence.¹¹² Held on a boat chained to Blackfriars Bridge on the River Thames, The End Ecocide event functioned as an opportunity for Westwood to critique David Cameron's initiative to raise public support for fracking by distributing portions of potential profits to local business. Westwood illuminated the connections between the hegemony of the political system, the economy, and environmental destruction, arguing that:

¹¹⁰ Truman, “Back to the Political Future,” 147-157 and Aidan Moir, “Transient Vogue: The Commodification and Spectacle of the Vagrant Other” (MA Thesis, York University, 2013), 84-91.

¹¹¹ “Vivienne Westwood Attacks Fracking ‘Bribes,’” *Agence France Presse*, January 15, 2014.

¹¹² Westwood, *Get A Life!*, 274.

Politicians are locked into this age-old thing where they're destroying the Earth and they think it's the best thing because they're not thinking. Once governments stop giving assets to companies and corporations then the world will really, really change. As soon as you start to implement actions and policy that what is good for the planet is good for the economy...you get difference values, a fairer system of politics, everything.¹¹³

Westwood later performed a rap for The End Ecocide campaign that was featured in a promotional video for the cause, with lyrics highlighting the connectivity of the planet and society: "The crime of ecocide is the greatest crime of all/everything is connected/if the grass dies we die/if the worms die we die/if the insects die we die/without birds we die/without fish we die/without plankton we die/everything is connected, we all die together."¹¹⁴ The End Ecocide campaign later became the theme showcased by Westwood's Gold Label spring/summer 2014 collection.

Westwood's Climate Revolution organized an anti-fracking protest in London, referred to as the Fracked Future Carnival, held on March 19, 2014, in which the designer led a march throughout London in conjunction with different nongovernmental organizations and community groups, including Friends of the Earth, Fuel Poverty Action, Ecocide, Frack Off London, and Reclaim the Power. Giving her employees the day off to attend the march, the Fracked Future Carnival began at Westwood's Battersea offices, travelling through Knightsbridge and finishing at the Jumeirah Hotel to coincide with the Shale Gas Forum, a conference discussing the business of fracking. The aim of the Fracked Future Carnival was to garner more public awareness towards the controversial practice, with Westwood utilizing militarized rhetoric to describe the march's intentions, arguing that "we've got a war to stop climate change, and the

¹¹³ "Vivienne Westwood Attacks Fracking 'Bribes,'" and Blackall, "Westwood Warns Off Fracking."

¹¹⁴ Westwood, *Get A Life!*, 453.

first battle is to stop the government from forced fracking on people.”¹¹⁵ Drawing parallels to the design aesthetic of her runway shows, protestors attending the Fracked Future Carnival were styled as zombies, an intentional move explained by one participant to *Dazed*: “the zombie is the shell where inside it’s decaying. It represents the system where the lobbyists have power on the government.”¹¹⁶ Westwood elaborated on the creative decisions required to achieve a protest that would capture the imaginary of popular culture:

Others who joined us were in carnival mood, dressed as zombies and ghouls. I hadn’t wanted a carnival. It’s a matter of life and death and I didn’t wear my war paint. We want to attract ‘ordinary people’ and by that we mean people who aren’t normally political. But our activist colleagues were right – we needed the carnival. We looked great. There were lots of press. I was asked to lead the procession. I bowed and put my hands together in prayer, as you would before a battle. Then off we went!¹¹⁷

Westwood’s reflections on the planning of her Fracked Future Carnival illuminate the ways in which she is often detached from the choices that becomes synonymous with her public persona. Such activities like the march result from the input of her creative team, and in the case of her organized protests, by individuals who have no direct relationship with Westwood.

Westwood later offered her support to the Talk Fracking campaign at an April 2015 protest at Westminster Bridge in London. Talk Fracking, an anti-fracking organization created by Westwood’s son and Agent Provocateur founder Joe Corré, aims to raise awareness concerning the environmental consequences of the oil extraction practice. Protestors carried signs reading “Let’s stay on the road to a fracked future,” mocking the slogan of the United Kingdom’s Conservative Party (“Let’s stay on the road to a stronger economy”). Similar to the Fracked Future Carnival, Westwood drew upon apocalyptic zombie imagery to communicate the primary

¹¹⁵ Stuart Griffiths, “Vivienne Westwood Leads the London Fracked Future March,” *Dazed*, last modified March 20, 2014, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/19321/1/vivienne-westwood-leads-london-anti-fracking-fracked-future-march>.

¹¹⁶ Griffiths, “Westwood Leads the London Fracked Future March.”

¹¹⁷ Westwood, *Get A Life!*, 289.

messaging of the dangers caused by the extraction practice. Describing the visuality of the Talk Fracking protest, *The Hollywood Reporter*'s Sam Red highlighted Westwood's reference to the Mad Max franchise, noting that "Westwood surrounded herself by zombie-like creatures on stilts who were dressed in metal waste and covered in copper coloured paint. In her arms the designer carried a terrifying, amputee baby doll smeared in 'blood' which she called a 'fracked baby of the future.'" ¹¹⁸ By drawing upon the visual references of Mad Max, such as with protestors on stilts in a similar manner to the crow fishers who roam the uninhabitable Green Place, Westwood's design activism reflects her main argument that the mass extinction of humanity due to the destruction of natural resources will occur without converting to an entirely green economy. Westwood is also ensuring that her visual tactics garner media attention by aligning her design aesthetic with an apocalyptic motif promoted by films like *Mad Max Fury Road* (2015) that have brought catastrophic environmental imagery into the forefront of popular culture. ¹¹⁹

Westwood, Cole, and *The Red Shoes* as a Form of Design Activism

One of the most recognizable moments of Westwood's incorporation of horror and apocalyptic imagery occurred during her September 2013 runway performance at London Fashion Week. Epitomizing *The Guardian*'s review that "a typical Vivienne Westwood show is reactive and often at odds with the rest of the fashion week," the show garnered headlines for featuring a performative dance by British model Lily Cole that was inspired by Hans Christian Anderson's fairy tale, "The Red Shoes." ¹²⁰ With Cole wearing a ghostly grey gown and dancing to the backdrop of a red spotlight, the inclusion of the dance symbolized for Westwood how

¹¹⁸ Sam Reed, "Vivienne Westwood Hosts Anti-Fracking Protest in London," *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 28, 2015.

¹¹⁹ Gill Branston, "Apocalyptic Imaginings," *Environmental Communication* 10, no. 6 (2016): 807.

¹²⁰ Morwenna Ferrier, "Vivienne Westwood Gets Political at London's Fashion Week Men's," *The Guardian*, January 8, 2018.

“humans are trapped in a destructive path towards disaster, like the dancer trapped by her shoes in the macabre Hans Christian Anderson fable.”¹²¹ In addition to Cole’s performative dance, models wore Westwood’s Climate Revolution t-shirts under brocade dresses, suits, and coats as well as floral pieces reflecting the designer’s ecological aesthetic. Continuing the aesthetic styling first shown during Paris Fashion Week, the models wore what the Associated Press described as “exaggerated, frightening zombie-like makeup”; Westwood admitted that the cosmetic decision was intentional to transform the models to resemble “animals caught in car headlights,” denoting the destruction of natural habitats caused by both ecological disasters and the destruction of natural habitats due to property development.¹²² The selection of Cole to perform the dance at the beginning of Westwood’s runway spectacle was apparently a last-minute decision made by Kronthaler due to rehearsals of the show running under the allotted time. Regardless of the initial intent behind the planning, Cole is a highly strategic choice to associate with Westwood due to the model’s public persona. Although she first appeared on the cover of British *Vogue* at the age of 16, Cole earned a double-first class art history degree from the University of Cambridge, and, similar to Westwood, presents herself as a committed environmental activist as a supporter of the Environmental Justice Foundation and organizer of frequent talks on climate change at Selfridges.¹²³

First published in 1845, “The Red Shoes” illustrates the plight of Karen, a poor girl who develops irritated feet after surviving the winter without a pair of shoes. Karen is gifted a pair of luxurious red shoes that she becomes enamoured with, but the infatuation causes her to neglect her responsibilities. Instead of caring for her ill guardian, Karen attends a ball wearing her red

¹²¹ Hui, “Modern Dance Opening Highlights ‘Fashion Activism’ at Vivienne Westwood’s London show.”

¹²² Hui, “Modern Dance Opening Highlights ‘Fashion Activism’ at Vivienne Westwood’s London show.”

¹²³ Maureen Brookbanks, “Britain’s Brainiest Beauty...But Boy She Doesn’t Want You To Know It,” *Daily Mail*, January 12, 2018.

shoes and her legs begin to dance uncontrollably. Her dancing legs lead her out of the town, where she passes an angel condemning Karen for her selfish action before arriving at the house of executioner, who agrees to amputate her feet to replace the red shoes with crutches. Karen returns to town where she learns the value of hard work while discouraging children from becoming preoccupied with the conspicuousness of material artefacts: “all the little ones were very fond of her, but when they spoke of dress and splendour and beauty she would shake her head.”¹²⁴ Haunted by the image of her amputated feet dancing while wearing the red shoes, Karen prays for God’s help. The angel reappears and leads Karen’s soul to Heaven, where she is finally freed from the red shoes. Drawing upon her dance background, Cole worked with Lorna Tucker to choreograph a narrative based upon “The Red Shoes” to convey the horrific struggles of climate refugees, as Westwood elaborates in *Get A Life!*: “the girl cannot stop dancing unless she can rid herself of the shoes. This would be a metaphor for climate refugees who must escape their hostile environment. The dance of death must end. Trapped in its hostile environment an animal will die. It will try to leave. It will leave but there is nowhere to go.”¹²⁵ The fairy tale can be interpreted as signifying contemporary society’s addiction to the enchantments and excessiveness of consumer culture, particularly since Karen’s predicament in “The Red Shoes” thematically address the deadly sins of greed, lust, and gluttony. Karen’s powerlessness to control her dancing legs while wearing the red shoes represents contemporary society’s inability to reduce their shopping, which, in the context of Cole’s performance, denotes the addictiveness of consumption that ultimately contributes to environmental destruction.

¹²⁴ Hans Christian Anderson, *Hans Christian Anderson: Stories and Tales*, translated by H.W. Dulcken (London: Routledge, 2002), 212.

¹²⁵ Westwood, *Get A Life!*, 234.

Westwood details the planning of Cole's performative dance rearticulating the thematic meaning of "The Red Shoes" into a form of activism addressing the connections between consumption and climate change. Westwood planned for the runway show to support the Environmental Justice Foundation; she focused her collection on the theme of climate refugees, who at approximately 30 million outnumber the estimated 10 million war refugees despite little attention directed to their plight by mainstream media. Following the conclusion of the runway performance, Westwood made her entrance alongside Cole and the pair distributed postcards marked to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, urging attendees to write messages in support of climate refugees. Cole designed a postcard proclaiming, "Planet earth is our home. Yet climate change now makes someone homeless every second."¹²⁶ According to Westwood, 38 million people in 2010 were displaced by natural disasters related to climate change with economic damage projected at \$125 billion, with the effects of environmental disasters most suffered in developing countries:

1.5 million homes were destroyed in Bangladesh by Cyclone Sidr in 2007; floods in Pakistan displaced around 1.8 million people, and damaged or destroyed up to 1.6 million homes and 6.8 million acres of crops in 2010; more than 950,000 Somali refugees were displaced to neighbouring countries between January 2011 and January 2012 as a result of the complex Africa crisis.¹²⁷

Since climate refugees are not recognized under the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the Environmental Justice Foundation launched their "No Place Like Home" campaign alongside Westwood's design activism at London Fashion Week to advocate for greater legal protections. Westwood designed organic t-shirts modelled by Naomi Campbell that were both manufactured and distributed using renewable green energy practices, with each piece resulting in a significantly smaller carbon footprint than the average item of clothing. The t-shirts

¹²⁶ Westwood, *Get A Life!*, 234.

¹²⁷ Westwood, *Get A Life!*, 64-65.

were also featured in a window display at Selfridges to promote a talk Westwood gave to the department store's clientele, which also functioned as a fundraising event for Cool Earth, an intriguing location choice considering the luxury British department store is emblematic of the conspicuous consumer culture Westwood frequently cites as a cause of climate change and environmental destruction.¹²⁸ Although the dance that Cole performed during the initial runway show was only about three minutes in length, Tucker also created a short film based upon the model's environmental interpretation of "The Red Shoes" which debuted at Selfridges during an event in support of the Environmental Justice Foundation.¹²⁹

Westwood's Critique of Consumer Culture

A prominent theme underlying Westwood's activism is the role of wasteful consumerism, urging consumers to alter their spending habits to prevent further ecological destruction. In a 2011 interview with *The Guardian*, Westwood highlighted the relationship between climate change and the economy:

I'm going to start by talking about how I see the world [...] The capitalist system is about taking from the Earth and from the other great commodity, labour. What's happening with this system is that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, and the only way out of it is supposed to be growth. But growth is debt. It's going to make the situation worse. We have got to change our ethics and our financial system and our whole way of understanding the world. It has to be a world in which people live rather than die; a sustainable world. It could be great.¹³⁰

Her argument, which Westwood continuously repeats in media interviews, asserts that the landscape of politicians like Obama disagreeing on environmental policies constitutes a metaphorical battle that will ultimately dictate the future of humanity. Sponsored by *The Observer*, Westwood's 2011 TED Talk also concentrated on her opinions concerning the

¹²⁸ Westwood, *Get A Life!*, 64 and 101-102.

¹²⁹ Westwood, *Get A Life!*, 278.

¹³⁰ Jeffries, "Vivienne's Vision," *The Guardian*, December 3, 2011.

hypocrisies of the political system and how drastic class discrepancies exacerbate the correlation between capitalism and climate change. She theorizes a critique on the influence of consumer capitalism on the condition of public culture. According to Westwood, it is necessary for citizens to alter their consumption habits to prevent the continued destruction of the environment and limited natural resources, and, in order to develop a greater social awareness, citizens must engage on an educational level with cultural texts and artefacts.¹³¹ While a fashion designer advocating for restrained consumption habits seems disingenuous, Westwood's promotes the need to buy more high-end, longer lasting clothes (such as her designs) to reduce impact on the environment.

Westwood has been extremely vocal in condemning the spending habits of those consumers who compose her primary audience and fan following, yet in doing so, reproduces the neoliberal rhetoric and ideology that she criticizes in her advocacy efforts. During interviews after showing her recent collection during September 2013 London Fashion Week, Westwood criticized what she believes is the reckless spending on trivial purchases by the underprivileged classes, attributing their actions as examples of wasteful consumerism that reproduce the materialistic values perpetuating largescale consumer debt.¹³² Westwood's solution to resist the ideology of consumerism – which she views as a form of propaganda – that has degraded civic life is through the consumption of traditional art. She frequently calls upon her public to resist the urge to shop and instead visit institutional art galleries, since “if you go to an art gallery you're putting in, not just sucking up. Propaganda can be resisted by loving art.”¹³³ After joining protestors during November 2011's Occupy demonstrations, Westwood emphasized the ability

¹³¹ Westwood, “Forget Fashion, This is About Climate Change,” *TEDxObserver 2011*, last modified April 1, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xg-lXwxQl_Y.

¹³² “Vivienne Westwood: everyone buys too many clothes,” *The Telegraph*, September 16, 2013.

¹³³ Jeffries, “Vivienne's Vision.”

of an artistic education achieved through visiting galleries in order to “become freedom fighters against capitalism, consumerism and philistinism.”¹³⁴ A major theme of her 2011 television documentary *Vivienne Westwood’s London* is condemning those who visit the city’s tourist location like Big Ben. Described by *The Globe and Mail*’s John Doyle as an “odd little program” where Westwood “takes us to look at paintings and talk about them,” the designer showcases prominent cultural institutions like the Wallace Collection, the National Gallery, and Barbican Concert Hall.¹³⁵ Westwood’s criticism of contemporary commercialism and the harmful influence of consumer culture on what is a romanticized ideal of the public complicates the potential of aesthetic in functioning as a form of design activism. In assessing how Westwood’s “catwalk spectacle” articulates the social criticism that forms a core element of the designer’s visual ideas, Juliet Ash identifies the apparent hopefulness in Westwood’s earlier aesthetic, arguing that “what also connects her to a vision of a better future is her acceptance of ‘pluralities’ as fundamental to her work, as a form of primitive dialectics: ‘I would prefer to see the world a better place. I do care.’”¹³⁶ Westwood’s reliance upon the visual technique of ironic historicism, best illustrated in her pattern of referencing ancient Roman and Greek symbolism – works to subvert the hegemonic power of emblems articulating status in liberal democratic societies, an expression of resistance that can also be found in the punk aesthetic that first defined her design philosophy.

¹³⁴ Jeffries, “Vivienne’s Vision.”

¹³⁵ John Doyle, “Sharks, of Various Species,” *The Globe and Mail*, July 30, 2011 and Andrew Ryan, “Tonight on TV/Cultural Picks,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 14, 2011.

¹³⁶ Juliet Ash, “Philosophy on the Catwalk: The Making and Wearing of Vivienne Westwood’s Clothes,” in *Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader*, ed. Juliet Ask and Elizabeth Wilson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 178.

Consumption, the Environment, and Pope Francis

The rhetoric, narrative, and metaphors Westwood employ in communicating her political ideals, particularly in regard to consumption, evokes parallels to that of Pope Francis. Since his 2013 election to the papacy, Pope Francis has been extremely vocal in regard to his environmental agenda, utilizing his position as the leader of a global institution to highlight the dangerous relationship between capitalism, consumption, and multinational oil companies in reproducing systematic inequality. His sociopolitical analysis on “throwaway culture” consequently frames consumer culture as the main activity that should be the focus of criticism when approaching discussions on environmental politics.¹³⁷ Critiques of consumerism, however, can also be found in previous papal writings, such as Pope Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in Veritate*, in which he argues that “the way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa. This invites contemporary society to a serious review of its life-style, which, in many parts of the world, is prone to hedonism and consumerism.”¹³⁸ Pope Francis expands upon this connection between ecological destruction, poverty, and consumerism, which has been a recurring theme prevalent in his public remarks throughout his papacy. His discussion in *Laudato Si’* on the destructive environmental impact of air conditioners best illustrates the connections between “throwaway culture,” individual choices, and environmental destruction:

People may well have a growing ecological sensitivity but it has not succeeded in changing their harmful habits of consumption which, rather than decreasing, appear to be growing all the more. A simple example is the increasing use and power of air-conditioning. The markets, which immediately benefit from sales, stimulate ever greater

¹³⁷ Erik Olin Wright, “Sociological Limitations of the Climate Change Encyclical,” *Nature Climate Change* 5, no. 10 (2015): 902.

¹³⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas In Veritate*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, June 29, 2009, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html.

demand. An outsider looking at our world would be amazed at such behaviour, which at times appears self-destructive.¹³⁹

The theme of throwaway culture and contemporary capitalism's dependence upon wasteful consumerism further strengthens Pope Francis's overarching argument in his encyclical that environmental issues are primarily an individual issue.

During his first Easter mass held less than three weeks after his election, Pope Francis cited the exploitation of natural resources to fulfill capitalistic "greed" and "selfishness" as examples potentially leading to the destruction of humanity, however his remarks in regard to the environment were overlooked by the press in favour of emphasizing his condemnation of the ongoing conflict in Syria.¹⁴⁰ In a guest editorial published in *The Washington Post*, Fordham University theology professor Christiana Z. Peppard contemplated how Pope Francis's emphasis on the environment in his initial appearances as pontiff can potentially reshape approaches to conceptualizing life and creation, writing:

Pope Francis is guiding the global church towards two major right-to-life issues: poverty and the environment... (or, in theological terms, "creation"). During his installation homily, Pope Francis invoked those words ten times. Granted, his namesake, St. Francis of Assisi, was – in the parlance of our times – something of a tree-hugger who chatted with birds and wolves...Furthermore, in 1979 St. Francis was named the patron saint of ecologists. So it's not enormously surprising that at his first press conference, Pope Francis mused, "These days we do not have a very good relationship with creation, do we?"¹⁴¹

Her commentary illuminates how Pope Francis's papal image was intentionally branded by discourses of environmentalism, reflected by the branding of his persona with the ecological motifs and themes associated with St. Francis of Assisi. Although it is unconvincing that he did not have a papal name pre-selected (especially considering how close Bergoglio came to the papacy during the 2005 conclave that elected Pope Benedict XVI), in his first press conference

¹³⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 35.

¹⁴⁰ Josephine McKenna, "Pope Francis Pleas for Greater Equality," *The Telegraph*, March 31, 2013.

¹⁴¹ Christiana Z. Peppard, "For Catholics, a New Kind of Pro-creation," *The Washington Post*, March 26, 2013.

with the media Pope Francis was specifically asked about his papal name and the reasoning behind the choice. His reply credited a fellow cardinal for reminding him not to forget the poor as the inspiration behind his choice when introduced as the new pontiff.¹⁴² Pope Francis's emphasis that his papal name is a reflection of how he will prioritize the poor as the metaphorical heart of the church is significant because it illuminates the role of the press in branding Pope Francis as an environmental pontiff through the association with Saint Francis of Assisi, an allegorical frame illustrated by Peppard's analysis in *The Washington Post*.

While the resurgence of popular and political discussions on climate change can be attributed to the impact of Francis's encyclical, the text also resulted in shifting attention away from the scientific and economic complexities of topics like global warming and greenhouse gas emissions by creating a space in public discourse to address the ethics of mutual care and responsibility in regard to environmental issues.¹⁴³ *The Toronto Star*, for instance, evoked language often used by popular media reporting on gossip or a political scandal, describing Pope Francis's encyclical as a "bombshell" that "was more than a bit explosive" with the potential impact to "wake up a sleeping world on one of the most controversial challenges of our age."¹⁴⁴ His institutional identity as a religious leader, however, distinguishes Pope Francis from other figures, such as Westwood, who also advocate towards environmental issues, and along with the celebrity associated with his persona, is part of the reason coverage of his encyclical captured public attention in a way not generally expected from papal writings. Pope Francis's environmental advocacy transcends the boundaries of the institution he represents, thereby supporting the argument of Jeremy Stolow and Alexandra Boutros that the pontiff signals "the

¹⁴² Marco della Cava, "Pope Francis Charms Press in First Media Address," *USA Today*, March 16, 2013.

¹⁴³ "Using My Religion," *Nature Climate Change* 5, no. 10 (2015): 899 and Robert J. Brulle and Robert J. Antonio, "The Pope's Fateful Vision of Hope for Society and the Planet," *Nature Climate Change* 5, no. 10 (2015): 900.

¹⁴⁴ "Pope Francis: The Radical Septuagenarian," *The Toronto Star*, June 20, 2015.

need not only to document and understand the ways religion has become (newly) visible in public life, but also to identify the specific terms on which that visibility is imagined, negotiated, processed, and circulated.”¹⁴⁵ The media coverage concerning Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si’* and the positive press reaction to his environmental activism rejects modernity’s theory of a secular society by showcasing how religion continues to be a visible force in topics central to the public. It is the legitimacy of the institution Pope Francis embodies that has helped elevate his environmental message across a media culture that has not granted the same respect to Westwood as fashion designer from a working-class background.

The fact that *Laudato Si’* was the first encyclical entirely written by Pope Francis (an earlier encyclical, 2013’s *Lumen fidei*, was partially written by Pope Benedict XVI prior to his retirement), along with the leak of a draft by a journalist from the Italian magazine *L’Espresso* despite a strict publication embargo, created demand for translators and environmentalists to comment on the text for major news outlets and generated significant media attention upon the document’s official release in June 2015.¹⁴⁶ To mark the authorized issue of *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis published 63 posts comprised of shortened sentences from the encyclical on his @pontifex Twitter account. The pontiff’s English-language Twitter account lists over 18.7 million followers (with an additional 32.5 million followers using eight other @pontifex accounts in different languages), and the reach of the pontiff’s posts distributed through social media is far greater than the number of people who will engage directly with the actual encyclical. The tweet, “The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an

¹⁴⁵ Jeremy Stolow and Alexandra Boutros, “Visible/Invisible: Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 40, no. 1 (2015): 7.

¹⁴⁶ Maria-José Pou-Amérigo, “Framing ‘Green Pope’ Francis: Newspaper Coverage of Encyclical *Laudato Si’* in the United States and the United Kingdom,” *Church, Communication and Culture* 3, no. 2 (2018): 139-140 and Michelle Boorstein, Anthony Faiola, and Chris Mooney, “Pope Urgent on Climate Change,” *The Washington Post*, June 17, 2015.

immense pile of filth,” has been retweeted more than 63,000 times with over 70,000 likes, making the post one of the most popular texts on Pope Francis’s Twitter feed.¹⁴⁷ It was the line most commonly cited by media coverage on the encyclical, with *USA Today* describing Pope Francis’s declaration as a “brutal observation.”¹⁴⁸

During interviews and addresses in which he publicly discusses his encyclical, Pope Francis maintains his position that *Laudato Si’* is not strictly a religious text but speaks to a universal public. Following a climate demonstration at the Vatican attended by Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews alongside Catholic priests and women religious, Pope Francis acknowledged the multifaith assembly in Saint Peter’s Square by encouraging “the collaboration between people and associations of different religions for the promotion of an integral ecology.”¹⁴⁹ Of the 63 tweets referring to *Laudato Si’* posted between June 18 and 19, 2015, only 11 posts referenced any notion of God or Christian faith. The majority of posts published by @pontifex focusing on the encyclical addressed the socioeconomic implications of climate change, reinforcing Juan Narbona’s argument that Twitter has become the primary means for Pope Francis to mediate his institutional identity as a global leader.¹⁵⁰ Identifying the intended audience of his encyclical within the opening paragraphs of *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis directs his argument towards “every person living on this planet” regardless of faith, in order to “enter into

¹⁴⁷ Pope Francis, Twitter post, June 18, 2015, 9:00 a.m., <https://twitter.com/Pontifex/status/611518771186929664>.

¹⁴⁸ Gregg Zoroya, “Pope: ‘No right’ to Destroy the Earth,” *USA Today*, June 19, 2015. For further coverage of this particular line being referenced in media reports, refer to Helen Nianias, “Pope Says the Earth is ‘Beginning to Look More and More like an Immense Pile of Filth,’” *The Independent*, June 19, 2015, Emma Howard, “Pope’s Encyclical, Young Activists of Climate Campaign and Carbon Bombs,” *The Guardian*, June 19, 2015, “The Pope and the Planet,” *The New York Times*, June 19, 2015, and Francis X. Rocca, “Pope Blames Markets for Environment’s Ills,” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 19, 2015.

¹⁴⁹ Elisabetta Povoledo, “Climate Marchers Gather to Show Rousing Support for Pope,” *The New York Times*, June 29, 2015.

¹⁵⁰ Juan Narbona, “Digital Leadership, Twitter and Pope Francis,” *Church, Communication and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2016): 91.

dialogue with all people about our common home.”¹⁵¹ Despite drawing upon previous Catholic teachings throughout the text, Francis distinguishes the readership of *Laudato Si’* from his earlier apostolic exhortation, which was directed towards “all members of the Church with the aim of encouraging ongoing missionary renewal” – an approach similar to the texts of Pope Saint John XXIII who addressed his writings on nuclear weapons to the “Catholic World.”¹⁵² Pope Francis presents *Laudato Si’* as a revolutionary text transcending the religious boundaries generally expected of a papal encyclical (yet still presuming at least a Christian audience), a symbolic move that correlates with his inclusive and representative public image.

Pope Francis’s encyclical is one example of how he has utilized environmental politics, in addition to other topics pertaining to social justice issues, to brand himself as a political figure in a way that distinguishes him from other pontiffs. In her analysis on how the Spanish press received the messaging of *Laudato Si’*, Maria-José Pou-Amérigo argues that certain media outlets viewed the encyclical as a self-serving “media bit on the part of Pope Francis who, with the help of his communication skills, managed to transmit something his forerunners did not, taking on a new political role in the public arena.”¹⁵³ Her argument is well illustrated through commentary collected by *The New York Times* from selected members of the public gathered to welcome Pope Francis during his September 2015 visit to New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C.; Sasha, who identifies as a practicing Hindu, characterizes Pope Francis as a “world leader more than a religious leader” due to his “ability not to shy away from real issues,” and a Jewish woman defended her decision to volunteer at the World Meeting of Families conference attended by the pope, arguing, “It transcends Catholicism. It transcends religion. This

¹⁵¹ Pope Francis, *Encyclical on Climate Change & Inequality*, 4.

¹⁵² Pope Francis, *Encyclical on Climate Change & Inequality*, 4.

¹⁵³ Pou-Amérigo, “Framing ‘Green Pope’ Francis,” 137.

pope is speaking for the poor and the powerless. That is beyond religion.”¹⁵⁴ Pope Francis has worked to maintain his brand identity as a global leader through the simple act of direct appeals. For instance, in his October 2020 TED Talk highlighting the reciprocal connections between the Covid-19 pandemic, global poverty, and the environmental crisis, Pope Francis deliberately directs his plea about consciously making better moral choices in everyday life to a diverse public: “I would like to invite all people of faith, Christian or not, and all people of goodwill to embark on this journey, starting from your own faith, from your own intention, from your own goodwill.”¹⁵⁵ Pope Francis breaks from reading his printed script during his TED Talk to specifically address agnostics, atheists, and those of other faiths – which itself is a radical act – further reinforcing how he positions his image as a public leader transcending institutional boundaries. The focus on environmentalism that has defined his papacy exposes Pope Francis to wider audiences at a time when influence and controversies surrounding the Catholic Church have diminished its role in the lives of some Catholics, while also extending his prominence in scientific circles which largely have been in conflict with religious figures.

The reference to possible motives behind the symbolic purpose of his encyclical to help form his public image as a global leader subtly speaks to the common misconception of Pope Francis as the first pontiff to address environmentalism. While *Laudato Si’* is the first encyclical written by a pontiff to concentrate exclusively on the environment, Pou-Amérigo argues that “references to the necessary respect for Creation and criticism against overuse of natural resources are consistent with what the Church has said repeatedly, in particular, in the Second

¹⁵⁴ Vivian Yee, “Pope’s Fans Abound, in Church and Out,” *The New York Times*, September 24, 2015.

¹⁵⁵ Pope Francis, “Our Moral Imperative to Act on Climate Change – and 3 Steps We Can Take,” *TED*, last modified October 10, 2020, https://www.ted.com/talks/his_holiness_pope_francis_our_moral_imperative_to_act_on_climate_change_and_3_steps_we_can_take?language=en.

Vatican Council and through the popes of that period and subsequent to it, from Paul VI to Benedict XVI.”¹⁵⁶ The opening paragraph of the *Laudato Si’* references the words of other pontiffs along with the head of the Eastern Orthodox Church Patriarch Bartholomew, who address the symbiotic relationship between environmental concerns and creation. Pope Paul VI termed the destruction of natural resources a “tragic consequence” and warned about the possibility of “ecological catastrophe” to the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization while Saint John Paul II argued in his first encyclical that humanity views the earth merely as a disposable resource for consumption.¹⁵⁷ Pope Benedict XVI addressed the environment as part of a larger discussion on globalization and capital development in his third encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* published in 2009. In addition to warning against the ecological destruction caused by unregulated economic growth, Pope Benedict XVI was first nicknamed the “green pope” by the press for his decision to incorporate renewable energy practices such as solar panels within the Vatican, commissioning the use of a hybrid Popemobile, and arguing that access to fresh water for impoverished and marginalized communities is a fundamental human rights issue.¹⁵⁸

What distinguishes *Laudato Si’* from the words and actions of previous pontiffs – and other religious leaders like the Dalai Lama and the Archbishop of Canterbury – is how Pope Francis connects environmental issues with global poverty and the escalation of social inequality. Despite popularly promoted as focusing explicitly on the environment, Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si’* addresses global poverty and the role of consumption, technology, and a general disregard for creation as key factors facilitating climate change and other ecological issues that

¹⁵⁶ Pou-Amérigo, “Framing ‘Green Pope’ Francis,” 138-139.

¹⁵⁷ Pope Francis, *Encyclical on Climate Change & Inequality*, 4-5.

¹⁵⁸ Pope Francis, *Encyclical on Climate Change & Inequality*, 5-6, Pou-Amérigo, “Framing ‘Green Pope’ Francis,” 139, Emma Green, “The Pope’s Moral Case for Stopping Climate Change,” *The Atlantic*, June 18, 2015, and Peppard, “For Catholics, A New Kind of Pro-Creation.”

hegemonically maintain the increasing divide between the poor and middle-to-upper classes. Previous popes have directed attention towards the poor in their writings, however, the word “poor” appears 61 times in *Laudato Si’*. In comparison, references to the poor occur sporadically in Benedict’s encyclicals; although 2009’s *Caritas in Veritate* contains 31 mentions of poverty, his first two encyclicals cited the poor and their struggles a combined 13 times. Pope Francis is extremely critical of capitalism and how blind trust in the market has contributed to the contemporary sociopolitical state, with Naomi Oreskes noting in the introduction to the published version of the encyclical that “while the word ‘capitalism’ does not appear in the letter, the word ‘market’ (or its variant) appears nineteen times, usually in a critical context.”¹⁵⁹ For Bruno Latour, the power of the encyclical resides in how the text connects the environment to systemic inequality and how Pope Francis contextualizes both the Earth and the poor as active agents with an intertwined destiny. Pope Francis addresses a significant correlation that has been overlooked by ecologists, who are primarily concerned about nature preservation over addressing the relationship between the environment and the global capitalist system. Latour credits the pontiff’s Latin American identity as a major influence in shaping his philosophical view, arguing that “the continent that suffered the most violent occupation on earth hears the cry of the Earth and the poor quite differently from Europe.”¹⁶⁰ The power in the encyclical is in how it functions as a “combative text,” reshaping public attention away from debating political decisions that ultimately result in little change to placing the poor along with planet Earth at the center of environmental focus.¹⁶¹ The combativeness of *Laudato Si’* resides for Anne MacLennan in Pope Francis’s request for the public to empathize with the poor, especially in how those marginalized

¹⁵⁹ Oreskes, *Encyclical on Climate Change & Inequality*, xiii.

¹⁶⁰ Bruno Latour, “The Immense Cry Channeled by Pope Francis,” *Environmental Humanities* 8, no. 2 (2016): 253.

¹⁶¹ Latour, “Immense Cry Channeled by Pope Francis,” 254.

groups and communities relegated to the outer margins of the Earth are particularly vulnerable to the destruction caused by the wasteful consumerism promoted by modern technologies like air conditioning.¹⁶²

The Limitations of Pope Francis's Advocacy Campaign

Pope Francis recognizes and condemns the power of transnational corporations and political and financial leaders as disparaging figures that facilitate the role of global warming and the economics of production and manufacturing resulting in the destruction of the Earth's natural resources. Contending that society needs to embrace the theological doctrine of common good in order to protect vulnerable and marginalized communities, Pope Francis notes that:

A politics concerned with immediate results, supported by consumerist sectors of the population, is driven to produce short-term growth. In response to electoral interests, governments are reluctant to upset the public with measures which could affect the level of consumption or create risks for foreign government. The myopia of power politics delays the inclusion of a far-sighted environmental agenda within the overall agenda of governments.¹⁶³

In accordance with the symbolism and branding of his papal name that have defined his papacy, Pope Francis's focus on the constructive power of care reflects the influence of Saint Francis of Assisi that manifests throughout the encyclical. This rhetorical shift locates the individual at the centre of environmental practices, circumventing the hegemonic framing of these topics as primarily political.

He has devoted his papacy to fostering dialogue regarding the systemic inequality reproduced by capitalism's destruction of the earth, and his criticisms towards the disposable mentality of contemporary consumerism is a significant theme throughout *Laudato Si'*. Although he briefly acknowledges the role of population growth along with affiliated issues such as air

¹⁶² MacLennan, "Promoting Pity or Empathy?," 237.

¹⁶³ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 109.

pollution that contribute to global inequality and poverty, more pointed criticism is directed towards consumer culture, an argument succinctly illustrated in the following passage from

Laudato Si':

Instead of resolving the problems of the poor and thinking of how the world can be different, some can only propose a reduction in the birth rate. At times, developing countries face forms of international pressure which make economic assistance on certain policies of 'reproductive health' [...] To blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues. It is an attempt to legitimize the present model of distribution, where a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized, since the planet could not even contain the waste products of such consumption.¹⁶⁴

His reference to population growth is representative of the encyclical's strategic approach to sensitive topics within Catholic doctrine. Only one sentence from this lengthier passage was posted on Pope Francis's Twitter feed as part of the 63 tweets marking the publication of *Laudato Si'* ("To blame population growth, and not an extreme consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues"); "population growth" is generally understood as a subtle but still effective reference to birth control and abortion.¹⁶⁵ Despite his public persona as a progressive pontiff – which is primarily reinforced not by his theology but in his rejection of the opulent lifestyle commonly associated with his predecessors and his awareness over how that image is presented and received by the media – Pope Francis's encyclical received little public criticism for reinforcing traditionally conservative ideas particularly in regard to women's rights, such as in his equating that "concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion."¹⁶⁶ Theologian Charles C. Camosy noted in a guest commentary in *The Washington Post* that "it isn't getting much press, but there is plenty in Francis's encyclical

¹⁶⁴ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 31.

¹⁶⁵ Pope Francis, Twitter post, June 18, 2015, 11:00 a.m., <https://twitter.com/Pontifex/status/611548963561304064>.

¹⁶⁶ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 75.

which also spells trouble for liberal orthodoxies.”¹⁶⁷ Although he acknowledges the effect of humanity on the planet by placing the blame primarily on consumption, Pope Francis does not have to publicly engage in topics he vehemently opposes as the leader of the Catholic church, such as abortion and the role of contraceptives in combatting the symbiotic relationships between the density of cities, global poverty, and environmental devastation.¹⁶⁸

Almost a year after the publication of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis spoke about the Zika virus epidemic in Brazil during a February 2016 informal press conference on the return flight to Rome after visiting Mexico. Despite referring to abortion as an “absolute evil,” Pope Francis approved the use of contraceptives in counteracting further spread of the virus.¹⁶⁹ Similar to his iconic line, “Who am I to judge?” – which was also delivered in a similar impromptu discussion with the press on the return flight of a papal visit – Pope Francis’s comments on contraceptives were widely circulated within public discourse, viewed as a further example of his willingness to slowly open the institutional towards possible transformation on crucial topics, particularly those related to women’s issues.¹⁷⁰ The continued branding of Pope Francis as a progressive leader supported by his comments on contraceptives and the Zika virus was later reproduced by Westwood in her social justice activism. Illustrating social injustices through a series of playing cards, Westwood has incorporated Pope Francis’s remarks on contraceptives in her design activism. One particular card applauds his evolving position on birth control, and, merged into the shape of an orb similar to the official Vivienne Westwood logo, reads, “He’s already begun!”

¹⁶⁷ Charles C. Camosy, “Abortion, Down Syndrome and Throwaway Culture: Why the Left Has to Grapple with Pope Francis,” *The Washington Post*, June 25, 2015.

¹⁶⁸ Paul R. Ehrlich and John Harte, “Biophysical Limits, Women’s Rights and the Climate Encyclical,” *Nature Climate Change* 5, no. 10 (2015): 904-905.

¹⁶⁹ Simon Romero and Jim Yardley, “Francis Says Contraception Can Be Used to Slow Zika,” *The New York Times*, February 18, 2016.

¹⁷⁰ See, for example, Emily Crockett, “Pope Francis Suggested Women Threatened by Zika Could Use Contraception. That’s Huge,” *Vox*, last modified February 18, 2016, <https://www.vox.com/2016/2/18/11049812/pope-francis-contraception-zika>.

Bravo Pope Francis. When the pope agrees to birth control, we end the world's problems.”¹⁷¹ To commemorate the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote in Britain in 2018, the art organization 14-18 NOW organized a march, PROCESSIONS, held on June 10th in major cities across the United Kingdom.¹⁷² Westwood participated in the London PROCESSIONS march, and used the occasion to advocate towards access to contraceptives, creating a banner proclaiming “Pope Recommends B' Control.” Westwood later posted an image of herself to her social media profiles posing with the banner and alongside the accompanying description “Birth Control = Control over your own life – Raises the status of women.”¹⁷³ Although not cited directly, it is assumed that Westwood's reference to the pope and birth control is in regard to Pope Francis's remarks concerning the Zika virus, which remain his most prominent public opinion on the matter. However, Pope Francis's acceptance of contraceptives in this particular instance did not signify a radical reworking of doctrine as supported by the media and Westwood's activism. The incorporation of Pope Francis into Westwood's activism signifies the strength of his progressive brand identity in popular imaginaries.

In addition to Westwood promoting Pope Francis as a champion of women's rights in her activism, the references to abortion and population growth in *Laudato Si'* are also notable because they reference the most apparent weakness of Pope Francis's reformist persona – his treatment of women, and in particular, those involved directly with the Church. Prior to his visit to the United States, Pope Francis announced a period of forgiveness to women who have had abortions in addition to alterations to help simplify the annulment process. Indicative of his

¹⁷¹ Westwood, “Seven of Hearts,” *Climate Revolution*, last modified July 17, 2017, <http://climaterévolution.co.uk/wp/hero-post/seven-of-hearts/>.

¹⁷² “About PROCESSIONS,” *PROCESSIONS 2018*, accessed December 30, 2020, <https://www.processions.co.uk/about/about-processions/>.

¹⁷³ Westwood, Twitter post, June 10, 2018, 9:20 a.m., <https://twitter.com/FollowWestwood/status/1005801933272174592>.

awareness over how his image circulates in public discourse, Pope Francis's primarily symbolic announcement gained noteworthy traction especially within the American press prior to his visit, illustrated by *The Washington Post* including his statements on abortion and annulment as two of "Pope Francis's most liberal statements."¹⁷⁴ Pope Francis's announcement is part of a larger rhetorical pattern in which he condemns the "obsession" placed on abortion for diverting attention away from social justice issues; such framing, however, is commonly cited by the press as evidence of his inclusive papacy, which ultimately masks the devastating effect of his actions within the very system he is attempting to reform.

The complicated politics of Pope Francis as a progressive global leader on female issues also reveals contradictory messaging in regard to the treatment and visibility of women within the institution. Nuns on the Bus, a social justice group composed of sisters whose bus tours of the United States advocating on topics like the economy and health care have been featured on *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, and *Rolling Stone*, were first ostracized by Pope Benedict XVI primarily for their "radical feminism" and support of the Affordable Care Act.¹⁷⁵ Although Pope Francis ended the Vatican's investigation into Nuns on the Bus in 2015 and professed his "love" for women religious at his first New York City event, he made a point of meeting with Little Sisters of the Poor during his visit to Washington, D.C., an institute which at the time was involved in a lawsuit with the government in opposition to the Affordable Care Act's contraception mandate.¹⁷⁶ His decision to meet with Little Sisters of the Poor was read by critics as a sign of approval by Pope Francis, yet the contradictions of this event were overshadowed by

¹⁷⁴ Anthony Faiola, "8 of Pope Francis's Most Liberal Statements," *The Washington Post*, September 15, 2015.

¹⁷⁵ Michelle Boorstein, "The Nuns on the Bus tour Promotes Social Justice – and Turns a Deaf Ear to the Vatican," *The Washington Post*, June 27, 2012 and Tara Murtha, "Nuns on the Bus: Dispatches From a Papal Road Trip," *Rolling Stone*, last modified September 24, 2015, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/nuns-on-the-bus-dispatches-from-a-papal-road-trip-58794/>.

¹⁷⁶ Kevin Sullivan, "Pope Francis to Nuns at St. Patrick's Cathedral: 'I Love You Very Much,'" *The Washington Post*, September 25, 2015.

the power of his ‘liberal’ brand identity promoted by media reporting on the papal visit.¹⁷⁷ However, the mixed-messaging of Pope Francis highlights his inability to reconcile women’s issues with his public commitment to poverty, social inequality, and creating a “home for all.” This criticism has remained persistent throughout his papacy, stemming from the misogynistic tone in his refusal to even engage with the idea of female priests and the lack of female representation in managerial or diplomatic positions at the Vatican until the January 2020 selection of Francesca Di Giovanni as Secretariat of State, followed by the August 2020 appointment of six women to financial roles (with no authority in matters of leadership).¹⁷⁸

Despite the motifs of spectacular environmentalism that provide the context within visual culture and larger public discourse for Westwood and Pope Francis to emerge as especially visible figures in dialogues about climate change and global warming, Obama’s image was primarily defined by other issues like the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, largescale social anxiety regarding the collapse of the global economy and American mortgage market, and the tumultuous process of enacting the Affordable Care Act. The parody edition of *The New York Times* designed by journalists and activists and posted online on November 12, 2008, just over a week following Obama’s presidential election, remains one of the more intriguing examples of the continuing discussions over environmental politics and public good. Accompanying the

¹⁷⁷ Sarah Pulliam Bailey and Abby Ohlheiser, “Pope Francis Meets with Little Sisters of the Poor, Nuns Involved in an Obamacare Lawsuit,” *The Washington Post*, September 23, 2015, Gregg Zoroya, “Moments that Veered Off Script Highlight American Trip,” *USA Today*, September 28, 2015, and Jim Yardley and Laurie Goodstein, “Pope Departs, After Showing a Deft Touch,” *The New York Times*, September 28, 2015.

¹⁷⁸ See, for instance, Diane Winston, “Pope Francis’ Woman Problem,” *Los Angeles Times*, last modified August 4, 2013, <https://www.latimes.com/newsletters/topofthetimes/la-oe-winston-francis-women-gays-20130804-story.html>, Andrew Buncombe, “American Nuns’ Abortion Message to Pope Francis: ‘You Don’t Quite Get It,’” *The Telegraph*, September 2, 2015, Sara McDougall, “For Bishops, It’s Anything but a Woman,” *The New York Times*, October 31, 2019, Celia Viggo Wexler, “Pope Francis Put a Woman in a Top Vatican Role. It shows How Little Power Catholic Women Hold,” *NBC News*, last modified January 21, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/pope-francis-put-woman-top-vatican-role-it-shows-how-ncna1119661>, and Angela Giuffrida and Harriet Sherwood, “Pope Appoints Six Women to Top Roles on Vatican Council in Progressive Step,” *The Guardian*, August 6, 2020.

headline, “Crumbling infrastructure brings opportunities: advocates seek to focus investment on proven, sustainable technologies to help move the country away from its dependency on fossil fuels,” is an advertisement for Exxon Mobil celebrating the then-fictional end of the Iraq war and the removal of American troops. Critiquing the destructive relationship between oil, transnational corporations, and foreign policy interests, the advertisement directs the reader’s attention to the main tagline, “Exxon is committed to meeting the new Congressional guidelines for socially, economically, and environmentally responsible energy.”¹⁷⁹ Although originally created in 2008, both the headline and the advertisement would not be out of place in discussions of Westwood and Pope Francis’s environmental activism. Since the publication of his encyclical *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis has directed his focus to the influence of capitalism, consumption, and oil in reproducing the global inequality that continues to marginalize communities susceptible to environmental ruin, inviting Naomi Klein to speak at promotional events for the encyclical and organizing numerous conferences and summits at the Vatican attended by executives from transnational corporations including Eni, Shell, BP, and ExxonMobil to discuss plans to implement clean energy solutions.¹⁸⁰ The spoof edition of *The New York Times’* imaginary coverage on sustainability, fossil fuel dependency, and clean energy solutions demonstrate that little progress has been made on these matters despite a social climate marked by interconnected crises in which iconic figures like Obama, Pope Francis, and Westwood have based their brand identities on issues central to conceptualizations of public good.

One of the reasons Pope Francis and Westwood’s environmental advocacy gain such considerable traction is due to how they are presented as public intellectuals within popular

¹⁷⁹ Sewell Chan, “Liberal Pranksters Hand Out Times Spoof,” *The New York Times*, last modified November 12, 2008, <https://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/12/pranksters-spoof-the-times/>.

¹⁸⁰ Naomi Klein, “A Radical Vatican?” *The New Yorker*, July 10, 2015 and Elisabetta Povoledo, “Pope Francis Tells Oil Executives to Act on Climate,” *The New York Times*, June 9, 2018.

culture. Recognizing the instability of the concept, P. David Marshall and Cassandra Atherton argue that previous attempts to define the public intellectual have broadly ranged from those who have spoken publicly on any topic to an extremely limited group that excludes individuals who possess the necessary traits but are either marginalized due to race, sexuality, or gender, or due to their areas of expertise, such as sports or fashion, that are depreciated as trivial or insignificant to public culture or civil society.¹⁸¹ They highlight Michael Keren's definition of the public intellectual, who argues that the identity includes "those writers, scholars, and artists who make public statements which involve an element of political protests...and whose intervention in the public sphere is legitimized, directly or indirectly, by their intellectual endeavours or status."¹⁸² Social media along with the intensification of self-promotion practices have inevitably helped transform the boundaries of the public intellectual into prominent celebrities. Referencing Marshall's argument that celebrity is the product of the symbiotic relationship between concepts of the public, democracy, and capitalism, Tania Lewis argues that the "process of populist 'democratization' and mediatization that have accompanied its growing commercialization have seen the authority of traditional experts become relatively weakened as more fashionable figures of authority such as the celebrity take stage."¹⁸³ Discussions concerning topics like environmental politics and health care, for example, now occur within the commercial spaces of popular culture, further engraining the expertise and authority of the celebrated public intellectual into everyday media activities. The popularity of TED Talks and other information-sharing platforms is evocative of the argument that online culture has reshaped the classifications governing who embodies the concept by placing greater emphasis on visibility. In a blatant

¹⁸¹ Marshall and Cassandra Atherton, "Situating Public Intellectuals," *Media International Australia* no. 156 (2015): 70.

¹⁸² Michael Keren as cited in Marshall and Atherton, "Situating Public Intellectuals," 70-71.

¹⁸³ Tania Lewis, "Branding, Celebrityization and the Lifestyle Expert," *Cultural Studies* 24, no. 4 (2010): 582.

departure from its original concept, TED Talks has adapted an entertainment-friendly structure, yet the prestige and elitism of the organization is bestowed upon the participants, and consequently that credibility translates to other spheres like politics, economics, and, in the examples of Pope Francis and Westwood, environmental activism.¹⁸⁴

Obama was frequently described and labelled as an intellectual by the media when he was building his image as a federal politician and potential presidential candidate. However, his ability to achieve an equivalent status as a public intellectual comparable to Westwood and Pope Francis is limited due to the rhetorical and symbolic conventions of the presidency that will continue to shape his image and brand identity. These institutional limitations, which were especially apparent during his presidential terms, restrict the ability of Obama's iconic identity to function in a similar manner as Westwood and Pope Francis. Environmentalism is an easily communicated visual frame of reference for Westwood and Pope Francis to build an iconic brand identity since these ideals register with trends circulating in public discourse, particularly in regard to sustainability and ethical consumption emerging as a lucrative market. It is significantly easier for figures like a fashion designer and a religious leader to pursue matters like climate change as part of their political platform because they are not an elected representative of competing communities and interests that form the 'public' in the same way as a presidential figure like Obama.

The devastating consequences of excessive consumption is a dominant motif uniting the platforms and advocacy defining Obama, Pope Francis, and Westwood's iconic brand identities. Although films like Michael Moore's documentary *Sicko* gained promotional notoriety by transforming stories of financial and personal ruin resulting from the exploitation of health

¹⁸⁴ Marshall and Atherton, "Situating Public Intellectuals," 73-75.

insurance companies into sensationalized entertainment, the discourse of crisis framing public discussions of the economic collapse and the war in Iraq was rarely applied to health care during Obama's 2008 presidential election. Evident through the promotional efforts undertaken by the Obama campaign following the signing of the Affordable Care Act into law, the topic of health care continued to be approached through the discourse of consumption. The connections between health care access and poverty were minimized in favour of iconic moments like Obama's appearance on *Between Two Ferns*, an example of how his approach to issues of public good are frequently overpowered by the symbolism central to his brand identity. The symbolic and economic power of consumer capitalism as the central framework governing society leads to a rhetorical questioning as to how a public figure can gain traction without consumption, especially since disregarding the logic of consumer society creates the risk of messaging being ignored. Obama, Westwood, and Pope Francis offer critiques of this system, yet their incorporation of discourses pertaining to public good into their brand identities exemplifies their understanding of how practices of consumption is integral to transforming their message in a way that can be easily communicated and implemented to promote a vision of social reform.

Chapter Six: Brand, Identity, and the Conflict Between Individual and Institution

“Brands are not activist. A brand cannot empathize, a brand does not yearn, a brand does not hurt. Brands and people are not the same.”¹

--- Katherine Bernard, *The New York Times*

Halloween was one of the numerous holidays celebrated annually during the Obama administration, marked by Barack and Michelle distributing candy to neighbourhood children on the White House lawn. The festivities on October 30, 2015 gained significant media attention after a toddler dressed as the pope – wearing a miter and seated in a child push car ‘popemobile’ – captured the attention and laughter of Obama. The official White House Twitter account posted a short video of Obama’s enamored interaction with the toddler alongside the tweet, “Top prize goes to Lil’ Pope.”² The amusement and delight expressed by Obama over the baby pope became an iconic moment in popular culture widely reported by media the media, with headlines ranging from *Buzzfeed*’s “President Obama Couldn’t Handle This Kid’s Adorable Pope Halloween Costume” and *US Weekly*’s “President Obama Is Totally Smitten By Toddler’s Adorable Baby Pope Costume.”³ The legacy of Obama’s embrace of the baby pope continues to be celebrated, with various news outlets, entertainment publications, and Twitter users honouring the anniversary of the event (“It’s the most wonderful time of the year: the anniversary of Obama reacting to Pope Baby”) along with framing the

¹ Katherine Bernard, “Vivienne Westwood: Punk? Yes. Political? Maybe,” *The New York Times*, January 26, 2017.

² White House Archived, Twitter post, October 30, 2015, 6:05 p.m., <https://twitter.com/ObamaWhiteHouse/status/660215950692716544>.

³ David Mack, “President Obama Couldn’t Handle This Kid’s Adorable Pope Halloween Costume,” *Buzzfeed*, last modified October 30, 2015, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/davidmack/lil-pope-for-president> and Will Mendelson, “President Obama Is Totally Smitten By Toddler’s Adorable Baby Pope Costume,” *US Weekly*, last modified October 31, 2015, <https://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-news/news/president-obama-is-smitten-by-toddlers-adorable-baby-pope-costume-20153110/>.

photograph of the pair as a pick-me-up (“having a bad day? just remember that time obama lost it when he saw a baby dressed as the pope”).⁴ After Pete Souza, the official White House photographer for the Obama administration, recognized the three-year anniversary with a throwback post on his Instagram account, *People* highlighted the moment’s appeal, noting that “the famous Baby Pope is still capturing hearts on social media, three years after winning first prize in a White House costume contest during Halloween 2015.”⁵ In commemoration of the final days of his second term, the image of Obama laughing with the baby pope was included in many photographic retrospectives of his presidency as symbolic of Obama’s unique ability to connect with children and maintain the lightheartedness and nonchalance that first characterized his public persona despite the stress and demands of his institutional role.⁶

The substantial media coverage that perpetuates this interaction as an iconic moment defining the Obama presidency materializes as sensationalized or irrelevant, however it alludes to the power of both Obama and Pope Francis’s brand identities in popular culture. The toddler costumed as a generic pope may not have been a direct reference to Pope Francis but gained traction since the Halloween festivities at the White

⁴ See, for instance, Noor Al-Sibai, “Never Forget When Obama Met The ‘Lil Pope,’” *Bustle*, last modified January 11, 2017, <https://www.bustle.com/p/these-precious-photos-of-obama-meeting-the-lil-pope-are-exactly-how-you-want-to-remember-him-29593>, Aoife Wilson, Twitter post, October 31, 2017, 10:53 a.m., <https://twitter.com/AoifeLockhart/status/925375250833035264>, and sara david, Twitter post, August 2, 2016, 1:33 p.m., <https://twitter.com/SaraQDavid/status/760529045125824512>, and The Obama Foundation, Twitter post, October 31, 2020, 9:53 a.m., <https://twitter.com/ObamaFoundation/status/1322537297821257733>.

⁵ Maura Hohman, “Barack Obama Can Barely Contain His Laughter over ‘Baby Pope’ in this Throwback Halloween Pic,” *People*, last modified October 31, 2018, <https://people.com/politics/barack-michelle-obama-laugh-baby-popemobile-halloween-costume-throwback-pic-pete-souza/>.

⁶ Sarah Gilbert, “The Best Photographs of Barack Obama’s Presidency – In Pictures,” *The Guardian*, last modified January 4, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/gallery/2017/jan/04/barack-obama-presidency-best-pictures> and Gabriel H. Sanchez, “44 Of The Most Iconic Pictures Of President Barack Obama,” *Buzzfeed*, last modified January 14, 2017, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/gabrielsanchez/the-most-iconic-pictures-of-president-obama>.

House occurred just over a month after the pontiff's first visit to the United States, which was a major media event. *The Boston Globe* provided an adept summary of the president of the United States as a job description, arguing it is "not so much a job as it is an unspeakably daunting combination of roles: diplomat, lawyer, motivational speaker, military commander, and times everything in between."⁷ In outlining the numerous roles and obligation defining the office of president, *The Boston Globe* inadvertently illuminates the subtle distinctions embedded within Obama's brand identity that despite the apparent differences draws parallels with Pope Francis and Vivienne Westwood. Obama, Pope Francis, and Westwood represent a complex public image that negotiates, and at times runs counter to the institutions they represent. Obama's brand identity faced criticism during his presidency, evident in the media's reaction to his recognition with the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009. His brand identity however was legitimized by the news media, who frequently placed Obama among the pantheon of American mythological figures like Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy – an allegory that Obama himself worked to promote. Pope Francis's election in 2013 symbolized an opportunity for the Catholic Church to rebrand itself, a process assisted by the overwhelming ecstatic media treatment Pope Francis received by both cultural commentators and the public in addition to his visibility on social media. The portrayal of Pope Francis in the 2019 film *The Two Popes*, along with subtle and indirect references to his persona in the HBO/Sky Atlantic limited television series *The Young Pope* (2016) and *The New Pope* (2020) offer opportunities to interrogate Pope Francis's progressive brand identity. Westwood is commonly regarded as an influential fashion designer who shapes public opinion, but her

⁷ Leon Neyfakh, "The Advice Wrangler," *The Boston Globe*, November 11, 2012.

corporate brand identity is exploited by her critics to undermine her activism. Her status as a cultural icon functions in a manner similar to Obama and Pope Francis in that her brand is appropriated to serve an institutional role in promoting a consumable version of Britishness that can be easily marketed to global publics. The process of transforming Westwood into an icon of Britishness, however, masks the complex politics of identification that her work aims to subvert and negotiate.

The Obama Brand & The Nobel Prize: Negotiating a Global Identity

One of the challenges unique to Obama's brand identity while president is that the traits and characteristics composing his image became entrenched into the popular imaginary prior to his election. Obama's celebrity quickly developed after the 2004 Democratic National Convention keynote address and was assisted afterwards by magazine profiles in *O*, *The Oprah Magazine* and *Men's Vogue*, multiple appearances on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, and direct and indirect references to his rising status in television programs like *Gilmore Girls* and *The West Wing*. While there are presidents who were well-known prior to their election, such as John F. Kennedy and Ronald Regan, Obama's celebrity prior to becoming president was unique because his image was influenced by dynamics of race and class, grounded within public discourses of accessibility and social reform, and circulated by digital technology and his campaign's social media presence. The Black Eyed Peas' will.i.am's "Yes We Can" music video originally posted on YouTube – which remixed Obama's concession speech from the New Hampshire primary that he lost to Hillary Clinton against a white and black backdrop juxtaposing images of Obama against celebrities like Scarlett Johansson, Tracee Ellis Ross, and John Legend – represented the campaign's ability to create viral

promotional moments that instantly transformed Obama's identity into an iconic brand.⁸

While Obama's presidential campaign is often praised as revolutionary, Darren G.

Lilleker admits that "Obama was simply engaging in an activity that has preoccupied probably all candidates for the US presidency: winning voters."⁹ The success of Obama's brand identity, particularly how it manifested during his presidential campaign, became itself a symbolic moment transcending the boundaries of an election campaign, illustrated by how slogans of "hope," "change," and "yes we can" became integrated into marketing rhetoric. *Ad Age* and the Association of National Advertisers awarded the Obama 2008 presidential campaign with "marketer of the year" designation, corresponding with the magnitude of commentaries in the print press and industry-specific marketing trade journals analyzing the symbolism of the "Obama brand."¹⁰

⁸ Donald Trump is not the focus of this dissertation, but it is important to acknowledge that Trump's brand identity personifies the escalating discourses of spectacle, celebrity, self-promotion, and branding in media and political culture. Douglas Kellner (2010) was optimistic about the diplomatic potentials of Obama's identity as a celebrity politician. He credited Obama's success to his campaign's ability mobilizing digital technologies and social media platforms to connect with voters, which, at the time of the 2008 campaign, were relatively new and possessing unexplored cultural power and authority. Alison Hearn (2017) and Annelot Prins (2020), however, have both highlighted how platforms like Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook – integral to circulating Obama's rising celebrity image and persona – created a media culture privileging practices of branding and promotion that enabled Trump to emerge as a celebrity politician. Drawing upon critiques by Sean Redmond (2010) and Lawrence Grossberg (2018) on the Obama campaign's commodification of largescale hopelessness into an easily consumable idealistic vision and the political left's embracement of the spectacle to advance their interests, Prins argues that Obama's empty neoliberal rhetoric consequently produced an affective space for Trump's campaign slogan and rhetoric to register with voters. In addition to Obama and Trump both framing themselves as "outsiders" to the inner workings of Washington, D.C.'s political environment, their campaigns relied upon the spectacle of iconic slogans that entered into the vernacular of popular culture. While they articulated widely different idealisms, "Yes We Can" and "Make America Great Again" were both conceptual slogans with messaging, symbolism, and imagery drawing upon socioeconomic anxieties about the economy. Despite their obvious differences, Trump's dependence on branding to promote his persona and image during his pre-political endeavours, and his ability to leverage that capital to win the presidential election, is a testament to the intensifying relationship between celebrity, politics, and the media, an association effectively established by Obama and the construction of his brand identity. The success of Trump's presidential campaign reinforces the spectacular power of the image in shaping brand identities in promotional culture, a process which subsequently minimizes the threat posed by negating biographical details or personal histories.

⁹ Darren G. Lilleker, "Autobiography and Political Marketing: Narrative and the Obama Brand," in *Real Lives, Celebrity Stories*, ed. Bronwen Thomas and Julia Round (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 134.

¹⁰ Naomi Klein, "How Corporate Branding Has Taken Over America," *The Guardian*, last modified January 16, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jan/16/naomi-klein-branding-obama-america>

Obama's brand identity is also inherently correlated with the larger cultural anxieties and apprehensions concerning domestic politics and the nation's image in international relations. Analyzing the intertextuality of Shepard Fairey's design art of Obama for the cover of *Time*'s 2008 "Person of the Year," *The Washington Post*'s Philip Kennicott argues that "at a time when capitalism seems to be foundering on the rocks of risks, greed and general grumpiness, the image of Barack Obama has become a sterling brand, a reliable, iterable, trust-inspiring label slapped on our big box of collective anxiety."¹¹ Kennicott's analysis of the symbolic power of Obama's image articulates Douglas Holt's argument that iconic brands, like Obama, gain their potency by appeasing the anxieties that form "damaging tears in the cultural fabric of the nation."¹² While his campaign's incorporation of digital technology and celebrity worked to distinguish the candidate as youthful and energetic in comparison to Bush and McCain, Obama's brand at the time of his election and inauguration was situated within the socioeconomic context of the larger identity crises facing the nation facilitated by the economic collapse as well as the nation's deteriorating international image due to the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the ongoing protest over state-sanctioned torture at Guantanamo Bay.

and Staci M. Zavattaro, "Brand Obama: The Implications of a Branded President," *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 32, no. 1 (2010): 123. For commentaries and analysis, see also Ellen McGirt, "The Brand Called Obama," *Fast Company*, last modified April 1, 2008, <https://www.fastcompany.com/754505/brand-called-obama>, Jonetta Rose Barras, "The Man of Tomorrow," *The Washington Post*, November 9, 2008, "Obama Stressed America's 'Brand,'" *The Toronto Star*, November 13, 2008, Andrew Keen, "What Brown and Cameron Should Learn from Obama's Internet-Savvy Campaign," *The Independent*, November 17, 2008, Paul Lewis, "From Ice-Cream to Cognac, Advertisers Try to Hijack the Magic of the Obama Brand," *The Guardian*, January 24, 2009, Karen von Hahn, "Street Style Hits the Smithsonian," *The Globe and Mail*, January 31, 2009, and Rahaf Harfoush, *Yes We Did! An inside Look at How Social Media Built the Obama Brand* (Berkeley: New Riders, 2009).

¹¹ Phillip Kennicott, "The Power of Brand-Old Message Art," *The Washington Post*, January 13, 2009.

¹² Douglas Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 8.

While Obama's presidential campaign was largely based upon the illusion that he represented a new form of politics and governance by presenting himself as open and accessible, his decision to ban press photographers from official events signifies for Timothy R. Gleason and Sara S. Hansen Obama's attempts to control how his image is communicated to the general public.¹³ Obama is not the first presidential candidate to attempt to offer a new vision for the nation; every politician regardless of party affiliation frames their campaign as a national rebranding effort. The brand identity of Obama's 2008 campaign, for instance, largely signified a move away from the American exceptionalism that was characterized by the rhetoric of the "war on terror," a theme that was central to the cultural politics of the previous Bush administration. By highlighting his childhood experiences in Indonesia and Hawaii and the global publicity garnered by his speech in Berlin during the 2008 campaign, Anna Hartnell argues that Obama's efforts concerning a national rebranding attempted to reconcile "the relationships between race, nation, and religion in the United States in order to insinuate a certain kind of social justice narrative."¹⁴ However, by promoting his presidential identity as a brand Obama elicits critical critique over the degree "to which style is elevated above substance."¹⁵ While the branding of Obama as a global citizen helped promote his identity as a president who could unite racial and ethnic divisions within the context of both domestic politics and foreign policy, such optimism rarely translates into practice and ultimately illuminates the vulnerability of Obama's brand identity.

¹³ Timothy R. Gleason and Sara S. Hansen, "Image Control: The Visual Rhetoric of President Obama," *Howard Journal of Communication* 28, no. 1 (2017): 57.

¹⁴ Anna Hartnell, "Rebranding America: Race, Religion, and Nation in Obama's Social Justice Rhetoric," *Comparative American Studies* 10, no. 2-3 (2012): 143.

¹⁵ Hartnell, "Rebranding America," 143.

The idealism that positioned Obama as embodying the institutional identity as president to activate change – and the inevitable disenchantment such optimism elicits – was a prominent narrative reflected in media coverage of the October 2009 announcement of the decision to award him the Nobel Peace Prize. In the weeks prior to the announcement on October 9, late night comedy – a medium central to Obama’s brand – began interrogating the lack of progress on the key issues of Obama’s campaign; both *Saturday Night Live* and *The Daily Show* mocked Obama’s frequent use of the “full plate” metaphor in response to liberal critics who accused him of inaction toward repealing the Clinton Administration’s Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy and introducing healthcare reform, while Jay Leno sarcastically defended the president as a hesitater, noting, “it took five months to decide on a puppy.”¹⁶ It is within this context that Obama’s Nobel Peace Prize announcement was dismissed by critics as empty and meaningless, consequently conferring support to his Republican opposition as evidence of high expectations despite political inexperience.¹⁷ The comments made by England’s national football team manager in a post-game interview after a television commentator awarded David Beckham player-of-the-game honours despite entering the match at the 59-minute mark – “Yes, I was a bit surprised. I just thought it was like Obama getting the Nobel Peace Prize after eight months as President” – were widely reported by the British press and articulated the occasional comedic framing of the Nobel committee’s selection of Obama.¹⁸

¹⁶ Mark Leibovich, “Another Fine Mess: Comics Whack Obama,” *The New York Times*, October 11, 2009.

¹⁷ Klein, “Obama Isn’t Helping. At Least the World Argued with Bush,” *The Guardian*, October 16, 2009 and Hendrik Hertzberg, “Nobel Surprise,” *The New Yorker*, October 19, 2009.

¹⁸ Tom Dart, “Capello Hails ‘Barack’ Beckham,” *The Times*, October 15, 2009, Dominic Fifield, “‘Beckham’s Award is like Obama Winning Nobel prize,’” *The Guardian*, October 15, 2009, Ian Herbert, “Capello Prepared to Put Faith in his Impact Player,” *The Independent*, October 16, 2009, Louise Taylor,

In a guest editorial for *The New York Times* praising the recognition, U2's Bono argued that the competing perceptions of Obama's image – the “fantasy version of the president” juxtaposed against the “virtual Obama” and the “real Obama” – are essentially projections imagining his potential to rebrand America amidst the national identity crisis he inherited upon taking office.¹⁹ Obama's self-awareness over how his recognition was viewed by the public was reflected by his tweet, “Humbled,” and expanded upon in his official statement in which he concedes that the award should be viewed as “an affirmation of American leadership on behalf of aspirations held by people in all nations.”²⁰ His statement alludes to the idealistic imagery shaping his multiple personas discussed by Bono, and more significantly, indirectly acknowledges the function of his brand identity at both the domestic and international level. The October 2009 Nobel Peace Prize announcement corresponded with the annual release of the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index, where the United States moved into the top ranking from seventh place the previous year. Notwithstanding the dire state of the economy, “the American electorate's decision to vote in President Obama has given the United States the status of the world's most-admired country.”²¹ Such examples of reactions to the Nobel Peace Prize announcement present Obama's image – his personal brand identity – as a platform to recontextualize the narratives defining America's global reputation.²² In the examples of the Nobel Peace Prize and Nations Brand Index, the personal brand of

“Bruce Backs Beckham,” *The Guardian*, October 17, 2009, and Paul Sonne and Guy Chazan, “Nobel Committee Chairman Draws Fire Over Pick,” *The Wall Street Journal*, October 19, 2009.

¹⁹ Bono, “Rebranding America,” *The New York Times*, October 18, 2009.

²⁰ Obama, Twitter post, October 9, 2009, 11:31 a.m., <https://twitter.com/BarackObama/status/4736968403> and DeWayne Wickham, “Obama Peace Prize Not Without Some Merit,” *USA Today*, October 13, 2009.

²¹ Hollie Shaw, “Obama Vaults U.S. to No. 1 in Nation Brand Ranking,” *National Post*, October 9, 2009.

²² Gary Younge, “The System Let Obama Be President. But He Still May Not Be Able to Beat It,” *The Guardian*, October 12, 2009 and Bono, “Rebranding America.”

Obama overpowers that of the nation to the point where both levels of branding become synonymous with each other and work to mask the realities of how such imagery translates into practice.

Branding Obama's Presidential Image Within Institutional Identities of Kennedy & Lincoln

As the president of the United States, Obama embodies an institutional identity representative of a multifaceted symbolic history in visual culture that directly informs the imagery shaping his brand in public discourse. Despite the immense power exerted by the position, it is not given that a president will become an iconic figure. Rather it is due to shifts in the social, political, and economic climate that helps elevate and bestow presidents like Lincoln, Kennedy, and Obama with their iconic status. Comparing Obama's charisma, rhetoric, policies, and political persona to previous presidents, especially Lincoln and Kennedy, helps create an intertextual narrative that brands Obama's iconicity within the imagery and discourses that shape mythologies central to national identity.²³ Technological advancements in communicative media have worked to strengthen the symbolic authority of the visual power of the American president in public discourse, with Gregory Frame arguing that from "John F. Kennedy's televised press conferences to the present saturation of our television and computer screens with images of the president... the image of the American presidency is at the forefront of our consciousness."²⁴ He emphasizes Obama's dependence upon the mythological legacy of

²³ "America under President Obama: Welcome back," *The Guardian*, November 6, 2008, Ben Macintyre, "Speed, Clarity, Optimism: What Obama Must Learn from Reagan and FDR," *The Times*, November 8, 2008 and Marc J. Hetherington and Thomas J. Rudolph, "What Would Lincoln Do," *The Guardian*, January 15, 2016.

²⁴ Gregory Frame, "Seeing Obama, Projecting Kennedy: The Presence of JFK in Images of Barack Obama," *Comparative American Studies* 10, no. 2-3 (2012): 164.

Kennedy in the formation of his brand identity. Contending that the Kennedy iconography has maintained its iconic power despite criticisms that continue to emerge regarding his questionable politics and tumultuous personal life in the decades following his assassination, Frame argues that Obama's 2008 campaign purposely incorporated the idealistic imagery and motifs associated with the deceased president to signify his presidential authority to a citizenry unfamiliar with his political identity. Obama's decision to visit Europe as a presidential candidate in 2008, and in particular his "iconic" and "historic" speech in Berlin delivered to a crowd of over 200,000 people, worked to legitimize his brand identity at the institutional level. In an attempt to trademark himself as the figure best equipped to rebrand the international image of the United States, Obama's speech was dependent upon the cultural and political memory of Kennedy's 1963 speech in West Berlin, "Ich bin ein Berliner."²⁵

While the association between Kennedy and Obama within the frame of Berlin and American exceptionalism assisted in authenticating Obama's institutional identity as president, the branding of Obama within the legacy of his predecessor was dependent upon discourses of domesticity. During NBC's 2008 election night broadcast, Brian Williams stated, "There will be young children in the White House for the first time since the Kennedy generation"; the fact that his statement overlooks other White House children in the post-Kennedy generation, like Amy Carter and Chelsea Clinton, is evocative of the ways in which the iconicity of certain presidents reproduces their legacy

²⁵ See for instance, Benedict Nightingale, "An Effortless Performer Who Speaks with Real Authority," *The Times*, November 6, 2008, Desmond Tutu, "The Man of Tomorrow," *The Washington Post*, November 9, 2008 and Geoffrey Robertson, "Now America Can Right Its Wrongs," *The Independent*, November 15, 2008.

and image within the popular imaginary.²⁶ Obama's admission during his victory speech of a promise made to his children to get a puppy after the election reinforced discourses of domesticity that branded Obama within the narrative of Kennedy during the transition, in which a dog was portrayed as a part of their relatable personas despite a longstanding history of presidential pets.²⁷ A common framing tactic employed by entertainment media and online publications like *HuffPost*, images of the Obama family were often juxtaposed against the Kennedys to illustrate their institutional identities in what *Vanity Fair* describes as "standard-bearers for a renewed American hope."²⁸ *Vanity Fair* illustrated the similar fashion sensibilities of Michelle Obama to Jackie Kennedy, while *HuffPost* conducted a "fashion face-off" between the "two 'cool' presidents," in particular highlighting the resemblance of Obama and Kennedy in photographs from their young adulthoods.²⁹ A more candid and spontaneous image captured by official White House photographer Pete Souza after he saw Sasha Obama sneaking into the Oval Office and hiding behind a couch during his first year of his term became one of the early viral moments of Obama's presidency. Media reporting compared the playful moment between Obama and Sasha with the image of John F. Kennedy Jr. hiding in his father's desk; headlines branded the Souza's photograph as "Kennedy-like" and *The Guardian* included the image as part of a larger review illuminating the comparable domesticity of

²⁶ Jacques Steinberg, "Burned Before, Networks Prove Reluctant to Name Next President Early," *The New York Times*, November 5, 2008.

²⁷ See, Katharine Q. Seelye, "4 Paws, So Many Choices," *The New York Times*, November 7, 2008 and James Bone, "Best in Show, With a Pedigree All His Own," *The Times*, November 8, 2008.

²⁸ "Jackie and Michelle: The White House Wardrobes," *Vanity Fair*, last modified June 2009, <https://www.vanityfair.com/style/photos/2009/06/jackie-michelle-slideshow200906>.

²⁹ "Jackie and Michelle" and Rebecca Adams and Ellie Krupnick, "President Obama vs. President Kennedy: Who Has The Best Style," *HuffPost*, last modified December 6, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/obama-kennedy-style-photos_n_3797844.

the Kennedys and the Obamas, such as playing on the swing set outside of the Oval Office and family picnics during summer vacations in Maine.³⁰

While the branding of Obama within the legacy of Kennedy was primarily mediated by photographic images, Obama's rhetoric and political persona was greatly influenced by Lincoln. The mythical construction of Lincoln as a signifier of national unity is commonly promoted by popular culture, such as in the rhetoric employed by and associated with Obama, and in doing so, obscured conversations concerning the racial inequalities of his politics from the mainstream consciousness. Demonstrated through Obama's campaign speeches that employ rhetoric of national unity and overcoming differences, Chris Marshall argues that Obama's continued reliance upon Lincoln's iconography functions as a "mythical presidential self-fashioning which places him firmly within the context of America's long struggle to overcome injustice and inequality."³¹ The allegorical status bestowed upon Lincoln is an important textual reference for Obama, who also commonly evokes the imagery and rhetoric of the iconic figure to signify his presidential identity to the larger American public. The decision to announce his presidential campaign in Springfield, Illinois was a deliberate decision to situate Obama's political image, who despite his growing celebrity and self-promotion might still have been unfamiliar to some, within the hegemonic metanarrative of Lincoln to help mediate his brand identity. While he made numerous references to Lincoln's "House Divided" speech throughout his remarks, the political persona shaping Obama's

³⁰ Tim Leonard, "Obamas Captured in Kennedy-like Oval Office Photo," *The Telegraph*, September 2, 2009 and "The Obamas and the Kennedys," *The Guardian*, last modified September 3, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2009/sep/03/barack-obama-kennedys>.

³¹ Chris Marshall, "From Gettysburg to Grant Park: Echoes of Lincoln in the Campaign Rhetoric of Barack Obama," *Comparative American Studies* 10, no. 2-3 (2012): 155-156.

brand identity was reinforced through the visual imagery of Obama standing outside the Old State Capital and the ensuing media coverage connecting his symbolism, rhetoric, and oratory ability along with a similar career history to the larger mythology of Lincoln entrenched within popular culture.³² Obama cited his desire to emulate Lincoln's bipartisan approach in his first public interview as president-elect on *60 Minutes*, which the press subsequently drew upon to brand the connotative messaging behind Obama's appointment of his primary opponent Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State by claiming that his decision was symbolic of Lincoln's preference for working alongside his adversaries.³³

Strategic choices like using Lincoln's bible during the swearing-in ceremony for his first inauguration were more deliberate articulations of his brand identity. Obama's decision following the inauguration to return a bust of Winston Churchill back to the United Kingdom, gifted to the White House by Tony Blair after the September 11 terrorist attacks, in favour of displaying sculptures of Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. represents for Hartnell a strategic decision symbolizing the motifs, rhetoric, and imagery characterizing Obama's rebranding of national identity and a shift away from imperial discourses associated with Great Britain and Europe.³⁴ Replacing the bust of Winston Churchill with Martin Luther King Jr. is specifically cited by Michelle Obama in her memoir *Becoming* as an example of how the couple attempted to democratize the White House through the removal of more traditionally highbrow and

³² See, for instance, Tom Baldwin, "Hype and Hope Abound as New Boy Dons the Mantle of Lincoln," *The Times*, February 10, 2007, Sarah Baxter, "Obama Stakes His Claim to History," *The Sunday Times*, February 11, 2007,

³³ David Jackson, "Obama to Meet with McCain Today in Chicago," *USA Today*, November 17, 2008, Tim Reid, "Obama Will Follow Lincoln's Lead in Choosing Cabinet," *The Times*, November 17, 2008.

³⁴ Hartnell, "Rebranding America," 144.

elitist artwork.³⁵ The symbolic emphasis placed upon Lincoln and King Jr. in constructing his brand identity is echoed by the rhetorical references to both figures in Obama's 2008 victory speech in addition to stacking Lincoln's bible atop King's travelling bible during the publicly held swearing-in ceremony for his second inauguration, which also occurred on Martin Luther King Jr. Day due to the traditional date, January 20, falling upon a Sunday.³⁶

The imagery of Lincoln remained a vital reference for Obama, particularly towards the end of his presidency. His 2012 re-election victory speech again drew upon Lincoln's legacy of working alongside the opposition to overcome political divide, a sentiment that gained traction in popular culture with the release of Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln*; critics drew parallels to the congressional pushback received by Lincoln to abolishing slavery with Obama's struggle in implementing the Affordable Care Act.³⁷ Having worked on the screenplay since the onset of Obama's political persona, *Lincoln* screenwriter Tony Kushner encouraged reading the film through the contemporary outlook of the debates, issues, and challenges unique to the Obama administration, alluding to the continuing wars and aftermath of the economic recession: "I've watched the Obama presidency through the lens of looking at Lincoln...the mess that Obama inherited from the previous administration is as great as anything an American president other than Lincoln has faced."³⁸ Obama hosted a private screening of the film at the

³⁵ Obama, *Becoming*, 309-310.

³⁶ "Victory Speech," *The New Yorker*, November 17, 2008 and Michelle Boorstein, "Obama to Take Oath on Bibles Used by Martin Luther King Jr., Lincoln," *The Washington Post*, January 10, 2013.

³⁷ Liam Lacey, "Spielberg's Lincoln Holds a Mirror Up to Barack Obama," *The Globe and Mail*, November 1, 2012, Peter Howell, "Seven Score and Nine Years Ago...Spielberg Bravely Aims for Historical Accuracy Over Juiced-up Dramatics," *The Toronto Star*, November 9, 2012, "Steven Spielberg's Lincoln," *The Times*, November 10, 2012, and Will Dean, "The Next (Post-Obama) Presidential Drama," *The Independent*, November 12, 2012.

³⁸ Lacey, "Spielberg's Lincoln Holds a Mirror Up to Barack Obama."

White House for staffers and cast and crew members prior to its general release, and praised Spielberg's depiction of politics and democracy as inherently "messy" on a December 30, 2012 appearance on *Meet the Press*.³⁹ Obama's final State of the Union address in January 2016 thematically borrows from Lincoln's 1862 address to Congress and directly cites the passage "dogmas of the quiet past"; in their review of his speech, *Politico* refers to the "cameo appearance" of reemerging Lincolnesque rhetoric as "a favorite source back in 2008," evoking a metaphorical bookend to frame the final year of Obama's presidency.⁴⁰ After the 2018 unveiling of Obama's official portrait by Kehinde Wiley for the National Portrait Gallery (on February 12, the date of Lincoln's birthday) which depicts Obama sitting in an armchair against a garden backdrop with flowers signifying his biographical connection to Africa, Hawaii, and the United States, art historian Paul Staiti highlighted the subtle reference to George H.W. Healy's paintings "The Peacemakers" and "Abraham Lincoln." Arguing that since very few presidential portraits draw influence from Lincoln, Wiley's portrait of Obama symbolically connects the legacies of two iconic presidents within narratives of slavery, racism, and the "fulfillment of promise."⁴¹

Obama's Ubiquitous Presidency: Debating How to Define His Iconic Brand Identity

The labour involved in maintaining Obama's individual and institutional brand identities represents what Joshua M. Scacco and Kevin Coe refer to as the ubiquitous

³⁹ Brian Truitt, "'Lincoln' Visits Obama at the White House," *USA Today*, November 15, 2012 and Erin Carlson, "'Meet the Press': President Obama Addresses 'Lincoln Moment,'" *The Hollywood Reporter*, last modified December 30, 2012, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/meet-press-president-obama-addresses-407127>.

⁴⁰ Ted Widmer, "How Barack Obama Made His Case," *Politico*, last modified January 13, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/01/state-of-the-union-2016-obama-213527>.

⁴¹ Paul Staiti, "A Surprising Influence on Obama's Portrait: Abraham Lincoln," *The Washington Post*, February 13, 2008.

presidency. Applying notions of the rhetorical presidency to the nation's changing demographics and unique characteristics of the contemporary digital media landscape, Scacco and Coe argue that the ubiquitous presidency functions as a paradigm in which "the president creates a nearly constant and highly visible communicative presence in political and nonpolitical arenas of American life through the use of mass as well as targeted media. This shift is born of a necessity to compensate for changes to the public, the media, rhetorical goals, and political content."⁴² Referencing key moments like his appearance on *Between Two Ferns with Zach Galifianakis* to promote the Affordable Care Act, releasing year-end lists of his favourite films, albums, and books, and inviting Lin-Manuel Miranda to perform early drafts of songs that would later become part of *Hamilton*, *The New York Times*' Wesley Morris argues that "Barack Obama's performance as president – meaning the performance he gave in the role of president of the United States – was flawless."⁴³ His description of the Obama presidency as a performance illustrates the larger cultural dynamics focused on self-promotion and celebrity that shaped Obama's brand identity. In a similar commentary reflecting on the cultural trends and motifs associated his presidency, Ian Bogost critiques in *The Atlantic* Obama's image as the "first social-media president." Arguing that though Obama successfully utilized technological advancements and the proliferation of social media networks to advance his political persona, his digital presence masked the role that his administration played in strengthening practices of surveillance capitalism, writing:

While the first social media presidency was busy tweeting and Snapchatting, supposedly for public engagement, it did precious little to address the impacts of these and other effects of technology on the American public as matters of public

⁴² Joshua M. Scacco and Kevin Coe, "The Ubiquitous Presidency: Toward a New Paradigm for Studying Presidential Communication," *International Journal of Communication* 10 (2016): 2018.

⁴³ Wesley Morris, "The Cultural Commander," *The New York Times*, January 19, 2017.

policy. Ultimately, history will judge the 44th president, online and off. But instead of the “first social media presidency,” I wonder if Obama’s legacy won’t instead be that of the “cool dad presidency.” What people liked about Obama’s relationship to technology is that it was so much like their own. Obama was relatable and with-it. He clutched his smartphone as much as anyone. He could make a post go viral and deserve it. But maybe what America needed from 2009 to 2017 wasn’t a cool dad to tweet and stream alongside its citizens. Maybe it needed a guardian to watch and safeguard it against its own worst habits.⁴⁴

Bogost’s reference to Obama as the “cool dad presidency” reflects how the events commonly referenced in relation to his persona, such as his attachment to his BlackBerry and criticizing Kanye West’s action at the MTV Video Music Awards, overpowered policy to become the main forces structuring his brand identity.

In comparison to George W. Bush’s persona that was dependent upon cowboy imagery and conservative Christianity rooted in simplistic binaries of good and evil that defined his administration’s “War on Terror,” W.J.T. Mitchell argues that “Obama’s image, by contrast, is much more difficult to specify. It comes in and out of focus. The Obama ‘icon’ is an ambiguous and self-conscious image, a figure of multicultural and interracial hybridity.”⁴⁵ Mitchell’s argument reflecting on the first few years of Obama’s presidency as to why it can be difficult to explicitly identify the traits and characteristics shaping Obama’s image draws parallels to the similar challenge in distinguishing *the* iconic moment of his presidency. The passing of the Affordable Care Act and the killing of Osama bin Laden are commonly cited as two of his more prominent domestic and foreign policy achievements, yet in retrospectives of Obama at the conclusion of his administration, these specific occurrences were seldomly hailed as especially iconic

⁴⁴ Ian Bogost, “Obama Was Too Good at Social Media,” *The Atlantic*, last modified January 6, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/01/did-america-need-a-social-media-president/512405/>.

⁴⁵ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 7.

moments. Together with the transformative approach to campaigning and radical aesthetics reflected by Shephard Fairey's Hope poster entering into the vernacular of popular culture, Obama's 2008 election as the first Black president of the United States will always be what defines his iconic identity due to the symbolic power of that image.⁴⁶

The conclusion of Obama's presidency in January 2017 sparked countless opinion pieces, reflections, and commentaries debating his presidential legacy that inevitably occur following the conclusion of a president's tenure. Ta-Nehisi Coates approaches his critical essay on the legacy of the Obama presidency, "My President Was Black," within the context of the influence of popular culture in public discourse, arguing that "if Obama's enormous symbolic power draws primarily from being the country's first Black president, it also draws from his membership in hip-hop's foundational generation."⁴⁷

Although critical of his rhetoric towards the Black community, Coates argues that Obama's image counteracted racially-coded derogatory stereotypes about Black Americans, and his ability to do so was dependent upon his cultural awareness, a vernacular that helped him shift between the predominantly Black locker rooms of the National Basketball Association to the couches of late night talk shows hosted by Jimmy Fallon and David Letterman. Obama's proficiency in performing towards different spheres constitutes what Patrick B. Oray believes to be his greatest political skill that was especially prevalent during the 2008 presidential campaign, arguing that Obama "presents himself as professorial, cool, elitist, a hip-hop icon, a sex symbol, an inheritor

⁴⁶ Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power*, xvi, Jennifer Schuessler, "Lessons Taught: Obama's Legacy as a Historian," *The New York Times*, January 17, 2017, Rupert Cornwell, "America Feels a better Place Than Eight Years Ago – and That Alone is No Mean Feat," *The Independent*, January 20, 2017, Peter Baker, "Yes He Did," *The New York Times*, January 22, 2017, Adam Liptak, "Some Big Wins in Court, but Weak Record Over All," *The New York Times*, January 24, 2017, and Derrick Clifton, "What the Williams Sisters Mean in America Today," *The Guardian*, January 29, 2017.

⁴⁷ Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power*, 294.

of the civil rights movements, racial healer, black (to some, too much; for others, not enough), authentic, and an outsider. While some have accused Obama of being a political flip-flopper, it must be said that Obama embodies what any good brand should – flexibility.”⁴⁸ These traits and characteristics identified by Oray that came to define his image (and evident in genuine interactions like the Baby Pope moment) were primarily solidified prior to his presidential election. The power in Obama’s brand worked to merge the more symbolic aspects of his persona with his political platform that many hoped would be applied to his approach to policy and governance. Obama’s brand identity has successfully preserved the power and authority of his image, yet the blurring of his persona and political platform into one entity is what consequently elicits frustration from some critics regarding the lack of progressive reform that was originally imagined following his election.

Leveraging The Obama Image into a Post-Presidential Brand

Acknowledging that the Obamas are active agents in the management of their public image, Caroline Brown analyses Michelle Obama’s media appearances to explore how as First Lady she simultaneously performs, challenges, and negotiates the ideological boundaries governing representations of race, gender, class, national identity, and motherhood. While she primarily focuses on the branding efforts undertaken to transform Michelle Obama’s persona following the hostility garnered by racist and derogatory criticism during the 2008 presidential campaign, Brown contextualizes the couple’s image consciousness as a “machine,” arguing that their “manipulation of

⁴⁸ Patrick B. Oray, “Myth, Symbol, and the Branding of an American Presidency,” in *Iconic Obama, 2007-2009: Essays on Media Representations of the Candidate and New President*, ed. Nicholas A. Yanes and Derrais Carter (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2012), 38.

commodity culture with its slew of icons, competing loyalties, and easily contained and disseminated messages has made the Obamas an attractive and lucrative product whose personal magnetism and social capital magnify the appeal of their political message.”⁴⁹ Brown’s contextualization of the Obamas highlights the way in which they have leveraged their images into a cohesive brand identity, particularly within the context of their work since leaving office. Contracts with Netflix and Spotify to stream content created by their production company Higher Ground Productions alongside the extensive promotional tour for Michelle Obama’s 2018 memoir *Becoming* (that formed the basis for the 2020 documentary of the same name) illustrate their ability to leverage the brand identity that has developed since the 2004 Democratic National Convention keynote address into a post-presidential career that distinguishes the couple from their predecessors.⁵⁰

In an episode of the web drama series, *The Good Fight*, that imagines an alternate reality where Hillary Clinton won the 2016 presidential election, lawyer Diane Lockhart describes to colleagues the atrocities of the Trump presidency, especially highlighting the rise of racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism. When asked by disbelieving colleagues how the Obamas responded to these injustices, Diane explains, “they had an overall deal with Netflix.”⁵¹ *The Good Fight* connotes a critique of their post-presidential careers, yet the reference also speaks to the vast symbolic power and cultural, economic, and social capital derived from the Obamas’ brand identity and their ability to exert control over the

⁴⁹ Caroline Brown, “Marketing Michelle: Mommy Politics and Post-Feminism in the Age of Obama,” *Comparative American Studies* 10, no. 2-3 (2012): 243.

⁵⁰ Joe Pompeo, “‘It’s Got The Democratic Halo, But There’s This Bourgeois Element’: Meet The Obamoguls,” *The Atlantic*, January 16, 2020.

⁵¹ *The Good Fight*, “The Gang Deals with Alternate Reality,” *The Good Fight*, CBS All Access, April 9, 2020, written by Robert King and Michelle King, directed by Brooke Kennedy.

politics shaping image and representation in public discourse. Although book deals, speaking tours, and other public engagements have been popular endeavours for other past presidents, the Obamas' expansion of this template coincides with the narratives and symbolism that defined the political aspect of their identities. In reference to their foray into content production, Obama provided a frame of reference to the public to process their post-presidential career: "One way of looking at what we've both been doing for the last 20 years, maybe most of our careers, was to tell stories. You want to be in relationships with people, and connect with them, and work together with them."⁵² The discourse of connectivity emphasized by Obama unites the endeavours defining his pre-presidential persona, such as his early memoirs, with the forthcoming activities that are disconnected from his emphasis on civic duty and social reform. Though they have undertaken numerous activities supporting civic initiatives and causes since leaving office, including Michelle Obama's work with the non-partisan organization When We All Vote promoting voter registration, the Obamas' venture into content creation has become a vital extension of their political image to further cultivate their brand identities. The Obamas' embrace of their professional persona as storytellers represents a larger career trend by creative public figures like Reese Witherspoon, Beyoncé, and Prince Harry and Meghan Markle to transfer the social, cultural, and celebrity capital accumulated by their brand identities to produce content with a focus on representing communities and experiences previously neglected by politics, media, and other institutional realms.⁵³

⁵² Pompeo, "'It's Got The Democratic Halo, But There's This Bourgeois Element.'"

⁵³ Andy Gensler, "Beyonce on Self-Management, Following Madonna's Footsteps, Developing Other Artists," *Billboard*, last modified December 12, 2013, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/business/5847820/beyonce-on-self-management-following-madonnas>,

Pope Francis & The Brand Identity of the Catholic Church

In recognition of the tenth anniversary of her bestselling text *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, Naomi Klein applies the logic of consumer branding that was the focus of her analysis on corporations such as Starbucks to Obama's status as a "superbrand" promoting the idea of America. Contending that the multiple and intersecting crises damaging the nation's reputation is attributed to failures and catastrophes in branding, Klein argues that

When Obama was sworn in as president, the American brand could scarcely have been more battered – Bush was to his country what New Coke was to Coca-Cola, what cyanide in the bottles had been to Tylenol. Yet Obama, in what was perhaps the most successful rebranding campaign of all time, managed to turn things around...it seemed that the United States government *could* solve its reputation problems with branding – it's just that it needed a branding campaign and product spokesperson sufficiently hip, young and exciting to compete in today's tough market.⁵⁴

Klein's analysis of Obama's symbolic power as a brand reveals a valuable public relations template also applicable to Pope Francis and the authority of his image in rebranding the Catholic Church after years of scandal and criticism. There are obvious differences between the two public figures – such as Obama's racial identity as a Black man and Pope Francis being elected by a conclave representing power and hierarchy rather than a democratic vote – that are imperative to how their image circulates in public discourse. Following Klein's argument, the election of the 'progressive' Pope Francis offered a unique opportunity to counteract the damaged reputation of the Catholic Church

Lacey Rose, "How Reese Witherspoon Took Charge of Her Career and Changed Hollywood," *The Hollywood Reporter*, last modified December 11, 2019, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/how-reese-witherspoon-took-charge-her-career-changed-hollywood-1260203>, and Brooks Barnes, "Prince Harry and Meghan Sign Megawatt Netflix Deal," *The New York Times*, last modified September 23, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/02/business/media/harry-meghan-netflix.html>.

⁵⁴ Klein, "How Corporate Branding Has Taken Over America."

compared with the strict doctrinal approach of Pope Benedict XVI, frequently alluded to by the media as “God’s rottweiler.”⁵⁵ The transformation of Obama into a commodity promoting the ideals symbolic of the United States as an institutional brand created a space in popular culture for Pope Francis to emerge as an invaluable brand identity functioning in a comparable manner for the Catholic Church.

The tenure of Pope Benedict XVI was an extremely turbulent period for the Catholic Church due to numerous scandals and his conservative approach to doctrine and tradition embodied by his resolute support for the use of Latin during mass, leading to numerous indictments within the media of an institution experiencing a fundamental identity crisis. Pope Benedict XVI’s retirement and the conclave electing Jorge Bergoglio to the papacy elicited numerous media commentaries about the symbolism and institutional significance behind these decisions. Writing from a marketing perspective, one notable opinion published by *Forbes* noted that, “Pope Francis will need some rock-solid branding skills. He’ll have to have a strong personal brand, a vision for the church’s brand in the 2010s and beyond, and an understanding of how outside forces might conspire to brand him.”⁵⁶ The significance of *Forbes*’ statement is how it outlines the different, and at times competing, brands that form Pope Francis’s personal and institutional identities. Although focusing specifically on Pope Benedict XVI’s handling of the continuing fallout from the sex abuse scandal, *The Boston Globe*’s James Carroll’s addresses the crisis plaguing the Church as an institutional structure that provides an

⁵⁵ Nick Squires, “Pope Benedict XVI: Profile of ‘God’s Rottweiler,’” *The Telegraph*, February 11, 2013, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/the-pope/9863582/Pope-Benedict-XVI-profile-of-Gods-Rottweiler.html>.

⁵⁶ Marian Salzman, “Branding the Pope,” *Forbes*, last modified March 18, 2013, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maryansalzman/2013/03/18/branding-the-pope/?sh=51f6b67f102b>.

interesting perspective in regard to the importance of branding to Pope Francis's symbolic authority and power:

The whole Catholic Church seems to be in crisis, but what is really at stake here is the collapse not of Catholicism, but of Catholic fundamentalism....the raising of religious barricades against tides of change...Today's Vatican presides as center of a commend society with global reach, attempting to exert absolute control over all aspects of Catholic life...Despite the impression that even many Catholics have, such papal dominance is a modern phenomenon...the pope replaced Jesus Christ as the face of the Church, and the more the pontiff was attacked, the more papal loyalty defined the core Catholic value.⁵⁷

While the intent is to provide a historical overview of the hegemonic power of the papacy, Carroll's commentary illuminates how discourses of branding have become an important element to the Catholic Church in a manner similar to other institutional structures, such as the role of Obama in creating a rejuvenated image of the American presidency after the end of the Bush administration. More significantly, Carroll frames the pope as a brand identity symbolic of the institution he represents, a logic that is responsible for how Pope Francis's image circulates not only in religious circles but larger media culture.

The Role of Religion in Brand Culture

Religions like Catholicism are not often considered as brands in ways comparable to corporate entities such as Apple, Nike, or Starbucks. Much like Judaism and Islam, Catholicism is unique to each particular region in which the religion is practiced since at the local level the institution is shaped by the intersections of local history and culture. Although the discursive relationship between religion and brand culture in relation to Catholicism has been largely overlooked, research specific to marketing has applied the logic and techniques of branding to analyze the organizational structure of the Catholic

⁵⁷ James Carroll, "Rescue Catholicism from Vatican," *The Boston Globe*, April 5, 2010.

church. Madalena Abreu, Tom Barth, and Dominic Baster, Shirley Beresford, and Brian Jones each argue that the Catholic church functions as a brand by providing a public service influenced by tradition, offering structure, interaction, and meaning for the larger community that assist in practices of identity construction.⁵⁸ In his analysis of the rise of nation branding to influence the imagery and feelings associated with different countries, however, Peter van Ham labels the Catholic Church as a “super brand” in possession of the “oldest and most recognized logo in the world, the crucifix.”⁵⁹ Unlike the simple cross associated with Protestants, Diane Winston reinforces van Ham’s argument by contending that the Catholic crucifix depicting the corpus is the religious symbol commonly depicted within visual culture (and a motif popularized by celebrities like Madonna), thereby strengthening the institution’s status as a super brand.⁶⁰

Commentaries about Pope Francis’s role in rebranding the Catholic Church represent another instance of religion maintaining visibility within both public discourse and larger brand culture. Responding to the rhetorical question of why *The Passion of the Christ* – produced, co-written, and directed by Mel Gibson, a practicing Catholic – became a cinematic phenomenon when released in 2004, Mara Einstein argues that the success of the film illuminates the tensions behind the reasoning that religion is inherently a private matter. Although Western society, and in particular the United States,

⁵⁸ Madalena Abreu, “The Brand Positioning and Image of a Religious Organisation: An Empirical Analysis,” *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 11, no. 2 (2006): 141, Tom Barth, “Crisis Management in the Catholic Church: Lessons for Public Administrators,” *Public Administration Review* 70, no. 5 (2010): 782, and Dominic Baster, Shirley Beresford, and Brian Jones, “The ‘Brand’ of the Catholic Church in England and Wales: Challenges and Opportunities for Communications,” *Journal of Public Affairs* 19, no. 1 (2019): 1-2.

⁵⁹ Peter van Ham, “The Rise of the Brand State: The Postmodern Politics of Image and Reputation,” *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 5 (2001): 6.

⁶⁰ Sara Coughlin, “Has Catholicism Earned This ‘Fashion’ Moment?” *Refinery* 29, last modified May 3, 2018, <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2018/05/197114/met-gala-theme-catholic-imagination-meaning>.

continues to be a relatively religious nation, the practice of faith has shifted in a post-September 11th cultural landscape with the growth of a brand culture around practices of Prosperity Christianity and New Age spirituality.⁶¹ In a chaotic consumer landscape that prioritizes individual discourses of spirituality and self-improvement, Einstein argues that faith brands, which she defines as religious-based products and services that form a larger corporate strategy, help institutions reach new consumers while also contributing to the reproduction of their symbolic authority. For Stuart Hoover, faith-based consumer products, such as papal merchandise including Pope Francis bobbleheads, are important cultural artefacts since they create a religious space for individuals “turning to a largely commodified inventory of symbols, values and ideas out of which they appropriate those which fit best into senses of themselves.”⁶² Along with other spiritual trends like the red string bracelets associated with Kabbalah that became fashionable after being worn by celebrities like Madonna, *The Passion of the Christ* symbolizes for Einstein how practices and expressions of faith are highly visible in popular culture due to the logic of branding and consumer capitalism yet religion itself is still considered an unmentionable topic in public discourse.⁶³

The marketing of religion is not a new phenomenon, and scholars such as R. Lawrence Moore, James Twitchell, and Kathryn Lofton have addressed the intersections between branding, consumer culture, and practices of faith.⁶⁴ Advertisements selling

⁶¹ Mara Einstein, *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age* (London: Routledge, 2008), 3-8 and Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic: The Politics of Ambivalence in Brand Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 167-172.

⁶² Stuart Hoover as cited in Einstein, *Brands of Faith*, 74.

⁶³ Einstein, *Brands of Faith*, 4, 14, and 25.

⁶⁴ R. Lawrence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), James Twitchell, *Branded Nation: The Marketing of Megachurch, College, Inc., and Museumworld* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 47-108, and Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 5-13.

bibles that appeared in newspapers, flyers, and pamphlets following the invention of the printing press demonstrate in Einstein's analysis of faith brands that religion has always been subject to the discourse of marketing and promotion within consumer society.⁶⁵ However, Einstein argues that the way in which the market for religious promotional products has intensified in consumer culture is a recent occurrence corresponding to changes in how individuals practice their faith.⁶⁶ Einstein summarizes the cultural impact of faith brands:

The interdependence between religion and marketing in our culture seems almost inevitable, and there are striking similarities between these cultural forms. These institutions both rely on storytelling, meaning making, and a willingness of people to believe in what is intellectually unbelievable. Religion creates meaning through myths, rituals, and practices; marketing creates meaning through advertising and shopping. Religion is the acceptance of a belief system; marketing is the acceptance of beliefs about products. Religions have faith communities; marketing has brand communities. Religion has become a product; products have become religions.⁶⁷

Arguing that all spiritual traditions are examples of "commodity practices," Einstein contends that branding is an important element for religious institutions like Catholicism since despite their apparent differences, they offer essentially the same service.

Advertising, branding, and other promotional tactics help to create the powerful, and at times, derogatory associations between a religion and its larger community of practice, such as stereotypes about Catholics as impoverished working-class immigrants.⁶⁸

Pope Francis and the Rebranding of the Catholic Church

The 2013 election of Pope Francis prompted numerous conversations within press coverage of the conclave regarding the symbolic values promoted by his brand identity,

⁶⁵ Einstein, *Brands of Faith*, 4-5.

⁶⁶ Einstein, *Brands of Faith*, 5 and 13.

⁶⁷ Einstein, *Brands of Faith*, 78.

⁶⁸ Einstein, *Brands of Faith*, 13.

particularly in regard to the characteristics associated with image rather than policy.

Writing for the *Financial Times*, fashion critic Vanessa Friedman identified the significance of branding as an important, and often unacknowledged, communicative power for global leaders like Pope Francis that manifests through his wardrobe and vestments:

Pope Francis hasn't really had a chance to do anything in terms of influencing doctrine – except appear in moments broadcast to millions. Whether or not they can understand what he is saying without the aid of the newscasters who act as intermediaries, they can all make their own assumption based on how he looks. There was a very clear rationale behind his decision to eschew the more fancy, ermine-trimmed red and purple robes of Pope Benedict in favour of plain white vestments; to swap the gold cross for an iron version. The choices telegraphed the importance of humility; the importance of recognizing and working with the poor; and the need, in a time of austerity, to acknowledge the suffering and deprivations of others. It was a discrete but unmistakable announcement of a new agenda, using the tools most immediately and least aggressively available.⁶⁹

Like other faith traditions and practices, symbolism has always been integral to the Catholic church. Press reporting on the legacy of Pope Benedict XVI acknowledges his conspicuous taste in fashion accessories like Gucci sunglasses and his fondness for his red Prada shoes; news of Pope Benedict XVI's retirement was met with flippant commentary on his fashion sense, with *The Guardian* characterizing him as a “fashion-forward” pontiff who “provided the Vatican with a strong sartorial voice.”⁷⁰ Friedman conversely characterizes Francis's papal vestments and accessories as representative of the Catholic Church's ability to utilize such attire as a symbolically powerful form of

⁶⁹ Vanessa Friedman, “Pope and Circumstance,” *Financial Times*, March 30, 2013.

⁷⁰ Henry Conway, “Pope Benedict: His True Legacy is His Fashion Sense,” *The Guardian*, March 3, 2013. See also Caitlin Dewey, “The story of Pope Benedict's Controversial Red Shoes, Which He Will Give Up,” *The Washington Post*, last modified February 26, 2013, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/02/26/the-story-of-pope-benedicts-infamous-red-shoes-which-he-will-give-up/> and Patrick Grant, “Benedict XVI Walks Away from His Papal Footwear,” *GQ*, last modified February 28, 2013, <https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/patrick-grant-pope-benedict-red-shoes>.

communication. Pope Francis's modest vestments and preference for sandals instead of the red shoes correlated to the papacy in visual culture gained cultural traction in a global socioeconomic climate defined by austerity and ongoing recovery after the 2008-2009 financial crisis, leading to men's magazine *Esquire* declaring him their "best dressed man of 2013."⁷¹ Friedman's commentary more significantly alludes to Pope Francis's awareness over the role of the press in communicating his brand identity to the public, particularly since he was predominantly unknown at the time of his election. Embodying the opulence typically associated with his position by choosing to wear the lavish vestments preferred by Pope Benedict would not correspond with the modest symbolism evoked by his papal name.

The branding of Pope Francis's identity as cool was a major narrative characterizing the coverage of Pope Francis's 2015 visit to the United States. Constituting a media event at a comparable scale to Barack Obama's first presidential inauguration in January 2009, Pope Francis's "historic" visit to Philadelphia, New York City, and Washington, D.C. was celebrated on newsstands with multiple national magazines releasing special commemorative issues. *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Life*, and *National Geographic* published special collector's issues, and more notably, *US Weekly*, a celebrity tabloid known for paparazzi images and gossip, marked the occasion of the pope's visit with a 72-page edition with content typically found in celebrity coverage including previous romantic relationships and his fondness for maintaining his personal appointment diary.⁷² Pope Francis's tour coincided with Trevor Noah's debut as the new

⁷¹ Max Berlinger, "The Best Dressed Man of 2013: Pope Francis," *Esquire*, last modified December 27, 2013, <https://www.esquire.com/style/mens-fashion/a26527/pope-francis-style-2013/>.

⁷² "25 Things to Know About Francis," *US Weekly*, September 2015, 36-39.

host of the satirical news program *The Daily Show*, who referenced the visit in his first episode by comparing the pontiff to “a young Bernie Sanders.”⁷³ Significant attention was also directed towards Pope Francis’s popemobile, a black Fiat 500L, that personified the discourses of humility and modesty that formed the narrative employed by the press to communicate Pope Francis’s persona to the public following his election, with the *Los Angeles Times* arguing that such symbolism “resonated as powerfully as any of his speeches.”⁷⁴ Other commentaries analyzed how the success of Pope Francis’s image in rebranding the Catholic Church as a more tolerant and inclusive institution on issues such as immigration, which gained notable traction within the context of the xenophobia characterizing Donald Trump campaign for the then-upcoming campaign to receive the Republican nomination for the 2016 presidential election.⁷⁵

The media reception of his election along with the spectacle of the American visit signify the success of Pope Francis in communicating a brand identity that reinforced the symbolic authority of the pontiff as an institutional identity and leader in global affairs. It is within this social context that the debut of the 2018 exhibit *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination* at New York City’s Metropolitan Museum of Art connotes a noteworthy transformation of the Catholic Church’s public image, and more critically,

⁷³ Hank Stuever, “Trevor Noah’s First ‘Daily Show,’” *The Washington Post*, September 30, 2015.

⁷⁴ Alan Zarembo, “Analysis: With Pope Francis, Catholicism has a New Brand – An Everyman’s Pope,” *Los Angeles Times*, last modified September 28, 2015, <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-pope-visit-assess-20150928-story.html>. See also Stephanie Kirchgaessner, “A Fiat is Worth a Thousand Words as Pope Francis Opts for Humble Ride,” *The Guardian*, September 23, 2015, Max Ehrenfreund, “Thanks to Pope Francis, the Fiat has Truly Arrived in America,” *The Washington Post*, September 25, 2015 and Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “The Back Story Behind the Pope Francis’s Fiat, a Statement of Style,” *The Washington Post*, September 30, 2015.

⁷⁵ See, for instance, Nicholas Kristof, “A Pope for All Species,” *The New York Times*, September 24, 2015, Harriet Sherwood and Ed Pilkington, “‘We Were Once Foreigners’: Pope Attacks Trump Brand of Migrant Demonization,” *The Guardian*, September 24, 2015, Eliza Filby, “US Republicans Should Learn from the Pope,” *The Telegraph*, September 25, 2015, and Colbert I. King, “The Power of Christians in Action,” *The Washington Post*, September 27, 2015.

illuminates the immensely powerful role that Pope Francis's brand identity contributes to how the institution is perceived within popular culture and public discourse. The exhibit was sponsored by Donatella Versace, whose brother Gianni heavily incorporated Catholic imagery into his fashion designs, and American billionaire and prominent Republican contributor Stephen A. Schwarzman; in his sponsors' statement Schwarzman indirectly acknowledges that *Heavenly Bodies* is a result of the collective goodwill generated by Pope Francis, or more precisely, his public image.⁷⁶ Rev. James Martin, a Jesuit priest and communications consultant for the Vatican, provided commentary regarding *Heavenly Bodies* to entertainment website *Refinery 29* specifically on the symbolic power of Pope Francis to function as the Catholic Church's most effective instrument in the institution's rebranding efforts, arguing that "the primary image of the Catholic priest in 2002 was the pedophile. The primary image of the Catholic priest in 2018 is Pope Francis. That's a sea of change."⁷⁷ His comments reflect the symbolic power of Pope Francis's branding efforts, including the way in which he has integrated his environmental platform into his public persona, to shift mainstream criticism away from the issues that have plagued the church in the last few decades. Criticism of Pope Francis does exist, but the image of his radical potential that has shaped his media representation predominantly overshadows legitimate questions concerning issues like the role of women in the church and disappointment over his silence in response to emerging sexual abuse allegations.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Andrew Bolton, *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018), 6.

⁷⁷ Coughlin, "Has Catholicism Earned This 'Fashion' Moment?"

⁷⁸ See, for instance, Stephanie Kirchgaessner, "Pope Francis Says Women Will Never be Roman Catholic Priests," *The Guardian*, November 1, 2016, Harriet Sherwood, "Credibility of Catholic Church at Stake in Sexual Abuse Summit," *The Guardian*, February 18, 2019, and Elisabetta Povoledo, "A Bigger Role for Women in the Catholic Church? 185 Men Will Decide," *The New York Times*, October 25, 2019.

Pope Francis and Social Media

While Obama is popularly regarded as the first “social media president” since his campaign’s incorporation of digital technology is a key aspect of his political persona, Pope Francis has significantly greater engagement with his followers on Twitter through the metrics of retweets and likes than any other global political or religious leader. Media reports compare Pope Francis’s social media followers to celebrities like Kim Kardashian, yet his success on Twitter embodies Twitter’s Manager of Social Innovation Claire Diaz-Ortiz’s argument that “a religious leader might have 1/50th the number of followers of a large celebrity but can still generate more retweets and more favorites and more engagement.”⁷⁹ One of the criticisms directed towards the label of Obama as the “first social media president” is that the technologies he is praised for utilizing became commonplace during his two presidential terms, a claim that assumes Twitter, YouTube, and other digital media would have been integrated into the communicative strategies of any president during this particular period. While Pope Benedict XVI created the @pontifex Twitter handle, the account flourished under Francis’s direction, with Twitter growing exponentially in the years following his election. Twitter represents an appropriate platform for Pope Francis, since as Michael J. O’Loughlin argues, the character limit imposed by Twitter corresponds with the pontiff’s succinct and accessible homilies and public addresses that are symbolic of his brand identity.⁸⁰ For instance, *The Washington Post*’s Michelle Boorstein highlights Pope Francis’s tweet – “The earth, our

⁷⁹ Seth Stephens-Davidowitz, “Googling for God,” *The New York Times*, September 20, 2015 and Laura Hudson, “Q&A: Claire Diaz-Ortiz, the Woman Who Got the Pope on Twitter,” *Wired*, last modified December 17, 2012, <https://www.wired.com/2012/12/pope-twitter-interview/>.

⁸⁰ Michael J. O’Loughlin, *The Tweetable Pope: A Spiritual Revolution in 140 Characters* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 4.

home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth” – as an example of his “digestible, punchy online style”; the post singled out by Boorstein is directly borrowed from *Laudato Si’*, reflecting Pope Francis’s ability to incorporate outlandish rhetoric to draw attention to his advocacy efforts.⁸¹

Pope Francis, however, does not create the tweets posted on his account, which are formed by the Vatican communications team based upon ideas offered by the pontiff. The question of authorship corresponds to Obama’s Twitter account which, despite being launched in March 2007 to assist with the presidential campaign, did not post his first solely authored tweet until he commemorated Father’s Day on June 19, 2011. The tweet was authenticated with the initials “BO,” a practice that would be carried forward in both Barrack and Michelle Obama’s Twitter profiles to their signify personal posts.⁸² There is a more general understanding that a politician’s social media accounts are curated by their communication team, a presumption evident by the lack of surprise and gentle mocking generated by Obama’s 2009 admission at a technology symposium that “I have never used Twitter,” despite being one of the most followed public figures on the platform. The irony of the statement was compounded by Obama’s well-known fondness for technology, particularly his BlackBerry, that constituted a dominant narrative in structuring his brand identity during the 2008 election and into the reporting of the inauguration.⁸³

⁸¹ Michelle Boorstein, “The Gospel According to @Pontifex,” *The Washington Post*, September 22, 2015.

⁸² Obama, Twitter post, June 19, 2011, 1:49 p.m., <https://twitter.com/BarackObama/status/82505176849711104>.

⁸³ Mark Milian, “President Obama: ‘I Have Never Used Twitter,’” *Los Angeles Times*, last modified November 16, 2009, <https://latimesblogs.latimes.com/washington/2009/11/obama-never-used-twitter.html> and Paul Boutin, “Obama Starts Tweeting for Himself,” *Gadgetwise: The New York Times Blog*, last modified June 20, 2011, <https://gadgetwise.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/06/20/obama-starts-tweeting-for-himself/>.

While at times subject to criticism concerning authenticity, the idea of a politician, even those whose personas are dependent upon claims to authenticity such as Obama, employing a team to manage their image has become more naturalized in public discourse than the marketing and communications management of the pontiff. The idea of a pontiff conferring with public relations consultants has not been visualized in popular culture in a manner similar to documentaries like *The War Room* and *By The People* and television series like *The West Wing* and *Scandal* (in addition to political consultants like David Axelrod regularly featured on news networks during election cycles for commentary and analysis), which glamourize the role of communication advisors and strategists in crafting a politician's brand identity and persona. Following his February 2007 campaign announcement and election to the presidency, significant media coverage was directed towards dissecting the selection, strategy, and contributions of Obama's advisors and communications staff (including features on his primary consultant David Axelrod and Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes) in designing the innovative approach to campaigning through digital and social media that resulted in powerful financial and grassroots organizing.⁸⁴ It is the lack of knowledge and representation concerning the communication strategy of religious institutions and the ensuing naiveté among the public that make the scenes focusing on the Vatican's chief of marketing in *The Young Pope* jarring for viewers, with the storyline relying on the larger

⁸⁴ See, for instance, David Montgomery, "Barack Obama's On-Point Message Man," *The Washington Post*, February 15, 2007, Bret Swanson, "Obama Ran a Capitalist Campaign," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 7, 2008, Jemima Kiss, "Digital Media: Why Everyone's a Winner," *The Guardian*, November 10, 2008, Patrick White, "How Generation Y Became Obama's Political Animal," *The Globe and Mail*, November 11, 2008, and Francesca Steele, "Presidential Reggae," *The Times*, November 13, 2008.

social myth of the pope as a spiritual figure unpreoccupied by the wordily political and corporate practices of image and brand management.

Pope Francis's presence on Twitter is due to a partnership developed by Claire Diaz-Ortiz, Twitter's Manager of Social Innovation, and authorized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012 as part of the social network platform's campaign to expand their global reach by recruiting and assisting public figures such as the Dalai Lama and Obama to establish their account profile, and more importantly, digital identity.⁸⁵ Pope Benedict XVI had already generated Twitter accounts for internal Vatican communications in 2010, and in early 2012 promoted his then-official profile @Pope2YouVatican, which, despite the existing username for an officially sanctioned Facebook profile, gained attention from *The Daily Show*'s Jon Stewart: "@Pope2YouVatican? The Pope can't get a straight-up Twitter handle? The Pope?! That is weak, Twitter. That is Tweak."⁸⁶ Diaz-Ortiz provided assistance to the Vatican's communication office in designing the @pontifex Twitter account, such as recommending the use of multiple accounts in different languages to more effectively reflect the institution's global reach. Following the initiatives undertaken by Pope Benedict XVI, Pope Francis hired the global management consultancy firm McKinsey & Co to expand upon the Vatican's existing innovative communication structure, a move seen by *The Washington Post* as signaling how the pontiff's "unexpected social media stardom is catapulting the antiquated communications culture of the Vatican into the modern digital world."⁸⁷ Twitter has

⁸⁵ Cecilia Kang, "For Twitter, a Lofty Purpose as Pope Benedict XVI Makes His First Tweet," *The Washington Post*, December 11, 2012.

⁸⁶ Ileana Llorens, "Pope's Twitter Account Revealed As @Pope2YouVatican, Spreads Themes From Lenten Message," *The Huffington Post*, last modified March 5, 2012, https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/pope-twitter-account-pope2youvatican-themes-lent_n_1307630?ri18n=true.

⁸⁷ Boorstein, "The Gospel According to @Pontifex."

become one of the more influential elements structuring Pope Francis's identity, evident by the creation of papal-themed emojis to commemorate official visits and the popular hashtag #popecrush to express one's admiration for the pontiff's remarks on immigration and gay marriage.⁸⁸ The power of this image, however, works to minimize the numerous digital contributions of his predecessor from discussions on the rebranding efforts of the Catholic Church. Unlike the popular and academic analyses of Obama's skill in selecting his advisors and strategists, little commentary in public discourse addresses the image management of the pope, thereby creating the impression that Pope Francis's social media profiles are personally managed by himself.

Aside from condemning social media as a diversion embedded within the destructive forces of wasteful consumerism and labelling himself a "dinosaur" for not knowing how to use a computer, Pope Francis's Twitter account is not the pontiff's only incorporation of digital technology into the promotion of his papal brand. He has frequently participated in Google Hangout sessions with children as part of his Scholas Occurrentes initiative, a partnership with UNICEF to assist disabled and disadvantaged children in developing skills in sports and the arts and sciences.⁸⁹ Following a 2018 meeting of Scholas Occurrentes participants at the Vatican, Pope Francis critiqued the tendency for youth to take selfies with the pontiff on their mobile devices, describing the scenario to reporters:

⁸⁸ See, for instance, Lily Burana, "His Holiness, My Heart," *The New York Times*, September 20, 2015, Perry Stein, "The Ever-Trending Pope Now has His Own Patriotic Twitter Emoji," *The Washington Post*, September 22, 2015, Ryan Ramgobin, "Popemania Hits the United States," *The Independent*, September 23, 2015,

⁸⁹ Heather Saul, "Pope Francis Admits He has No Idea How to Use a Computer During Google Hangout," *The Telegraph*, February 5, 2015 and "UNICEF to Support Scholas, Pope Francis' Initiative to Connect, Educate and Inspire Adolescents," *UNICEF*, last modified April 21, 2015, https://www.unicef.org/media/media_81638.html.

They were all there waiting for me. When I arrived, they made noise, as young people do. I went to greet them and only a few gave their hand. The majority were with their cellphones (saying), ‘photo, photo, photo. Selfie!’ I saw that this is their reality, that is the real world, not human contact. And this is serious. They are ‘virtualized’ youths. The world of virtual communication is a good thing, but when it becomes alienating, it makes you forget to shake hands.⁹⁰

His comments sparked headlines for his apparent ‘crustiness’ often widely associated with older individuals, best illustrated by *Slate*’s reaction of “this frickin’ Pope!” due to his “wack opinions on selfies and cellphones.”⁹¹ However, the selfie is a form of presentation that has greatly shaped Pope Francis’s iconic brand identity. Described by *CNN* as a “precedent-shattering moment,” the first known papal selfie taken by a group of young pilgrims visiting St. Peter’s Basilica during the summer of 2013 was widely disseminated through both traditional and social media following the initial reporting of the moment by *L’Osservatore Romano*, a daily newspaper that covers papal activities and events occurring in Vatican City.⁹² This particular image was frequently cited in year-end reviews as part of the larger spectacle of selfies featuring public figures, including Obama participating in a selfie with other world leaders at Nelson Mandela’s funeral, which was deemed one of the dominant cultural trends of 2013 with the Oxford English Dictionary designating “selfie” as their word of the year.⁹³ Selfies with Pope Francis became a phenomenon viewed as signifying ideals of relatability and accessibility that shape his brand identity as “the coolest pontiff in history” according to *The Guardian*. The scope of

⁹⁰ Junno Arocho Esteves, “‘Selfie’ Culture Leads to Alienation, Departure from Reality, Pope Says,” *National Catholic Reporter*, last modified May 15, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/francis-chronicles/selfie-culture-leads-alienation-departure-reality-pope-says>.

⁹¹ Heather Schwedel, “Of Course the Pope Thinks Selfies Are the Problem With Kids Today,” *Slate*, last modified May 16, 2018, <https://slate.com/technology/2018/05/pope-francis-thinks-selfies-are-the-problem-with-kids-today.html>.

⁹² Eric Marrapodi, “Is This the First Papal Selfie?” *CNN*, last modified August 30, 2013, <https://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/08/30/could-it-be-the-first-papal-selfie/>.

⁹³ “Cutting Remarks,” *The Sunday Times*, December 22, 2013, Ben Zimmer, “The Words That Popped in 2013,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 23, 2013.

the trend was best illustrated by *The Washington Post*'s humorous rating of papal selfies, ranging from celebrities such as Canadian tennis player Eugenie Bouchard capturing the pope in the background of her self-photograph to the pontiff posing with newlyweds in St. Peter's Square.⁹⁴ Pope Francis's sentiments concerning selfies, however, signify his understanding in regard to the ways in which his image circulates within public discourse and how to exert this self-awareness to garner significant press attention in a media landscape that does not typically grant religious leaders significant press coverage.

The Cinematic Pontiff: Negotiating Pope Francis's Brand Identity in *The Young Pope*, *The New Pope*, and *The Two Popes*

Celebrating the 2018 debut of the *Heavenly Bodies* exhibit at the annual Met Gala, Rihanna received considerable attention from the media for wearing an ornate Margiela minidress and matching jacket accessorized with a bejeweled mitre that evoked the elaborate regalia typically associated with papal imagery in popular culture. Reactions on Twitter hailed the singer as "Pope Rihanna" while also mocking HBO and Sky Atlantic's miniseries *The Young Pope* (2016) with tweets including "This is the young pope we deserve" and "cancel then reboot the young pope."⁹⁵ The combination of Rihanna costumed as a pontiff and the frequent references on social media to a television mini-series about a pontiff and the politics of the Vatican are examples illustrating Douglas Holt's emphasis on the role of cultural intermediaries in contributing to the development and circulation of the myths that bestow brands with their symbolic

⁹⁴ Stuart Heritage, "Point and Pout," *The Guardian*, December 12, 2013 and Abby Ohlheiser, "A Brief List of Pope Selfies, Ranked," *The Washington Post*, last modified September 12, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/09/12/a-brief-list-of-pope-selfies-ranked/>.

⁹⁵ Rachel Syme, "Pope Rihanna and Other Revelations From the Catholic-Theme 2018 Met Gala," *The New Yorker*, last modified May 8, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/on-and-off-the-avenue/pope-rihanna-and-other-revelations-from-the-catholic-themed-2018-met-gala> and "The Most Hilarious Twitter Reactions to Rihanna's Met Gala Look," *Harper's Bazaar*, last modified May 8, 2018, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com.sg/life/celebrities/twitter-reaction-rihanna-met-gala-look/>.

power.⁹⁶ *The Young Pope*, *The New Pope*, and *The Two Popes* are examples of cultural texts elevating the mythology concerning the pontiff as a brand identity in popular culture. Without directly referencing the pontiff the televised mini-series *The Young Pope* and *The New Pope* incorporate subtle critiques of Pope Francis's radical image, a reading which is dependent upon the larger mythology created by media coverage and other cultural intermediaries, including his representation in the 2019 film *The Two Popes*, that works to shape his larger brand identity.

Promoting the Pope as Brand in *The Young Pope*

The Young Pope, a joint Italian, French, and American television miniseries, depicts the dealings stemming from the surprise election of the first American pontiff, Pope Pius XIII (played by actor Jude Law) and his attempts to instill highly conservative and disruptive reforms within the church. The miniseries begins with a dream sequence, in which Pope Pius XIII addresses the crowd gathered in St. Peter's Square and causes some cardinals to faint due to the liberal and reformist declarations made by the new pontiff:

What have we forgotten? We have forgotten ... to use contraceptives, to get abortions, to celebrate gay marriages, to allow priests to love each other and even get married... To divorce, to let nuns say Mass, to make babies in all the ways science has discovered and will continue to discover.... there is only one road that leads to happiness. And that road is called freedom.⁹⁷

Although *The Young Pope*'s Pius XIII is a defender of conservative Catholic doctrine, the dream sequence personifies both the hopes and disappointments associated with the imaginary of Pope Francis's brand identity following his election during the 2013 conclave. The dream sequence also functions as a symbolic critique of Pope Francis's

⁹⁶ Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 183.

⁹⁷ *The Young Pope*, "Episode 1," Sky Atlantic, October 21, 2016, written and directed by Paolo Sorrentino.

radical image; even if Francis initiated any one of the progressive reforms discussed by *The Young Pope*'s Pius XIII, it still would not be anywhere near as radical an action as that undertaken by Pope Benedict XVI when he announced his retirement.

The Young Pope also spotlights the labour and strategy involved in creating and circulating the pope as an image no different than other celebrity figures. In the second episode of the series, the head of marketing for the Vatican meets with the newly elected Pope Pius XIII to discuss the urgent matter of updating the official papal merchandise, and explains the necessity of souvenirs and consumer products to the branding efforts of the Vatican:

Today's papal turnover requires us to come up with new designs, which we will then need to get into production as quickly as possible. All those items with the Holy Father's picture on them, which the faithful just love and which make up a sizeable slice of the Vatican budget. ... What would be required is a brief photo shoot, which will then enable us to get into production as soon as possible a series of items displaying your Holiness's picture: key chains, postcards, ashtrays, lighters, picture cards, plates.⁹⁸

The glaringness of the scene is dependent upon naïve ideas concerning the pontiff as an identity unassociated with the vulgarity of marketing and promotional culture. However, the image of the Pope, along with other religious-based merchandise, are important and valuable everyday elements involved in practices of identity construction that also are situated within the politics of licensing and image management under consumer capitalism.

Papal merchandise was a popular subject featured in press coverage reporting on Pope Francis's 2015 visit to the United States, especially in local newspapers like the *New York Daily News*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *The Philadelphia Daily News* that

⁹⁸ *The Young Pope*, "Episode 2," Sky Atlantic, October 21, 2016, written and directed by Paolo Sorrentino.

highlighted the sensational memorabilia ranging from bobbleheads to dollar bills available from local vendors and pop-up shops. In addition to a concert with performances by Jennifer Hudson, Gloria Estefan, and Martin Sheen, the Archdiocese of New York highlighted the ability to purchase “papal merchandise” in a release sent to local congregations in an attempt to persuade those attending the pontiff’s mass held at Madison Square Garden to arrive early to ease security screening procedures. Officially-sanctioned merchandise available for purchase included commemorative baseball hats, Christmas ornaments, and rosary beads with Swarovski crystals.⁹⁹ To recognize his visit to Washington, D.C., the city’s Metro distributed 40,000 limited-edition SmarTrip card sleeves featuring an image of Pope Francis.¹⁰⁰ Reporting on the variety of booths selling papal-themed merchandise at the World Meeting of Families attended by Pope Francis in Philadelphia – including the opportunity for attendees to take photographs with life-size cutouts of Popes Francis, Benedict XVI, and John Paul II as part of a marketing campaign for the online dating website CatholicMatch.com – *The Philadelphia Daily News* described the convention as a “celebration of capitalism.”¹⁰¹ The irony of the outlandish merchandise available at the World Meeting of Families is that these products and the replication of Pope Francis’s image were licensed and approved by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia who consulted with retail advisors specializing in souvenir marketing to design memorabilia that reflected the pope’s relaxed persona.¹⁰² The mania

⁹⁹ Kate Taylor, “Performers Will Precede Papal Mass at Garden,” *The New York Times*, September 15, 2015 and Jennifer Fermino and Corky Siemaszko, “Tending To His Garden,” *New York Daily News*, September 26, 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Faiz Siddiqui, “Metro Flying Through Pope Sleeves Fast,” *The Washington Post*, September 22, 2015.

¹⁰¹ Willian Bender, “Pope Merch Doesn’t Disappoint,” *The Philadelphia Daily News*, September 23, 2015.

¹⁰² Samantha Melamed, “Pope Portrait Painter Now Talking with Getty Images,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 1, 2015 and Matthew Diebel, “Plush Doll Souviner Fits Pope’s Warm and Fuzzy Personality,” *USA Today*, September 16, 2015.

surrounding commemorative papal souvenirs signifies the promotional success of Pope Francis's brand identity within popular culture, since, as *The Philadelphia Inquirer* noted, "it's hard, after all, to conceive of a similar appetite for Benedict bobbleheads."¹⁰³

Pope Francis's global popularity has resulted in a drastic increase in the vending of unofficial papal merchandise, causing the Vatican to hire a copyright law firm in 2017 and threatening in an official statement to monitor and regulate the reproduction of the pontiff's image. Further naturalizing the identity of the pope as a brand, press coverage of the Vatican's attempt to control copyright emphasized the connection between Pope Francis and the discourse of celebrity, citing intellectual property consultant Nick Kounoupias's statement that "the pope's image rights are no different from those of any other famous celebrity and so it's not surprising that the Vatican is giving notice that it will protect rights as necessary."¹⁰⁴ Images of the pope have always been susceptible to replication, primarily from local parishes and street vendors. The scale and context in which Francis's likeness is reproduced, however, has intensified due to both his global popularity as an icon and the rise of e-commerce websites like Etsy, where users can purchase a wide variety of products ranging from Pope Francis bobbleheads and crochet dolls to face masks and socks displaying his image.

Re-Constructing Pope Francis's Brand Identity in *The Two Popes*

Written by Academy Award nominee Andrew McCarten – who specializes in biopics, having also created the screenplays for *The Theory of Everything* (2014) and *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018) – *The Two Popes* documents a fictitious meeting between

¹⁰³ "Francis of Philadelphia," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 20, 2015.

¹⁰⁴ Danica Kirka and Nicole Winfield, "Copy This: Vatican Stakes Out Rights to Pope Francis' Image," *The Chicago Tribune*, February 26, 2017.

Pope Benedict XVI and Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio (portrayed by actors Anthony Hopkins and Jonathan Pryce) following the scandal in which Vatican banking documents were leaked to the press a year prior to the former pontiff's resignation. Refusing to accept Bergoglio's retirement while also informing the cardinal about his upcoming announcement, the pair discuss the struggles of the church and its dwindling institutional power, with director Fernando Meirelles interjecting a biographical history of Bergoglio's career including his alleged transgressions during Argentina's Dirty War. Similar in style to fictional recreations of other iconic moments, such as *The Queen's* visualization of the British Royal Family's reaction to Princess Diana's death, *The Two Popes* incorporates historical news footage to bestow its narrative with a sense of authenticity. By articulating Bergoglio as a radical religious figure that is strengthened through juxtaposing his rather freely-dramatized beliefs against the strict doctrinal image of Pope Benedict XVI, *The Two Popes* acts as what Douglas Holt refers to as a co-author in constructing the mythologies underlying Pope Francis's identity as an iconic brand in public culture.¹⁰⁵ Although a meeting between the two individuals prior to Bergoglio's election reportedly never occurred, *The Two Popes* plays upon the symbolic power of the rarity of two living pontiffs. In particular, the narrative of the film gains potency by drawing upon the iconic image of Pope Francis meeting with Pope Benedict XVI almost two weeks after the conclave in Castelgandolfo, the papal summer residence. The unusual meeting between two popes was proclaimed as "historic" by the press, since it was the first occasion that two living popes met in over 600 years.¹⁰⁶ Video footage from the real

¹⁰⁵ Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 183-187.

¹⁰⁶ See, for instance, Elisabetta Povoledo, "Behind Image of Seamless Transition, Vatican Navigates Uncharted Waters," *The New York Times*, March 23, 2013, Katherine Lackey, "Pope Francis Tells

meeting is included towards the end of *The Two Popes*, with the actual Francis and Benedict embracing each other in a friendly manner, confirming a rapport that is denoted by the film as a growing friendship cultivated from their difficult conversations. However, the relationship between the two pontiffs is reportedly tense and antagonistic due to contentions of Benedict XVI's continuing authority on key doctrinal issues like celibacy and his decision to remain living in the Vatican.¹⁰⁷

After introducing the fictional Pope Francis, *The Two Popes* goes back to 2005, where the then Cardinal Bergoglio is delivering a sermon in the slums of Buenos Aires before he receives news of Pope John Paul II's death. Audio from a news broadcast accompanies visual footage of John Paul II's funeral, providing an overview of the highly regarded pontiff's complicated legacy:

He was a champion of human rights who fought for justice for the poor and reached out across all faiths for unity. But in sharp contrast, Pope John Paul II's papacy also marked a clear end to liberalization and a return to the church's harsh condemnation of homosexuality, abortion, contraception, and the ordination of women and married men.¹⁰⁸

The election of Pope Benedict XVI is represented as a continuation of John Paul II's unforgiving stance on key issues like gay marriage, and selected news reports interviewing Catholics are showcased by *The Two Popes* reinforcing this view; one individual condemns the selection of Benedict XVI as "bad for the poor in Brazil and the poor in the world," a statement juxtaposed against an assumingly conservative Catholic, who supports the new pontiff for "standing up for dogma." Including such criticism of

Benedict: 'We are Brothers,'" *USA Today*, March 23, 2013, and "'We are Brothers'; For First Time in 600 Years, a Reigning Pope Meets a Former Pope," *The Toronto Star*, March 24, 2013.

¹⁰⁷ For more detailed analyses of the relationship between Pope Francis and Pope Benedict XVI, refer to John Cornwell, "Pope vs. Pope: How Francis and Benedict's Simmering Conflict Could Split the Catholic Church," *Vanity Fair*, October 31, 2018 and Jason Horowitz and Elisabetta Povoledo, "Two Popes, and One Big Furor After Benedict Weighs in on Priestly Celibacy," *The New York Times*, January 14, 2020.

¹⁰⁸ *The Two Popes*, written by Anthony McCarten, directed by Fernando Meirelles (2019: Netflix).

Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI's theological approaches to Catholic doctrine within the beginning scenes of *The Two Popes* accentuates one of the film's major arguments, the need for the traditionally conservative institutional to become more widely accepting to a drastically changing social landscape. During their fictional discussion on the state of the Catholic church and the role of Pope Benedict XVI in accelerating the institution's struggles, Bergoglio identifies the central issues that are commonly cited in public discourse:

We have spent these last years disciplining anyone who disagrees with our line on divorce, on birth control, on being gay. While our planet was being destroyed, while inequality grew like a cancer, we worried whether it was all right to speak the mass in Latin, whether girls should be allowed to be altar servers, we built walls around us and all the time the real danger was inside of us.¹⁰⁹

The scene creates the impression with viewers that Bergoglio embodied a progressive identity and political platform prior to becoming pope. While there were certainly aspects of his modest identity evident in his practices while a cardinal in Argentina, this passage from *The Two Popes* brands Bergoglio with a liberal approach to issues like gay marriage and the use of contraceptives and minimizes his tumultuous relationship with then President of Argentina Christina Kirchner, a vocal critic of the Church's actions during the Dirty War. As bishop, Bergoglio was blatantly disapproving of policies by Kirchner and her deceased husband and presidential predecessor Nester Kirchner that approved public medical facilities to distribute free contraceptives, as well as Argentina's 2010 legalization of gay marriage and reforms allowing same-sex couples to adopt. Bergoglio attacked these policies as a "war against God" that was contrived "by the devil" –

¹⁰⁹ *The Two Popes*.

rhetoric similar to Pope Benedict's views on the issue.¹¹⁰ By articulating a reformist image associating significant human rights issues such as contraception, gay marriage, and the role of women in the church with Bergoglio without addressing the future pontiff's own complicated politics, the film's screenplay fails to challenge the contradictions embedded within Pope Francis's beliefs. Since *The Two Popes* consequently reproduces the progressive image of Pope Francis, the film is an example of how the media act as co-authors in creating his brand identity.

The characteristics associated with Pope Francis's public image, primarily his modesty and open-minded approach to Catholic doctrine, are immediately reinforced by the opening scenes of *The Two Popes*. The film begins by depicting the newly elected Pope Francis attempting to complete everyday tasks like purchasing a flight while receiving a hostile reception from those who do not believe him to be the now famous Jorge Bergoglio living in Vatican City. After being summoned by Pope Benedict XVI for a private meeting in Castelgandolfo, a discreetly dressed Bergoglio is reprimanded for not wearing the proper attire symbolizing his clerical rank, adamantly carries his own luggage, and sparks surprise from the pontiff for engaging in conversation with the gardeners. Pope Benedict XVI confronts Bergoglio about his criticisms of his papacy, particularly on issues like celibacy and gay marriage. Bergoglio is presented by *The Two Popes* as also open to the possibility of marriage for priests, declaring that "celibacy can be a blessing, it can also be a curse." Following his election, news reports attempting to

¹¹⁰ Silvina Frydlewsky and Anthony Faiola, "Bergoglio Tested by Argentine Leaders," *The Washington Post*, March 16, 2013, Philip Sherwell and Nick Squires, "Pope Francis: A Humble Man Facing a Mighty Challenge," *The Telegraph*, March 17, 2013, Nicole Winfield, "Pope Francis, Argentine Leader Meet," *National Post*, March 19, 2013, and Rachel Donadio and Alan Cowell, "After Frosty Path, Pope Meets Argentine Leader," *The New York Times*, March 19, 2013.

predict the reforms of his progressive papacy highlighted his background with the Jesuit order, which is not as directly opposed to celibacy and other orthodox matters as other orders.¹¹¹ Very few reports, however, addressed Pope Francis's estranged relationship with the Jesuits after his ejection from the order during the late 1980s due to tensions stemming from the Dirty War – an aspect of his biography visualized by *The Two Popes* – and for his more conservative theological approach. The absence of any sign or comment from Pope Francis on movement regarding priest celibacy, especially during his visit to United States where celibacy is cited as a major impediment to attracting prospective priests, has remained a major critique of his papacy that again is disregarded by the film in reinforcing a favourable progressive image.¹¹²

The Two Popes also constructs Bergoglio as supportive of gay rights, though this is accomplished through indirect references and associations. Pope Benedict XVI raises Bergoglio's position on homosexuality, to which he responds that his comments were reported out of context by the press. This scene promotes the impression that Bergoglio is supportive of gay marriage, an understanding which is reinforced in a later scene where he admits shifting his judgement that civil marriage for gay partnerships constitutes the "devil's plan." Although Pope Francis's iconic statement, "Who am I to judge?" is not referenced by the film, the closing scenes of *The Two Popes* features actual footage of the pontiff's international tours, including a very brief snapshot of the pontiff standing on a balcony in Dublin waving the rainbow LGBTQ pride flag. Although it looks to be the

¹¹¹ See for instance, Andrew Brown, "An Uphill Task to Inspire the Flagging Faithful," *The Guardian*, March 14, 2013 and Michelle Boorstein, "Why it is Surprising to Find a Jesuit as the Pope," *The Washington Post*, March 17, 2013.

¹¹² See for example, Francis A. Quinn, "How the Pope Might Renew the Church," *The New York Times*, September 19, 2015 and Stephan Richter, "The Ticking Clock on Reform," *The Boston Globe*, September 20, 2015.

real Francis, it is actually a life-size cut-out of the pontiff with the flag held by an activist hiding behind the paper model during a protest against the Catholic church's treatment towards the LGBTQ community during his 2018 visit to Ireland.¹¹³ The denotative reading of these scenes reinforces the media construction of Pope Francis as a supporter of gay rights established by the iconic power of his "Who am I to judge?" declaration that gained him the honour of LGBTQ magazine *The Advocate*'s 2013 "Person of the Year."¹¹⁴ Pope Francis has occasionally publicly declared his "love" for LGBTQ people, yet in papal writings he has also compared gay rights to a fashion trend and still has not initiated any reforms to Catholic teaching on this issue.¹¹⁵ His comments provide hopefulness to those who continue to face discrimination from their governing institutions, however *The Two Popes* overstates Pope Francis's persona as a supporter of gay rights, and, in doing so, further strengthens this aspect of his progressive brand identity.

Pope Francis's position on climate change has become the central issue in which he has built his brand identity, supported by examples like the selection of his papal name and the predominantly advantageous publicity garnered by devoting his first encyclical to the environment. Aside from a very brief acknowledgement that the "planet [is] being destroyed," *The Two Popes* does not isolate climate change as the critical issue grounding Francis's papal identity but instead chooses to highlight Francis's advocacy concerning

¹¹³ "In pictures: Pope Francis in Ireland," *BBC News*, last modified August 26, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45313858>.

¹¹⁴ Lucas Grindley, "The Advocate's Person of the Year: Pope Francis," *The Advocate*, last modified December 13, 2013, <https://www.advocate.com/year-review/2013/12/16/advocates-person-year-pope-francis>.

¹¹⁵ Carol Kuruvilla, "Queer Catholics Condemn Pope's Claim That Being Gay Has Become 'Fashionable,'" *HuffPost*, last modified December 4, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/pope-francis-homosexuality-fashionable-gay-priests_n_5c06a557e4b0cd916fb08010?ri18n=true and Harriet Sherwood, "Pope Francis backs same-sex civil unions," *The Guardian*, October 21, 2020.

the refugee crisis despite the fact both of these crises are not mutually exclusive.

Although his 2013 trip to Brazil for World Youth Day received extensive press attention from the global media, Pope Francis's visit to the Italian island of Lampedusa to meet with northern African migrants seeking asylum constituted his first official outing outside of Rome. It is presumably this papal visit that sets the scene depicting Pope Francis's struggles to book a flight from Rome to Lampedusa over the phone at the beginning of *The Two Popes*, although this reference to the migrant crisis might not be apparent to viewers less informed about the pontiff's public image. The final moments of *The Two Popes* feature a collage of edited clips portraying refugees traveling across the ocean on makeshift boats alongside Jonathan Pryce delivering a condensed version of Pope Francis's real homily during his visit to Lampedusa:

We are seeing a globalization of indifference. There is a culture of conflict, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us live in soap bubbles, which however lovely, are also insubstantial. We've become used to the suffering of others. 'It doesn't affect me.' No one in our world feels responsible. Who is responsible for the blood of our brothers and sisters? The refugees washed up on the shores of the Mediterranean? 'I don't have anything to do with it. Must be someone else. Certainly, not me.' When no one is to blame, everyone is to blame.¹¹⁶

Critics of Pope Francis have identified the lack of any concrete substance in his rhetoric when commenting on political, economic, and environmental issues during interviews, homilies, and Sunday remarks to St. Peter's Square, such as his abstracting of the migrant crisis as the "globalisation of indifference."¹¹⁷ Comparing what he believes to be selfish behaviour promoted by discourses of consumption – what he labels as throwaway culture

¹¹⁶ *The Two Popes*. For the full text of Pope Francis's remarks during his visit to Lampedusa, refer to Pope Francis, "Visit to Lampedusa: Homily of Holy Father Francis," Vatican website, July 8, 2013, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html.

¹¹⁷ John Hooper, "Pope Attacks 'Globalisation of Indifference' in Lampedusa Visit," *The Guardian*, July 8, 2013.

– to living in a “soap bubble” evokes parallels to Vivienne Westwood’s outlandish and at times exaggerated rhetoric, which features sensationalized phrases that garner public attention and easily translate in media reporting.

The Two Popes’s adoring depiction of Pope Francis’s comments and actions regarding the migrant crisis is a prominent example of how his brand identity circulates within the imaginary of popular culture. Considering that the moment in Lampedusa highlighted by the conclusion of the film occurred less than four months after his election as pontiff, *The Two Popes*’ lack of any critical engagement with then still developing legacy of Pope Francis informed Aleks Wansbrough’s review of the film as “premature and slightly reminiscent of Barack Obama winning the Nobel Peace Prize less than a year into his presidency.”¹¹⁸ His visit to Lampedusa does not register a level of iconic power comparable with other moments from his papacy such as his environmental activism and “Who am I to judge” statement that garnered significantly greater attention from the media – a reflection of the hierarchal structure determining which social issues are given visibility in public discourse. The visit, however, represents the pontiff’s continuing advocacy towards the global treatment of migrants and refugees, with Pope Francis acknowledging the sixth and seventh anniversaries of the Lampedusa visit with tweets connecting the suffering of migrant populations to global injustice, the overarching narrative connecting his activism on issues related to poverty and environmentalism.¹¹⁹ Accompanied by #Lampedusa, these tweets constitute one of the relatively few instances

¹¹⁸ Aleks Wansbrough, “The Two Popes: A Mixed Bag Theologically and Politically, with Bravura Performances,” *The Conversation*, last modified December 3, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/the-two-popes-a-mixed-bag-theologically-and-politically-with-bravura-performances-127096>.

¹¹⁹ Pope Francis, Twitter post, July 8, 2019, 7:00 a.m., <https://twitter.com/pontifex/status/1148184956356554753> and Twitter post, July 8, 2020, 7:30 a.m., <https://twitter.com/Pontifex/status/1280826463839641601>.

where Pope Francis adds a hashtag to his posts to help facilitate further engagement with the topic; other instance in which hashtags are also incorporated include the more general and frequently employed #prayforpeace, identifying special events like World Youth Day's #Rio2013, and maintaining the conversation regarding environmental issues with the #LaudatoSi.

Exploring the Boundaries of Pope Francis's Brand in *The New Pope*

The Two Pope's depiction of Pope Francis as a progressive and inclusive pontiff is a testament to how dominant such representations are in branding his public image. An intriguing critique of Pope Francis's brand identity, however, is illustrated through the subtle references to the pontiff included in the limited television series *The New Pope* (2020). Functioning as the second series to *The Young Pope*, HBO and Sky Atlantic's *The New Pope* depicts the inner turmoil caused by Pope Pius XIII's sudden collapse and the need to elect a new pontiff while he remains in a coma. The curia decides to elect what they believe to be a gullible and easily controllable cardinal, who, inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi, takes the papal name of Francis II. During his introductory remarks to the crowds gathered in St. Peter's Square, Francis II evokes the symbolism and rhetoric associated with Saint Francis, particularly in regard to poverty and migrant populations:

We can pray. For those who suffer, those forced to flee. But we can do even more. We can open the Vatican and take in the poor, desperate migrants. From tomorrow, the Vatican gates shall remain open! And what else can we do? We can give our wealth to the poor! My name is Francis II because I do what St. Francis of Assisi would do.¹²⁰

Following his declaration, Pope Francis II creates resentment amongst the curia for opening the gates of the Vatican to refugees and migrants, demanding cardinals turn in

¹²⁰ *The New Pope*, "Episode 1," Sky Atlantic, January 10, 2020, written by Paolo Sorrentino, Umberto Contarello, and Stefano Bises, directed by Paolo Sorrentino.

their ostentatious jewelry for more simpler adornments, and begins selling the Vatican's archives and art collection with profits going towards eliminating global poverty. *The New Pope*'s storyline alludes to an event that occurred in 2015 following the migration of thousands of Syrian refugees to European countries. Pope Francis accepted two families onto Vatican property, and presumably placed them within one of the smaller parishes of Vatican City and not in St. Peter's Basilica as depicted by *The New Pope*.¹²¹ There are limits to Pope Francis's reform tendencies, boundaries that are explored and pushed to the extreme by creative texts like *The New Pope*. By portraying a pontiff who translate reform into action, *The New Pope*'s critique of Pope Francis's brand identity also illuminates the potential fault lines that occur within the church when such promises of change create inevitable divisions and friction.

Although the current pontiff is not referenced in either *The Young Pope* or *The New Pope*, it is assumed through indirect references that both series occur in a post-Francis imaginary. In addition to the obvious allusion to the future with *The New Pope*'s Francis II, both series refer to Pope John Paul II as a saint, who was canonized by Pope Francis. The actions of the fictional Francis II in *The New Pope* function symbolically to encourage critique of Pope Francis's liberal identity that has become the focus of his brand as pontiff. Opening the Vatican to migrants and refugees and selling the vast art collection rouses disgust from the power circle of cardinals in *The New Pope* who respond by assassinating Francis II. This storyline also illuminates the lack of control and power a pontiff truly has to ignite concrete change within the very institution they lead, a

¹²¹ Stephanie Kirchgaessner, "Vatican to Take in Two Refugee Families as Pope Calls for 'Every Religion' to Help," *The Guardian*, last modified September 7, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/06/pope-francis-calls-on-catholics-to-take-in-refugee-families>.

structural similarity Pope Francis shares with other political leaders like Obama since their roles are primarily symbolic and largely shaped by other governing bodies (Congress in the case of Obama). A popular criticism of the Catholic Church is labeling their art holdings as inherently hypocritical (as alluded to by *The New Pope*), which, since his election, has been a popular criticism directed towards Pope Francis for failing to auction off extremely valuable pieces despite his condemnation of corporate culture, excess, and continued suffering of the poor. Ireland's *The Sunday Independent* for instance acknowledges that Pope Francis does not have the power to auction Michelangelo's Pieta, but conversely argues that "given his interest in ordinary men and women, this Pope might allow them [to] see the priceless art treasures in the Vatican museums for free. And God knows, the Church has enough money"; other critics like British historian Peter Watson contend that selling the Vatican art collection and instead displaying pieces created by the poor and other marginalized communities constitutes a "radical act of redemption" that would be more effective than any administrative reform initiated by Pope Francis.¹²² *The New Pope* illuminates the lack of nuance in this type of analysis, denoting that such actions could never realistically occur because that would strip the church of their main source of symbolic power and the institution's global authority on which it depends. It would however certainly be a nice gesture of goodwill if Pope Francis adopted an open access model to make the Vatican's archival collection significantly more accessible to the public. The cinematic negotiation of his mythological construction by *The Two Popes*, *The Young Pope*, and *The New Pope* demonstrate how

¹²² Peter Watson, "The Pope Should Hold the Biggest Art Sale Ever," *The Times*, March 22, 2013 and Niall MacMondagle, "The Descent from the Cross by Caravaggio," *The Sunday Independent*, March 31, 2013.

Pope Francis's institutional brand, primarily shaped and co-authored by other cultural intermediaries, is frequently at odds with his personal image and beliefs.

The Dissonance of Vivienne Westwood's Brand Identity

In a similar manner to Obama and Pope Francis, Vivienne Westwood's brand operates on multiple levels – as a person, a British cultural icon, and in terms of the corporate label associated with her name – that are often in direct competition with each other. Cultural texts like the documentary *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist* in addition to consistent media coverage highlighting this contention in Westwood's public image frame such contradictions as further examples of her absurd personality. This type of criticism not only undermines her image but also works to underscore the systematic socioeconomic and political inequalities shaping consumer culture that the financial survival of her corporate brand identity is dependent upon.

In comparison to other luxury fashion conglomerates like LVMH and Richemont, which holds a wide portfolio of shares in well-known labels and retailers such as Dior, Marc Jacobs, and Givenchy and Cartier and Net-a-Porter, Westwood's company does not possess a comparable level of capital. Carlo d'Amario, managing director of the Vivienne Westwood brand, speaks to the hardships of remaining an independent fashion designer, explaining in *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist*:

If you see other people, Stella McCartney, McQueen, Galliano, Jean Paul Gaultier, everybody belongs to a big corporation. And Vivienne is independent. On top of Vivienne there's Vivienne. Nobody tells Vivienne what she must do. Of course, this kind of freedom you must pay for that. Independent means you must work three times more.¹²³

¹²³ Tucker, *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist*.

Despite the struggles facing the company, d’Amario helped transform the corporate structure of the Vivienne Westwood label in accordance with the demands of the fashion industry by prioritizing the runway performance as a spectacle granting the designer’s persona the symbolic capital that translates into revenue from licensing and branded merchandise lines such as handbags, jewelry, and other accessories. As of 2018, her company employs roughly 300 individuals maintaining the status as one of the “last independent global fashion houses in the world” that prides itself as existing “to produce more than clothes and accessories” by using “collections, collaborations and catwalk shows as a platform to capture the imagination, promote innovative design and campaign for protecting life on Mother Earth.”¹²⁴ Westwood has been a vocal critic of the corporate burdens plaguing designers that are imposed by the fashion industry, arguing in a 2013 interview with *The Times* that although licensing agreements and complementary merchandise lines are detrimental to the creative process and contribute to the environmental destruction facilitated by consumption, they are critical entities that elevate Westwood’s brand in popular culture:

It subsidises our main work. If a suit costs £5,000 it should have cost £15,000, and the way you support that is you have all these leather goods and sunglasses and stuff. I have far, far too much product, and I hate expanding just because people in China want to open a chain of shops [closing her boutiques] would be difficult and I would feel cut off from the general public if I did that and started being a campaigner. This gives me a voice.¹²⁵

Lorna Tucker’s documentary *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist* highlights the philosophical tensions stemming from the geo-economic structure of the fashion industry, illustrated

¹²⁴ “Our Approach,” *Vivienne Westwood*, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://www.viviennewestwood.com/en/our-approach/>.

¹²⁵ Deborah Ross, “Come On In, the Water’s Lovely: What’s Vivienne Westwood Doing in the Amazon Rainforest?” *The Times*, January 12, 2013.

through the comments of an unnamed Vivienne Westwood employee: “The company has grown, it has become very big. She can’t just press a button and undo all that. She’s got a duty to support the people who are here, who’ve worked for her. And it’s very difficult to just undo those decisions that have been made.”¹²⁶ The apparent conflict between the practices of an industry that is governed by the demands of international markets and the political orientations of Westwood not only as a designer but also an activist – elements that have become integral to her public persona – is an issue commonly referenced in criticism of her work.

The conflicting discourses of identity, activism, and consumerism in the creation of Westwood’s brand identity are well reflected in the profile of the designer as part of a larger commemorative issue celebrating the 25th anniversary of British *Marie Claire*. Recognized as the “Most Inspiring Woman in Fashion,” *Marie Claire* included a portrait of Westwood captured by British photographer Rankin, and in presenting her as an “icon” and “fashion legend,” *Marie Claire* also labels the designer as an “active political protestor” evident through her clothing choices.¹²⁷ Westwood is styled in her resistance wear, including arm warmers with illegible writing, purple nylons with “Revolution” readable down the leg, and two makeshift necklaces made out of plastic see-through sheet covers that display the Climate Revolution logo and a picture of Chelsea Manner, the former American military intelligence officer convicted of releasing classified documents to WikiLeaks, accompanied by the caption, “truth;” Rankin’s image of Westwood was later selected for the cover of her 2016 published diary *Get A Life!* In the interview

¹²⁶ Tucker, *Westwood: Punk, Icon, Activist*.

¹²⁷ Francesca Rice, “24 Iconic Women Who Have Rocked Our World,” *Marie Claire*, last modified September 16, 2013, <https://www.marieclaire.co.uk/entertainment/people/marie-claire-s-icons-of-the-last-25-years-sneak-peak-108711>.

accompanying her profile for *Marie Claire*, Westwood argued that the deliberate styling of her outfit is an example of her aesthetic approach to activism, and that the juxtaposition of the Climate Revolution logo against a photograph of Manning illustrates the larger inequalities naturalized by neoliberal policies and the decisions made by politicians like Obama and David Cameron. Global warming has intensified due to the “rotten” economic order that promotes war and poverty, and Manning, along with Julian Assange, is a persistent presence in Westwood’s activism and is regularly cited as a heroic influence on her work.

Despite her attempts to spark discussion with her fashion collections as a model of design activism, the press continues to mock her work for its inherent corporate conflict of interest and prevent Westwood from achieving the public dialogue she wishes to accomplish. To honour a high school teacher who taught her about Habeas Corpus and other fundamental civil liberties, Westwood partnered with the re-phuman rights organization Liberty in 2005 to design a t-shirt raising awareness towards a British government proposal to hold for three months without charge citizens suspected of terrorist activity or connections. Featuring a hand-drawn heart captioned with “I’m not a terrorist, please don’t arrest me,” the unisex t-shirt continued to be sold on the Vivienne Westwood online shop along with a matching children’s version and a toddler onesie, leading *The Guardian* to shrewdly note that “if the weather of the formidable designer were not enough, the government will also have to contend with the massed ranks of politically active babies.”¹²⁸ The dissonance between Westwood’s competing identities as an anti-consumption activist while also the literal embodiment of a brand label is the

¹²⁸ Maev Kennedy, “Radical Chic: Westwood Challenges Terror Laws,” *The Guardian*, September 25, 2005.

source of Suzy Menkes's criticism. Denouncing Westwood's identification as an activist while simultaneously presenting collections at London and Paris Fashion Weeks, Menkes criticized the designer in 2005 (many years prior to Westwood fully adopting activism as the foundation of her branded persona) for failing to self-identify her dual personas as an activist and a businesswoman:

How dare she send out a show laced with anarchist messages, take her bow in a clinging dress with the word 'propaganda' spiraling around her ample figure, announce that the spirit of her show is 'the more you consume, the less you think' and then take the opportunity to launch her collection of punk safety pins in diamonds?¹²⁹

Menkes's admonishment illuminates Westwood's blurring of the boundaries between ethical consumption, corporate demands, and social justice. The contradiction has remained an unremitting aspect of her brand that Westwood has not yet attempted to reconcile, primarily due to the attention such dissonance brings with media coverage of her actions. Such criticisms of Westwood's visualization of her activist identity in her fashion collections illuminates the increasing power of consumption as a discursive convention to recontextualize identity into a commodity within a larger consumer society. The commercial connections of Westwood's design such as her collaboration with Liberty – a profitable model due to low production costs that she continues to rely upon with Climate Revolution and Save the Arctic – demonstrate how her aesthetic vision of design activism is performed and mediated by the network of journalists and consumers who form her public, the very foundation in which she bases her brand identity.

Commentary like Menkes' rhetorical declaration of "how dare she," however, reflect a tendency of Westwood's critics to report on her collections following her shift since 2008

¹²⁹ Carole Cadwalladr, "I Don't Feel Comfortable Defending My Clothes," *The Guardian*, December 7, 2007.

concentrating more exclusively on environmental issues without any consideration or acknowledgement of the designer's history of socioeconomic and political awareness.

Although she has been associated with political causes throughout her career, Westwood has utilized her environmental work to rebrand her public image as an intellectual figure and activist. Isabel Sánchez Vegara's popular children's series *Little People, Big Dreams* frames the designer as an advocate for the disenfranchised, drawing a parallel between punk as a form of protest and her environmental activism.¹³⁰ The strength of her brand identity as an activist is evident in how cultural texts portray her persona, such as in the *Vivienne Westwood* edition of the children's illustrated biographical series *Little People, Big Dreams* and the digital exhibits, "Vivienne Westwood: Fashion and Activism" and "Vivienne Westwood: Politics and Fashion" produced as part of a collaboration with the British Fashion Council and Google Arts & Culture.¹³¹ The introductory text to both Westwood digital exhibits also positions the designer's brand identity as an activist and reproduces the central elements composing her more recent public persona:

Vivienne Westwood is one of the last independent global fashion companies in the world. At times thought provoking, this brand is about more than producing clothes and accessories. Westwood continues to capture the imagination, and raise awareness of environmental and human rights issues. With a design record spanning over forty years, Vivienne Westwood is now recognised as a global brand and Westwood herself as one of the most influential fashion designers, and activists, in the world today.¹³²

¹³⁰ Isabel Sánchez Vegara, *Vivienne Westwood* (London: Francis Lincoln Children's Books, 2019).

¹³¹ Lorelei Marfil, "BFC, Google Team on Digital Fashion Educational Platform," *Women's Wear Daily*, December 5, 2016.

¹³² British Fashion Council, "Vivienne Westwood: Fashion and Activism, *Google Arts & Culture*, accessed June 27, 2020, <https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/vivienne-westwood-fashion-and-activism-british-fashion-council/wQKC0Y4apC2qIg?hl=en>.

Using a mixture of photographs and accompanying text, the slideshow functions as a retrospective of Westwood's fashion career with an emphasis on her activism, ranging from her initial connection with punk to her focus on environmental issues. "Vivienne Westwood: Fashion and Activism" functions as more of a retrospective addressing notable moments and collections that construct Westwood's iconic identity, concentrating on her early work as a form of design activism expressed through the aesthetic of "urban guerilla" – a technique uniting assertive designs with subversive statements. Following the overview of Westwood's collections from the 1970s to 1990s, "Vivienne Westwood: Fashion and Activism" shifts to highlight the designer's focus on social justice issues, and, in particular, environmentalism. With a photograph displaying the cover of the July 2008 issue of *Dazed & Confused* guest edited by Westwood, the exhibit details Westwood's collaborations with Greenpeace, the Environmental Justice Foundation, Cool Earth, and the United Nations' Ethical Fashion Initiative. "Vivienne Westwood: Politics and Fashion" expands upon the environmental issues that form the basis of Westwood's most recent activist persona, concentrating more specifically on her spring/summer 2016 "Mirror the World," part of a larger campaign by Westwood in support of the non-profit organization We Are Here Venice advocating towards the consequences of climate change and the tourism industry on Venice, Italy.¹³³

Negotiating Englishness, the Monarchy, and Scotland in Westwood's Institutional Brand Identity

The images and motifs that structure her brand illuminate how Westwood's identity is an element that is continuously negotiated not only by herself as an individual

¹³³ British Fashion Council, "Vivienne Westwood: Politics and Fashion," *Google Arts & Culture*, accessed November 4, 2020, <https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/vivienne-westwood-politics-and-fashion-british-fashion-council/6gICcZODtuyELA?hl=en>.

but is also influenced by the politics and critical judgements shaping her public representation as a cultural icon representative of a constructed, yet equally contested, national identity. To commemorate both Queen Elizabeth's diamond jubilee and London's hosting of the 2012 Summer Olympic Games, the Royal Mail released a limited-edition stamp collection showcasing postwar British fashion. Designed by Norwegian photographer Sølve Sundsbo, the 10-stamp collection featured designers including Jean Muir, Zandra Rhodes, Paul Smith, Alexander McQueen, and Westwood. The stamp showcased Westwood's classic tartan mini-kilt from her autumn/winter 1995/1996 "Viva LaCocotte" collection, an outfit that entered into the popular imaginary after model Naomi Campbell tripped when walking down the runway in Westwood's trademark platform boots (which was also featured in the Google Arts & Culture digital exhibit "Vivienne Westwood: Fashion and Activism").¹³⁴ The inclusion of Westwood in the Royal Mail's Great British Stamps series is a powerful example of how cultural intermediaries have constructed Westwood as an icon symbolic of a collective representation of Britishness that registers with global audiences. One of the more sensationalized instances of this commodification of Westwood's identity is her inclusion alongside other British cultural icons like Elton John, Freddie Mercury, and David Bowie in a limited-edition box of Christmas crackers available for purchase at Selfridges.¹³⁵ The Royal Mail and Selfridges promote Westwood as a consumable British cultural icon, but the triviality of products like stamps and Christmas crackers masks the tensions between

¹³⁴ Imogen Fox, "Great British Fashion Stamps, by Sølve Sundsbo – In Pictures," *The Guardian*, last modified May 11, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2012/may/11/royal-mail-fashion-stamps>.

¹³⁵ "Crackers – Icons Christmas," *Selfridges*, accessed November 4, 2020, https://www.selfridges.com/GB/en/cat/crackers-icons-christmas-crackers-pack-of-six_293-3001158-SEL1912/.

Westwood's ideas and experiences about British identity and how her image is situated within institutional discourses of Englishness, particularly in regard to the designer's relationship with the aristocracy and the politics of the United Kingdom.

Westwood's aesthetic is greatly influenced by discursive concepts of empire and aristocracy that blend to create an idealized vision of Englishness. The Vivienne Westwood edition of *Little People, Big Dreams* characterizes the designer's aesthetic as merging "punk and aristocracy, making the poor look rich, and the rich look poor."¹³⁶ Though the text is primarily aimed at children, *Little People, Big Dreams* succinctly describes Westwood's design philosophy and the importance of aristocratic motifs to her aesthetic that are appropriated by other cultural intermediaries to brand her identity as iconic of Britishness. While they emerge disconnected within popular imaginaries, Peter Davey argues that Westwood and the monarchy were united by their hostility to the cultural politics of Thatcherism.¹³⁷ Westwood's incorporation of the images and symbols associated with aristocracy is rather an extension of her anti-establishment punk aesthetic, with Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton arguing that:

To identify with the Queen is presumptuous; to dress up like her is to forget your place. The fact that the Queen's clothes have traditionally been reviled in the fashion world as lacking in style and sex appeal also marks them out as yet more fertile ground for Westwood's strategic play on the interrelated themes of Englishness and class.¹³⁸

Their argument is evident in examples like Westwood embodying the Queen for a photoshoot with fashion photographer Gian Paolo Barbieri and her decision to have a

¹³⁶ Sánchez Vegara, *Vivienne Westwood*.

¹³⁷ Peter Davey, *English Imaginaries: Six Studies in Anglo-British Modernity* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1999), 130-131.

¹³⁸ Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton, *Women in Fashion: A New Look* (London: Quartet Books, 1989), 154.

Black model portraying Queen Elizabeth I.¹³⁹ These caricatures worked to critique the economic and symbolic power of a collective English identity that is primarily defined by the exclusionary borders of race and class.

Rebecca Arnold expands upon this argument to analyze how the Englishness mediated by Westwood's work is removed from the everyday lives of those individuals who wear – or more accurately browse – her clothes, arguing that the designer's relationship to British identity is significantly more complex than acknowledged by critics. Such dissonance is well illustrated through Westwood's dependence upon the visuality of the Swagger portrait in constructing her vision of Englishness, a style popularized by Van Dyck that combines the formality of portraiture with a sense of audaciousness to evoke status and future ambitions. The codes and symbolism of aristocratic English dress are used in Westwood's collections to encourage the wearer to connect with their body in a manner that challenges the historical style serving as her aesthetic inspiration. Westwood's clothing evokes similarities for Arnold to the "heroic images" characterizing Van Dyck's paintings, arguing that the designer "has hijacked aristocratic emblems, disregarding social hierarchies and the etiquette of dress to produce living Swagger portraits, wrapping the wearer in fantasy and nostalgia."¹⁴⁰

Westwood's dependence upon such imagery cannot be adequately addressed without situating her work within the larger socioeconomic context of the 1980s and early 1990s in Britain. The recession plaguing the nation bestowed symbolic power upon the yearning aristocratic fantasy. Her persistent use of Harris Tweed and tartan fabric that

¹³⁹ Evans, "Yesterday's Emblems and Tomorrow's Commodities," in *Fashion Culture*, ed. Bruzzi and Gibson, 101.

¹⁴⁰ Rebecca Arnold, "Vivienne Westwood's Anglomania," in *The Englishness of English Dress*, ed. Christopher Breward, Becky Conekin, and Caroline Cox (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 165.

evoke the elitism of the English countryside despite the Scottish origins of the textiles constitutes examples of an imagined cultural identity that Arnold argues ceased to exist outside of the portraiture serving as Westwood's aesthetic philosophy. Instead, the potency of these textiles in her work during a period of economic hardship signify for Arnold "an idealized vision of aristocrats of the past, whom she believes paid more attention to patronizing the arts, to developing visual culture and literature."¹⁴¹ Arnold's analysis illuminates the complexities underlying Westwood's relationship to the aristocratic culture that she is commonly believed to challenge by her design aesthetic. Conversely Westwood expresses much respect and even admiration for the privileged classes associated with aristocratic culture for their patronage of the traditional high arts, a sentiment that continues to manifest in the rhetoric surrounding her more contemporary activism.

Westwood's admiration for the aristocracy is disconnected from the anti-establishment origins of the punk aesthetic she is more frequently connected to within popular culture. She has expressed her disappointment regarding the recuperation of punk as symbolic of a more mainstream expression of Englishness.¹⁴² Arnold argues that Westwood's sentiment regarding the loss of punk's symbolic power is a recurring theme expressed through her collections during the late 1980s and early 1990s, thereby demonstrating the designer's newfound mentality that "subcultural dress may generate attention, but, in England, it will rarely gain you legitimate social standing."¹⁴³ The shift towards the aristocracy as an artistic inspiration – which itself is an influential emblem

¹⁴¹ Arnold, "Vivienne Westwood's Anglomania," 166.

¹⁴² Wilcox, *Vivienne Westwood*, 15.

¹⁴³ Arnold, "Vivienne Westwood's Anglomania," 170.

associated with British identity – signified Westwood’s desire to seek recognition from the fashion industry. Despite intended as a caricature to critique the neoliberal politics of Margaret Thatcher’s government, Arnold contends that Westwood’s appearance on the cover of *Tatler* wearing a double-breasted suit originally designed for the prime minister signified the designer’s attempts to assert herself as an emerging talent worthy of recognition within the male-dominated fashion industry. Reflected by the suit featured on the *Tatler* cover, the history of English tailoring provided Westwood with a means to seek the acknowledgement that her other creative contributions failed to receive from her peers and critics.

The clothing worn by Queen Elizabeth and Princess Margaret during their childhood served as the inspiration for Westwood’s autumn/winter 1987-1988 Harris Tweed collection featuring capes, suits, and makeshift crowns created from the iconic Scottish handwoven wool fabric, which were also tailored to echo the stylings of Savile Row and Digby Morton.¹⁴⁴ In a March 2004 interview with *The Independent*’s Susannah Frankel ahead of the debut of her retrospective at the Victoria & Albert Museum, the designer reflected on the prominence of the Royal Family in her life, admitting, “as a child, I collected pictures of Princess Anne and Prince Charles sitting on the lawn with the corgis.”¹⁴⁵ Westwood has routinely praised the durability of the textile that has become heavily integrated into her design aesthetic, admitting in public interview:

I could not do a winter collection without Harris Tweed.... I must just mention a country walk in my birthplace in the Pennines when all my relations and I were caught in a storm. The rain went through all of the rainproof modern anoraks of my country cousins and I was the only one who remained dry in my Harris Tweed trouser suit.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Arnold, “Vivienne Westwood’s Anglomania,” 166-167, 170.

¹⁴⁵ Susannah Frankel, “And Long May She Reign,” *The Independent*, March 15, 2004.

¹⁴⁶ Simon Chilvers, “Check Mate,” *The Guardian*, November 29, 2004.

Harris Tweed become synonymous with Westwood's brand identity, acting as a signifier of her notion of Britishness. The blurring of these two iconic entities into an image articulating the brand of Westwood is also strengthened by the similarities between the Harris Tweed and Vivienne Westwood logos, both of which integrate the orb as a royal symbol mediating complex understanding of tradition and identity.¹⁴⁷ In company overviews, Vivienne Westwood explicitly identifies the label's longtime connection with Harris Tweed as part of the designer's commitment to continuing ideals of craftsmanship that are frequently associated with hegemonic narratives of British heritage and identity.¹⁴⁸

While Westwood frequently expresses admiration towards the monarchy, particularly in regard to the British Royal Family's patronage of the arts and Prince Charles' environmental efforts, she simultaneously critiques the elitist symbols of the institution that are commonly referenced as a primary signifier of national identity. Negotiating hegemonic ideas in regard to class and gender to expose what Arnold describes as "the lie of a coherent single definition of Englishness," Westwood's aesthetic incorporates references to hunting that act as signifiers to parody and illuminate the exclusivity and inaccessibility of the aristocratic country lifestyle from the everyday life for the majority of the nation. For instance, Westwood accessorizing a women's Harris Tweed suit with a hunting rifle and platform boots reveals for Arnold the "absurdity and formality of the social etiquette that surrounds such aristocratic dress and

¹⁴⁷ For an analysis of the Westwood orb logo, see also Jean S. Clarke and Robin Holt, "Vivienne Westwood and the Ethics of Consuming Fashion," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 25, no. 2 (2016): 201-204.

¹⁴⁸ "Our Approach" and "The Orb," *Vivienne Westwood*, last modified June 13, 2013, <https://blog.viviennewestwood.com/the-orb-2/.na>.

lifestyle.”¹⁴⁹ Her caricature of outdoor aristocratic life encourages the individual wearing the clothes to masquerade in a realm completely removed from their existence, yet simultaneously provokes a feeling of estrangement encouraging a critical questioning as to why these symbols are naturalized as core signifiers of British identity.

While they materialize in public discourse as two antagonistic personalities with very little in common, Westwood has also spoke publicly about the influence of Prince Charles in her work. In an interview with the *Financial Times*, Westwood acknowledges the symbolic power of the institution he represents in articulating an identifiable British aesthetic:

‘I like Prince Charles,’ says Vivienne Westwood, whose anti-monarchy punk movement in the 1970s made Charles look starkly out of step in his young adulthood. ‘I think he deserves our respect.’ Westwood’s change of opinion is at the front of a wider acceptance of royal male style. ‘British people have always looked to royalty for inspiration. It has been even more apparent in the current men’s wear trends, with the recurrence of traditional British fabrics, formal tailoring, polo inspired outfits and equestrian styles; fashion that we associate with royalty.’¹⁵⁰

Having described climate change as the “wolf at the door,” Prince Charles is a source of much admiration and respect from Westwood for utilizing his esteemed position to advocate on behalf of rainforest preservation efforts despite the fact she believes he is “criticized on the principle that he is not supposed to voice opinions that might influence people.”¹⁵¹ In interviews she has publicly praised Charles for establishing social standards in terms of artistic and environmental preservation efforts, particularly for his assertion that humanity is dependent upon cultural and ecological preservation.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Arnold, “Vivienne Westwood’s Anglomania,” 167.

¹⁵⁰ Charlie Porter, “Keeping it Royal,” *Financial Times*, November 8, 2008.

¹⁵¹ Gordon Rayner, “Princes Charles Says Climate Change is the ‘Wolf at the Door’ as Meeting with Donald Trump is Mooted,” *The Telegraph*, January 19, 2017 and Westwood, *Get A Life!*, 301.

¹⁵² Stuart Jeffries, “Vivienne’s Vision,” *The Guardian*, December 3, 2011.

Dedicating her autumn/winter 2015-2016 menswear collection to Prince Charles, models wore suits evoking Savile Row tailoring and t-shirts adorned with his face. Show notes accompanying the performance hyperbolically proclaimed that if global leaders “ruled the world according to his priorities during the last 30 years, we would be alright and we would be tackling climate change,” while *Dazed* reported that models wore makeup styled to appear as if their faces were bruised to symbolize their fight against climate change to acknowledge Prince Charles’s efforts.¹⁵³ Westwood is a frequent attendant at events hosted by Prince Charles, having participated in ceremonies recognizing recipients of the Duke of Edinburgh Awards and collaborating on exhibitions promoting the Royal Drawing School. She also designed an exhibit for Prince Charles’s Garden Party to Make a Difference, a 12-day ecological-themed festival held during September 2010 within the Clarence House gardens that was open to the public and promoted sustainable and environmentally friendly living practices, in addition to the opportunity for guests to explore the prince’s private vegetable patches.¹⁵⁴

In interviews with the press Westwood has expressed contradictory views on the monarchy and members of the Royal Family. Noting that Westwood’s rise as an eccentric personality coincided with the transformation of Princess Diana into a global icon, *The Independent*’s Susannah Frankel quotes an interview the designer gave at the time in which she proclaims, “I’m against royalty.... I wish royalty would corrode away, because I’m against all leaders and authority that prevent people grabbing the potential they were

¹⁵³ Morwenna Ferrier, “How Vivienne Westwood Fell in Love with Prince Charles,” *The Guardian*, January 19, 2015 and Jamie Waters, “Vivienne Westwood’s Top Ten Political Moments,” *Dazed*, last modified April 8, 2015, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/24335/1/vivienne-westwood-s-top-ten-political-moments>.

¹⁵⁴ Westwood, *Get A Life!*, 279, 313, 348 and Caroline Donald, “A Veg Patch Fit for a Prince,” *The Sunday Times*, August 29, 2010.

born with.”¹⁵⁵ In the same interview with Frankel, when asked about her opinion on Queen Elizabeth, Westwood answered with indifference: “Well, I’m against nationalism, I think it’s horrible, and I’m a bit doubtful about anything that promotes it, but I don’t see any reason for getting rid of her.”¹⁵⁶ Her comments illuminate the dissonance embedded within the public image of Westwood, since her status as a cultural icon is promoted as a symbol of national identity. *The Sunday Times* highlighted Westwood’s apparent reversal of her position on the monarchy as an iconic British institution, noting:

Vivienne Westwood is a great admirer of the Queen. No honestly. It was a misguided folly of the times, says the godmother of punk, that led to her to stick safety pins through Her Majesty’s nose on T-shirts designed for the Sex Pistols during the silver jubilee in 1999.... At the age of 64 the brazen fashion designer now wants to save the monarchy, declaring that it was a mistake of the 20th century to ‘think that because some traditional things should be done away with, you have to throw them all out.’¹⁵⁷

Having once characterized the monarch as “the personification of English hypocrisy,” Westwood herself praised Queen Elizabeth to *The New York Times* and spoke to her importance to British society, arguing that “all this ridiculous ritual that surrounds her – that’s what holds the society together. She does really represent something, because she’s a woman – and that’s unusual, somehow.”¹⁵⁸ Westwood’s comments speak to her complicated relationship to British culture that is often misrepresented or misconstrued by the same intermediaries who are critical in shaping the designer’s identity.

Although Westwood’s feelings about the monarchy have ranged from critical to accepting, she is a vocal critic of the very country that she is often labelled as

¹⁵⁵ Frankel, “And Long May She Reign.”

¹⁵⁶ Frankel, “And Long May She Reign.”

¹⁵⁷ “Anarchy in the UK – More like God Save the Queen,” *The Sunday Times*, January 1, 2006.

¹⁵⁸ Anna Burnside, “Couture Queen Westwood Weaves Her Way to Scotland,” *The Sunday Times*, August 10, 2008 and Cathy Horyn, “The Queen V,” *The New York Times*, October 18, 2009.

representative of as a national icon. As early as 1999 Westwood spoke of her hatred of England and wish for Scottish independence from the United Kingdom. Prior to the July 1999 election of the Scottish Parliament in response to the results of the 1997 devolution referendum, Westwood expressed her resentment towards England to *The Sunday Times*, asserting:

I think it would be great if Scotland separated from England. I am very anti-patriotic. I prefer Scotland to England. In fact I would prefer anywhere to England. There's a terrible cold-arsed arrogance about the English, which means that they are completely lacking in humility and self-awareness. There is such a complacency on their side that they think they are better informed, more at the centre of things, that they rule the world and are where it's at, when they are not.¹⁵⁹

Although her position on English-Scottish politics had been addressed, Westwood's backing of the "Yes Scotland" campaign for the 2014 Scottish independence referendum sparked substantial headlines and debate within the British press. Westwood was inducted into the Scottish Fashion Awards' Hall of Fame in early September 2014, and in accepting the honour revealed how Scottish independence offered hope for restoring civility and democracy.¹⁶⁰ What captured the attention of the public, however, was another instance of Westwood transforming the runway into an expression of design activism. During the runway performance of her ready-to-wear collection at London Fashion Week on September 14, 2014 – just four days before the referendum – models bore blue "Yes" buttons in support of the "Yes Scotland" campaign and Westwood herself draped a Scottish flag on her shoulders. Two days prior to the collection's debut, the Vivienne Westwood Instagram account revealed the messaging for the collection; a

¹⁵⁹ Patricia Nicol, "Queen of Punk is Hot on the Scots," *The Sunday Times*, January 24, 1999.

¹⁶⁰ Craig Brown, "Dame Vivienne Steals the Show at Scottish Fashion Awards," *The Scotsman*, September 2, 2014.

photograph of the designer holding the show notes visualizing a separation of Scotland from the Union Kingdom was accompanied with the caption, “Vivienne says Yes!”¹⁶¹ Proclaiming “I hate England” to the press following the runway performance, Westwood explained her reasons for supporting Scottish independence, arguing that the referendum “could be a great day for Democracy,” since “they already have a more democratic financial system, eg no tuition fees, and they care more for people. They just wouldn’t do what we’re doing in England...In England there is hardly any democracy left. The government does what it wants. That which should belong to people – it gives it all to business.”¹⁶² She does not provide any concrete or substantive arguments as to why she ‘hates’ England that are rooted in a particular policy. The broad language used by Westwood during media interviews prior to the Scottish referendum not only evoke similarities to her previous declarations on British politics, illustrated by her description of England in the interview with *The Sunday Times*, but it is also a rhetorical pattern found across all her advocacy efforts. Choosing to express her politics through this type of sensationalized language is a point of contention that her critics use to undermine the public’s estimation of her intelligence and Westwood’s influence. This language, however, is a deliberate choice by Westwood because it contributes to creating press for herself and therefore maintains her brand identity’s visibility.

The transformation of her runway performance at London Fashion Week into another instance of her design activism captured significant attention by the press.

¹⁶¹ Vivienne Westwood, “Vivienne says Yes! A clue behind her #RedLabelSS15 show message,” Instagram post, September 12, 2014, <https://www.instagram.com/p/s2lKDwEM29/>.

¹⁶² Hannah Marriott, “Why Vivienne Westwood Supports Scottish Independence – Even Though She’s English,” *The Guardian*, last modified September 15, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/fashion-blog/2014/sep/15/why-vivienne-westwood-supports-scottish-independence-even-though-shes-english-yes>.

Headlines like *The Guardian*'s "Why Vivienne Westwood supports Scottish independence – even though she's English" and *The Times*' "I hate England, says Vivienne Westwood" tap into the popular imaginary of the designer of an emblem of a constructed notion of Britishness. Her comments were viewed by numerous commentators as a betrayal, an opinion best illustrated by *The Telegraph*'s assertion that the if "leader British fashion designer and English-born Dame Vivienne Westwood hates England... she [should] return her OBE and DBE, regardless of the Scottish independence vote!"¹⁶³ Writing for *The Telegraph*, Grace Dent viewed Westwood's political runway performance as symbolic of the larger ethnic and social tensions negotiated by both the "Yes Scotland" and "Better Together" campaigns while also situating the designer's viewpoint within the popular imaginary of her iconic identity, writing:

Westwood's hatred of England was certainly news – and dismaying news at that – to me. Until now, I have coveted and worn her clothes with an undercurrent of British pride. Vivienne is a true national treasure, cracking since the 1970s with Brit-style eccentricity, her clothes zinging with nods towards crowns, ermine, monarchy, punk rock, her gorgeous tartan jackets.¹⁶⁴

Dent's commentary highlights the dissonance and contradictions composing Westwood's public image as an icon of Britishness. The overblown reaction by the British press to Westwood and her animosity towards England illuminate how public figures who are transformed into cultural icons are often portrayed as fixed entities without any agency and the resulting uproar of hypocrisy that occurs when they critique the constructed notions of identity that intermediaries employ in shaping image. Although she has spoken publicly in the past regarding her feelings about England and Scotland, it is due to the

¹⁶³ Frank Williams, "At Your View," *The Independent*, September 17, 2014.

¹⁶⁴ Grace Dent, "Oh Scotland, Can't We Still Be Friends," *The Independent*, September 16, 2014.

power of her identity as a national icon that her actions at London Fashion Week gained such a hostile reaction from those very intermediaries responsible for building that aspect of her image. While her initial remark “I hate England” was widely reported, Westwood clarified her commons the following day on the Vivienne Westwood Twitter account, explaining that she “used to love England” and supports Scottish independence “because they could have a more people friendly government” – which she believes is an approach that would benefit England.¹⁶⁵ Westwood, however, represents a highly complex public persona. Labelling her as a national icon – and then demonstrating apparent outrage when the actual persona reacts against the imaginary – works to minimize the contradictions that make her identity so compelling.

What also makes the critical reaction to Westwood’s support of Scottish independence – based on Westwood’s naturalized identity as an icon of Englishness – intriguing is how her most recognized collection, 1994’s *Viva La Coquette*, features tartan kilts, a cultural signifier of Scotland and a fabric that has been as linked with Westwood’s brand identity as Harris Tweed. Justifying Westwood’s selection to the Scottish Fashion Awards’ Hall of Fame, the organization’s founder Tessa Hartman highlighted the parallels between the designer and signifiers of Scottish cultural identity, noting in particular that “she has done more for Scottish textiles than any other designer of her generation. Her brand name is synonymous with the tartan pattern and her fascination for this iconic fabric is unrelenting.”¹⁶⁶ Tartan is a symbol of Scottishness that Peter Davey positions as a textile inherently embedded within the designer’s gendered

¹⁶⁵ Vivienne Westwood, Twitter post, September 15, 2014, 1:28 p.m., <https://twitter.com/followwestwood/status/511567295198814208>.

¹⁶⁶ Brown, “Dame Vivienne Steals the Show.”

critique of aristocracy and identity, arguing that tartan is a “fabric in which the monarchy has long cross-dress, in order to maintain a working, hierarchal Union with the other... Westwood’s tartans...are a permanent reminder in her work of the fabrication of national identities, of their contingency and relation to power.”¹⁶⁷ Alison Lesly Goodrum argues that the selection of Naomi Campbell, as a Black model and a global celebrity, to wear the outlandish tartan suit represents Westwood’s unrelenting negotiation of British national identity. The wearing of tartan – itself a fabric symbolizing the ‘othering’ of the Scottish by England – on a Black model works to interrogate racialized discourses of belonging and exclusion central to contemporary British cultural politics, with Davey characterizing Campbell’s tartan suit as an “unstable figuration of national and counter-national identifications.”¹⁶⁸ The Viva La Coquette collection became entrenched into Westwood’s iconography primarily due to the runway performance at Paris Fashion Week when Campbell tripped while walking in a pair of extremely high platform boots. Campbell’s fall on the runway is often referenced as a key moment associated with both the British model and Westwood’s iconic identities, a sentiment best illustrated by *The Guardian*’s reaction that the “tartan mini kilt by Vivienne Westwood is memorable not for its design, but because it was the outfit Naomi Campbell was wearing when she famously took her platform-induced catwalk tumble in 1993.”¹⁶⁹ The tartan Harlequin coatdress with a matching fascinator and argyle nylons worn by Campbell was the piece selected from Westwood’s extensive catalogue to be depicted on her commemorative

¹⁶⁷ Davey, *English Imaginaries*, 131.

¹⁶⁸ Davey, *English Imaginaries*, 131 and Alison Lesley Goodrum, “Producing ‘Britishness’: Globalisation and the Construction of National Identity in British Fashion,” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Gloucestershire, 2001), 22-23.

¹⁶⁹ Fox, “Great British Fashion Stamps, by Sølve Sundsbo – In Pictures.”

stamp by the Royal Mail. The inclusion of Campbell's modelling of the tartan suit as Westwood's entry in the Great British Stamps series masks the socioeconomic, racial, and cultural politics negotiated by the original image, which were largely overshadowed by memories of Campbell tripping on the runway.

Constructing cultural icons like Westwood as static images enables intermediaries to employ such individuals as discursive texts that communicate the motifs involved in processes of identity construction at a larger institutional level. This process of reconstituting individuals into national icons by minimizing or excluding the agency, beliefs, and values that shape the original image is also evident in the circulation of Obama and Pope Francis's brand identities. Obama, Pope Francis, and Westwood's public identities are composed of competing identifications which foster the tensions and dissonance creating the meaning and power behind their image. Obama and Pope Francis embody institutional identities of 'the president' and 'the pope,' roles which themselves reflect complex symbolic histories that bestow power and authority upon them. Their identities as iconic brands therefore perform dual functions promoting both their personal image along with the institution they represent, a delicate balance which consequently makes Obama and Pope Francis vulnerable to critique. Pope Francis and Obama's brand identities represent the idea that someone who is positioned as outside the hierarchal boundaries of the institution is often presumed to represent progressive ideals of change and reform. When figures like Obama or Pope Francis offer commentary, critiques, or apologies in regard to issues, events, or previous actions undertaken by the people or institutions they represent – such as Obama's acknowledgement of not achieving anything significant to warrant the Nobel Peace Prize or Pope Francis's complicated

statements on gay marriage – they become vulnerable and subjected to more forceful public criticism, however their collective brand identities were not outright attacked by the media with the same hysteria faced by Westwood when she supported Scottish Independence. Westwood's image as a cultural icon thereby negotiates the complex politics underlying British identity, particularly in regard to how discourses of Scottishness and Englishness are visualized within popular culture. The contradictory branding of Westwood as a British icon, demonstrated by examples like her inclusion in the Great British Stamps series and support of Scottish independence, is also illustrative of Westwood's understanding as how her identity is appropriated into commodified symbol of Britishness with global economic power.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion: The Persistence of Brand Identities

“We need our shared icons, we need the labor they produce to create shared meaning, we need the powerful way in which they create a sense of shared-ness. They are a crucial factor in the production of alternative imaginings, counter-strategies, and a key element in the ways that shared meanings and values can lead to hope.”

--- Marita Sturken¹

After six years into his papacy and the allure of his modest persona deteriorating, Pope Francis’s decisions became increasingly open to critique. His relative lack of action in regard to repairing the fractured relations within the church stemming from the sexual abuse scandal, and his alleged failure in holding accountable those accused of either committing or covering crimes, has been a consistent source of criticism throughout his papacy. Both conservative and liberal critics alike have questioned Pope Francis’s leadership approach; progressive commentators have condemned Pope Francis for his ineffectiveness in initiating any type of radical social reform on issues such as abortion, and prominent conservative-leaning journalists like *The New York Times*’ Ross Douthat have focused their critiques on his governance approach, such as how Pope Francis mandated his decision to allow divorced individuals to receive communion.² While once considered historic and revolutionary, Pope Francis’s environmental message that worked to significantly shape his brand identity was overwhelmed by other examples of climate change activism that captured the imaginary of the public (such as Greta Thunberg), primarily due to the little direct power a pontiff (or a celebrity) has in determining international policy.

In early January 2020, Pope Francis gained international headlines after video footage captured the pontiff slapping away the hand of a female pilgrim attempting to pull him for a hug during a New Year’s Eve walkabout in St. Peters Square. The clip of the slap became a viral

¹ Marita Sturken, “The Continued Relevance of the Icon,” *Sociologica* 1 (2015): 3.

² See, for instance, Andrew Brown, “The War Against Pope Francis,” *The Guardian*, last modified October 27, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/oct/27/the-war-against-pope-francis> and Ross Douthat, *To Change the Church: Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

sensation, with #popeslap trending on social media. Pope Francis later apologized for losing his temper during his New Year's Day address, using the moment to draw attention towards violence against women.³ The incident brought popular attention to another instance in 2019 when the pope reprimanded pilgrims attempting to kiss his papal ring with a similar slap, which together with the events during New Year's Eve, revived discussions of Pope Francis's humble image as a common human rather than a global icon and religious leader.⁴

The media coverage over the “#popeslap” in January 2020 marked the drastic resurgence of Pope Francis's relevancy in popular and political culture that was greatly assisted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Mainly confined to the Vatican since the beginning of the public health crisis and with little to no crowds to interact with in St. Peters Square, Pope Francis's digital presence on Twitter became critical to exercising his symbolic power demonstrated through weekly livestreams. The socioeconomic issues deepened by the repercussions of the pandemic have intensified Pope Francis's advocacy in regard to global poverty, environmentalism, and xenophobia, which acts as the foundation of his third encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, published in October 2020 and informed by the evolving pandemic climate. He brought further attention to his reestablished progressive image after conflicting media reports emerged proclaiming his support of same-sex civil unions after a misconstrued interview was featured in an Italian documentary. With news headlines declaring this a “bombshell” revelation, *The Daily Show's* Trevor Noah enthusiastically declared that “once again, the pope coming out and going up against the establishment, taking a progressive stance for the church. I love this guy! And I think

³ Lauren Strapagiel, “The Pope Apologized For Slapping A Woman's Hand Away But The Memes Are Still Here,” *Buzzfeed*, last modified January 2, 2020, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/laurenstrapagiel/pope-slaps-womans-hand-apology>.

⁴ Angela Giuffrida, “Pope Francis Apologises After Slapping Woman's Hand,” *The Guardian*, January 1, 2020 and Ruth Marcus, “Must of Us Are Bad At Apologizing. The Pope Just Showed Us How It's Done,” *The Washington Post*, last modified January 2, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/most-of-us-are-bad-at-apologizing-the-pope-just-showed-us-how-its-done/2020/01/02/711aea90-2d99-11ea-bcb3-ac6482c4a92f_story.html.

I know what happened here. Just like the rest of us the pope has been quarantined at home binging every season of *Queer Eye*.”⁵ Although the Vatican and some news reports attempted to address how Pope Francis’s words were either wrongly edited out of context and merely represented his support of civil law rather than marriage, the majority of media coverage on the interview worked to rearticulate the brand identity of the pontiff as a radical LGBTQ ally that was first established by the iconicity of his “Who am I to judge” statement.

Alongside the revival of Pope Francis’s brand identity, the tumultuous socioeconomic and political landscape of 2020 also coincided with the reemergence of Barack Obama in public discourse and popular culture. Keeping a moderately discreet persona after leaving the White House – thereby enabling a larger promotional space for the release of Michelle Obama’s 2018 memoir *Becoming* – Obama spent the first years of his post-presidential career vacationing and delivering speeches at corporate and not-for-profit events while privately working on his forthcoming memoir, rumored to be part of a joint \$60 million contract with his wife from Random House.⁶ Spontaneous public appearances by Obama became viral social media moments, evident by the reaction of his attendance at game two of the 2019 NBA Finals in Toronto following an Ottawa speaking engagement.⁷ Obama began more regularly posting on his @barackobama Twitter account in March of 2020, observing the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic and the racial justice demonstrations by offering his perspectives and retweeting different commentaries. Although both he and Michelle appeared in virtual campaign activities,

⁵ Trevor Noah, “A Ray of Sunshine – The Pope’s LGBTQ Support & Big NASA News,” *The Daily Social Distancing Show*, YouTube video, 9:15, posted by CTV Comedy Channel, October 23, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=54djI2cmr6s>.

⁶ Kate Kelly, “A Piece of Obama’s Post-Presidential Life: Sandwiches and Speeches,” *The New York Times*, September 26, 2017.

⁷ Des Bieler, “Barack Obama Gets ‘MVP’ Chants, Standing Ovation in Toronto at Game 2 of NBA Finals,” *The Washington Post*, last modified June 3, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2019/06/03/barack-obama-gets-mvp-chants-standing-ovation-toronto-game-nba-finals/>.

in the final days of the 2020 presidential election Obama spoke in-person at rallies for Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden. In September 2020 Obama announced the upcoming November release of his memoir *A Promised Land*, the first of two installments which begins with personal reflections on his mother, progresses through the first few years of his presidency and concludes with the killing of Osama bin Laden. Obama began an extensive promotional campaign that included performing in TikTok videos for Random House Publishing, formal interviews with *60 Minutes*, *CBS Sunday Morning*, and *The Oprah Conversation*, and appearances on late-night talks shows like *Jimmy Kimmel Live* and *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*. To commemorate the publication of his memoir, Obama published a playlist of music he felt was emblematic of his presidency, which he elaborated upon in a surprise interview with YouTubers TwinsTheNewTrend as part of an episode for BookTube.⁸

Similar to his earlier biographical works *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama's *A Promised Land* functions as an opportunity to re-exert ownership, agency, and control over his political legacy and brand identity. Commenting on Obama's media campaign to promote the release of *A Promised Land*, *The Globe and Mail's* television critic John Doyle argued that:

Obama has been on U.S. TV more often in recent days than a Geico commercial. Morning, noon and night, he's there, dispensing wisdom, rueful remarks, insight and self-deprecating humour. You could argue that he's there to promote his new book, *A Promised Land*, and that would be true. But only in a sense. In the heft of the narrative thrust, it's equally true that a charismatic philosopher, the wise man, that classic literary figure, has appeared just in time to dole out sage advice and the understanding gained from experience...Most narratives need stock characters and the wise old man is exactly that. Stock characters are reassuring to the audience and, by accident or design, Obama's

⁸ Barack Obama, "This was fun. I heard @twinsthenewtrend were listening to some of the songs on my *A Promised Land* playlist, so I decided to drop in and surprise them. We talked about a lot, from Bob Dylan to old-school mixtapes to the role music played in my memoir. #APromisedLand," Instagram post, November 19, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CHYdqJogyku/>.

playing the role with aplomb. Mind you, in most storytelling, the wise older figure appears in order to offer guidance to a younger hero, and then fades away.”⁹

Although Obama is almost 20 years younger than Biden, his elite status within the hierarchy of celebrity culture eclipses that of his former vice-president and bestows him with a more paternalistic image. This narrative highlighted by Doyle was also a major theme structuring Obama’s participation in Biden’s presidential campaign, a motif evident in “A Socially Distanced Conversation: President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden,” a 16-minute interview between the two figures posted on social media in which Obama discusses their administrative legacy and questions his “friend” Joe on his approach to the prevalent election issues.¹⁰ Emerging as a prominent voice, or “wise older figure” during the transition from the Trump to Biden administration, the release of *A Promised Land* brings to the forefront the governmental challenges and opposition plaguing the Obama administration and thereby works to constrain the hyperbolic expectations of drastic change framing Biden’s transition to the presidency that branded Obama’s election in 2008.

At a more symbolic level, Doyle’s analysis of the promotional campaign for *A Promised Land* illuminates how Obama’s brand is at its most powerful when dependent upon narratives of anxiety and crisis, while also alluding to the potential of Obama maintaining a more visible presence in public discourse now that he has reformatted his image as more than a critical observant to the nation and rhetorical institution of the presidency. Similar to how Obama’s brand identity as a rising presidential candidate negotiated the national angst building from the repercussions of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the 2008 global financial crisis, the rhetoric of hope re-emerges in his promotional efforts for *A Promised Land* to reconcile the

⁹ John Doyle, “Cometh the Hour, Cometh the Man: What Obama’s TV Blitz is Really About,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 18, 2020.

¹⁰ Obama, Twitter post, July 23, 2020, 10:00 a.m., <https://twitter.com/BarackObama/status/1286300267642851329>.

contested social and political landscape in order to “heal our divisions and make democracy work for everybody.”¹¹ Obama begins his interview of Biden in “A Socially Distanced Conversation” by comparing the dire economic climates of 2008 and 2020, highlighting that “even before inauguration, we had seen a historic financial crisis... We’re now in a situation where not only we’ve got an economic crisis, but we also have a public health crisis to boot.”¹² Examples like his interview with Biden and the strategic timing of *A Promised Land*’s release – a memoir which addresses in detail the intricate balance required when governing during crises – demonstrate how Obama’s iconic brand identity gains power and effectiveness when the imagery and symbolism behind his persona draws upon the social interruptions occurring throughout public discourse.

Regardless of their apparent differences, the visibility of Obama and Pope Francis during the Covid-19 pandemic and presidential election illuminates the critical role of iconic brand identities in shaping public discourse and neutralizing social apprehensions. The return to relevancy assisted by the intense media attention directed towards Obama and Pope Francis in regard to their actions during 2020 exemplifies Douglas Holt’s argument that iconic brands possess the ability to adapt in accordance with drastic and unforeseen social, political, and economic shifts. For Holt, the ability to acclimatize to various ruptures is what distinguishes iconic identities like Pope Francis and Obama, since, as he argues, “these brands derive their value from how well their myth responds to tensions in the national culture, when there are tumultuous cultural shifts, the brand’s myth loses steam. I call these shifts *cultural disruptions*.

¹¹ Obama, Twitter post, September 17, 2020, 6:10 a.m., <https://twitter.com/BarackObama/status/1306535933475532803>.

¹² Obama and Joe Biden, “A Socially Distanced Conversation: President Barack Obama and Vice-President Joe Biden,” YouTube video, 15:50, posted by Joe Biden, July 23, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3hgsAXbvWc>.

When disruptions hit, iconic brands must reinvent their myth, or they fade in relevance.”¹³ Pope Francis and Obama have not completely reinvented their brand identities. The rhetoric framing Pope Francis’s approach to addressing the Covid-19 pandemic is an extension of his previous work concerning poverty and the reproduction of global systematic inequality; although his second encyclical *Laudato Si’* was promoted as a radical environmental text, poverty formed the core theme of the text, with many of the arguments made by Pope Francis repeated in *Fratelli Tutti*. The publication of Obama’s memoir reveals more intimate details or insights into the mythical process of governing and the everyday challenges of his administration, but similar to Pope Francis, the promotional campaign for *A Promised Land* replicates the core themes, symbolism, and metaphors that he utilized to construct his brand identity. Pope Francis and Obama have merely seized the narratives and discourses stemming from the cultural disruptions of 2020 to revive the imagery, characteristics, and symbolism that first established their respective brand identities.

Although Pope Francis and Obama have received re-energized media attention for their work and activities during this period of unrest and anxiety, Vivienne Westwood’s iconic identity has maintained its stability due to her continued environmental activism and strategic brand partnerships. Following his appointment as creative director for Burberry, one of the first initiatives undertaken by Riccardo Tisci was announcing a special collaboration with Westwood released in December 2018. Described as a “union of punk and heritage, rebellion and tradition,” the collection featured Westwood’s iconic tailored pieces in Burberry’s check pattern in addition to a t-shirt in support of the environmental organization Cool Earth.¹⁴ In April 2020 Westwood

¹³ Douglas Holt, *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004), 23.

¹⁴ “Vivienne Westwood & Burberry,” *Burberry*, accessed November 22, 2020, <https://ca.burberry.com/vivienne-westwood-burberry/>

announced her partnership with Canopy, a not-for-profit organization that has worked with companies like H&M, Zara, and Target to assist in developing internal sustainability practices. Her collaboration with Canopy aims to advocate towards the connections between the fashion industry and the wasteful consumerism that accelerates forest destruction.¹⁵ She has maintained her diary postings that are accessible online through her Climate Revolution website, in which Westwood critiques the actions of corrupt political leaders from Obama to Boris Johnson in benefitting from their role in reproducing social inequality, contextualizing capitalism as a deadly force enabling the global destruction caused by climate change and the pandemic.¹⁶ Westwood provided a reflective overview of her activities during the pandemic to *The New York Times*, elaborating on how she has returned to studying fine art during the lockdown while also promoting her new series of Friday speeches detailing her activism posted weekly on the Vivienne Westwood Instagram account.¹⁷

In an approach similar to her other spectacular environmental protests, Westwood gained significant media attention in July 2020 when she designed an outlandish installation outside London's Old Baily Courthouse to dissent against Wikileaks founder Julian Assange's legal hearings concerning his extradition from Britain to the United States. Designed by her son Joe Corr  – who also staged the protest in 2017 where Westwood burnt pieces from her archive to symbolize the destruction of punk by consumer capitalism – Westwood locked herself inside a large bird cage hovering over 10 feet in the air. Dressed in a yellow suit, Westwood identified as Assange and described herself as the “canary in the coal mine,” evoking the use of animals as

¹⁵ “Earth Day 2020: Vivienne Westwood x Canopy,” *Canopy*, accessed November 22, 2020, <https://canopyplanet.org/earth-day-2020-vivienne-westwood-x-canopy/>.

¹⁶ Vivienne Westwood, “Easter Monday – Corona Under Control?” *Climate Revolution*, last modified April 17, 2020, <https://climaterévolution.co.uk/wp/2020/04/17/easter-monday-corona-under-control/> and “Vivienne’s Diary – 3.11.20,” *Climate Revolution*, last modified November 2, 2020, <https://climaterévolution.co.uk/wp/2020/11/02/viviennes-diary-3-11-20/>.

¹⁷ Westwood, “The World According to Vivienne Westwood,” *The New York Times*, December 5, 2020.

sentinel species in industries such as coal mining to warn workers of pollutions, pesticides, and other environmental hazards. Her protest aimed to equate the “poisonous gas” with international governance that will not only destroy Assange’s life but also journalistic free speech rights and protections, and acted as a critique of American exceptionalism, arguing to reporters that “they are the ones who are most corrupt of all.”¹⁸ Although she attracted significant media attention, Westwood’s protest was branded by her critics as another example of her bizarre personality, with numerous reporters placing the installation outside of the Old Baily Courthouse within the larger history of her environmental design activism.

What distinguishes Westwood’s brand identity from that of Obama and Pope Francis is in the consistency of her image along with a self-awareness over how her actions, while often discredited by the same critics who praise similar contributions by other celebrity figures, work to maintain her visibility in a culture and industry dominated by men. After interviewing Westwood in 2011 for *The Times*, Deborah Ross provided an overview of the complexity of the designer’s persona, writing:

To be perfectly honest with you – and I have no reason to lie – I’ve no idea if Dame Vivienne Westwood is totally nuts or a genius, if her work is balmy or high art, if she is overestimated or underestimated, or any of those things. But I can tell you this: just as she doesn’t make her clothes easy, she doesn’t make her thoughts easy, and you have to concentrate so intensely on trying to follow her line of thinking that, even though we only spent an hour together, I was completely done-in afterwards; so exhausted I fell asleep on the bus home and ended up in Walthamstow, which isn’t where I wanted to go at all.¹⁹

Her description of Westwood’s image accounts for the intricacies and contradictions that make her such a compelling figure in popular culture, underlying how it is the talk of Westwood within

¹⁸ Andrew Nguyen, “Why Is Vivienne Westwood in a Cage?” *The Cut*, last modified July 21, 2020, <https://www.thecut.com/2020/07/vivienne-westwood-leads-protest-in-a-giant-bird-cage.html>. See also Elizabeth Paton, “Vivienne Westwood Dresses Like a Canary for Julian Assange,” *The New York Times*, last modified July 21, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/21/style/vivienne-westwood-julian-assange.html>.

¹⁹ Deborah Ross, “Malcolm McLaren Wouldn’t Leave the House Until He Made Me Cry,” *The Times*, February 5, 2011.

public culture that helps elevate her brand identity with iconic status. Ross's commentary also accentuates the common criticism charged at Westwood attempting to weaken her public image. Journalists and other cultural commentators enjoy mocking the ironies of Westwood's environmental activism, highlighting in particular her air travel as evidence of hypocrisy. However, such widespread criticism is rarely directed towards other celebrity environmental activists, such as Leonardo DiCaprio and Mark Ruffalo, who are similarly situated within a capitalistic system that reproduces the power relations that form the basis of their work. The anti-capitalistic rhetoric Westwood incorporates into her activism is no different than that expressed by Pope Francis, especially in regard to the discourse of consumption in creating social hierarchies and environmental destruction. The only difference between the two figures is in the means of expression; Westwood is dependent upon displays of spectacular environmentalisms, whereas Pope Francis's message is legitimized based upon the institution he represents.

For figures like Pope Francis, Westwood, and Obama, their institutional and corporate roles will always illicit skepticism from the public that subjects them to sometimes unfair critiques regarding their intentions, claims that question the legitimacy and authenticity of their personas. A politician or religious leader, as well as a fashion designer critiquing the logic of consumption that supports her industry, can exhibit traits of modesty or accessibility while still being concerned about how their image will be received by their critics and the public. However, Obama, Westwood, and Pope Francis are inherently connected to discourses of self-promotion that shape practices of identity construction, a practice performed across seemingly different realms of influence and institutions like fashion, politics, and religion. The image behind the brand is inherently political, and while figures like Obama, Pope Francis, and Westwood may have genuine intentions, the power and authority of the symbolic identity they embody

representing the institutions of politics, religion, and fashion cannot be detached from their public persona.

The persistence of Obama, Pope Francis, and Westwood's identities in popular culture is a testament to how myths of magic and enchantment conceal the rigorous labour and effective strategy involved in creating, and more importantly, maintaining an iconic brand. Similar to what Holt refers to as "myth markets," cultural intermediaries play a critical role in generating the narratives that circulate within public discourse, which often are dependent upon the mutually beneficial relationship between nostalgia and what Sarah Banet-Weiser describes as a "widespread anxiety about social change and a need for security and comfort in times of crisis."²⁰ One reason for the powerful resurgence of Pope Francis, Obama, and Westwood during a tumultuous period defined by the interconnected crises perpetuated by the Covid-19 pandemic is that the chaos of this cultural climate requires the iconic idealism symbolic of their brand identity to negotiate largescale anxiety.

The construction of Obama and Pope Francis's brand identities was largely dependent upon the labour of the news media to communicate a frame of reference for the public to identify and consume the idealism and symbolism associated with their personas. Their iconic status in popular culture was also assisted by the social climate that gave their brand identities potency, particularly in regard to the various crises plaguing the United States and the Catholic Church's global standing as institutional super-brands. The branding of Obama and Pope Francis as progressive political and religious figures who will oversee radical reform have become entrenched within the imaginary of popular culture, and they both have integrated such symbolism and imagery into their public personas. In contrast to Obama and Pope Francis,

²⁰ Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 59-60 and Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic: The Politics of Ambivalence in Brand Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 130.

Westwood's iconic identity is the more genuine of the three figures, primarily due to how she is often discredited by her critics, and the failure to be taken seriously has unintentionally allowed her the freedom to explore how to confront the media's representation and treatment of her image. In his analysis of iconic brands, Holt argues that although celebrities are mediated constructions with little to no correlation with the practices of everyday life, internationally recognizable companies like Jack Daniels "offer a more accessible form of iconicity that attends to people's desires to directly experience valued myths."²¹ The transformation of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis into iconic brand identities critiques Holt's argument since their individual media representation invites the public to identify with the ideals that characterize their image, particularly in regard to utopian notions of social reform and change. The emergence of persona as the dominant form of identity construction within promotional culture helped bestow Obama, Westwood, and Pope Francis with the allure of authenticity that masks the labour involved in this process. The iconic brand identities of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis demonstrates the limits of a public figure to exert agency and self-awareness, revealing the constant battle between individual, institution, and the media that is masked by the intentionality of branding as a public relations strategy, thereby obscuring the ability to identify who possesses the power to determine the symbolism, metaphors, and characteristics forming the brand image in promotional culture.

Within the context of Jean Baudrillard's framework of symbolic exchange, the brand identities of Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis have been stripped of the complex tensions, histories, and experiences that form their personal identities – what essentially makes them

²¹ Holt, "Jack Daniel's America: Iconic brands as ideological parasites and proselytizers," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 6, no. 3 (2006): 375.

human – by capitalistic social relations in consumer society.²² Such details exemplifying notions of waste and excess – elements central to George Bataille’s characterization of the general economy – pose numerous challenges for image-making in a media environment highly influenced by discourses of celebrity, promotion, and branding.²³ The triumph of Pope Francis, Westwood, and Obama to emerge as powerful brand identities in a consumer culture governed by symbolic exchange is a testament to the ability of their media representation – which they each actively contribute to in addition to the labour of journalists and other cultural intermediaries – to detach themselves from such excessive, uneconomical details that can overwhelm, detract, and complicate how their image circulates.

Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis are representations of consumer culture’s ability to manufacture a brand identity where potentially hostile personal histories are removed in favour of a streamlined and idealistic image that resonates with the dynamics of popular culture and political discourse. Despite publishing three memoirs revealing the select stories and narratives he wants to promote and make public, it is difficult to discern particular aspects of Obama’s history or previous career endeavours (even when his campaign heavily promoted his past as a community organizer). The iconic ideals associated with his political persona overpower his personal identity in support of the larger brand. In a similar manner, the phenomenon of Westwood obscures her complex and layered background despite frequent yet unsuccessful attempts to personally intervene in the construction of her public image. While Westwood and Obama’s biographies negotiate dynamics of race, class, and nationality, this process is most apparent with Pope Francis, whose brand identity minimizes his alleged involvement and

²² Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1993), 133.

²³ Robert Dunn, *Identifying Consumption: Subjects and Objects in Consumer Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 198-199.

association with the tumultuous history of Argentinian politics during the Dirty War that has occasionally threatened his professional endeavours. It is not a coincidence that Mother Teresa, as one of the very few other iconic religious celebrities comparable to Pope Francis and who continues to resonate with global publics, emerges from a complex geopolitical history which could have detracted from her image if not repressed by the symbolic power of her brand identity. Strategies of image management and selective disclosure in brand culture thereby work to manage the wastefulness that occurs when biographical details and histories become open knowledge and complicate how an identity is consumed by the public. The consumption of such excessive details complicates the image and potentially threatens the idealism that bestows iconic brand identities like Westwood, Obama, and Pope Francis with meaning and symbolic power in popular culture. Brand identities like Obama, Westwood, and Pope Francis become especially iconic and able to survive major disruptions because it is exceedingly difficult to identify the details underlying the constructed image, and this management of waste and excess enables them to transcend institutional borders and imagined boundaries. Brand culture under symbolic exchange ultimately creates a reproducible template that obscures the various levels of production involved in the manufacturing of consumable identities, enabling the image to overpower any sense of lived reality.

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